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Krik? Krak! Exploring the Potential of Creative Life Writing for
Opening Dialogic Space and Increasing Personal Freedom

By

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In Education

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted, either in the same or different form, to this or any other university for a degree.

Signed_____

For my parents

Kirsty Jean Turnbull
Meril Arthur Gordon

With all my love

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There have been many people, family, friends, neighbours and faculty who have supported me through this journey I do not have the space to acknowledge everyone but they know who they are and I offer them my deepest thanks.

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SUMMARY

My doctoral research is a critical and creative investigation into the dialogic relationship between memory and imagination through creative life writing and its potential for personal freedom. It looks at what happens when writers enter into a creative relationship with their life stories, focusing on the potential of creative life writing for loosening narratives and self-conceptions that mould identity.

I explore my topic in three different ways: through (1) qualitative research into the effects on participants of a series of creative life writing workshops I facilitated at a hair salon/barbershop serving a culturally diverse community of people of African, Caribbean, Asian and European heritage; (2) my own creative life writing, *Skipworth Street's Bonfire Night*, written in response to the qualitative research; and (3) a case study of *Lionheart Gal*, a book of creative life writing produced by Sistren Theatre Collective in 1970's Jamaica. My explorations of these three components are informed by two different but related bodies of literature: theory and practice of creative life writing for personal development and literary and political writings from the African Diaspora.

Four main observations from the research are explored:

- (i) the practice of creative life writing enabled the writers at the salon, and myself through my own writing, to 'access and objectify' our personal material (Hunt 2001) and, by doing so, to distance ourselves from life-held narratives and open up psychic space for looking at ourselves from different perspectives;
- (ii) through the process of creative life writing the writers discovered a sense of self that was multiple and embodied;
- (iii) the notion of *finding a voice* in the creative writing process was intrinsic to the participants' experience of finding personal freedom, allowing them to speak in the workshop with greater authority;
- (iv) creating a safe-enough environment for creativity to take place was essential to enable participants to move with confidence into their own personal space and writing.

The research takes up Sistren's director, Honor Ford-Smith's (1986) call for a 'unity between aesthetic imagination and the social and political process'. She believed that for real political change to take place there had to be an 'altering' or 'redefining' of socio-political structures and that, for this to happen, we needed to unlock 'the creative power of rebel consciousness' buried deep within our own stories. In bringing these ideas into the present, the thesis draws on Paul Gilroy's (2005) suggestion that the idea of 'multiculturalism' should be revived by 'conviviality', which, he says, better reflects the complex issues of diversity and difference in present urban societies. The creative life writing workshops in the salon/barbershop created a space for putting conviviality into practice: by redirecting participants' attention to their feelings and emotions, the workshops enabled them to recognize and negotiate difference and multiplicity rather than conforming to fixed hegemonic ideals.

Skipworth Street's Bonfire Night explores key concepts informing and emerging from my research that I either explored consciously in my own creative writing or that arose spontaneously through it. I was able to challenge my own tacit assumptions and life held narratives, as unconscious material emerged that enabled me to look at myself, as well as my research, from a broader perspective.

This study offers new perspectives to emancipatory processes located in the use of creative life writing for personal development as well as to socio-political discourses of identity. It has practical applications for schools and youth and community groups, as well as adult education.

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INTRODUCTION

My doctoral research is a critical and creative investigation into the dialogic relationship between memory and imagination through creative life writing and its potential for personal freedom. It looks at what happens when writers enter into a creative relationship with their life stories, focusing in particular on the potential of creative life writing for loosening narratives and self-conceptions that mould identity, and for opening up the possibility of stepping outside existing conceptual frameworks and viewing the self and the world through a broader lens. My research draws from the bold and visionary stance of Audre Lorde that ‘poetry is not a luxury; it is a vital necessity of our existence’ (Lorde, 1984, p.36).

0.1 Background To The Research In My Own Experience

The starting point for my research topic is where I was born, which was a place that neither parents called ‘home’. I inherited the residue of displacement and ‘otherness’, oscillating between conflicting positions of being an insider and outsider. I grew up in the seventies in Leicester, one of the largest migratory communities in the UK, which was also the proud home of the National Front. It was here that I became introduced to the ‘necessity’ of story-making (ibid, p.37) and how stories travelled through memory, generations and play. I became aware of the two strands of migrants’ stories, the ones that were out in the open, which embraced the embellished and colourful memories of ‘home’ that arched above the grey grimness of England; and the ones that lay deep inside of the body, the ones that were buried in silence. Story-making is an inherited survival device; creating essential dialogue for the individual and the

community. The stories provide a creative vehicle which uses memory and imagination 'to navigate the uncharted terrain of a migratory experience' (Grewal et al, 1988, p.2).

My desire to explore story-making led me to become a documentary filmmaker and a facilitator of cultural and community film screenings and forums. I have participated in the sharing and documenting of personal narratives in Europe, Southern Africa, the Caribbean and the USA. In the myriad of other people's stories I began to acknowledge my own quest to achieve some congruence between my inner and outer worlds. However, it was my last job in the USA that brought things to a head. I was working on a television series in New York with a team of *experts*: filmmakers, scholars, artists and community activists who were brought together to explore contemporary issues regarding racial politics in the twenty-first century, with the objective of offering a new insight into the existing dialogue. One of the concerns for the series was that race was still being discussed within a black and white paradigm and therefore failed to reflect the complex realities and voices of a contemporary multicultural nation. The filmmakers and production crew were racially diverse and highly qualified, but for the most part the series did not challenge the racial discourse to the extent that had been premised. In my view this was because we as storytellers had not acknowledged and challenged our own internalization of the racial paradigm. This meant that we could not see the issue of race from a different point of view. What followed was a collective silence.

It was in the editing suite that I began to think about the importance of distancing ourselves from the stories we told. The process of editing can take months and

requires the director to view the same footage an infinite number of times. As I revisited my interviews I would often see stories from a different perspective and wished I had asked different questions. But they were other people's stories and not my own. Most interviewees who participate in documentaries do not have access to the post-production process and therefore are denied the benefits that come from revisiting and reflecting on the narratives that are told. I recognised that, like Marilyn Chandler, my quest for stories was 'not only for answers, but for questions that allow new ways of seeing and describing experience' (Chandler, 1990, p.25). I had to begin with my own stories; I did not want a camera looking outwards; I needed a lens to look deep inside where I could *feel* the stories. I knew the importance of revising, reflecting and reconstructing narratives, which is difficult to do when we are telling our stories, so I thought about how the craft of writing might help me 'to find secrets in experience that are obscured from ordinary sight' (hook, 1999, p.40).

It was time for my personal journey of story-making to take another path. After working in post-Apartheid South Africa and Namibia, Native American reservations, the Caribbean diaspora in post-colonial Europe and post-Civil Rights Movement America I was aware of the legacy of social constructs that can mould the tongues and voices in which we tell our stories. I wanted to unpack the creative process in order to understand how we can access and develop the craft of creativity, so that we can tell our stories with the complexities, contradictions and uncertainties that lie in the imagination.

After spending more than fifteen years hearing stories being told across three continents I wanted to know if it was possible – if we needed to – could we distance

ourselves from the stories we told, in order to ask: ‘What might this situation look like from a different angle’ (Chandler, 1990, p.41)? Narratives are crucial to the way we see ourselves and relate to others. I wanted to see whether, if we changed the narrative(s) we live by, we could give new meaning to our past and current experiences. I was particularly interested in the notion of ‘living in the wrong story’, the implication being that the stories we tell, believe or feel in ourselves may have little connection with the narratives that currently govern our lives.

I left New York with my son for the University of Sussex and began a Master’s Degree in Creative Writing and Personal Development (CWPD), with the hope of understanding a process that held the possibility of renewing and reinventing the narratives that shape our view, mould us and set our stance (Walker, R., 2001, p.305). Returning ‘home’ to the UK to begin a master’s degree was more challenging than I had expected. Suddenly, after working extensively within an African diaspora context I had now returned to an environment where I felt the *minority* again both in race and class. I felt my voice scurrying away into familiar corners of the past. I felt like an outsider. I had returned to my country of birth where, as Caryl Phillips wrote, referring to black British experience, ‘a great violence is done to one’s sense of self’ (Phillips, 2004, online). Why was I here? I just left a country that was about to vote in a president who shared not only the same birthday but the same racial make-up. I had come *home*, yet my confidence had fled. How was I going to find my writing voice if I did not feel ‘safe enough’ in this collective space? Why did I keep writing about Leicester where I grew up and not the more ‘exotic’ places from my travels - Bahia, Ouagadougou or Harare? I had countless questions.

My experience of the Master's programme was invaluable and unexpected. As hooks says of her writing experience: 'I must come again and again to a solitary place - a place where I am utterly alone' (hooks, 1999, p.xv). I was ill prepared for the dialogue that takes place with oneself when left alone to write. I realised as a filmmaker I had not dared to 'have that terrible but necessary confrontation with all of [my] selves' (Albani, 2010, p.67) in order to enter the transformational process.

The Master's in CWPD offered insight into the creative writing process, through the teaching of writing techniques, critical engagement with literary and academic theories, the development of my own writing practice and the invaluable group space for sharing work, thoughts and emotions. I began to think more reflexively and to create an opening for new ideas and stories to come forth. I embraced Donald Winnicott's idea of the necessity of a "safe enough" space for creativity to take place' (Winnicott, 1971). I would consciously enter into a metaphorical space where mind, body and spirit would come together to converse (and dance) with memory and imagination, which held the possibility of distancing from the old and creating new stories; stepping outside my own box.

I was born in England from Antiguan and Scottish parentage. As Zadie Smith asserts, my personal multiplicity is written on my face (Smith, 2009, p.138). The terrain I travel is multifaceted and it is through this lens that I want to further investigate the creative process of becoming *unstuck* from omniscient and unchanging life-held narratives. To draw from Shabnam Grewal, my research is a continuation of a 'migrant's journey not in the simple sense... it includes the other form of migration -

movement across the frontiers of life into new uncharted territories of the self”
(Grewal et al, 1988, p.2).

0.2 Nature Of My Research

The strength of the artist is his courage to look at every old
thing with fresh eyes (Walker, A., 1983, p.137).

I began my Master’s in Creative Writing and Personal Development because, as previously stated, I wanted to understand a process that held the possibility of becoming *unstuck* from narratives that set our stance (Walker, R., 2001, p.305); the ability to step outside *our* box and view ourselves and the world through a broader lens. My doctorate is a continuation of this inquiry, as I focus on writers’ experience of fictionalising their memories and examining whether this brings about a change and what that change may be. I am interested in this mindful relationship between memory and imagination which, as bell hooks claims of her own experience of writing her ‘autobiographical narrative’, enabled her to look at her ‘past from a different perspective and to use this knowledge as a means of self-growth and change in a practical way’ (hooks, 1999, p.86). I was struck by, and keen to explore, hook’s reference to ‘a practical way’, which I interpreted as a transformation that is actively relevant to a writer’s life.

My research explores how this approach might be applied in group settings in my own community, a hair salon/barbershop, based in the city of Brighton and Hove. This

salon serves a culturally diverse community of people of African, Caribbean, Asian and European heritage. It is a microcosm of a contemporary urban British society; a setting where boundaries such as gender, race, religion and other signifiers are crossed and intertwined. It is an English community that challenges the deeply held hegemonic claims of Englishness/Britishness, representing a new generation of Europeans. The salon is the 'hub' of the community, a place of collective activities and a natural setting for the telling and sharing of stories. It is a place where issues around self and identity are particularly significant, and where, I would suggest, there is an inherent exploration of the dialogic relationship between internal and external discourses in the pursuit of trying to make sense of the incongruities that lie within. This socio-cultural space offers a fitting environment to investigate the creative possibilities of opening a dialogic space in order to achieve a greater degree of reflexivity in sense of self and identity, as well as in thinking processes. It is an environment that provides an important exploratory lens to the discussion of identity, concepts of self and life-stories, and has relevance to discussions of identity politics currently taking place.

One of the key concepts underpinning the research, as reflected in the thesis title, is Krik? Krak! – a call-response ritual between storyteller and listeners in Caribbean story-making. Novelist Edwidge Danticate draws from this tradition, seeing Krik?Krak! as 'an acknowledgment that a transition takes place as the teller and listeners leave their reality and enter into a story-space' (Danticat, 2004, online), a place of unforeseen possibilities. Rocio Davis says in the ritual of Krik?Krak!: 'you're not merely an observer - you're a part of the story' (Davis, 2001, p.66). Davis echoes the sentiments of poet-activist Kamau Brathwaite who also suggests that the story is

formed out of a reciprocal relationship: ‘oral tradition on the one hand demands not only the griot [storyteller] but the audience to complete the story ... the noise and the sound that the maker makes are responded to by the audience and are returned to him [or her]’ (Brathwaite, 1984, p.18). I see my research as part of this tradition: it attempts (1) to create a creative-critical space, a response to the call for this story to be told; (2) to explore the various dialogical relationships that take place in the process of story-making and the ‘necessity’ for writers to engage with the ‘power within’ during this process; and (3) the notion of the writer being able to set their story free, similarly to the way the story unfolds between the teller and listener – the creative writer acts as both griot and audience, allowing the story to develop a life of its own.

0.3 The Research Questions I Have Formulated To Explore My Topic Are:

- What sort of environment does a facilitator need for this purpose?
- How might the techniques of fictionalising life-stories be used to help people engage more reflexively with the narratives within which they are located?
- How can the idea of ‘finding a voice’ be understood in this context?
- What is the relevance of this work to debates around identity politics?
- What does personal freedom mean within the context of my research?

I explore these questions in three different ways: through (1) qualitative research into the effects on participants of a series of creative life writing workshops¹ I facilitated at

¹ I refer to these also as creative writing workshops; the term creative life writing is used interchangeably with the term fictional autobiography (see Chapter 1).

the hair salon/barbershop; (2) my own creative life writing written in response to the qualitative research; and (3) a case study of *Lionheart Gal*, a book of creative life writing produced in the 1970s by Sistren Theatre Collective based in Jamaica. My explorations of these three components are deepened and strengthened by two different but related bodies of literature: on the one hand, theory and practice of creative life writing for personal development as it has been developing in the UK and elsewhere over the past 20 years and, on the other hand, autobiographical and reflective essays and literary and political writings of writers of the African Diaspora.

0.31 The Hair Salon

My research in the salon endeavours to open the sort of dialogical space I encountered on the MA, where people felt safe enough to share personal stories and reflect on their sense of self. Locating the creative life writing workshops in a culturally diverse hair salon/barbershop where my family and I are also clients has been centrally important. My work has always entailed working in diverse cultural communities which I wanted to continue to do with this research; it also allows me to bring practice and theory together.

My research is primarily about exploring the effects of engaging in creative life writing on sense of self and identity. CWPD takes a primarily psychological perspective and does not look at the wider socio-political picture. By locating the inquiry in a multi-cultural setting I aim to broaden the discussion of CWPD. Caryl Phillips wrote of his experience of being a black child growing up in Britain in the 60s and 70s, ‘the full complexity of who I am – my plural self, if you like – was never going to be nourished’ (Phillips, 2004, online). I am interested to find out the

potential of creative life writing as a process to ‘nourish’ people to engage and explore the *full complexity* of themselves.

0.32 My Own Creative Life Writing

My creative writing explores key concepts informing and emerging from my research that I either took up consciously into the writing or that arose spontaneously through it. I was able to challenge my own tacit assumptions and life-held narratives, as unconscious material emerged that enabled me to look at myself, as well as my research, from a broader perspective. It is vital for me to engage in the same creative writing process that I am examining, so that I too may open the dialogical space of my thinking in exploring my findings.

0.33 Lionheart Gal

The making of the book *Lionheart Gal* by Sistren Theatre Collective was a very important project and contributed significantly to post-colonial and feminist discourse of the seventies and eighties. It resonates and offers insights to my own project in many different ways. In the afterword of *Lionheart Gal*’s second publication (2005), Honor Ford-Smith calls for ‘folks to take up its contradictions and absences, to engage with them’ (Ford-Smith, 2005 p.298). My research responds to this call as I take up some of the ideas she conceived in Jamaica more than three decades ago and locate them in the context of Brighton 2013. *Lionheart Gal* offers an historical and socio-political context to my research. There is a similarity between the two projects, as both attempt to create space for personal change through creative life writing. Honor Ford Smith offers an insightful and invaluable account of her experience working in a collaborative relationship and provides context to the existence of continuums between aesthetic imagination and political discourse; memory and

imagination; body and mind; theory and practice, all of which becomes pertinent to my own inquiry.

One important continuum between my own work in the salon and that of Sistren is that they both draw attention to the role of the body; the shared understanding that the body plays an instrumental role in our search for identity and a sense of self. My research explores the idea that by engaging with our feelings and emotions through the creative life writing process we can transcend omniscient life-held narratives and connect to a more complex and whole human being. As Audre Lorde says:

As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring ideas. They become a safe-house for that difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action (Lorde, 1984, p.37).

0.4 Theoretical Perspective: Bringing Together The Psychological And The Socio-Cultural

Recognising the critical dialogic relations between a person's inner and outer worlds introduces a psycho-social approach to understanding the makings of identity and social change. It is this interdisciplinary approach that provides the theoretical framework for my thesis. One of the main aims of my study is draw from disciplines of psychodynamics, cultural studies and literature in order to offer a greater breadth to my research, which emphasises the interconnection between self, family, community

and society.

0.41 The Socio-Cultural Dimension

Some things matter not just because someone told you it does but because what was shared resonated somewhere deep inside, so much it makes you want to know more, in fact you feel *compelled* to know more. It is these ideas, experiences and memories that we deem important, essential even, which significantly shape the way we see things and want to change things. Many of the writers I have included in my thesis have charted my socio-political, cultural and psychological journey, and have therefore informed the theoretical framework of this thesis.

One such writer is Caribbean born intellectual Stuart Hall. Undoubtedly he was instrumental in impacting the minds and imaginations of my generation, those whose parents had migrated to this country. Paul Gilroy attributes the work of Hall to ‘help[ing] us to appreciate that we have been living through a profound transformation in the way that “race” is understood and acted upon’ (Gilroy, 2014, online). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says that ‘academics worldwide could not think “Black Britain” before Stuart Hall’ (Spivak, 2014, online). It was he who also coined the term ‘multicultural drift’, referring to the increasingly visible presence of African, Caribbean and Asian people in all aspects of British social life. Hall instigated a socio-political and cultural discourse that provided a theoretical context to understanding and processing the Black-British identity and experience; an identity and experience to which I *belong*.

0.42 The Impact of Hall(ism) on My Research

How theory translates into everyday lives

Heralding Hall as ‘the most prominent public intellectual in the last 50 years’, Angela McRobbie also states that ‘If asked to sum up what was at the heart of his persona, I would say that Stuart had a deep and abiding love for ordinary everyday life and ordinary people’ (McRobbie, 2014, online). In 1979 he became a professor at the Open University because he said that the attraction was that it was a: ‘more open, interdisciplinary, unconventional setting ... [providing opportunities for] talking to ordinary people, to women and black students in a non-academic setting’ (Hall, 2013, online). Hall had a profound respect for theory, particularly how theories of race as well as class, gender and sexual politics translated in our everyday lives: ‘Theory is a detour on the road to somewhere more important’ (Hall, 2000a, p.199).

Hall’s ideas embodied collaborative relationships between theory and activism, people and politics, private and public discourses, each influencing each other dialogically in the endeavour of creating lasting change in the lives of ordinary people. This ethos and engagement that mindfully place theory at the centre of the lives of ‘ordinary people’, encouraging the hidden and the silenced to be heard and acknowledged, making genuine connections and critical analysis, serve as salient founding blocks for my own research.

How Hall interplays with theory and his own autobiographical narrative.

A significant way Hall informs my research is his engagement with theory and his personal experiences and memories. I was drawn to the idea of theory being a site of agency, as it can offer a conceptual framework for understanding ourselves and the

world around us. The use of personal narrative also allows for a broader perspective, connecting rather than separating our experiences, emotions, thoughts, and perceptions. It alters the paradigm of research and findings to include ‘knowledges in ways that inform, challenge, and affirm the self, culture and community’ (Dei, 2001, p124).

Instead of asking what are people’s roots, we ought to ask them to think about what are their *routes*, the different points by which they have come to be now; they are in a sense the sum of those differences (Hall, 1999, online).

For Hall finding out about our many *routes*, in other words connecting to our personal journeys, experiences and memories, was instrumental to attaining a sense of self, a self which embodies ‘multiple personalities, multiple identities’ (ibid). He dismissed the idea that our ‘routes’ are not interconnected; in fact he advocates that ‘we need to try and make sense of the connections with where we think we were then as compared to where we are now’ (ibid). Thus for Hall the ‘biography...or the stories we tell ourselves or the autobiographies we write’ (ibid) are critical in understanding ourselves. It is for this reason that his own autobiography is at the core of his work: ‘I have to confess that in this respect I’m driven by purely anecdotal and personal experience...What seemed to have been turning points in my own life were all turning points I recognised after the events’ (ibid). It is such turning points which are inherent within his theoretical ideas: ‘we all write from a particular place in time, from a story and a culture which is specific’ (Hall, 1990, p.222) and therefore critical to understand.

0.43 Identity and the Diaspora

You have to position yourself *somewhere* in order to say anything at all (Hall, 1989, p. 24).

Hall says growing up in the Caribbean provided a test case to understanding identity. It was the home of ‘hybridity’ and a region which, he insists, had the *most* complicated colour *stratification* system in the world; his ‘grandmother could differentiate between about fifteen different shades between light brown and dark brown’ (Hall, 2000a, p.204). He was very much aware of his own hereditary positioning in this complex social structure based on race/class division: ‘I was too black in my family, which impacted me from the time I was born. I couldn’t rest on what I was given’ (Hall, 2013). Drawing from his experience of the Caribbean, he understood the complexity of the emerging diaspora happening in Britain: ‘Black-British spoken from multiple identities – Caribbean, [Asian, African], black and British’ (ibid, p.207).

Hall refers to social identities as the ‘great stable collectives of class, race, gender and nation’. On the one hand he says identities ‘stabilize and stage our sense of ourselves - have allowed us to know who we are’ (Hall, 1989, p.22), and we cannot deny their political and cultural significance; but, on the other hand, Hall warns against the ‘sealed’ and ‘closed totality’ of social identities. Diasporic identities were not defined by ‘essence or purity’ but by the necessity of recognising ‘heterogeneity and diversity’ (Hall, 1990, p.225). He wanted us not to assume identity as a fixed feature but instead more of a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process’ (ibid,

p.222):

Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (ibid, p.225).

These notions of tension between ‘the necessity and impossibility of identities’; of identity being a process rather than an unchanging and omniscient presence; and the emerging diaspora identity which is multiple and diverse, all speak directly to my research. The research participants, as well as myself (the researcher), are British of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage, thus embodying the ‘diasporic identity’.

0.44 Opening the Dialogic Space with a Psychodynamic Perspective

It wasn’t a joke when I said that I migrated in order to get away from my family. I did. The problem, one discovers, is that since one’s family is always already ‘in here’, there is no way in which you can leave them (Hall, 1987, p.44).

Hall was primarily a socio-cultural thinker, but he also recognised the importance of individual psychology. For example, the above quote highlights the realisation that no matter how far we distance ourselves from places and people, from the narratives we are trying to ‘get away from’, ultimately we have to face them as they are as much ‘in here’ (internalised) as outside:

It is not possible for the self to reflect and know completely its own identity

since it is formed not only in the life of the practice of other structures and discourses, but also in a complex relationship with unconscious life (Hall, 1989, p.22)

Hall recognises that our concepts of self and identity are themselves ‘grounded on the huge unknowns of our psychic lives’ (ibid) and that to have a more authentic understanding of ourselves we cannot depend purely on discourse; we have to find ways ‘to reach through the barrier of the unconscious’ (ibid). However, he does not, in my view, take this far enough. By contrast, the idea of the necessity of exploring the ‘unknown’ that lies in our unconscious is fundamental to my research.

The psychodynamic perspective sees the psyche as ‘problematic and conflictual’: ‘...individuals exist in a state of tension with themselves, other people and the world in general’, but it also acknowledges the possibility of change, of moving out of stuckness in certain ways of thinking and being towards a more workable state of being characterised by ‘The ability to change, to respond flexibly to life’s circumstances in adaptive and creative ways...’ (Leiper and Maltby, 2004, pp.3-4). This psychodynamic perspective is a powerful way of thinking about self and identity and the internalisation process. It opens the dialogue to self-identity and challenges our own residue of fixed and essentialist notions of our identities and concepts of self. Hall’s heterogeneous concept of the diaspora highlights the necessity for identities to be fluid and multifaceted, but his ideas also draw attention to the difficulty of discarding embedded, essentialist notions. His discussion of an identification process eventually leads him to a notion of selfhood as a ‘stable inner core’:

We are never quite there, but always on our way to it, and when we get there, we will at last know exactly who it is we are (Hall, 2000a, p.200).

This suggests a return to an essentialist self which was there from the beginning and which we are always trying to achieve, as opposed to the possibility of recognising a fluid multifaceted self, existing in the present:

No matter how convinced we are theoretically that identities are constructed and not 'natural', invented not given, always in process and not fixed, at the level of experience and common sense identities are generally expressed (and mobilized politically) precisely because they feel natural and essential (Ang, 2000, p.2).

The notion that we tend to hold onto or get stuck quite rigidly in our identities is a significant starting point for my research, which looks at the possibility that the creative life writing process can loosen narratives and self-conceptions that mould identity. Whether or not it is because, as Ang suggests, identities 'feel natural and essential', they provide us with a sense of belonging and safety in our communities; or they can keep at bay difficult emotions and psychic material we have not processed from childhood or upbringing. This is where psychodynamics comes in, because it offers a way of understanding why identities can become fixed rather than fluid – 'dead ends' of thinking and feeling, as Eugene Gendlin describes them (Gendlin, 1996, pp.7-15) – and what is needed in order to begin to loosen them up.

I have found particularly pertinent to my study the theories of psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, because he points out how important the environment is to enable people

to 'let go' of dominate narratives which shape our lives. Although his ideas are located in a client/therapist situation, his notion of a 'holding' framework is still relevant and applicable to a learning environment. A good learning environment in which creative life writing is being practiced 'holds' people whilst they loosen their identities or the self-concepts containing life-held narratives which have hitherto contained them. The intention is for people to learn how to 'hold' themselves, with the help of the writing process and the group process and the facilitation and the development of new conceptual frameworks derived from theory, in such a way that they can go on to develop a more fluid sense of self. Cultural theorists such as Hall introduce the psycho-social understanding of self and identity, but in my opinion fall short of giving us a way of making sense of the deeper psychological process involved in the move to a more fluid sense of self. It is for this reason that my research employs a multi-disciplinary approach, bringing together psychodynamic ideas with the socio-cultural, and thereby gaining a more substantial theory-and-practice-based understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

0.5 Going A Piece Of The Way With Them

Zora Neale Hurston, in her essay *How it feels to be coloured me*, writes of her experience of how, when white people visited her town Eatonville, which was 'exclusively all coloured' (Hurston, 1928, p.153), she would offer courtesy to the visitor by walking with them, 'going a piece of the way with them'. Cultural theorist Carol Boyce Davis refers to Hurston's actions as 'constructed on the model for relationships with "strangers"' (Davis, 1994, p.46).

In this model of offering courtesies to visitors which comes out of several African and African based cultures, the host goes a “piece of the way” with a friend or visitor depending on the relationship. (ibid).

Davis uses this formation to support her decision to use a range of theories in a flexible way rather than offering one theoretical approach. She particularly uses it in the context of reading texts by black women, as she contends that no one theory can speak for all, that a theory can only take us a part of the way. She argues that the complex realities of black women’s lives demand a multidisciplinary use of theory. Davis refers to all these theories as visitors - the ‘visitor’s theory’:

I believe that the “visitor’s theory” offers a technique of interaction similar to the intention of “multiple articulations” ... It is a particular way of reading or writing the Black/female experience which plays on a variety of possible configurations (ibid).

In trying to understand the effects on my research participants of engaging in creative life writing, I similarly draw on a range of different theories in a flexible way: the socio-cultural and the psychodynamic. But as my research is set in a multi-cultural diasporic context and concerned with practice as much as theory, I also draw into the frame some of the ways established writers, particularly women writers of the African diaspora, have used their creative imagination, both in their personal writings and their critical essays, to explore and express their ideas about emancipatory processes. Thus the ideas of creative writers such as Honor Ford-Smith, Zora Neale Hurston and Zadie Smith will engage with the socio-cultural ideas of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and others, as well as with the psychodynamic theories of D.W Winnicott and Eugene Gendlin, allowing dialogic engagements which have not previously taken place;

similarities and differences opening dialogic space and offering the potential to understand personal, psychic transformations from a new perspective:

Acknowledging encounters with others, with known and unknown forces, happy or horrendous...the journey is the link[age] (Gabriel, 2011, online).

Chapter 1

Contextual Overview

My research draws from two different but related bodies of literature: (1) reflective essays and literary and political writings of writers of the African Diaspora, and (2) writings in the theory and practice of creative life writing for personal development. This chapter provides a context for the research by introducing these two bodies of literature and some of the key concepts which have become the building blocks of my approach. The process of finding the literature includes the conventional search of bibliographies of books relevant to my research, researched online, journals however I would say that that my research was based on a more intuitive process as I drew from literature that has shaped my thoughts and ideas and therefore invariably informed my study.

1.1 The African Diaspora and Migratory Experience

I use the concept of diaspora to illuminate the trans-national workings of identity-formation and to challenge fixed and essentialist conceptions, using the example of the modern African diaspora into the western hemisphere (Gilroy, 2002, p.304).

Diaspora is a contemporary concept that indicates the mass movements of people searching for better economic and social opportunities or safe refuge from war, enslavement or poverty. The migratory experience requires people to adjust their cultures to new personal, geographical, socio-political and cultural realities. The

majority of people of the African diaspora are located in Europe, the Caribbean, North and South America. According to Paul Gilroy, the concept of the diaspora 'is a valuable idea because it points towards a more refined and worldly sense of culture than the characteristic notion of soil, landscape and rootedness' (ibid, p.328). For Gilroy the transitional experience is central to the formation of diasporas, as it leads to shifts and the reformulation of identities and cultures which transcend national and geographical borders.

The migratory experience requires renegotiations and adjustments to life-held narratives that shape identities and bind communities. My research lies in the explorations of writers gaining a fluid relationship with seemingly omniscient and unchanging life-held narratives. I am therefore particularly interested in the creative process of writers whose lives have been shaped by a migratory experience, which requires the self to interplay and oscillate between different cultural frameworks. It is this implicit practice of crossing boundaries that, if recognised, can be applied to the creative writing process and open up the possibility of stepping outside existing conceptual frameworks that restrict and diminish.

My inquiry draws from a legacy of writers who have travelled great distances crossing borders: geographically, psychologically, socio-politically and culturally, entering into new uncharted terrain. The overarching theme of their work is 'draped over a need to go beyond the narrow parameters of whatever restrictions time and place have imposed on them' (St Aubin De Teran, 1999, p.x). The writers have mapped and redefined their complex and multidimensional lives, challenging single identities and hegemonic agendas. They tell of migrant journeys mapped in prose, poetry and

politics as they (re)create pathways of emancipation through their passionate accounts of their personal and public lives:

It is a migrant's journey not simply in the commonly accepted sense, but also in the sense of migrations from past to future lives. It includes that other form of migration - movement across the frontiers of lives into new, uncharted territories of the self (Grewal et al, 1988, p.2).

My research engages with a new generation of writers such as Zadie Smith (2009), Rebecca Walker (1995, 2001), Gary Younge (2012) and Adiche (2009). These are voices that reveal the intricate crossings of their own personal and socio-political boundaries, as they challenge old certainties, allow for contradictions and ambiguities and confront a world rooted in polarity. Their voices inform and express a new conversation in the emancipatory discourse; as they critically examine their personal experiences and memories; they speak of a new world unfolding, the consequence of a mass movement of people across the globe that has reshaped lives and landscapes. Smith writes of her journey across class and cultural lines; Adiche the transformation from a singular to a multifaceted self and community; Walker recasts the concepts of feminism and bi-racial identities; and Younge moves across racial, religious and national borders. Individually and collectively these reflective essays and political writings offer a complex and contemporary lens to a re-visioning of Britain which offers recognition to a society that is diverse in culture and multiplexed in identities.

The new generation of black British writers is a continuation of, and in conversation with, a generation of literary and political writers who are the pioneers of forging new

ways of seeing things. It is imperative that my research engage with the voices of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ to offer context to a vigorous, radical and enduring journey of innovative ideas and transformative ways of being. I draw from the reflective essays and critical writings of writers such as Zora Neale Hurston’s (1928) *How It Feels To Be Colored Me*; Honor Ford-Smith’s (1989) *Notes Towards a New Aesthetic*; Audre Lorde’s *Poetry is not a Luxury* (1984) and Paule Marshall’s (1983) *Poets in the Kitchen*. It is iconic writers such as these who have charted the journey of navigating alternative terrains to pursue personal and collective freedoms. As Alice Walker says: ‘It is in the end the saving of lives that we writers are about. Whether we are the “minority” writers” or “majority.” It is simply in our power to do this’ (Walker, 1983, p.14).

These writers advocate the ‘necessity’ of the imaginative space, for example Ford-Smith refers to the ‘creative power of rebel consciousness’ residing in the tales we tell that can transform our lives (see Chapter 3) and Paule Marshall suggests the space for the imagination can offer a ‘vastness, complexity and power’ to the lives we live’ (Marshall, 1983, p.630). These writers have passed on their belief in the intrinsic role of the imagination in the recollection of our memories and experiences, in order to redefine the parameters that determine identities and self-conceptions. They re-evaluate experience not only intellectually but also emotionally, as they offer alternative ways of theorizing and dismantling dichotomies such as the personal and the political, memory and imagination, individual and collective selves.

My research draws particular attention to the writings and ideas of critical theorist bell hooks because her work is centred in both creative life writing for personal

development and African diaspora socio-political and cultural discourse. She therefore offers a critical conduit to the two main areas of my study.

The work of the African diaspora writers included in my research has critically and creatively charted their own life stories, and these offer invaluable insight to the renewing and reinventing of narratives that are often presented as omniscient and unchangeable:

I hope you will see these writers as yet another group of pioneers, outlaws who demand to exist whole and intact, without cutting or censoring parts of themselves (Walker, R, 1995, p.xxxv).

1.2 Creative Life Writing for Personal Development (CLWPD)

Creative life writing for personal development is a body of practice and literature which has been developing over the past 20 years or so. It is associated with the work, amongst others, of Gillie Bolton (2004), Celia Hunt (1998) and Fiona Sampson (1998). It could be described as the use of fictional autobiographical writing as a means of self-exploration, whether done on one's own or in a facilitated group in education or health and social care, or in a one-to-one context in some form of psychotherapy (Hunt & Sampson, 1998, p.201). My own experience of it was through the MA in Creative Writing and Personal Development at Sussex (2008-2009).

The term 'fictional autobiography' has been primarily used to describe the kind of writing done in this field, but it is also more recently being referred to as 'creative life writing', and I have chosen to use this term. Life writing includes a broader area than autobiographical writing; it encompasses autobiography, letters, diaries, travel

writing, biography and blogs, amongst other forms (Jolly, 2001). I have decided to use the genre of creative life writing (CLW) because, unlike conventional autobiography or life writing where the writer ‘may not be aware of the extent to which she is fictionalizing, in fictional autobiography she has given herself permission to fictionalize herself’ (Hunt, 2000, p.12). As Liz Stanley states: ‘there has been ample recognition of the role played by fictions within the apparent facts of autobiography (Stanley, 1992, p.60). However, the writer of creative life writing takes a step further and is not so occupied with the pursuit of factual accounts of the past or present but more interested in expressing personal memories and experiences through feelings and emotions associated with them. Hunt’s distinction between autobiography or life writing and fictional autobiography or creative life writing is in ‘the relationship between the writer and her words on the page’ (Hunt, 2000, p12). The writer, by giving herself ‘permission to fictionalise herself’, discards the pursuit of factual truth, a truth that Liz Stanley refers to in any case as a ‘creation rather than a representation of self’ (Stanley, 1992, p.60), and instead searches for a ‘personal truth, a felt authenticity’ (Hunt, 2000, p12).

This ‘giving permission to fictionalise’ herself and her experience involves the writer in making a ‘pact’ with herself, that she will ‘allow [her] material to emerge as freely as possible’ (ibid, p.163). This idea of the ‘pact’ comes from Philippe Lejeune’s (1989) work on the existence of an implicit pact in autobiography writing - *Le Pacte Autobiographique* - between writer and reader, where the writer undertakes to engage in the pursuit of truth as far as she is able. According to Paul John Eakin, Lejeune’s concept of a *pact*, a contractual genre, was his attempt ‘to establish [...] a boundary between factual and fictional modes of discourse’ (Eakin, 1989, p.ix). Lejeune

suggested that the difference between the autobiographical novel and the autobiography was that the former included ‘personal narratives’ as well as ‘impersonal narratives’, i.e. it involved different ‘degrees’ of ‘resemblance’ to the author, whilst the latter, ‘does not include degrees: it is all or nothing (Lejeune, 1989, p.13). For Lejeune, the autobiographer has made a contract with her readers to tell the truth of the self and in her eyes any veering away from the truth betrays the pact. Lejeune does, however, recognise intermediary autobiographical forms where truth and fiction are not so cut-and-dried; he refers to this genre as autofiction. For Lejeune autofiction, like the autobiography, is located in a contractual relationship with the reader, as the fiction is grounded in autobiographical truths. In both autobiography and autofiction the pact conveys the author’s intention to the reader.

Many writers have criticised Lejeune’s notion of the autobiographical pact, and it is this central issue of intentionality that, Eakin argues, ‘will continue to dog Lejeune right up to the present day’ (Eakin, 1989, p.3). Liz Stanley, for example, questions the reliability of the representation of self within the autobiographical genre and challenges the idea of the author’s utter pursuit of truth: ‘when it comes to the past, memory actually holds the key, for we inevitably remember selectively’ (Stanley, 1992, p.62). In later years Lejeune re-evaluated his concept: ‘I have always reasoned as if the centre of the autobiographical domain was the *confession*...[in which] there can be no compromise with the truth’ (Lejeune, 1989, p.125). He begins to recognise the muddy waters between the factual and imaginary representations of the self. His reassessment of the pact recognises the relations between the emergence of conscious and unconscious material in a writer’s recollections of experiences and memories, which dismantles the distinction between memory and imagination.

Hunt's use of the concept of the autobiographical pact introduces the contractual genre into the field of creative life writing for personal development. However, the process of creative life writing shifts the focus of the agreement within the framework of the quest for truth: creative life writers seeking personal development through their writing make a pact with *themselves* in a quest for *personal* truth through their imagination rather than a pact with the reader. There is also a difference between fiction and creative life writing. Whilst both are rooted in writers' thinking processes and therefore in their influences and experience in the world, whether in actuality or through reading, and both involve writers in letting go and immersing themselves in the chaos of the creative process, the fiction writer may not necessarily be trying to find things out about herself, whereas in creative life writing for personal development the writer is consciously aware of using fiction and poetry as a way of doing so. Again, intentionality is central.

In fact, Lejeune's notion of the *phantasmatic pact*, which he uses in connection with autofiction, comes close to this (Lejeune, 1989, p. 27). As Hunt points out, he uses this term to describe the way autofiction allows the reader to gain insight into the writer through 'phantasms' of the author revealed in the text. Similarly in creative life writing for personal development the writer can learn things about herself she did not know from the personal 'phantasms' that appear spontaneously on the page (Hunt, 2010, p.234). This can lead to self-growth.

Liz Stanley suggests that 'fictions may actually hold more truths about the past than a factual account' (Stanley, 1992, p.64). The fictionalising of our life story allows us to

excavate and explore conscious and unconscious material, memories that have been hidden or previously unavailable. And it is this 'intertextuality of fiction and autobiography' (ibid, p.60) that links my two main research areas together; as Toni Morrison points out: 'the act of imagination is bound up with memory' (Morrison, 1995, p.98).

Writers in creative life writing for personal development suggest that fictionalising our memories and experience creates a distance from narratives that shape concepts of self and identity. The creative life writing process allows us to stand outside ourselves, as if looking through a window and seeing ourselves and our life experiences on the other side. It is the creative distancing through fiction that helps insight into the self. We recognise that it is us but by standing outside we view our memories from a distance and in doing so create a space for personal memories and experiences to be seen from a different perspective, which allows a new story to emerge. As bell hooks says: 'Writing the autobiographical narrative enables me to look at my past from a different perspective and to use this knowledge as a means of self-growth and change in a practical way' (hooks, 1999, p.86).

Audre Lorde, in her memoir *Zami*, challenges the notion of the absolute truth of the self as she moves away from the idea of autobiography as a factual account of life experiences. Lorde incorporates fiction, mythology and autobiography as a way of exploring her own personal truth of understanding the self. bell hooks also offers valuable insight into her personal experience of writing her life story. She recalls that her memories and recollections 'came in surreal, dream like style that made me cease to think of them as strictly autobiographical because it seemed that myth, dream and

reality had emerged' (hooks, 1999, p. 83). hooks refers to memories not evoked by her 'conscious mind' but from the 'unconscious' that is 'dark and deep within' (ibid. p. 86).

One of the important insights emerging out of research into the use of creative life writing for personal development is the way this kind of writing, undertaken in the context of a particular kind of group work or one-to-one relationship, can facilitate a shift away from stuckness in dominant self-concepts and towards a more fluid and flexible sense of self, which often brings with it increased fluidity in thinking processes (Hunt, 2000, 2004, 2010). My research explores how this approach might be applied in group settings in a culturally diverse community in Brighton to see whether it is possible to free up narratives of identity which may have become fixed. Working towards a more fluid relationship with life-held narratives requires us to *let go* of familiar grounding in our everyday identities and to enter into an imaginative space where conscious and unconscious material can intermingle and be felt in the body. As I will be saying below, the idea of engaging with a bodily felt sense of self is important within creative life writing and also in the story-making in the African diaspora, both of which emphasise that the body cannot be reduced to text and that the body is felt as well as constructed. For example, Honor Ford Smith (1986, 1989, 2005) draws her understanding of the creative process of life stories from the legacy of Caribbean tale-telling which presents emotional and bodily knowledge as essential components to the decolonization process.

In the context of my research where socio-historical events such as colonialism, migration and marginalism have impacted many of the recollections and experiences

of the clients in the hair salon I was particularly interested in Marilyn Chandler's description of creative life writing as a *healing art*, a 'deeply regenerative human activity' (Chandler, 1990, p.3). Chandler's interest lies in life experiences involving suffering, and she suggests that writers of such events are responding to an 'impulse to communicate linked with survival itself' (ibid). She suggests that the impulse to write is a response to the writer's need 'to achieve some congruence between inner and outer worlds' (ibid, p.4) and thereby gain a greater understanding of dominant life-held narratives that shape identity and concepts of self. Chandler says that the act of the imagination involves the writer 'stretching ordinary language to fit the unconventional and extraordinary' (ibid. p.4). She echoes Audre Lorde's view that the imagination allows us to connect to 'places of possibility within ourselves', which is a 'vital necessity for our existence' (Lorde, 1984, p.37).

1.3 Winnicott's Concepts of 'Holding Environment', 'Potential Space' and 'Third Area of Experience'

There are a number of key theorists used in the literature on creative writing and personal development who I have found particularly helpful in my research. One of these is object relations theorist D.W. Winnicott, whose concepts of the *holding environment*, 'potential space' and the 'third area of experience' have very much influenced my approach.

1.31 Holding Environment

This concept is central, as it links my main two areas together. My research interest lies in the possibility of using creative life writing to work towards a more fluid

relationship with life-held narratives, which requires *letting go* of grounding in familiar identities and entering into an internal space that can feel unfamiliar and disturbing, as unconscious and semiconscious material emerges. Winnicott's notion of the holding environment offers insight into the importance of creating a contained and safe space (both psychological and physical) for this creative process to take place. The idea of a *holding environment* is central to the conditions needed for creativity and self-growth to take place, which Winnicott believes to be intrinsically connected with each other. He used the term 'holding' to refer to the supportive environment that a therapist creates for a client. He compares this relationship between a mother and her child, where the mother is nurturing and caring which instils the child with a sense of trust and safety. For Winnicott the 'holding environment' is essential between mother and child for the child to achieve a 'healthy development' (Winnicott, 1965, p.44). He says the 'infants come in to being differently according to whether the conditions are favourable or unfavourable' (ibid p.43) . He highlights the 'importance of personal and environmental influences in the development of the individual' (ibid, p.37), based on the notions that without a 'good enough holding' the various stages of development 'cannot be attained' (ibid, p.44). A holding environment allows the child or adult to feel secure and explore the relationship between their inner psychic world and outer realities.

I began to see the necessity of a holding environment as I worked to develop a writing space in the salon, as well as a 'holding' space for the writing process for my own doctoral thesis. Drawing from the works of Winnicott I began to recognise the importance of creating a 'safe enough' holding space that would facilitate rather than inhibit writer's explorations of personal memories and experiences. Holding

environments such as the creative life writing group in the salon allows for feelings and emotions to be explored and expressed safely. Celia Hunt says that for creativity to take place we ‘have to find our own particular ways of holding the space for the imagination’ (Hunt & Sampson, 2006, p.70). The holding space therefore enables the writer to enter into an imaginative space.

1.32 ‘Potential Space’

Winnicott calls the space for the imagination the *potential space*, where inner reality and outer life meet (Winnicott, 1971, p.3). He states that the *potential space*, also referred to as an *intermediate area of experiencing* is first established during the early stages of a child’s life, when it starts experiencing itself as separate from the mother, which he refers to as the *transitional stage*. The child’s experience of being alone and the effectiveness of the *potential space* vary between individuals and depend on the nurturing and trust that the mother has bestowed on the child. The child is gradually able to be alone because the unconscious has become imbued with the presence of the mother; gained a ‘sense of benign inner presence’ (Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p.79). The sense of the mother’s presence also exists in *transitional objects*, such as toys, blankets and teddy bears that the child has brought into the *potential space*. These are objects that have been introduced by the mother and are associated with her: ‘The object represents the infant’s transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate’ (Winnicott, 1971, p.19). The transitional objects in the holding environment begin the process of individuation, when the child begins to separate her sense of self from her mother and becomes aware of ‘me’ and ‘not me’ (Winnicott, 1965, p.45).

For Winnicott the *benign inner presence* is imperative for the child as she enters into a *transitional space*, a *potential space* of exploration between her inner and outer worlds. The *transitional objects* that represent the outer world facilitate the first experience of play (ibid, p.130). The *holding space* is critical during this *transitional* stage, if the child does not feel safe, the experience of playing can be frightening and chaotic. Winnicott claims that play starts between mother and child and therefore the *playground* is a *potential space* between them (ibid, p.64). For Winnicott the idea of playing is related to the *preoccupation* of the child which he refers to as being ‘lost in play’: ‘The playing child inhabits an area that cannot be easily left, nor can it easily admit intrusions’ (ibid, p.69). For Winnicott the *intermediate area of experiencing* and the *transitional objects* facilitate the child’s first creative act, which becomes the foundation for subsequent acts of creativity in adulthood.

My research interest lies in the exploration of the *potential space*, the imaginative space where persons’ inner and outer realities come together. Entering an imaginative space can allow writers to *let go* of their current self–narratives, which may be fixed or limited and engage in a more fluid and multifaceted sense of self. Winnicott’s concept of *play* is fundamental to the creative life writing workshop: ‘it is only in playing that the child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self’ (ibid, p.73). My research explores how the salon and the creative life writing workshop in different ways serves as holding spaces for the client/writer to enter into a personal exploration of their own life stories. In the context of my research I explore the salon as a potential ‘maternal’ holding environment and examine the *transitional objects* that

have been brought into the writing group that support the clients/writers to enter a dialogical relationship between their own inner and outer realities.

In the context of my research when I refer to the imaginative space or space for the imagination I draw on Winnicott's concept of the potential space.

1.33 *The Third Area of Experience*

I also find helpful Winnicott's idea of the 'third area of experience' that he also refers to as the *potential space*: 'which expands into creative living and into the whole cultural life of man [and woman]' (Winnicott, 1971, p.38). His ideas connect to the socio-cultural conversations in diaspora writings of the 'thirdspace' and such connections open new ways of looking at familiar discourses and experiences. The notion of 'thirdspace' emerges from the post-colonial critique and the new cultural politics of difference and identity. Theorist Homi K Bhabha contends hybridity is the thirdspace of the 'in-between' relating to 'a process of translating and transvaluing cultural differences' (Bhabha, 1994, p.252). Gary Younge conveys his personal experience of 'in-betweenness' involving the birth place of his parents and the country of his birth. It is these circumstances of straddling between two (or more cultures) which shape a diasporic identity.

I'm sure that my affinity to Barbados was linked in no small way to my sense of alienation from England. I was from 'there' because I couldn't be from 'here' - even if 'here' was the only place I had ever really known (Younge, 2010, p.21).

Bhabha's concept of the 'third space of enunciation', a space of hybridity, refers to cultures which are responding to a reality that is in constant flux and in doing so challenges the fixity of authority of dominating structures of power and knowledge. It is though the exploration says Bhabha of 'hybridity', this 'Third Space', we may elude the politics of polarity' (Bhabha, 2006, p.157) and therefore make the 'renegotiating' of hegemonic structures of power possible. He sees the third space as a merger of two cultures which he describes as 'the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures' (Bhabha, 1996, p.54). For Hall it is not necessarily an in-between state but more of one that is the amalgamation and interaction of cultures, a new shared and multifaceted identity. bell hooks refers to the thirdspace or 'marginal space' as a location outside mainstream society: 'To be in the margins is to be part of the whole but outside the main body' (hooks, 1991, p.149).

The participants in the workshop spoke of their experience of 'otherness' and their writing revealed identities 'constructed across difference', which can be experienced as being in between cultures and/or situated on the outside of the official culture (Hall, 1987, p.45). In the context of my research I drew from the common thread that ran through the various ideas of the thirdspace; a place which embodies change, multiplicity, hybridity and fluidity, 'constantly shifting and changing' (Soja, 1996, p.2). A multicultural site which Gilroy suggests has become the 'ordinary feature' of contemporary Britain and challenges notions of homogeneity and fixed classifications which underpin social structures' (Gilroy, 2005, p.iv).

Cultural theorist Edward Soja describes the thirdspace simply as a place where everything comes together: 'a fully lived space, a simultaneously real-and-imagined,

actual-and-virtual locus of structured individuality and collective experience and agency' (ibid, p.11). I began to recognize the workshop, the writings of the participants and indeed my own writing as a thirdspace, a meeting place where the participants could 'bring everything together' (ibid, p.2); a space which mirrored the complexity of our own lives. For hooks the 'thirdspace' is a 'location of radical openness and possibilities':

We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world (hooks, 1991, p.153).

The thirdspace represents a new site which relates to Winnicott's concept of the 'third area of experience' also known as the *potential space* where the inner psychic worlds and the external realities meet. He emphasises the idea of fluidity and interconnectedness between spaces which are often perceived as separate. He says this area 'can be looked upon as sacred to the individual in that it is here that the individual experiences creative living (Winnicott, 1971, p.139). For Winnicott creative living is individuals attaining a healthy relationship with the outside world. The third area similar to the thirdspace is multiple, fluid and a 'connective tissue' between inner and outer realities (Bhabha, 1996, p.54).

By bringing together the psychological and socio-political perspectives I viewed the thirdspace as a new site for radical openness that enabled writers to oscillate and interplay between multiple spaces –cultural, psychological and emotional; making

sense of the incongruities that lay between inner and outer realities and also opening the possibility for the participants to become agents of their own change.

Winnicott, hooks and Soja 'third area/space' holds potential for creativity and transformation:

spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories.

Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice' (hooks, 1991, p.152).

Edward W. Soja says that the thirdspace as a concept 'is not sanctified...to construct a holy trinity, but to build further, to move on, to continuously expand the production of knowledge beyond what is presently known' (Soja, 1996, p.61).

1.4 Identity

Identity is like fire. It can create warmth and comfort, or burn badly and destroy (Younge, 2010, p.4).

I cannot remember a time when I have not been aware of some form of *naming* that has been prescribed or I have subscribed to. I grew up in a working class neighbourhood in the Midlands; the people living there were often identified as immigrants although like my father most were British citizens entering this country with a British passport.

My earliest memories are littered with experiences of the feeling of *otherness*, a

feeling of being different. An accumulation of experiences which oscillated between feeling awkward to being disturbingly painful; like sitting on a crowded 25 Evington bus going into town and my mother placing me on her lap so the seat would be made available beside her and yet it would remain empty for the whole journey; ‘...or the time when I was nine I went to see my grandmother for the first time. She had previously refused to see me because my father was black, but now she was dying. All I remember of that visit was my grandmother crying and touching me dismayed that I was ‘just like a normal girl’, although I was more concerned that my aunt insisted on spraying everything immediately after I touched it. My mum stormed out the house but we never spoke about it. One day after school, I witnessed my schoolmates mainly of Asian-parentage assaulted by ‘skinheads’ and their dogs; the incident was never discussed. The details of these particular memories are blurred and I have at times wondered if they actually happened, but what I do remember with cold-cut clarity is the shame and silences that followed. Nicole King says the narratives of the self are informed by the lives that we have ‘witnessed’. I wonder how much my own identity has, as King suggests, been ‘improvised, constructed, negotiated in conditions of danger or shame, class or family conflict’ (King, 2000, p.7).

It was not until I was older that I began to make a claim to the territory of being a black working-class-woman, but I do know before the naming and the claiming that, for us children in the neighbourhood where I grew up, the felt experience of *difference* entered our thinking process; we were issued with an identity long before we knew we were wearing it. Stuart Hall refers to this experience of ‘displacement as a place of identity... a concept you learn to live with, long before you are able to spell it’ (Hall

1987, p.45). Hall reflects on his own sense of identity: ‘I realise that it has always depended on the fact of being a *migrant*, on the *difference* from the rest of you’ (ibid, p.44). For Hall the black identity is comprised of the acknowledgment of self through *difference*:

I believe it is an immensely important gain when one recognises that all identity is constructed across difference and begins to live with the politics of difference... Black is an identity which had to be learned (ibid, p.45).

Stuart Hall says: ‘We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always “in context”, *positioned*’ (Hall, 1990, p.222). He refers to his own life and work, growing up in Jamaica, living his adult life in England, ‘in the shadows of the black diaspora’, and his work on cultural studies, all of which offers insight to him being ‘preoccupied with the diaspora experience and its narratives of displacements’ (ibid, p.223).

Similar to Hall, my background positions me in my research and therefore my ‘preoccupation’ with a diaspora experience and the dismantling of life-held narratives maybe understandable. I agree with Hall when he says: ‘identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past’ (ibid, p.225).

1.41 Whose Identity Are We Talking About?

I share similar concerns to feminist and writer Nawal el Saadawi regarding the application of the term identity:

Why keep asking me about my identity? Why does no one ask you what is your 'identity'? Is it that the American 'identity', American culture, does not require any questioning, does not need to be examined, or studied or discussed? (Saadawi, 1999, p.7).

Pratibha Parmar says: 'In these post-modernist times the question of identity has taken on colossal weight particularly for those of us who are post-colonial migrants inhabiting histories of diaspora' (Parmar, 1997, p.68). Nawal el Saadawi insists that if we are going to talk about identity politics it 'requires to be updated' so that this discourse 'does not remain the exclusive tool of the powerful against the people who are being postcolonialized' (Saadawi, 1997, p.8). Gary Younge echoes Saadawi's view point as he also states: 'in general, the more power an identity carries, the less likely its carrier is to be aware of an identity at all' (Younge, 2010, p.45). Saadawi (1997) and Younge (2010) raise important concerns that it is often the people who are seen as less powerful in society that the discussion of identity is attached to; as Younge points out: 'Caucasian male is an objective position in itself: not an identity but an orthodoxy' (ibid, p.47). Younge has written extensively about identity in the 21st century which requires his readers to renew the concept:

Those wedded to preserving their identity - indeed handcuffed to it - are often powerful. When all said and done they have the most to lose. They just don't refer to it as identity. They call it tradition, heritage or, simply, history (ibid, p.31).

1.42 *The Conception of Identity Politics*

At the beginning of the twentieth century historian and civil rights activist W.E.B Dubois introduced the concept of ‘double consciousness’ in his book *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). He was specifically referring to the experience of African–Americans [Dubois uses the term Negro] and the internalization process of their identity. For Dubois black people’s concept of self was spilt into two conflicting identities: an American and a Negro. Black people did not just see themselves from their own individual stance but from how they were seen outside. Double consciousness refers to the notion of black people being forced to be ‘looking at one’s self through the eyes of others’ (Dubois, 1903, p.38), and ‘others’ related to the white society that repressed and devalued them. The internalization of dehumanizing anti-black sentiment from the outside world thus significantly informed the African-American experience and understanding of self. Double consciousness refers to the black struggle to unify the different dimensions of their identity. Dubois’ idea of identification underpinned the developing discourse of self and identity.

The academic study of identity was conceived in the period of the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960’s (Wetherell, 2010, p.4). The birth of identity politics in the United States opened a dialogical space to discuss the race relations that existed in the country. Due to the conception of identity politics in a highly racially charged period of American history, the discussion of identity transcended the boundaries of academic discourse, and it became ‘central to activism, to social justice campaigns and to the investigation of these’ (ibid). Although there was an acknowledgment that identity comprised both psychological and social components, there was often tension between the sociologists and psychologists,

sociologists paying little attention to the individual psyche; psychologists showing a lack of interest in the socialisation process of identity. For writer and activist James Baldwin, identity arose out of the critical relationship between the individual and society and could not be addressed in a hierarchical structure or separately.

Baldwin was a critical voice in the civil rights period (and post-civil rights) and challenged fixed conceptions of race, religion, culture and sexuality. In his seminal book, *The Fire Next Time* (1962), he addresses the embedded notion of racial identity in America. He fervently rejected the notions of superiority/inferiority as being ordered by the 'will of heaven' and argued that the concept of a black identity is 'an invention' (Baldwin, 1962, p.69). He recognised racial identity as a construct and the indelible imprint it had on American political and socio-cultural structures. Stuart Hall also spoke of identity as a construct in the context of a post-colonial discourse as he was 'aware of the fact that identity is an invention from the very beginning' (Hall, 1987, p.44). Baldwin viewed the makings of a black identity as a product of inferiority that could be internalised: 'if the world does it to you long enough and effectively enough you begin to do it to yourself' (Baldwin, 1973, p.17). The civil rights movement raised the agency of the black American voice and in doing so challenged complacent assumptions based on racial inequality. Baldwin refers to the challenge to transcend entrenched identities:

Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shining and all the stars aflame. You would be frightened because it is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality.

Well the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as

an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of this place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations (Baldwin, 1962, p.8).

Although Baldwin is referring to a particular period in American history and is referring to how the black identity is perceived by white America, this notion of fixity can be applied to many dominant identities and concepts of self, such as gender, class, sexuality and other signifiers which are often experienced as ‘fixed stars’ that shape our lives, and when the permanence and power of them are challenged it ‘profoundly attacks one’s sense of one’s own reality’ which can be frightening and can lead us to be wedded to identities even if we want to change or distance ourselves from them.

1.43 Fanon and the Internalization Process

In the opinion of Fanon: ‘not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man’ (Fanon, 1967, p.110). He reiterates Dubois’s notion of the double consciousness: ‘If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process’ (ibid, p.11). Fanon’s seminal works, *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), examine the psychology of the colonized and the means of empowerment necessary for their liberation that opened the discussion of the American civil right movement. He highlights the internalization process or, as he refers to it, the ‘epidermalization’ of the inferiority complex. He says ‘in the collective unconscious, black = ugliness, sin, darkness, mortality’ (Fanon, 1967, p.192) and draws attention to black people’s battle of self-hatred, ‘a Negro is forever in combat with his own image’ (ibid, p.194) and refers to his own personal experience: ‘it was impossible for me to get away from an *inborn complex* to assert myself as a BLACK MAN... I am *fixed*’ (Fanon, 2000, p.329). Fanon speaks of the psychological damage

of black people who have internalized self-loathing, which is experienced as presented as omniscient and unchanging, thus denying or creating conflict with any form of self-love and self-value.

Fanon speaks of his own challenges to overcome the incongruities that lay within himself; on the one hand he feels a sense of self that is expansive and empowered, and on the other hand he is aware of the internalisation of external discourses which are dismissive and degrading, based on the colour of his skin:

Nevertheless with all my strength I refuse to accept that amputation. I feel in myself a soul as immense as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers, my chest has the power to expand without limit. I am the master and I am advised to adopt the humility of the cripple (ibid, p.334).

Fanon (although the term was not used in the sixties) applied a psycho-social approach to understanding his personal experience of racism as well as the experience of other black people: 'the analysis that I am undertaking is psychological', although acknowledging 'it is apparent to me that the effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities' (Fanon, 1967, p.11). He looks at the effects of racism by examining the individual's dialogical relationship between their inner and outer worlds, bringing together psychological and social discourses. He suggests that the external racial discourses are internalised and become 'implicit knowledge'; these discourses become the norm and inseparable to a person's sense of self:

A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world – such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world – definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world (Fanon, 2000, p.327).

Fanon was radical in his thinking in the fifties and sixties as he brought into the debate of race the essential component of the body. The traditional conception of identity politics arose within social movements, ‘in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, in the wake of the de-colonization and nationalistic struggles’ (Hall, 2000a, p.204), and thus the focus of identity politics lent towards a social constructionist perspective of understanding the impact between socio-political constructs and collective identities. Stuart Hall in a post-colonial context echoes Dubois’s double consciousness: ‘the self as it is inscribed in the gaze of the Other’ (Hall, 2000a, p.202), and says the structure of identification is ‘always constructed through splitting. Splitting between that which one is, and that which is the other’ (ibid). Hall says that it was only ‘in more recent times a psychological discourse of the self ... a notion of the continuous, self-sufficient, developmental, unfolding, inner, dialectic of selfhood. We are never quite there, but always on our way to it, and when we get there, we will at last know exactly who it is we are’ (ibid, p.200). My concern with this statement of Hall’s is that, although acknowledging the internalisation and fluid nature of identity, there is an underlying residue of an essentialist self which we as individuals are trying to attain; rather than a recognition of a multifaceted self that currently exists. Hall however does reiterate Fanon’s idea that: ‘Identity is not

something which is formed outside and then we tell stories about it. It is that which is narrated in one's own self' (ibid, p.202), and it is this notion, Hall argues, that:

breaks down the boundaries, between outside and inside, between those who belong and those who do not, between those whose histories have been written and those whose histories they have depended on but whose histories cannot be spoken' (ibid).

Dubois's concept of double consciousness is helpful in my research because it recognises the power of external discourses being internalised and also the conflict between 'opposing' identities. This very much speaks to the experience of the participants in my workshops. In fact the participants represent a generation that Hall refers to as embodying a triple consciousness:

Third generation young Black men and women know they come from the Caribbean, know that they are Black, know they are British. They want to speak from all three identities. They are not prepared to give up any one of them (ibid, p.207).

My workshops revealed the participants' ongoing challenge between conforming to fixed narratives authorised by family and society and embracing other identities and senses of self emerging in their writing: 'the small voices, the quiet never-said-this-out-loud-before-voices' (Walker, 1995, p.xxxvi). Hall wrote about the struggle of identification and recognition.

If people from ethnic minorities are to become not only citizens with equal rights but also an integral part of the national culture, then the meanings of the term 'British' will have to become more inclusive of their experiences, values and aspirations. Otherwise Britain will be a multi-ethnic, mono-cultural society, which is a contradiction in terms. The binding function of national identity only works if individuals can somehow see themselves reflected in the culture (Hall, 2000b, online)

Fanon and Hall refer to a self that is not purely constructed and the idea that the body plays a significant role in the formation of how we see ourselves. This reflects the experience of the participants, although I am more concerned in my research with the role of the felt body than the constructed body (see 1.5). By bringing theories into relation with practice in the hair salon/barbershop, I am offering a new way to discuss identity politics and CWPD.

1.44 *The Complexity of Identity*

The word 'identity' is a noun. In vernacular use, it implies an object or a distinctive fixed essence which a person, a place or a group could possess (Wetherell, 2010, p.5).

Margaret Wetherell says that: 'Identity is notoriously elusive and difficult to define' (ibid, p.3). Paul Gilroy is critical of identity's analytical value because it 'has proven to be such an ambiguous source in the analysis of race, ethnicity and politics' (Gilroy,

2005, p.xv). Wetherell says that earlier work on identity was trying to ‘capture the essence of identity - what was the same, what was similar and what was shared’ (Wetherell, 2010, p.16). Sardar Ziauddin suggests identities are often experienced out of shared commonalities within groups that bind people together: ‘a badge of belonging’ (Sardar 2008, p.28). Gilroy discards this idea of identity primarily being rooted in similarities, as he sees this as a narrow and fixed interpretation that fails to encompass the complex lives and relationships which exist in a contemporary British society. He expands on Dubois’s notion of double consciousness, which he locates in being both black and English. He offers a complex interpretation of looking past society’s confines of racial classification out of a ‘desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity’ (Gilroy, 1993, p.19). Gilroy suggests that the identity of Black English is not simply the opposing components but a far more complex and interconnected relationship. He introduced the idea of ‘conviviality’: ‘cohabitation and social interaction that have made multicultural an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere’ (Gilroy, 2005, p.xv). Gilroy’s notion of conviviality challenges us to understand relationships beyond the confines of fixed racial classification and ordering; to identify diversity and difference without the need to cement it in a place.

Since the conception of identity politics, which was located in a far more rigid racial, class and gender environment, movements such as Black Nationalism, post-colonialism and feminism have contributed significantly to change the socio-political landscape, lending a more complex lens to the discussion. As Gary Younge claims:

Any form of identity politics that seeks to diminish that multiplicity, or rank identities into some pre-ordained hierarchy, will inevitably end in distortion (Younge, 2010, p.146).

As there has been more understanding that the self is not purely constructed and the body plays a significant if not primary role in the formation of how we see ourselves, it allows for a complex discussion of self and identity, which reflects the core work of CWPD and my own research.

1.5 Self and Embodiment

My research draws on the idea that the self has multiple dimensions: ‘self-knowledge is intrinsically multimodal; it cannot be reduced to any single source of information’ (Neisser, 1994, p.10). I am interested in exploring the creative life writing process as a space for the imagination that enables writers to engage with the many sides of their personalities and identities that shape their lives.

Jerome Bruner refers to the fluid nature of narratives that mould identity and concepts of self: ‘we constantly construct and reconstruct ourselves to meet the needs of the situation we encounter’ (Bruner, 2003, p.64). Acknowledging the loosening of life-held narratives does not, however, suggest that our stories are arbitrary and we can just pick and choose the ones we want. Eugene Gendlin says that: ‘We are not bound by the forms of the past but we cannot construct just any narrative that we like’ (Gendlin, 1996, p.2). According to Gendlin, to gain an understanding of who we are we have to turn our attention to bodily sensed knowledge.

1.51 *Self and Identity as Socially Constructed*

The idea that self and identity are socially constructed was a dominant view in the humanities and social sciences for many years. For Zoe Sofoulis the empowering aspect of acknowledging that ‘things were socially constructed’ was that it meant that ‘they could be re-constructed: social change was possible’. The underlying belief was that if people could be changed, society could be changed, and if society changes ‘we could change the kind of people society constructs’ (Sofoulis, 2009, online). In her latest article ‘Social Construction for the Twentieth Century’ she discusses the idea that our search for understanding self-concepts and identities can no longer rely on just discourse but has to include the role of the body:

Social constructionism was the weapon of choice ... for women and ethnic minorities, and remains relevant wherever repressive economic, political and religious agendas target populations because of their supposedly ‘natural’ or ‘given’ characteristics. However, that a certain standpoint is or once was politically useful, necessary, or expedient does not guarantee its continued relevance as realities change, complexities emerge, and new concerns arise. Some limits to social construction became apparent in the early stages of the ‘corporeal turn’ of the 1980s, when the emphasis was on how the body was represented, and/or inscribed by society (ibid).

The way the body is represented and/or inscribed by society is an important backdrop to my research, as well as to my own experience. For example, after graduating from university many years ago my friend and I spent a month travelling around Egypt. On one of the boat trips we took along the Nile we met a woman who was from Leicester,

the same city where I was born and grew up. On hearing this I enthusiastically shared the commonality of our roots. Initially I assumed that she did not hear me because she remarked several times how well I spoke English. My friend, who is also English of Jamaican heritage and speaks with a distinct Yorkshire accent, was also complimented for her use of the English language. I repeated saying I was born and grew up in the same city as her, and eventually she responded by saying she ‘had no idea that Egyptians lived in Leicester’. It was inconceivable to her that we could be English tourists and not be Egyptian; we were ‘characterized and identified by only [our] appearance, more specifically skin pigmentation’ (Florez, 2012, online). The colour of our skin contradicted a ‘vision of Englishness’ which ‘exclud[ed] other possibilities, other versions of Britain’ (Phillips, 2003, p.22). The disconnection in this human interaction was based purely on how we looked and how that look was translated:

Looks mattered because of the history of the racialisation of ‘looks’; they mattered because discourses about the body were crucial to the constitution of racisms. And racialised power operated in and through bodies (Brah, 1996, p.3).

Laura Flores suggests that: ‘social construction is something that you might not be aware of’ (Flores, 2012, online), but the experience of the participants in the workshop, and indeed my own experience, revealed that this was not the case for British people of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage.

Social construction is how society groups people and how it privileges certain groups over others...It is all just a social process which makes us differentiate between what's 'normal' and what's not 'normal' (ibid).

Toni Morrison draws attention to the 'deliberateness of the construction, the consciousness necessary for establishing difference' (Morrison, 1993, p.39); a difference which bell hooks asserts is located in 'colonial imperialist paradigms' which 'reinforce and sustain' the same hierarchies based on 'white supremacy' and continue to define social classifications of race, gender and class (hooks, 1981, p. 28). Joan Anim-Addo reiterates the idea of the racialised body as a 'particularised historical construction, deriving from colonial-cultural encounters, specifically that of the Atlantic slavery' (Anim-Addo, 2007, p.9).

1.52 The Role of Embodiment and Emotion in Self and Identity

My research therefore is located within a decolonization process, as it explores how we can emancipate ourselves by gaining a fluid relationship to historical and socio-political constructs which shape our identities and sense of self. For this purpose it brings ideas of embodiment and emotion into relation with ideas of social construction. Research interest in embodiment and emotion is expanding rapidly across a range of academic disciplines including cultural studies, political science, history, sociology and psychology. Previously the study of feelings and emotions was marginalised and associated with qualitative and interpretive approaches and so-called 'soft' science. However, in the last 30 years scholars have wanted to find out more about embodied social action: understanding how people engage with their bodies and how this informs their perceptions of themselves and what is going on in the world.

Margaret Wetherell refers to the term ‘psychosocial’ as a means to ‘expand the scope of social investigation’, as it allows for ‘a focus on embodiment, to attempt to understand how people are moved, and what attracts them, to an emphasis on repetitions, pains and pleasures, feelings and memories’ (Wetherell, 2012, p.2). Similar to Merleau-Ponty, she seeks to engage with both the text and the body: ‘everything is both manufactured and natural in man [and woman]’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.189). Wetherell’s concept of *affective practice* is an ‘assembling of multimodal resources’ between the social, the psychological and the physiological. The central component she has identified as ‘most [crucial]’ is the body: ‘it is the participation of the emoting body that makes assemblage an example of affect rather than an example of some kind of social practice’, thus bringing together feeling and thought, social and personal relationships (Wetherell, 2012, p.159). Wetherell’s understanding of ‘affect’ is as ‘*embodied meaning-making*. Mostly, this will be something that could be understood as human emotion’ [authors italics] (ibid, p.4).

Feminist theorists have made a significant contribution to highlighting corporality and the critical role the body plays in socio-political discourse. Simone DeBeauvoir, in her seminal book, *The Second Sex*, located her ideas between the body and the self: ‘to be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world’ (Beauvoir, 1953, p.39). She speaks of how women experienced their bodies as objects through the eyes of others, which consequently limited and undermined the understanding of self: ‘the exuberance of life....restrained’ (ibid, p.323). Beauvoir’s focus on the significant relationship between the woman’s body and the self is similar to W.B. Dubois’s focus on the racialised body. The internalization of the racialised gaze from the outside

world greatly influences how black people experience themselves: ‘a world that yields the black man [or woman] no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see him through the revelation of the other world’ (Dubois, 1903, p.38).

Feminist and racial discourses have highlighted the critical relations between bodies and selves, thus expanding the social and political parameters to engage with ideas of mind and body. Stanley points out: ‘What results is a truly radical approach to theorising knowledge, one which refuses the scientific distinction between mind/knowledge and body/experience’ (Stanley, 1997, p.4). Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price contend that the theoretical recognition of embodiment has created a generative space which accounts for ‘sexual difference...racial difference, class difference and difference due to disability’ (Price and Shildrick, 1999, p.5).

For Audre Lorde, within the Euro-centric intellectual tradition: ‘we rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious’ (Lorde, 1984, p.37). Dubois also expressed his concern: ‘These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed or forgotten’ (Dubois, 1903, p.39). Dubois’s use of ‘power of body and mind’ reminds me of Ford-Smith’s idea of ‘creative power of rebel consciousness’, a source of embodied knowledge hidden within our own stories, charting ‘ways in which women can move from the apparent powerlessness of exploitation’ (Ford-Smith, 1986, p.xiii).

In my research the creative writing process is explored as a way in which the research participants, and I with my own writing, are able to unlock the power within our own stories by connecting to a bodily sense of self which extends outside of the text of social constructions. Phenomenological philosopher Eugene Gendlin is very helpful in

this connection. He refers to a *bodily felt sense*, a physical feeling that carries deep embodied knowledge and can bring personal meaning. He sees this bodily felt sense as those feelings that are often not given much attention, a ‘gut feeling’, a sensation that ‘begins in the body and occurs in the zone between the conscious and the unconscious’ (Gendlin, 1996, p.1). The felt sense ‘is not about words and thoughts but the attention in the body’ (ibid, p.19). He points out that at first the feeling can be ‘unclear, murky, puzzling, not fully recognizable’ (ibid, p.26), but in time it can reveal experiences and memories that would otherwise be missed.

Gendlin’s notion of the bodily felt sense supports the idea that we are not just discourse and that the body plays an instrumental role in our search for identity and sense of self. Even Liz Stanley, a confirmed social constructionist supports the idea of embodied knowledge when she recognises that ‘rather than travelling the “strict” constructionist’s route, we feel the necessity of taking the body seriously’ (Stanley, 1993, p.197). Elisabeth Grosz’s notion of ‘the crisis of Reason’ (Grosz, 1993, p.187) challenges the old Cartesian certainties of knowledge which separate mind and body, placing the former source as superior to the latter. She recognises the body as a critical source in the making of knowledge. Embodiment is a centrally important concept for my research, as I see creative life writing as helping us to ‘move away from a sense of fixity or “stuckness” in one or more dominate self-concepts’ (Hunt , 2004, p.163) by engaging with the body, listening to how we feel and our perceptions of what is going on in the world. Creative writing offers an exploratory space for finding words that are able to express feelings that Gendlin describes as ‘puzzling’ and ‘unclear’ (Gendlin, 1996, p.26).

Gloria Bavette Gordon's experience of doing her PhD speaks to Gendlin's idea of the bodily felt sense containing social constructions:

A major issue that engaging in my PhD process threw up for me were my silences; silences which I had come to realize were not necessarily of my own choosing...The conscious engagement with my silences made me aware that in my mind they were reflecting the 'mental inferiority' ascribed to Blacks in the western world...I was to conceptualize silence as a social construct (Gordon, 2006, pp.248-249).

Gordon's recognition of 'silence as a social construct' echoes Lorde's idea of the necessity for the 'transformation of silence into language and action [as] an act of self-revelation' (Lorde, 1984, p.42). This was a turning point for me as a facilitator as well as a writer, as I recognised the importance of the stories we told but also those that remain silent, and by expressing the unspoken in the creative writing process we are attempting to dismantle dominant discourses and 'open up new possibilities for the construction of self and the assertion of agency' (hooks, 1991, p.28).

The kind of work I have always wanted to do requires me to learn how to manoeuvre ways to free up language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed determined chains (Morrison, 1993, p.xi).

1.6 Emancipation and Personal Freedom

What do we become when we put down the scripts written by history and memory, when each person before us can be seen free of the cultural or personal narrative we've inherited or devised? When we ourselves, can taste that freedom? (Walker, R. 2001, p.305)

The notions of freedom and emancipation are central to my research and to my own story. My father grew up in a village in Antigua called *Liberta*. I watch my son listen to his grandpa telling him the same proverbial story that he told me: 'It's called *Liberta* because we were the first people to be liberated from slavery in Antigua'. I wonder if the mention of 'we' weighs as heavy with my son as it did with me. I remember thinking as a child: what does this have to do with me? I wasn't even there. I realised on hearing the retelling of this familiar story that the notion of emancipation is a life-held narrative that is inscribed into my personal and collective memory. Similarly Danzy Senna, a writer for whom mixed-race identity is a recurring concern, speaks of her parents who 'instigated and courted' memory that would shape the person she would become: 'they supplied us with a language for what we were before we could talk' (Senna, 2010, p.167). In her latest book of short stories, *You are Free*, Senna looks at the concept of freedom: 'To be born is to be encumbered by identity and by projections and by a body' and therefore the only person in her stories who is truly free is an unborn child (Senna, 2011, online).

Senna places the search for freedom in everyday circumstances which resonates with my own idea of freedom which has come to take on many forms. My work has taken

me to the deep south of the United States where the residue of segregation is still prevalent, to Angola where the power lay with those that controlled the landmines, and post-apartheid South Africa where the scars of subjugation have a long way to heal. I have been brought to my knees in prayer for my mother to be free of cancer and for me to be free of an abusive relationship. Freedom in its multiple guises has been my greatest quest. My research responds to the call of Honor Ford-Smith as she asks for a new generation to engage and evolve the dialogue of narratives of liberation (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.298).

1.61 *Personal Freedom*

How to Use the Emergency Oxygen Mask on a Plane

1. Place the mask over your nose and mouth. Place the elastic piece on the mask around your ears and back of your head.
2. Grab a second mask if travelling with a child or a companion that needs help. The adult should always put on an oxygen mask first, working quickly and confidently with precision before putting a mask on a child (Brite, 2014, online).

If you ask most parents, they express disconcertion that they would choose to put on their masks before placing it on their child/children, but as the airlines repeatedly warn us, a passenger can not help another unless they are equipped to do so. I would argue that for many of us wedded to various categories within identity politics the pursuit of the personal before collective freedom can be equally disconcerting even if it is a necessity.

It feels almost confessional when Rebecca Walker speaks of her aspirations to be a *good feminist*, as she reflects that it was ‘not just a deep desire to change my behaviour to change the world but a deep desire to be accepted, claimed and loved by a feminist community’ (Walker, 1995, p.xxx). For Walker feminist beliefs ‘were my own, and we mirrored each other in the most affirming ways ...our love was dependent on that mirroring (ibid). She reiterates the importance the feminist movement plays in her life and work for liberation, but she also speaks of desires and ideas that may not *mirror* the movement:

That moment of articulating my difference, when I imagined it in my mind, was not one of power of me coming to voice about my own truths, it was filled with the guilt of betrayal (ibid).

Walker expresses the complexity of the pursuit of emancipation and the ‘guilt’ when our personal pursuit of freedom does not always mirror collective ideals.

Studying for my Masters in Creative Writing and Personal Development (CWPD) offered a critical-creative space to revisit and renew my own ideas of narratives of liberation. CWPD is all about the emancipatory process but more in a psychological sense than in a broad socio-political sense. Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) draws attention to the external ‘authoritative discourses’ - I refer to these as life-held narratives - which have been internalised, ‘internally persuasive’. For Bakhtin the internally persuasive discourse is not separate from the authoritative voice; the two are interconnected due to the internalization of the authoritative discourse. He says that embodying them in fictional characters allows the writer to engage with many different dimensions of the self on equal terms. If we

view the authoritative discourse, for example, racism, sexism, the discourses of parents and other authority figures, purely as an external voice or action, we fail to recognise the complex and multiple processes of oppression and emancipation. If we choose to hate or reject the oppressive forces outside, we are invariably doing this to ourselves.

Important for my research is the understanding that emancipatory discourse is more complicated than it appears, as oppression is not just from the outside; it is also buried deep within us. The socio-political implies that oppression is primarily coming from the outside and therefore discounts our capacity to oppress ourselves or that our life has brought internal oppressions that we have not worked through. In other words it eschews the psychological.

For Audre Lorde the emancipatory process cannot take place unless we connect to our inner world, which is achieved by paying attention to our feelings and emotions: 'I feel therefore I can be free' (Lorde, 1984, p.38). For Lorde the discourse within holds 'the hidden source of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore lasting action, comes' (ibid). She claims that if women do not recognise this vital inner source of creative power, we become submissive to racist and patriarchal authoritative discourses:

For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation...Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered within (Lorde, 1984, p.58).

1.62 Creative Life Writing and Freedom

During the creative life writing process for my MA dissertation I felt as if the idea of freedom had become tangible. As I continued to write I felt a bodily release that resonated deeply, as if I was exhaling for the first time. Al Alvarez says ‘finding your own voice as a writer is the equivalent of – feeling free in your own skin. It is liberation’ (Alvarez, 2005, p.38). bell hooks says that for her the writing of a particular memory was ‘decided not by my conscious mind but all that is dark and deep within me, unconscious but present. It was the act of making it present, bringing it into the open, so to speak, that was liberating’ (hooks, 1999, p.86).

The emancipatory process is central to my research which is exploring the potential of creative life writing for loosening life-held narratives that shape identities and concepts of self. It looks at the creative writing process that enables the writer to liberate themselves from personal and political constructs which prevents them from thinking more reflexively. My research explores a different way of looking at the emancipatory process; by bringing together the psychodynamic with the socio-political, it aims to give another layer to the field of CWPD and to identity politics, to bring more awareness of these different levels from which we are trying to emancipate ourselves.

1.63 Memory and Life Narratives

As I have proceeded on my research journey, certain things have come to loom larger than they did in the beginning; the relationship between memory and identity has emerged as a key factor in this inquiry. My research explores how the imagination

impacts the telling of memories; stories that ‘make sense of our lives’. I refer to memories that appear fixed and prevailing as life-held narratives or, as psychologist Ulric Neisser calls them: ‘life narratives’, which he deems critical, as they become significant memories and a ‘way of defining ourselves’ (Neisser, 1994, p.1).

For Neisser there are different stages of memory, which he refers to as ‘historical’ and ‘episodic’ memory. The historical event we never can get hold of exactly. Neisser refers to the remembered self as a version of how we perceived the experience at the time. He is not saying there is no truth in memory: ‘people remember what happened to them – some of it anyway’ (ibid). He views memory as a reconstruction of events rather than a recalling of events. We are telling *our* version of experiences, which leaves room for quite a lot of fiction in our memory: ‘Even when people strive for accuracy, what they remember may not be just what happened’ (ibid, p.2). Jerome Bruner also views the remembered self as constructed: ‘self is not an entity that one can remember, but is, rather, a complex mental edifice that one constructs’ (Bruner, 1994, p.41). Bruner sees the recall of memories less as ‘true reports’ and more as a narrative construction that has the function of helping the teller clarify his or her self-concept: ‘When you ask people what they are really like, they tell a great many stories involving the usual element of narrative’ (ibid, p.43). Liz Stanley also claims that memory is selective:

Memory’s lane is a narrow, twisting and discontinuous route back through the broad plains of the past, leading to a self that by definition we can never remember but only construct through the limited and partial evidence available to us (Stanley, 1992, p.62).

Annette Kuhn refers to memory having ‘roots in the past and reverberations in the present’ (Kuhn, 1995, p.3). Marilyn Chandler also recognises the connection between past and present memories: ‘the past informs the present, the present also changes the past and autobiography enacts the changing of the past’ (Chandler, 1990, p.60). The understanding of memory is essential in this research project as its objective is to examine the participants’ experience of creatively engaging and exploring their personal memories and past experiences. The memories we recall shape our present stories about the past and help to make sense of our lives in the present. For Neisser ‘the remarkable thing is not just that past events influence the present ... but that they are explicitly reconstructed by the person who experienced them’ (Neisser, 1994, p.1). Neisser refers to these ‘reconstructions’ as *episodic memory*. If these ‘remembered events’ are deemed to be important they become *autobiographical memory*, which may form part of a *life narrative*. Neisser says these life narratives or, as I call them, life-held narratives, are critical in the way that we define ourselves. The problem is that life narratives are often presented as ‘if they were the chief or even the only ingredient of the self’ (ibid) which, as Neisser claims, is ‘very hard to change’ (ibid, p.7).

Bruner links ‘turning points’ to stories riding ‘on a wave of episodic memory’, which adds to the entrenchment of these stories in people’s lives. He refers to ‘turning points’ as an experience that leads to a person having a ‘new belief, new courage, moral disgust, “having had enough”’. These stories become dominant and fixed and therefore inform and shape the autobiographical self. For Bruner such stories are ‘drenched in affect – certainly in the telling and presumably in the living’ (Bruner, 1994, p.50).

As I discuss later, one of the things that was highlighted by the research participants was the notion of ‘living in the wrong story’ or, probably more accurately, living in a singular or limited story that failed to recognise the complexity of their identity. The implication being that the narratives that govern our lives are often at odds with the way we feel ourselves to be. This links to the idea of the self as having multiple dimensions. Daniel Albright discards the notion of the singular self: ‘We are more plural than that...When I try to account for my inner life – my conflicting desires, my moments of decision – I tend to see it as a drama with several actors, each a fraction of myself’ (Albright, 1994, p.29). Neisser also rejects the notion of the single self: ‘self knowledge is intrinsically multimodal; it cannot be reduced to any single source of information’ (Neisser, 1994, p.10). My research explores the self having a multiple dimensions but there being the possibility of feeling whole and grounded.

1.7 The Concept of Voice

A concept that is connected to self and identity and makes links between my two main areas of study is *voice*. The literal meaning of voice ‘denotes the sound of the speaking or singing voice received by the ear’ (Hunt, 2006, p.24), but in the context of this research my interest lies in the metaphorical sense of ‘finding one’s voice’, which is integral to an empowering process. I am working with two metaphorical meanings of voice: (i) voice as the right to speak and make one's voice heard and (ii) voice as a bodily felt sense of self.

1.71 Voice as the Right to Speak and Make One’s Voice Heard

Due to my research being located in a ‘multicultural’ environment, I was particularly interested in the notion of *voice* in relationship to identity. Peter Elbow refers to

‘having a voice’, which is traditionally associated with ‘having the authority to speak’ (Elbow, 2000, p.204). Voice in relation to identity often refers to an identity which is officially not recognised and therefore the process of ‘having a voice’, involves the recovery of hidden, suppressed or forgotten identities. Similarly, bell hooks, June Jordan and Audre Lorde speak of women’s and/or black women’s voices being devalued or silenced. Lorde says: ‘I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared’ (Lorde, 1984, p.41), which reinforces the notion that ‘there is something important and political at stake in being able to use a voice that you experience as yours’ (Elbow, 2000, p.192).

I am particularly interested in the idea of finding a voice in the context of my research. The salon represents a socio-cultural environment where the ‘accustomed or home voice’ is valued. But what does this really mean in the creative writing process of an individual *finding their own voice*, a voice that they experience as theirs?

In order to have greater understanding of *voice* in a creative life writing process I drew from the ideas and theories of Bakhtin. He suggests that the words we write or speak come from the voices of others: ‘One’s own discourse and one’s own voice, born of another or dynamically stimulated by another’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p.348).

Bakhtin refers to a dialogical relationship between the authoritative discourses: ‘religious, political, moral; the word of a father, adults and of teachers etc’, and the internally persuasive discourse that ‘is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society’ (ibid. p.342). The authoritative discourse is not an external voice that exists solely outside of us but a discourse that has been absorbed internally and therefore is inherent to the internally persuasive discourse that occurs within us. In the Bakhtinian sense, an important

aspect of a writer's self-growth is the increased awareness of 'distinguishing between one's own and another's thought' (ibid. p.345). This evokes the idea of *ventriloquism*: the voice coming from somewhere else, although it comes from one's own mouth: 'In all likelihood the words we put on the page when we start to write will not be our own' (Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p.25). 'Finding a voice' is not about rejecting the voices of others but becoming aware of them and making the words our own. From the Bakhtinian point of view the writer is encouraged to shift from the notion of finding a voice that is singular and fixed to a creative process that allows an engagement with many voices of the self which are fluid and changing.

One of the challenges in my research is the tension between voice as a singular phenomenon and voices plural. Elbow says: 'we can move back and forth between something that feels like our own voice and speaking with a range of voices' (Elbow, 2000, p.218). Zadie Smith's essay *Speaking Tongues* explores the relationship between the singularity and plurality of voice and identity. She offers a personal and insightful account of her own experience of oscillating between different voices, her 'old voice' which represented Willesden where she grew up, 'a big colourful working class sea', and her Cambridge voice, where she studied, which was a 'smaller, posher pond and almost univocal' (Smith, 2009, p.134). As time progressed Smith says she lost her 'double voice' for a 'single one', the voice she 'picked up at college'. She suggests that society requires that we sacrifice one voice for another; our voice like our identity is presented as fixed and singular which, Smith argues is an 'illusion' (ibid).

Elbow puts forward the idea of voice in the singular as something more authentic and belonging to the body, and voices plural as a necessary consequence of our having to engage with different contexts, which Zadie Smith refers to in *Speaking Tongues*. Elbow and Smith offer insight into the aims that underlie the creative life writing workshop in the salon; the possibility for writers of entering into a creative process with their own life-stories as they connect to the many different voices of the self.

1.72 Voice as a Bodily Felt Sense of Self

Peter Elbow 's concept of *resonant voice* is particularly valuable for my study as it refers to the relationship between social discourse and the unconscious. Elbow says that a discourse can never fully convey a complete person: 'A person is usually too complex ...writers or speakers *do* manage to find words which seem to capture the rich complexity of the unconscious' (Elbow, 2000, p.206). He suggests that the voice that resonates is the voice that is closest to a 'whole person' because it connects to the unconscious (ibid.). He emphasises that *resonant* voice is connected to the body: 'the body shows more of ourselves than the conscious mind does' (ibid. p.208).

Elbow directly links the metaphor of voice with the body: 'getting more of ourselves from behind the words' (ibid. p.210). His ideas echo poet Seamus Heaney's idea of 'getting your feeling into your words'; both writers relating voice to bodily feeling and emotion. Heaney says that: 'Finding a voice means that you can get your own feeling into your own words and that your words have the feel of you about them' (Heaney, 1980, p.43). Writer and political activist, Audre Lorde, in her seminal essay *Poetry is not a Luxury*, puts forward her view of the *necessity* to 'train ourselves to respect our feeling and emotion and to transpose them into a language so they can be shared' (Lorde, 1984, p.36).

The idea of ‘bodily felt sense’ (Nicholls, 2006) is important within creative life writing and also in the story-making in the African diaspora, both of which emphasise that the body cannot be reduced to text and that the body is felt as well as constructed. Gendlin’s theory of ‘felt sense’, as outlined above, explores the importance of paying attention to feeling and emotion in meaning-making. Similar to Bakhtin, Elbow claims that resonance occurs more in artistic discourse; there is more of the unconscious in discourse when ‘we make up things, tell stories, use metaphors and exploit the rhythm and sounds of language’ (Elbow, 2000, p.207). Fiction allows the conscious and unconscious voices to come together, as Bakhtin (1981) says of the *heteroglossia* of the novel, when the page serves as the space for the many voices of the writer. Elbow also refers to the role of fiction in helping to develop an authoritative voice. Fiction allows the writer to experiment with other voices, if they do not have the confidence in their own personal voice. This is critical in a workshop such as mine, where people are not used to their voices being heard; they might find it difficult to speak from a personal perspective but writing in other voices may help them to find their voice of authority.

The concept of voice is also critical to the understanding of my case study of *Lionheart Gal*, a collection of life stories by Jamaican women. One of its leading critics, Carolyn Cooper, argues that the book denies the women a voice because it ‘serves to confirm not the appropriateness of the Jamaican mother–tongue, but the imperial authority of the English father tongue’ (Cooper, 1993, p.90). However, Honor Ford Smith, the editor of *Lionheart Gal*, in her critical reflections on the making of the book, offers a broader, multifaceted framework for the expressions and

articulations found in the narratives. It is here that my research explores the tensions between the individual and collective voice(s) and where Elbow's idea of the singular voice as belonging to the body and the plural voices as a consequence of engaging with different contexts becomes a useful exploratory lens.

1.8 Bakhtin's Concept of 'Dialogue and Dialogic Relationship'

Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogue provides a valuable theoretical framework for understanding my research. According to Bakhtin, the individual's experience is shaped by her *outsideness* to her own viewpoint; she is able to look inside herself from the 'eyes of another' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.295). Writers engaged in a creative process attempt to see the self from the perspective of the other with the possibility of seeing something new that they did not see before. Morson and Emerson reinforce this idea: 'one always sees something in the other that one does not see in oneself' (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p.53). The capacity to see the other, which could be another person or another part of ourselves, requires us to let go of our own perceptions, which Bakhtin refers to as our 'surplus' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.299). It is this 'surplus' of vision that allows us to enter into a dialogue or dialogical relationship between the experience as the 'self as other' and our 'familiar sense of self' (Hunt & Sampson, 2006, p.4). Dialogue in the Bakhtinian sense is intrinsic to the notion of reflexivity: a creative process that allows the writer to move back and forth fluidly to different dimension of the self: 'giving ourselves up to the experience of "self as other"' whilst also retaining a grounding in our familiar sense of self' (ibid). The dialogic process is different from empathy, where one gives oneself completely to the other.

In what way would it enrich the event if I merged with the other, and instead of two there would be now only one? And what would I myself gain by the other's merging with me? If he did, he would see and know no more than what I see and know myself; he would merely repeat in himself that want of any issue out of itself which characterizes my own life. Let him rather remain outside of me, for in that position he can see and know what I myself do not see and do not know from my own place, and he can essentially enrich the event of my own life (Bakhtin, 1990, p.87)

Bakhtin refers to this experience as *live entering* or *living into* the other. It involves letting go of our own perceptions – what Bakhtin calls our 'surplus' – and enables us to see the other more clearly, whether this other is another person or another part of ourselves. It is the ability to create a dialogical relationship between being inside and outside ourselves. Losing oneself to another would only continue to create a singular and monologic point of view whereas regaining 'one's own outsideness and surplus of vision' permits dialogue, multifaceted viewpoints; creating new understanding to see beyond the 'close circled of our own lives' (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p.53). This suggests that dialogue in a creative writing process offers the possibility to the writer of stretching far beyond their present knowledge and perceptions.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogue requires the writer to cultivate a creative internal distance. Dialogue within the creative writing process allows space to open up between the writer and their words, but in order for this to happen the writer has to abandon if only temporarily their ties to their material. It is this relinquishing of control that allows a space to open between the writer and their work, allowing the

writing to develop a life of its own. The notion of a dialogical space(s) is pertinent to my research located in a creative life writing workshop in a salon. It is in this dialogical space that writers may become aware of different points of view that may vary from their usual way of thinking. Bakhtin's concept of dialogue is intrinsic to his idea of voice. The novel for Bakhtin is a dialogical, multi-voiced space; the author's voice is merely one among the many to be found in the novel. He emphasises the importance for the writer of *letting go* of the autonomous position that she holds as the creator of the work and engaging with other voices of the conscious and semi-conscious on equal terms (Bakhtin, 1984, p.51). In my research I find particularly helpful Bakhtin's idea of the potential of the creative page for giving space for the writer to engage with the many different voices of the self. This idea, which he refers to as *heteroglossia* or *multi-voicedness* (ibid), involves the writer in seeing herself from the perspective of the other, whether other people or the self as other.

Dialogue in the creative writing process is often referred to as a 'double-voiced', which is another Bakhtinian term (Bakhtin, 1981, p.344). Doubling the self in writing practice is a reflexive process because as we re-read our work we are able to gain a sense of looking at ourselves from the outside and therefore seeing our own experience from another point of view; more than one point of view is voiced in the single voice of the writer. Peter Elbow suggests that the creative process enables the writer to move between the voice that feels like our own and voices that are multiplexed (Elbow, 2000, p.90).

In an earlier discussion of the key concept of *voice* I discussed in greater detail Bakhtin's notion of the dialogical relationship that takes place within the individual

between the authoritative and internally persuasive voice(s). The authoritative voice', which is generally known as the discourse of 'acknowledged truths, of the official line'; the monologic word (Bakhtin, 1981, p.342). Kay Halasek describes the internally persuasive word as a 'resistant form of discourse...proximate, dynamic, and closely connected to and assimilated into the writer's own words' (Halasek, 1992, p.57). This dialogical relationship can be misperceived as a dialogue between two separate and fixed entities, the external and internal worlds; however, Bakhtin refutes the perception of two separate 'boundaries' or 'territories', or that a person is restricted in a particular place and time. He describes the internally persuasive voice as being 'half ours and half someone else's' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.345), referring to the internalization of the external voice. Bakhtin perceives the dialogical space between the discourses as an 'elastic environment' where the individual oscillates between different discourses of the self: 'neither individuals nor any other social entities are locked within their boundaries. They are extraterritorial, partially "located outside" themselves' (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p.50). Bakhtin's notion of dialogue is central to my research as it suggests the importance of the writer creating a creative and fluid relationship with their own life-held narratives and fixed notions of self. The idea of creating an internal distance from our personal memories and experiences fosters a position of *outsideness* to our stories, which enables us to develop a dialogue that offers greater understanding of the self and opening up the ability to step outside existing conceptual frameworks and view the self and the world through a broader lens.

Chapter 2

Methodology and Methods

2.1 Ontology

The stranger *travels between*, and in doing so brings their ontological borderlands with them, indeed who wears it like an almost visible marker which sets them apart in their difference. This difference is not merely experienced, it is *lived*. It becomes the stuff of which ‘a life’ is thus composed, and it is central to identity and feeling, and thinking (Stanley, 1997, p.6).

I came to this research with a way of seeing the world that is deeply rooted in my background. I grew up in a migrant community in the middle of England; my parents are migrants from very different cultural, racial and geographical backgrounds from each other. Neighbours of Indian, Jamaican, Pakistani, Polish, Irish, Ugandan and English origins lived next to one another in tightly packed rows of pre-war terraced houses. Stories of personal experiences and memories from my parents, as well as members of the community, served for me as a sustainable thread in the realities of negotiating the concepts of home and displacement. The stories revealed and validated complex and hidden life-journeys that exposed the emerging diverse cultural landscape of Britain.

For Stuart Hall, the migratory experience that marked the post-colonial era reinforced the notion of ‘Otherness’; people were constructed differently by those who had the power ‘to make us see and experience ourselves as “other”’ (Hall, 1994, p.394). Journalist Gary Younge, born in Stevenage of Barbadian parentage, reflects on his ‘sense of alienation from England’ during his childhood. He spoke of how ‘I ingested my affinity to Barbados with my mother’s milk’ and how he chose to be from ‘there’ because he couldn’t be from ‘here’ (Younge, 2010, p.21). I was also breastfed with my mother’s kinship to her birth place, Scotland; we visited regularly as it was clearly the place where she felt most at home. I wanted more than anything in the world to belong to the same *home* as my mother but as in England it was always made clear that I was not from ‘here’. So I eventually clung to Antigua, the birth place of my father and a home I had yet to visit. I, like Younge, represented a generation of Britons who found placements in distant lands that offered a lineage and a sense of citizenry.

Stuart Hall states that identities ‘undergo constant transformations’ (Hall, 1994, p.394), and Younge reiterates this idea of fluidity when he suggests that identities ‘may change a great deal from time and place’ (Younge, 2010, p.86). He draws from his own personal experience when he was seventeen and lived in Sudan; he says: ‘Up until that time I never described myself as British, even though I was born there’ (ibid). Initially he said he was Barbadian but the more he had to qualify where he came from, he wrote: ‘I simply had to admit that I was indeed British’ (ibid, p.87), even though British people had ‘continuously reminded me of my “foreignness”’ (ibid, p.86). I had a similar experience to Younge. During the thirteen years of living in South Africa, the USA and the Caribbean I came to the realisation that my cultural

identity is ‘indeed British’ but at the same time I *felt* more at *home* in Johannesburg, New York and St John’s, than in the country where I grew up. My attempts to understand how I looked at myself and the world around me were becoming increasingly complex, contradictory and changeable. Being brown, black, bi-cultural/racial, working class, female, a Midlander and a mother, I take occupancy in many spaces. My lens to my research is one of a migrant as I move across a myriad of frontiers. It is this movement of oscillation and interplay between the spaces that are constructed and given that informs my research.

When I asked my father why he came to England he simply replied, “I wanted an adventure” and thus, as Shebnam Grewal, notes ‘began the business of transforming transplanting ways of being, seeing and living’ (Grewal et al, 1998, p.1). In the view of Isabel Hoving, the idea of displacement can bring loss, ‘but also the potential for personal transformations’ (Hoving, 2001, p14), an opportunity for redefinition of self and for choosing a new way of seeing things. I am of course aware that many migrants do not always embrace change, and unlike my father, the change of circumstances may not be out of choice but survival. The migratory space, however, offers an understanding of the ‘tenuous constructions that constitute identity’ (Jiménez Muñoz, 1995, p.116).

The ground breaking work of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Fronteria* investigates the literal frontier along the borders of Mexico and the USA and offers another dimension to the migratory space. She describes it as a place ‘to distinguish *us* from *them*...a vague and undetermined place created by emotional residue of an unnatural boundary, it is a constant place of transition’ (Anzaldua, 1987, p.3). The

borderlands 'is a place that draws together the difference', gender, class, age and ethnicity' (ibid). The idea of the 'borderlands' may seem a distant place from the environment of a hair salon/barbershop in an urban city in Britain but both represent a space of 'difference' and 'otherness', a place for redefinition of self and identity. Liz Stanley draws from the seminal work of Anzaldua's 'cultural borderlands'; she says that it gives insight to the "academic frontiers", particularly in regards to women who are seen as "other" to the citizenry here' (Stanley, 1997, p.3). For Stanley these borderlands are a 'a place of liminality...a "contested zone" that formulates the reconstruction and re/negotiation of identities and biographies and thus also knowledge' (ibid, p.2). This notion of cultural borderlands offers an understanding to spaces and people that 'crossover, passover, go through the confines of the normal' (ibid).

I find useful Jerome Bruner's reference to the fluid nature of narratives that mould identities and concepts of self: 'we constantly construct and reconstruct ourselves to meet the needs of the situation we encounter' (Bruner, 2003, p.64). Acknowledging the loosening of life-held narratives does not, however, suggest that our stories are arbitrary and we can just pick and choose the ones we want. Eugene Gendlin says that 'we cannot construct just any narrative that we like' (Gendlin, 1996, p.2).

Zora Neale Hurston's essay 'How it *feels* to be coloured me', explores her own constructed and embodied senses of being 'colored'. She writes that: 'When I disembarked from the river-boat at Jacksonville...I was not Zora of Orange country any more I was now a little colored girl' (Hurston, 1928, p.153). She also expresses a *bodily felt* experience of self when she was listening to Jazz. For Hurston, the music

connected to a personal narrative that transcended time and space. She felt liberated from the confinements of social constructs, that she says ‘made me American’. Her body responded to the music: ‘It constricts the thorax and splits the heart with its tempo’ (ibid, p.154); allowing her to feel connected to a freer, more complex sense of self: ‘I dance wildly inside myself’.

The essay offers an understanding of narratives of self which acknowledges the constructed but also draws attention to the felt body. Gendlin’s notion of the *bodily felt sense* supports this idea that we are not just discourse and that the body plays an instrumental role in our search for identity and a sense of self. Even Liz Stanley, a confirmed constructionist, recognises that ‘rather than travelling the “strict” constructionist’s route we feel the necessity of taking the body seriously’ (Stanley, 1993, p.197).

Embodiment is an important dimension of my ontological position, as are self, identity and story. I describe the lens to my research as diverse and inclusive, drawing from key concepts of the academic field of transformative learning where the self is viewed as ‘a complex, integrated being with multiple layers of meaning’ (Sefa Dei, 2001, p.124). Edmund O’Sullivan refers to transformative learning as ‘a process in which we question all the assumptions about the world and ourselves that make up our worldview, visualise alternative assumptions, and then test them in practice’ (O’Sullivan, 2001, p.vii). For me ‘alternative assumptions’, as Honor Ford Smith proclaims, ‘recreate life so that the realm of thought, feeling and action are no longer kept separate and distinct’ (Ford-Smith, 1989, p.27). My research is led from this holistic perspective using more inclusive ways of knowing, integrating data that

previously may not have been acknowledged. In the last thirty years in the academic field there has been a corporeal turn in order to gain a more organic sense of the self; this involves thinking about the body as being both felt and constructed. Elisabeth Grosz refers to 'the crisis of Reason' as she challenges 'founding presumptions and methodological criteria governing knowledges by examining (re)explorations of the body' (Grosz, 1993, p.187). Similarly to Grosz, my approach to the research is also to recognize the body in the making and evaluation of knowledge.

Grosz argues that this crisis is a 'consequence of historical privileging of the purely conceptual or mental over the corporeal', due to the 'inabilities of Western knowledges' (Grosz, 1993, p.87), which reduced or discarded the role of the body. Many of the writers discussed in my thesis were born in the West; with origins from the Southern Hemisphere; therefore the term 'Western' in itself is not a fixed given. The mass movement of people across frontiers has shifted the socio-political and cultural formations of 'fixed' territories. The view that informs my research offers a counter-narrative to the hegemonic notion of Englishness/Britishness, which also refers to the singular, omniscient concept of 'Western knowledge'. When I speak of the body, my research includes a range of ways it is perceived. Alice Walker, for example, dedicates the *Colour Purple* 'To the Spirits' that move through her body 'Without whose assistance/Neither this book/Nor I would have been written' (Walker, 1993). Audre Lorde referred to the writing process of her 'biomythography' as drawing from embodied knowledge, as she thought it necessary to pay attention to feelings and emotions to connect to a broader sense of self: 'My body, a living representation of other life older, longer and wiser. The mountains and valleys, trees, rocks. Sand and flowers and stone. Made in earth' (Lorde, 1982, p.xvi).

My ontological position is akin to George J. Sefa Dei's perspective that is located in the 'inclusiveness of diverse knowledge and ways of knowing' the self and understanding the world around us. He embraces both the created and the given. He redresses traditional paradigms that fall short of recognising the interconnection of the 'psychological, emotional, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of an individual' (Sefa Dei, 2001, p.124).

My research shows the extent of my personal journey being also a collective pursuit, as Rebecca Walker wrote of 'people attempting to live their lives envisioning or experiencing identities beyond those inscribed on them' (Walker, R.,1995, p.xxxvii). Therefore as I/we attempt to transcend these boundaries, (in doing so) I/we open our personal and public spaces in which I/we are located. If I do not reflect the expansion and diversity of these spaces, I /we continue to be located outside, which does not acknowledge that we are not just shaped by our environment but we also shape the environment and discourses in which we live.

2.2 Epistemology

A given epistemological framework specifies not only what 'knowledge' is and how to recognise it, but who are 'knowers' and by what means someone becomes one (Stanley, 1993, p.188).

Liz Stanley says that within a feminist praxis: ‘ontology (a theory of being) and epistemology (a theory of knowledge) become symbolically linked “moments”’ (Stanley, 1997, p4). This refers to the interconnected relationship between how I understand the world and how I go about finding out about it. Feminist and cultural politics inform both my epistemological and ontological positions as they challenge traditional assumptions regarding the research process and evaluation.

I adopt a radical approach to my research which Stanley describes as “‘coming to know” in different ways’ (ibid). This is echoed by bell hooks: ‘rethinking of ways of knowing, a deconstruction of old epistemologies’ (hooks, 1994, p30). The Cartesian position of traditional science, which maintains the distinctions between mind/knowledge and body/experience, is rejected. Radical epistemologies attempt to dismantle hierarchical claims of knowledge; elevating feeling and emotion as a legitimate source of knowledge, refusing ‘to see it as inferior to, even very different from, “science”’ (Stanley, 1993, p.21). Sandra Harding argues that traditional epistemologies ‘intentionally or unintentionally, systematically exclude the possibilities that women [This applies equally well to other social groups defined by race, culture, class, religion, etc.] could be knowers or agents of knowledge’ (Harding, 1987, p3).

For my research I have attempted to re-evaluate the relationship between my role as a researcher and the production and evaluation of knowledge. I have chosen a multi-strategic approach to my inquiry so I can draw from conventional and unconventional pools of knowledge and knowers, with the aim of presenting a more complex

understanding of my project. Therefore I have chosen to explore my research questions through three different lenses:

- (1) undertaking participatory action research through facilitating a series of creative life writing workshops in a hair salon/barbershop for the purpose of examining the experience of the participants;
- (2) engaging in my own creative life writing in response to the qualitative research; and
- (3) undertaking a case study of *Lionheart Gal*, a book of creative life writing.

Like William Torbert, I see these three strands of inquiry as ‘mutually necessary’ (Torbert, 2006, p.207); a view shared also by Matt Henn, who says that multi-strategy research is ‘increasingly advocated on the grounds that it helps to facilitate a more valid and holistic picture’ (Henn, 2006, p.19). This approach is often referred to as ‘triangulation’, where data resulting from different research conclusions can be brought together. The merits of this approach are that findings can be juxtaposed to ‘gain their individual strengths [as well as] compensate for the particular faults and limitations of any single method’ (ibid, p.20). Mary O’Conner also advocates the use of a diverse method of research with her idea of *multi-modality*: ‘multi means of inquiry, reflection and reporting on research’ (O’Conner, 2001, p.251), and she highlights the value of including data that may not fit conventional research formats, such as life stories, poems and fiction. Her model offers an effective framework for my research, as it allows for creative and critical voices to be engaged in the analytical process and contribute to a conversation that may offer a broader perspective on self, identity, embodiment and story.

The method of inquiry was a critical concern as it needed to strengthen and sustain the multi-strategic approach to my research. It was also important that I addressed what bell hooks refers to as ‘the gap between theory and practice’ (hooks, 1995, p.65). I was embarking on a journey that required a different approach to traditional field research where ‘official researchers [produce] theory, which practitioners apply to their practice’. I instead locate myself as an agent of knowledge and therefore the research is about me ‘as a practitioner generating new ideas’ and developing my practice and ‘putting those ideas forward’ as a personal theory of practice’ (McNiff, 2006, p.5). I was invariably led to action research, as it offered a flexible and sustainable framework for an alternative research inquiry that brought together practice, theory and experience:

Action research is part of a new scholarship. It emphasises the idea of knowledge generation as creative practice that evolves through dialogue. It recognises knowledge not only as an outcome of cognitive activity, but also as embodied; that is, mind and body are not perceived as separate entities but as integrated (McNiff, 2003, p.17).

2.3 Methodology - Participatory Action Research (PAR)

PAR seeks to understand and improve the world by changing it. At its heart is collective, self-reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they

participate and the situations in which they find themselves (Baum et al, 2006, p.854).

My methodological approach is participatory action research to explore the experiences of participants of a series of creative life writing workshops I facilitated at a culturally diverse hair salon/barbershop in Brighton and Hove. There are several reasons why I chose Participatory Action Research as my method of inquiry. At a very early stage of my research I recognised a commonality in aspirations and ethos between my past experience as a documentary filmmaker and my current and relatively new terrain of academia: both were based on the interconnected desire of exploring life-held narratives that are often hidden, ‘forgotten’ or silenced, with the aim of making positive changes to the lives of individuals and/or communities. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury claim that action research produces ‘practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives’ (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.2). Bjorn Gustavsen spoke directly to my concerns of a theory based research inquiry: ‘theory alone has little power to create change [...] there is a need for a more complex interplay between theory and practice’ (Gustavsen, 2001, p.17). I knew the fundamental engagement with this inquiry was going to be a relationship of collaboration and participation and not centred primarily on ‘long term-observations’ (Potter, 1996, p.51), which is the underlying ethos for ethnographical methodology. My decision to use PAR as my method of inquiry was reinforced by the sentiments of action research practitioners Reason and Bradbury who claim that ‘the primary purpose of action research is not to produce academic theories based on action: nor is it to produce theories about action...it is to liberate the human body, mind and spirit in search for a better, freer world’ (Reason, 2001, p.2).

I chose participatory action research as my method of inquiry because it provided a framework that mirrored my values and objectives:

- (1) the centrality of the emancipatory process within the research. One of the aims of the creative life writing workshops is for the participants to develop their own writing voice. In the view of Bud Hall participatory action research ‘fundamentally is about the right to speak’ (Hall, 1993, p. xvii), which is reiterated by Richard Winter’s description of action research as seeking an ‘authentic voice, a voice with which to speak one’s experience and one’s ability to learn from that experience’ (Winter, 1998 p.54);
- (2) the importance of a collaborative relationship in the process of the research, redressing the imbalance of power and aspiring for a ‘democratic dialogue’ between the researcher and the research participants (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.xxv). Action researcher, Ella Edmondson Bell, describes the benefits of her own co-inquiry as ‘elevating learning experience for all... stimulating dialogue between the researcher and participants in the creation of new knowledge’ (Edmondson, 2001, p.52);
- (3) the importance of participating actively in *fieldwork* in my research has always been a critical aspect of my process of gathering information, whether previously as a filmmaker or currently as a scholar-practitioner; action research challenges old assumptions such as ‘knowing through *thinking* [as opposed to] knowing through *doing*’ (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.xxv). Participatory research allows experiences and action to be considered as legitimate sources of data;

(4) the underlying belief of scholar-practitioners that the aim of their research is ‘about making a positive change in the world (ibid).

This method of inquiry differs fundamentally from a traditional paradigm based on positivism where data collection is understood as being ‘independently observed and measured by objective scientists’ (ibid p.855). Patricia Maguire says that PAR is ‘contesting the voice of authority’ (Maguire, 2001, p.64), as it pays attention to the power dynamics within the inquiry and attempts to dismantle the disparities between the researcher and the participants. Contrary to conventional research, ‘the researched cease to be objects and become partners in the whole research process’ (Baum, 2006, p.854). The researched become ‘agents of their own change’ (ibid, p.885) as the power relations are redefined and other forms of knowledge that influence the research inquiry are authenticated.

2.31 Researcher Identity

Prior to the proposed research I was already involved in the salon community and I felt it was important to search for a method of inquiry that included my *insider* positioning in the research findings. Kenneth Clark in his action research, *Dark Ghetto*, makes a distinction between being an ‘involved’ observer and a ‘participant’ observer. Being an *involved* observer acknowledges that the researcher is a member of the community, as opposed to a *participant* observer present for the duration of the inquiry. Clark writes: ‘I could never be fully detached as a scholar or participant’ (Clark, 1973, p.402). Clark’s ‘involved observer’ is similar to Torbert’s ‘observant participant’ (2001); both researchers acknowledging the emotional relationship and

involvement with their research. In the opinion of Tim May: ‘the greater the personal involvement with the group and its members, the more the researcher is able to understand the meanings and actions they undertake’ (May, 2001, p.162). Allowing for both the emotional and the intellectual to be involved in the research process contradicts the positivists’ approach based on the pursuit of objectivity that a ‘rigorous research’ involves the separation of researchers from the subject of their research...reason and emotion must be separated’ (May, 2001, p.21). Locating myself as an ‘involved’ researcher acknowledges my stance within the realm of post-positivism in the research inquiry: ‘It is both the experiences of the researched and the researcher which are important’ (May 2006, p.21). Participating actively in my research presented a challenging environment that allowed me to explore central concepts to my research such as my own fixity in a set of values, world-views and personal narratives.

2.32 The Location of the Participatory Action Research in a Hair Salon/Barbershop

The creative life writing workshop was situated in a hair salon/barbershop, based in the city of Brighton and Hove. The salon caters for people of African, Caribbean, Asian and European heritage. It is a microcosm of a contemporary urban society, a setting where cultural, gender, racial and religious boundaries are crossed and intertwined.

One of the reasons I chose this particular salon for the inquiry was because I felt comfortable and familiar within the space, which was a critical factor, as the research required me, the researcher and writer of this thesis, to push beyond my own personal boundaries and step outside of my own conceptual frameworks; as Rebecca Walker

says: ‘the prison that we create for ourselves is the most onerous of all’ (Walker, 1995, p.xxxviii). Unless I was willing to challenge my own life-held narratives and the conceptual frameworks that shape my identity and concepts of self, how could I ask others to do the same?

2.321 The Hair Salon/Barbershop as a Cultural and Educational Space

For the past ten-years the salon owner/senior stylist and senior barber, a wife and husband team, both British born of Caribbean parentage, have played an instrumental role facilitating and supporting educational and cultural activities in their salon in order to raise understanding and dialogue with the diverse and multicultural families and communities of East Sussex. The salon works with volunteers, local organisations, schools, libraries, museums, theatres and community radio.

The couple offer hair care workshops that are frequently attended by white parents who find hair care challenging for their mixed-heritage children. The workshops create a dialogue between parents and children that extends beyond the discussion of hair and into issues such as identity, self and placement. There is also an on-going oral history project, where clients are encouraged to write about their hair-stories. This involves an exhibition of family histories and stories of the community using a mixture of family photos and interviews carried out by a dedicated team of volunteers. There has been a play inspired by stories and memoirs of the hair stories, written and performed by clients of the salon. There has also been the publication of a coffee table book ‘Positive HAIRitage’ to promote positive images of black and mixed-raced hair which was distributed free to local schools, community projects and libraries in the Brighton and Hove area. The aim of the book is to celebrate hair of the African diaspora and mixed heritage, creating positive images of local black and mixed

heritage adults, children and families. The barber has also had considerable success with organizing HIV/AIDS awareness and testing days that are held in the salon.

2.322 The Cultural Relevance of the Hair Salon/Barbershop

The hair salon/barbershop inherently provides an important exploratory lens for the discussion and exploration of life stories, identity, concepts of self and culture. Many interesting challenges and questions are raised as the research explores the process of opening dialogical space(s) both internally and externally with the introduction of a series of creative life writing workshops based in the salon.

This salon, like many others, is the ‘hub’ of the community; it is a place that my son and I gravitated to when we first arrived in Brighton; it is a place that we intuitively felt a part of and enjoyed the communal atmosphere and sharing of knowledge. Bryant Keith Alexandra, ethnographical researcher on Black barbershops in the US, refers to hair salons and barbershops as being ‘integral and cultural sites within the black community’ (Alexandra, 2003, p.105). He notes:

Over the years of moving state to state ...the test of establishing community for me has often been grounded in locating a barbershop. I sought the services of a communion with the cultural familiar, in a geographical site that was unfamiliar (ibid, p.107).

He says that the role of cutting hair is secondary and the salon is primarily for cultural exchange or, as he says, drawing from Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of cultural currency, ‘cultural communities provide and circulate information in ways that add to a

collective knowledge of what's happening... establishing relationships and orientations to people, space and time' (ibid, p.106). The community role of the hair salon/barbershop in my research holds similarities to research studies that are located in the African-American communities in the United States. Yolanda J. Majors' study refers to the African-American salon as a setting for the telling and sharing of stories: 'oral narratives of personal experience and storytelling are produced and interpreted through acting participants, generally for the purposes of providing resources, problem solving, or building knowledge' (Majors, 2003, p.298). Major's account reflects the experience of the hair salon/barbershop in my own research, which is very specifically socio-culturally located. She also describes in her research, *Shoptalk*, the role of the stylist as an instrumental storyteller in the salon space with the 'use of voice, body and movement as tools to bring her narrative to life' (ibid, p.302). Majors recognises the 'constructs of multiple roles' (ibid, p.303) within the salon. I recognise that the hair salon/barbershop is an inherently story-telling setting, and as I wanted to explore the 'opening of the dialogical space' through creative life writing, it was important to create a safe-enough environment for the workshops within a public space, to open up the possibilities for client/writers to explore personal memories and experiences.

I built on the safe space that the salon in my study had already established. There were strong ties and intimacy between the clients and stylist/barber due to the longevity of the relationships. The salon catered for the different generations within a family, and it was not unusual for a stylist to watch their customers change from toddlers to adults. Such intimacy is also reflected in the nature of the hair care, such as the physical contact involved in washing, cutting and styling hair. The relationship

between client and stylist/barber often extends beyond hair and beauty care to areas where the client may seek personal, social or medical advice.

Cultural theorist, Kobena Mercer refers to the political nature of the salon in Britain, particularly for black people when he says: ‘hair is never a straightforward biological fact’. Because hair is groomed and cut by human hands: ‘such practices socialize hair, making it the medium of significant statements about self and society and the codes of value that bind them, or do not’ (Mercer, 1994, p.112). Socio-political dialogue in the community takes place in public spaces like hair salons and barbershops. These spaces challenge dominant cultural discourses and can be understood as emancipatory spaces from the limitation and challenges of daily realities.

2.33 Setting-up the Project

I introduced my idea of facilitating a creative writing workshop to the salon, and it was enthusiastically received. Due to the growing number of activities taking place in the salon it was decided that a steering committee would be established, which I was invited to join. This began the process of collaboration and accountability. A committee comprised of six people (diverse in gender, race and age) was established to organise the various projects taking place in the salon. There was an informal understanding that we would all support each other’s projects. I participated in a writing course for hair stories, an oral history project and the makings of a coffee table book.

The salon members gave me considerable amount of support during the development of the creative life writing workshop. The Black History organisation, also members

of the Salon community, provided office space (situated across the road from the salon). I was able to make calls, email, print, photocopy flyers and information for the workshop free of charge. Flyers and posters for the workshop were distributed and exhibited in the salon. However, publicity for the workshops was most effective by ‘word-of-mouth’ through the workers of the salon and customers. I was also connected to the community emailing database. The long term commitment allowed for the development of a collaborative and dialogical relationship between the researcher and the research participants. The other activities in the salon in which I participated will not be directly used in the data collection of my own inquiry, however, the experience and cooperative relationship informed the designing of my research. Being involved in the salon environment and projects allowed for the creative life writing workshop to be in sync with the needs and desires of the salon members in the following ways:

- I became aware of the multifaceted nature of the salon. I began to recognise my own restricted, single narrative of the salon;
- I experienced a shift of perspective from participating in the salon as client to being involved as an active salon member as a researcher and volunteer;
- The workshop was originally referred to as creative writing and eventually changed to creative life writing due to the salon members expressing their interest and commitment to exploring their personal memories and life experiences;
- I gained a greater understanding of the role and potential of socio-cultural spaces.

2.34 Structure and Format of the Creative Life Writing Workshop

Period: 19th February – 2nd April 2011

Structure: Creative Life Writing Workshop: two hours once a week (Saturday mornings) over a period of 10 weeks

Participants:

Group A: Beginner Writers (men and women): 4 participants

(Three new clients wanted to join after the first session of group A, but the group decided that it had ‘gelled’ and consequently it was ‘too late’ for newcomers to join).

Group B: More established (all women): 5 participants

Age range for both groups: From early twenties to mid-sixties

Participants’ heritage included: Liberian, Jamaican, German, Barbadian, Scottish, English, Nigerian, Indian, Chinese and Brazilian.

2.35 Evaluation and Cycles

I *loosely* began cycles associated with participatory action research as follows:

- (1) identify areas of interest;
- (2) gather information;
- (3) interpret data;
- (4) evaluate and act on information;
- (5) act on results;
- (6) new cycle - re-identify issues by going through another cycle.

The creative writing groups were different: Group A were beginners, and Group B more established writers. Although Group B did have a few more participants with creative writing experience, both groups were fairly mixed in ability. Initially I had seen them as two separate groups, but because members of the two groups spoke to each other about their experience in the workshops, there was much more continuity between the groups than I had expected. At the end of the sessions with Group A I decided to examine, evaluate and implement any changes for the new cycle that would begin with Group B. In my evaluation I focused on four different aspects:

- (a) the environment of the workshops;
- (b) the participants' experience;
- (c) the experience of being a facilitator;
- (d) the fictional and poetic techniques used.

Although I present my analysis in detail in Chapters 4-6, in brief there are four key factors I identified in the cycle process of re-evaluating the workshops:

- (1) the importance of the critical dialogical relationship between the salon environment and the group members of the workshop;
- (2) the importance of the workshop being an autonomous space in the salon (situated in the basement); the comfort and intimacy (all group members sat around one table) affected the participants' willingness and ability to engage with the creative writing process;

(3) the importance of the facilitator to hold the space, so that the participants felt safe enough to be creative; and

(4) the importance of the participants having fun and playing with the fictional techniques, so they were able to be immersed in the process.

2.36 Learning from Group A to implement changes to Group B

There were very few changes regarding content between the two groups; we discussed mostly the same text and used the same writing exercises. This was particularly helpful because after the workshops finished the group discussions and experiences were able to be continued between the members of the different groups. The main difference was that Group B received one extra oral storytelling exercise because some of the members of the group were preparing to use the material they had written to create a play.

The significant difference between the groups was regarding facilitation. When working with Group B I felt more confident about: my ability to teach, the comfort and safety of the workshop space and working with the participants. After the first session I was aware of the interest and willingness of the participants to engage with the creative process and take ‘risks’ with their writing.

The main point I learned was that the writers needed to have more time in the group to write and reflect on their writing. Group B opted not to take a break in the session, which afforded more time. I also realised the importance to ‘check in’ with the writers at the beginning of each session to allow them to share and reconnect with the group about how they were feeling about themselves and their writing. It was also important that I made myself available after the group so participants could speak to me.

2.4 Data Generation for Participatory Action Research

My participatory action research engages three strands of data:

- (1) semi-structured interviews with the client/writers;
- (2) the participants' writings from the workshop; and
- (3) my journal notes on the workshop experience.

2.41 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview is flexible; whilst starting from a standard list of questions, it allows new questions to be raised during the interview in response to what the interviewee says. This method of interviewing is beneficial as it allows 'grouping of topics and questions that the interviewer can ask in different ways for different participants' (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, p.195).

The goal of the semi-structured interviews I conducted with the participants was to obtain information regarding their experience of the creative life writing workshop. Semi-structured interviews are an effective way of generating information, because in the view of Deborah Padgett 'talking and dialogue have intrinsic appeal due to their familiarity in everyday lives' (Padgett, 2008, p.80). Dialogue was a critical component in the design and development of the workshops between the salon members and myself, so the semi-structured interviews were a continuation of a dialogue that already existed. Tim May supports this type of questioning because it 'enables the interviewer to probe beyond the answers and thus enter into a dialogue with the interviewee' (May, 2001, p.123). This informal way of interviewing 'allows people to answer on their own terms' (ibid).

Nevertheless even with a conversational style interview as part of my quest to achieve an equitable power relationship between researcher and participant, I cannot abdicate the reality of my positionality in this dialogical relationship. I recognise my own privileged position as a scholar that may be perceived as the ‘knower’ or ‘expert’, and I am aware as the interviewer that the questions I ask set the parameters (even if loosely) for discussion. In my view, however, semi-structured interviews are an effective means for the researcher to gain understanding of how the participants make sense of their experience in the research inquiry, and because I was applying a multi-strategic approach to acquiring data, I felt confident that the limitations of a single method (Henn, 2006, p.20) would be compensated for by the other forms of data collection.

2.42 Participants’ Creative Life Writing

One of the main criticisms of the interview approach is that the interviewees’ responses are influenced by the questions. The aim of including in the data analysis the participants’ writing produced in the workshop was to obtain information about the writers’ experience that was not derived from direct questions. The clients’ writings may reveal material that has arrived from a less conscious state (Todres, 2007), and therefore the data analysis includes the bringing together of the conscious and less conscious material of the participants’ experience, which is important in a research project that is looking at what happens when writers enter into a creative relationship with their life-stories.

2.43 Researcher Journaling

[Journaling] points to instances when you really did learn something new, and were able to articulate what you had learned and the significance of that learning for you (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006, p.55).

Journaling has been an important component in my research process, as it allows me to recognise and also articulate the growing incongruities between my theoretical objectives and participatory realities². Journaling offers me the opportunity to reevaluate my experience and recognise changes to be made. It highlights the reoccurrence of themes and ideas which become central focal points for the research and leads to a focused, lucid and sustainable research topic. Journaling has also become an invaluable source towards trying to understand and process my experience within a theoretical and creative context. I base my self-reflective writing on McNiff's suggestion: 'On the left side write "What happened" and on the right side write "What I learned"' (McNiff, J., 1996, p.26). Seemingly simple advice, but the creation of two different categories allows for the nurturing of a dialogical relationship between my reflective self and acting self. Similarly Barry Jones wrote of his reasoning for entering into a conversation with himself: 'these inputs stimulated my thinking and led me eventually to the idea of concocting an "imaginary friend", an interlocutor who would become a springboard for my self-reflection' (Jones, 1989, p47).

One of the sections of my journal is dedicated to writing about my felt experience of my participatory action inquiry. It is this felt experience that I investigate through my own creative life writing; immersing myself in the 'memory, expanding it through

² The journaling notes are implicit rather than explicit in the data chapters.

imagination and experiencing what the memory feels like' (Hunt & Sampson, 1998, p.23).

2.5 My Own Creative Life Writing

Researchers should be aware of the ways in which their own biography is a fundamental part of the research process. It is both the experiences of the researched and researchers which are important (May, 2001, p.21).

It is essential to engage with the investigation both creatively and critically in order to explore the many avenues of 'truths' which underlie the research. Sigmund Freud argued that our consciousness was determined by our unconscious and therefore, particularly as an involved researcher, I wanted to explore my own tacit and unconscious assumptions influencing my interpretation of the inquiry. My research interest lies in the possibility of 'loosening' life-held narratives that mould identity and stepping outside of existing frameworks, and therefore it is important that I engage in a similar creative process to the writers in the workshop. By creatively exploring my response to my qualitative research project, I open up the possibility of challenging and transcending my own conceptual frameworks and limitations of life-held narratives, as I gain a greater understanding of myself and view my research from a broader perspective.

William Torbert says that: 'second person research/practice presupposes and works to cogenerate first person research/practice' (Torbert, 2001, p.213); this offered an understanding of my relationship with the salon and my own writing in the context of

the research inquiry. It was important that I engaged in the same process as Gloria Bravette Gordon in her own action research inquiry. I too wanted to ‘draw on my own personal experiences and understanding, allowing me to engage in a powerful sensemaking process’ (Gordon, 2006, p.243). The aim is similar to that of Gordon: that the knowledge I seek might enable me ‘to transform my perspectives and therefore ways of being in the world’ (Gordon, 2001, p.248).

2.6 Case Study of *Lionheart Gal*

Lionheart Gal brings a greater understanding to the themes and categories that I have identified in my inquiry. The research takes up Sistren’s director, Honor Ford-Smith’s (1986) call for a ‘unity between aesthetic imagination and the social and political process’. She claimed for genuine political change to take place there had to be a revision of socio-political structures and for this to happen, the ‘creative power of rebel consciousness’ needed to be unlocked, buried deep within our own stories. It is this relationship between the imaginative space and the socio-political that underpins my research and opens the dialogue of CWPD. Ford Smith offers a different way to think about the role of the body within emancipatory processes.

It is also the ‘cracks and contradictions’ of Sistren which offer a broader understanding to my own study, particularly regarding issues of voice, the role of facilitation and the challenges of overcoming power imbalances within a collaborative project. The journey of *Lionheart Gal* by giving historical and socio-political context to my research reveals continuity and differences between the projects.

2.7 Analysis of the Qualitative Data - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

My research objective is to make sense of the experience of the writers who participated in the creative life writing workshops and to analyse that experience to give some meaningful insight to my research. I chose to analyse my data by using IPA because the fundamental ideals of this approach spoke directly to the process and experience of my research in the salon. I contemplated 'Grounded Theory' because so many of the themes have arisen since the completion of the action element of my inquiry, but I could not separate the fact that although new themes have come to light, the theories and ideas that I brought to the workshop influenced the final outcome. Once I recognised that my research interest was particularly focused on acquiring an understanding of the writers' experience in the creative life writing workshop, I felt the best methodological approach would be phenomenological because this method asks the question: 'What is it like to experience a particular situation' (Bloor, 2006, p.3)?

Smith and Osborn speak of IPA as 'assuming a chain between people's talk and their thinking and emotional state' (Smith, 2008, p.52). This relates directly to the underlying aims of my research project of engaging with emotional and intellectual forms of knowing. IPA is concerned with the sense making process of both participants and researcher and how this collaborative relationship makes them 'co-generators of new knowledge' (Martin, 2001, p.172). The *interpretative* aspect of the phenomenological analysis acknowledges that the researcher's positionality is from an 'insider's perspective', as they are trying to get closer to the participant in order to understand the research experience from the participants' point of view. This concept

is referred to as the ‘double hermeneutic’, where the ‘participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world’ (Smith, 2008, p.51). IPA offers a relational framework that allows for the personal and the critical elements of the research to engage with each other.

Smith and Osborn state that there is no single, definitive way to do IPA, although all approaches require a commitment to the ‘painstaking analysis of cases rather than jumping to generalizations’ (ibid, p.54). They suggest, however, three ‘exemplary’ methods for IPA, all of which were incorporated into my inquiry:

- (1) IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes (in my study, 9 participants);
- (2) the IPA researcher usually tries to find a homogeneous sample (the salon defines the boundaries of the research);
- (3) semi-structured interviews are the key form of data collection.

In using IPA my aim was to identify categories and themes that arose out of the action research cycles. I paid particular attention to the language used to describe experience, for example metaphors and imagery, based on the principle that these often contain hidden meanings. I used cross-sectional analysis to explore categories and themes.

2.8 Limitations of Study

The time period that I had projected to be actively involved in the salon was five months but the inquiry lasted for fourteen. During the process of developing the

workshops I began to appreciate the view of social researcher Tim May, who points out that the outcome of a research project 'is clearly assisted by being exposed, overtime, to the culture' (May, 2001, p.162).

The collaborative and participatory nature of the inquiry provided a challenging research environment. Ideologically I agreed with the ethos of PAR, that the findings of the research are the outcome of a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the research participants but in practice it was not always easy. One of the challenges was related to scheduling and participation. I had originally prepared for the creative writing workshops to run between twelve to sixteen weeks, which would contain three research cycles and working with one group between eight to twelve participants. This did not happen, mainly due to the participants' busy schedule. Although all the participants agreed that Saturday mid-morning was the best time for them, it still conflicted with other regular weekend commitments. In order for the participants to see the project through, which included group participation, submission of creative writing from the workshop and semi-structured interviews, the duration of the project and the number of participants able to be involved was reduced. Subsequently, the workshops took place over a period of ten weeks with nine participants, between two groups: Group A, 4 participants, and Group B, 5 participants. Ideally I would have liked to run more workshops over a longer period and to have had a larger number of participants.

More data would have strengthened my findings, as would the possibility of running further cycles of action research. However, it *was* possible to take lessons learned from the first cycle into the second. Nonetheless, although I note the limitations due to

group size and the lack of opportunity within the period of the research for running any further cycles, the participants reiterated during the sessions and interviews that they found the small groups beneficial to their writing practice and experience of the workshop and appreciated that the schedule was structured around them, making it possible for them to attend.

An early misconception of my investigation was my simplistic approach to the salon space. Without realising, I had approached my research with the idea that there were two distinct autonomous spaces; the salon being far more singular and fixed than the space downstairs which would be housing *my* creative life writing workshops. I had underestimated the dialogical relationship between the two spaces. I realised that to understand the potential of creative life writing it became imperative to gain a better understanding of how the participants experienced both the salon and the workshop environment, and how this experience impacted the writers' creative process as they explored their personal memories. When considering the findings of this study, it is important to bear in mind that my and the participants' immersion in the salon prior to the research made change more likely. This would not necessarily be the case for facilitators using this approach outside of such a context.

I am also aware that the interdisciplinary nature of the project has meant that I was not able to plumb the depths of all the different disciplines I have engaged with. If I do further research on this topic, I will have the opportunity to immerse myself more deeply in the different literatures.

2.9 Research Ethics

Ethical issues have the potential to impact at *every* stage of the research process and within any research project (Henn et al, 2006, p.68).

Ethical considerations were a critical component in this research project especially as my inquiry was participatory. It was critical that ethical factors could not be an ‘afterthought’ but ‘interwoven’ into the research process (ibid, p.93). McNiff advises that ‘you have to be constantly alert to ethical considerations (McNiff, 2003, p.34).

2.91 Pre-Workshop

I held an introductory session one week before the start of the creative life writing workshops. I gave information about my research and held a discussion with those salon clients who were interested in taking part. I informed them of the research aims and process and in response they asked questions and shared their concerns and aspirations regarding involvement in the study. I was concerned about the formal structure of this discussion, which required ‘contracts’ to be signed and information about academic requirements, but to my surprise the information was warmly received from potential participants as they gained greater clarity about the project and what was being asked of them and the researcher. I read aloud and distributed an ethics statement (how I intended to conduct the research) and letters of permission to all the participants in the hair salon (see Appendix 1). The ethics statement and permission letter were duplicated after signing and both parties kept identical copies, which included a promise of confidentiality of data and identity, and ensured that each participant had the right to withdraw from the research.

2.92 Post-Workshop

A cornerstone of research ethics is that respondents should be offered the opportunity to have their identity hidden in a research report (Oliver, 2010, p.77).

The participants ‘let go’ into their creative process, far more than they expected, revealing surprising insights into their personal memories and experiences; consequently after the workshops group members expressed concern about protecting their identity. To address this, action researchers ‘commonly use pseudonyms to prevent research participants from being individually identifiable’ (Henn et al, 2006, p.85). The writers in the group, however, felt this was not sufficient, due to the smallness of the group and the project being based in the local community. The point about using pseudonyms or individual identifications is that, as I develop my ideas by drawing on participants’ creative writing, the interviews and my own journaling notes of the writers’ experience of the workshop, I am creating a trail to individual testimonies that could be ‘identifiable’ by other members of the group if not the wider community. Changing people’s names was not enough to maintain anonymity: ‘the inclusion of geographic locations, work places, and other characteristics can often be used to identify’ (ibid). Therefore to honour the anonymity of the group and their concerns, I discuss their experiences through thematic categories rather than under individual identifications. My data analysis also neither identifies nor distinguishes between the two groups, i.e. I do not refer to ‘Group A’ or ‘Group B’. This also helps to maintain anonymity.

Choosing not to distinguish between the groups does not restrict the research findings. I had anticipated distinctions that were not necessarily experienced by the participants. Group A was a mixed group (male and female) with less writing experience and Group B was an all women group who were more experienced writers. One of my tacit assumptions was that writers in the all women workshop would feel free to explore personal memories and express them more than if men were participating in the workshop, but this proved not to be so. During the interviews the participants focused on the cultural space, size of the group, fiction techniques and facilitation in regard to their ability to explore their creative writing practice. I was paying particular attention to the language used to describe their experience and there was not a marked difference between the groups. When I have chosen to draw from material that may identify a particular participant, I have asked for additional permission. McNiff says: 'Never take anything for granted. Always check back with people if there is any doubt and in matters where there is some possibility of misunderstanding' (McNiff, 2003, p.51). The participants spoke of how fictionalising their memories allowed them to change characters and circumstances so friends and family would not be identified. They also removed work from the study if they carried this concern.

2.93 My Own Creative Writing and Facilitation

With regard to family members, friends and associates who appear in my own creative writing, I have also used different names and locations to avoid personal recognition.

I also considered the ‘exploitative potential’ of the research and needed to consider ethical implications of ‘power, authority, and influence’ between the researcher and research participants during the process of the inquiry (Henn, 2006, p.88). McNiff insists the researcher has to ‘make it clear from the start that they are participants and co-researchers, and not “subjects” whom you are studying’ (McNiff, 2003, p.50). Accountability and continuous discussion of my objectives, both with the hair salon/barbershop steering committee and my doctorate supervisor, were a central part of my approach. My research was approved by the University’s ethics committee.

Chapter 3

Exploring how *Lionheart Gal* Opens the Dialogical Space within the Emancipatory Process

It is the conflicts, struggles, cracks and absences that are in themselves productive of expanded vision of liberation. It is the unsettling, unfinished and contradictory quality of these stories, the uneven terrain of power they traverse, that in the long term is most productive of dialogue and action. (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.294)

Lionheart Gal is a seminal book of fictional-autobiographical stories of Jamaican women told and written by Sistren Theatre Collective in 1986. Sistren share a collection of narratives that reveal lives that were previously hidden from mainstream Jamaican Society. Karina Smith refers to these stories as ‘lived experiences of participants ... drawing on the knowledge participants had of Jamaica’s oral tradition (which has been passed down through generation), and in general consciousness-raising’ (Smith, K., 2008, p.234). The stories continue a Caribbean legacy of passing on tales of freedom found in the lives of ordinary women; tales that redefine the parameters of emancipation, by bringing together private and secreted areas of experience into socio-political discourse. My research is a response to *Lionheart Gal* exploring a creative process that has migrated and transformed across continents and generations. The aim of this chapter is to explore the continuities and the changes of a

dialogue that began more than 25 years ago in the Caribbean and continues to inform my doctoral project located in a hair salon/barbershop in present day Britain.

3.1 The Relevance of Sistren to a Research Project based in a Hair Salon/Barbershop in Contemporary Britain

My research project is similar to Sistren in the sense that it is a community based creative project which provides a safe space for its members to embark on an exploration of personal memory and experiences as a means to help them engage more reflexively with the narratives within which they are located.

Sistren's agenda is located in the decolonisation process of the new independent Jamaica and therefore when Ford-Smith refers to 'the incomplete project' of emancipation' she is referring to the pursuit of being free from colonialism which has defined social relations based on the lines of race, gender and class (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.298). In this context Paul Gilroy also acknowledges the incompleteness of this project, as he points out that although we are now in a new millennium the legacy of colonialism continues to exist significantly in 'post'–colonial Britain:

...by making the formative experience of empire less profound and less potent in shaping the life of colonizing powers than it actually was. This popular, revisionist output is misleading and dangerous because it feeds the illusion that Britain has or can be disconnected from its imperial past (Gilroy, 2005, p.2).

It is here that I see my research in one respect as continuing the project of the decolonisation process. The unifying trait between the participants was that their heritage such as Ghanaian, Jamaican, Nigerian and Indian was all linked to the British Empire. The starting self-perceptions for most of the participants in the creative writing workshop were rooted in racial and cultural identities which produced feelings of ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’ within mainstream society. It is this notion of being the ‘outsider’ of the official culture which the members of Sistren, being black-working class-women, also experienced in Jamaica, and their attempts to change their situation offers significant insights to my own study.

What is striking to me about Sistren and what I drew from them for my project was that although they were located within the decolonisation agenda, they sought ways to dismantle the process outside of the parameters of colonial thinking. They insisted that the only way to achieve genuine change was by ‘reinventing’ social and political structures. *Sistren/Lionheart Gal* was a very important project at a specific point in time and continues to resonate with my project in the salon and also with my own creative life writing in my research in a number of ways: (1) Sistren’s journey of putting theory into practice offers invaluable insight to the facilitation of my own project that is also trying to dismantle life-held narratives; (2) Ford-Smith highlights the necessity of a dialogue between ‘aesthetic imagination’ and socio-political discourse in order to envisage and nurture a new society; (3) She offers my research another way of thinking about the body outside the socio-political perspective and the critical role that the body plays within emancipatory processes and (4) Sistren represents a safe space for women to be creative with their personal memories and experiences which have not been spoken before in public and reconnecting with these

stories can help to transform their lives and others. I choose to implement these ideas within my own project and I explore them in the chapter under the following headings: the historical and socio-cultural context; the role of the imaginative space in the emancipatory process; and the cracks and contradictions in *Lionheart Gal*. By taking up the conversation of Sistren and exploring some of the ideas within my own practice, I hope to continue the ‘expanded vision of liberation’ (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.294).

3.2 The Historical and Socio-Cultural Context

My research study is located in a culturally diverse setting in England that challenges the hegemonic notion of Britishness. To understand the complexities of my inquiry it is important to know the historical and socio-cultural context that informs the findings.

By the end of the 1960s most countries previously under British rule had sought and attained independence. By the 1970’s old certainties had begun to crumble making way for a new world to take shape. Historian Dominic Sandbrook describes the decade in which contemporary Britain was born, at a time in which the British Empire had been consigned to history; as one colonial possession after another had declared independence during the 1950s and 1960s (Sandbrook, 2010, p.253). The national narrative of the British Empire that bonded its people together fragmented. Voices of discontent and frustration dominated the nation; there were four general elections, the rise of trade unions and strike action, blackouts, and 25% inflation. The uncertainties and challenges marked the decade as ‘a period of unprecedented gloom and decline’ (ibid, p.10). Whilst post-war Britain was being redefined, there were equally fervent

movements throughout post-colonial nations to establish a new national agenda. The social, cultural and political foment that characterized this era sought to challenge the dominant world order. History, culture and identity were all confronted and pressured by a new world order.

Prominent among post-colonial nations creating a new national identity was Jamaica. Karina Smith discusses the 'blueprint' of social change that Michael Manley's government (People's National Party) brought to Jamaica in the 1970s. Part of the government's objective was to promote the 'development of Jamaica's oral tradition ... through the arts, media and the educational system' (Smith, K, 2008, p.234).

Sistren Theatre Collective founded in 1977 was a direct response to cultural initiatives that emerged from Manley's government to 'debunk the prevalence of Eurocentrism in constructions of Jamaica's national identity' (ibid). One of the central reforms of the government was to 'shift Jamaica's focus from its British colonial legacy to its African heritage' (ibid). Sharon Green emphasises the importance of this period in post-independent Jamaica, 'when hope for change and empowerment pervaded working-class and ghetto communities' (Green, 2006, p.111). Anthony Payne also echoes the feeling of optimism as black Jamaicans came 'to feel for the first time that they were full members of a national community' (Payne, 1994, p.34). Cultural theorist Stuart Hall describes the Seventies as the period when Jamaica turned *Black*: 'Black is an identity which had to be learned and could only be learned in a certain moment. In Jamaica that moment is the 1970s' (Hall, 1987, p.45).

Karina Smith says that the seventies in Jamaica can be described as a 'transitional period between phases of colonialism' (Smith, 2008, p.234). Radical social

movements and organisations were formed to fight against colonialism, sexism and racism. The Seventies in Britain was also a period that shaped identities and personal and socio-political aspirations of many of the people of my generation and subsequent generations that were seeking placement in the new post-colonial landscape. We became Britons, children of parents who were rooted in the experiences of ‘back home’ whilst simultaneously planting the realities of a new home. My father and his generation had one foot in the Caribbean and one foot in the UK, so the walk forward was influenced by the developments taking place in both regions. The dialogue across continents was intrinsically connected as the children of the Empire were born with the idea of Britain being the benevolent ‘Mother Country’; I grew up in the weaning-off period.

The Caribbean economy like that of other countries under colonial rule was developed to provide goods and profits for the British Empire; consequently the region was underdeveloped and lacked investment. As the emerging new independent states took the reins to govern themselves, the issue of economics was only one component of a complex relationship that needed to be addressed in the decolonisation process.

Michael Manley argued that for genuine transformation to take place in Jamaica there had to be ‘an almost traumatic process of release from the psychology of dependence’ (Manley, 1974, p.22). Bob Marley’s Redemption Song captures the sentiments of the Caribbean’s long-lasting struggle from colonialism; the sentiments were taken from a speech given in 1932 by Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican black nationalist:

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, None but ourselves can free our minds (Marley, 1980).

3.22 The Continuing Relationship between the Caribbean and the Diaspora

My first degree was in Caribbean Studies and it was the first time that I began to appreciate and recognise the extent to which my quest of understanding ‘who I was’ in this British context was one that was shared by many of my generation. I sought understanding and information from writers such as Andrea Levy. Levy started writing to unravel her own family's story, of her parents coming from Jamaica to the UK and her own experience growing up here. She represented a black British voice which was often not acknowledged in mainstream society. In her novel *Small Island*, based during and after the Second World War, she explores the depth and complexities of the relationship between the Caribbean and the ‘Mother Country’. An example of this is shown when Gilbert Joseph, enlists in the Royal Air Force:

Living far from you is a beloved relation you have never met. Yet this relation is so dear a kin she is known as Mother. Your own mummy talks of Mother all the time... Then one day you hear Mother calling – she is troubled, she need your help. Your mummy, your daddy say go. Leave home, leave familiar, leave love (Levy, 2004, p.116).

Many people in the Caribbean and other countries dominated by the British Empire held this view of the benevolent ‘Mother Country’. People of the colonies fought in the war(s) to preserve and protect Britain. In response to labour shortages following the Second World War, Britain began a recruitment drive in the Caribbean. As a result, many thousands of people made the decision to emigrate to Britain and begin a new life. When they arrived on British shores few were prepared for the harsh, cold

realities of not being greeted as fellow citizens but instead received as unwanted immigrants:

Can this be the fabled relation you heard so much of? This twisted crooked weary woman. This stinking cantankerous hag. She offers you no comfort after your journey. No smile. No welcome. Yet she looks down on you through lordly eyes and says ‘Who the bloody hell are you?’ (ibid, p.116).

3.23 *The Seventies*

The seventies was a period of ‘extraordinary cultural and social flux, when immigrants were transforming the cultural landscape of Britain’s cities’ (Sandbrook, 2010, p.12). Author and journalist, Gary Younge, says in his article, *Growing up black*: ‘The 70s were a pivotal era in black British history. When people started arriving in large numbers’ (Younge, 2012, online). It was a challenging time for black Britons as they attempted to navigate uncharted and often hostile terrain:

To them falls the burden of becoming British while remaining black, matching the colour of their skin with the crest on their passport – not just about the right to be in the country, but to stay in it, not just to survive but to thrive (ibid).

Younge reflects a generation ‘salvaging their own scattered and forgotten histories’ and having to explain to Britain ‘how their shared histories made their presence possible’ (Younge, 2012). Sri Lankan novelist, A. Sivanandan, captures the

contemporary realities between the host country and the new arrivals: 'We are here because you were there' (Sivanandan, 2008).

3.24 *The Eighties*

By the eighties, 'Black British' identity was heavily rooted in Caribbean culture and offered an alternative narrative for a new generation of Britons. Bibi Bakare-Yusef wrote: 'hegemony of Caribbean culture in general is called upon to speak for and represent the cultural tastes of all Britain's blacks' (Bakare-Yusef, 1997, p.81). The eighties presented an unprecedented platform for black British expression. One of the decisive events that led to the support of black institutions and artists was the government's response to the 1981 Brixton riots, and the publication of Lord Scarman's report investigating the causes of it. Scarman identified racial disadvantage and inner-city decline as key causes. One of his recommendations was for local and national government to invest in the black community.

During this decade Black-British expression was prominent and prolific. The ground-breaking, *International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books* (1982-1995) based in London, brought together local and international publishers, political activists and artists to a forum where ideas were exchanged and work was showcased. There was also an eminent poetry circuit; dub-poets such as Jean 'Binta' Breeze, Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah achieved national and international recognition with their style of 'reggae-poetry' that combined Jamaican style speech with reggae music. The black British experience took to the stage with theatre companies such as *Temba* and *Black Theatre Collective* and also to television with popular sit-com, such as *No Problem* and the *Lenny Henry Show*. Documentary and

cultural shows were also aired, such as *Black on Black* and *The Bandung File*. Film production companies such as *Black Audio Collective* and *Sankofa Film Collective* became the first wave of black British Independent filmmakers choosing to tell their story their own way.

The eighties was also a prolific time for British women of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage as they came together to discuss issues that were not being addressed by white women or black men. They joined a radical wave of women of colour telling their stories and discussing ideas pertaining to their own gendered experience. Radical feminist publishers such as Sheba and Virago and literary magazines such as *Wasafari* and *Spare Rib*, promoted a new wave of black British women writers such as Joan Riley, Buchi Emercheta, Amryl Johnson, Grace Nichols and Jackie Kay. Women artists, academics and activists came together to redefine the parameters of a black British experience.

3.25 *The Arrival of Lionheart Gal*

In regards to Black British arts and activism the eighties was a dynamic and transformative period. The arrival of *Lionheart Gal* at the height of black British cultural consciousness was perfect timing. The narratives of the book located in the lives of black working class women written in Jamaican Creole registered an assumed cultural authenticity for its British readers. *Lionheart Gal* represents the post-colonial struggle for independence where black culture in Jamaica symbolised authenticity. The narratives of Sistren made it permissible for women to renew and reframe their personal memories and experiences within an emancipatory process.

3.3 Background of the Sistren Theatre Collective

Sistren Theatre Collective was among the new wave of radical Caribbean women's organisations; a grassroots theatre collective which connected its goals with those of the post-colonial struggle for independence in Jamaica and other post-colonial societies. The Collective was conceived when Honor Ford Smith was invited in 1977 to direct a play for workers' week with women from the Impact Program (a government initiative to offer 'temporary relief to the problems of unemployment' among the working-class). The Impact Program was lowly paid but Ford-Smith utilised the program to offer a space in which 'women could begin to organise their own concerns' (Ford-Smith, 2005, p. xxii). Sistren was founded to address issues such as gender, class, violence and sexuality. Sistren's theatrical productions became a creative outlet for personal memories and experiences to be explored. Many of these stories had never been shared in public. Under the artistic direction of Honor Ford-Smith, Sistren redefined the creative space by 'challenging the boundaries between domestic and public spheres' (Ford-Smith, 1989, p.28). This small theatre collective maintained that personal life experiences were essential to any discussion and action within the decolonisation process, in order to dispute and dismantle fixed assumptions and mind-sets that shape society.

3.31 Theory to Practice

Groups like Sistren conceived in a newly independent Jamaica were committed to 'bringing the master's house down' and becoming the architects of a new nation. Sharon Green says Sistren's work was participating in the cultural decolonization process (Green, 2006, p.112). For Ford-Smith this meant that in order to build

something different post-colonial societies would have to reject the ‘master’s tools’ (Lorde, 1984). Ford-Smith describes the preliminary approach to the development of the creative process as dismantling the European concept of ‘art’ and ‘artist’. She rejected the idea of the ‘arts’ as being ‘somehow transcendent and unrelated to ordinary life. cordoned off from economic and political process’ (Ford-Smith, 1989, p.27). She saw herself and the members of *Sistren* as cultural workers as opposed to ‘artists’ (ibid). The aim of the cultural worker is ‘an attempt to re-create life so that the realms of thought, feeling and action are no longer separate and distinct’ (ibid).

Ford-Smith’s revision of the concepts of ‘arts’ and ‘artist’ reflects the scrutiny she applied and believed was necessary to rebuild new structures. She emphasised the importance of emancipatory processes to be reassessed in order for new outcomes and constructions - personal, cultural and socio-political - to be achieved. I drew from Ford-Smith for my own project the importance to attempt to rebalance the inequity of power between facilitator and participant and also to ‘demystify’ the idea of a ‘writer’, so that my facilitation installed the belief that all the participants were equipped to participate fully in the workshop and become the authors of their own stories.

Whilst Green states that the goals of *Sistren* were located in the post-colonial struggle for independence, I would argue that under the ‘cultural’ direction of Ford-Smith, *Sistren* was far more radical than this; *Sistren*’s aim of ‘altering or redefining of the parameters of political process and action’ (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.xv) was to shift the post-colonial discourse into a new site, which suggested ways of ‘re-inventing the

terms of struggle and the strategy itself'. She highlights the way tale-telling creates an imaginative space that challenges omniscient and authoritative forces. She claims that 'the tales are the places where the most subversive elements of our history can be safely lodged' (ibid). Sistren's Theatre Collective provides a safe and imaginative space that allows for the restoration of knowledge that has been hidden from the official culture of Jamaican society. Drawing from the tale-telling legacy, Ford-Smith suggests that creating a space for imaginative expression is integral to the emancipatory process. The tales that migrated across generations restored the 'centrality of imaginative expression ... to the human experience' (ibid, p.xvi).

3.4 The Role of the Imaginative Space in the Emancipatory Process

One of the fundamental factors for 'altering and redefining' the socio-political parameters was the acknowledgment that the lives and experiences of Jamaican women were seen as less important in both the emancipatory movements of nationalism and feminism. Ford-Smith wrote of post-colonial Jamaica that 'From its inception the nation was a problematic construction, operating in highly classed, gendered and racialised ways' (ibid, p.285). Jamaica remained a highly divided society out of which the collective grew. Sistren also 'differentiated itself from liberal Western feminism', joining the ranks of many feminists of colour who felt that Eurocentric-feminism was failing to address their issues. Ford-Smith says that Western feminism 'spoke about women's oppression when what they meant was their own experience of it' (ibid, p.xxiv). Sistren sought the necessity of an alternative path if women of the Caribbean were to achieve freedom within the decolonization process; the answer lay not outside the region but within:

Storytellers have never been silent in the face of colonial violence ... Here, the role of the storyteller is central to the exercise of agency and renewal (Sium & Ritskes, 2013, p.5)

Sistren drew from African traditions located in the Jamaican legacy of tales of life stories passed down through generations, coated in memory, imagination and mythology, with the narratives obscuring 'what is overtly threatening to the powerful' (ibid, p.xv). Ford-Smith refers to tales such as those about Ni, a Maroon priestess and warrior who fought against slavery. One such story was of Ni being attacked by British soldiers and how 'she bounced their bullets off her bottom' (ibid). She says 'to recognize her [Ni] it may be necessary to readjust one's sense of the rules of resistance and the limits of power' (ibid, p.xiv). This notion of 'readjusting' implies the necessity for a broader understanding of knowledge and how it may be used within an emancipatory process:

Since those who win struggles rarely do so by confronting the oppressor on his own terms, these discoveries [tales] may suggest ways of re-inventing the terms of struggle and the strategy itself (ibid, p.xv).

According to Ford-Smith the tales such as those of Priestess Ni offer an opportunity for Jamaican women to connect to their greatest act of resistance, their body. She suggests a shift in ideologies that deviate from Eurocentric norms. The idea of Ni 'bouncing bullets off her bottom' is a tale that needs to be de-coded as it reveals a 'greater truth – one which states the female body brings forth life' (ibid, p.xvi). For Ford-Smith 'the body itself has often been the place ... where suppressed knowledge

has been stored (ibid, p.31). Bodily knowledge induces both ‘thought and feeling’ for the teller and receiver of these stories, releasing a power that can serve as a basis to reinvent possibilities and strategies of resistance and resurgence.

The aims of Sistren were radical and bold, identifying bodily knowledge as an essential component of the decolonization process. Narratives like *Ni* speak of the hidden power within a woman’s body, the *creative power of rebel consciousness* that resides within; a power that can resurrect life, a self that has been lost or silenced or oppressed by external forces. Kamau Brathwaite also refers to Caribbean storytellers as coming ‘from a historical experience where they had to rely on their breath...they had to depend on immanence, the power within’ (Brathwaite, 1984, p19). This notion of embodied knowledge echoes the ideas of Audre Lorde: ‘Within these deep places, each of us hold an incredible reserve of creativity and power’ (Lorde, 1984, p.37). Lorde, like Ford-Smith, emphasises the ‘necessity’ to respect and listen to our emotions and feelings, as it is there ‘where hidden and growing our true spirit rises’ (ibid. p.37). This idea of knowledge production as an intimately embodied process is one that my own work with the creative writing group in the salon resonates strongly with.

3.41 *The Resilience of Hidden Power*

Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott also draws attention to the resilience of the hidden power; stating that even under the most extreme oppressive circumstances where an individual feels disempowered and disconnected to their life and community, creativity cannot ‘utterly’ be destroyed. Winnicott’s concept of creativity moves from the creation of individual works of art, such as a ‘symphony or sculpture’, to

encompass a ‘universal’ concept, according to which creativity ‘belongs to being alive’ (Winnicott, 1971, p.91). His idea of ‘aliveness’ is focused on an individual and their relationship with the outside world. Winnicott believes that central to human development is the ability for creative living. He says it is our capacity to be creative that makes our life worth living:

One has to allow for the possibility that there cannot be complete destruction of a human individual’s capacity for creative living ... hidden away somewhere there exists a secret life that is satisfactory because of its being creative or original to that human being (ibid).

Winnicott’s idea of ‘a secret life hidden away’ draws attention to the inner world of the individual and its potential for transformation. He refers to the hidden source of creativity as the *creative impulse* that is intrinsic to ‘living itself’ (ibid, p.93). The *creative impulse* echoes the cultural perspective of the *creative power of rebel consciousness* that is located in the Caribbean traditions of story-making. His ideas are relevant to individuals and groups of individuals such as Sistren and indeed my own project. Ford-Smith and Winnicott both suggest an inner source of creative power that opens up the possibilities of personal transformation. It is the concept of the literal body of feeling and emotion that brings the psycho-dynamic and socio-political thinkers together in my research in order to ‘challenge the limitations of narratives’ (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.286).

3.5 The Narratives of Lionheart Gal Makes Private Lives Public

There was nothing in our [Jamaica's] education which confronted the needs of the private world....Only in our drama club, after school where we improvised emotional and physical situations, was anything connected to our real lives (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.185).

According to Ford-Smith Sistren altered the political parameters by creating a new context centred within their own lives. An 'important precedent' for the collective was Jamaican black nationalist and feminist writer Una Marson (1930s), who 'based her poetry and plays on her own personal experience' and in doing so emphasised 'the link between art and nationalist struggle, art and organisation' (ibid, p.xxiv). Sistren was making the same connections.

The making of *Lionheart Gal* followed a similar process to the development of their theatrical productions: 'that is, of taking in from women through testimony and shaping it into a final product' (ibid, p.xxvii). The 'testimonies' were developed from interviews between Ford-Smith and the members of Sistren; each interview was constructed around three questions: 'How did you first become aware of the fact that you were oppressed as a woman? How did the experience effect your life? How have you tried to change it? (Ford-Smith, 1986, xxvii).

Many of the tales explored the journey from childhood to womanhood and the complicit and complex relationship between mothers and daughters. The narrator of *Me Own Two Hand* uses her story to look back on her experiences and learns from

them. She is determined to do things differently with her own daughter: ‘Me try me best fi siddung and talk to her and show her di difficulty of pregnancy and relationships wid men. Ah show her di part dat can be good too. ... It no mek no sense fi have sex as no secret’ (ibid. p.174). *Lionheart Gal* locates personal issues in a broader socio-political context, such as the issue of colour discrimination in Caribbean society, the impact of poverty and the lack of education. It is within these tales that women find the power ‘to change oppressive circumstances in which they find themselves’ (ibid, p.xiv).

Similar to *Sistren*, the workshop in the salon and my own writing were embarking on an exploration of personal memory and experience as a means to help the participants and myself to engage more reflexively with the narratives within which we are located. It was because of Ford-Smith that I began to recognise the importance in my own research of not only engaging with the psychodynamic elements but also the socio-political realities. The women’s narratives presented in *Lionheart Gal* offered complexity and visibility to lives that had been dismissed or diminished. It was in these stories that *Sistren* created a dialogue between their thoughts and feelings and their external realities. They spoke against the condemnation of being a ‘gal pickney’ that knew ‘notten bout school for Papa waan we fi cook’ (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.5) and the violence that shadowed many of the women’s childhoods: ‘dem strip me naked and gimme five different beatings’ (ibid, p.15). The stories challenged authoritative discourses such as education and religion that reinforced class and racial discrimination: ‘In true Christian style ...[religion] glorified the poor because they had suffered and suffering was supposed to be Christian. It ignored what they really were and their struggles’ (ibid, p.192). The stories revealed the corruption of politicians

and state violence implemented by the police: ‘de police a terroise we’ (ibid, p.249); and feelings about migration: ‘To me leaving country was like going to a nodder world’ (ibid, p.17). The women spoke of their hardships and also their joys: ‘mi grandfadda sing wid me, dance wid me’ (ibid, p.98); they spoke of desire: ‘it come like me head a go blow off me body di way how me feel nice’ (ibid, p.48); issues that divide women: ‘she believe the colour of yuh skin haffi do wid our ability’ (ibid, p.58); and the issues that unite: ‘In those days, man was wholly and solely in control of di woman’s life body and everything’ (ibid, p.162). The rebel spirit appears in their tales: ‘she grab up her cutlass like dem de ole warrior’ (ibid, p.30); and one woman speaks of her mother ‘in di spirit’ to warn of a stranger who intended to harm her in the street: ‘She never afraid...me just see she turnround and get in di spirit and start, “dinky, dinky, ling tang-dang, titty ting tang ting-tang-tang”’ (ibid, p.158).

Sistren’s stories share personal and painful memories, and by doing so they radically and courageously place private issues onto a public platform. The tales reveal the differences and shared terrain between the lives of Jamaican women, disclosing their feelings, thoughts and actions in secreted stories of sex, love, ‘duppys’, violence, ‘di spirits’, poverty and migration. Green says that Sistren ‘dedicated itself to using popular theatre techniques to give voice to Jamaican women’s experiences of oppression’ (Green, 2006, p.112) One of the members wrote:

Our work with Sistren allows us to explore women’s issues without anyone breathing down our backs to tell us these things can wait because they are “secondary” (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.240).

3.6 From Jamaica to the Diaspora

The story *Exodus' a Run* explores the impact of migration on the people left behind in the Caribbean: 'Every parent as dem children leave school, a try fi send dem away fi go England' (ibid, p.22). The evolution of Sistren, and eventually *Lionheart Gal*, opened a dialogue between people living in the Caribbean and the diaspora. Sistren recognized that they represented a conversation that resonated to women beyond the borders of Jamaica, as they were sought after 'by women elsewhere, in particular by black women in the diaspora' as Ford-Smith points out: 'it was a dialogue that was both local and global (ibid, p.295). The stories performed and published represented continuity between *there* and *here*. I remember women from my parent's generation being in the audience in London of performances of Sistren, weeping and laughing because the stories represented the experiences of their own lives. For those of us who were born in the diaspora the stories gave us a lens into the lives of our parents, grandparents, aunties and cousins, but also into our own lives as many of us were struggling in various ways for our own survival.

3.61 The Legacy of Tale-Telling Influence the Written Word

Author Paule Marshall reflects growing up as a young girl in New York listening in the kitchen to the stories her Barbadian mother and her mother's friends used to tell each other: 'They were women in whom the need for self-expression was strong, and since language was the only vehicle readily available to them they made it an art form that – in keeping with the African tradition in which art and life are one – one was an integral part of their lives' (Marshall, 1983, p.629). It is these stories that Sistren brought to the stage.

Similar to Marshall I attribute my love and aptitude for writing to listening to my parents and family tell stories from ‘back home’. Marshall says: I grew up among poets. ... They were just a group of ordinary housewives ... that made it possible for me to imagine’ (ibid, p.628). She tells how the women used ‘everyday speech, the simple commonplace words—but always with imagination and skin—they gave voice to the most complex ideas’ (ibid, p.631). It was these stories woven seamlessly together of memory and imagination that gave Marshall her ‘first lessons in the narrative art’ (ibid, p.633). Some of the participants in the salon also spoke of how their interest in creative writing began from listening to family members telling stories. One participant reluctantly confessed ‘the storytelling instinct comes from her [her mother]’ (I47.12)

My mum actually was the storyteller in my family which I only actually connected with that a few years ago when I was getting around to forgiving her for stuff ... my Mum used to tell us stories a lot. She would lean against the wall in the bedroom, when me and my brother was tiny and she would just go into one about what it was like when she grew-up in St Lucia on her father’s farm; just ridiculous stories (I45.19).

Ford-Smith suggests that it is these stories - ‘funny, vulgar, amazing or magically real’ - that are passed down through generations that have been carrying the poetic truths of life stories (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.xv).

3.7 The Cracks and Contradictions of *Lionheart Gal*

This strategy of exposing and naming the source of power which gives rise to the way we think about our lives is not fool proof (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.296).

Carolyn Cooper's seminal essay on *Lionheart Gal* was influential on much of the criticism that followed the publication of the book. According to Cooper, from the outset of the project *Lionheart Gal* was flawed. She argues that *Lionheart Gal's* 'fictional –autobiograph[ies]' does not represent the lives of the collective but instead it is the 'mediating consciousness' of Ford-Smith (Cooper, 1993, p.483). Green says that Sistren 'dedicated itself to using popular theatre techniques to give voice to Jamaican women's experiences of oppression' (Green, 2006, p.112) and therefore for Cooper one of the major criticisms she has of *Lionheart Gal* is around the question of Sistren's voice in the book.

One of the key controversies over *Lionheart Gal* is about how the book was made. The original idea of the book was based on the documentation of past plays contextualised within particular pre-determined themes. Ford-Smith points out that the plays 'would not behave', as they 'refused to become supporting evidence of predetermined factors' (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.xxvii). She says: 'we gave up trying to trim them and silence them'; and therefore it was decided the stories for *Lionheart Gal* would be written 'testimonies' in response to questions set by her. Cooper refutes Ford-Smith's notion of *Lionheart Gal* drawing from the Caribbean legacy of tale-telling because of the intervening method of the development process. She refers to the literary confinements of the rebellious spirits of tale-telling: 'The autonomous oral

stories revolt against the constricting, scribal narrative intention of the predetermined thematic project' (Cooper, 1993, p.89).

What is striking for me is that both Cooper and Ford-Smith refer to the rebellious spirit of oral stories, the notion that stories themselves hold the spirit of change. In the context of my research this idea is continued within a written form of storytelling. The writer through the creative process begins to create an internal creative distance from their life stories and personal memories; it 'places one "outside" an experience' (Chandler, 1990, p.41). It is within this creative space that a new story begins to take shape, as the writers begin to see their stories from a different perspective. It is as if the story has a life, a 'spirit' of its own which is not separate from the writer but offers a more expansive vision of themselves and the world. It is this process of story-making that Ford-Smith says is 'invaluable in the effort to change the effect of oppressive forces on our lives' (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.xvi).

Coopers argument is not questioning the continuity between oral and written narratives which has long been debated; she recognises, like other scholars such as Walter Ong, the interconnection between them both: 'in all the wonderful words that writing opens, the spoken word still resides and lives... Writing can never dispense with orality' (Ong, 1982, p.8). Her concerns are based on the kind of Jamaican Creole language which is used in the text and the ordering of that language. She contends that by writing the introduction of *Lionheart Gal* in English, which precedes the majority of testimonies written in Jamaican Creole (Patwah), Ford-Smith serves 'to confirm not the appropriateness of the Jamaican mother-tongue but the imperial authority of the English father tongue' (Cooper, 1993, p.90). She contends that for actual change

to take place in Jamaica there needs to be a 'hierarchal inversion' of the linguistic system. She refers to the language used in *Lionheart Gal* as 'Jamaican *and* English' as opposed, in her view, to the use of the more authentic system referred to as 'Cassidy orthography' (ibid, p.91), a writing form that was created by linguist Frederick Cassidy specifically for oral language used in Jamaica. She claims that the 'reader who is already literate in English is forced to surrender the privileges of literacy', because it has not been developed to satisfy the English speaker but to 'fill the space of our real African language' (ibid).

Ford-Smith has written extensively about the importance of 're-defining' emancipatory processes, therefore Cooper's critique is provocative and pertinent as she accuses Ford-Smith of maintaining the socio-political structures that she had set out to challenge and transform. Rawle Gibbons says: 'perhaps the most enduring tyranny of colonialism is that of language' (Gibbons, 1995, p.58); therefore it is not surprising that Cooper focuses her argument around this topic. Bill Ashcroft also reiterates that language 'seems to go to the core of our perceptions of ourselves, of our understanding of our identity' (Ashcroft, 2009, p.1). Ford-Smith emphasises the importance of the use of Patwah in the writing of the narratives as being 'part of the process of gaining control over one's own life' (Ford-Smith, 1986/2005, p.xxix) but also acknowledges the difficulty of transferring Creole (Patwah), an oral language, into text. Although Patwah was spoken by most Jamaicans, it was not taught in schools and therefore was written by few people. Ford-Smith was one of the few who could transcribe the oral stories. Sharon Green says that the tension between English and Patwah is 'deeply-rooted in Jamaica's colonial history' and thus she sees the debate not pertaining particularly to Sistren but as more of a reflection of the

complexity and magnitude of a broader on-going 'struggle between establishing a post-independence national and cultural identity and the maintenance of colonial hegemony' (Green, 2006, pp.112, 117).

Cooper mocks Ford-Smith when she writes that *Lionheart Gal* in a 'Bakhtinian sense of the word dialogic is impeccably subversive' (Cooper, 1993, p.87), suggesting that it is only masquerading as a subversive text. She draws on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to dispute Ford-Smith's claim of creating a counter-narrative which challenges authoritative discourses, referring to Bakhtin's two categories of discourse: 'authoritative discourse' and 'internally persuasive discourse'. The authoritative word is 'connected to a past that is considered to be 'hierarchically higher' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.342). It presents itself as the supreme authority: 'it demands our unconditional allegiance...permits no play with the context framing it', it is permanently fixed (ibid, p.343). In the context of the discussion of *Lionheart Gal* the authoritative word is that of colonialism, the 'English father tongue' which has shaped gender, race and class politics in Jamaica (Cooper, 1993, p.90); and the internally persuasive word, which 'is not *finite*, it is *open*' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.346) and experienced as a new discourse, is linked to the awakening of a Jamaican identity located in its African-Caribbean heritage. Bakhtin suggests that when someone is 'striving to liberate [themselves] from the influence' of discourses of authority, they must acknowledge and engage with the internally persuasive discourse: 'such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness' (ibid, p.345).

Cooper's reference to Bakhtin's ideas of dialogue is pertinent to my own research, as I am also exploring how to acquire a more fluid relationship with 'authoritative

discourses' and how such discourses in both projects are reproductions of hierarchies that defined the colonial era. Both Ford-Smith and Cooper reveal the difficulty of liberating ourselves from discourses of authority. Bakhtin's notion of a dialogic discourse involves understanding that the discourse of authority is not purely an external voice but one that can become internalised. He tells us that we cannot dismiss the authoritative voices but we can diminish their authority by engaging with other internally persuasive voices:

One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse (Bakhtin, 1981, p.348).

Cooper raises important issues as her provocative essay transports the reader to the heart of the central issues faced by a newly independent nation as she ardently questions the presence of continued European and cultural hegemony. I agree with Cooper that the role of Ford-Smith is problematic as editor, interviewer and writer, which suggests that too much of the 'shaping' of the women's narratives lay with Ford-Smith rather than the women themselves. As the facilitator of my own project although the participants are able to write their own story I still need to be alert and recognise my power of influence as I help to facilitate their creative writing process. Where I feel Cooper falls short is that she continues to locate her argument within a binary framework which was established during the colonial era. Her ideas are aligned with the nationalist agenda of connecting Jamaica's identity to its African heritage. I recognise the imperativeness of deconstructing political and cultural frameworks but in fact what Cooper is suggesting is an 'inversion' rather than deconstructing the

existing hierarchal structures. I find this problematic as Morrison points out: 'I do not want to alter one hierarchy in order to institute another' (Morrison, 1993, p.8). This approach presents the idea of an 'authentic' Jamaica or Jamaican experience which denies cultural and socio-political complexity of a nation and its people.

Paradoxically, Cooper's essay claims to challenge the hierarchy of colonialism by engaging 'in an experimental Jamaican subversion of the authority of English language as our exclusive voice of scholarship' (Cooper, 1993, p.91). Surprisingly the first half of her critique is also written in 'impeccable' English and the second part in Jamaican Creole based on Cassidy's orthography, all of which she accuses Smith of doing. Cooper's candid criticism of Smith's upholding of an authoritative discourse that she sets out to challenge, is also reflected in her own 'experimental' essay. Her experiment can also be accused of duplicity in that the essay was first published in *Kunapipi* academic journal which relies on a highly literate readership. The paradox of Cooper repeating the errors of which she accuses Ford-Smith shows the immense challenge of moving beyond authoritative discourses.

The work of Ford-Smith and Cooper draws attention to the immense challenges and contradictions of 'altering and redefining parameters' (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.xv) within an emancipatory process; a place where we can be both the liberator and oppressor in our pursuit of freedom. It is this challenge that has brought me to my research and connects me to the journey of Sistren Theatre Collective: how do we move beyond life-held narratives - authoritative discourses - that define the way we see ourselves and others?

3.8 The Authenticity of a New Identity

Cooper makes a very identity-based critique and at the core of her argument she refutes the idea that *Lionheart Gal* represents the authentic black culture in Jamaica because of the ‘intervention’ of Ford-Smith, and by doing so she raises the contentious issue of *authenticity* within the formation of a new Jamaican identity.

Cooper is writing very much from a Black Nationalist perspective which is distrustful of anything that is not perceived as representing the shift of Jamaica’s identity from Eurocentrism to an African heritage perspective. The subtext to Cooper’s argument is made clear when she states that ‘all post-colonials are not created equal’ (Cooper, 1993, p.15), which is directed at the privileged position of Ford-Smith as head of the project being middle class and ‘light skinned’ in a group of primarily black, working-class women. Ford-Smith does not deny her ‘privileged’ position in the project: ‘buried within the process are issues of the class and race power of the facilitator’ (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.31). She, however, advocates the necessity of groups such as Sistren and the work they produce ‘as attempts to intervene in specific relations of power and knowledge even if they rarely, if ever, completely transcend these relations’ (ibid, p.294). She hints at the complexities and incongruities that lie behind the construct of her own racial identity within the collective: ‘The collaboration between myself, an apparently white Jamaican, and thirteen black Jamaican working-class women’ (ibid, p.31).

Although she was not white, she was seen as a white woman. She addresses this in her own fictional-narrative, which seems to be ignored within the discourse of identity politics. Her story *Grandma’s Estate* in *Lionheart Gal* reveals her acute sense of race and its complexities in her consciousness. She writes of her grandmother reminding

her that ‘you’re not white: you only look white’ (ibid, p.181), of her brown skinned mother who is ‘so much darker’ than herself, and her great-grandfather being a white planter who was ‘so wicked’ to her great-grandmother (ibid, p.194). She tells of her grandmother’s fear of the family returning to being dark skinned: ‘if you marry one of those boys yuh will go right back’; revealing a ‘self-hatred’ in her grandmother ‘that shook’ her. Identity politics at the time of Sistren were so contentious that the issues Ford-Smith addressed in her own fictional- narrative seemed to be ignored within the discourse of *Lionheart Gal* or else are interpreted by a critic like Cooper as de-legitimizing Ford-Smith’s editorial role.

3.9 A Different Approach

This is where we have to begin, [] renewal begins in the imagination
(Chandler, 1990, p.70).

Ford-Smith introduced to my research a different way to look at stories. She refers to the historical, political and cultural aspect of the idea of embodiment, empowerment and resistance; advocating for the political and the imaginative aesthetics to come together. Her ideas offer a new and exciting dimension to my study in Creative Writing for Personal Development and my own practice in fictional-autobiographical writing. Ford Smith suggests that creating a space for imaginative expression is integral to the emancipatory process. Roger Bromley says that by placing narratives in an imaginative space it initiates ‘an attempt to produce an act of reinscribing, of revising and hybridising the settled hierarchies, by constructing a third space beyond existing, social and cultural binaries’ (Bromley, 2000, p.1). For Ford-Smith the tales

that continued to migrate across generations restores the: ‘centrality of imaginative expression and beauty to the human experience. It is to release the power contained in the images and to create a basis for political action’ (ibid, p.xvi).

Cooper argues that because of the ‘intervention’ of Ford-Smith the members of Sistren were denied the opportunity to delve into the imagination process and to tell their own stories. On the one hand I agree with Cooper that the methodological process of the stories of *Lionheart Gal* was susceptible to the ‘shaping’ of Ford-Smith being interviewer/editor; however, on the other hand, the collaborative process still enabled the women to connect to the feeling and emotions of their memories and experiences. In the view of Karina Smith the methodology applied by Ford-Smith ‘involved tapping into the lived experience of participants’ (Smith, 2008, p.239). Ford-Smith says: ‘Sometimes somebody speaking would get carried away and leave the parameters of the drawing, pursuing a conflict that she had defined for herself’ (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.xxvii). The collective members attributed changes in their lives to their involvement in Sistren: ‘Ah learn to read and write... Acting help mefi understand odder people... Ah play plenty of lead parts. Each one bring out a strength in me’ (ibid, p.215); ‘After we don talk ah get to feel dat di little day to day tings dat happen to we as women, is politics too’ (ibid, p.253); ‘I began to feel a part of the process that I could interfere in and act upon’ (ibid, p.191).

3.10 ‘Take Up’ *Lionheart Gal*

One of the critical differences between Sistren and my own project was that the participants in my research were able to write their own story and there was also more focus on the participants using fictional and poetic techniques to fictionalise their memories. In fact Everlyn O’Callaghan’s criticism of *Lionheart Gal* is that the

‘testimonies’ have ‘become to a large extent “fictionalized”’ (O’Callaghan, 1987, p.3). Although Ford-Smith writes extensively about the legacy of the Caribbean tales, which she says are a combination of the real and the imagined, it is more in her fiction and poetry published after *Lionheart Gal* that she is able to engage fully in this creative process. *Lionheart Gal* was a grassroots activist theatre group and therefore the narratives, although not strictly testimonies because the stories changed for performance, were still testifying to something such as being beaten, raped or child labour. Ford-Smith also testifies to the difficulties she experienced growing up. The narratives were a part of a socio-political agenda; they had to work within a particular framework. It is in Ford-Smith’s book of poetry, *My Mother’s Last Dance*, that the readers are introduced to stories which have not had to ‘sit neatly’ because of ‘predetermined factors’, but have been allowed to ‘restore the centrality of the imaginative expression’ (Ford-Smith, 1986/2005, pp.xxvii, xvi). She connects to subtle feelings and emotions, which offers complexity to her exploration of memories and experiences, as shown in her poem, ‘Self Portrait’:

In the mirror a white woman peers back at me
 Droopy cheeks squeezing the corners of an old smile
 Skin loosened under the chin, jawline eroded...
 After years of wishing them cuplike, firm and small
 Like the ones in soft porn American pin-ups
 I’ve made peace with my heavy breasts.....
 Underneath I am nursing a crop of warts, medals from my forties
 (Ford-Smith, 1997, p.19).

The stories of the participants in my research project were not necessarily testifying but were engaged with a creative process, which allows, in my view, for a broader exploration of personal memories and experiences, as the stories were not constrained by being part of an explicitly political agenda. However, placing my research in a hair salon/barbershop is drawing from Ford-Smith's idea of dismantling the notion of 'art and artist' as somehow separate from 'ordinary life' (Ford-Smith, 1989, p.27). I did not want the participants to feel that creative writing was something unattainable or disconnected to their everyday realities. When Winnicott refers to the *creative impulse* and Ford-Smith the *creative power of rebel consciousness*, they are both connecting the process of creativity to the ability to engage with life itself.

I learnt from Sistren the necessity for writers to have another space of discourse that allows them to immerse themselves in the story they are writing, but also to be able to create a distance from their writing. Sistren's reflexive part seems to belong to Ford-Smith because she is the one who writes the foreword and afterword in *Lionheart Gal*, and subsequent essays about the experience and process of the collective and publication. Most of the individual narratives in the book are so caught up in the ordeals of the writers' lives that there is not the luxury of reflection within the creative process itself. Not having the socio-political constraints of Ford-Smith, I was able to create a project which incorporated the voices and writings of the participants. The fictionalising of personal memories offered the writers a creative process which allowed them to explore their experiences from different perspectives. The workshops were a creative-critical space as I introduced ideas and concepts which helped them to understand and articulate their own creative process. Participants' ideas were explored in their own creative writing and also in the semi-structured interviews. Similar to

Ford-Smith, the creative writing for the participants - and indeed my own work - provided an invaluable space where we were able to go beyond the limits of discourse, as unconscious material emerged that had previously been unavailable.

Another important influence of Sistren on my project relates to the question of how to facilitate a developmental writing group. An important dimension of Winnicott's work, and also that of groups like Sistren that embark on the exploration of personal journeys, is the necessity of creating a 'safe-enough' space for creativity to take place. For Winnicott the 'holding' space is an essential condition both for creativity and for healthy self-development and therefore it is vital for the child or adult to have 'a sense of trust and confidence' in the mother or therapist who is facilitating the space (Winnicott, 1971, pp.40, 138). Ford-Smith uses a maternal metaphor to refer to her own role as 'facilitator': 'the daughter starts life merged with the mother and gradually separates' (Ford-Smith, 1989, p.33). She equates the group dynamics of Sistren to a family, as their relationships deepen and members 'replay painful issues based in early childhood' (ibid). Although Winnicott's ideas are located in a therapeutic context, they are still pertinent to a group environment such as Sistren.

Ford-Smith's commitment to creating a safe space was informative to my own project, as I also wanted to create a space in which the participants felt at ease to explore their memories and experiences. Ford-Smith speaks of the collaborative relationship within the collective, but also highlights her own more complex position within the group: the 'facilitator must also prepare to withstand the emotional tensions and conflicts that emerge within individuals and groups' (ibid). She points out that one of the main challenges she faced as the facilitator was the 'actual reality of

working across racial and class differences, and the enormous commitment that this requires' (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.297). The critics of *Sistren* held deep suspicions towards Ford-Smith based on racial and class factors. One of the significant differences between the projects is that my research is based in a contemporary urban context in Britain, where there is considerably greater movement across race/class/gender boundaries compared to Jamaica in the 1970s and 80s and therefore in regards to Ford-Smith own racial heritage there is more scope for its complexity to be recognised now than in the newly independent Jamaica.

3.11 Conclusion

Sistren/Lionheart Gal as a case study is pertinent to my research as it offers important insights into how exploring one's own experience through fictional autobiography helps to challenge socio-political discourses and by doing so helps people to find a voice, in the sense of having a stronger sense of agency to act in the world. It also highlights the challenges of facilitating such a process. Cooper argues that Ford-Smith sustained the power relationships she had originally set out to challenge, but the fact that Cooper also upheld the hierarchical structures she accuses Ford-Smith of doing reflects the magnitude of the challenge to transcend authoritative discourses that define the way we see ourselves and others. In a Winnicottian sense the women's collective provided a safe-enough holding framework where women could express their feelings about their lives in the context of the socio-political situation in which they found themselves in the new Jamaica. *Sistren* helped the women not only to find their individual voice but working collectively gave them a voice which could challenge the socio-cultural discourses.

Sistren represents a movement that shaped and reflected the makings of a black British identity in the UK. It offers a framework that allows me to bring together and engage the various discourses that have shaped my own life-story and subsequently shaped this inquiry. I was able to transpose some of these ideas into my creative writing groups located in a hair salon/barbershop in contemporary Britain, which has a far more fluid crossing of boundaries of race, class, gender and sexuality than was possible in the highly race/class-divided society out of which Sistren grew. Although at very different points on the spectrum of the postcolonial era, similarities are evident between the projects as both attempt to challenge fixed hegemonic ideals which continue to shape self-perceptions and identities. The decolonization process is not a narrative that was particular to the new independent nations such as Jamaica but a process that was intrinsic to the personal and political journey of a new generation of Britons; the same Britons who participate in my research project.

Ford Smith offers another way to think about my research, such as the role of the body within emancipatory processes. She also emphasises that for genuine change to take place the aesthetic imagination and the socio-political discourses have to come together, which has not been done before in a Creative Writing for Personal Development context. The aims and aspirations of Sistren were often constricted by political and identity politics of that time, which were so embattled, but I am in the position to take her ideas forward in the context of Brighton 2014.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis 1:

The Experience of Creative Life Writing in a Hair Salon/Barbershop

4.1 Introduction

It's like looking at the same thing but twisting it a bit in the light and being able to see it differently (I49.23) ³

The subsequent three chapters examine the data arising from nine participants' experience of a series of creative life writing workshops I facilitated in a hair salon/barbershop in the city of Brighton and Hove. The aim of my research is to explore what happens to memory when writers engage in creative life writing. I am particularly interested in how intentionally using the imagination in writing about oneself impacts the telling of the writers' memories and how this may change their relationship to their sense of self and identity, and the stories that they choose to tell.

³ References from the participants' interviews will proceed with 'I' to indicate interview followed by page number and line number(s). The same is for creative writing but instead the page and line numbers are preceded by C.

A selection of the participants' interviews and creative writing is included in the index

I chose to use participatory action research as my method of inquiry because I wanted to engage with practice as well as theory in order to gain a greater understanding of my research topic. The salon serves people from a diverse cultural background, people of African, Caribbean, Asian and European heritage, and has proved to be an invaluable environment for my investigation.

4.11 *Participatory Research*

After being involved in the hair salon/barbershop community for more than eighteen months, as a client, volunteer for existing oral life history projects and the developing of my own research project, I became aware that the exploration of personal memories and experiences was at the core of the clients' interests. The idea of using fictional and poetic techniques to engage with personal memories offered a different approach for the clients to explore their life-stories, as previously they had worked within the parameters of Philippe Lejeune's (1989) 'autobiographical pact', where the autobiographer has made a contract with the reader to tell the truth of herself as far as she is able and any intentional veering away from truth-seeking betrays the pact. As I argued in Chapter 1, the contractual agreement in creative life writing is not a relationship between the writer and reader but 'between the writer and her words on the page' (Hunt, 2000, p12). She has given herself permission to fictionalise her own personal memories and experiences in order to find a more personal truth; it is not the facts of the memories she is seeking to grasp but the feelings and emotions associated with them.

In order to examine my data I chose Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) because my objective was to acquire a sense of people's experiences and then attempt

to interpret them. IPA's approach is 'the examination of how people make sense of their experiences' (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009, p.1) based on the idea that when people are engaged with 'an experience....they begin to reflect on the significance of what is happening and IPA research aims to engage with these reflections' (ibid, p.3). One of the initial stages of this analytical process is that the researcher identifies 'emergent themes' that surface throughout the data and looks for connections between them. In the case of my research I began to recognize reoccurring experiences expressed by the participants of the workshops:

- the importance of safe and contained spaces;
- the power of sharing and listening to stories;
- the development of confidence and courage;
- learning to trust and the importance of feeling connected and accepted.

As I repeatedly engaged with my data and sought connections between emerging themes, I started to identify overarching topics or, as Smith refers to them, *cluster themes*: 'a magnet with some of the themes pulling others in' (Smith, J. 2003, p.70). Bringing together specific themes proved particularly helpful because it enabled me to delve deeper and gain a broader understanding of the individual and group experience in the creative life writing workshops. I found not only continuity between the 'clusters' but also interdependence: each in various ways sustained and nurtured others. The key themes that will be discussed in this chapter are:

(1) Creative Playing: 'Letting Go' in the Creative Process;

- (2) Creating Spaces for Change;
- (3) Multiple Voices/Dimensions of the Self

These *cluster themes* were drawn from three components of the data: (1) semi-structured interviews with the client/writers; (2) the participants' creative writing from the workshops; and (3) my journal notes on the workshop experience. IPA recognises that the researcher is drawing on their own 'interpretative resources to make sense of what the person is saying, but at the same time one is constantly checking one's own sense-making against what the person actually said' (ibid, p.72). Examining data from multiple sources (interviews, creative writing and journaling) is in line with the overall objective of my multi-strategic research project: 'to facilitate a more valid and holistic picture' (Henn et al, 2006, p.19).

4.12 The Role of the Environment in Participants' Experience of Change

It is important to note that the workshop gave the writers a language and a way of thinking about their own experience. It was not just the writing exercises, but the whole environment of the workshop: what I brought into the group as facilitator, as well as the experiences and ideas that the participants carried with them. I consciously tried to create a space that was inclusive and culturally diverse, with fictional and poetic exercises, oral storytelling techniques and published work.

The ideas from my MA in Creative Writing and Personal Development were instrumental in the design and delivery of the workshop. I had begun my PhD on the tail of completing my Masters in the same subject. During this process I had been immersed in a particular type of teaching and learning, and this had informed a particular conceptualisation of creativity and memory, as set out in Chapter 1. I had

adopted a theoretical framework that accompanied me into the workshop. The main idea underlying my study is that of dismantling life-held narratives, which is a theoretical position. I was not trying to achieve an unbiased research environment because there are always frameworks and belief systems that we bring in to our research: 'biography is a fundamental part of the research process' (May, 2001, p.21) but during the process of analysing the data I became increasingly aware of the importance of my role as researcher/facilitator and the *difference* that this made to the group dynamics.

I introduced to the group a selection of texts to illustrate different aspects of the creative writing process such as the essay 'Poetry in the Making' by English poet Ted Hughes', which refers to letting go into the creative process, and Korean-American poet, Ishle Park's poem 'Samchun in the Grocery Story', which explores the idea of the multifaceted self. As well as writing exercises such as freewriting, alpha and list poems and oral storytelling techniques, all these contributed to discussions that offered the participants further understanding and ways to develop their writing practice. In a way I was helping the writers to understand their experience of the creative writing process through certain conceptual frameworks and what was happening to them experientially. As the writers began to gain a better understanding of the creative process, they began to relax into it.

This combination of theory and practice does not invalidate the findings but reveals another dimension of the writers' experience of the workshops. The language and ideas that I had introduced in the workshop resonated strongly with the writers, as is obvious from their discussion in their post-workshop interviews of the ideas of

‘letting go’, exploring the ‘many sides’ of themselves and ‘taking risks’. These ideas obviously felt sufficiently authentic for making sense of their felt experience.

The interviews and the creative writing of the participants show how they experienced the creative writing workshop and their understanding of the process. I brought particular approaches and learning, the writers came with their different approaches and experiences, and the process of the group was a meeting point for these different ideas to challenge, cajole and strengthen each other, and together in a basement of a salon changes were experienced for the participants and the facilitator.

4.13 *Overall findings*

The data of my participatory action research reveal how the creative writing process impacts the telling of memories. Creative life writing or fictional-autobiographical writing helped the participants move beyond life-held narratives by increasingly becoming aware of bodily feelings and emotions and engaging with many different dimensions of themselves, allowing them to engage with a more holistic sense of self. The workshops enabled the writers to ‘let go’ of implicit life narratives and explore their more subtle felt experience on the periphery of awareness. The participants revealed the importance of being immersed in the creative writing process or as Winnicott describes it, ‘lost in play’ (Winnicott, 1971, p.18), in order to be able to explore beyond their familiar sense of self and identity. The use of fictional and poetic techniques helped the writers to use their imagination in different ways, and it was here in this process that they were able to move through writing blocks, transcend comfort zones and stretch beyond their present self-understanding’s narrow and limited understandings of the self, as I show below.

The environment of the salon and the facilitation of the workshops played a far more significant role in my research inquiry than I had anticipated, reinforcing Winnicott's view of the importance of creating a safe-enough 'holding environment' for creativity to take place. The writers discussed their 'familiarity' and 'comfort' with the space and toyed with the 'contradictory' ideas of containment and freedom. This 'holding environment' allowed the writers to 'belong'; 'feel heard'; 'feel free to say anything and not be judged'. This interchange between the participants and the environment was a major influence on the group dynamics and the creative process and outcome of the workshop. I began to recognise a correlation between the writers' experience of gaining a creative and fluid relationship with their own life stories and their experience of a creative and fluid relationship with the workshop and salon. There was interdependence; one could not happen without the other, as they nurtured and sustained each other.

I also recognised the merits of holding the creative life writing workshops in the salon based in a culturally diverse location. The cultural perspective is imperative to gaining insight into and understanding the inquiry. As discussed in Chapter 1, scholars from the African diaspora and cultural studies such as bell hooks (1990), Bhabha (1994) and Soja (1999) have used the term 'thirdspace' or 'marginal space' to refer to communities that are situated on the 'margins' of society. Within this context the hair salon/barbershop can be conceived of as a thirdspace: a culturally diverse community that challenges the traditional concept of Britishness. However, as the dialogical relationship between the environment and the individual became increasingly relevant, I began to draw on the ideas of Winnicott's psychological perspective on 'the third area' or, as he more frequently refers to it, the 'potential

space', a hypothetical space in which the individual oscillates between internal and external realities. It is this movement that I observe in the writings of the participants, as they move back and forth between the many spaces of their daily lives. The British experience of the participants does not seem to be one that is placed on the margins but is more of a co-existence, fluidity between multiple spaces that extends to and beyond race.

The fictionalising of memory enabled the participants to engage with multiple dimensions of themselves and, in the process of doing so, they were able to gain a more fluid relationship with life-held narratives that had impacted significantly on their identity and sense and self. The notion of *finding a voice* in the creative writing process for the participants became a key theme that was intrinsic to their experience of finding personal freedom. I will now discuss these various findings in detail.

4.2 Creative Playing: Letting Go into the Creative Process

It is in the playing and only in the playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self (Winnicott, 1971, p.73).

The participants expressed their experience of the workshops as being: 'funny and silly, it took away my fear of anxiety' (I76.15); 'I just think we laughed a lot so the ego of people trying to impress was just not there, we were just enjoying being together' (I76.23); 'I had so much fun, I didn't feel embarrassed' (I19.32). I had intentionally wanted to create a playful environment for the workshops, partly

because the participants had busy lives and I wanted to offer a creative space that they would be excited to attend Saturday mornings despite other commitments demanding their time. My aim was also to create a space that helped people to explore outside their comfort zone. I drew from Winnicott's idea that playing 'facilitates growth' and is intrinsic to the creative process. He describes the 'preoccupation that characterizes the playing' as the moment when a child or adult becomes "lost" in play' (Winnicott, 1971, pp.56, 69, 18). In the context of my research I understand this as an experience that allows the participants to lose themselves, as they become immersed in the creative process.

As the writers became 'lost in play', they plunged into an exploratory pool of self-discovery and found new ways of seeing things. The writers spoke of their experience of their writing process as being: 'immersed in what's going on rather than slightly holding back' (I77.2); 'feeling relaxed is what I feel certainly has led me to my breakthrough' (I50.19); 'it's a space that you occupy, mentally and sort of physically' (I79.7). There was a shared experience between the participants of feeling absorbed into the creative process which allowed them to enter into uncharted territories of their memories: 'a bit like going into a trance and going quite deep' (I63.5). To draw from Winnicott's idea of playing, the participants consciously entered their writing process and the workshops as if they were entering a designated playground, as they explored their inner and outer worlds: 'creating this world for other people to step in' (I31.17); another writer spoke of 'just being aware of writing and creating a space for yourself' (I31.8). Edwidge Danticat refers to the call and response Krik? Krak! as a ritual of the teller and listener(s) as they transition from their daily realities and enter into an imaginative space. In a way as the facilitator I was calling the participants to a story

space and together we entered. One writer spoke of the importance of ‘turning up’ to write, reinforcing the idea that *playing* is not an apathetic activity but an action where the person is engaged: ‘I was so inspired I was buzzing ... God you’ve just got to turn up, you’ve got to turn up and do things and how two hours can just have such an impact’ (I79.29).

4.21 *Writer’s Block*

One of the main issues raised in the workshop was the participants’ concern about their experience of ‘writer’s block’: ‘I’m totally blocked’ (I6.4); ‘I am so blocked with my writing so much of the time’ (I42.20). Winnicott speaks of the process of the ‘removal of blocks’ (Winnicott, 1971, p.67) that can take place during the ‘preoccupation’ of play, allowing for conscious and unconscious material to emerge. Although used in a psychodynamic context, the idea of the ‘removal of blocks’ relates directly to the aims of the workshop. Poetic and fictional techniques such as freewriting help the writers to quieten or silence their inner critic, which is often the reason they have trouble putting words on paper. One writer says the exercises helped her to ‘stop saying - Oh I’m not too sure about this, that’s an old voice, not sure if this is any good’ (I7.1). Peter Elbow says freewriting ‘gets you going, gets you writing, makes it much easier to begin’ (Elbow, 2000, p.87). Natalie Goldberg calls it *timed writing*: ‘keep your hand moving. Don’t cross out, don’t worry about spelling, don’t think’ (Goldberg, 1986, p.8). This technique was particularly helpful for beginners, writers who had not written creatively for a long time or those experiencing a block. It allowed them to jump straight into writing, not having time to contemplate fears or listen to the voice of the inner critic.

4.22 *The Necessity of the Creative Process*

I was struck by the immediacy and willingness of the participants to ‘let go’ into the creative process and embark on a journey across unknown territories. I explore this further in following chapters but here I want to note that one of the reasons that the writers were able to *let go* is because they felt safe and comfortable in the workshop space, but they also expressed an ‘irrepressible’, ‘urgent’, ‘pressing’ need to tell their stories: ‘I let myself go’ (I4.20); ‘It was like a floodgate that was opened. It was all packed in there ready to go’ (I12.12); ‘There is something that is dying to emerge’ (I5.4).

According to Marilyn Chandler ‘making experience into story fulfils a variety of human needs’ (Chandler, 1990, p.3). She says that we have a need to become the ‘authors of our own stories’ (ibid) as a way of reclaiming control of our lives, and that we also need to assert our differences and also similarities to one another. The workshop was proving to exemplify such explorations and expressions. One of the participants wrote a piece called ‘Twenty Three Minutes’ about a 15 year old girl in Germany going to a party in a car with American GI’s and says in the interview that when she wrote the story she felt she had acquired ‘the freedom to imagine being powerful’ (I61.3) She continued to speak of regaining control of her life by ‘taking it [memory] out of your head and bringing it to the page’ (I61.12):

Georgia was very clear in her head, crisp, cold, alert and awake....You could say in the last seconds Georgia was never clearer and more in control (C36.74).

This idea of the writing as a life-supporting container is conveyed by another participant:

There is no difference between my writing and a deep sea diver's oxygen tank.
Crucial to my survival

Dive, dive deep

and deeper still and ...breathe (C32.21).

Most of the writers in the group said that creative writing was important to them, even for the participants for whom this genre of writing was new or fairly new; as the workshops progressed they recognised that they 'have things to say'.

4.3 Mining for Memories

The data showed certain notions such as 'letting go' and connecting to a plural sense of self resonated strongly with the participants. I had introduced these ideas into the workshop through fictional and poetic exercises and examining published writing. The writers were beginning to understand their experience through certain conceptualisations that I was discussing in the workshop. I was using and adapting exercises and ideas that had resonated with me on my MA and therefore the group sessions were a combination of practice and theory. Until revisiting the data I did not appreciate the extent to which this creative and critical exploration in the workshop

was helping people to understand and engage with the creative process better. One of the participants says: 'I'm not saying you shouldn't be playful with your writing but sometimes there's no critical inquiry and it's really important' (I45.17).

I had not considered not using theory, as I was continuing a practice that had worked for me. Using exercises and texts that were culturally diverse and a range of genres also helped the writers to have a better understanding of the creative process and nurtured their willingness to engage. One writer said she preferred 'much more about writing things that were connected to me' (I70.17). The participants appreciated the opportunity of being introduced to new writers but it was also important to discuss writers who had contributed to their own writing journey: 'it was really nice to hear Lorde, Agard, Marshall, all of them, just to hear the names of these people as highly respected in the same way as I respect them' (I43.12).

As I examine the data I also recognise the reciprocal relationship of the learning process within the group:

It was very much like come together, we are going to share something and learn from it which is exactly precisely what happened because I learnt from you, I learnt from [names a group member]; we all learnt from each other, which is a really different way of learning than when we go and sit in front of a teacher who's going to teach us how to do writing and then we are going to go away. Do you know what I mean, it was a completely different learning dynamic really (I75.25).

The dialogical relationship that existed in the learning process in the group was intrinsic to the participants' ability to 'let go' into the creative process because the writers were reflectively engaged with their emotional and thinking processes throughout the workshop:

It's not just a one way communication, it's not a kind of hypodermic needle model of communication where they transmit and you receive. It's like you're actually involved in some other more complex interaction (I76.27).

A good example of the 'interaction' of the learning process in the group was when one of the participants saw her writing as a life-supporting container, as mentioned above: 'There is no difference between my writing and a deep sea diver's oxygen tank' (C32.21). This metaphor strongly resonated with the other group members: 'Oh God, I just loved that whole metaphor of her deep sea diving because I thought from her deep sea diving, I saw myself in a garden, shovelling, shovelling and digging' (I62.11). The participants and I spoke during the sessions of their experience of uncovering hidden or forgotten memories. It was, however, the participants who began to use metaphorical concepts of 'excavation' or 'mining' to describe the retrieval of their memories or past experiences: 'The workshops you gave delved deep into who I am' (I44.22); 'I wanted to see if I could dig deep and find it'; (I 13.19); 'It was all about digging deep to how it felt' (I14.6); 'I like the thought of digging into your work' (I26.4); 'dig deep see what would come out and let it go' (I14.20) and 'expressing something deep in me that I've not touched before' (I5.3).

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson claim that that everyday language is filled with metaphoric references: ‘metaphor plays a very significant role in determining what is real for us’ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.146). The suggestion is that the way people communicate is based on a metaphorical language which originates from bodily experience and therefore ‘reveals not only some things deep about our conceptual system but also something deep about our inner experience’ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p.269). Therefore the metaphors such as ‘digging’ and ‘diving deep’ are not random but brilliantly convey a bodily felt experience of the participants engaging with their inner lives. The metaphor reveals our unconscious material and shows us (and others) ‘who we really are’ (ibid, p.269). Gillie Bolton also highlights the role of a bodily felt experience in metaphors:

Many deeply painful or problematic memories can be accessed through metaphor. Writing due to the way it powerfully wields metaphor, can allow access to these otherwise hidden memories (Bolton, 2006, p.14).

4.31 *Leaving Your Comfort Zone*

One of the most effective fictional exercises in the workshop was asking the participants to write a *list poem*, where the writer begins each line with the same words. I had asked the group to make a list that repeats the following statement: ‘Today I decided...’. The writers were instructed not to think too hard about it and write whatever came to mind; they could always rearrange later. One participant informed the group before he read his poem that he had done this exercise before in another writing group and therefore was not so keen to do it again, so he decided to write something ‘light and trivial’; he was however very surprised at the outcome.

Today I decided to check my bank account for more details of all my transactions

Today I finally decided to read a book about Stanislavski after ignoring it for so long

Today I decided I will go running ...

Today I have decided I will finally ask my mother about whether she will attend a show I am doing called Swan Lake. I have decided.

Natalie Goldberg says: 'the repetition helps release ideas and feelings and it is a chance to play with words' (Goldberg, 1986, p.7). The aim for the writer is to not think about spelling or grammar, thereby transcending the inner critic and entering a place 'where you are writing what your mind actually sees and feels, not what it *thinks* it should see or feel' (ibid). Goldberg says that poetic forms such as the *list poem* are ways 'to capture the oddities of your mind' (ibid, p.8). Similarly Manjusvara suggests the *list poem* is a good exercise to approach 'core beliefs'. He claims that 'the momentum to keep adding to the list is often enough to overrule what we consider to be a more acceptable voice' (Manjusvara, 2005, p.26). The list poem proved to be a turning point because the participants noticeably began to take greater risks with their writing. It was as if this exercise gave the writers *permission* and an outlet to be outrageous, silly, salacious, surprising, which they ran with, producing hilarious and hidden tales. Here are a couple of extracts that began with 'Surprisingly I love...'.

 Surprisingly I love German bread, dense heavy and filled with aroma

Surprisingly I love the English humour

Surprisingly I love my mum and I just discovered that this morning, despite we haven't talked for two years

Surprisingly I love watching hooligans misbehaving and show what we all try to hide in ourselves (C37.1)

The extract from the list above reveals the writer leaving her comfort zone as she voices unspoken thoughts and feelings. She expresses feelings that she had not explored before. The last line is particularly interesting in terms of transgressing one's usual boundaries.

One of the writers spoke of her experience of this exercise when she wrote:

'Surprisingly, I love the smell of my own farts'. The most *surprising* aspect of her writing this was how difficult it was for her to write it: 'I hesitated on putting in and then I put it out...I was thinking am I going to go there, no I'm not going to go there, and then that thing if you do go there that is the thing that people are going to remember' (I73.3). During the interview the writer spoke of the lesson she learnt that day, that this line was incredibly difficult for her to read out in the workshop, yet it 'drew the most response from people as they thought it was very funny' (I73.5). Of all the 'surprisingly I love...' pieces this was by far the most well received; the group laughed and applauded the writer's humour and 'bravery'. A seemingly simple sentence created a crack, another identity of the writer. She had *dared* to present another side of herself. The writers spoke at length about the experience:

The whole thing about the 'surprisingly' is about how we can unseat our narratives because you have a narrative of yourself...and it is about how you unlock yourself out of that narrative' (I71.25).

The creative life writing workshop was exploring ways for the participants to 'unseat' life-held narratives, and it was in the process of these seemingly simple writing exercises that the participants began to understand their own creative writing process and the impact that it had on the telling of their stories: 'the sort of writing that really stands out are things where people surprise you or you go outside of your comfort zone' (I72.7).

The group dynamics and the workshop environment were beginning to change: there was an increased openness and receptivity. It was as if people who knew each other were reintroducing themselves to the group: 'I haven't heard her say that before and it kind of made me think, gosh maybe I need to think how I think I know someone's writing or their creativity and then actually they surprise you' (I79.19).

4.4 Creating an Inner Distance

It's on the page, you have truly liberated yourself and since then I never think of it again, and if I think of it, I feel very differently. I feel it's an old landscape, it's no longer in me (I61.20).

For the above participant writing her story was an empowering process as she was able to gain distance from a narrative that she felt she had been carrying for a very

long time. Similar to this writer, as the other participants consciously fictionalised their life-held narratives, they created a space to ‘step back’ and view the self and the story from a different point of view: ‘I feel very differently... it is no longer me, it’s a part of a narrative but it no longer defines me’ (I61.19); ‘it’s like you put yourself on the table as if you were just a passer-by’ (I29.14); ‘it’s [the fictional-autobiography] given me a way of relooking at it [the memory] again and being able to rewrite it in a way that I can step back from it’ (I48.26).

According to Hunt and Sampson, creative life writing is ‘deeply personal, deeply connected with the writer’s self, but it also involves moving away from the self and becoming impersonal’ (Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p.2). As participants fictionalised their memories, they created a space that allowed them to move between familiar and unfamiliar narratives of the self and their story. They started to gain a more fluid relationship with narratives that had seemed omniscient and unchanging. One participant spoke of her creative writing process: ‘You can both step away and at the same time bury more deeply into the writing’ (I49.4). It was if she was able to see herself as an ‘outsider’, a spectator of her own story but also as an ‘insider’, as a participant; it was these two positions of self that she would oscillate between.

Although this will be discussed later in another section, the movement of the writer between the familiar self and the self as ‘other’ refers to the notion of reflexivity.

According to Bakhtin, the individual’s experience is shaped by her *outsideness* to her own viewpoint; she is able to look inside herself from the ‘eyes of another’ (Bakhtin, 1984, p.287). Writers engaging in a developmental creative process attempt to see the self from the perspective of the other, with the possibility of seeing something new that they did not see before.

4.41 Writing about the Creative Writing Process

I was surprised how many of the participants wrote about the creative writing process in their poems and prose. It was as if they were not only ‘surprised’ or ‘amazed’ at what they had written: ‘my God where did this come from’ (I19.19), but were equally ‘captivated’ and ‘inspired’ by the process that got them there. From the beginning there was a desire to creatively explore the stories they had carried around for many years but also a yearning to learn the craft that would enable them to engage and express these stories. The participants shared an interest in memory and the craft of creative writing:

- i) Side up
 Side down
 my upward urge
 is drawn held
 Strong line biting
 Story lovingly biting
- ii) I find my beat
 with upward bound
 in sideways flick
 twist my wrist
 to say my dawn

to know why (C27.1).

For this writer there is physicality to her writing process: she sees it as capturing, ‘biting’ her ‘upward surge’ - the feelings and emotions of her memories. Developing the craft of writing has made this possible. For another participant her writing was intrinsic to her living:

I die anyway every time I fail to express what I want with the words that I want... I need to carry on with the words, not censor myself, not hide from myself, when characters won’t tell me who they are I get frightened (C32.5).

4.5 Conclusion

The writers spoke of how the workshop ‘offered new ways of thinking how to write’ and how to use their imagination in different ways or at least be more active. The theoretical work had proven to be as important as the creative work in order for the writers to understand and engage more effectively with the creative process. As the facilitator, I introduced ideas and concepts that offered a language and understanding for writers to articulate their own creative process, but I was struck by how this served to open the ‘floodgates’ for the participants to share their own theories, ideas and stories. There was a shift in the learning process and it was not viewed as just learning led by the facilitator but as a collaborative process between researcher and participants, allowing for a broader and more complex understanding of an inquiry than I had originally set out to accomplish. Letting go into the creative process allowed the writers to transcend boundaries that had been restricting and reducing their sense of a holistic self; it allowed the writers to play and enjoy the process of

retrieving memories and experiences that had been lost or silenced and to learn increasingly how to engage with, and listen to, bodily feelings and emotions, to tell the stories that *felt right* to them, in a voice that resonated, felt authentic. As the participants explored their memories they found that they could engage more dialogically with narratives that they had experienced as omniscient and unchanging. The writers spoke of their experience of putting their stories on the page and how this created a distance that enabled them to move more fluidly between different senses of self. By doing this they opened up an imaginative space for a story they ‘had not set out to write’, which allowed them to view themselves and their life from a broader and multifaceted perspective.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis 2:

Creating Space(s) for Change

As discussed in Chapter 1, Winnicott's notion of the 'holding environment' (Winnicott, 1971, p.150) emphasises the importance of safe enough and contained spaces for creativity and self-growth to take place. This is a centrally important concept for my research, as the loosening of life-held narratives through creative life writing requires writers to let go of their familiar sense of self and identity and open themselves up to feelings and emotions that may be uncomfortable or unsettling. Providing contained holding environments for this work enables participants to explore and possibly 'achieve some congruence between inner and outer worlds' (Chandler, 1990, p.4). In my research inquiry these 'containers' present themselves in a variety of ways that sustain and nurture each other:

(1) *the hair salon/barbershop* served as an overarching container for the participants and played a far more significant role than I had anticipated;

(2) *the creative life writing workshop and facilitator's role* held the group dynamics and the writers' creative process, thus facilitating rather than inhibiting the exploration of personal memories and experiences;

(3) *fictional and poetic techniques*, such as list poems and alpha poems, offered the writers flexible literary frameworks to work within, allowing them

to engage with conscious and unconscious material; and

(4) *increased attention to, and awareness of, bodily feelings and emotions*, which the exercises encouraged, provided a vital holding space for the imagination, as the writers loosened the hold of implicit life-held narratives and connected with different aspects of themselves.

I discuss these four ‘containers’ in the following sections.

5.1 The Salon as Container

The hair salon/barbershop served as the overarching holding space for my research inquiry. The clients’ relationship with the salon was fundamental to their experience in the creative life writing workshops. The participants shared an appreciation of and familiarity with the salon: ‘I just belong by mere ethnicity’ (I39.3); ‘a place that is like a home where you are accepted and where you feel safe(I7.16). The participants consistently reinforced the idea of the salon being a ‘good space’; ‘feels like family’; ‘it feels like second home’; ‘I know the salon very well, a very homely sort of place, a place where you are accepted’(I3.5); ‘it feels like family when you walk in here and you just go haaaa, you know everyone says that’ (I1.4).

5.11 Emerging Themes of Home and Family

Participants’ frequent use of ‘home’ and ‘family’ to describe their experience in the salon suggested the notion of safety and a sense of belonging, yet in the participants’ creative writing ‘home’ and ‘family’, which were also repetitive themes, had a more complex and disconcerting tone. Nearly a third of the participants had grown up in

children's homes or were adopted: 'when I was a child in a children's home I had to sing because I was so unhappy' (I3. 24); 'I grew up in a home and that was very much about being in a space where we were only for instance allowed to go out once a week' (I56.27). It is here within this familial theme that the cracks in dominant narratives begin to show, as the participants engage with the incongruities and complexities of their own realities. One participant wrote of a mother she had never met:

Remembering to love
Is to go back in time
To know the mama's
Love was strong
Whatever else went wrong (C8.1).

The abstract above demonstrates the writer dismantling a life-narrative of her mother. Before she wrote this she said that she had always regarded her mum as weak because she had left the family when she and her siblings were young, but as she creatively revisited memories of her mother she recognized that her mother's 'love was strong' despite all the things that 'went wrong'. Through the creative life writing process the participant began to engage with feelings of anger and betrayal and, by doing so, to allow other feelings and emotions to emerge that were implicit or buried.

The participants also refer to the complex relationship with the concept 'back home', the country where their parents were born. British-born writer Gary Younge refers to his relationship with his parent's country: 'I grew up with an understanding that there

was a distinction between where I had always lived (Stevenage) and where I was from (Barbados)' (Younge, 2010, p.21). The affinity for the concept of 'back home' was strengthened by the realities of people growing up in the country of their birth where they felt isolated and not recognised as citizens. One participant says she 'never felt that this [Britain] was my place' (I25:20). Another writer's exploration of home is from the perspective of the family members who 'stayed behind' in West Africa:

At last, my brother's child!
 My niece has come
 Bringing gifts from my brother
 Who left for Great Britain in 1940
 He never returned
 Does my niece know the loss
 That we suffered here? (C10.1)

So whilst 'home' was a complex concept for many of the participants, sometimes evoking difficult memories, the salon and the workshop were revealed as being positive and containing 'home' for them.

5.12 Confinement and Freedom

The concepts of 'home' and 'family' are related to two other themes that the participants explored extensively in their writing: 'confinement' and 'freedom'. A striking example is when I introduced the work of poet Marilyn Hacker's *Love, Death and the Changing of the Seasons* (1995), a verse novel in sonnets. I used Hacker's novel to discuss creativity within the confinements of literary forms such as sonnets

and haikus. This idea particularly resonated with one of the participants, but in a way I had not expected. The participant immediately related the confinements of space in the structure of the poem to her personal experience of growing up in a care home: ‘It was all in that confined space and the politics that played out and the drama’ (I57.3). She then took this idea of confinement into her own writing and creatively explored a past experience that she had previously had difficulty revisiting, using the image of confinement in a car.

[The participants’ creative writing is discussed further below].

That confined space [of the care home] really brought me to the story of being in that car...I felt in this confined space a particular freedom, and I thought how can you feel free in a car and why do you feel free? (I57.8).

By locating her story in the confinement of a car the writer felt safe-enough to explore a difficult past experience: ‘sitting in the car is autobiographical but what I’ve done I’ve taken it to the extreme... I wanted to explore fiction and freedom’ (I59.21). She had chosen a confined space to hold her imagination; in this space she had given herself permission to fictionalise a painful past experience and by doing this it gave her the ‘freedom to imagine being powerful’ (I61.1).

5.13 .A Space of Cultural Diversity

The concept of the salon as ‘home’ was partly due to the felt sense of inclusivity, as one participant said candidly: ‘it’s a place where I walk in and people look like me’ (I25.23). A salon catering for people of African, Caribbean, Asian and European heritage produces an atmosphere that for many ‘creates a setting that gives it

normalcy' (I15:11). This notion of 'normalcy' would be a reoccurring theme in the workshop. The salon as a metaphorical representation of 'home' expressed an experience where people felt they could be 'themselves', which was, as they pointed out, not always the case in their daily lives: 'The best things for me was the comfort of being in this place, you know the comfort of it not being in alien territory because I often feel that black people walk in alien territory every day' (I38:16); 'Around Brighton I'm known because I'm black, whereas in here there are many people who look like me. So here is almost nice being *anonymous*' (I39:18); '[It is] a place that I feel I can be me, a hub where you can go and relax and let go' (I54:25).

The idea of the salon as an environment where participants felt they were 'not trying to fit in' (II2.17) was also attributed to the inclusivity and diversity of the space based on culture, gender, class, religion and other social signifiers. It is 'a space where all kinds of people meet because everyone wants to get their hair done and you can be a doctorate student or working on the tills at Tesco's; it's a great leveller' (I36:21).

5.14 *Cultural Currency*

Bryan Keith Alexandra says that he found in his study of African-American barbers that: 'Although the barbershop was the site for cutting hair, the act of cutting hair seemingly became secondary' (Alexandra, 2003, p.112). This was a similar experience for the participants in my research: 'I don't even use it as a hairdresser anymore; it's a space, if you walk past you're looking to see people you want to talk to' (I36:23); 'This hairdresser is a place of storytelling, of communities talking about sususususu gossip here, do you know what happen here and about auntie so and so ... you let go, you let go, you come out refreshed with a new hairdo and all the dramas

that happen' (I54:21). There was a strong connection that the participants made between the hairdressers and barbershops as being the 'natural' place to hold a creative writing workshop: 'I found it very good because it's the salon and the tradition that it brings' (I15:18); 'I've overheard conversations talking about writing, talking about storytelling' (I54:18); 'I loved it. The environment was very conducive'; 'Most people see that salons and hair to be activities of creativity...it is a place where it is just natural to think it is going to be held there. An environment already set up for us' (I15:22).

5.15 Continuing a Conversation

After being involved in the hair salon/barbershop community for more than eighteen months, as a client, volunteer and the developing and designing of my own research inquiry, I became aware that the exploration of personal memories and experiences was at the core of the clients' interest. I would therefore describe the timing and positioning of my research in the salon as entering a conversation that currently existed but exploring a new direction. Positive Hair Day (PHD), for example, was a community project located in the salon which helped clients explore their personal hair-stories as a focus for building greater understanding of black and mixed-heritage identity, culture and experience. My research followed, which ironically is a PhD project - the same acronym as Positive Hair Day - and in this light-hearted vein a connection was made. Many of the participants in the creative writing workshops had participated in, or were aware of, the PHD Hair project; therefore for them there was a continuum, not only in name but more importantly of their own personal interests. The idea of using fictional and poetic techniques offered a different approach to exploring personal memories and experiences. Recognising that my research inquiry

entered an existing conversation helped me to understand the thinking and emotional processes that many of the participants had brought into the workshop. Introducing the creative writing workshop as an academic project added another dimension to the dialogical space that already existed in the salon.

As the above has demonstrated, the salon served far more as a container for the participants than I had anticipated. Their relationship with the salon community provided a feeling of ‘safety’ and ‘belonging’. The majority of the participants in the group were clients of the salon for between 7 and 10 years. It was this longevity that offered ‘familiarity’, which they readily transferred to the workshop space.

5.2 The Creative Writing Workshop Space

Within the overarching container of the salon lay the contained space of the creative writing workshop. It was here that I wanted to explore the writers’ experience of fictionalising their memories. The notion behind the exploration of imaginative space(s) for my research is based on the understanding that memory is reconstructed and therefore memory is always using imagination. As Ulric Neisser points out: ‘The remarkable thing is not just that past events influence the present ...but that they are explicitly reconstructed by the person who experienced them’ (Neisser, 1994, p.1). Being the facilitator, my aim was to introduce fictional and poetic techniques that would enable people to use their imagination in different ways or at least be more active. This would require the participants to let go of their everyday sense of self and to open up to a larger sense of internal space which, as Lorde suggests, holds ‘unexamined emotion and feeling’ (Lorde, 1984, p.37). For Hunt and Sampson, letting go into the creative process requires us to:

...relinquish, if only temporarily, our reason and to tolerate a state that may seem like a kind of madness or a kind of dreaming whilst awake, with all the potential hazards that involves (Hunt & Sampson, 2006, p.69).

It was therefore imperative that I found ways for the imagination to be 'held'. How the participants *felt* in the workshop would help or hinder their personal explorations. As the facilitator of the creative writing workshop it was important that I created a space that allowed participants to transfer their feelings of safety and familiarity that they experienced in the salon into the workshop. It helped that I was a member of the salon community, as a client and also as a volunteer on other projects that had taken place there. It was, however, also important that I created a space that, whilst connected, was at the same time independent from the central space. The salon represents a public area that has its own prevailing narrative and may have assisted or restricted participants' own personal journey. There were a number of contributory factors which helped the creative writing workshop to gain an autonomous, safe and comfortable space within the salon.

5.21 Creating a Space for Change in a Basement

The workshop was held in the basement of the salon, away from the daily activities of business. Creating a space specifically for the workshop helped significantly to develop a group dynamic that was separate from the salon. The basement had purposely been painted white by the senior barber with pictures and texts of previous projects exhibited on the wall. This was to establish, as suggested by the salon steering committee, a designated space for creative activities. During the workshop

the participants sat around a table with snacks and refreshments: ‘Sitting around the table was intimate, got us sharing quickly’ (I1.11). For the writers the size of the space mattered and contributed significantly to making the workshops a conducive environment: ‘we were contained but big enough not to feel closed in, but contained enough to have unity in the group’ (C9.10); ‘it was not too big and not too small, it worked perfectly’ (I81.24).

5.22 Facilitation Essential for Holding the Space

Ford Smith’s facilitation of Sistren Theatre Collective drew my attention to group dynamics particularly because of the size of the groups I was working with: ‘in small groups individuals tend to play painful issues based on early childhood and to make the group their family’ (Ford-Smith, 1989, p.33). It soon became clear in my own creative writing groups in the salon that the writers had created an intimate bond with each other, the space and also with me as the facilitator. The role of facilitator was significant in creating a holding space for creativity to take place: ‘felt comfortable from the facilitator...I knew what was going to happen; I’m going to have a positive learning experience’ (I17.25); ‘the atmosphere within the group and the facilitation was so congenial I was able to have no fear in writing’ (I19.9); ‘it felt very much like that we were not being driven but we were being guided, so that felt very nice, so it wasn’t like you were going “Oh God I don’t know what I’m doing now”’ (I75.18); ‘One thing the facilitation being really good and I just think we laughed a lot, so the ego - that whole thing of people trying to impress - was just not there, we were just enjoying being together and being with each other’ (I75.23).

As the facilitator I wanted the writers to capture, as Winnicott says, the ‘precariousness of magic itself’, when the adult or child experiences letting go into the creative process, becomes ‘lost in play’. For Winnicott ‘it is a magic that arises in intimacy, in a relationship that is being found to be reliable’ (Winnicott, 1971, p.64). It was important for me as the facilitator that the writers had confidence and trusted my ability to *hold* the group as they chose the precarious and daring path of self-exploration: ‘It was the trust you had with the tutor; the way you [facilitator] were in the group, I felt I could write anything; you made it fun which really helped’ (I34.21). In Kate Thompson’s view none of the poetic or fictional exercises will work ‘without trust between the facilitator and the group’ (Thompson, 2006, p.141), and as Yalom points out in a therapeutic context, ‘the members relate to one another at first through their common relationship to you [facilitator]’ (Yalom, 1985, p.113). As the facilitator, my role was critical for setting the tone of the atmosphere in the workshop and creating a space where people felt safe-enough to explore and write about private and sensitive issues. One participant describes his experience of the workshop as: ‘a place that is like home, where you feel you are accepted and where you feel safe even if a conflict came up’ (I7.17).

5.23 Academic Research: Planting the Seeds of Renewal

The creative writing workshop as an academic research project created its own separate dimension to the salon, which began in the introductory meeting. In order to meet the ethical requirements of my research it was mandatory that I offered an introductory meeting to the clients who were interested in taking part. In the meeting I spoke about the nature of my project, expectations and requirements for participants

and researcher. The clients raised questions and shared their views and experiences of creative writing and other relevant topics.

The introductory meeting served as an opportunity for people to introduce themselves to the group beyond the 'client' identity. It was also important that I established my role as facilitator, which would differentiate from how some of the participants had previously known me as a customer in the salon. I began by sharing a little of my own life experiences and my interest in life stories, which brought me to this research project. As I introduced myself candidly through stories I was surprised at how at ease and comfortable I felt. The creative writing workshop was already taking shape as the clients reciprocated and began to introduce themselves through their own stories. Together we heard rites of passage with the fighting of crocodiles, growing up in care homes, the personal relevance of St Georges Day, and the significant, sad and surreal experiences of creative writing. The story-making process had begun and the foundations of the creative writing groups were laid as people shared, listened and respected each other.

Unexpectedly the mandatory requirements needed for an academic project turned out to be an asset. The introductory meeting offered structure, information and clarity to the clients. Together we spoke of group rules such as confidentiality and respect towards others, which reinforced a feeling of safety within the group. We spoke for three hours and during this time everyone was on board. But most importantly the introductory meeting created a space that was connected to the salon but at the same time separate. There was a new set of ground rules. One participant joked saying: 'what happens in the basement stays in the basement', and this reinforced the

importance of confidentiality and opened the possibility of transcending familiar narratives – a new holding space had begun to form.

5.24 *Starting Positions: The Group*

There is a kind of relaxedness and a safeness and a sort of bondedness that you feel, because it was much more of a rare event when you live in a community where you are often isolated as the only one (I2.6).

Locating my research in a group of British writers with one or both parents from the African or Asian diaspora offered an insightful element particularly for a research inquiry based around story, self and identity. The culturally diverse and inclusive space served as a holding space for the participants and researcher/facilitator. The writers spoke of the group space as achieving an ‘unspoken understanding because it feels quite rare...we are always in a minority in our current environment because of not being white’ (I27.4); ‘when you feel that there is a space created for people like you, you feel more of who you are’ (I38.24); ‘I just belong by the mere fact of my ethnicity’ (I39.3); ‘You are going to be understood, you can be free in what you can say, you can say all of your experiences’ (I50.12).

It was mainly at the beginning of the workshop that the writers spoke and wrote of their life experience of being ‘marginalised’ or ‘invisible’, having a sense of ‘otherness’ or ‘displacement’:

One day a white girl came

Guess what,
 Her name is [writer's name]
 Oh but that's a darky's name!
 Came the horror stricken cry.
 Not fit for you, oh my oh my! (C.6.5)

As I have said, my research interest lies in the possibility of offering a creative writing workshop where people could let go of dominant self-narratives which may be experienced as omniscient and unchanging, and to explore dimensions of themselves and their lives that have been ignored or silenced. In the course of the research people had to locate themselves in the workshop before they could begin to open themselves up to change.

5.25 Feelings of Exclusion and Otherness

Before I enter that space [a university creative writing class], metaphorically, here's my blackness, I put it in there [the participant mimes putting something in the bag]. I have a bad hair day, I put that in the suitcase; I feel depressed, I put that in the suitcase and I lock it tight and I leave it outside, and then I go into that space supposedly to be creative and I have to write my poetry... I am the only black person in the group. I feel they could not cope with it, could not understand and that is why I leave a part of myself outside (I55.12).

The above comment relates to a writer's experience of attending creative writing courses where she is the 'only black person in the group'. When she spoke about

leaving a part of herself in a suitcase outside the class, the powerful metaphor broke through any veils of politeness, constraint or awkwardness in the research workshop, allowing for a burst of emotions and experiences to come forth from the other participants: ‘You’re never quite comfortable, always trying to fit in’ (C2.13); ‘always on the edge and slightly marginalised’ (C2.21); ‘I was asked to write about things that I didn’t have a deep connection to and I would think how can I trust what I say with you because you probably won’t even see it’ (C74.7). The participants spoke of a reality that extended beyond the boundaries of creative writing groups: ‘I don’t think you ever get used to never being in the majority or never been seen on a daily basis, not noticeable’ (I39.7). However, one of the participants spoke of always enjoying working in groups and, although this was her first creative writing workshop, the feeling of ‘not fitting in’ was not a factor because she was used to it: ‘It’s the way things are’ (I34.23).

5.26 *Writing Black*

The experience of ‘otherness’ often restricted and prevented the ability and willingness to write; rather than letting go into the imaginative process the participants resorted to familiar narratives that offered only shallow representations of themselves. One participant spoke of being ‘tired and frustrated’ of having to ‘over-explain’ with what she was trying to say. Another writer sympathised and said that she may have walked in as a writer but when she sat down in the class she became a ‘black writer’. She said for her the ‘space dictates’ her writing process. I asked her to expand on what she meant: ‘I couldn’t put my finger on it until I came here’ (I34.19). The writer refers to a prose piece she wrote in the workshop: ‘Uncle Ben’s car smells

like him' as 'reassuring' (C32.24). It was only when she was re-reading her writing to the group that she noticed:

I was thinking about my uncles but there was no mention of them being black and I did not want to describe them as black ... It wasn't an issue and it is a given, your life is not just a response to slavery and racism, your life is as a human being on earth (I41.25).

The *space* dictated the participants' experience of their writing practice and the stories they chose to write. The feeling of normalcy allowed them to feel centred and not in the margins of their experience: 'feeling as an insider is critical for me especially when I want to express or explore things I've not done before' (I60.32). The workshop environment provided a unique experience for the participants, allowing them to seek and scrutinize the complexities of their memories and experiences, not from the margins where 'you often have to hold yourself [back]' (I40.13) but from the standpoint 'where you can say all of your experiences' (I50.12).

5.27 Challenges: Bob is not for everyone

Creating an environment that felt inclusive and comfortable could not be based on a single collective narrative; doing this would be replacing one authoritative discourse for another. It was essential that the workshop discourse represented the multiple identities that occupied the space. Enabling this to happen was not as easy as I thought and my own tacit assumptions were challenged.

During the introductory meeting the prospective participants spoke of the work of artists they liked. One person referred to Bob Marley's Redemption Song, which was greeted with an enthusiastic approval from other people. I had referred to the song in my research proposal which I shared with the group. At the end of the meeting one of the clients pulled me aside and spoke of a specific moment when she felt estranged from the group. It was the discussion of Bob Marley; she did not like his music and therefore felt at odds when the rest of the group, including me the facilitator/researcher were all praising him. She felt marginalised.

The participants spoke of their challenge of being the 'only black' person in a writers' group but locating a creative writing workshop in a space where 'black people' feel the majority presents itself with its own challenges. I thought of Zadie Smith when she wrote about the concept of 'blackness' being 'too narrow... It made the blackness a quality each individual black person was constantly in danger of losing. And almost anything could trigger the loss of blackness: attending certain universities, an impressive variety of jobs and a fondness of opera' (Smith, 2009, p143) or, in the case of the workshop, the participant not liking Bob Marley. When the client raised the issues of 'Bob' with me, it was a reminder of the tenuousness of our identity, particularly where the issue of identity is heavily woven into a collective narrative which offers a sense of belonging to a group. It also reminded me of my role as a facilitator and to be cautious of revealing my own preferences and choices which may inhibit or distance participants' involvement in the group.

Being approached by the participant reminded me of my role as a facilitator to create an inclusive space and challenged my own implicit view, which was an invaluable lesson for the forthcoming workshops.

5.3 Poetic and Fictional Techniques as Containers

Poetic and fictional techniques offered a literary framework that served for the writers as a *holding space* for the imagination. Carol Satyamurti refers to poetry as ‘the experience of containment’ (Satyamurti, 2003, p.35). For Satyamurti, poems can be containers ‘where chaotic and disturbing experiences can be held and given some kind of shape’ (ibid, p.36). It is in the ‘shaping’, the forming of a poem or prose that the participants began to see their memories in a new way.

One of the participants speaks of poetry writing as ‘uncovering things’ she hadn’t been able to face, such as her fears of her mother aging, the feeling of loss of not becoming a mother and the apprehension of losing the continuity of her family:

I am pained by their aging deformity

She has now shrunken has grown me tall...

Will I be her continuity?

Who will I take inside my circularity?

It takes so much to grow myself

Have I lost our continuity? (C30.6; 14)

The above poem is a great example of how the writer's poem offered a contained space for her to explore feelings that she had kept hidden. In this way the poetic techniques offered containers for the imagination and allowed the writers to explore the incongruities between their inner and outer realities.

5.31 .The Metaphor as a Container

One of the striking aspects of the participants' writing was how many of their stories were located in a contained space, for example a racing car, Nan's bedroom, Uncle Ben's car, a pair of boots and a sailing boat. For most of the writers the enclosed environments they chose in which to explore their stories were on the periphery of their immediate familial space, creating a distance for exploration but still on familiar and safe-enough ground. Most of their stories came from early childhood memories, for example:

I'm 5 years old sitting in my Nan's bedroom in front of a mirror with a towel on my head. Swishing it side to side and back and forth until my heart's content ... how I wanted more than anything else to have long straight hair (C20.1).

It is here in this contained imagined space that the writers explore their *felt* experience of their memories. Early memories are more likely to be based on the feelings and the emotions of the experience, perhaps because 'a child experiences the world before it has the capacity to reason' (Hunt, 1998, p.24). The fact that she writes in present tense

(as a child) is very significant in terms of fictionalizing memory; it has the capacity to immerse the writer into the feeling of the memory.

The extract above is part of a story of the writer exploring her personal journey of identity and acceptance which continues:

Forty-Five years later, I am sitting in front of another mirror admiring my honest to goodness own locks. This is my story of nappy haired me growing into my luscious locks and obviously all the bits in the middle (C20.7).

The literary container of ‘nan’s bedroom’ allowed the writer to acknowledge her personal journey of being able to accept and admire herself.

The car was also a popular container for the participants. I have chosen two stories to have a closer look at the impact of the creative process for the writers.

(a) *Twenty Three Minutes*

This story is based in the seventies in Germany; 17 year old Georgia (pseudonym), who is ‘Afro-German’ and is driving in a car with three African-American GI’s, on the way to a party. The car runs out of petrol and the men in the car wave down another car of an elderly German man who is willing to give them petrol in exchange for sexual favours from Georgia. The story ends with Georgia aiming the gun at the man.

The writer refers to the car in her story as a place she chose to revisit and renew a painful experience: ‘I wanted to explore fiction and that freedom, if the girl has that

freedom to go all the way...what would she do?' (I60.2). The car at the beginning is not portrayed as a safe place: 'You could say that she is naive to be sitting in this car, with her 15 year self, apparently oblivious to what she exposes herself to' (C34.20), but as the journey proceeds the writer makes it clear that the element of danger lies outside the car: 'She rooted herself into her seat; wanted to stay in the car' (C35.39). During the journey Georgia, 'in a drifted state', begins to reflect on her life by pulling together the different strands of her African-European identity which have felt disconnected before: 'She is a sister black and beautiful' (C34.4) and she is reminded of her Germanness when asked if she speaks German, 'Spreken Zi Deutsch?' When she spoke German it connected her to a self that she had denied and kept hidden: 'it came as a shock to feel it so deeply' (C35.31). She realized at this point the importance of accepting the complexity of her identity and history: 'she almost eradicated her German accent, almost fooled her to be what she wasn't' (C35.50). The journey in the car is a metaphor for the girl's personal journey of moving from powerlessness to empowerment, which allows the girl to become an agent of change of her circumstances: 'You could say in this split second Georgia never felt more powerful' (C36.83).

In the container of the car the writer explores themes of isolation, power, disconnection, sexual, racial and gender politics. She speaks of the importance of writing about them: 'It allowed me to make sense of so many things. There is something about getting all that stuff that drives you crazy in your head on paper' (I60.33). The opportunity to write a story about it using the metaphorical journey of the car represents Georgia's own personal shift as she connects to other complex dimensions of her identity.

(b) *The Racing Car*

For one writer driving a racing car became a catalyst in his writing practice and personal growth. In the workshop and in the interview the participant said that when he began the workshop creative writing was ‘a new thing for me’ (I18.26). For this writer the exercise to introduce oneself through an item of clothes was an important starting point, as he recognized the importance of his identity rooted in his heritage:

Agaba is a predominantly West African type clothing, which is formal wear ...
It is traditional in looks, outlook and culture. It is truly innovative creation
which holds stead in many traditions (C12.1;10).

David Rogers says that to begin to recognize the multiple nature of our identities we have to ‘really understand the complex attachments to culture and tradition’ (Rogers, 2004, p.26). This writer approached his writing in a manner of stateliness and control, which is seen with his alpha poem:

Alternative methods
Brilliance at its best
Creativity in ingenuity
Dominative ambition (C12.20)

The control remained until he drove his ‘racing car’.

As I watch him approach his racing car I could see the beam, the happiness in

his flow, the eagerness in his stride, the command in his movement...it struck me. This man loves to be free to flow without boundaries....to achieve without attainment (C13.1).

In the interview he said that the fictional exercises were ‘a new learning process’ for him and as the workshop progressed he felt that he was ‘increasingly writing outside my comfort zone’ (I20:26). When he first began to write in the group he said: ‘I couldn’t think of anything private because my mindset has always been on a professional side of thinking’. As he increasingly engaged with the creative process he says: ‘mostly everything seemed to have flown with me and as it flowed out I didn’t have any inclination to inhibit or stop it’ (I23.5). Beforehand the writer had written mainly in an impersonal first person, but this time he shifted to an observational first person in which he was both the narrator and a third person character. This helped him to create a distance from familiar and authoritative narratives that shaped how he saw himself. The story brought attention to the protagonist’s feelings and the joy and freedom he felt when experiencing them:

To call this a hobby will be a lie. This was the soul of his occasion, the activity of his love, the heaven of his peace. This is the platform where he comes into his own without hesitation or hindrance, the moment of his dreams, the pleasure of his creativity (C20.6).

This was the test of speed, wideness without limitation (C13.6).

The story offers a new awareness, from the point a view of the narrator, of another

side of himself that has emerged in the objectified self-character: 'it struck me. This man loves to be free to flow without boundaries'. After he wrote 'The Racing Car' his writing noticeably began to change; he returned to writing about himself directly in the first person, as if sitting in a new skin, and his writing seemed far more embodied: 'Questions filled my heart once again. My chest beating a racing zest'; 'Touching upon my world; Groping in the dark in a world that I see as senseless and irrational' (C15.7). Being able to objectify himself into the container of the racing car enabled the writer to explore and release feelings and emotions that lay in the margins of his awareness. The group space reinforced this by providing a safe space for such explorations: 'I felt very comfortable that even if I produce a bad set of writing that the group would not embarrass me' (I19.6). This writer began with formal style of writing and progressed to a more personal and intimate style. This was particularly relevant for a writer who oscillated between life narratives rooted in tradition and culture and his own individual aspirations: 'I had been living a lie. Not because of myself but those who were in charge of my upbringing; an attempt to protect me from the truth gone wrong' (C15.11).

The poetic and fictional techniques enabled the participants to capture memories and experiences in order to explore and experiment. They provided containers for the imagination that allowed the writers to transcend familiar grounding and venture into more unknown terrain, as subtle personal material came to the forefront of their consciousness. The 'cars' provided literary holding spaces which allowed the writers to become 'lost in play' or, as Lakoff and Johnson refer to it, to inhabit a metaphorical space in which to '*let yourself go, to lose yourself*' (authors' italics, Lakoff and Johnson, 1999, p.273). For Lakoff and Johnson metaphors can capture 'a positive

experience, especially when losing oneself entails a freedom from the pressures of everyday concerns', which is reflected in 'The Racing Car'. They also refer to the complexity of metaphors, as they may also be the containers of 'negative emotions' such as when 'you are seized *by anxiety* or *in the grip of fear* (ibid; authors' italics). The 'metaphor is thus a way of conceptualizing a wide range of very real experiences, both positive and negative' (ibid). As we have seen, my first example, 'Twenty Three-Minutes', captures both the positive and negative emotions of the participant's objectified self-character.

5.4 The Body as a Container

As we become more in touch with our own ancient, non-european consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes' (Lorde, 1984, p.37).

The experience of the body as a container is about learning to trust or as Lorde says 'respect' one's feelings and emotions, and one cannot do that if there are difficult feelings that are hidden and have to be kept at bay. This is why it is so important that the learning environment is containing in the first instance, both in terms of facilitation and the relationship with the group. As people begin to express difficult feelings and find that they are accepted in, and supported by, the group, they can begin to trust a creative process that reveals deeper feelings and emotions to them. This is a very important part of the process of opening up – it is about becoming one's

own container – learning to be in the process.

I began to understand the containers in which participants located their stories, which allowed them to focus their attention on the felt experience of their memories; as they spoke about what it felt like, for example, to be in Uncle Ben's car: 'the delicious lurching of my stomach' (C33.10). These containers in a way were also embodied because they were about what it felt like to be in the uncle's car. The body is a critical holding space for the imagination because, by the writers engaging with their feelings, they are redirecting their attention to what it *feels* like to be themselves.

There were certain reoccurring themes that appeared during the participants' writing, including the related themes of *silence and sounds*, which are very much about the body's perception. One writer explored his notion of belonging, attempting to understand the difference between how he felt in the place where he was born and the place he now calls *home*:

In the place where I lived there was never a silence or stillness.....

Today in my own town there was utter stillness...It was then that I realized that I was completely alone (C1;1;15).

Silence for this writer represents an estrangement from a place he considers home. He continues this idea in another piece of writing 'Clap Clap Clap'. He wrote this in response to an exercise that required the participants to introduce themselves through an item of clothes. Again he explores the notion of *home* and self-identity as he writes from the perspective of the flip-flops he wore in his country of birth:

Clap clap clap that was the first sound I heard, like the rhythm of my heartbeat....

Claaap Claaap Claaap. Eventually me and my sound became dreary and tired. I was starting to make a noise that wasn't my music

Clap, Clap, Clap. There were brief moments when it was but only for a short period. Eventually it stopped all together. (C3.1;9;11).

These few extracts from a longer piece reveal a discontinuity between home and a sense of self which he expresses through the ideas of sound and silence. The sound of the flip-flops represents the writer's embodied experience of himself. He said that he had chosen this item of clothes because it was something that he wore all the time 'over there but not over here' (C25.20). The sound of the clap clap clap represented an aspect of himself that he felt no longer existed living here in Britain, as if it was a part of him that he left behind; the sound of the flip flops 'eventually [] stopped all together'.

It is in this writing that the participant is exploring the difference in his felt experience between two different places of home.

He said of his experience of introducing himself through an item of clothes: 'I was surprised by it... If you had asked me to just introduce myself I wouldn't have said any of that' (C20.30). The flip flops represents an aspect of himself that he feels he

left behind. This is a good example of the conscious use of the imagination allowing the writer to get in touch with feelings and emotions that lay in the shadows of the dominant or more conscious narrative. This creative process allowed the writer to be surprised by the recalling of a memory, which indicates the spontaneity of the process. The writer connected to an embodied memory, a past experience that remained as a bodily memory. Writing from a different point of view allowed him to explore outside familiar parameters and connect to a more complex dimension of himself:

I was actually eager to write without thinking twice about embarrassing myself and when I wrote I marveled about what I wrote and each step I had to pinch myself to say my God where did that come from (I19.16).

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the various holding spaces participants need in order to feel safe-enough for creativity to take place: (1) *the hair salon/barbershop*; (2) *the creative life writing workshop*; (3) *fictional and poetic techniques*, and (4) *embodiment*. The spaces were not experienced as autonomous but interconnected and sustaining for each other. The workshop space imbued the safety and familiarity of the salon which was a critical factor in enabling the participants to *let go* into the creative writing process. The various collaborative stages of the development and delivery of the project between the facilitator and researcher established a relationship based on ‘trust and reliability’ (Winnicott, 1971, p.148), which enabled the writers to explore personal memories and experiences beyond familiar life-held narratives. Locating the workshop in a salon where we all felt a sense of belonging allowed for an ease and willingness to engage in the project, although it was the facilitation and

group work which created a distinct holding environment for the participants to feel safe enough to take risks with their writing. As one participant claimed, the workshop was ‘the least inhibiting kind of environment’ in which to explore (I40.1). The poetic and fictional techniques offered holding frameworks for the imagination, allowing the writers to engage with their body, thus becoming more attentive to what it feels like to be themselves and to begin to trust those feelings. All these different elements contributed to opening a dialogical space between the inner and outer realities of the participants; allowing them to experience and articulate a complex and multifaceted self. The research reveals a group of writers who were ready to enter imaginative space(s) for change; reconstruct their own story, identity and self in their own terms by paying attention not just to text but also to the body.

Chapter 6

Data Analysis 3:

Many Voices of the Self: It Takes Many Notes to Make a Symphony

I should have kept both voices alive in my mouth

(Smith, Z, 2009, p.134).

This chapter is about how the fictionalising of memory enabled the participants to engage with multiple dimensions of themselves and in the process of doing so to deconstruct, diminish and at times dismiss life-held narratives that had impacted significantly on their identity and sense of self. For one writer her stories: ‘helped me to connect to all sides of me, my Indian, African, Scottish and Brazilian heritage. I embraced a fuller more complex [names herself]’ (I8.24). Creative life writing enabled this writer to connect to different dimensions of her personality and create a more fluid relationship with her life-held narratives: ‘for me it was very helpful to look at something from a completely different perspective, to talk from another voice’ (I6.6). Similar to this writer, other participants spoke of connecting to ‘other voices’, ‘different voices’, ‘an unfamiliar voice’, as they expressed the way their writing process helped them to connect to multiple aspects of themselves.

6.1 Finding a Voice

The notion of *voice* or more specifically *finding a voice* in the creative writing process became a key theme in the participants’ experience of the workshop. The semi-

structured interviews revealed two particular areas relating to the notion of voice: (1) having the right to speak and to be heard; and (2) voice as a bodily felt sense of self.

6.11 Having the Right to Speak and to Be Heard

The writers' spoke of their experience of the creative writing group as: 'being able to tell your story'; 'to share it with other people and to be heard'; to me there is something very powerful to be able to express oneself' (I2.9), and 'I think reading it out is another quality entirely' (I3.20). For a group of writers that have described their experience of being in mainstream society as 'not being noticeable' (I39.10), the notion of finding their voice, having the right to be heard was deeply connected with having the right to be seen: 'You have some mutual seeing of each other, and because with each other in our group I felt that they could see me and I could see them' (I74.1).

Natalie Goldberg says that finding one's writing voice is 'ninety percent listening' (Goldberg, 1986, p.52). For most of the participants listening to others was as important as being heard: 'you learnt from other people in the group. It's like listening to everybody else's story, you listen to the depth that people might reveal and how they write and it is quite insightful to you' (I30.16); 'to me what I wrote was not as important as the process of sharing it and listening' (I81.8); 'there is a power in the word in what people are saying, and then to understand that, to relate it to your own experience; to hear things spoken out loud has a kind of naming' (I76.8). It was as if the writers, by hearing someone else's story, offered another perspective or further insight to their own. The writers learnt and drew courage from each other; as one ventured outside their comfort zone it enabled others to do the same: 'you go outside

of your comfort zone, in terms of saying things that perhaps you don't actually normally share or unlock yourself in some way, so that really just affected my writing' (I72.7).

Some of the participants described the exchange of listening and being heard as a 'fellowship': 'I loved the sharing, I loved the insights, I loved the fellowship... just listening, encouraging' (I2.26); 'expressing oneself in the moment and it was just received very well, you know, and that was the fellowship, we could all support and nourish and give insights, it was great' (II6.24); 'there is already a fundamental basis of acceptance of caring and valuing, and yes and love, fellowship' (I7.18). The use of the word fellowship is significant because by the writers' own admission it is a word that they have not used and experienced in other learning spaces. The writers felt 'safe', 'supported' and 'nourished' in the group, and there was a sharing of common interests and experiences. There was a correlation between the writers' experience of *being heard*, telling their stories in the workshop and the idea of *fellowship*. It was as if for some of the participants the fictionalised stories were told and heard as testimonies: private memories and experiences made public. For bell hooks the telling of these hidden stories is 'the beginning stage in a process of self-transformation'; she also says of her testimonial writing that it 'enabled me to find a voice' (hooks, 1999, p.6). The idea of fellowship reflects the mutual exchange that existed in the group, which contributed significantly to the writers finding or developing their voice(s).

6.2 Voice as a bodily felt sense of self.

The creative life writing redirected participants' attention away from factual details towards the feelings and emotions that were attached to their memories. They began

to pay attention to their bodies and ‘listening’ to how they were feeling. For one participant her writing practice was about: ‘playing with words until it fits right, until it describes feelings or what I am trying to convey’ (I61.7); ‘all these things inside of you and you are looking to find the words for them’ (I5.20). This whole idea of ‘fit’ supports Lorde’s belief in acquiring ‘disciplined attention to the true meaning of “it feels right to me”’ (Lorde, 1984, p.37). The creative process for the writers was trying to find a language that could articulate their feelings and emotions. For Seamus Heaney the craft of poetry writing is to ‘get your own feelings into your own words and that your words have the feel of you about them’ (Heaney, 1980, p.43), which was an experience shared by most of the writers in the workshops, whether they were writing poetry or prose fiction.

The focus was not so much on the portrayal of factual details of past experiences but more about capturing and conveying stories that felt authentic, *real* to them. Peter Elbow refers to the *resonant voice*, a relationship between discourse and the unconscious. For Elbow a person is ‘usually too complex’ to rely on narratives that engage solely with conscious material. The writing process allows the individual ‘to find words which seem to capture the rich complexity of the unconscious’. Elbow suggests that the voice that *resonates* is the voice that is closest to a ‘whole person’ (Elbow, 2000, p.206), because it connects to the unconscious. As a participant said: ‘underneath there is something very raw and very radical that you can imagine that exterior just only hides’ (I61.7). The participants found that by speaking with a voice or voices which resonated, ‘felt right’, they uncovered material which had not been available before.

One participant decided to write something that would be funny and quirky about a memory of ‘putting a bra over my vest’, but as she proceeded in her writing she noticed she felt ‘upset ... there’s something bigger behind this’ (I63.20). This seemingly innocent story unveiled memories that were ‘very, very hidden’ (I64.25). She was surprised at the complexity and ‘sadness’ that surfaced because it was not the story she set out to write. This writer continued to follow her feelings and emotions, as she realised it led her to stories that she had not planned to write. She says of her experience of writing the story: ‘I had to cry just before I could put it on a page’ (I61.15). This experience of her writing process suggests that emotion preceded the act of writing, as if the telling of the story began with an absence of words; it was rooted in a felt sense. Other writers spoke of their *felt* experience as stories ‘bubbling away down inside of me’ (I12.3); ‘buried’, ‘hidden’, and ‘it starts to come up and something begins to flow’ (I4.23).

These metaphors gave the participants a language for making sense of their experience. The significance of the metaphors here relate to something authentic that needs to come out – something raw, ‘bubbling’ and ‘flowing’. The writers spoke of the stories as if they were embodied: ‘stories from deep within’ and the necessity to ‘get it out there. It’s on the page’:

It’s out of you, now, it’s almost like vomited out, you know, it’s out of you so I think it’s healing, it’s liberating, it’s more than just writing; there’s a big thing going on, really that’s what I feel. Yeah it’s huge (I61.23).

Chandler's idea that 'narration is a way of purging guilt and pain, recentring the self, and reconnecting the self' (Chandler, 1990, p.ix) is one way of looking at this intense and forceful image. Psychotherapist Eugene Gendlin refers to the importance for people to connect to the fullness of who they are and their experiences by focusing on 'inward bodily attention' (Gendlin, 1996, p.1). The writers spoke of their experience of 'voicing' their felt experience in the creative writing process: 'expressing something in me that I have not touched before' (I5.3); 'I was trying find that ultimate expression and somehow having that opportunity to get from a deep, deep place' (I5.8). The writers began to pay attention to the felt experience of their memories and by doing so they searched for words that could articulate their feelings and emotions. In the process they began to find their voice or, more accurately, multiple voices that reflected a broader understanding of themselves and the world.

Huffing and puffing I dropped to the floor
 There in a heap my quest there ended
 And faith in myself restored and mended
 Pulse rate racing, my heart gave a tug
 In front of my eyes were my faithful Uggs
 Just like me they are brown and scruffy
 After a night on the town were a bit scruffy
 Warm and cool in equal measure
 Treat us right we're a national treasure (C22.9).

The poem above was written from an exercise requiring the writers to introduce themselves from the point of view of an item of clothing they wore. The writer of the

above poem said that she struggled to find an item; it was only when she ‘surrendered’ to her feelings and wrote about her ‘much loved Uggs’ [boots] that words began to follow ‘quite easily’. She said she would not have described herself as ‘brown and scruffy’ and ‘certainly not as a national treasure’ but when she read it back she ‘loved it’ as the poem resonated with her; it brought out a ‘playful’ voice that she is not always known for (I25.18).

6.21 Voicing the Holistic Self

Most professors were often deeply antagonistic toward, even scornful of, any approach to learning emerging from a philosophical stand point emphasizing the union of mind, body and spirit, rather than the separation of these elements (hooks, 1994, p18).

bell hooks says that an individual has ‘psychological, emotional, spiritual, and cultural dimensions, which is rarely taken into account in traditional learning environments’ (ibid, p.124). Locating the creative writing workshops in a hair salon/barbershop in a non-traditional learning space allowed for a more collaborative design and development of the research inquiry with the salon community. As I said above, one of the writers spoke of her experience of other creative writing workshops as leaving ‘a part of myself outside’ (I55.21), and therefore she was unable to bring her ‘holistic self’ (I55.21) into the learning space. The idea of wholeness for her, and other writers in the group suggested the unification of mind, body and spirit. A key aspect of the methodology of CWPD is to explore a more spontaneous and bodily-felt approach to writing, for many of the writers this was intrinsic to the engagement of the holistic

self. One writer says her creative process allowed for ‘all your experiences, your feelings, your spirituality, the things you “repress”’ (I50.22) to come together; and another participant says that for her creative process the ‘spiritual space is a part of it’ (I5.9), ‘it’s as important to me to use all the means of my senses ... to be able to communicate how I perceive the world, *all* aspects of it’ (I27.19).

It was therefore critical that the participants were able to bring their own conceptualisations, language and voice(s) into the workshops, as this allowed them to engage and express themselves in a way that *felt right* to them. They brought into the group their own experiences and ideas which were already questioning dominant narratives that were not congruent with how they felt about themselves. In other words they were already challenging dominant narratives of self and identity. The group work and environment enabled participants to express themselves more readily in a way that felt right.

Writers such as Alice Walker, Honor Ford Smith and Audre Lorde share many of the ideas that underlie creative writing and personal development (CWPD), particularly in focusing attention on embodiment and creating space for the imagination. These writers, however, add another dimension to the discussion of embodiment and a felt sense of self, as they locate their ideas in ancestral memory, spirituality and nature. Alice Walker dedicates one of her books ‘To the Spirits/ Without whose assistance/ Neither this book/Nor I/ Would have been/Written’ (Walker, A, 1983), and Audre Lorde says: ‘My body [is] a living representation of other life older longer wiser. The mountains and valleys trees and rocks’ (Lorde, 1982, p.xvi).

I had included extracts from such writers in the workshop, but I had not anticipated how important they were for the participants: ‘What I found really inspiring was the way you were able to bring in black narratives into the conversation’ (I43.7). The narratives resonated in such a way for the participants; it was as if permission was given that they could bring all of themselves into the group and not only be heard but understood: ‘something about being able to express one’s voice and the feeling and the atmosphere that you are in...I don’t know, there is something magical’ (I3.20). The ‘spirit’, spirituality or belief systems were not defined in the workshop although there seemed to be a shared understanding that it represented a connection outside of discourse: ‘Mother Nature is my originator and my being’ (I19) and another writer wrote:

I am in the arms of a mother tree

I am being held in its circularity

I am being grown

I am its continuity (C29.1)

6.22 *Taking Risks: Making the Private Public*

By engaging with the body and ‘listening’ to emotions and feelings the participants began to gain an understanding of what it felt like to be themselves. To engage in this process the writers at times took great risks with their writing, as they exposed different characteristics and personalities that may be perceived as going against convention, cultural norms, family customs or self-conceptions.

I think the reason that I am so blocked with my writing so much of the time [is] because I'm quite a private person, ... so I really appreciated the fictionalising, using fiction to turn autobiographical writing into something that's different again (I42.20).

This participant began to find a freedom in fictionalising her memories of 'Uncle Rufus of the cruel eyes and Chinese burns' (C33.3). Other participants also spoke of 'loyalty', 'responsibility and 'accountability' to family and community, and they too began to find a 'freedom' to explore and express personal experiences within a fictional and poetic framework. bell hooks tells of her own challenges to tell her story: 'what went on in the domestic household was a bond between us – was a part of what made us family. There was a dread one felt about breaking that bond' (hooks, 1999, p.81). The participants through their creative writing explored their familial relationships, focusing on continuity and interconnectedness, and deriving in the process a way of understanding the relationship between their individual and collective selves. The writer of the poem below was struck by the 'honesty' that came through her writing. Giving herself permission to fictionalize her memories released her from an unspoken contractual agreement between family members and herself not to speak publically about 'private family matters':

A salty clear line traces
my upward surge
follows falls feels
grandma's final anger
mother's halt to release

A heated room of unknowns
 hoping to hasten unpaining
 Cords of connection
 Hopeful dislike
 Simmering outrage
 Define the edifice
 The net the push and the pull
 Of I inside we (C28.30).

The writer of the extract above expresses the complexity and tensions between herself and her family. The idea of continuity ‘cords of connection’ is a theme she explores in other poems but here she is specifically exploring aspects which are unspoken in her family – the ‘simmering rage’ of her grandma, mother and herself. The fictionalising of memory allowed the participants to find their voice(s) and tell of experiences that otherwise would have not been told:

6.3 Dismantling Distinctions

Zadie Smith in her essay *Speaking Tongues* speaks of the pressure from society that ‘Voices are meant to be unchanging and singular’ (Smith, 2009, p.134). Smith is referring to how she felt pressured to choose between her working class Willesden voice that she grew up with and a middle class Cambridge voice that she acquired at university. Initially she would oscillate between them but as time progressed her double voice had deserted her for a single one:

We feel that our voices are who we are, and that to have more than one, or to use different versions of our voice for different occasions, represents at best, a Janus-faced duplicity and at worst the loss of our very souls (ibid).

Smith's experience of the singular voice or choosing different ones for different occasions reminds me of the remark one of the participant's made about how the 'space dictates' how she feels and presents herself in a particular environment: 'we all have our masks, our façade we put on to go out in the world' (C39.1).

As discussed above, for one participant the risk he observed in his writing began when he wrote 'The Racing Car', a narrative that expressed a desire that was discouraged and dismissed by his family: 'As I watch him approach the racing car...this is a platform where he comes into his own without hesitation or hindrance, the moment of his dreams, the pleasure of his creativity' (C13.1). After this narrative he wrote a reflective prose entitled 'Story', which demonstrates an opening of his personal dialogical space:

What exactly was I born for?

Oh questions, questions and more questions. Oh father. Oh mother. All I know is my transit started with you. Yet my answers do not rest in you and my end does not have your involvement. ..

The rest I am not meant to know or understand or control. I am (C19.2; 19).

The writer read 'Story' in the workshop and received an emotional response from the other group members, as some were also grappling with their own tensions between

their private and public voices. The writer said that he ended with 'I am' because he grew up with a concept of a collective self rather than an individual self. His writing was helping him to recognise and move between these two concepts. By fictionalising his memories the participant was able to explore outside his comfort zone, entering unknown terrain: 'it allowed me to sharpen one side of me, that side that was becoming dormant' (C23.22). By doing this he began to recognise the different dimensions of himself that he embodied; there was one side of him that was 'part of a whole and was never an entity of my own', and there was also a side that he saw in his creative writing: 'when I was flowing I didn't think it was going to be like this and when it comes out onto the paper, I think, Oh Gosh, is that me' (19.19). In his creative writing this participant was able to bring together two worlds of himself that he didn't think could co-exist. He recognised his complex attachments to his traditions and culture and also his personal pursuit of his dreams and desires:

Steeped in traditions which were embedded and emerging. Busting out in bunches like flowers. Heaving like bees of the honey comb. I suddenly became confident. Full of strength. Full of knowledge. Full of joy (C15.17).

The first sentence captures very well the idea of implicit life narratives (steeped in; embedded) and how he is becoming more aware of them. And then (presumably) his own authentic feelings 'bursting out, heaving' and how this brings confidence, self-knowledge and joy.

6.4 Permission to be Multifaceted

All your elements, all your experiences, your feelings, your spirituality, the things you repress, the things that you locked up in a cupboard....there was a kind of permission of exploring those parts (I50.22)

The participants would often use the word ‘permission’ when describing their experience in the group and creative writing workshop: ‘you have given a kind of state of permission to say things which we wouldn’t otherwise’ (I50.16). This idea speaks directly to the underlying principle of creative life writing – the ‘phantasmatic pact’ (Lejeune, 1989, p.27): that the writer has given herself *permission* to fictionalise her memories and by doing so opens up a dialogical space between herself and the page allowing engagement for many different voices of the self, a process which Bakhtin refers to as ‘heteroglossia’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p.263). The participants talked about this: ‘I thought it was exciting the way we had so many different exercises that brought out so many different aspects of our characters’ (I10.13); ‘I’m beginning to explore my weirdness, my oddness...there’s value because there is a story’ (I51: 25); ‘Gives you a different way to read things, a multi-layered way’ (I48.15).

During the interview one participant spoke at length about the fictionalising of memory and its impact on her own identity: ‘I feel that writing fiction and poetry, particularly using poetry ... was very helpful to look at something from a completely different perspective, to talk from another voice’ (I6.5). She said that it spoke to her personal interest of exploring her own life story: ‘I probably have a particular vision how I see myself, which might be true, might not be true’ (I57.20). This writer gave

herself *permission* to look at herself from many different perspectives through the eyes of her characters and by doing so she said: ‘it opened up this whole wide world’ (C58.1). She saw herself: ‘as a mixed-raced girl who grew up clueless about her identity... afro glittering like a globe in the night sky’ (C34.3). Other participants experienced similar shifts from singular identities to a more diverse framework, allowing for a complex and plural self. The heritage of the nine participants was culturally diverse, which challenged not only the hegemonic notion of Britishness but their own understanding of themselves. As the writers wrote from different voices in their stories and poems, they began to recognise the multiple spaces that they occupy and oscillate between; the inherent fluidity of their lives:

I knew not, till 1988
 The colour of my palette
 That I’m African
 Grown up in Scotland (C6.11).

The writers were keen to explore a broader narrative that shaped their lives, as reflected in one of the list poems:

I wish I could tell people what I really think
 I wish I could live in a white skin for a day
 I wish I could live as a man for a day...
 I wish I could not be so fearful at times (21.7).

The above poem served as a catalyst for other writers in the group as they responded saying that they also wanted to explore the idea of living in someone else's skin. The following week I devised a writing exercise called 'Walking in Someone Else's Moccasins'. The idea was to write from a completely opposite perspective, such as, if they were female, to maybe write from a male voice, or if they were young, to write from an older voice, etc. My formulating of this exercise also demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between facilitator and writers in this creative writing group; the call and response, a relationship that allowed all of us to feel engaged in the story-making process of the workshop.

This became a far more insightful exercise than either I or the writers expected. By occupying 'someone else's skin' the writers explored feelings and emotions outside their own autobiographical framework. A female writer who confessed to having an aversion to physical fitness wrote from the perspective of a male long distance runner:

I have trained long and hard for this opportunity to compete at this level.

Nights out with mates, missing the cup final and never having time to chat up those babes at high school now seem worth the sacrifice. Beads of sweat running down my face, the salt stinging a body so tired (C23.22).

The writer shared with the group that in the process of writing the piece she began 'to feel the competitiveness, focus, and stamina that was needed to win the race'. These were traits that she would not usually associate herself with but 'it didn't feel a stretch to write about it' (I15.10). Using the voices of other characters, especially the ones that seem opposite to us, can exhume emotions and characteristics of our identity that

have lain hidden or forgotten. This writer began to recognise the ‘drive and focus’ she has for her work, which was not as far a departure from the long distant runner as she originally thought.

Using the same exercise another writer decided he wanted to write from the voice of a ‘shepherdess’:

Being a shepherdess is hard work. I watch over my flock every day for my life. I tend to their wounds; bring them food when they are hungry. While holding the youngest lamb in my arms, she asks me, “Mother when you look in the distance why does it make you sad?” I replied to the little lamb and said “because I am waiting for the lost sheep to return and only then I can be truly happy (5.1).

The writer says that the above piece was different to his other writings for the workshop; it was ‘softer and gentler’. However, ‘The Shepherdess’ metaphorically represents a thematic link that runs through much of the participant’s writing in the workshop, which is about being alone. The participant’s prose predominantly explores his feelings of leaving one country for another and the resulting loneliness and disconnection. The very nature of the shepherd is about working alone but also the eventuality of the ‘lost sheep’ returning home: ‘only then I can be truly happy’. The writer had chosen the skin of someone that he thought was totally opposite from him and had little to do with his own personal story or voice. Yet the outcome was a powerful metaphor that embodied the underlying themes of his writing. The writer, by

loosening control over his imagination, had allowed unconscious material to emerge and take shape.

Through their stories the writers began to loosen embedded narratives that had shaped their lives, as they expressed and explored a broader landscape of their existence. The fictional and poetic techniques in the workshop offered them ‘a new way of thinking how to write’ (I25.11) and a different way of using their imagination. The following extract is from a participant of African and European heritage, who grew up working-class and is now ‘supposedly middle-class’:

Following an invisible being led by
 A thread from the brownness of time (tribe)
 honouring guest on the paperish hand
 cap the cloak of my desire...
 go with others skating fast - sharp corners
 of the towering sense of diaspora
 of the split in two wide part (26.1; 10)

This writer was looking for a language to reflect her many voices that ‘cross and entwine, rooted in her own continuity’ (I34.19). She experiments with a poem, dismantles disconnections and discovers a voice(s) that feels like her, as she plays around with space and creates a space that encompassed the ‘split’ of the diaspora experience.

6.5 Conclusion

The interviews were held individually and privately away from other group members. The writers spoke about how creative life writing helped them to connect to different dimensions of themselves by bringing out a sense of a 'holistic self', how it offered 'opportunities to think outside the box', to find their 'own unique voice' and to be 'surprised' and 'shocked' by their discoveries about themselves. The consensus of the group was that when they 'dared' to leave familiar grounding, 'to talk about anything', 'to share fully', they found the experience 'liberating', 'freeing', 'freedom at its best'.

Participants' experience of fictionalising their memories helped them to move beyond life-held narratives by engaging with the body; they began to listen to emotions and feelings that offered a more complex understanding of their lives. The creative writing practice was an exploration of finding a language, a voice or voices that resonated with them. The writers played, took risks and excavated their memories and by doing so discovered the subtle voices and experiences that lay under or on the edge of life-held narratives that shaped their identities. Writing through other characters can imbue writers with a confidence and forthrightness they may not experience in everyday life. They gained courage from listening to each other finding their voices, as their experiences were often related. Seeing their stories through the eyes of the 'other' particularly when the 'other' was within was to be invaluable in their process of renewing stories that were presented as embedded and unchanging. The poetic and fictional exercises guided a journey of 'uncharted territories of the self' (Grewal et, 1988, p.2), as their voice changed from first person to third and third to first, each

time creating shifts of perspectives of the self. The imagination tied to memory allowed the opening of spaces and voices of the unconscious and the conscious to emerge, allowing for the complexity of a 'whole person'. The creative process allowed the writers to connect to multiple dimensions of themselves as they dismantled distinctions that lay within. Dominant narratives that had shaped their lives were diminished but not dismissed, as one participant remarked: 'It's like a note in your symphony but not soul defining' (I34.16).

Chapter 7

Skipworth Street's Bonfire Night

Chapter One

“When Suzy was a school girl

A school girl Suzy was

She said ooh aaah

I've lost my bra

I don't know where me knickers are...”

‘You don't know where yer bloody knickers are?’ Angie screeches, and we all burst out laughing.

‘It's nearly six hours; bloody ‘ell I think she's gonna to do it,’ Angie continues with an excitement that makes us all giddy with determination.

Quietness enters our end of the street as eyes become fixed on me. My friends look like zombies; hypnotized by my feet jumping up and down, skillfully timed to Nazy's mum's washing line that defiantly hits the ground. I'm wearing last year's battered brown boots that are a touch too small; worn because the clear, crisp, clapping sound makes me feel like one of them flamenco dancers that came to our school last year and danced like nothing scared them.

‘She goin’ for the world record?’ Wayne asks disbelievingly joining a small crowd made of mainly kids.

‘Yeah , now shur-rup, and let ‘er get on with it?’ Angie barks.

‘Well what’s it?’

‘What’s what?’

‘The world record?’

‘Bloody’ell! What’s it to you?’

‘Six hours and twelve minutes.’ Nazy says like she’s the keeper of all records.

Angie turns her head quicker than whiplash but doesn’t say anything because Nazy’s turning the rope and Angie can’t afford any mistakes. Nazy knows this and this is what she has above us all, timing.

‘Listen Ange, I’m risking my neck for this, if me mum finds out her clothes line is lickin’ the street. I’ve had it. So if someone wants to know the record. What’s the big deal?’

‘Don’t mess with Mizzy Nazeema,’ Shelley cuts in making us all laugh, except Angie.

‘Gwaan Sharpes you can do it.’ Nigel’s voice takes the tension out of the air, at least for me. I almost trip on disbelief that gorgeous Nigel *bloody* Thomas, is shouting my name. With the arrival of Shelly’s new breasts, Angie’s motor mouth and Nazy’s long wavy hair looking like she’s one of the Angels for Charlie, my shyness loses me in the shadows, but not today.

‘How much longer, Sharpes?’ asks Nigel.

‘You’re goin’ to put ‘er off,’ Angie protests.

She doesn’t like it that he calls me Sharpes; ‘He’s being fresh.’ she complains but I love it, even if it is after Ena Sharples on Coronation Street, who gets on his nerves because she talks too much and *I don’t*.

‘My arms ‘urting!’ Shelly shouts in defeat.

‘Don’t you bloody dare muck this up,’ Angie warns and gives her a glare that makes Shelly’s back straighten when it wasn’t even slouched.

Angie is mostly known as ‘Bloody Babs’ because of the constant use of her favourite word and that she has long blond hair like a Barbie. She hates the name and always says that she could ‘bloody knock down Ken with an eyelash.’ She’s my best friend and the main reason I’ve been jumping rope for the past six hours because when Angie believes in you she makes you feel like the Queen of Scotland or better still Debbie *amazing* Harry.

‘What the fuck’s ‘appening ‘ere?’ Shelly’s Dad asks appearing from nowhere.

‘Breaking the world record,’ Wayne says believingly.

‘What in?’

‘Ice skating,’ Angie scoffs.

We all laugh, including Shelly’s Dad.

‘Right then where’s the sarnies? This must be seen. C’mon my girl.’

I nearly lose my rhythm, which is the key to survival; but with a dramatic step to the side, I take my rightful position. If it wasn't so freezing I'm sure I would have heard gasps. I continue to jump but it's starting to get dark and I feel uneasy. At first we weren't going to do it this Saturday; partly because it's too cold but mostly because it's bonfire night and who the hell wants to be caught by a banger. Last year, Dave Charles was seriously burnt because of the idiot McDowell throwing a Catherine Wheel at him when he got off the bus. Now it feels the worst idea but Angie said she was sick of feeling scared every year because of the tossers on our street, so she persuaded us all it was the perfect day to break a record.

'I've got to go soon,' Nazy says quietly, knowing that when she goes the clothes line goes with her. She needs to get ready to go to Vicky Park, which she goes to every year with her family to see the firework show. She says it's fantastic. I've always wanted to go but she lives a few streets away from us where it's not so bad; and her dad, Mr Ali, owns the chippy, so no one is going to hurt him.

I'm getting tired and worried but I don't want to disappoint Angie.

Angie tells everyone we're twins and they laugh saying we can't be because her dad's from Ireland and mine is from Jamaica; he's actually from Antigua but that's just a small detail and irrelevant because Angie always says 'So bloody what! We're both from Highfields,' which shuts them up. She always speaks her mind just like when Mr Hughes our headmaster joked in the assembly that Highfields 'is the melting pot of England or as some might say sticking pot because no one seems to be going home.'

Angie says 'He needs to choke on his bloody chuckles' which made us all laugh, although the stunned Mr Hughes chose to send me out of the hall.

‘We *are* at home,’ Nigel objects.

His friends laughed but Nigel looked mad and sad at the same time and I don’t know anyone who can do that; but he’s also thirteen and looks nineteen so he is extraordinary.

‘Get out!’ We’ve never seen Mr Hughes so angry; it was like everyone was waiting for lava to spurt out of his mouth. I had stood frozen unsure of what had taken place but thrilled that I would be following gorgeous Nigel *bloody* Thomas out of the hall. I felt we were leaders of a revolution and wanted to turn around to everyone and shout ‘join us!’.

‘Five more bloody minutes!’ Angie screams breaking my thoughts.

My mind can be miles away but never interrupts my fancy footwork, which I increase for the last lap.

‘Look at Miss Fancypants’, Shelly’s Dad cheers.

‘Go on Sharpie!’ Nigel shouts.

‘C’mon girl you can do it,’ Shelly’s father says.

For a moment I get self-conscious and feel that I’m going to mess up. Shelly and Nazy glance intensely at each other and then return their eyes to the rope they are expertly turning.

‘Ten, nine, eight, seven...’ Angie begins the count down and everyone joins in. I catch Nigel’s eye and he smiles, six, five, four...’ I’m jumping so high my knickers are showing and wonder if this is why he is smiling. Oh no...

‘Three, two, one.... Yeeeeeeeah! She’s done it, six and a half hours, non-stop!’

Angie yells and runs to Shelly, Nazy and me and we all throw ourselves at each other, laughing, kissing and hugging.

‘We succeeded because this was a team effort!’ I shout and immediately regret sounding so dorkey.

‘Yeah’ Nazy agrees and I instantly feel better.

Nigel pats me on my back and says, ‘That was a feat, Sharpes.’

I was about to speak but was interrupted by Shelley’s dad.

‘Fuckin’ell! Who would’ve known, World Skipping Champion Ena fuckin’ Sharples.’

‘This is the best day of my life’ Shelly says.

‘Nuff respect,’ Wayne interrupts giving Angie a high five.

‘We are bloody heroes’ Angie says and we all cheer.

‘What’s the time?’

‘I dunno,’ Angie replies.

Nazy darts down street like Daley Thompson; she must have remembered the washing line and Vicky Park.

‘See ya tomorrow’.

‘See yaaaaaaaa!’ we scream.

Shelly and her Dad start to walk down the street. Her dad walks as if tiredness has just hit him and he slowly turns around as if he's forgotten something.

'Ange, you don't 'ave the time?'

'Nah,' she answers,

'But how did you time the ...?' He doesn't finish his sentence and instead gives one big chuckle.

'See ya, tomorrow,' I turn round to say but Angie has already disappeared.

I float five doors down. I suddenly feel anxious and want to get inside. I struggle with the key, push the door open and stumble into the front room and immediately turn on the light. Angie calls this room the street behind the curtains because it only takes one step and you're indoors. Angie hates living so close to the street, 'Where's the bloody privacy?' but I love the closeness.

The curtains are closed and a sudden chill runs through me and I rush to put on the gas fire that has replaced our old fireplace. I throw off my coat and gloves and sit close on a speckled white and brown thick piled rug, watching the blue flicker turn to a steady orange and if by magic the room begins to feel warm and cozy. I can't resist a smile, remembering Angie's face when she first saw our newly decorated front room. 'This is Habi-bloody-tat,' which is our favourite furniture shop in town. She warns 'not to live with a bloke until you've got your own flat, and it's decked out with furniture from Habitat so if he runs out, you'll hardly miss him'. My mum had taken off the wallpaper and had painted the walls white. No one in our street had painted walls and Shelly said only posh houses and museums have white walls, but the best compliment came from Nazy, when she said, 'it's not just posh but modern and that's

hard to find'. I can't ever remember feeling so good, well until now. White walls and a world record can't get any better than this.

Scoobydoo is on but that would mean I would have to go into the living room, which is too cold and dark. On a small wooden coffee table next to the fire sit my snacks and drinks. My mum says the table was made from an Oak tree more than two hundred years old that was in the garden of the house where she grew-up. She said she cried all day and night when the tree was cut down and so Pops made her the table from the wood to console her. The table looks out of place in the room now and we tried to put it in the living room but it didn't work and I missed putting my feet under her legs while I waited for my mum to come home.

I open my precious purple scrapbook, which is huge and take out my super slick, thick purple felt tip, eager to write and then I hear the key turn and my mum walks through the door bringing in the bitter cold air. Her red lipstick lips offer a big, inviting smile and I clip my knee on the table edge as I run to hug her.

'Careful, Champ.'

'How'd you hear?'

I have no interest in knowing as her arms wrap around me and I sink into the soft pudginess of her body. I inhale her one-dab-a-day Chanel Number Five as she kisses me on my forehead. I hold on tightly as if by instinct I know that her ample flesh is only on lease and far too soon her soft skin will be just sitting on bone.

'So tell me about it?' my mum asks as she gently prizes my arms apart.

She takes her coat off and slings it over our old settee before she sits down. She takes off her shoes that have been worn a little too much and replaces them with

pastel yellow slippers. Her jet black hair falls across her face and she reminds me of a movie star in a black and white film, looking like she's from another time and place. I can see she's tired and feel her effort to stand up.

'So bonfire night it is.' she says. 'We have fireworks, sausages, beans and spuds. Let's try not to burn the rose bushes this year.' We both giggle.

'Did you buy sparklers? Is Uncle Frank and Auntie May coming round?'

'Of course!'

I begin to get excited as I see it more as a party to celebrate my success. Our neighbours are not related but feel like family. Uncle Frank who fought in the Second World War says he will start the next one if England doesn't bleeding win the World Cup again'. Uncle Frank has a way of making my mum laugh like no one else.

My mum opens the door that leads into the living room and I'm on her heels beginning my detailed account of breaking the record. My mum turns and then I hear what she has already responded to; muffled male voices outside our front door.

The letter box flap is slowly lifted open, I'm expecting to see Angie's hand as she screams, 'It's got me! It's got me!' like she does most mornings when she calls for me on the way to school. Whatever is supposed to come through has got stuck, as if waiting on cue for the eerie music and for someone to shout 'Action!'

My body instinctively moves towards the front door but with the same impulse my mum pulls my arm back like she does when I cross the road without looking. I start to say something but the seriousness in her eyes forces me to swallow my words. I take another look and I see that she's scared and this terrifies me. The final push and we both see the doors delivery; a flame spitting Roman Candle.

I thought my mum would grab me out of the room but she's frozen, her eyes fixed on the door. I feel anxious but I always do just before the shower of purple, red and orange light hits the night sky. I worry that I'll be disappointed and now I worry even more that it will put black burn marks on our pristine white walls.

'Wog lover!' The words of vile, sneering mouths explode into our home; leaving a foul stench of filth that fills our front room and our bodies. We stand staring at the door unable to take shelter. The threatening blue flame peering through the door decides to retreat and sizzles out slowly leaving an unbearable silence.

Mum and me drop to the floor and huddle together like a pile of old blankets. Not a word has been spoken. For each kiss on my cheek she holds me tighter. I hold her delicate face like I'm the grown-up and she reads me as clear as Blyton.

'No! It's not because of you,' she whispers. 'It's never because of you Sweets.'

My face falls into hers and our wet skin holds us desperately together until Uncle Frank and Auntie May knock on our door for the firework display.

Chapter Two

We hear the knocking on the door but neither of us moves. The letter-box flap opens and the fizzled firework falls on to the floor as if disappointed with its anti-climactic performance. The door knocks again as if the caller can see us huddled in the corner. Uncle Frank has a distinct knock so now we know it's not him.

'Who is it?' I shout with such anger it surprises both mum and me.

A whispered "Fatima, Fatima" flutters gently through the letter box.

My mum hurries and kicks the sizzled remains out of the way as if forgetting that only minutes earlier it had paralyzed us with fear. She opens the door without caution and standing almost like statues is Nazy and her mum.

‘Come in, come in, you must be freezing,’ my mum says as she ushers them both inside. Nazy closes the door and the sound of the latch locking seems to prompt her mum to burst out crying and all she manages to splutter out is ‘Kirsty.’

I rarely hear her name called and it feels strange that she has any name other than mum. She wraps her arms around Mrs K, like she has just done with me and tells her not to worry and she’ll put the kettle on.

My mum reaches out and touches my face and tells me not to worry. I’m not sure if she is talking about the Roman Candle or the reason Mrs K is crying or both. I only know that I’ve been worrying a long time before tonight and I wish I could stop.

Mrs K follows her out of the front room and without turning around, says ‘You girls have a nice chat.’

I want to grab her and tell her to leave and find her own mummy to cuddle because she’s mine and someone has just tried to blow up our house, the jacket potatoes are not in the oven and they take ages to cook and why is Uncle Frank and Auntie May not here, have they changed their mind about us? I’ve just broken the world record and noone cares and she gets to go to Vicky Park to see the best bonfire night of all times and is spoiling our night when we’ve just got our party-pack of fireworks from Woolworths. It’s just not fair.

‘What’s wrong?’ Nazy asks. My eyes remain fixed on the door that her mum has just closed so they can talk secretly.

‘Nothing’, I say. I feel embarrassed as if I had spoken my thoughts aloud.

‘It’s like they’re friends.’

Nazy laughs, ‘Of course they are, haven’t you ever noticed?’

‘No, I never thought about it. I just thought they talked because of us.’

‘Nah, they’re good friends.’

‘How do you know and I don’t?’

‘It’s not a big deal; who cares?’

I do I want to scream at the top of my voice but instead my tummy tightens. I feel if I look away from the door my feelings are going to burst out like one of Uncle Frank’s greyhounds bolting through the starting gate at the races. My mum says you can’t stop things that are meant to be from happening but I couldn’t help but think that if the firework blew up in our front room, scorching purple, red and orange on our white walls, even best if it blew up our house, of course leaving us safe, it would have changed everything and things that are meant to be wouldn’t happen to us and my mum would still be with me for next year’s bonfire night.

‘Open the bloody door. They’re not gettin’ away with it,’ Angie shouts through the letter box which shatters the silence. Both Nazy and I laugh because her blond strands are caught in the letter box and she looks like a cat tangled in a ball of wool trying to set herself free.

It is only when I walk towards the door still in giggles to help Angie that I turn to towards Nazy and notice.

‘ Huh!’

‘You’re only noticing now, great friend you are,’ Nazy taunts.

‘Notice what?’ Angie shouts impatiently.

‘When did it happen?’ I ask out of not knowing what to say.

‘Let me think, oh tonight,’ Nazy responds sarcastically as it was obvious considering we’ve just spent all day together breaking the world record, although that now seems ages ago.

‘Why didn’t you tell us?’

‘I don’t know’.

I said it was not a big deal but it felt huge. Angie bangs the door and Nazy and I smile uneasily to each other knowing that Angie can’t take the suspense, so I stall a little more before opening it. Nazy decides to sit on the sofa and tries a couple of seating positions as if she is preparing for her big moment.

‘What took you so long?’ Angie complains as she marches inside.

‘Bloody ell! When did this ‘appen?’

‘Thanks for the support,’ Nazy snaps.

It is then I realise that Nazy is really nervous and I hope this is the reason her mum was crying.

‘But why?’ Angie sounding confused.

‘It’s time,’ Nazy says.

We all sit on the settee with Nazy in the middle.

‘Say somethin’,’ Nazy pleads.

‘Can yer still be friends with us?’ Angie asks.

‘Of course’, and without warning tears trickle from Nazy’s eyes who at that moment seemed more of a Nazeema.

Angie and I both put our arms around her clasping each other’s hands. I feel safe with Angie like everything is going to be alright and I hold on tighter.

‘I’d hate it if we couldn’t be friends’ I say and start to cry. I hold my breath so I don’t start to do what Angie calls ‘snot-bawling’ when your heart comes through your nose.

‘I’d use yer dad’s chilli sauce to burn down his chip shop if we couldn’t be mates,’ Angie says defiantly.

Still holding on to each other we all burst out laughing.

‘Why didn’t you tell us that you’re going to be wearing that thing round yer ‘ead? We’re supposed to be yer mates?’ Angie asks as if she’s been betrayed.

‘Hijab’, Nazeema corrects.

‘Yer what doner kebab?’ Angie teases and breaks the uneasiness that’s filling the room.

Nazy touches her hijab and jokingly retaliates, ‘You’re only jealous. I’m waiting for Angie’s come back but she gives a laugh that is far too short and then I know that she felt the way I did. We were in a way jealous and it was not the first time either. Even the cream coloured fabric that fell gently around Nazy’s face made her more beautiful which although she is one of my best friends seems to be a little unfair. It crossed my mind that now you can’t see her hair I may have a better chance with Nigel Thomas.

He had once said in the playground in front of Paulette Hughes and Pauline Stevens who were supposed to be hotter than Pam's People, although I never saw them dance, that Farrah Fawcette could only dream of having Nazeema's hair. The way he said Nazeema and not Nazy was as if they were destined to be together and then I hated that he probably didn't even know my name. It was official that Nazy had the most beautiful hair in Highfields and Hollywood and now that she dared to cover her hair, she's going to go down in the history books as being the bravest of all.

Angie says I have long legs and told me to wear knee-length socks to accentuate them, I know if I had to stop wearing them; I wouldn't be able to do it.

It isn't just the way Nazy looks. I remember when we first went to her house; it was as if she had a secret life that none of us knew about. I suppose we all have that part of us, we don't tell each other everything. Like I love that my mum is Scottish and not English as she corrects anyone that makes the treasonous mistake. She knows Gaelic and teaches me; although in years to come I will regret forgetting. Summer holidays are spent in Inverness and Edinburgh with my Great Aunt Elgin and Great Aunt Margaret. I particularly love Great Aunt Margaret; she is tall like me and her fingers are long like mine. She is the oldest person I know yet she walks as if she is carrying books on her head, like she knows she is someone special. She used to teach at a girls school and she told me that when the war came, every day she would cite a Robbie Burns poem to them to remind *her* girls to contribute to the new world that was unfolding and warned them not to squander it. I didn't know what she meant but I did know that my Auntie Margaret hated 'squandering' more than anything else. 'Cleanliness' she would say 'is next to Godliness, waste is the Devil himself'. I loved hearing her stories as her voice tilted up and down as if climbing the hills in the Orkneys she said she did as a child, and her arms and hands passionately waving as

perfect assistants for drawing you into her world. We would spend most of our time in the kitchen as she and my mum would cook together. Often they would forget I was there and be transported into another time and they would speak of buried hurts and lives lived and not lived. My mum came alive, crying, laughing and joking with such ease there were times I didn't recognise her. I always begged Great Auntie Margaret, to come and live with us so my mum could stay being the person she seemed to like so much.

The first time Shelly, Angie and me were invited to Nazy's house, I realised that as much as I loved my family in Scotland I was not a part of it, not like Nazy was to hers. She didn't just have a couple of aunts that accepted her; she was seen as a gift that would bring happiness to the family whereas I was seen by most of my family as the present that needed to be returned after the Christmas holidays.

When we entered Nazy's house it was like entering a different world. We had to take our shoes off at the door, which traumatised Shelly because she had holes in her socks.

'I'm glad you could make it' Mr Ali greeted us with a smile that made us instantly feel welcomed. It was strange to see him not behind the counter.

'Who's that? Angie asks hesitantly.

'er dad' Shelly says.

'He looks so posh,' Angie said sounding intimidated.

'Omar bloody Sherif,' she adds and we try to stifle our giggles.

'I'm so glad you're here,' Nazy says and I could tell she really meant it.

Throughout the evening Mr Ali introduced us to plates of food as if they were the guests for us to meet ‘this is chicken biryani, do you know, lamb korma or paratha bread, have you ever seen nan bread?’

Shelly’s dad came early to pick her up and even though she cried and made a scene in front of everyone she still had to go. Angie said we’re as good as adults because we were able to stay. At the end of the night Mr Ali wanted to walk us home but Angie said that her Dad was meeting us at the corner, which would have been difficult to do since she had never met him but it was vital we had time to walk the long way home *alone*, so we could talk about the evening.

‘Let me be as big as Barry White and eat that food all the time. I died went to heaven and came back for more,’ says Angie.

‘I couldn’t even leave for heaven I just kept on eating,’ I quipped.

We laughed and talked all the way home, making loads of declarations.

I said ‘I’m never going to wear shoes again in the house.’

Angie says ‘I’m never going to eat with a knife and fork again, me mam goin’ to love that’, which made us both laugh knowing Angie wasn’t even allowed to use her hands to eat fish and chips.

‘Who knew?’ I regretted saying this as soon as the words came out of my mouth. I don’t understand how two words that are meant to fly with others turn out to have weights and sink like balloons with stones tied to them. I wanted to stop but I couldn’t.

‘She’s our best friend but she has a life that has nothing to do with us?’ I don’t know why this hurt but it did.

‘I wish we spoke another language at home’, Angie says wistfully.

‘You do, because yours isn’t English’, I say as an attempt to return to where we were.

Angie ignores me, ‘Do you think that’s why Patsy’s a punk?’

‘Whaaat! So she can have tea at Nazy’s house?’ I say genuinely not understanding.

‘Nah, so she can have somethin’ of ‘er own.’

‘You girls alright?’ my Mum asks as she enters the room, which made me realise I had drifted away again. She places hot chocolate and chocolate penguin biscuits on to the small table; we leave the settee and huddle close to the gas fire, wrapping our fingers around hot mugs.

‘Do you think I’m going to be treated differently at school?’ Nazy asks as she struggles to take the biscuit wrapper off.

‘Yeah of course,’ the words seem sharp even for Angie and so she attempts to soften them.

‘People just need to get used to not seeing yer ‘air.’

I decided on Monday I’m going to wear my dusky-pink extra-long socks, even though we are only allowed to wear blue or black.

‘So now Miss Doner Kebab is sorted,’ Angie Says. You know it was the McDowell and his boys that put the firework in yer door?’

‘We don’t know that for sure,’ I say not wanting to return to it.

‘I do, I saw them,’ Angie says adamantly

‘Let’s forget it,’ I say.

‘Nah, they can’t get away with it. I’m sick of it’.

‘I’ve got more things to worry about than McDickhead.’ The truth rings louder than I wanted which makes Nazy and Angie look at me.

‘What’s goin’ on?’ The gentleness of Angie’s words lands deeply and gives me a shake from the inside. I feel tears rising up and I swallow in the attempt of getting them stuck in my throat. I succeed so I replace the word, ‘nothing’ with a shrug.

‘I still think we should sort’em out,’ Angie says even more determined.

‘I agree,’ says Nazy.

‘But you’re wearing your fingymajig now,’ I say.

‘And!’ Nazy responds letting both Angie and me know that she is still the same friend.

So over jacket potatoes, baked beans, extra fat sausages, grated cheese, and more hot chocolate this time with marshmallows we begin to plot and plan.

‘Let’s put the fireworks through ‘is door and see ‘ow he likes it’ Angie suggests.

‘We could hurt his baby brother or his mum’ Nazy says.

‘You’re right’ Angie agrees.

‘Doesn’t look as we’re going to Vicky Park tonight,’ Nazy says relieved.

‘Doesn’t look like we’re going to have our fireworks’ and I too felt relief not wanting to be outside again even in my own backyard.

‘He can’t keep on doing this, ruining our life like his,’ Angie says as if all our problems and solutions fell at the feet of McDowell.

We exchange ideas like the ball in table-tennis until one of us has a winning shot.

‘I’ve got an idea. Who’s more scary than McDowell?’

‘Pimp Paul?’ Angie asks.

‘Worse’ I say.

‘Dealer Crack-a-Nory’ Angie suggests.

‘I mean really scary’ I say.

Angie says knowingly, ‘Demons, I watched Carrie last week and ‘er body was possessed. I slept with me Mam that night’.

‘I thought you look weird, sure your body’s not been taken over?’ Nazy teases.

‘Don’t even joke. Don’t even talk about it ‘cause it just ‘as to ‘ear its name and it’s in yer’.

‘Okay no-one says the d-word,’ Nazy mocks.

‘Tell us then,’ Angie asks impatiently.

‘Remember what Shelly’s Dad told us’.

‘What, when were three, five, seven, yesterday, today?’ Angie snaps.

‘C & A.’ I say as I start to enjoy the rare opportunity of having the upper hand.

‘Leave the clues to Kojak, what the bloody’ell are you takin’ bout?’.

‘Remember when Shelly’s dad told her about the time he was walking home from The Albert when he saw Old-Man-Canavan, leaving his house ‘suspiciously’.

‘Oh Yeah’, Angie remembers with renewed interest.

‘What was he doing?’ asks Naz.

‘Acting suspicious’ I repeat.

‘Apparently and no-one must know but Shelly said that when most people get drunk after a few pints, her dad gets messages.’

‘What!’ says Nazy.

I decide to pause before continuing. I’m at the centre of their attention for the second time today which I am becoming to love.

‘Go on then’, Angie asks raring for me to continue. I realise that Shelly has only told me and for a moment I’m aware that I’m betraying her trust but I can’t resist. The next time we do ‘truth and dare’ I’ll do three extra, no two extra dares as long as it has nothing to with Nigel Thomas.

‘When her dad has a couple of pints, he gets messages, he knows certain things,’ I whisper.

‘Like whaaat?’

‘Like the night the bin blew-up outside the C & A in town, Shelly’s dad knew who did it’.

‘Cause of the messages?’ Angie asks totally absorbed.

‘Exactly, he’d already been shown’.

‘Canavan acting suspiciously’, Angie proudly concludes.

‘Shelly’s dad said from the time Old-Man-Canavan had moved into our street the messages had started to come and that night confirmed it’.

‘Confirmed what?’ asks Angie.

‘I got it’, Nazy shouts out triumphantly as if she’s won Spot the Ball in the Sunday People. ‘He’s in the IRA.’

‘It all makes sense,’ she continues, ‘He’s always in the phone box calling *who*? He’s a grouch, which is probably because he feels bad killing people and he lives alone because who wants to live with a killer’.

Nazy gets into it so much that she says ‘maybe it wasn’t McDowell tonight at your door, it was him and it only looked like a firework but it was a bomb’.

We all look at the charred mess on the carpet near the door which confirms that it was definitely a firework.

I still ask anyway, ‘Why would the IRA want to kill me and me mum?’

Angie says assuring, ‘The IRA ain’t racist, they just don’t like the English and the Irish that don’t believe in’em’, you’re safe’.

‘Unless you were passing the C&A at that particular time’, adds Nazy.

Nazy takes a big slurp of hot chocolate and with a brown frothy moustache she slowly rests her mug at the side of the fireplace, places her hands down on her lap with her fingers spread as if she is going to play the piano and says,

‘Okay, tonight you had a firework though your door which didn’t go off but that’s not important because we’re all sick of McDowell, so we decide to do something about it, we all agreed that putting a firework in his door was too dangerous because of his mum and brother and let me see if I really have got it right...contacting the IRA is a safer option?’

‘I don’t want him to get hurt just get scared the way we were?’ I say trying to make the idea more reasonable.

‘This is crazy, you know this, right?’ Nazy says trying to be the voice of reason.

‘I think we’re pretty lucky having the IRA living on our streets and we wouldn’t know if it wasn’t for Shelly’s dad’s messages so maybe its meant to be,’ says Angie unable to contain her excitement.

‘What are you talking about, they kill people?’ protests Nazy.

‘Not all the time. Sometimes they just scare ‘em and that’s what we want them to do to McDowell’, says Angie our new IRA expert.

‘How do you know this?’ asks Nazy.

‘“Cause if the old man was really dangerous Shelly’s dad would’ve got a message to warn him not to let his daughter play near his ‘ouse and we were skipping, exactly across the road from where he lives. Look we broke the world record, we’re on a roll, we can do this. It’ll be worth it jus’ to see Dowell’s face,’ Angie says with confidence.

Nazy uses her hands like scales and as her left hand rises she says ‘skipping’ and then she raises her right hand and says ‘IRA’. As her hands rotate up and down, she

repeatedly says ‘Skipping, IRA; Skipping, IRA; Skipping, IRA; I suppose there’s not much between them.’

‘He’s a bully and needs to be stopped; teachers, police, his mam don’t scare him, the only chance is Old-Man-Canavan,’ Angie says and looks at me for support.

‘Why would he do it?’ Nazy still unconvinced.

‘We’ll just say that McDowell said somethin’ ‘bout the IRA, which is bad enough to be warned but not that bad to be killed’, says Angie like she’s done this hundreds of times before.

‘And what’s that?’ I ask.

‘I don’t know, let’s think ‘bout it but it has to be one of you who go and speak to ‘im because they don’t like us English’, says Angie.

‘What are you taking about, we’re as English as you?’ I protest.

‘You know what I mean, I mean real English’.

‘Nah I don’t, we’re all born at Bond Street hospital, we’re as real as you’, I snap back.

For a moment the room divides the way the sea had done for Moses. I wanted to say something but all I could draw was silence and Angie’s bag of one-liners seemed to be empty. Nazy pulled her Hijab off and said with a voice spilling over with hurt,

‘Does that help yer Angela.’

It was a punch that we were planning for McDowell but we all felt it instead.

‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it’, Angie’s voice trails away and the rest of the words are swallowed. The room feels unsettled and we do something that we’ve never done before. We sit in silence. The silence gets heavier and heavier as if the air has found the only way to get out the room.

‘I’m adopted’, Angie pronounces.

I didn’t know this and feel hurt that she has kept this secret away from me even if I have proven tonight that I can’t keep them.

‘So your mum’s not yer mum?’ asks Nazy. ‘I’m sorry I had no idea’.

‘Do you have any idea who she is, that must be terrible?’ I ask.

‘She’s Russian’, responds Angie

‘Do you know her name?’

‘Err Olga Korbut’, Angie says quickly.

‘What, like the gymnast?’ I ask.

Angie looks at us both, as if smothering a smile and then suddenly burst out laughing.

‘Nah! I’m not adopted, I jus’ couldn’t take the silent treatment. I’m really, really sorry, purrrlease forgive me.’

We look at each other and exchange a shared relief that we have returned to where feels good. Nazy picks up two cushions and throws one to me, Angie rushes to get another and we descend on each other hitting and screaming until we lose our strength and feel fine with each other again. We purposefully fall in front of the warm gaze of

the gas fire. Our legs and arms stretch across each other excited with an idea that manages to push all others out of the way.

‘I have a plan’, Nazy says surprisingly decisive, as she places the soft cream colored material around her hair as if she’s been doing it all her life. I feel a sharp pang again of a divide between us all, as if this is the start of things never being the same. I wonder if we all shared the same thoughts because we reach out simultaneously and grab the last three chocolate Penguin biscuits, tear off the wrappers and click them like the swords we saw in *The Three Musketeers*.

‘First things we need to know is who’s going to speak to Old-Man-Canavan?’ I ask.

‘That’s easy, we’ll send the Russian’, Nazy says.

And we all burst out laughing.

Writing Myself into My Research

Critical Reflections on *Skipworth Street's Bonfire Night*

Since the beginning of time we have used stories and myths to organize the world for ourselves by imposing narrative patterns upon experience (Chandler, 1990, p.4).

My creative life writing, *Skipworth Street's Bonfire Night*, is a response to the qualitative research at the hair salon/barbershop. Through my facilitation and group work I aimed to help the writers to utilize their imagination in new ways by redirecting their attention to their feelings and emotions. The underlying idea was that, by engaging with the body and listening to their feelings, participants might be able to gain a more fluid relationship with life-held narratives. To have a greater understanding of the participants' experience it was imperative for me to engage with the same creative process.

I had begun this research journey as a result of feeling frustrated as a film producer working on a documentary series which aimed to offer a new perspective to the conversation of racial politics. As one of the makers of the programme, I felt that we found it very difficult to dismantle the discourse(s) that shaped our own *thinking*. Therefore, my aim for my research was to find a way of challenging old certainties by broadening the spectrum of knowledge, no longer basing it on the assumption of the privilege of the 'mental over the corporeal' (Grosz, 1993, p.187). It was therefore important that, as the author of my thesis, I should provide for myself a space where I

could focus my attention on an embodied approach to my research. Natalie Goldberg always tells her creative writing students to open up their minds ‘to the possibility that 1+1 can equal 48’ (Goldberg, 1986, p.82). I needed to see my research beyond the limits of my own embedded discourses and explore the wider possibilities of 1+1. Manjusvara says that it is only when we begin to trust the creative process that: ‘we can become free from the limiting habits and views that undervalue so much of what we do’ (Manjusvara, 2005, p.1).

This chapter, then, explores key concepts informing and emerging from my research that I either explored consciously in my own creative writing or that arose spontaneously through it. It offers a different approach to exploring my topic, a first person experience rather than the third person of the qualitative research. It discusses how, by creating a holding space for my own imagination, I was able to challenge my own tacit assumptions and life-held narratives, as unconscious material emerged that enabled me to look at myself, as well as my research, from a broader perspective.

7.1 Creating My Own ‘Holding Space’ for the Imagination

The participants spoke extensively about feeling ‘comfortable’ and ‘belonging’ in the salon and the workshops, and it became evident that there was a correlation between the writers’ experience of a safe and dependable space and their engagement with the creative process. As I have said, the writers’ experience of a safe space echoes D.W. Winnicott’s notion of a *holding framework*; the importance of a contained space deemed ‘safe enough’ and reliable (Winnicott, 1965) for people to explore outside of their familiar grounding.

Manjusvara refers to the 'step by step' of the creative process which enables the writer to proceed 'into more shadowy regions of the psyche - those rooms of our house that we never venture into in' (Manjusvara, 2005, p.25). Creating a holding environment for the imagination I saw as one of the first steps of engaging with my own creative process.

To explore the idea of the holding space I made a conscious decision not to write *Skipworth Street* in the university library but instead in a designated, contained space in my home, and similarly that the story would primarily take place in the 'front room' of the home of my alter ego narrator. The holding environment, in Winnicott's terms, facilitates an *intermediate area of experience or potential space*, a place where the inner psyche meets the external world. The 'front room' of my narrator, Sharpes, represents just such a *potential space*: because of its proximity to the street, the external world is also present inside:

Angie calls this room the street behind the curtains because it only takes one step and you're indoors. Angie hates living so close to the street, 'Where's the bloody privacy?' but I love the closeness (p.212).

The 'front room' also represents for Sharpes a place which is different to the rest of her house and the homes of the neighbours: 'No one in our street had painted walls'. It is a room where her worlds merge and are full of possibilities: 'white walls and a world record can't get better than this' (p.213). It is a room where she can be alone: 'I rush to put on the gas fire ... if by magic the room begins to feel warm and cozy'

(p.212). For Winnicott it is important for the child or adult to be able to be comfortable being alone, so that self exploration can occur.

The story is told in first person and therefore the reader has access to the inner psyche of the narrator. To establish the relationship between the inner and outer worlds the story begins outside on the street where Sharpes lives, which helps to set-up for the reader her external world as well.

7.2 Writing from Childhood

I had not expected to write about my childhood but like most of the participants of the workshop there was a pull or, as Chandler suggests we were ‘responding to an impulse’ to tell a story of early memory. Hunt suggests that ‘a child experiences [] the world before it has the capacity to reason’ (Hunt, 1998, p.24). It is therefore not surprising that as we engage in a creative process that has the potential to experience a sense of self beyond the text, we begin our search in a period of our lives before we make to ‘reason’. One of the participants said she felt ‘empowered’ returning to her childhood: as adult and author she felt she was in control [I34.23]. I could see this with my own writing process: as I returned to the past I also felt a sense of control and gained an understanding of my experiences that I did not possess as a child. Paul Eakin says that the reason we are drawn to our past is because it helps us to understand our present self: ‘... the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness’ (Eakin, 1985, p.5). By exploring my past I hoped to get a better understanding of my present self and of the perceptions that informed my research.

7.21 *Transitional Objects in the Creative Process*

I took the precautions that Winnicott spoke about when a child begins to create its own space independently from the mother; they will take a toy or blanket imbued with her presence. Thus, Winnicott says, the mother is never too far away. Sharpes's mother is situated in the room adjoining the front room, where she is talking with Mrs K, and she occasionally enters the potential space, the front room, with hot chocolate and biscuits.

As discussed, in the Salon the writers' transitional objects were often things that they wore throughout the workshops, such as necklaces or favourite boots. In various ways these objects made the participants feel good about themselves; there was something empowering which helped them feel secure to explore outside their familiar psychic terrain. In *Skipworth Street* Sharpes also includes her own transitional objects which imbue her with a feeling of safety and allow her to feel brave to leave her comfort zone:

I am wearing last year's battered brown boots ... worn because the clear, crisp, clapping sound makes me feel like one of them flamenco dancers that came to our school last year and danced like nothing scared them (p.206).

When Sharpes initially goes into her house before her mother comes home, her object of comfort is a table made by her grandfather, Poppy, for her mother when she was child:

The table looks out of place in the room now and we tried to put it in the living room but it didn't work and I missed putting my feet under *her* legs while I wait for my mum to come home (p.213).

Taking transitional objects into the creative process is part of the 'steps' Manjushvara refers to; as you progress and trust the creative process you become less reliant on the objects. Working within a safe holding framework allowed my mind to run freely, but not recklessly, as I delved deep into my imagination and into painful experiences.

7.22 The Freedom of Play

Skipworth Street begins with Sharpes' and her friends' attempt to break the world record for skipping, which they managed to do in 'six and a half hours', although it is later revealed to the reader that no-one had a watch to time the competition. Breaking the record for skipping in the narrative is not about the importance of factual details but the importance of play in the creative process. For Winnicott the notion of 'playing' is critical in an individual's creative and self-discovery process, as it allows the person to become immersed, 'lost in play' (Winnicott, 1971, p.18). Marion Milner says: 'There is the same need for 'circumstances in which it is safe to be absent minded' (i.e. for conscious logic and reason to be absent from one's mind)' (Milner, 1950, p. xiii). The experience of play allows writers to lose themselves in the space for the imagination, which is a 'step' towards engaging more deeply with their inner lives. It is during the activity of play that unsolicited feelings, memories and emotions emerge, revealing to us things we had forgotten or are experiencing as new.

Relinquishing control can make room for what Christopher Bollas calls 'the arrival of news from the self' (Bollas, 1987, p.236). The activity of skipping represents play and

friendship but at the same time there is an underlying awareness of fear and defiance: ‘Angie said she was sick of feeling scared every year because of the tossers on our street, so she persuaded us all it was the perfect day to break a record’ (p.209).

Relinquishing control can make room for what Christopher Bollas calls ‘the arrival of news from the self’ (Bollas, 1987, p.236). Sharpes says her ‘mind can be miles away but never interrupts my fancy foot work’(p.210), and in this way the reader is introduced to Sharpe’s inner dialogue. It is in the act of play that Sharpes begins to discover different dimensions to her personality: ‘my shyness loses me in the shadows, but not today’ (p.207).

7.23 Different Levels of the Holding Space

In my findings I refer to the participants’ experience of multiple holding spaces such as the salon, the workshop, the group, the page and the words of creative writing – all providing a safe space for the imagination. I explore this idea in my own writing, but in doing so I also experience different levels of *holding* that I had not considered before. The street like the salon is a place where Sharpes and her friends feel they belong, ‘our street’, which allows her to play. In the same way the participants as clients in the salon would freely banter and engage easily in dialogue with the staff and other clients. However Sharpes’ front room and the workshop represent another level of holding space: it is here that they transition into the ‘potential space’ where they begin to explore and ‘excavate’ feelings and emotions that they would not have felt equipped to do outside the facilitated creative writing process and group work. In a writing group the support of other group members and the relationship of trust with the facilitator are important to the sense of safety. I was the facilitator of the workshop and similarly as the writer I held the space for Sharpes and her friends to explore.

7.3 The Arrival of News from the Self

Creative life writing encourages you to pay attention to your feelings and emotions and the more you trust the creative process, a space opens for the unspoken and unknown to appear. The firework and the racist words entering Sharpes' house represent an act of violence where she is confronted with her fears. The outside world has come inside her intimate world, which could be said to signify the internalisation of the external discourse: 'The final push and we both see the door delivery ... The words of vile, sneering mouths explode in our home, leaving a foul stench that fills our front room and our bodies' (p.214) This extract reveals the explicit experience of racial hatred and abuse, and I remember feeling vulnerable as I wrote the scene but at the same time compelled to tell the story. Sharpes had already spoken about her fears: 'its bonfire night and who the hell wants to be caught by a banger. Last year, Dave Charles was seriously burnt...' (p.209), and now she faced the threat of a firework in her home. It is memories like these which become 'life narratives'; significant memories which impact the way we identify ourselves (Neisser, 1994, p.1). Unknowingly to the young Sharpes, an identity was being 'constructed across difference' (Hall, 1987 p.45); an identity which Phillips describes as 'an outer garment handed to you at birth that you learn to recognise, wear, feel proud of, brag about, and end up being buried in [...]' (Phillips, 2004, online).

Writing *Skipworth Street* I became aware of how early in my life I became aware of having a particular identity imposed on me and how it manifested and continues to impact my life and research. Sharpes' headmaster makes a racist jokes about their neighbourhood: 'the melting pot of England or as some might say sticking pot because no-one one seems to be going home' (p.209). Angie responds: 'He needs to

choke on his bloody chuckles'(p.209), and although it is Angie who says it, unknowingly to her she is bestowed with white privilege, and it is her friend Sharpes who did not say anything and is the one who is sent out of the assembly. Nigel Thomas, who is a boy of Caribbean parentage [the story has yet to reveal], says: 'We *are* at home'(p.209), and is also sent out. I was struck by how early the idea of resistance and the pursuit of emancipation began to become a part of my and my peers' language and life. When Sharpes is sent out of the assembly with Nigel: 'I felt we were leaders of a revolution and wanted to turn to everyone and shout "join us"'! Ford-Smith says that by connecting to our stories we connect to a legacy of resistance, a 'creative power of rebel consciousness' (Ford-Smith, 1986, p.xiii) which we can apply in our everyday lives.

We were children, yet our 'outer garment' had begun to impact our lives; the identity imposed on us by society and the way we were made to feel by others. Sharpes describes Nigel as looking 'mad and sad at the same time and I don't know anyone who can do that but he's also thirteen and looks nineteen so he is extraordinary' (p.210). Sharpes saying this revealed to me my personal motivation behind my research and why it was located in a creative life writing workshop in a culturally diverse community that resembled very closely the place where I grew-up. I suppose I've always been interested in the kid that was angry and ageing and how actions of discrimination affect childhood and the people we become. Phillips says: 'The first time one is called a 'nigger' or told to 'go back to where you come from one's identity is traduced and a great violence is done to one's self sense of self' (Phillips, 2004, online). In the process of writing *Skipworth Street* I began to understand how real change can take place, which was responding to a tacit question underlying my

research and which is at the centre of identity politics: *How can we engage with but at the same time move beyond life-held narratives which have shaped our identities and concepts of self?*

At what point does refusing to acknowledge the importance of difference become a callous denial of human diversity, and when does stressing it become an indulgent and insidious obstruction to what could potentially unite us? (Younge, 2010, p.5)

The participants spoke of their experience of seeing their memories ‘in a totally different way’ through the writing, which is how I began to experience my memories through writing *Skipworth Street*. Here in my own creative life writing process I experienced something that I struggled to do as a filmmaker. The writing connected me to what could be called ‘inner attire’, which was far more colourful and textured than the ‘outer garment’.

7.4 The Embodiment of my Identity

The workshop participants spoke about the surprises their writing produced, as the creative process unearthed some of the ‘many layer of his or her own truth’ (Chandler, 1990, p.25). It was in Sharpes’ front room that I was to be confronted with my own. Elbow refers to ‘lucky or achieved moments’ when writers:

manage to find words which seem to capture the rich complexity of the unconscious or words which, though they don’t *express* or *articulate* everything that is the unconscious, nevertheless somehow seem to *resonate*

with or have behind them the unconscious as well as the conscious' (Elbow, 2000, p.206; his emphasis).

As I wrote the scene with the firework coming into Sharpes' home, the words resonated as if I had finally freed something inside of me. I felt an intense release in my body, as if I'd been holding my breath (for years) and had finally exhaled. Gendlin's idea of bodily felt sense speaks to this experience: 'With the emergence of such a single bodily sense comes relief'. Writing within a contained imaginative space provided a way for me to convert my feelings into language and by doing this it offered access to parts of me that I had not connected to before: 'From being unclear and closed, [the felt sense]has shifted and opened' (Gendlin, 1996, pp.20, 34). I was not prepared for the implicit nature of the creative process that lay under such a boulder of life-held narratives. Sharpes's mother tells her: 'it's not because of you'(p.215). These few words revealed an intense feeling born out of guilt which I had known as a child and since forgotten. It was a feeling that I had never spoken to anyone until it revealed itself on the page. I was aware far too young that my mother was open to ridicule and abuse because her child's skin was brown.

One of the participants spoke of their writing as 'a floodgate that was opened' (I13.12). I began to have a greater understanding of what he meant as my own floodgate opened, revealing feelings that I had locked away deep within, and my writing surprisingly served as the key to liberate them. Sharpes is able to express feelings I was unable to as a child:

I sink into the soft pudginess of her body. I inhale her one-dab-a-day Chanel Number Five as she kisses me on my forehead. I hold on tightly as if by instinct I know that her ample flesh is only on lease and far too soon her soft skin will be just sitting on bone (p.213)

As the writer I was able to connect to a personal experience and evoke emotions that were attached to that situation, but at the same time create distance, because it had now become Sharpes's memory and I was seeing it from her point of view. Entering the process of reflexivity where I moved back and forth between experiencing the self as the other whilst also keeping connected to a familiar sense of self opened a dialogic space that allowed for a more complex and multi-dimensional self-narrative to emerge. I began to experience a sense of inner space 'which was not restricted or refining....Transformed interior space is expansive' (hooks, 1999, p.190).

Through my creative life writing, just like the experience of the participants, the pages revealed the expansive space of my interior world which 'mirrored' my psyche back to me. I experienced this, in Gendlin's sense, as engaging with an embodied sense of self. In a Bakhtinian sense, although he does not talk about embodiment in the same way; embodiment for Bakhtin means embodied in a person, not a felt body, his concept of the dialogic relationship offered an important perspective to understanding my experience of the creative process. It helped me not only to articulate the 'authoritative discourses' I had internalised, but also to reformulate the external discourse and, by doing this, to create an internally persuasive discourse that was

more my own, or at least ‘half-[mine] and half someone else’s’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p.345), which enabled me to move beyond the restraints of a life-held narrative.

7.5 Conclusion

When [she] is able to transform [her] personal crisis into a work of art the writer has taken possession of the thing that has threatened to possess [her] (Chandler, 1990, p.23).

The more I trusted the creative process the more organically the stories came forth. Ultimately this meant that I began to trust and authorize the voice from within, which connected me to a deep source of creativity. Similar to the participants’ creative life writing experience I began to realise how tightly woven into my own psyche were the external narratives that had become integral to my identity. With my writing practice I had created a space such as I had facilitated in the workshop, where I was able to stop thinking for a while and pay attention to things that were more subtle and that I needed to articulate. Just as for the participants, the change I identified in me by mindfully fictionalising my memories and experiences was that I moved towards a more embodied sense of myself and found that these embodied memories felt more authentic. I was able to speak with a voice with greater authority, which directly impacted writing my thesis.

Toni Morrison says that as black women it is important that we become the agents of our stories, as we are rarely in the position to tell them. Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche warns against the ‘danger of the single story’:

All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story (Adiche, 2009, online).

Skipworth Street allowed me to connect to the many stories that made me:

Language in its way enables us to become agents rather than victims of circumstance - to enact rather than simply to suffer change (Chandler, 1990, p. 41).

Writing from a child's perspective allowed for stories to flow from the imagination before reason was embedded into the psyche. I was able to play with this idea of imaginative space as the girls contemplate contacting 'old man Canavan', who has been 'identified' as being a member of the IRA by the 'messages' Shelly's dad receives when he has been drinking. In the imaginative space 'girl power and friendship' can be recognised, which supports their desire to enact emancipatory processes, but at the same time it reveals the challenges of the 'daily realities' of (re)negotiating multi[cultural and emotional spaces that exist within ourselves, groups and communities. When Sharpes sees Nazy in her hijab: 'I said it wasn't a big deal but it was huge'; it was also difficult for her friend: 'without warning tears trickle from Nazy's eyes'(p.218). However Nazy also took agency from her new experience:

‘I still think we should sort’em out.’ Angie says even more determined.

‘I agree,’ says Nazy.

‘But you’re wearing your fingymajig now,’ I say.

‘And!’ Nazy responds letting both Angie and me know that she is still the same friend (p.224).

As Natalie Goldberg says:

At any point, we can step outside our frozen selves and our ideas and begin fresh. That is how writing is. Instead of freezing us it frees us (Goldberg, 1986, p.32).

I entered the creative writing process similar to the participants in the workshop, not knowing where it was going to take me but as characters and plots emerged on the page I was compelled to follow. I had underestimated the holding environment; sitting in the front room in *Skipworth Street* I felt safe which enabled me to play and take risks. It was as if my imagination served as a torch, giving a bright light to memories that had been overshadowed. What was most surprising about writing this story was that I unexpectedly connected to a period in my life which I had previously avoided but instead of just finding sorrow, I also found laughter, friendship, courage and resilience.

The space for the imagination surprises you and for me that is the most freeing of all.

Chapter 8

Creative Life Writing for Personal Development in a Psycho-Socio-Political Context

The tales and the process of making them suggest the possibility of a unity between aesthetic imagination and the social political process and action.

(Ford Smith, 2005, p.xv)

One of the main aims from the beginning of my research has been to discuss identity and embodiment in the context of a psycho-social (psychology and the socio-political) framework. Creative Writing for Personal Development prioritises the psychological perspective and socio-political views are secondary, if there at all. By locating my study in a specific socio-cultural location, a hair salon/barbershop that caters for Caribbean, African, Asian, and European heritage I aim to open the discussion of CWPD. Identity politics recognises an internalisation process which involves the integration of attitudes, values, beliefs and the opinions of others into one's own identity or sense of self; the discourse however, gravitates towards external factors as primary contributors to forming identities and concepts of self. Thinking more about the body is another level for the socio-political, as the focus shifts to not just what is happening outside a person but also what is happening inside.

In the field of identity studies, researchers are increasingly turning to

analysis of feeling practice to understand people's allegiances and investments, and the activities of categorising, narrating, othering, differentiating and positioning (Wetherell, 2012, p.10).

By engaging with both perspectives, the psychological and the socio-political, I demonstrate my commitment to a study that is grounded in the critical-creative dialogue between inner and external realities.

8.1 The Key Change in Participants' Sense of Self

What I found from the writers' experience in the workshops (and also from my own creative life writing practice) was the invaluable process of being able, on the one hand, to gain closer access to their deeply felt personal material and, on the other hand, to gain sufficient creative distance from it to transform it into creative writing. Celia Hunt calls this "accessing and objectifying personal material" (Hunt, 2001, p.xxx). The workshops helped the participants to let go of some of the labels, if only temporarily, and to gain more sense of confidence and voice to speak or write from a sense of self that felt more authentic. The writers began to identify and experience different aspects of self as they began to trust their feelings more and develop a more multi-faceted sense of self. It soon became evident that the role of the body was critical to this process. The writers, by increasingly becoming aware of bodily feelings and emotions, were able to 'let go' of implicit life narratives and explore more subtle felt experiences on the periphery of their consciousness. Peter Elbow advocates for writers to get in touch more with a felt sense, the felt authenticity of the body and the body's relationship with the world because 'the body shows more of ourselves than the conscious mind does' (Elbow, 2000, p.208).

8.2 The Embodiment of the Emancipatory Process

One of the reasons that *Lionheart Gal*/Sistren Theatre Collective became a key case study in my research was because the project offered another dimension to the role of the body outside of a psycho-dynamic context. Honor Ford-Smith says that the stories of *Lionheart Gal* drew from a Caribbean legacy of passing on tales of freedom found in the lives of ordinary women. These stories themselves held a ‘creative power of rebel consciousness’, suggesting that stories buried inside ourselves held a hidden power which would enable us to fight oppression and acquire freedom. Ford-Smith claims the body holds knowledge that has been suppressed and that this knowledge is essential to emancipatory processes. She drew from a legacy of Caribbean tales such as priestess Ni that spoke of hidden powers within a woman’s body; powers that were used in the past to overthrow the colonial government: ‘the tale is offering a greater truth – one which states the female body brings forth life’ (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.xvi).

Sistren’s goals were aligned with the post-colonial struggle for independence. It was in this political environment that Ford-Smith advocated for radical change to the parameters of socio-political structures. For Ford-Smith to acquire freedom there had to be a ‘readjustment’ to one’s understanding of the ‘rules of resistance and the limits of power’ because ‘those who win struggles rarely do so by confronting the oppressor on his own terms’ (Ford-Smith, 1986, p.xv). Audre Lorde shared similar ideas:

For the master’s tool will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but we will never bring about genuine change (Lorde, 1984, p.112).

Ford-Smith (1986) and Lorde (1984) argued that for ‘genuine change’ to take place we (women of the African diaspora) had to ‘come more into touch with our own ancient, non-european consciousness ... learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of power’ (Lorde, 1984, p.37). Both writers located the path of freedom in the realms of the imaginative space, drawing attention to our feelings and emotions; they highlighted the role of the body as an essential frontier for change.

Rediscovering the meaning of signs and images within tales like these is to restore the centrality of imaginative expression and beauty to human experience. It is to release the power contained in the images and to create a basis for political action (Ford-Smith, 1986/2005, p.xvi).

According to Robert Strongman it is the rebellious spirit of Nanny (Ni) which is found in the stories of *Lionheart Gal*, such as ‘Rebel Pickney’; the central character represents ‘the very personification of Jamaican revolt against tyranny’ (Strongman, 2003, p.48). The story opens with a statement: ‘All my life we live in fear’ (Ford-Smith, 1986, p.3). Her childhood is marked by brutal beatings from her father and other members of the family: ‘Him strip we naked and tie we up pon a big breadfruit tree...In di evening me get conscious and feel di result a di beating (ibid, p.8). The story reveals how Betty survives a childhood of violence and abuse and eventually overcomes her ‘fear of patriarchal reprimand and punishment’ (ibid, p.6). When Betty becomes a mother to her own child she is determined not to treat her children the way

she was brought up: ‘Me no beat my pickney...me no waan grow dem like me’ (ibid, p.17).

Ford-Smith purports stories such as Ni ‘form a kind of bedrock of consciousness of female resistance among Jamaicans’. Despite historians refuting Ni’s existence and reducing her to a mythical character, the stories of her possessing magical powers continue to survive and are passed on through generations. Ford-Smith contends the ‘image-laden tales live on’ and continue to offer ‘an inspirational code for struggles of women’. For her ‘the record keepers of the colonial era may colonise our memory’ but they are unable to suppress the power that is held in the images and therefore it is these images which create a bases for ‘redefining political action (Ford-Smith, 1986, p.xv).

8.3 The Imaginative Space as a Potential Space

Restoring imaginative expression as a means of political action is at the heart of my concerns in this research, and I discuss this further below. But first it is important to say that underlying the exploration of imaginative space(s) in my research is the understanding that memory is reconstructed: ‘the past is continuously modified by the experiences of the present and the “self” who is doing the remembering’ (King, 2000, p.32) and therefore memory is always using imagination.

D.W. Winnicott refers to the imaginative space as an intermediate area of experience also known as ‘the “potential” space where inner reality and outer reality meet’ (Winnicott, 1971, p.3). For Winnicott it is an experience that is established during the early stages of a child’s life when it starts experiencing itself as separate from the

mother, which he refers to as the 'transitional stage'. The child is gradually able to be alone because the unconscious has become imbued with the presence of the mother; the child has gained a sense of benign inner presence. The mother's presence exists particularly in 'transitional objects', such as toys, blankets and teddy bears which have been important parts of the relationship between them. For Winnicott this benign inner presence is imperative for the child as she enters into the potential space of exploration between her inner and outer worlds. The transitional objects that represent the outer world facilitate the first experience of independent play (Winnicott, 1971, p.130). The 'holding environment' is critical during this transitional stage: if the child does not feel safe, the experience of playing can be frightening and chaotic. For Winnicott the role of the mother is essential for providing her child with a feeling of wellbeing and security. The 'transition stage' of a child's self-development 'depends on the continuation of reliable maternal care or on the build-up in the infant of memories of maternal care' (Winnicott, 1965, p.44). A 'good enough holding' framework enables a child or adult to explore the external world which helps them to discover to a sense of being.

In the context of my research the salon and the workshop within the salon could be seen as a maternal holding environment that imbued a sense of safety for participants to play and explore. When I presented the exercise of introducing yourself through an item of clothes, amongst which were participants' favourite boots, necklaces and a charm bracelet, most of them were wearing their chosen item in the workshop, and some of the items continued to be worn throughout the creative writing series. The reasons offered included: 'it's my favourite'; 'it makes me feel good'; 'I wear it for good luck'. It was here that I began to see Winnicott's transitional objects in a

different context. It seemed that the participants had brought into the 'potential space' of the workshop their own transitional objects, which enabled them to feel safe enough to explore their inner worlds and outer realities.

It is with this stream of thinking that I began to see the collective identity also like a transitional object, something that members of the group brought into the workshop; the racial and cultural identity installed a collective sense of safety and belonging. In the early stages of the workshop the shared narrative between the participants provided a key component in their ability to let go in the creative process.

It is important at the start of a creative writing group to establish a 'safe group experience ... from which people can then move with confidence into their own individual space and writing' (Thompson, 2006, p.37). My aim was to achieve this in my own workshop by using poetic and fictional techniques as guides for the writers to engage with their private and individual space. All the different elements - the exercises and the group work and the holding environment - generate frames for thinking and feeling, where participants can experience a fuller, more embodied knowledge of self. I have begun to understand embodiment as a holding space; a holding space which is not the shape of the physical body but more of a felt sense, the emotional and bodily felt dimension of thinking processes. It is this perceptual-emotional dimension that brings inner and outer worlds together and helps us gravitate towards a feeling of wholeness.

Winnicott's idea of the potential space is a metaphor for how a person understands feeling connected to the outside world. It is within this creative space, the potential

space that the person begins to discover who they are; the individual begins to establish 'Here I am. What is inside of me is me and what is outside of me is not me' (Winnicott, 1971, p.176). The workshop as a holding space was fundamental to the creative process, as it gave the writers permission to express themselves more readily in a way that felt right and offered tools with which to do this.

8.4 Key Change: Beyond the Starting Point

I witnessed the starting self-perceptions for most of the writers as being much more anchored in racial and cultural identity, as many of them spoke of being a black person in a white majority space. It was very much a collective narrative as most of the participants reiterated each other's experience of alienation, otherness and marginalisation. In the contained space of the salon and the workshop – a culturally diverse and safe enough space – the clients were able to feel that they did not have 'to [try] to fit in' (I2.17); it was 'an environment already set up for us' (I15.25); 'a setting that gives it normalcy' (I15.19). The creative life writing workshop provided a space that gave 'a state of permission to say the things we wouldn't otherwise say' (I15.15). In this environment people could temporarily stop thinking about implicit life-held narratives and focus on feeling and emotions which trigger memories that are more personal, and perhaps more authentic.

8.41 The Inheritance of Movement

An important aspect of the workshop was the engagement with life-held narratives; they were not ignored or denied. Through the group work the participants wrote and spoke in a myriad of ways about how movement and displacement of people was a narrative that they had inherited; they identified how the experience of migration had

impacted their personal lives. As one participant wrote:

I grew up being called [REDACTED]
 I understood it was a French name
 In Scotland where I grew ...
 One Day a white girl came
 Guess what,
 Her name is [REDACTED]!
 Oh but that's a darky's name!
 Came the horror stricken cry
 Not fit for you, oh my, oh my! (C6.1)

The creative life writing revealed an implicit reality of the writers' experience of crossing multiple socio-cultural spaces in their everyday lives, which was not always reflected when they first *spoke* of their experiences. This awareness of the multifacetedness of their lives, the interplay and oscillation between the different spaces, opened up the possibility of stepping outside existing conceptual frameworks, as it allowed for a broader and more complex recognition of self and the multi-spaced world they occupied. The radical openness of the workshop provided an important opportunity for people to reflect on their sense of self and how dominant discourses and self-concepts construct them. As the participants began to pay attention to their feelings and emotions they explored stories that stretched far beyond implicit narratives. One participant 'unexpectedly' wrote about her mother who, in her words, she 'didn't like very much' but unexpectedly in the midst of her writing practice she was reminded of a memory that was funny, in fact hilarious, and without warning her

words gave new light to a relationship darkened by sorrow and pain.

8.5 'Finding a Voice' in the Creative Writing Process

8.51 *The Gap v Inner Space*

What is a sincere voice? When we say that someone speaks or writes sincerely, we mean that they “really really believe” what they are saying. This means that they experience no gap at all between utterance and intentions, between words and available thoughts and feelings. But what about the gaps between utterance and *unavailable* or *unconscious* thoughts and feelings? (Elbow, 2000, p.206).

Elbow's reference to the gap between discourse and the unconscious is critical in my research as it relates to the nature of change experienced by participants in the workshop and also to my own experience of creative life writing. Elbow implies that a gap between utterance and intention is a problem, as it creates a disconnection between our words and our thoughts and feelings. Hunt refers to something similar when she writes about people who are new or 'not so new' to the writing process: 'they are not in their writing, there is an emotional distance between themselves and their words' (Hunt, 2001, p.97). This is pertinent to my study because, on the one hand, I am trying to create distance, a space for the writers to be able to objectify their material in order to see their story from a different perspective but, on the other hand, 'an emotional distance between themselves and their words' can produce writing which is 'empty and unfelt' (ibid). The central issue here is around distance, and

Hunt's distinction between 'unhelpful' or negative distance and positive distance is useful. In the context of my research I understand Elbow's notion of the *gap* as a negative distance, when we do not have a voice. When there is a gap between utterance and intention we fail to have a voice in the sense not only of the ability to imbue our creative writing with a felt world, but also of agency to speak in the world. Finding a voice is precisely about having generative space in the psyche, where utterance, intention, consciousness and language can come together, rather than a gap. The gap does not allow for those connections to take place, whereas the space which is a positive is a place where connections can be made.

The space is about opening up the space for the imagination and that gives it a certain authenticity because it is drawing on the felt sense (Gendlin, 1996); it is not just about the discourses, it is not just about writing that is outwardly directed, it is a dialogue between felt sense and language. This relates to one of the key changes that I and the participants have experienced in the creative life writing process: we have gone from there being a gap between intentions and utterance to feeling able to bring those utterances more spontaneously into being on the page. In other words, the workshops enabled the participants to engage in a creative life writing process that allowed a generative space to open between their words and unconscious or semi-conscious material. It is a space that allows new stories to emerge and new ways of seeing things.

The process of CWPD through facilitation, group work and fictional and poetic exercises not only creates a generative space but enables writers to learn to hold that space for the imagination. This involves becoming grounded in the body, in bodily

feeling, and trusting bodily feeling as the core of ourselves. Being grounded in the body means that identity becomes a fluid process open to change, rather than relying on identities rooted in social narratives or self-concepts. These narratives and self-concepts are safer, of course, because identifying with a community is a safer place to be, particularly if we feel threatened by the world or we do not have enough confidence to stand on our own; we want to be part of something that warrants a label. Again this is not easy work. Nikki Jackowska points out that: ‘The writer’s dilemma and the human dilemma are much the same: how to satisfy two apparently conflicting necessities, the need for both individuality and for belonging’ (Jackowska, 1997, p.79). The creative life writing process is about creating a space for the imagination and being able to tolerate the tensions that can consequently arise between an individual and the collective self, but also into that space often come things which are difficult, such as grief, loss, pain, regret, beating oneself up for not having achieved this or that, or for not being a good person. The space is important but the space is difficult and that’s why it is important to hold it as a facilitator, to hold people in that process and to implement tools which hold it, like the writing and the group work.

8.6 Creating a Generative Space in the Workshop

The creative life writing workshops provided an opportunity for the participants to put their personal experience out onto the page, as if putting oneself onto the page. I recognised that it was the things we carry inside of us, usually all muddled up together, that can be brought out and expressed through the creative writing process, as the participants found: ‘there is something very powerful to be able to express oneself’ (I30.8); ‘I think it’s a good way to examine different aspects of yourself’ (I29;14). It was not so much that they were coming to the workshop with a singular

sense of identity, but with an unexplored ‘mishmash’ of things. The workshop provided a space for people to ‘unpack’ their identities, as it were, to put an array of personal experience on the page, separate these things out, rearrange and renew them, and then put them back in again, so that they might work together a little bit better. The fictional poetic exercises helped the writers to fictionalise their memories and see their story from different points of view, through the eyes of the characters on the page. Using the voices of other characters unearthed emotions and characteristics of themselves previously concealed. Author Annie Lamott says: ‘We write to expose the unexposed’ (Lamott, 1995, p.198). The group work enabled participants to trust their creative process, allowing them to abandon their need for certainty and security and find out what they have to say in the course of the writing itself .

One participant’s creative writing process presented a reality from a different perspective; she recognised that growing up in a children’s home was far better than living with her mother, which previously she had always described as perfect: ‘ I grew-up in a [children’s] home ...some of the experiences were fantastic, within the walls was where you opened up this whole wide world’ (I56.26); ‘I wanted a mother and she wanted to see a black woman defiant and I was needy and that clashed’ (I58.9). Through the creative writing practice the participants recognised the importance of objectifying themselves, as they got in touch more with their felt sense.

Metaphors emerged spontaneously in participants’ creative writing, giving them a language for speaking about aspects of their experience which they previously did not have an adequate way of framing. There was often a direct correlation between the themes which emerged out of the participants’ writings and the themes that surfaced

in the group discussion, such as the notion of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’. Some of the participants spoke of the salon as ‘a second home’, suggesting a space that felt safe and right. The writing revealed a far more complex idea of home which was not always secure, reliable, or feeling right. Writers spoke of their experience as being a ‘black man or women’ yet their writing was mostly absent of the naming of their skin colour, instead there was an intense burrowing to surface memories that had been kept in the shadows, to pursue their imagination that brought unfamiliar material to the forefront of their consciousness. A racing car for one of the writers became a metaphorical space that allowed the writer to feel beyond the restraints of his everyday life: ‘This was a test of speed and a wideness without limitations...it was a freedom at its best’ (C13.12). The metaphors gave the participants a language for making sense of their experience; allowing them to express themselves beyond the use of everyday language in order ‘to fit the unconventional and extraordinary’ (Chandler, 1990, p.4). The metaphors served to be a far more significant holding space than I had anticipated, as they often created continuity with the writers’ inner experience:

Metaphors are a great language tool, because they explain the unknown in terms of the known. But they only work if they resonate in the heart of the writer (Lamott, 1995, p.77).

For Lamott metaphors which ‘work’ are not arbitrary; they capture the essence of the ‘heart’ suggesting metaphor originates from the body. Metaphors are an important way of conceptualising our experiences and giving us a new understanding of them. They determine ‘what is real for us’ by giving new meaning to our past and to what

we know and believe (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.146). According to Lakoff and Johnson metaphors originate from bodily experiences and therefore reveal material from our deep inner world.

The participants revealed the importance of being immersed in the creative writing process or, as Winnicott describes it, 'lost in play' (Winnicott, 1971, p.18), in order to be able to explore beyond their familiar grounding. I facilitated the workshop as if a 'designated playground' for writers to immerse themselves in their play on the page; presenting exercises such as freewriting and Alpha poems to help them keep the self-critic at bay and to write more spontaneously. For Winnicott it is only when the person is 'playing', a process that he perceives as being creative, 'that the individual discovers the self' (ibid, p.73). In his view a playful self removes blocks and inhibitions to growth; play is essential for people throughout their lives. He claims creativity starts with the child's first moves to separate both psychologically and physically from the mother and in his opinion is a necessary process of self-growth. The process of play allows the child to learn to play alone, but in the presence of someone; she has become imbued with the presence of her mother: 'Responsible adults must be available when children play; but this does not mean that the responsible person need enter into the child's playing' (Winnicott, 1971, p50). Winnicott says that play creates a dialogic relationship between the inner psyche and outer realities of an individual. It is through play that the child or adult is able to gain a more complex understanding of themselves; creativity allows us to integrate the many different dimensions of our personality. Winnicott believes avidly that by playing, we are being creative, and it is essential because creativity 'belongs to being alive' (Winnicott, 1971, p.91). Lamott's idea of a creative writer echoes the

sentiments of Winnicott when she states that being a writer is to ask how alive am I willing to be (Lamott, 1995, p.236).

Through my facilitation, which imbued in the group a sense of ‘trust and confidence’ (Winnicott, 1971, p.138), the workshop provided a space for spontaneous play, enabling the writers to be immersed in the creative process. As they did so, they began to be open to change rather than closed to the experience. Natalie Goldberg refers to this process as going:

to the place where energy is unobstructed by social politeness or the internal censor, to the place where you are writing what your mind actually sees and feels, not what it *thinks* it should see or feel’ (Goldberg, 1986, p.8).

8.61 Facilitating an Understanding of the Creative Life Writing Process

By introducing the participants to poetic and fictional techniques and various literary practices, I was offering the group ways of thinking about their own experience from different perspectives. I brought into the group conceptual ideas from my Master’s degree, a diverse selection of texts that crossed literary genres, geographical and socio-cultural spaces: writers included those of Korean, American, South African, British Guyanese and Indian nationalities. I drew from my personal experience of story-making as a documentary filmmaker living across three continents. The ideas and concepts introduced to the group offered a language and understanding for writers to articulate their own creative process. The theoretical work was to become as important as the creative work in order for the writers to understand and engage more effectively with the creative process, as I show below. The theories introduced to the group served as another holding framework, a conceptual framework for

understanding what they were experiencing, enabling them to articulate their own creative process. In this way we see how theory and practice were coming together. This combination of theory and practice depicts another dimension of the participants' experience of the workshops.

The theories that I had introduced in the workshop resonated strongly for the writers, as is obvious from their discussion in their post-workshop interviews of the ideas of 'letting go' and 'holding space'. These ideas felt authentic for making sense of their felt experience. It raised the question why did these theories work so well for them and also for me because I was introduced to the same ideas on my Masters course. Is there something perhaps phenomenologically correct about these theories? In other words they are not just any theories and ideas but ones which actually get very close to the real bodily experience? I would argue that they are and that is why they made sense and had such an impact on the participants and myself:

Just having that space to listen was very valuable because (a) people are saying things that are relevant to me, and (b) watching them go through their own processes was very transformative of naming and then letting go of something, is really helpful I think. It was quite cathartic. It's not just a one way communication, it's not like a kind of hypodermic needle model of communication where they transmit and you receive, it's like you're actually involved in some other more complex interaction, you know what I mean, so it's not just you say something, I absorb it, I assimilate it [...] it's more diffused communication. And I think that is very interesting and I think it's very non-rational. That's why I'm finding it very hard to articulate; it's very

non-rational (I76.22).

The extract above portrays an experience of a writer in the workshops where she is actively engaging with a process that Gendlin refers to as moving ‘between thinking and bodily sensing’ (Gendlin, 1996, p.26), both of which, he claims, are required when trying to articulate a bodily felt sense experience. For this participant the workshop provided new concepts which offered further self-understanding.

Offering new ways of thinking about experiences within a space for the imagination allows for a dialogic relationship to take place between inner and outer knowledge. She said: ‘it’s not like a kind of hypodermic needle model of communication’; it was not another authoritative discourse to be internalised. The facilitation and group work encouraged the writers to pay attention to their feelings and emotions and, by doing so, they engaged with the creative and critical texts and exercises on the basis of whether it *felt right* for them or not: ‘it’s not just you say something, I absorb it, I assimilate it’. The writer refers to her engagement with ‘a more diffused communication’; she began to explore a way of experiencing that was more subtle. Gendlin offers an explanation of this by saying that ‘to find the bodily sense she does have to turn her attention away from the old information, away from what is clear’, and the writer’s description of the process as ‘non-rational’ echoes this. The bodily knowledge is very much a part of the thinking process and, when acknowledged, it ‘enables people to locate experiences they would otherwise have missed (Gendlin, 1996, p.2).

8.7 Identity Politics and Embodiment

8.71 The Authentic Self versus the Self that Feels Authentic

The push for authenticity runs deep in identity politics and corrodes from the inside. At its most powerful and insidious, it creates a form of self-policing whereby everyone assumes that everyone else is meeting an abstract ideal standard apart from them. At its root, it insists that who we are necessarily determines what we do and how we think (Younge, 2010, p.101).

Paul Gilroy says that ‘identity seems to afford a means to acquire certainty about who one is and where one fits’ (Gilroy, 1997, p.312). Identities offer placement, a space to understand, engage and develop one’s concept of self and engagement in the world. Although identity politics has to a certain degree moved away from the notion of a fixed essence, the concept of the authentic self is a remnant of the notion of fixity that continues to shadow identity politics. Writer and feminist Rebecca Walker, speaks of her personal experience of breaking away from the notion of the authentic feminist:

The parts of myself that didn’t fit into my ideal were hidden deep down deep, and when I faced them for a fleeting moment they made me feel insecure about my values and my identity (Walker, 1995, p.xx).

For Gilroy identity stops becoming a process of self-actualisation and ‘becomes instead a *thing* - an entity or an object - to be possessed and displayed’ (Gilroy, 1997, p.307). Zadie Smith says: ‘I love to be female and I love to be black’ (Smith, 2009, p.142), but also refers to the pressures to ‘keep it real’ as ‘a sort of prison cell, two feet by five. The fact is, it’s too narrow. I just can’t live comfortable in there’ (ibid, p.143). Daniel Albright says that identities serve a purpose: ‘life would be intolerable without some predicate, some ballast of identity’ (Albright, 1994, p.21) that offers grounding to our understanding of ourselves. If, however, identification becomes a fixed mechanism, it serves to diminish and demean the complexity of an individual.

Margaret Wetherell says that in recent years ‘memory, narrative, emotion and affect’ (Wetherall, 2010, p.3) have contributed significantly to gaining an understanding of the self that is both constructed and given. In her view, people’s ‘names and looks’ are ‘translated into a felt sense of personal place, continuity and location and into accounts of “who one is”’. For Younge the complexity of modern identities highlights Wetherell’s ‘felt sense of a personal space’; he captures the experience of generations of Britons who attempt to reconcile the incongruities that lie within the formation of how the self is identified:

The girls used to consider themselves Pakistani, until they visited Pakistan. [This change was] internal. [But] they could not consider themselves British because the external world told them they weren’t. So their identity became “British Muslim”. Not a religious revival but an establishment of an identity (author’s parenthesis, Younge, 2010, p.147).

It is the notion of ‘modern identities’ which surfaced in the participants’ writing and group work. They spoke of the ‘limits’ and ‘restrictiveness’ of their own identities and how their writing revealed contradictions and ambiguities that lay within. Identity politics since its conception in the 1960s has broadened its parameters, redirecting our attention not only to how we think about ourselves but possibly more importantly how we *feel* about ourselves, located in our attempt to reconcile the incongruities between inner and outer realities. For Rebecca Walker the world has changed and requires fluidity in the recognition of personal and social interactions:

For us the lines between Us and Them are often blurred, and as a result we find ourselves seeking to create identities that accommodate ambiguity and our multiple personalities (Walker, R. 1995, p.xxxiii)

8.72 *The Complexity of Conviviality*

Gilroy revisits the whole idea of identity by introducing the concept of *conviviality*. The ‘convivial culture’ describes the daily interaction of different races as a reality in British cities. He contends that conviviality creates a ‘distance’ from the idea of ‘identity’, because it engages with the multiple and complex identities that exist in contemporary urban communities. He uses the term to describe ‘the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere’ (Gilroy, 2005, p. xv). In a sense Gilroy’s notion of ‘conviviality’ resuscitates terms such as ‘multiculturalism’, ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘humanism’ – which he suggests have become fixed fixtures that are unrealistic in a contemporary reality: ‘the radical openness that brings conviviality alive makes a nonsense of closed, fixed, and reified

identity and turns attention to the unpredictable mechanisms of identification' (ibid).

'Convivial' is defined as: 'relating to social events where people can eat, drink, and talk in a friendly way with others' (Merriam-Webster, online). This is precisely how Gilroy is using the term. In discussing his notion of conviviality he refers to many parts of Britain that are multicultural. In his view, particularly amongst the young in urban areas, race has almost become irrelevant; there is an ease or a 'friend[lier] way' towards difference; it is a social interaction which is as accepted as 'eating and drinking'. Gilroy's notion of conviviality does not, however, imply the 'absence of race or the triumph of tolerance', but that virtue lies in: 'the radical openness that brings conviviality alive [which] makes a nonsense of closed, fixed, and reified identity and turns attention to the unpredictable mechanisms of identification' (Gilroy, 2005, p.xv). For the rest of the population in his opinion the issue of race has become more prevalent especially since the the bomb attacks in America in September 2001 which has instigated a fear of Muslim terrorists; fear of the 'black' gun crime, fear of asylum seekers and enmity to new eastern European immigrants.

For Gilroy it is necessary that we acknowledge that the residue of the colonial past still exists in contemporary British society and continues to impact the way we see race, gender and class within a hierarchal framework: 'These problems were not left behind when Europe's empire were overthrown or faded away' (ibid, p.7). He says that behind terms such as 'multiculturalism' there is a denial or ignoring of the past, so he proposes a 'remaking of the nation's relationship with its imperial past' (ibid, p.xii). Gilroy argues that the demise of racial hierarchy can only be achieved if we look forthrightly at colonial history so that we recognize the complexities of a

contemporary society.

Gilroy acknowledges the paradox of achieving conviviality amidst dominant discourses of colonialism; on the one hand he suggests a society that recognizes and endorses difference and diversity and on the other he understands that a 'focus on racial difference obstructs empathy and makes ethnocentrism inescapable' (ibid. p.63). This speaks to the complexity of identity politics, highlighting the issue of how race or any discourses of discrimination can be transcended in a feasible and useful way without disregarding their power. I find this very useful in understanding the context of my research, but I agree with Theresa Enright that Gilroy's concept of conviviality 'does not give us a clear path towards a future unencumbered by race', as he falls short of explaining how conviviality can be achieved:

Although [Gilroy] provides a cohesive thread that links the colonial past with the present, the link to a cosmopolitan future is more tenuous and he does not clearly explain how to achieve his project. He provides us with a glimpse of what conviviality means, but does not venture to explain how to bring it about (Enright, 2009, online)

8.73 Conviviality from Theory to Practice

The recognition of a complex British identity does not take away the challenge of negotiating and navigating the various cultural, psychological and socio-political spaces that individuals move between. Regardless of the many identities, whether engendered by family or society, there are elements of British identity which tend to drive us towards fixity, because of labels or the way our parents and society impacts

our development of self-understanding and in the process we lose our fluidity and our ability to be multiple. The cultural identities of the participants were multiple, yet most experienced themselves in a way that Stuart Hall describes as an identity that is comprised by the acknowledgment of self through *difference*. As one participant shared: ‘I don’t think that you ever get used to never being in the majority’ (I39.9). When I asked the writers about their experience of other creative writing groups, those that attended spoke about their feelings of otherness, which was attributed mainly to being in a white majority space. This raised the issue of experiencing a black identity and the impact it had on the self. The idea that we have a self which is a fixed thing is experiential. The fact that we are now discovering that it is not quite like that does not change that fact that for most people that is how they experience it and will continue to do so. The idea that the self is a process is counterintuitive. In the creative life writing group the participants experienced a process of trying to understand how we understand a self which is not fixed, but fluid and constantly in process.

Gilroy’s concept of conviviality is a useful way of thinking about my research project. I see my study as a way of putting Gilroy’s theory of conviviality into practice, which offers one possible answer to Enright’s question of ‘how to bring it about’ (Enright, 2009, p.1). I view the workshops in the salon as a ‘convivial space’ – a space that enabled writers to transcend discourses of discrimination and other life-held narratives in a useful way without ignoring their power. It was space of openness and fluidity, where people were at ease with others and could talk in a friendly way with others, to refer back to Merriam-Webster’s definition, and faced difference within themselves as well as in relation to each other. I would also liken the creative page that I see as a

holding space for the imagination to a convivial space. Similar to Bakhtin's idea of the novel as a dialogical, multi-voiced space, the creative process allows the writer to engage with the many different voices of the self, the *multi-voicedness* of the self. He suggests that the creative process allows a dialogical relationship between the 'authoritative discourses' and the 'internally persuasive discourse'. He describes the internally persuasive voice as being 'half ours and half someone else's' (Bakhtin 1981, p.345), referring to the internalization of the external voice. Bakhtin states that in order to engage in the dialogic relationship on *equal terms*, the internally persuasive voice would have to 'liberate itself from the authority of the other's discourse' (ibid, p.348).

In a Bakhtinian sense Gilroy's idea of conviviality recognises the power of 'authoritative' discourses and seeks not necessarily equality between all 'discourses' but to engage with and go beyond the confines of them. The idea of dialogue between external discourses and internally persuasive discourses can be linked to Gendlin's felt sense, in that the felt sense, I would suggest, is an important component of how voice comes about in the relation to the reformulation of external discourses internally. My research understands that we are socially constructed, because we are born into a society which has language and frames the world in particular ways, but we are also learning from writers, theorists and psychotherapists such as Lorde, Ford-Smith, Gendlin and Winnicott who claim that we are not *only* text; there is more to us than that:

Compared to what we can usually think ... what comes from the bodily sensed edge of awareness is characteristically more intricate and

multifaceted and yet also more open to new possibilities (Gendlin, 1996, p.2)

Gilroy's reference to 'conviviality alive' suggests movement, fluidity, and if the concept is unpacked (although he is not relating it to the body), it is helpful. It relates to Winnicott's notion of creativity, which 'belongs to being alive'; it is a fluid and active engagement of individuals and their relationship with the outside world (Winnicott, 1971, p.91). Conviviality involves feeling and emotion; it means we are easier in our body and we are able to express emotion. Gendlin describes the bodily felt sense as 'a relief as if the body is grateful' (Gendlin, 1996, p.20), which also could be described as convivial, easier in our body – for example, when writers are able to express what they feel. I know when it happens to me in my writing process, when I manage to achieve what Seamus Heaney calls 'getting your feeling into your words' (Heaney, 1980, p.43); it is as if I have exhaled from the deepest part of me, because the words on the page feel full of me, a me I had only just discovered but felt I had been carrying for a very long time.

I view the creative life writing workshops as a convivial space because, as the participants in the workshops paid attention to their feelings and emotions, they were able to acknowledge and negotiate difference and multiplicity rather than conforming to fixed hegemonic ideals. Gendlin's felt sense feels much more appropriate to the experience that I have seen happening amongst the participants in the workshop and also in my own experience. My research shows that embodiment, which, in my understanding of it, focuses on bodily feelings and emotions, is not separate from identity. It allows for a more dialogical relationship between different parts of self,

our different identities; we are multiple rather than fragmented, and if we are loosely multiple we can move between these different dimensions of ourselves.

8.74 Zora Neale Hurston and Gendlin's *Bodily Felt Sense of Self*

A good example of the relationship between felt sense and socio-political construction in identity is provided by novelist and anthropologist, Zora Neale Hurston. She wrote an essay: 'How it Feels to be Coloured Me' (1928). I read this essay before I knew anything about the *bodily felt sense* but I was drawn to the title; she wrote about how she *felt* about herself as being intrinsic to her identity. Although Hurston wrote on African-American culture, her contribution to the Harlem Renaissance (a cultural movement that spanned the 1920s and 30s) has been criticised by fellow African-Americans, who highlight 'her flat refusal to politicize her early writings by adopting the prevailing notions driving African-American social reform' (Aberjhani, 2003, p.165). It was not until Alice Walker wrote an article in 1975 for *Ms Magazine*, 'In Search of Neale Hurston', that her writing was recognised and celebrated for its landmark contribution to American literature and commitment to African diaspora culture. Walker recognised Hurston's ambivalent attitude to 'race' as a resource for thinking in less rigid ways about 'race' than was then characteristic of black cultural politics.

In her essay Hurston articulates embodiment in relation to identity at a time when the African-American experience was examined mainly within a socio-political framework and almost four decades before the conception of 'identity politics' (1960's). This ground-breaking essay broadens and endorses an understanding of self, as it explores her own constructed and embodied senses of being 'colored':

When I disembarked from the river-boat at Jacksonville, she was no more. It seemed that I had suffered a sea change. I was not Zora of Orange country any more. I was now a little colored girl. I found it out in certain ways. In my heart as well as in the mirror (Hurstun, 1928/1979, p.153).

For Hurston, leaving where she grew up, ‘exclusively a coloured town’, and moving to a city that included white residents, introduced her to another identity, ‘that was not Zora’. It is here that Dubois would probably identify the experience of the beginnings of a *double consciousness*, the Zora that she knew and the ‘colored girl’ she had become. Fanon says: ‘as long as the black man [woman or child] is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others’ (Fanon, 2000, p.326). Hurston recognises the internalisation process of becoming ‘coloured’ and therefore does not reject the term, as it is now ‘in my heart as well’, but she also does not accept the dehumanising definition of it: ‘I’m not tragically colored ...Slavery is the price I paid...No one on earth had a greater chance for glory’ (Hurstun, 1928, p.115). In her writing she shifts between referring to herself in the first and third person, using literary form to express her moving back and forth between the different dimensions of her identity. This is a good example of Hunt and Sampson’s understanding of the reflexive process:

we are both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ ourselves simultaneously and able to switch back and forth fluidly and playfully from one position to the other, giving ourselves up to the experience of the ‘self as other’ whilst

also retaining grounding in our familiar sense of self (Hunt & Sampson, 2006, p.4).

Hurston, by objectifying herself in her writing, was able to explore ‘a sense of standing outside [herself] and observing what [she was] doing and thinking’ (ibid), which allowed her to explore different dimensions of herself. In a Bakhtinian sense dialogue in the creative writing process is often referred to as ‘double voicing’, where more than one point of view is voiced in the single voice of the writer (Bakhtin, 1981). As Bakhtin says, when referring to the opportunity for dialogue when authors create characters out of themselves in a novel: ‘By objectifying myself (i.e. by placing myself outside) I gain the opportunity to have an authentically dialogic relation with myself’ (Bakhtin, 1986, p.122). The idea of double-voicing gives an alternative view to the theory of double consciousness where a person embodies two ideals that are in conflict with each other. Doubling the self in writing practice is a creative, reflexive process because, as we re-read our creative life writing, we are able to gain a sense of looking at ourselves from the outside and therefore seeing our own experience from another point of view. The writer in a personal development context can experience the creative writing process as engaging with two ‘selves’, which involves ‘not *getting rid* of the self but *doubling the self*’ (Hunt & Sampson, 2006, p.4). Hurston’s writing met with harsh critics such as author Richard Wright, who accused her of abandoning her ‘coloured’ heritage to appease white people. I would argue that Hurston’s exploration of her identity and concept of self was very much based on a dialogic relationship between her inner and outer realities, and therefore her expression of what it *felt* like to be her was not based on rejecting her ‘colored’ self but more of an attempt to engage with a multifaceted self.

Bakhtin says: ‘The importance of the struggle with another’s discourse, its influence in the history of an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p.348), and Hurston took on this ‘enormous’ task of engaging with multiple voices that she *felt* made up Zora. I suggested above that Bakhtin’s idea of dialogue between external discourses and internally persuasive discourses can be linked to Gendlin’s felt sense, as the way voice comes about in the internal reformulation of external discourses. For Gendlin in order to engage with a more whole and complex self one has ‘to turn away from one’s words and thoughts to attend in the body, or at least attend to feelings’ (Gendlin, 1996, p.19). Hurston expresses a bodily felt experience of self when listening to music in a jazz club. For her, the music connected to a personal narrative that transcended time and space. She trusted bodily feeling, which is a more fluid process and not so reliant on the fixity of social concepts. She felt liberated from the confinements of social constructs, which she says ‘made me American’ (Hurston, 1928, p.153). Her body responds to the music: ‘It constricts the thorax and splits the heart with its tempo’ (ibid, p.154), allowing Hurston to feel connected to a freer, more complex sense of self: ‘I dance wildly inside myself’ (ibid, p.154), an experience that Gendlin says can only take place ‘unmistakably in the body’ (Gendlin, 1996, p.20). Gendlin states that these sensations are not experienced on the periphery of the body: ‘It is sensed in the viscera or the chest or the throat, some specific place usually in the middle of the body’ (ibid, p.18). He says that to achieve the fullness of the felt sense the person has to enter inside the body which Hurston did; it is as if she surrendered her whole being to the feeling that emerged from the dance. Gendlin says that this feeling is more than emotion: ‘It comes, so to speak, “around” or “under” ... or “along with” the heart

pounding or as the physical quality the memory brings with it” (ibid, p.20). He believes that it is something that the person feels and when the right word or activity such as dancing is found, it creates a ‘relief as if the body is grateful for being allowed to form its way of being as a whole’ (ibid). As one comes to have a:

sense of this whole as an object there comes to be a difference between oneself and that sense. “It is there, I am here.” There is a concrete disidentification ... “Oh...I am not that!” ... When one has a felt sense, one becomes more deeply oneself (ibid, p.21).

This idea of Gendlin’s relates to Hurston’s essay because she was able to ‘disidentify’ and recognise ‘I am not that’: ‘I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood’ (Hurston, 1928, p.153), which means that she was able to engage with a deeper understanding of herself. She explored the multiplicity of her identity by engaging with the body, listening and redirecting her attention to what it felt like to be her.

The process moves between thinking and bodily sensing; both are required. But to find her bodily sense she does have to turn her attention away from the old information, away from what is clear. Instead she turns to what is felt unclearly around the clear feelings, and beneath them (subtle feelings more on the periphery of awareness) (Gendlin, 1996, p.26).

For Gendlin the felt sense is not just emotional, it is perceptual as well. He says that when it is opened up it ‘may contain thoughts, perceptions, memories, desires as well

as emotions' (ibid, p.59). Gendlin's felt sense and Hurston's dialogue with inner and outer realities feels completely appropriate to the experience that I have seen happening amongst the participants in the workshop and also in my own experience.

8.8 Writing for Personal Freedom

What do we become when we put down the scripts written by history and memory, when each person before us can be free of the cultural or personal narratives we've inherited or devised? When we ourselves can taste that freedom? (Walker, 2001, p.305)

One of the most striking aspects of the creative writing process for the participants and for me with my own writing was that our stories allowed us, if only temporarily, to 'put down the scripts' or, as I refer to them, the 'life-held narratives', that define our identity and sense of self. In a Bakhtinian sense it was the 'authoritative' discourses that we were tackling and tussling with in our writing. I had initially described my research project as being located in a 'post-post-colonial' British society – by this I meant that my research, centred in a contemporary, 'multicultural' urban city, represented a new conversation, *distant* from the ones held in the 'postcolonial era'. According to Ford-Smith, *Lionheart Gal*'s objective of freedom was clearly to dismantle the colonially-formed divisions of race and gender which figured prominently in the decolonisation process. The workshops in the salon had not set out to discuss race as a starting point, but from the beginning it became evident from the participants that it could not be ignored. As Gilroy (2005) points out, the racial remnants continue to exist from the colonial past; the key is not to be cemented by it.

It became evident in my research that the notion of freedom is not so much freedom from external oppression as freedom from the way external discourses have become part of one's own life-held narratives which one holds onto because it is safer to do so

The creative writing of the participants revealed a complex notion of personal freedom; 'the scripts' they chose to 'put down' or (re)write varied between each writer and expressed a combination of political and personal narratives they had 'inherited or devised' (Walker, 2001, p.305). The writers were able to engage with life-held narratives and at times the imaginative space allowed their stories to explore and experience different sides to their memories that they had not considered before. It was as if a space had opened up, allowing for new stories to emerge, and it was in this space that the writers were able to experience movement towards freedom.

There was something undoubtedly empowering for the participants to get what was going on inside them onto the page. The ability to objectify their felt experience definitely seemed a step towards personal freedom. It is not necessarily easy to determine the experience of change for the participants, but one of the changes that unquestionably did occur was that through the writing, group work and facilitation, a safe space was *held* for the exploration of the imagination, a space that allowed for engagement of the known and, even more, unknown material of the self, and there was something in this process that was fluid as well as focused which allowed the participants to expand their language to fit their own skin.

One of the key elements of CWPD is that writers give themselves permission to fictionalise their writing, allowing them to explore their memories through feeling and

emotion rather than focusing on factual details. For psychologist Robyn Fivush ‘emotions are a critical link between what happened in the past and what that event means for the self’ (Fivush, 1994, p.145). The creative life writing process required the participants to be more active with their imagination; based on the idea that if memory is ‘only a reconstructed version’, the imagination is always at work (Neisser, 1994, p.8). It is this use of the imagination which Morrison believes is the only way that the writer is ‘to yield up a kind of truth’ (Morrison, 1995, p.92) about the important parts of their life story. Entering into a space held for the imagination enables the writers to articulate unconscious material, allowing the felt sense to enter the thinking process.

In the introductory meeting for the research one of the prospective participants described ‘fiction as a lie and autobiographical writing as the truth’, which evoked Lejeune’s ‘autobiographical pact’ (1989), where the writer has made an unspoken contract with the reader to tell the truth of herself as far as she is able. One of the most surprising aspects for the participants was how much their creative writing revealed memories and experiences which they had forgotten. One writer in the workshop said: ‘what amazes me the most is that imagination is not just pure fiction at all’ (I33.9). Morrison says that her work as a fiction writer is often referred to ‘fantastical, or mythic, or magical, or unbelievable’ and she openly states: ‘I am not comfortable with these labels’. For Morrison what is important is that:

fiction is not random...the approach that’s the most productive and most trustworthy for me is the recollection that moves from the image to the text. Not from the text to the image (Morrison, 1995, pp.93-94).

Marion Milner also asserts the significance of the imaginative space and how it provides meaningful information for understanding our sense of self:

of course imagination itself does not spring from nothing, it is what we have made within us out of all our past relationships with what is outside, whether they were realised as outside relationships or not (Milner, 1950, p.28).

The group work and the poetic and fictional techniques gave the participants freedom to explore emotions and feelings relevant to their experience, within a contained and safe framework. In a Winnicottian sense the *holding* space enabled the writers to engage in a dialogical relationship between their inner and outer realities, thus exploring the incongruities that lay within. As the writers reread their work, discovering memories which had previously been unavailable to them, they began to acquire greater trust and appreciation for the creative process.

Lejeune suggests that when an author states that their fictional writing is more truthful than their autobiography, ‘they designate the autobiographical space in which they want us to read the whole of their work’ (Lejeune, 1989, p.27). The suggestion is that the writer has drawn attention to the gaps that exist in her work which need to be filled by the imagination of the reader. The author has intentionally ‘chosen to leave their autobiography incomplete, fragmented and full of holes and open’ (ibid, p.28). It is within these ‘holes’, intratextual space, which he refers to as autofiction, that exists the *phantasmatic pact* between author and reader (ibid). The text reveals ‘phantasms’ of the author, which allows the reader to gain insight into the writer. Similarly, in

CWPD when the writer enters a creative process where she is mindfully fictionalising her memories, conscious and unconscious come together on the page, revealing ‘personal phantasms’ that show things about herself she did not know before. The participants responded enthusiastically to their new discoveries of the self: ‘I marvelled about what I wrote and each step I had to pinch myself to say my God where did this come from’ (I19.16); ‘It’s given me a way of relooking at it again and being able to rewrite it in a way that I can step back from it’ (I42.17).

One of the aspects of the writing process which was unexpected for the participants and also for me in my own writing practice was connecting to subtle memories that had been overshadowed by life-held narratives, ‘significant memories’ which shape the way we identify ourselves and others (Neisser, 1994, p.1). One participant felt a ‘release’ when her stories revealed: ‘how funny [her mother] was. I completely forgot. I’ve been angry with her for so long’ (I47.10), and another participant remarked: ‘me and my brothers and sister used to get up to all sorts of mischief before she left’ (I10.18). Author Jill Kel Conway says of her experience of recollecting her memories that she unexpectedly connected to the joyful memories of growing up that had been eclipsed by dramatic events that had taken place:

I found that my memory was all the painful things. But in the process of telling that story I rediscovered so much that was beautiful about my childhood (Conway, 1995, p.172).

Similarly to Conway, the writing process for the participants was able to give ‘back the good things that [they] had forgotten’ (ibid. p.173).

The creative writing process opened a dialogical space where the writers, through engaging with multiple objectified self-characters on the page, were able to connect to the many different dimensions of themselves. There was something in this process that was not always easy but it was liberating. By engaging with a multifaceted self the writers were able to experience and authorise a sense of self beyond constructed labels that had been inherited or devised. The writers at times engendered their characters to act and speak in circumstances that in real life they may have found difficult to do, as a result the participants entered new terrain of the self that they had not dared to explore before.

What was undeniable in the writers' experience in the workshop was being able to find the words to express how they felt. The notion of 'finding a voice' in the creative writing process for the participants was intrinsic to their experience of finding personal freedom. The case study of *Lionheart Gal/Sistren* demonstrates that having a voice is critical to an empowering process, enabling women to become agentic in their own emancipatory process. A similar process took place in the research workshops. The salon represents a community of people, many of whom felt that their voices were not *heard* or authorised in mainstream society. Although the workshops, unlike *Sistren's*, were not about changing socio-political policy, they were nonetheless focused on helping people to find a voice on an individual level and, in doing so, they were more able to engage with discourses which shaped their identities and sense of self. The creative writing process allowed the participants in the workshops to speak with greater authority; to have a stronger sense of agency to act in the world. The participants spoke about 'the ability to talk about anything, there was freedom, it was

liberating' (I2.23); 'I have found my voice ...own unique voice' (I7.3); 'I experienced freedom because of digging, I excavated what I found so hard to express' (I57;12); 'It's on the page you have liberated yourself' (I61.18).

Ultimately the participants experienced that 'there is a power in the word' (I75.13), not any old word but the word that *fits*. One participant says: 'I keep going with the words and playing with the words until it fits right, until it describes feeling of what I am trying to convey' (I14.24); consequently when the words express your feelings and emotions it is, 'as if the body is grateful for being allowed to form its way of being whole' (Gendlin, 1996, p.20). According to Daniel Albright it is the body that shows us more of who we are:

As we have seen the remembered self contains huge gaps; but the body we know has been continuously in existence since the day of our birth, and affirms the unity of being that memory fails to affirm (Albright, 1994, p.26).

Having agency is personal freedom because you feel more grounded, and you need the body to ground you, to feel more agentic in the world.

The group work enabled the participants to use their creative life writing to work towards a more fluid relationship with life-held narratives which had become embedded and unhelpful. The holding environment of the workshop and the writing itself enabled the writers to let go of grounding in familiar identities and explore less familiar material of the self, which served to be expansive and empowering.

We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives (Okri, 1997, p.46).

Chapter 9

Creating A Radical Space for Openness

Conclusion and Implications

The year I was 15 was the year I had titled in my diary '*It sucks*'. My mum died of cancer; my maths teacher asked me out; Mr Chapman the career teacher said I had a choice of working at Walkers Crisp factory or being an auxiliary nurse; my best friend's father said that she could no longer be friends with me because he didn't want her to go out with my brother (I didn't have a brother - 'black boys you know what they're like'); my other friend had threatened to throw boiling water over herself and suffer a slow scourging death if her parents forced her to marry a man she had never met (although she confessed to me later that the water was lukewarm); and I had grown two inches and was taller than all the girls and most of the boys in my class. It was the year that officially sucked.

9.1 A Sense of Attachment and the Articulation of Identity

One of the most liberating aspects of the participants' creative life writing process and indeed of my own writing practice was the very simple recognition and acceptance that our lives did not fit into a tidy box. What emerged on the page was not a 'single story' - 'a definitive story' that denies 'the possibility of feelings more complex' (Adiche, 2009, on-line) - but an essential space for people 'to face and embrace their contradictions and complexities' (Walker, 1995, p.xxxv). Giving ourselves permission to fictionalise our memories served as a passport allowing us to cross borders and

explore ‘new, uncharted territories of the self’ (Grewal et al, 1988, p.2).

The inheritance of a migratory experience was a shared narrative between the participants and researcher, all of us being of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage growing up in Britain. I began to recognise at an early stage of the research that it was this collective narrative that impacted the group dynamics and the stories they chose to tell. The workshops provided a unique opportunity for the participants not to distance themselves from the legacy of migration but to draw from it, recognising movement not always as displacement and loss but as an opportunity of redefining self, past experiences, memories and thus choosing to see things from a different perspective.

The writing process provided a personal journey, ‘migrating into a better, more comfortable place’ of the self (Grewal et al, 1988, p.5), which bell hooks refers to as ‘home’ where you have ‘the capacity to live fully ... to resurrect, to reconcile, to renew’ (hooks, 1998, p.190). For the participants the concept of home was an important starting point for their exploration. The notion of home is necessarily complex for people with a background in a migratory experience as ‘it is linked in no small way to [the] sense of alienation from England’ (Younge, 2010, p.21). Poet Oliver Senior suggests ‘home’ is a place where there is ‘a condition of resonance’ (Senior, 2011, p.19), and it was this kind of home that the participants’ writing gravitated towards; a place where they were ‘not trying to fit in’ (I2.17) but that *felt right* and they belonged. The resonance Senior implies also connects to the call and response notion (Krik? Krak!), which is in the title of my thesis; the idea of resonance suggests that the words echo back to you, and you get a full hearing or, as Braithwaite refers to it, ‘*total expression*’ (author’s italics, Braithwaite, 1984, p.19). Through

facilitation and group work the writers increasingly paid attention to their feelings and emotions and, using their imagination in the creative life writing, found a place where they were able to express themselves beyond the use of everyday language. I experienced a similar process through my own writing. The creative life writing enabled us not, as Rebecca Walker (1995) cautions, to have to fit ourselves within a label, but to give ourselves permission to explore outside (as well as inside) the label and in so doing to expand our language and voice(s) to fit our own skin:

When we have gone in and looked around for a long while, just breathing and finally taking it in - then we will be able to speak in our own voice in the present moment. And that moment is home (Lamott, 1995, p.201).

9.2 Phantasms and the Embodied Self

My research shows how the mindful fictionalising of memories has the potential to renew not only our identity but the way we experience our lives, allowing for connections to be made that may not have been made before. Throughout my thesis I have used interchangeably the terms creative writing and creative life writing, as I see both as involving the writer in entering the imaginative space to tell her story. The reason I have steered towards using the term creative life writing or fictional autobiographical writing, as it is sometimes referred to, is because it emphasizes the writer's *mindful* relationship between memory and imagination. When Zadie Smith wrote her high profile debut novel 'White Teeth', Philip Tew and other literary critics referred to the book as 'fundamentally autobiographical' (Tew, 2010, p.21). Smith initially refuted claims that the characters were portrayals of her own experiences, although recently she has made it apparent that her autobiography is notably evident

in the book. Clearly she did not set out to write an autobiographical fiction but her autobiographical material got into the novel nevertheless.

Of course there is nothing new in this idea that autobiographical material of the author emerges through the pages of creative writing. But in the creative writing for personal development context, writers make a conscious or implicit pact with themselves – as discussed, Hunt (2012) drawing on Lejeune (1989) calls this the ‘phantasmatic pact’ – that they will allow their material to emerge spontaneously, so that they may learn things they did not know about themselves from the personal ‘phantasms’ that appear on the page. This can lead to self-growth.

Working in the field of creative writing for personal development drew my attention to the possibilities of actively fictionalising memories as a move towards a more embodied sense of self; engaging with embodied memories which felt more authentic. This approach highlights the idea that the only way we can truly come to know ourselves as full, complex human beings is by engaging with the unconscious, which echoes Elbow’s notion that ‘the body shows far more of ourselves than the conscious mind does’ (Elbow, 2000, p.208). The participants in the workshop as well as myself in my writing practice engaged in a writing process which opened up the space for the imagination; creating generative space in the psyche where language, conscious and unconscious material could come together. This allowed us as writers to increasingly trust bodily feeling as the core of who we are and therefore identity becomes a fluid process as we become less reliant on identities embedded in social discourses.

My research offers a contemporary context and conversation to the field of CWPDP, as

it takes the idea that the writing process opens up the possibility of stepping outside limited life-held narratives and places it within a diasporic framework. This engagement between the psyche and the socio-political offers new possibilities for the way we see ourselves and the world around us.

9.3 Creating a Generative Space in a Cultural Context

One of the important aspects that my research brings to CWPD is that it is much more aware of the multiplicity of cultures and ways of being, which reflects more the multicultural nature of contemporary Britain. Research into CWPD shows that participants often discover multiple dimensions of themselves, which enables them to distance themselves from social self-concepts (e.g. Hunt, 2013). But I took these ideas and placed them in a more diverse context where participants were explicitly able to explore difference and multiplicity rather than conforming to fixed hegemonic concepts, and in doing so I challenged the notion of a ‘multi-ethnic, mono-cultural society’ (Hall, 2000b, online).

The workshop provided a space which was inclusive and diverse, as reflected by its participants and also the group work which used literary texts, theories and poetic and fictional techniques (written and oral) specifically chosen to reflect this diversity. Prose and poetry of South African, Guyanese, Indian, Nigerian, American and English origin resonated strongly with the participants.

The books we choose to bring into the classroom say a lot about what we think is important, whose stories get told, whose voices are heard, whose are marginalised (Christensen, 2009, p.6).

Facilitating a workshop that the participants felt was ‘a space created for people like you, you feel more of who you are’ (I38.24), was an empowering experience, as they felt a freedom to explore their own voice(s). My study addressed the concerns participants raised about other writing courses: ‘there are instances that references are made to your culture or it’s made invisible and so you are never quite comfortable, you are always trying to fit in’ (I2.15). As previously mentioned, one participant spoke of her experience of other creative writing courses: ‘I leave a part of myself outside’ in a ‘suitcase and I lock it tight’ (I55.16). She said that the difference with the workshops in the salon was that ‘not only do I bring my suitcase, I open it and all can come out’ (I55.22). Creating a learning environment where *all* participants feel that they belong enables them to engage fully in the process, speak of things that they had not spoken of before in public, and also to feel comfortable using words and mannerisms which they felt they did not have to explain in order to be understood. This contributed to the writers’ ability to let go into the creative process and explore beyond familiar grounding.

When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this non-being, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard (Rich, 1986, p.199).

My research shows the necessity for the participants to see and experience themselves

in learning and creative processes which, as Winnicott believes, is intrinsic to any self-development. A significant factor in the success of this project was that the participants were able to engage in a learning experience which ‘had us in mind’; the creative writing process served as a ‘mirror’ which enabled the participants to see multiple dimensions of their reflection.

9.31 Shifting the Gaze

One of the challenges of my study was exploring ways to locate theory within practice and make it central to the lives of ordinary people. I was particularly interested in Hall’s notion of the ‘gaze of otherness’, as the participants in the workshops and indeed myself expressed our own experiences of identities being formed through the relationship to the other.

... most of the identities that I have been I’ve only known about not because of something deep inside of me – the real self - but because of how other people have recognised me (Hall, 1989, p.23).

W.E.B. Dubois and Simone de Beauvoir drew attention to how we can come to experience ourselves through the eyes of others, the internalization of racialised and gendered agendas from the outside world. One of the significant accomplishments of my research is the recognition that creative life writing enabled writers to engage in a process which created a fundamental shift in the relationship to the other. Hunt and Sampson suggest that by fictionalising our memories we are able to be ‘both “inside” and “outside” ourselves simultaneously and able to switch back and forth fluidly’ (Hunt & Sampson, 2006, p.4), and thus the writer is able to be the ‘eyes of another’

for herself (Bakhtin, 1984, p.287). The writer actively becomes the gaze of the other; the story offers a new awareness from the point of view of the narrator. The work of CWPD enables the writer to create a shift from a gaze which *disparages* to one that is *deferential*. The workshops created the possibility for participants to suspend, if only temporarily, less helpful narratives, as they redirected their attention to stories that felt connected to ‘something deep inside of [them]’ (Hall, 1989, p.23).

9.4 Self as Agent of a New Postcolonial Discourse

My research responds to the call of Ford-Smith for ‘folks to take up’ what she refers to as *Lionheart Gal*’s ‘incomplete project of emancipation’ (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.298). In the context of my study where I explore the experience of writers intentionally using the imagination to write about their memories with the possibility of dismantling life-held narratives, I was particularly interested in Ford-Smith’s idea of the necessity of a ‘unity between the aesthetic imagination and the social and political process’. Ford-Smith’s ideas were radical in the mid-seventies as she insisted on the necessity of ‘altering’ or ‘redefining’ (Ford-Smith, 1986, p.xv) the socio-political discourse and action within the decolonisation process.

In the new millennium Paul Gilroy in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) is also suggesting that for genuine change to take place there has to be an ‘altering’ or, as he refers to it, a ‘remaking’ (Gilroy, 2005, p. xii) of the socio-political discourse which he says is still located in the colonial way of thinking. Gilroy locates his ideas in a Britain which, he suggests, is not as post-colonial as the terms ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ would have us believe; ‘past colonial relations persist’ in contemporary culture and politics (ibid, p.3). Gilroy’s idea of *conviviality* requires us

to move beyond fixed notions of identity which fail, in his view, to reflect a society which is inherently comprised of diversity and difference, a place, as Zadie Smith says, where ‘you have no choice but to cross borders’ (Smith, 2009, p.139).

Although set in very different times and geographical locations, there is continuity between the ideas and aspirations of Ford-Smith and Gilroy. *Sistren* was located in a highly racial and class divided Jamaica in the mid-seventies and Gilroy’s notion of conviviality seeks to embody a multi-cultural British society in a new millennium; decades apart but still an engagement in the same conversation that attempts to dismantle the power relations of colonial ways of thinking and recognize human relationships beyond the confines of homogeneity dependent upon fixed identifications and ordering.

When Gilroy says ‘it is important to ask what critical perspectives might nurture the ability and the desire to live with difference on an increasingly divided but also convergent planet’ (Gilroy, 2005, p.3), it is not unlike Ford-Smith’s requirement of emancipation:

exposing and naming the source of power which gives rise to the way we think about our lives...a commitment to dialogue across difference of class, sexuality, race, age and nation (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.296).

Ford-Smith and Gilroy are saying that for change to take place there have to be adjustments of socio-political discourse and actions. They both share the opinion that we have to engage with the ‘two apparently conflicting necessities’ (Jackowska, 1997, p.79), which in this case are ‘affirming the geopolitical potency of race’ (Gilroy,

2005, p.7) and at the same time ‘interven[ing] in [and transcending these] specific relations of power and knowledge’ (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.294). I would argue that my research creates a dialogue between these ‘two apparently conflicting necessities’.

One of the striking factors for me which emerged out of this study was how much my research was still located in the decolonization process; the conversation continues to be prevalent and relevant. One of the significant ways my research moves the conversation forward is the adoption of a psycho-social theoretical perspective for understanding self and identity. The psychodynamic approach offers a way of making sense of the ‘huge unknowns of our psychic lives’ (Hall, 1989, p.22) which, as Hall argues, is imperative when trying to understand the relationship between ourselves and the world around us. This interdisciplinary approach offers ways to move beyond the confines of fixed socio-political classifications; recognising our capacity ‘to live with difference’ without becoming embedded in it (Gilroy, 2005, p.3). Gilroy refers to this as ‘radical openness’ and, although he does not explain how this can be achieved, my research offers a practical approach to how this can be done in a learning context (Gilroy, 2005, p.xv).

9.5 Reformulating Identities and Social Concepts

Ford-Smith speaks of Sistren’s ‘commitment to dialogue across difference’ and therefore of the importance of drawing from a Caribbean legacy outside the dominant structures of colonialism; the necessity of bringing together the socio-political and the aesthetic imagination. My study is located in contemporary multicultural Britain and it is within this environment not harnessed by the social restraint of a newly Independent Jamaica that I am able to ‘take up’ with my research to a stage which

was not afforded to Sistren.

We need to know what sorts of insight and reflection might actually help increasingly differentiated societies and anxious individuals to cope successfully with the challenges involved in dwelling comfortably in proximity to the unfamiliar without becoming fearful and hostile (Gilroy, 2005, p.3).

The creative writing workshops brought together the ‘socio-political and the aesthetic imagination’, thus providing a ‘convivial space’ because, as the writers engaged in the creative process, they redirected their attention to their feelings and emotions and in doing so, they were able to recognize and negotiate difference and multiplicity rather than conforming to fixed hegemonic agendas. This allows for ‘recentering the self, and reconnecting the self, and reconnecting with community’ (Chandler, 1990, p.ix). This is where psychodynamics comes in, because it offers a way of understanding why identities can become fixed rather than fluid, and what is needed in order to begin to loosen them up. The workshops in the salon provided a safe and reliable environment for the participants to engage with group work and a creative process that enabled them to unseat fixed social-political discourses and explore unknown territories of the self which, ultimately allowed them to increasingly engage ‘comfortably in proximity to the unfamiliar without becoming fearful (Gilroy, 2005, p.3).

Conquering the Goliaths in our life, however they present themselves, is not easy; as our sense of self is tightly entwined with the discourses we want to transcend. Naming

and claiming identities based on race, gender, sexual orientation, class have served for many as a haven. Jamie Heckert says: 'I'm sure I would have been a lot more damaged by the sexist and homophobic environment in which I grew up if I had not been able to convert stigma into pride' (Heckert, 2002, online). Categories of identification have often been the sculpture and the shield of our sense of being, and therefore the distancing from, or reformulation of, certain discourses can be challenging. Rebecca Walker describes her own fears of reformulating her feminist identity, which led her 'to confront that childlike and almost irrational fear of being different and therefore unacceptable' (Walker, 1995, p. xxxviii). Zadie Smith refers to 'the first step of a typical British journey. A hesitation in the face of difference, which leads to caution before difference and ends in fear of it' (Smith, 2009, p.149).

The practice of creative writing enabled the writers at the salon and myself in my own writing to 'access and objectify' our personal material (Hunt, 2001) and by doing so to distance ourselves from life-held narratives and open up psychic space for looking at ourselves and others from a different point of view. As Toni Morrison highlights 'fiction is not random' (Morrison, 1995, pp.93-94), agreeing with Lorde that it is 'an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotions and feelings' (Lorde, 1984, p.37). The workshops provided an important opportunity for people to access their 'reserve', and by doing so to experience a broader, more multifaceted sense of self, causing unhelpful dominant discourses to diminish in stature.

9.6 Individuality and Belonging

There was a shared cultural narrative between participants and researcher as all being clients of the salon. The starting sense of identity in the group was, for most of the participants, the experience of ‘difference’, being ‘marginalised’, ‘otherness’ growing up and living in Britain, which served as a collective identity. It was this collective sense that allowed the participants to ‘open their suitcases’ and unpack their identities, memories and experiences. In the context of my research I refer to the collective identity as being similar to Winnicott’s notion of a *transitional object*, something that members of the group brought into the workshop; the racial and cultural identity imbued a collective sense of safety and belonging. I also learnt the importance of creating an environment that allowed for diversity and difference within our own collective narrative. It was here that I began to differentiate between a negative and positive collective identity; the former was fixed and denied difference and individuality, whereas the latter engendered in people a sense of belonging but not a sense of being fixed by that belonging. The facilitation and group work opened a dialogic space between each person: ‘Whatever you came in with and whatever was going on for you, you would be accepted’ (I11.25); enabling them to play and explore differences, contradictions, ambiguities and uncertainties that existed within themselves individually, within the group and outside the group.

9.7 Confronting the Challenges of Difference

I hope that in accepting contradictions and ambiguities, in using *and* much more than we use *either/or*, these voices can help us continue to shape a political force more concerned with mandating and cultivating freedom than

with policing morality (author's italics, Walker, 2005, p.xxxv).

Whilst I was writing my thesis I visited my family. It was one of those rare occasions when I was asked about my research – ‘What are you doin’ again?’ I cannot remember exactly what prompted what was to follow but a partner of one of my family members confessed that he had in the last elections voted for the BNP (British National Party). He said although he regretted doing so he felt that he had been abandoned by the other political parties, being ‘white male, working class and unemployed’. A gulf opened up in my aunt’s living room between my family and a man whom we had come to love and because of this (love), a conversation began that we were not prepared for but had to participate in. This is an example of the complexity of crossing borders and confronting them in ordinary lives and relationships. I explore this in Skipworth Street, where Sharpes and her friends have to confront the stark and painful issues of difference when it appears within their friendship, their intimate circle:

For a moment the room divides the way the sea had done for Moses. I wanted to say something but all I could draw was silence and Angie’s bag of one-liners seemed to be empty. Nazy pulled off her hijab and said with a voice spilling over with hurt ‘Does that help yer Angela.’ It was a punch that we were planning for McDowell but we all felt it instead.

The creative process offered a space for the participants as well as myself to confront everyday realities involved in living up closely with the unfamiliar; difference which interrupts and intervenes alliances and assumptions; replacing the known with the

unknown. Rebecca Walker says the world we live in now blurs boundaries and interconnects far more than ever before and calls for us to move away from a world rooted in polarity:

This way of ordering the world is especially difficult for a generation that has grown up ... knowing and loving people who are racist, sexist, and otherwise afflicted. We have trouble formulating and perpetuating theories that compartmentalize and divide according to race and gender and all of the other signifiers (Walker, 2005, p.xxxiii).

The workshop provided a space for the exploration of contradictions and ambiguities in the participants' life narratives without rejecting or denying issues such as race, class and gender and other classifications. One of the participants spoke candidly about the difficulties of being of African and Asian heritage growing-up in a working class community in Scotland and living in a care home. She saw her writing practice as allowing her to take 'ownership' of her life: 'I discovered that I was meant to be a bridge between all these different worlds that I was to inhabit' (I8.21). Marilyn Chandler says:

By finding a way to tell one's story differently, a sense of possibility is restored, and free will, expressed in the act of authorship, reengages in the old, valiant struggle against fate (Chandler, 1990, p. 37).

9.8 Teaching Towards Difference and Diversity

I believe it is an immensely important gain when one recognises that all identity is constructed across difference and begins to live with the politics of difference (Hall, 1987, p.45).

Gilroy applies Hall's idea of difference to the present in his notion of 'conviviality', revealing the complex issue of diversity and difference in contemporary urban societies. The workshops in the salon served as a microcosm of the modern world and therefore it may have been inevitable that the subject of difference surfaced. I am not suggesting that the theme of difference should necessarily be overt and spoken, but that the workshop/courses could be shaped in such a way that those ideas of difference and the 'gaze of otherness' are subtly being worked on. I did not enter the workshop to speak of difference and identity but, by developing an atmosphere that was inclusive and diverse, this kind of exploration of the self was made possible.

Potentially this type of work can be empowering; recognising our own differences and heterogeneity enables us to develop a stronger sense of agency. Embodiment is important here, because it helps us to have a place to stand which is not so much in the external discourses as in our own sense of who we *feel* ourselves to be, and that potentially helps us to be more in dialogue with those discourses. It may be that all political change inevitably comes down to how individuals and groups of individuals act in the world, of having a stronger sense of agency. My research indicates that the initial and critical step towards achieving change is the necessity of engaging with the difference and diversity, the desired and undesired which lie within ourselves.

Therefore change has got to come from the individual's ability to act in the world, but

as my research also shows the individual needs to be in dialogue with others, and it is this moving back and forth between the two axes which promotes self-growth, and hopefully from this ‘lasting action comes’ (Lorde, 1986, p.37).

I am proposing to continue to develop workshops like the ones in the salon, especially if they could be longer, because the writers would then be able to explore and expand more from difference in relation to self towards difference in relation to others. Creating a space where people feel they belong allows them to experience less comfortable feelings without being fearful of difference, and that in itself has proven to be liberating.

The participants were on their own personal journey of understanding themselves better, which led them to take part in the research. Drawing from the work of CWPD provided invaluable tools of exploration which gave insight to the work that I was trying to achieve and that the participants were hoping to experience. The outcome of a project like this is unpredictable; you cannot tell how people are going to respond to the group work. But positive experiences are possible if the facilitator remains open and flexible, and as bell hooks suggests the facilitator ‘must genuinely *value* everyone’s presence. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the class dynamic, that everyone contributes’ (hooks, 1994, p.8).

The aim of my research and future projects is to create learning environments which ‘genuinely *value*[...] everyone’s presence’ (ibid). I have since facilitated creative writing workshops in white-majority spaces and have used the same exercises and literary texts that I used in the salon, based on the premise that the exploration of

difference, ‘dwelling comfortably in proximity to the unfamiliar without becoming fearful and hostile’ (Gilroy, 2005, p.3), applies to us all in different ways, and presenting a workshop where difference and diversity is incorporated into the design and facilitation provides a learning experience which is more in context with the globalised world that we share.

9.9 Impact Beyond the Workshop

The group work in the salon offered the writers visibility and voice(s) not only through their own writing but from engaging with the writing of others in the group and the published work discussed. After the ending of the salon workshops some of the participants continued to meet and formed their own writers’ group, which I facilitated and subsequently also edited their book of prose and poetry which has now been published. They have performed their stories at an event at a principle theatre venue in Brighton, which was sold out and people had to be turned away. Part of me would like to take the credit that it was my workshops that led the participants from a basement in a salon to the central spotlight on a theatrical stage, but of course this is not the case; although I do think however it highlights the potential of creating safe-contained, diverse and inclusive spaces where participants’ experience is one of *belonging* and being *heard*. It also shows the importance of providing a space where participants may unseat definitive life-held narratives and in doing so reveal complex life stories reflecting movement and interaction rightly fitting for a contemporary multi-cultural society; this was experienced as liberating and a process they wanted to share.

As I read the myriad of stories that spontaneously spun onto the participants’ pages and listened to them being shared around the table in the workshop, I thought of Paule

Marshall's referring to her experience as she listened to her Barbadian mother with her friends sharing stories around the kitchen table: 'freewheeling, wide-ranging, exuberant talk functioned as an outlet for the tremendous creative energy they possessed' (Marshall, 1983, p.629). It was these stories that Marshall says allowed the women to fight back against 'invisibility and powerlessness ... [as they] exercised some measure of control over their lives and the events that shaped them' (ibid). Similarly the workshop enabled the writers to connect to their own 'tremendous creative energy' and in doing so to temporarily stop thinking about implicit life-held narratives as they focused their attention on feelings and emotions which elicited memories that were more subtle and personal and felt more authentic.

Chandler says 'renewal begins in the imagination' (Chandler, 1990, p.70). This was experienced not only by the participants but also by my own experience of the creative life writing process in the research. Chapter One of *Skipworth Street's Bonfire Night* was published in the literary magazine, *Msllexia*, where the judge, writer Rachael Cusk, described it as 'a fresh and vibrant evocation of childhood with all its subtle tensions, along with more brutal experiences of regionalism, gender, colour and social class' (Cusk, 2013, p.31). I, like the participants, was beginning to shed light on the 'subtle tensions' of my self-narratives, whilst at the same time still engaging with and dismantling the omniscient presence of life-held narratives and socio-political discourses.

The study offers a new perspective to emancipatory processes located in the use of creative writing for personal development, as well as to socio-political discourses of identity. With care, and taking into account the lessons I myself have learned, it will

be possible to take this work into schools, colleges and universities; youth and community groups, as well as into adult education. Further research on the effects of this work is very much needed, and I would like to be involved in it. I am currently consulting on an educational project based in Brighton, 'Unfolding Identities', which involves creating a DVD to facilitate engagement by school pupils in issues of cultural and racial diversity, belonging and identity. I have also been approached to work on a book project of writings of Europeans of African and Asian heritage, which I hope to pursue after I have completed my doctorate.

9.10 Conclusion

My research has been a journey towards the importance of mindfully locating theory into the lives of ordinary women and men, and by doing so I offer a study which is relevant and committed to the dialogue for personal and socio-political change. I show the relevance of the process of creative life writing for personal development in and for modern multicultural societies in relation to negotiating identities and self-concepts that "[live] with and through, not despite difference' (Hall, 1990, p.235). By drawing from, and interrelating, the works of writers and theorists from the fields of psycho-dynamics, cultural and literary theory, I have been able to investigate Ford-Smith's idea for a 'unity of the aesthetic imagination and the socio-political' in a contemporary study located in a basement of a hair salon/barbershop. It is the pursuit of this union which has allowed me to 'alter and redefine' boundaries and open the conversation between identity and embodiment. The interdisciplinary approach of my research brings together ideas of writers and theorists that have previously not engaged with each other and, by doing so, offers a new way of understanding the stories we tell and the impact these stories have on the way we view ourselves and the

world around us.

Drawing from the data produced out of the creative life writing workshops this research offers another perspective, which moves away from social concepts of centre and margins. By using the psycho-dynamic approach I show a new site for radical openness, a reality where people oscillate and interplay between multiple spaces – cultural, psychological and geographical – crossing a myriad of frontiers, compatible with a contemporary world of constant change. My research explores the dialogic space between language and the body and contends that embodiment, which, in my understanding of it, focuses on bodily feelings and emotions, is not separate from identity. In fact I suggest it allows for a more dialogical relationship between different parts of self, our different identities, and therefore moves away from the concept of the self as split into conflicting identities, suggesting far more that we are multiple rather than fragmented, and if we are loosely multiple we can move between these different dimensions of ourselves. This new insight opens up the possibility of stepping outside existing conceptual frameworks, as it allows for a broader and more complex recognition of self and the multi-spaced world we occupy.

In this research the psychodynamic lens brought new insights to the writings of women of the African diaspora, showing the innovation, imperativeness and influence of their ideas of creativity, memory, emancipation and identity. Carol Boyce Davis says that ‘the experience of Black women lends itself to the notion of fluidity, multiple identities’ and that it is the ‘cross cultural, transnational, translocal, diasporic perspective [that] redefines identity away from exclusion and marginality’ (Davis, 1994, p.8, p.4). It is this ‘consciousness of expansiveness’ which informs my

research; starting from the point of liberation that is not *despite* but *because of* our diasporic and migratory inheritance. This study shows how CWPD located in a cultural context presents the possibilities of enabling us to become agentic in our own emancipatory processes; introducing the understanding and necessity for ‘new analyses, new questions and new understandings [as we] unlock some of the narrow terms of the discourses in which we are inscribed’ (Davis, 1994, p.5).

As I conclude my research I am reminded how this journey began in a documentary production office in New York, born out of the frustration as a filmmaker to offer new insight into an existing dialogue of race in the 21st Century. I felt that we had fallen into a familiar pit where new initiatives were drawn from old formulas and consequently little change was made. This research highlights what a difference it might have made to the ensuing discussions if, as filmmakers and writers of the documentary series, we had all engaged in a creative writing group at the outset exploring identities in the way I have at the salon. My study suggests how this might have changed the nature of the subsequent conversation as new insights and questions surface, causing paradigms to shift and new possibilities to be unearthed.

The significance of this research stretches far beyond the walls of a local workshop as it continues to have a prominent place in current and pressing conversations on literary teaching practices both in North America and Europe. Pulitzer Prize winning author Junot Díaz (2014) spoke earnestly of the “unbearable too-whiteness” of creative writing courses in the US and how nothing has changed since he studied for his MFA in creative writing in the early nineties. Díaz claims: ‘Too white as in my workshop reproduced exactly the dominant culture’s blind spots and assumptions around race and racism (and sexism and heteronormativity, etc)’ (Díaz, 2014, online).

Professor of creative writer, Aminatta Forna, reiterates the sentiments of Díaz saying that the same phenomenon happens here in the UK, thus ‘deny[ing] the validity of other, alternative voices’ (Forna, 2014, online).

Díaz refers to his ‘wildest MFA dream’ (Master of Fine Arts):

where writers of colour could gather to develop our art in a safe, supportive environment. Where our ideas, critiques, concerns, our craft and, above all, our experiences would be privileged rather than marginalised; encouraged rather than ignored; discussed intelligently rather than trivialised...where our contributions were not an adjunct to Literature but its core.

This ‘wildest dream’, which was accomplished in the creative writing workshops in the salon, is not just Díaz’s dream, but shared by many, including award winning poet Daljit Nagra who feels frustrated with British poetry because ‘it is rare for our work to be viewed in the context of a serious engagement with forms and traditions of the British canon as we are not fully accepted as part of it’ (Nagra, 2014, online).

Workshops such as the ones located in this research show the necessity of theories of difference and diversity to be at the core of our classrooms, workspaces, our everyday lives. This research is joining the pioneering initiatives taking place here in the UK such as the one being created by Professor Bambo Soyinka, who is planning a new centre for transnational writing and literature and forming a network of international universities leading in this field; addressing the need of ‘providing a forum for writers and students who want to cross borders’ (Soyinka, 2014, online).

This research highlights the need for collaborative work across academic fields, and literary, cultural and community sectors, so we can have a better understanding of the

reality of contemporary relationships and experiences that inevitably inform our learning processes and environments. My study provides a critical conversation for understanding contemporary society that continues to bear the consequence of the persistence of colonial ways of thinking ‘and obstructs the development of multiculturalism’ (Gilroy, 2005, p.2). The strength of my research is found in its practice, which demonstrates that having a voice is critical to an empowering process. As history continues to reveal, it is the stories that we feel *compelled* to tell that allow us to recognize narratives of difference and multiplicity rather than conforming to fixed hegemonic agendas.

I contend that creative writing for personal development that engages with a socio-political context is a valuable tool of renewal, reconstruction and transformation. In a Winnicottian sense I see this research and the creative writing workshops as providing a *potential space*, allowing for the essential dialogue between the self and the outside world that we are often too busy, or have not been given the opportunity, to have. Such workshops allow us to unlock the ‘creative power of rebel consciousness’ buried deep within our own stories (Ford-Smith, 2005, p.xiii). As we learn to express our silences, feelings and emotions on the page, we begin to take those personal tiny and titanic steps towards freedom:

You’re never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there’s always that one little piece inside of you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don’t speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside (Lorde, 1984, p.42).

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APPENDIX

Flyer: Distributed in the Hair Salon/Barbershop

CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP

Creative Writing Workshops will take place
at Shae Shae Creations Hair-Salon

The workshop will offer you the opportunity to carve out personal time in your busy life to explore and develop your own writing; you will be able to learn how to use fictional and poetic techniques to explore the creative writing process; you will be supported and encouraged in your creative explorations and you will be part of a group setting that can offer an invaluable space for sharing work and ideas.

The Creative Writing Workshop is part of a doctorate research project in Creative Writing and Personal Development (Sussex University). The research aims to explore and understand a creative process that might offer the opportunity to become *unstuck* from personal stories that shapes our views and moulds our sense of self.

The first Creative Writing Session will commence the week of 14th February, time and date will be confirmed by the availability of participants. If you are interested there will be an Introductory Meeting for further questions and information.

Date Saturday February 12th

Time 12.00 Noon

Venue [REDACTED]

You can also contact me Sindi Gordon by email: sindi.gordon@sussex.ac.uk
or mobile # [REDACTED]

Ethics Statement**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET****Research Project: Krik?Krak! Exploring the Potential of Creative Life Writing for Opening Dialogic Space and Increasing Personal Freedom**

You are invited to take part in the above research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand what the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The study aims to explore the potential of creative writing- by which I mean fictional and poetic techniques – for writing about ourselves and telling our stories. For this purpose I will be running a creative writing workshop here at the Salon, as outlined below. I am particularly interested in seeing what effects these techniques might have on people's understanding of themselves and their place in contemporary British society. Hair salons and barbershops are known for the telling and sharing of stories, so I am also interested to find out what effects it might have to run a workshop of this kind in a community space such as this one. I am undertaking this research for a Doctorate in Creative writing and Personal Development at Sussex University.

The workshop will take place weekly over 4 weeks in the first instance, each session lasting two hours. At the end of this time, we (i.e. myself and the workshop participants) will reflect in the workshop and make plans for a second one of similar length, taking into account any changes that might need to be made. I am expecting that there will be between 6 and 10 people in the group. Participation in both workshops would be ideal, but is not vital. I anticipate that the first workshop will begin in February 2011, with the second taking place in March 2011.

WHY HAVE I BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

Because I am interested in trying out this workshop at the hair salon/barbershop, it is important that participants should all be clients of the salon. I am inviting you to participate because you have previously expressed interest in doing so and because of your personal interest in creative writing.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Even after signing the form, you will be free to withdraw from the project at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IF I TAKE PART?

Apart from participating in the creative writing workshop, you will need to take part in a one-to-one interview after the workshop has ended. I will need to tape-record these interviews. If you are in agreement, I would also like to collect copies of the creative writing you produce for the workshop.

All the material I collect from you will be kept strictly confidential and any material I use in the writing up of the study will be fully anonymised. The material will be kept until the study is complete and written up. If I decide subsequently that I would like to use some of the material for further publications, I will seek further consent from you.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE DISADVANTAGES AND RISKS OF TAKING PART?

The project will require a time commitment to either one or both workshops (although, as I said, you can withdraw any time). All creative writing workshops can potentially open people up to sensitive issues and therefore it will be important for us to create together an environment where people feel safe enough to open themselves up to a new experience.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

The direct benefits to you of participating in this project are: firstly, that you will be able to carve out a personal time in your busy life to explore and develop your own writing; secondly, you will be able to learn how to use fictional and poetic techniques to explore the creative writing process; thirdly, you will be supported and encouraged in your creative explorations by myself as facilitator; fourthly, you will be part of a group setting that can offer an invaluable space for sharing works and ideas. There will also be benefits for the wider community, in contributing to understanding the role and effect of creative writing groups in public spaces such as the hair salon.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I WANT TO TAKE PART?

If you want to take part in the research, please fill out the consent form and return it to me today or as soon as possible. I will then notify you when the course is due to begin and what you need to bring.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY?

The results of the search will be used in my doctoral thesis, a copy of which will be available in Sussex University library. As I said above, subject to further consent from you I may wish to publish some of the material in the form of journal articles after the study is complete.

WHO IS ORGANISING AND FUNDING THE RESEARCH?

I am conducting the research as a student of the Centre for Community engagement, University, and I am self-funding.

WHO HAS REVIEWED THE STUDY?

The study has been reviewed by my supervisors, as below, and the Director of Research at the Centre of Community Engagement, University of Sussex. The Research has been approved by the Social Sciences Cluster-based Research Ethics Committee (C-REC).

For further information you can contact me

Sindi Gordon sindi.gordon@sussex.ac.uk or 0776 [REDACTED]

Supervisors: Dr. Celia Hunt C.M.Hunt@sussex.ac.uk and

Dr. Denise Decaires-Narain D.Decaires-Narain@sussex.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, you should contact my supervisors.

Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet.

Permission Letter**Krik? Krak!****Exploring the Potential of Creative Life Writing for Opening Dialogic Space and Increasing Personal Freeddom****Project Approval Reference:**

I agree to take part in the above Univeristy of Sussex research project. I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement, which I make keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- particpate in one or more writing workshops
- be interviewed by the researcher individually or in the group
- allow the interview to be audio taped
- if I feel comfortable, I will allow the researcher to have copies of the creative writing I produce during the workshop.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that I disclose will lead to the indentification of any individual in the reports on the project, either by the researcher or by any other party.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I understand that the reuse of data concerning me for any purposes including future research or publication cannot take place unless I consent in a written agreement.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

1st Week: Creative Writing Session Plan

Saturdays Salon

Session 1 19th February 2011

11- 11.05am Welcome.

11.05 -11.15am **Ice Breaker**- Each participant gives meaning/story about their name they were given or chosen. They have been given notice before the workshop to write something regarding their name.

A great ice-breaker - good way to remember people's name but also touches lightly on identity and self.

11.15 -11.20am Short discussion of group guidelines and a hand-out of approaches to giving constructive feedback.

11-20 - 11.45am **Freewriting**

Freewriting is the easiest way to get words on paper. The participants in this workshop are beginners or have not written creatively for a long time. This exercise allows you to jump straight into writing, not having time to contemplate fears or listen to the voice of the inner critic. Hoping to achieve what Victoria Field says she likes to establish as early on as possible in a writing session the feeling from the participants 'I can do it'.

Starting phase: *Today I decided...*

Writing time slots: 3 x 3 x 7 mins

3 mins to write - don't stop, don't cross out or check spelling.

3 mins - read through, underline strong or significant words, on another sheet write from this chosen word or phrase.

Reread, recognise overall theme or feeling. Choose another word or phrase and write from that. Read through pull together anything significant to make poem or short prose, anything just write.

7 mins writing

After writing - discuss as a group.

Ask participants how they felt about the exercise and ask people to read aloud their work (if they wish).

Asking the participant how they felt might help them to become aware of their feeling and emotions during the creative writing process. I also remember when on the MA the tutor asked our group and it reinforced a safe and caring environment, that helped me to write in the sessions.

11.45 -12.15 **Two Truths and a Lie**

This is a group exercise

Write down two truths and one lie about yourself. Avoid the mundane like 'I like chips' or I drive a red car when you really drive a blue car.

2. Each participants shares with the group and the group attempts to pick out the lie.

3. After everyone shares, students will pick one of their lies and write a short narrative.

12.15 -1.45pm **Published Writing**

Group Discussion

The First Page – How to start your story

Both authors begin by immediately dispelling stereotypes

Text: *Confessions of a Gambler* by Rayda Jacobs and *Boy with the Topknot* by

Sathnam Sanghera – First page of their book.

Attention to language and metaphors

1.45 -1.50pm Home Exercise

Introduce yourself from the point of view of an item of clothing that you wear.

1.50 - 2.00pm Check-in

Feedback - thoughts and feelings on the workshop.

Suggest keeping a writing journal.

AIM:

to have written, shared, writing and heard others

to have open dialogic space - oral-scribal

to have introduced fictional techniques for life stories

to have given workshop parameters and information for critical feedback

Questions for Post-Workshop Semi-Structured Interviews

The questions were used as a general guideline.

1. What were your thoughts about the creative writing workshop before you came to the introductory meeting?
2. What made you decide to participate in this workshop?
3. Have you done creative writing before? If so, what kind?
4. Have you attended a creative writing group before and if so what was your experience?
5. It is important to a certain degree to feel comfortable and safe in the workshop; what were the important factors for you, if any, to feel safe in the group?
6. What was it like for you having the creative writing workshop in the salon?
7. What did you think about the writing space itself?
8. What aspects of the workshop were particularly helpful and what aspects were not helpful for you in the workshop?
9. How did you feel about using fiction and poetry to write about yourself?
10. What were the emotions that you felt during the workshop and how were they received?
11. What have you learnt about writing?
12. Did you learn anything new about yourself from the writing and the workshops?
13. What will you do with the experience of the workshops?

Excerpt: Semi Structured Interviews with Participants Post- Workshop

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What were your thoughts about the creative writing workshop before you came to the introduction meeting?

17. I saw the flyer that came, first from [REDACTED] through all of us in
18. the Positive Hair Project [REDACTED] [identifies group members]
19. and just seeing the benefits what can happen in an informal environment

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1. I was just really interested because I know you and also I don't know you
2. in this aspect, in your research aspect and I was just really
3. intrigued to see what would happen. What would come out of
4. it and I liked the thought of digging into your work as well
5. in some way.

What did you think about having the creative writing workshop held in the salon?

6. I loved it. I loved it. It just seems really apt to be downstairs
7. from an actual sort of activity that is taking place that has such
8. an effect on myself but all of us in our own way which is
9. hairdressing and it is just a part of that relationship between
10. ourselves and our hair. So I think for it to be a contemporary
11. place now where people of all ages can come and do something
12. about their hair and be in really good hands I think, something
13. very nice about that.

What do you think about this actual space where we wrote?

14. I quite like being contained because I felt like in a small place
15. around a table. I think the table has that aspect where you
16. have social exchanges and you have food and it is not a formal
17. place; whereas if we were just in a circle of chairs in a room

18. without a big table for instance it would feel quite different.

Was it important for you to have elements of feeling safe for you to feel creative and write?

19. I hadn't really thought about it before but I think the safety
20. would be what I was going to write, would I
21. be listened to at least not necessarily with sympathetic ears
22. but just I probably want to feel safe in the actual metaphorical
23. environment but I hadn't actually thought about the physical
24. environment but then I would want to if I when I go to the
25. beach and write something in my book I have my back against
26. the wall so it's like in a little corner (chuckles) so I suppose it's
27. there without realising it.

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What are the aspects that you expect from the group for you to write, to be creative?

1. I think from a group to feel that I am with people who perhaps
2. can understand some of the things, some of the issues that
3. might be part of what we are going to be writing about, is
4. great actually, that sort of unspoken understanding because it
5. feels quite rare coming as I do as we have done in this group.
6. As you all know I'm a bit reluctant to the words minority
7. group because it is so easily banded around, in fact we are
8. always in the minority in our current environment because of
9. being not white. So I think of having some sort of shared
10. understanding. I would be okay with there being men there as
11. well, it didn't have to be a women's group but I think it was
12. actually quite nice to be in a group that I did know everybody
13. so it felt easier to push yourself to write things and to be
14. completely honest and to bare your soul a bit.

Excerpt: Identifying and Coding Emerging Themes from the Data Analysis

Post-Workshop Semi-Structured Interviews

Cluster Themes

Holding Environment
 Group Dynamics
 Growth/Personal Freedom
 Circular/Collaborative Experience
 Diaspora/Marginalised Space
 Out of the Box/ Renewing Narratives
 Fictionalising Concepts of Self and Life Narratives
 Creative Process/Creative Writing Process
 Renewing Narratives and Language
 Challenges of Research
 Mainstream /Authoritative Space

Themes experience	Coding Interview (I) Page Number Line Number	Key words/phrases
Holding Environment Nurturing and inclusive	1.1	environment was very conductive
	1.3	feels like family
	24.14	it feels like a second home
	1.11	sitting round the table was intimate got us sharing quickly
		I know the salon really well, a very homely sort of space.
Safe space/ Feeling safe to excavate	69.22	we've found a safe space here as a group
	50.16	the fact that we know each other and you have given a state of permission to say the things we wouldn't otherwise say.
	3.5	felt safe to dig deep and allow that to flow
	7.16	a place that is like home

Contained	7.17	where you are accepted and where you feel safe even if a conflict came up
	81.12	I'm used to having my hair done here, it was very, very easy to come here
	26.19	The safety would be what I was going to write would be listened to
	40.1	...least inhibiting kind of environment.
	10.3	Felt like a safe space to explore here and sit in this space, it just lent itself.
	9.10	We were contained big enough for us not to feel closed in but contained enough to have unity in the group.
Familiarity	54.16	A community hum
	81.24	It was not too big not too small, it was like a holding space.
	54.21	Hairdresser is a place of storytelling, a community talking about susususus gossip. A hub where you can relax and let go.
	54.25	There's a whole kind of another world, it's an in-crowd and inside world.
	9.15	Normalise the experience
	15.19	It creates a setting that gives it normalcy
	15.22	The tradition that it brings to it...salons activities of creativity. An environment already set up for us.

Excerpt: From Journal Notes

Saturday 12th February
 Introductory Session

I was so nervous but very organised
 which helped. The salon has been
 super supportive. My project feels
 very much like a continuation of all
 the activities which have taken place
 and will continue to take place here.
 I knew most people by sight but
 a couple of people I did not know.
 It was warm and cosy. The salon
 painted the basement and brought
 a heater. Udana fields says ideally
 the creative writing space should
 be neutral - this is the opposite.
 The space is colourful, with photos
 and written stories on the wall
 (from past projects). I'm surprised
 that the appeal or part got at least
 up that it is a PhD project. People
 had lots of questions - what's it
 about? Why are I doing it? Why here?
 Can they drop out if they want to? etc.
 But more than the questions people
 have stories to share - they spoke
 about growing up, why they want to write,
 why they haven't written for a long
 while - for some it has been since
 school (a negative experience) for others
 they feel blocked, don't know where
 to begin, haven't got the time.

Belonging
 Home
 ease
 with
 each
 other
 +
 me
 familiar
 incident
 revealing
 lot
 holding
 back
 in it
 is
 needed
 round

Excerpt: From Journal Notes

19th February
1st Session

There is a comfort and ease in the workshop. I feel a confidence which I wish I felt at Uni. I'm surprised at how everyone was so open and willing to try new things. There was a genuine excitement and a sense of belonging in the group and the salon. I referred to the salon as 'a second home', 'our place', 'a place I feel comfortable'. I think it helps that I'm also one of the clients. The ice-breaker - asking people to talk about their names was a great idea - everyone had vivid stories. No one seems hesitant to share. [Time keeping is going to be important]. A few spoke about being nervous to write but the free writing exercise was perfect - to jump straight into it. The participants were 'blown away', 'shocked', 'surprised' [their words] about how much they wrote and how they had not intended to write what they did. Making time for participants to share their work is going to be hugely important as there is an eagerness to share it but equally they seem to really want to listen to the other group members - they support each other.

gel!
we gel!
our group!
stories come from where?
surprise laughs!
tears
possibly need to slow down process
Don't want people to share more than can handle

Excerpts and Coding for the Participant's Poems and Prose written in the Creative Writing Workshop

p.3 *I wish I could...*

- 1 I wish I could win the lottery
- 2 I wish I could drive a car
- 3 I wish I could have superpowers
- 4 I wish I could travel to the Caribbean anytime and any day
- 5 I wish I could remember everything I read
- 6 I wish I could love

p.6 *Something about my name, Oh my, oh my!*

- 1 I grew up being called Lorraine
- 2 I understood it was a French name
- 3 In Scotland where I grew
- 4 No one else the origin, knew
- 5 One day a white girl came
- 6 Guess what?
- 7 Her name was Lorraine!
- 8 Oh but that's a darky's name!
- 9 Came the horror stricken cry
- 10 Not fit for you, oh my, oh my!

- 11 I knew not , till 1988
- 12 The colour of my palette
- 13 That I'm African
- 14 Grown up in Scotland
- 15 Not a Scot that just happen
- 16 To be a dark skinned woman.

p.13 ***The Racing Car***

1 As I watch him approach the racing car, I could see the beam, the happiness in
2 his flow, the eagerness in his stride, the command in his movements, that
3 authority he exudes. And then it struck me. This is a man who loves to be free
4 to flow without boundaries, to achieve without hesitation at a moment of
5 thought, to achieve without attainment.
6 To call this a hobby would be a lie. This was the soul of the occasion, the
7 activity of his love, the heaven of his peace. This is a platform where he
8 comes into his own, without hesitation or hindrance, the moment of
9 his dreams, the pleasure of his creativity.
10 This was a test of speed and wideness without limitations. This was
11 sport for most if not all, but living for him, where risks pale into infinity,
12 . and rationality pales into oblivion. Whereas for us it may be solemn, for
13 him it was freedom at its 13 best.

p.20 ***A Story About Me***

1 I'm 5 years old sitting in my Nan's bedroom in front of a mirror with a towel on
2 my head. Swishing it side to side and back and forth to my hearts content. Hey
3 man I was the original forerunner of all those Pantene hair commercials you see
4 now on the telly. How I wanted more than anything to have long straight hair
5 instead of looking like the original Michael Jackson (back in the day when he
6 was still black!).

7 Forty-Five years later I am sitting in front of another mirror admiring my honest
8 to goodness own locks. This is my story of nappy haired me growing into my
9 luscious locks and obviously all the bits in the middle.

p.21 ***I wish I could.***

- 1 I wish I could skate
- 2 I wish I could speak a foreign language
- 3 I wish I could not always go into motor mouth
- 4 I wish I could move to a bigger house
- 5 I wish I could have all the people I love in my house
- 6 I wish I could not always worry about the future
- 7 I wish I could tell people what I really think
- 8 I wish I could live in a white skin for the day
- 9 I wish I could live as man for a day
- 10 I wish I could make life more like musical
- 11 I wish I could not be so fearful at times
- 12 I wish I could lost weight and eat what I like.

p.22 ***Snug as a bug in an Ugg***

- 1 Snug as a bug in an Ugg
- 2 Not sure how to approach this task
- 3 Even less certain that it is within my grasp
- 4 Define myself as an item of clothes
- 5 In this fair city where everything goes
- 6 Scratched my head, searched in vain
- 7 All I got was an addled brain
- 8 Desperate measures were in store
- 9 Huffing and puffing I dropped to the floor
- 10 There is a heap my quest there ended
- 11 And faith in myself restored and mended
- 12 Pulse rate racing, my heart gave a tug
- 13 In front of my eyes where my faithful Uggs
- 14 Just like me they are brown and scruffy
- 15 After a night on the town were both a bit puffy
- 16 Warm and cool in equal measure
- 17 Treat us right we're a national treasure

Poetic and Fictional Techniques included in the Creative Writing Workshop

Some of the exercises were written at home by the participants to be shared and discussed in the following session.

1.. Freewriting

It is a period of non-stop writing. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. This exercise allows you to jump straight into writing, not having time to contemplate fears or listen to the voice of the inner critic.

2..Two Truths and a Lie

This is a fun, oral exercise. Each participant takes it in turn to tell the group three statements about themselves, one of which is untrue.

3.. Introduce yourself from the point of view of an item of clothing that you wear.

The participants were asked to think of an item of clothes and introduce themselves from the point of view of a chosen garment.

This exercise allows the participants' to explore new ways of seeing themselves.

4.. List poem

The instruction here is to make a list that repeats the statement:

Surprisingly, I like.....

The group was instructed not to think too hard about what they were writing.

Manjusvara says this is a good exercise to approach our 'core beliefs' is to compile a list: 'Freed from the grammatical constraints of language, what we write can now be produced less by our thoughts and more by our feelings' (Manjusvara, 2005, p.24).

5.. AlphaPoems

A similar technique to the *list poem* is the *alpha poem* which also allows writers to connect to their feelings more than their conscious thoughts. It is a poem, in which every line starts with the next letter of the alphabet. The writers were given a set time of five minutes to complete the exercise and to write as much of the alphabet as possible, all completed A-Z.

6.. Working from Photographs

The participants had been asked to bring in a photograph that was significant for them. They were asked to divide into pairs and to give their partner their photograph. The partner's role was to say what they saw in the photo and then the pair discussed how this compared with the perception of the owner of the photo. This was followed by a group discussion. Afterwards the writers chose one photo to write from. If the photo is a group photo, they could explore the event portrayed from the point of view of someone else in the photo.

7.. Writing from an Object

One of the participants requested this exercise. The idea is to bring an object from home to the workshop. I asked the writers to use as many of the five senses as they could to write about the object.

8.. Walking in Someone Else's Moccasins

Participants were asked to write in someone else's moccasins, preferably someone completely different from them in, for example, gender, race or age. This home exercise again came from a group member, inspired by a participant's list poem.

9.. A Different Point of View

During the workshop we read and discussed text that had been written from different points of view: first-person, second-person and third-person. The writers were asked to write about an experience, a moment or a significant person in their life and write about it from the three different points of view. After the exercise the participants shared with the group how the varying perspectives informed their story and their writing practice.

10.. Round Robin

The facilitator randomly selects one of the participants sitting around the table to tell a story. At any point the facilitator can point to any other person and the story must be continued without hesitation, if so another person is chosen. Finally, participants are asked to continue writing from the last strand of the story. This exercise allowed the participants to think about telling of stories in a spontaneous way without self-editing.

The writers had fun making their stories wild and unpredictable, transcending self-imposed boundaries.

11. Group Poem

This exercise was given at the last session for each group. I asked the group to think of one line that would describe their experience of participating in the workshop. A sheet of paper is passed around the group, each participant writes their line on the paper, folds it so the other person does not see what they have written, and the next person writes their line and so forth until all the participants have written their line. At the end of the exercise the paper is unfolded and the several lines are read as a poem.