

A Reflexive Inquiry into Gender Research:

*Towards a New Paradigm
of Knowledge Production
& Exploring New Frontiers
of Gender Research in
Southern Africa*

Edited by

Samantha van Schalkwyk
and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela

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INTRODUCTION

SAMANTHA VAN SCHALKWYK
AND PUMLA GOBODO-MADIKIZELA

The mother, wrinkled and meek, shuffled into the other room the first time; the second time, when we tried to interview her, she pulled a blanket to her eyes and disappeared into a corner.

Taken from the paper of Elena Moore (this volume), the research journal entry above speaks powerfully about certain tensions and the messy realities that we as feminist scholars often face during our engagements with participants. Moore is a researcher from the United Kingdom who at the time was doing research in black South African townships. Her research was based on exploring the intergenerational transmission of motherhood among three generations of women. Moore speaks of one of her experiences going into the women's home to interview them. She describes a poor black woman who lives in a shack in a township on the outskirts of Cape Town, South Africa. Over 20 years since democracy the legacy of apartheid lives on and the socio-spatial landscape still reflects the ethos of the Group Areas Act. Poor people predominantly reside in ghettos, or townships, to which they were moved as a result of apartheid policies. These areas are beset with a range of social problems, including severe poverty, unemployment, and high levels of violent crime that pose challenges to a life of integrity and self-worth.

The excerpt above aptly conveys a sense of the old woman's experienced vulnerability when researchers from a tertiary institution came into the intimate space of her home and began asking private and sensitive questions about her family life. Moore, the researcher, describes her own emotional memory of the event and the woman's lack of agency – the mother was “wrinkled” and “meek,” she did not walk but rather “shuffled”. The woman pulls a blanket to her eyes, as if to protect herself from the intensity of the emotional invasion.

Moore explains the context of unequal power relations that the old woman lived in and that her presence, as researcher, may have rendered the woman increasingly vulnerable to her abusive husband. This image speaks to the experiences of many researchers who have faced

participants' sense of anxiety or unease at being exposed to research processes that are very unfamiliar to them. Sometimes our research topics are considered sensitive issues to the participants (and their family and community) and often we cannot pre-empt these views before we arrive at the location of the research. Indeed, what is considered to be a sensitive topic is dependent on the relational circumstances and the conversational encounter between the researcher and the researched—that is the “*cultural* and *contextual* circumstances and the *personal* views held by the people involved” (Hydén 2008, 22). It is important that we, as researchers and activists, are in tune with our participants' views, otherwise we miss out on the essence of our interactions with those who take part in our research.

Often our very presence as researchers heightens participants' vulnerabilities, especially when we are working with people who have cultural beliefs that are very different to our own. In some circumstances we may be prying into areas of the participants' lives that are rendered taboo and “unspeakable” by their culture. We may inadvertently place participants in an uncomfortable or even dangerous position by asking them to respond about certain private aspects of their lives. Such attempts may be met with silence on the part of participants—similar to the blanket in the diary entry above—a symbolic shield with which the old woman tries to protect herself. Often as researchers and activists we do not express the difficult positions that we find ourselves in whilst we are working in the “field”. In this compilation we hope to unearth some of these silences in ways that can be useful for conceptualizing power and “self” in the process of an African-centered knowledge production.

Setting the Context

The idea for such a book on a reflexive inquiry into gender research emerged from an international gender symposium held in 2012 at the University of the Free State (UFS) titled, “African gender perspectives: dialogues between scholars, activists, and community-based workers”. The symposium comprised a diverse array of people who work in the field of gender—scholars, activists, and scholar-activists. Present were also community-based workers who live in underprivileged communities in South Africa and who are faced head on with the harsh realities of gender inequality and the economic and social challenges of addressing gender issues in the Southern African context.

The community activists included Faeza Meyer, a backyard shack dweller who had been involved in land housing rights and who is the Chairperson of Tafelsig Residents Unite in Cape Town. Faeza was

working on a research project with feminist historian, Koni Benson, from the University of Cape Town. The researcher and community activist joined forces to document Faeza's experiences of living in a small informal settlement in Tafelsig, Mitchell's Plein. Mitchell's Plein was one of the townships built on the periphery of Cape Town for "colored" people of mixed race ancestry who were forcibly removed from the white areas during the apartheid era. The area is beset with a range of problems, which include high levels of crime, poverty, gangsterism, and other social ills. Due to overcrowding and a severe lack of housing a small community had occupied a piece of land in this area, and had been subjected to a range of violent land invasions as authorities attempted to remove citizens from the land.

Other community members included members of a youth group "Nabz Unite" who live in an impoverished township called Namibia Square, which lies in the Free State, South Africa, on the outskirts of Bloemfontein. The rise of democracy in South Africa has not afforded the residents with any improvements in their quality of life and the community is characterized by severe poverty, joblessness, and other social ills such as crime and violence against women. The youths live in a current state of hopelessness with the burdening pressures of adulthood running in stark tension to their sense of hopelessness and the lack of social opportunities.

Present at the event were also members from a group for abused women, called Sisters for Sisters, which is based in Cape Town, South Africa. These groups shared their experiences of working with researchers/activists on different occasions. The Sisters for Sisters group focused on their experience of taking part in a doctoral research project (run by Samantha), and the "Nabz Unite" group discussed their experiences of taking part in a series of workshops in their community that were run by colleagues at UFS. These stories added much value to our dialogues as we, the researchers and activists, were able to gain a different perspective about research processes and we could begin to interrogate our "hidden" assumptions about researcher-researched relational dynamics. The conversations contributed to an alternative, often silenced, view about what it means to be an economically and socially disadvantaged social being who participates in social research. For this we are truly grateful to the community members who spoke their minds in a space that was unfamiliar and perhaps a bit daunting to many of them.

Most of the chapters in the book are based on research that has been done in the South African context. There is one chapter that explores students' perceptions of sexuality in a university setting in Zimbabwe and another chapter which is based on research that was done with cancer

caregivers in Kenya. It is important to note that some of the researchers live, or have lived, abroad and have conducted much of their fieldwork in South Africa. They thus come from contexts that are very different to those of their research participants. Jennifer Fish and Savannah Russo are researchers based in the United States who were studying the experiences of poor black grandmothers in a South African township, Khayelitsha. Elena Moore comes from the UK and she entered into a very unfamiliar terrain in her work on motherhood in three generations of Xhosa women living in townships on the outskirts of the Western Cape, South Africa.

Other authors came from the same context as their participants and shared the same ethnic identity and culture as their participants. However, various other identities that the researchers had access to meant that their worlds were still vastly different from the people who took part in their research. Jennifer Githaiga identified with the participants of her study because she shared the experience of caring for a family member who was dying of cancer and she was from the same country as her Kenyan participants. However, she writes about how her identity as an educated doctoral researcher created a visceral distance from her research participants.

Elaine Salo shared the same racial categorization as her participants and she spoke the same language as them, however her status as a middle class woman with a motor car meant that the community treated her as significantly different “other”. Fay Hodza, a Zimbabwean heterosexual male, conducted fieldwork with Zimbabwean heterosexual students about homosexuality. Fay does not consider homosexuality as a negative identity (as many of his participants do), and it is from this position of difference that he was able to critically interrogate the students’ narratives. Thus, these positions of difference were of critical significance, shaping the experience of both researcher and participant and influencing the type of data and the analysis that was produced.

Following the symposium all of the contributors attended a weekend workshop in the peaceful setting of Monkey Valley in Cape Town. This was a rich space within which we could openly and honestly share the intricacies of our experiences in the field and the complexities of our personal involvements with our topics and our relations with participants. This was a chance for us to regroup and synthesize our thoughts and to provide feedback to each other that fine-tuned the chapters and our imaginings of the book as a whole. It was also a space through which we could provide support to authors who were grappling with ways to translate their practical experience of gender work into a narratable form through the written word. Particular challenges that were voiced were the

challenges of documenting activist work in the field of sexual violence and the challenges of activists and academics coming together and working in ways that can mutually contribute to the fight against gender-based violence in the South African context. We wanted to use these conversations in ways that will move “African-based” gender work forward.

In research on gender and gender-based violence we see the same issues arising again and again—that is, the work is often disconnected from the research participants or it rehashes what has been done before. Research that does not take the micro factors of context into account (context as in participants’ micro context *and* the geo-social research context) does not have the potential to promote change in the ways in which we theorize gender issues in the African context. We realized that many of the researchers/activists at the gender symposium were doing things differently and that a lot of the work was connecting to *real* social issues.

The stories across our various divides (community-based workers, activists, scholars) were charged as we grappled with issues to do with sexual violence, sexuality, masculinity, activists/scholar/participant experiences and subjectivities, survivor identities, and processes of change. The multiplicity of our voices all contributed rich contextual detail in ways that offer the potential for new theoretic insights in gender work. We addressed core questions of how scholars who work in the African context can do gender research differently and how we can find another language to communicate what goes on when we engage in such work. We also engaged in dialogue about scholarship as it is connected to real community issues in ways that can inspire social change. We wanted to create a book that would document these innovative dialogues and capture a sense of the spirit of “moving beyond” the boundaries of traditional feminist research in Africa. Of course, such a project had to be firmly rooted in our (Southern) African context.

The current socio-political landscape of South Africa is one characterized by extreme rates of violence. The history of apartheid has instilled a culture of violence in the country (Goldblatt and Meintjies 1997; Misago, Landau, and Monson 2009), and it is a space where traumatic memories are desperately struggling to be heard, often in horrific ways. Shame is an integral part of people’s social reality within this complex space. Such shame is often not acknowledged or expressed, however, shame is deeply written onto the bodies and psyches of many South African men and women. Very often when shame cannot be acknowledged and expressed by men this shame translates into insatiable

rage, which is frequently played out onto the bodies of women. South Africa is a place in which some of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world are documented (Moffett 2006), where women are more likely to be raped than educated (Naidu-Hoffmeester and Kamal 2013), where people are brutally attacked and often killed because their sexuality does not fit the norms of hegemonic heterosexuality, and where any sort of difference is deemed license to dehumanize, oppress, and hurt—as seen by the increasing emotional and physical “xenophobic violence” against black African foreigners who are living in South Africa (Harris 2002; Strauss 2011).

As individuals who conduct gender research in this context, we need to be sensitive of these embodied emotions and the very real affects that they have on people in the aftermath of social and political trauma. It is crucial that researchers who work with people of this bruised and torn apart nation are attentive to the power dynamics inherent in research and that they strive to not reproduce patterns of power and oppression through their research work. The questions that we ask throughout this volume are in line with ways of doing exactly this.

Our questions are fuelled by the underlying assumptions of the “subjective elasticity” of identities (see Hoel 2013, 33). What this means is that we acknowledge the multiple identity positions of participants and researchers and we focus on the messiness of embodied lived realities that are constantly produced and in progress, shaped by the particular context within which research/activism takes place. The types of questions that we are asking are thus based around our views that the African social-spatial landscape significantly shapes the identities and processes that emerge throughout our research endeavors and, in this way, the context molds the process of knowledge production and the type of knowledge that we produce.

Our Epistemological Positions: Subjective Elasticity, Contextual “Selves,” and Destabilizing Hegemonic Power Relations

The word “feminism” has come to represent a vast array of politically conscious ways of thinking that attempt to uncover unequal societal power imbalances and try to change dominant structures of power. In this compilation our understanding of what constitutes the core of feminist work has been enhanced by De Lauretis (1987, 113) who says that feminism is, “A critical reading of culture, a political interpretation of the social text and of the social subject, and a re-writing of our culture’s

master narratives”. Feminist research in the field of gender is thus centrally concerned with issues of deconstruction, power, and liberation for social change. It is on these three themes—deconstruction, power in research relationships, and processes that work towards liberation for social change—that our book focuses.

Our research efforts are broadly based within a qualitative epistemology—all of the contributions adopt a holistic approach to research and the study of people’s subjective realities and experience in context. With the “interpretive turn” in social science came an increased skepticism of the “objectivity” of research and issues of power relations in research came into question (Pillow 2003). In her pioneering paper Oakley (2003) critiqued traditional methods of research as being based on (and as reproducing) hegemonic gender relations. She argued that it is standard practice for interviewers to perform masculine traits of objectivity, authority, and emotional detachment, while participants are to act according to traditional feminine traits such as compliance and submission to authority. However, those who work in the field of gender should know that we, as researchers and activists, are not neutral knowledge seekers and our work cannot be conceptualized through the mere metaphor of “extracting” something (information/ “truth”) from participants.

Researchers/activists are subjects, human beings that most often inhabit a more powerful position in relation to the research participants and others that they work with. As Riley, Schouten, and Cahill (2003, 10) state, such an understanding of the power dynamics of research processes is crucial for interrogating the politics and practices of social research as it, “puts relationships, subjectivity and ethics as salient concepts within the research process”.

We believe that destabilizing traditional research scripts is an essential component of producing new frontiers of knowledge in the field of gender and to do this we have to be able to acknowledge the different kinds of identities that we “inhabit” when we practice research/activism. Most importantly, we have to make transparent certain identities that make us uncomfortable along the way. In much of this compilation the authors interrogate these “messy” and challenging identities; we do this by situating our work in line with feminist and poststructuralist theories.

The work of this contribution falls within a critical feminist approach to research that has been born from postmodern and postcolonial feminist theories. These approaches have in common an acknowledgement that the person is political (thus dissolving the boundaries erected between self and society), a view that patriarchy is an organizing principle in society, and the idea that knowledges (not the singular knowledge) are multiple,

shifting and situated (Callaghan and Clark 2006). Poststructuralist theories transcend traditional notions of the “self” and focus on the social embeddedness of identities—hence the focus is on a relational notion of personhood as a social construction which can be understood through mutual engagement and dialogue (Fisher 2004 as cited by Etherington 2007). Through our gender work we therefore acknowledge that meanings are multiple and that they are never finished.

According to such approaches the immediate social context within which the participants and the researcher are located at the moment of research/data gathering is of critical significance. Research happens within particular spatial-temporal contexts which shape how we conceptualize gender categories as well as the kinds of relationships that we, as researchers, develop with the researched. What we have learnt from these approaches is that power is in flux and we (as researchers and participants) constantly fluctuate between different positions during the process of research/activism. Our work is based on the view that we should not assume that a narrative adequately reveals the meaning of an action beyond the relationship with the researcher through which the narrative is produced. Melucci (1995) says that if attention is not paid to the conditions of production of a text, and to the reception and interpretation of it by the researcher, then one is practicing a new kind of objectivism under the guise of “subjective sources”. The researcher and the participants are reflexively interdependent and interconnected and these connections need to be made explicit during the analysis (Mauthner and Doucet 2003). In our book we use this knowledge to make sense of our challenging and often contradictory experiences as researchers within strange and rather unanticipated landscapes. Such a move encompasses possibilities of moving towards a place of better integrity and also of producing new, exciting kinds of knowledge. A central aspect of this re-imaging of fieldwork relationships is the idea of “pushing the boundaries” of reflexive engagement (Bondi 2009), or what we term “complicating reflexivity”.

Complicating Reflexivity

Reflexivity has been defined as a research practice through which investigators turn their gaze onto their own subjectivity as it “exists” within the research context and as it impacts on researcher–researched interactions (Parker 2005). The concept has been defined as processes whereby researchers reflect on their research relationships and, in doing so, interrogate unequal social relations that stem from various social

positions (Bondi 2009). In order to “do” reflexivity, it is important that researchers recognize their differences of gender, class, race (and other positions) that separate them from the people that they study (Kobayashi 2003), *and* that they interrogate how (and why) these positions matter. Such reflective processes are meant to capture the rich fabric of social life that is overlooked by more traditional methods (Kobayashi 2003). According to Bondi (2009, 328), on a theoretical level reflexivity acknowledges that, “all knowledge bears the impress of the social relations entailed in its production, including the complex power relations between researchers and participants”. However, researchers’ practical engagement with reflexivity often does not match up to the standards/criteria of the theory. Often reflexivity is treated as an afterthought noting points of difference with the participants through brief and uncritical descriptions of certain social categories.

As such, critiques of reflexivity have abounded. In particular a reflexive practice whereby the researcher focuses on their own social locations and experience have been accused as being self-absorbed in nature and as being the antithesis of activism (Kobayashi 2003). Some scholars argue that researchers’ focus on their “self” excludes other, more pertinent issues (Bondi 2009) and that such reflections serve to distance them from their subjects, through constructing a sense of a detached other, and by virtue of the researchers’ power to name and situate themselves in relation to the researched (Kobayashi 2003). A central argument is that reflexivity can end up distracting attention from much more important political goals and social change agendas (Bondi 2009).

Kobayashi (2003) argues that reflexivity is not the best tool that we have at our disposal for taking us further towards social change. However, what she refers to here is a self-reflexive reflexivity that is researcher centered and a mere reflection of one’s difference in relation to the people of study. Reflexivity can (and as we show, should), however be much more than a mere self-reflexive exercise. When we let go of the assumption that reflexivity should be done by announcing the social categories to which we, the researchers and activists, belong then we can begin to explore more complex and uncomfortable approaches to the process of identity transformation in context (Pillow 2003). It is this territory that our chapters in this volume explore.

For example, and a dominant theme throughout the chapters that make up this compilation, as researchers we very often transverse socio-cultural landscapes. That is, we negotiate social (and physical) landscapes that are very different from our own contexts—we are placed both physically and psychologically in unknown territory. It can be very intimidating for us, as

researchers, to enter into and experience the participants' topographical texture, however this is crucial information and foregrounding such tensions can help improve our analyses significantly (Pillow 2003). In order to push the boundaries of reflexivity we need to be willing to enunciate this unfamiliar/threatening territory. Some have stated that communicating dilemmas in fieldwork helps us work towards a more ethical research stance (see, for example, Etherington 2007). Once researchers can move away from a self-absorbed focus on their own identities and focus on the rich dynamics of the *context* and a reflexive engagement of what went wrong (or right) during their engagements with the participants then reflexivity can be a productive tool in the generation of new knowledge.

Denzin's (1997) five different typologies of reflexivity in qualitative research can serve as a useful guide for conceptualizing how we can push the boundaries of reflexivity. He outlines the categories of methodological reflexivity, intertextual reflexivity, standpoint reflexivity, queer reflexivity, and feminist reflexivity. The initial starting point of reflexivity, the base work *per se*, is to recognize the differences between the researcher and the researched. However, the crucial aspect of this process is then taking up a moral stance in working to eliminate, or reduce, such unequal power dynamics. This is the core of what Denzin (1997) refers to as "feminist reflexivity". As Kobayashi (2003, 348) argues:

reflexivity has no meaning if not connected to a larger agenda—which for most of us is avowedly both political and personal—meant to change the world. How we choose to change the world is a very personal matter; but the results are not.

Reflexivity is thus a varied and multiple concept that encompasses and feeds into both theory and practice (Bondi 2009). Reflexive engagement should entail a practice of on-going conversation about experience that should inform our definitions, concepts of the self, our relational conduct, as well as our political practice.

Poststructuralist lines of thinking have politicized the practices of representation; we, as social researchers and activists, now face particularly challenging questions with regards to reflexivity: Can we truly represent another? Whose story is it—the researcher or the researched? How can we engage in ethical (and productive) representation, and then who is the representation serving in terms of ethics and usefulness? (See, for example, Pillow 2003.) Reflexivity in this sense is a process whereby we make visible the ways in which we do the work of representation; it is through such an examination that we can foreground issues about the

politics of representation (Pillow 2003). However, we would argue that as gender activists and researchers who have a passion for working towards social change, our reflective practices need to be based on something more—a true connection between human beings.

Quoting the popular work of John Bradshaw, “Creating love: the next great stage of growth” (1992), hooks (2002) says that global societies’ acceptance of patriarchal domination as a founding narrative has resulted in a preoccupation of narratives of power rather than narratives of love. In this sense we have lost what it means to love in both our personal and professional worldly endeavors. For hooks (2002) this means the absence of care, respect, and responsibility. This is starkly apparent in much qualitative work in which research participants are given token acknowledgements and the research agenda is unequivocally designed to serve only the institution/researcher. So, we ask the question, “How can we re-gain an ‘ethics of responsibility’ and an ‘ethics of care’ in social research?”

In this book we offer insights into the processes and practices of novel and exciting forms of reflexivity that *can* be embraced to move us beyond reflection and moral discussions and further towards a social change agenda. Pillow’s (2003, 188) concept of “interrupting reflexivity” stands as a useful tool to illustrate what we are offering in this book. Pillow (2003) says that this kind of reflexivity renders knowing as uncomfortable and as unattainable. Knowing is unattainable because our ways of knowing the other (and the self) are blurred by the white noise of economic and political institutions. The chapters in this book provide rich context-driven insights that help to counter the privileging of a “reflexivity” that prioritizes the researcher’s identity. We engage in explicit discussion about the economic, political, and institutional contexts within which our research processes are situated, and the ways in which these contexts shape our interactions with others during research/activism.

We reflect on the power dynamics inherent in the research process in different but related ways. Broadly, in our book we conceptualize power in research as, firstly, power to define, and secondly, power to practice certain ways of being—both of which can lead to the achievement of certain political goals. Our contributors in this book practice feminist reflexivity in their gender work in the sense that they destabilize power structures according to three different conceptual levels of what power is and what it does (and can do) in research. The first is power as definition. The second is power as social action. The last is power as reflective awareness and communication.

The section below outlines our (the editors) analyses of the ways in which the contributors of this volume have worked towards “pushing the boundaries” of reflexivity. We analyze these contributions through the lens of “interrupting reflexivity;” drawing on the feminist themes of deconstruction, power in research relationships, and a social change agenda we weave a picture of the ways in which the contributors collectively work towards “ethical reflexivity” in African gender research.

Towards an Ethical based Reflexivity

As we work to add to the global body of knowledge, it is important to keep in mind the effects of our contributions, however it is equally important that we keep in mind the effects and repercussions of the processes that we engage in to create this knowledge. In fact exceeding “normal” institutional expectations of research ethics is part of the core work that researcher/activists should be doing in Africa and with certain vulnerable participants (Swartz 2011). As Salo (this volume, 171) states:

the questions for African feminists have always required that we interrogated the praxis of knowledge production and of methodology that go beyond the usual normative acknowledgements of ethics, consent and commitment that underwrite standard social science research.

We need to examine our interviews, focus groups and other processes of knowledge production as more than mere data-gathering “tools” and we need to move beyond a “token ethics” which is written up according to prescribed institutional “rules”. All of this entails that we pay closer attention to the relational nature of research encounters (Boonzaier 2014) and the intuitions, motivations, and emotions that emerge within these sites. In this way we will be able to move towards a deeper understanding of our processes of doing research. Such “interruptions” of traditional conceptualizations of reflexivity is, for us, a move closer to “ethical reflexivity”.

Qualitative research, and especially work in the field of gender, requires a high level of personal commitment—both in terms of researchers’ taking up personal responsibility to uphold ethical practices during the research process and the emotional dynamics that occur through these human interactions. The latter is a dimension that is not so readily discussed during researchers’ reflections of their work; however this is an ever-present aspect of gender research. It speaks to what we give of ourselves as researchers in these encounters not because of what you might gain in return but because these are ethical human interactions, it

speaks to the fact that we, as gender researchers, temporarily inhabit unfamiliar and challenging environments that impact our sense of self and emotions as well as others' emotional and ontological territory (Hoel 2013). The link between reflexivity and ethical research is established by researcher transparency (Etherington 2007). When the reader is given important detail about our choices, interactions, and emotions then they can observe the ways in which these subtle and unpredictable situations arise—what Guillemin and Gillam (2004, 262) call “ethically important moments,” and, importantly, how we negotiate these situations. In such moments the decisions made by the researcher has important ethical consequences (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). We would add that such an agenda can be enhanced by additionally making transparent one's political and social change agendas and theoretical choices, and the ways in which these choices have shaped our representation of the people who take part in our research.

Power relations between the researcher and the researched are never egalitarian but rather are fuelled by imbalances which are shaped by race, class, academic authority, and level of control over the research process and the research output (Hoel 2013). These issues are magnified when working with vulnerable or traumatized communities (Swartz 2011). Researchers are often silent about important issues of power in research relationships. Such silence regularly happens by choice or by the restrictions of institutional norms about doing research and practicing the “researcher” role. Researchers often engage in what Finlay (2002) calls “selective silence”—that is they ignore issues during the research that were difficult for them to manage. This often entails a kind of suppression of verbal or other information that the researcher may find difficult to narrate. When we produce neat final written products in the form of books, academic papers, or theses we do not readily acknowledge that the process of getting to the finished product was not neat or uncomplicated in any way.

Researchers need to be explicit about their research processes and about their (political) motivations, choices and experiences that emerged along the way. In this way we can begin working towards a level of accountability with regards to our gender research. The innovative potential of our book lies in the ways in which the contributors grapple head on with such issues. We move beyond the suppression and silence about research experience/method that is so characteristic of contemporary qualitative work in the field of gender. Throughout the book, we keep bringing attention back to the importance of the social context with

regards to the interpretations and ideas that we have about the people that we study.

Practicing “Ethical Reflexivity” through the Deconstruction of Research Participants’ Social Positions

As researchers we often practice a more powerful position in relation to our participants through the kinds of research questions that we ask. Some questions “close off” or inhibit any opportunity for social change in the lives of our participants. Scholars in different fields have criticized certain research questions. For example, the question in the field of violence against women, “Why do abused women stay?” was put under much scrutiny as it placed focus on the psychological deficits of abused women and did not acknowledge the social and economic factors that inform women’s choices to stay with an abusive partner. It was argued that more appropriate questions that acknowledge abused women’s social agency would be, “*How* do abused women stay?” Such a question moves away from psychologically pathologizing abused women and leaves room for the exploration of some level of agency. This example highlights the power of research questions in terms of their linguistic capacity to situate the researched as certain kinds of subjects.

Another potent use (or abuse) of power can be the definitions that we utilize in our research and then reinforce in our written work. In the first section of our book, “Multiple ‘selves’ in context: disrupting gendered categories and definitions,” the authors interrogate certain social categories and binaries of masculinity/femininity, personhood, the body and the sexual self. It is through such investigations that hegemonic definitions and “feminine/masculine” categories can be challenged and destabilized, and that socially constructed, oppressive ways of being can be transcended. The work in this section “speaks” to the first theme of feminism outlined above—that is the deconstruction of language to disrupt hegemonic gendered power. The contributors highlight their important decisions surrounding language and how they represent their research subjects/topic. Such sensitivity to language and representation is an ethical strategy in itself (see Swartz 2011).

In the opening chapter, “Rape and the limits of the law: revisiting the criticism against the South African Sexual Violence Legislation,” Azille Coetzee revisits the important question of whether the fight against sexual violence in South Africa should be pursued through avenues of legal reform. She does this through the lens of Carol Smart’s skepticism of the law as an appropriate medium through which to effect transformation.

Coetzee takes us through a philosophical interrogation of legal definitions that is well situated within the specific South African context. She argues that feminists who pursue change through legal means should look beyond legal definitions and the language of rape and should be ready to delve into transforming the power and logic of the law and challenge the laws power to define. Overall Coetzee concludes that there are significant limits of pursuing change through law reform and feminists should not be looking at the South African criminal law system as a solution to the problem of rape but rather they should pursue the fight through other mediums—such as active pursuits of redefining concepts of masculinity, femininity, personhood, and the body.

In chapter 2, “Beyond heteronormativity: doing gender and sexuality in university contexts,” Fay Hodza presents his reflections on gender and sexuality issues among students at a university in Zimbabwe. These are topics that are widely suppressed in a context in which homosexuality is largely rendered pathological, and sometimes even demonic. Hodza outlines his precarious position as a researcher who is studying such taboo, “thorny” topics. He speaks about the stigmatization and incredulity that he received from other scholars who labeled him “insane” and “un-African” because he was doing such gender work in the Zimbabwean context. This was a pertinent issue for him as a Zimbabwean, heterosexual, married male with a political agenda to promote equality. Hodza’s paper speaks to social-political issues of otherness, themes that point to the issues of what is problematic for the democracy of Zimbabwe. Hodza interrogates socially shamed positions to do with homosexuality and also interrogates the positions which his colleagues from Zimbabwe infer of him, as researcher. Here he is doing the work of deconstruction. Hodza’s work is important because it is only through talk about non-normative, “silenced” ways of being that new kinds of discourses and realities can be born.

In the third chapter of Part I, “Woman abuse in South Africa: reflecting on the complexity of women’s decisions to leave abusive men,” van Schalkwyk and colleagues explore the experiences of a relatively understudied group of women—abused women who are residing in shelters in South Africa. They coherently weave a picture of these women’s experiences of leaving abusive men and the complex decision-making processes that characterize their journeys—shedding insight on what the context of poverty, deprivation, and joblessness means for abused women. Following authors such as Davies and Harré (1990) and Davies et al. (2006), the authors adopt a feminist poststructuralist analytic approach of identities as precarious, contradictory and ever-changing and as constructed through language at certain contextual moments. It is through

an acknowledgement of their ideological approach to selfhood that the authors open up new kinds of questions about the complexity of abused women's experience. In this way they explore women's social agency as it develops within the specific context of the shelter sphere in South Africa. By asking such "identity questions" the authors problematize dominant cultural narratives of abuse, powerlessness, and victimhood.

These chapters show that when we begin to acknowledge the multiplicity of identities that are ever in flux, we can begin to deconstruct what it means to be a violated (and) sexual being. Importantly, in these ways we can begin to challenge and (re)construct different meanings about gender and power and what it means to be a victim of sexual assault, an "abused woman," and a human being who prefers to have sex with others of the same gender. These definitions have significant implications as they provide room to conceptualize space for the recognition of the power of the category of human being that we are researching, and thus provide the mobility to move towards social change. These chapters highlight the importance of researchers' reflexivity about how they categorize the people that they research. The chapters that follow in Part II of the book deal with reflections of power and the possibilities of social action through research/activism.

Practicing "Ethical Reflexivity" through Bridging Research—Activist Binaries

In the second section of our compilation, "Feminist praxis: collaborations and bridging research-activist binaries," the authors reflect on their own research and activist processes. The stories depict real work in constructing collaborations between the "powerful" and the "powerless," between the "researcher" and the "researched," between the scholar and the activist. These chapters are in line with what Finlay (2002) calls "mutual collaboration"—a type of reflexivity through which researchers engage in various strategies to enlist participants as co-researchers and through which they embrace multiple voices, shared realities, and contradictions. However, such collaborative pursuits have often been used as an intellectual means of validating data (Finlay 2002) while less has been focused on mutuality as an intentional ethics of reciprocation in research that can contribute to flatten power gradients between participant/researcher and community worker/activist (Swartz 2011).

The chapters in the current compilation bring political motivation into the picture. They illustrate how we can practice mutual collaborative

reflexivity with a social change agenda, with the aim of changing the lives of our participating “partners”. Most importantly the authors highlight that when one has a social change agenda, one should never truly be able to categorize oneself as *either* researcher *or* activist/“teacher” or student”. Such collaborative work should value the combined insights of different persons, places, and contexts (Benson and Meyer, this volume). The work in this section provides insight into how we, as researchers and activists, can work towards liberation and a change in current social conditions—change not as abstract thought or ideas but as something that happens in the “here and now” of research. Through collaboration across divides, the authors co-produce knowledge in diverse formats that are relevant for the lives of activists/community-based workers “on the ground”. They show that through such collaborations both researchers and activists can engage with their co-produced insights and, by doing so, they can push the boundaries of traditional academic knowledge in ways that are productive for all.

In chapter 4, “Documenting trauma, hope and human security: scholar activist work with Grandmothers against Poverty and Aids,” Fish and Russo use a human security lens to explore the experiences of black grandmothers living in the Cape Town township of Khayelitsha within the broader context of the HIV/AIDS crisis, poverty, and deprivation. They engage in a reflexive analysis of knowledge production through feminist-activist methods. Importantly, Fish and Russo critically engage with their position as privileged, white North American scholars researching the experiences of poor women in a black township in South Africa, and outline a number of components of scholar-activist research that they believe are transferable to scholar-activist work in other sites.

In chapter 5, “‘Writing my history is keeping me alive’: politics and practices of collaborative history writing,” Benson and Meyer reflect on the process, the politics, and the practices of collaborative work between a feminist historian and a community activist who formally occupied “illegal” squatter land in a small community on the outskirts of Cape Town, South Africa. Through their collaborative efforts and a collection of sources they weave together a story of people’s experience of a land occupation in ways that challenge traditional notions of methodology and authorship. Through rich descriptions of what they call a feminist collaborative methodology, they make visible the power positions that emerged throughout this process. Their collaboration makes explicit the intersection between research and political struggle. Importantly, Benson and Meyer say that this process of evolving methodology saw changes in the kinds of questions that they asked—from more theoretical debates such

as, “who can and should write history?” to more activist questions like, “what can history be used for and how can it produce solidarity?”

In their chapter, “Ought antiracists males be (pro)feminist too? Engaging black men in work against gender and sexual-based violence,” Botha and Ratele (chapter 6) describe their collaboration as two African heterosexual men who are passionate about working towards a gender equal society—Ratele as a scholar and Botha as an activist in the field. Botha is an activist who works as a media and government relations person for a non-governmental organization and Ratele is a professor who is engaged in research at a South African university. They have worked together for many years on masculinities and other gender and sexually related topics. They ascribe their sensitivity to the fact that each focuses on different processes and outcomes of activism/research—Botha mostly engages with people in the public eye and Ratele engages in more long-term reflection and research. The contributors say that their collaboration supplements and enriches each other’s work. They use the plural “we” to describe their connected journey towards a manhood that embraces self-definitions that are different from those imposed by patriarchal masculinity.

Ultimately the chapters in Part II highlight the emergent and transformative nature of collaborations—in providing new kinds of perspectives and knowledge, in eroding dominant narratives of personhood and practice, and in challenging researchers and activists to “push new ground” and to think of themselves and their roles differently. As the authors show, a large part of this work is deconstructing certain assumptions of hierarchy and knowing. In particular these collaborations across divides and across epistemological ways of knowing the world resulted in important shifts in perspectives. The authors moved from engaging in theoretical and language-based questions towards engaging in questions that focused more closely around issues of their connections with each other and the rich potentials of solidarity.

Practicing “Ethical Reflexivity” through Intersubjective Reflection

Reflexivity has become an important topic for qualitative researchers in general, and more specifically for those who engage feminist approaches to research. Two foundational influences underpinning reflexivity are intersubjectivity and relational psychoanalysis, concepts that emphasize the interpersonal dimension of the process that unfolds in relational psychoanalytic practice. This perspective suggests that rather

than a neutral therapist making interpretations of the client's statements and behaviors, the therapist and client influence one another at both the conscious and unconscious levels.

The intersubjective epistemological model has broadened our understanding of the qualitative research process, and intersubjectivity is now seen to be at the core of knowledge production in the relationships between researcher and participants. Thus, making sense of the data is no longer seen as a role exclusively for the researcher, but rather a process of "co-production" of knowledge (Colombo 2003), which unfolds because of the reciprocal mutual influence inherent in these relationships between researcher and participant. Researchers then have to be aware of the interplay between their emotions and those of participants, how their own stories and biographies intersect with those of the participants, and how their positions of power and privilege may have affected the kind of knowledge that is produced.

In "Feminist reflexivity: ethics and researcher-researched power relations"—the third and final section in our book, the contributing authors grapple with these issues of power in research relationships, and of the intersection between their personal stories and the stories and circumstances of the participants in their research. Through critical reflection, they use their own fieldwork experiences to examine the deep emotions that they felt when they conducted the research. To demonstrate transparency and accountability, they confront the issues of researchers' power in relation to the people that they study. A central part of the work in this section is a critical interrogation of our assumptions of shared identities and the ways in which intersectional identities are always linked up with broader inequalities, which are fuelled by social and institutional forces. One cannot unequivocally claim a sense of shared identity with our participants, and to do so would be naive and to ignore the situated "truth" of our research encounters. The authors in this section give transparent accounts of power dynamics that occur throughout their research processes and their chapters constitute a move away from traditional discourses of methodology. A central theme throughout is that we, as researchers and activists, should look deeper than standardized ethical issues of consent, anonymity, and a shallow acknowledgement of our discomfort due to our position of power in relation to research participants.

Elena Moore (chapter 7) reflects on the challenges she encountered as a researcher from the UK applying her research skills within urban townships in the South African context, and the "heart-break" of witnessing the intense male control that dominates the homes of the women who were participants in her study. Moore, from whose diary entry

the quote at the beginning of this introduction is drawn, also speaks candidly about her own disconnectedness from the woman hiding herself under a blanket: “I did not know how I could communicate with this participant whilst she was hidden under these blankets” (this volume page 158). These are the kinds of experiences that challenged everything she knew about research—ethics, confidentiality, and communication. At the same time, however, Moore argues that through her close engagements with the participants, and by confronting and engaging with the dis-ease in the research process, she gained unique insight into the women’s lived realities and their everyday existence. From engaging in such a way as qualitative researchers we learn more about how different people experience themselves as embodied beings in their social context and throughout the research process, this knowledge obviously enriches our understanding of their lived experiences and enhances our analysis of their stories in invaluable ways. Moore eloquently traces her thoughts and perspective through providing snippets of her field notes and neatly presents us with insight about the origins of her data. As such Moore’s chapter constitutes an outstanding reflexive exercise that is both comprehensive and holistic.

In chapter 8, “Autobiography and the research context: reflection on unbecoming the ‘native’ anthropologist,” Elaine Salo makes a call for feminist researchers to pay deeper attention to what “we” consider to be shared feminist epistemologies, dominant feminist perspectives on modernization, and normative discourses of ethics and methodology. She traces her experiences in the lively Rio Street of Manenberg, an impoverished colored community on the outskirts of Cape Town. Through rich descriptions of her interactions with the women of Manenberg, Salo poses critical reflections about shared temporalities and gender and raced identities. Salo uses the term “native anthropologist” because she was studying a familiar place, the colored township of Manenberg, South Africa, and she was looking at the experiences of colored women with whom she shared gendered and racial classification under the old apartheid system.

An important issue when considering one’s own power in relation to the people that we study is our own choice as researchers what to disclose to research participants. From a traditional research ethics perspective this translates to informed consent about the research process and other important information about the project (Escobedo et al. 2007). However, issues of disclosure become more complex when we are working with a social agenda in mind, when we connect with participants as human beings and not as the all-powerful researcher. In chapter 9, “Interrogating our

research processes: reflexive positioning in an IPA study of women family cancer caregivers,” Githaiga examines the experiences of Kenyan women cancer caregivers. Githaiga disclosed to her participants her experience of caring for her father who was diagnosed with incurable cancer, and in this way she negotiated the position of “insider”. She discusses this “insider” position and shows how it often led to a blurring of boundaries: “I felt like they were telling *my* story”. These moments of connection with the participants are significant as they often entail an “emotional pull” to memories of past trauma and hurt on the part of the researcher—such connection has powerful implications for how the research process unfolds (our narratives connect with and drive the process) and how we interpret the data (we are processing what women say through our own emotional memory mechanism).

The chapters in this section highlight a point that Finlay (2002) has made about reflexivity. When it comes to the actual research process, Finlay (2002, 209) argues, engaging in reflexivity is “full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails”. Indeed, the act of narrating the “unspeakable” aspects of qualitative work means moving into dangerous territory, because by interrogating our actions, and sometimes exposing the inadequacy of our methods, we are, in essence, admitting that these research processes are far from perfect, or even fair. Yet, we believe that it is crucial to be explicit about our choices and to acknowledge that we are more than *just* researchers, we are human beings who connect to participants on various levels. Reflexive practice in research can help us adapt our research methods in ways that can engage more deeply with nuances of culture and the different positions and realities that we all bring with to the research encounter. It ensures the vitality of research processes (Bondi 2003). Thus, we come to a deeper understanding of our participants’ “truth” (and our “truth” as researchers).

Some Concluding Thoughts

Dilemmas of power and ethically acceptable research relationships need to be revisited repeatedly because they cannot ever fully be resolved, asymmetries will always be present, especially when conducting research in the current post-apartheid South Africa of poverty, deprivation, and hopelessness.

In this compilation we add to the body of work that has begun to question a mere self-reflexive reflexivity that adheres to the prescriptions of “standard” social science ethics—what Etherington (2007, 601) refers to as “dutiful ethics”. The contributors show that close attention to the

processes of the production of research creates the possibility of yielding rich new insights within the field of qualitative gender work, and that engaging in deeper levels of reflexive engagement is a means to do just this. The contributors of this compilation offer significant moments of reflection about their research and their research subjects. In this way we highlight ways in which feminist scholars can engage in gender work in important ways that enhance a move towards a more “ethical reflexivity,” which enhances human worth and dignity.

These reflections highlight the importance of interrogating the difficulties of research rather than blinking ourselves to the challenges and dilemmas that often form part of the research process. It is through confronting these difficulties head on that we can gain valuable insight that can evolve the processes and production of future gender work in sub-Saharan Africa. We ask important questions that may help feminist researchers who are serious about adopting a social change agenda proceed through the “messiness” of social research.

Our wish is for this compilation to stand as a resource for young feminist researchers who have not been formally taught ways in which to express their intuitions that they experience as researchers who are studying gender in the African context. We also want this work to stand as a source of inspiration to more experienced scholars in the field who may require some renewed hope and fresh ideas in the field of gender work. We hope that this book fuels courage to make previously silenced processes and relations transparent, to learn from these significant moments, and to move towards a much needed new paradigm of knowledge production that forefronts ethical work and our significant connections as human beings.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DOCUMENTING TRAUMA, HOPE, AND HUMAN SECURITY: SCHOLAR ACTIVIST RESEARCH WITH GRANDMOTHERS AGAINST POVERTY AND AIDS

JENNIFER N. FISH AND SAVANNAH L. RUSSO

Introduction

This chapter draws upon narrative accounts of South African grandmothers and participatory organizational observations to bring into focus the intersecting complexities and complementarities of scholar-activist research. We discuss our shared process of acquiring, analyzing and expanding applied research with a community-based organization of 300 grandmothers, which provides support for women on the front lines of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. By connecting the micro level of grandmothers' day-to-day experiences with a larger context of post-conflict trauma, reconciliation and national development, this scholar-activist research illuminates the distinct experiences of elder women, who struggle to realize the promises of the post-94 democratic South Africa in the face of the escalating AIDS pandemic. As we explore how grandmothers act as agents of human security, experience continued trauma, provide multigenerational caretaking labor, and act as community leaders, we simultaneously interrogate the underpinnings of feminist scholar-activist research.

This chapter centers analyses of human security, gender and post-conflict reconstruction on Grandmothers against Poverty and AIDS (GAPA), a community-based organization of elder women, all of whom experienced suffering and severe marginalization under the apartheid regime and now face the current wave of the HIV/AIDS crisis' caretaking and economic demands. The foundation of this scholar-activist research

with GAPA began ten years ago.¹ The bulk of the material for this chapter, however, emerged over the course of a focused research project in Cape Town in 2011, when we interviewed 22 members of the GAPA organization and engaged in a month of extensive ethnographic observational research in Khayelitsha.² Throughout this period, we focused on grandmothers' experiences of the impact of HIV/AIDS, particularly in relation to the high levels of crime and poverty that pose serious threats to personal, community, health and political security for elder women in this community. Our collection of data required that we build individual and organizational trust with GAPA, ask sensitive questions about intimate topics to individual participants, engage in intensive observations of daily life and family structures, and sit alongside grandmothers who recounted severe life challenges, loss and persistent grieving. In this chapter, we integrate our academic topic of inquiry—the relationship among grandmothers, HIV/AIDS and human security in South Africa—with a reflexive analysis of the process of acquiring knowledge through feminist-activist forms.

Framing Human Security through a Feminist Lens

Our research shows how elder women provide not only core foundational support systems and community social cohesion within Khayelitsha, but also central *human security* functions within the larger socio-economic context of South Africa's post-conflict transition. As an outgrowth of the traditional nation-state focus of security studies, human security frameworks ask, "What can we do to ensure that people around the world are able to secure themselves, their families, and their communities, from the various threats they face every day?" (Hubbard, Suzuki, and Koryu 2008, 15). This perspective places individuals and civil society at the center of analysis to examine the particularities of the local in the context of larger global dynamics. While exploring the transnational, human paradigms simultaneously incorporate personal, community, national and international scales (Lammers 1999, 62). The 1994 launch of the new security framework in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shifted human security emphasis to include socio-economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, and personal wellbeing (Ray and Basu 2006, 5). The HIV/AIDS crisis provides an exemplar of this perspective because it impacts health, economic livelihood, food supply and community cohesion, while illuminating the daily human impact of insecurity.

When we look at human security as an ideological framework, the burden of political, social and economic instability is assumed more heavily by women throughout the world. Here, the burgeoning field of feminist security studies synthesizes the human security analysis of a wider measure of peace and stability with a gender lens that focuses on the disproportionate impact of socio-economic, health, and environmental insecurity on women. This shift in orientation and applied practice complements the trends toward a human security framework, while widening the scale of empirical studies to include individuals, organizations and civil society more broadly. According to feminist security studies scholars, gender is central to both development and security studies because of the asymmetric power relations between men and women across societies, which reinforce conflict, violence and unequal access to resources. Feminist security studies scholars focus on how such imbalances in access to resources are central to world politics and contribute to the insecurity of individuals, particularly, marginalized and disempowered populations (Tickner 2001). As Annick Wibben (2011, 5) argues:

Feminists have played an important role in proposing alternative conceptions of power and violence that go beyond the traditional military configurations of the discipline of IR, including ideas of common and cooperative security arrangements, and non-state-centric perspectives on security.

For these reasons, feminist security studies scholars have consistently argued that human security and post-conflict peace transitions cannot be achieved without the vital integration of attention to women and a wider gender perspective.

We draw from feminist and human security studies to situate the experiences and contributions of Khayelitsha grandmothers, who are on the front lines of the HIV/AIDS crisis in South Africa. At this particular moment in South Africa's ongoing post-apartheid transition, when the promise of social justice in the building of democracy confronts the pervasive HIV/AIDS pandemic, elder women encapsulate a critical juncture where human security, development and reconciliation intersect. Through the case study of GAPA, we explore both the individual narratives of grandmothers as well as the role of civil society organizations in securing communities, confronting the AIDS pandemic and addressing the particular needs of elder women who live within the socio-economic structural residue of apartheid's harshest inequalities. From this research, and our analysis of the scholar-activist methods undertaken to gather these data, we intend to deepen and expand theoretical and applied

considerations of the meaning of peace and security, as it is lived on a daily basis among this particular and symbolic population.

Women and HIV/AIDS in South Africa

In South Africa's post-94 political, economic and social context, accompanied by the unparalleled AIDS crisis, women continually bear disproportionate burdens of the aftermath of apartheid and the costs of rebuilding a new democratic nation. In the communities most heavily impacted by HIV/AIDS, they support orphaned children, care for the sick and dying, work more hours in paid and unpaid labor, coordinate funerals and serve as heads of households. Within the prevailing socio-economic circumstances, these gender disparities become even more pronounced (Ferreira and Kalula 2009). Furthermore, the overarching geographic location dynamics of urban townships in Cape Town shape the gender-specific nature of AIDS and its caretaking dimensions. A closer examination of this disproportionate burden suggests grandmothers are "picking up the pieces" of the AIDS pandemic (Smetherham, Miller, and Fish 2013). In doing so, their networks and community support organizations become that much more vital to survival, as well as a collective response to the crisis.

Our study took place in Khayelitsha—South Africa's fastest-growing township. Khayelitsha captures the existing race, class and gender divides that reflect South Africa's highly stratified history and foundation (Uthando 2011). Since its establishment in the mid-1980s, Khayelitsha has seen a steady population increase, paralleled by increases in HIV/AIDS rates at nearly 13 percent nationally and extremely high unemployment rates at 41 percent nationally and over 70 percent in township locations (South Africa HIV and AIDS Statistics 2010). A substantial portion of the homes in Khayelitsha are informal squatter camps, which lack proper sanitation and security. Rates of violence and crime have escalated, coupled with substantive increases in gang violence and drug use. In particular, violence against women has escalated, as South Africa often claims to have one of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world, with extremely high incidents of intimate partner violence (Abrahams et al. 2012). The relational links between unemployment, housing, crime, and violence against women are poignant factors that shape the growing numbers of HIV infections and its disproportionate impact on women.

Elder women in Khayelitsha face a particular dual experience because they hold the history of living through suffering within the apartheid era

and are now taking on central roles as the caretakers, as their own children are dying of HIV/AIDS at escalating rates. These grandmothers—who lived through South Africa’s end of apartheid and the ushering in of a new democratic nation under Nelson Mandela—thought they would be taken care of in their elder years, yet now face the realities of their need to perform care labor as the HIV/AIDS pandemic’s demands place an enormous toll on elder women in the most affected communities (Miller, Smetherham, and Fish 2012). Yet, even as their lives are reshaped by the needs of this pandemic, women continue to organize collectively to confront the HIV/AIDS crisis and its central links to poverty and development within South Africa. With these two overarching trends—an increase in HIV/AIDS and the reliance on elder women to provide caretaking—non-governmental and civil society organizations play a central role in responding to grandmothers’ needs and confronting the pandemic through collective mobilization. Let us turn to an analysis of the organization at the heart of this study.

Feminist Research with Grandmothers against Poverty and AIDS

Our feminist scholar-activist research orientation emphasizes the importance of building relationships with the participants in this study, as well as the organization as a whole. The narrative data collected for this study emerged from a ten-year working relationship established through continual contact and a series of academic exchanges for US students and faculty at Grandmothers against Poverty and AIDS (GAPA). In this section, we overview key components of our findings while within GAPA’s main programs and outreach services. Let us begin with a short overview of the organization, followed by a more detailed account of our findings surrounding women and human security. Next, we move to a reflective analysis of our research process, paying particular attention to the ways in which our role as researchers shaped the research design, process and findings.

Formed as a pilot project by University of Cape Town occupational therapists, Kathleen Broderick and Monica Ferreira, GAPA initially set out to empower grandmothers from townships in the Western Cape of South Africa through social and small-scale bereavement support groups that also promoted HIV/AIDS education. With acquired government support, small- and large-scale donations from organizations like the Stephen Lewis Foundation (a program of the United Nations Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa), and individual donors, GAPA became an

official non-governmental organization (NGO) in 2001. The formalization of this organization stemmed from grandmother members' clear indication of the pressing need for a larger-scale ongoing community-based project to fight the interlocking problems of security, development and HIV/AIDS (GAPA 2011). Today, GAPA reaches over 300 grandmothers through a total of nearly 30 support groups, including income-generation training, grief support groups, health and wellness programming, and an afterschool education and nutrition program for over 200 children. These focus projects, as well as the larger organizational philosophies, are guided by a perspective that draws upon the social capital and status of elder women as central figures in the fight against AIDS, violence and poverty. Our research suggests that in addition to supporting individual women and smaller groups, GAPA has become a central community base that holds a symbolic presence about the collective force and contributions of grandmothers on the front lines of the AIDS pandemic.

The philosophy of the organization requires that each member be affected by HIV/AIDS in her immediate family or household. GAPA supports a decentralized leadership philosophy where grandmother members are an active part of the organizational structure. Kathleen Broderick (pers. comm.), founder of GAPA, stated that GAPA was "building the capacity of older women to cope with their life circumstances, achieving this through building self-esteem." She went on to identify the following central ways in which GAPA serves as a community-based, grandmother-run support system where the flow of knowledge is expansive and inclusive: 1) making educational enrichment opportunities available in various language formats; 2) contributing to household income through the skills development that builds upon the agency of grandmothers' hands; and 3) providing opportunities for community leadership roles and the spread of knowledge, while advocating on behalf of older persons. Within this advocacy role, GAPA plays a vital role by supporting the daily needs of grandmothers and maximizing their potential to gain state-sponsored child support and foster care grants for the added economic costs they assume in stepping into intergenerational parenting roles.³

Grandmother members, Olivia and Gladys, characterized GAPA as an organization that seeks to help the elder generation in the wake of AIDS: "GAPA is trying to help the grannies and the grandchildren of the grannies who have lost their parents."

Gladys' definition of GAPA reaches deep into the core foundational aspects of the organization to address the innumerable costs of the grip of AIDS on parent-aged populations. With an overarching goal to support,

educate and empower grandmothers, GAPA works to provide security and stability for elder women and their grandchildren. Along with Olivia and Gladys, Florence, a staff member at GAPA, described the organization's role in decreasing the burdens of death, AIDS and poverty for many grandmothers:

GAPA is telling people each and everything that is heavy and a bad thing, that is not the end of the world you can keep on going. Life is going and that problem will be solved. It will pass and you can keep on going with your life.

Doris gave her own definition of what GAPA does in her life and community, underscoring the role the organization plays for elder women:

GAPA first thing, likes us to be happy and not to sit in the house thinking about everything. GAPA is here to give you a new life and a new thinking and you have something to do as old people.

The belief that elder women can overcome obstacles and serve as valuable assets to community development became a key piece in the organizational model, after small-scale support groups had initially been created to ease grandmothers' suffering and increase their coping skills. In these ways, rather than reifying common associations about elder women as passive and likely unaware of the HIV/AIDS context, GAPA positions itself as an organization comprising grandmother social change agents who actively confront the multiple dimensions of poverty and the AIDS pandemic as a collective force.

The community formed through GAPA's model serves to make women like Tenjiwe stronger in her capacity to cope with the daily experiences of AIDS-affected community life:

I get rest [here] and the stresses went off. It made [me into] something. I just talk to the other one [and get support]. Every day I am longing to come here, it is happy every day. I realized I am not the only one. AIDS is in all our houses. I am becoming stronger.

Because AIDS plays such an impactful role in all of the grandmother members' lives, GAPA seeks to build upon this shared experience to foster collective strength, coping skills and resilience. The GAPA model includes both a community outreach program component and substantive organizational efforts devoted to empowering the capacities of individual grandmothers to act as community leaders and change agents, in the face of severe poverty, unemployment, security instability and HIV/AIDS.

Grandmothers reap benefits in their GAPA membership through a series of education and self-improvement programs. Workshops are continually conducted by trained grandmother members three days of every month, covering a wide variety of topics, including HIV/AIDS, parenting, business and gardening skills, human rights, sexual violence and bereavement. These sessions are open to the public in efforts to expand the impact of GAPA's educational component. To promote wellness for its members, GAPA grandmothers launched a weekly health club with over 45 participants (GAPA 2011). Various elements of security, economic support and education play vital roles in the mission of GAPA and all of these related programs. Within a larger national context of high unemployment, escalating violence, AIDS and a systemic educational inequality, GAPA strives to address the severe levels of community insecurity rendered from the persistent fissures between South Africa's apartheid history and its long walk to the realization of the 1994 vision of a human rights and social equality-based democracy.

HIV/AIDS, Caretaking and Shifting Grandmother Roles

The reality of caretaking in the midst of security issues, such as unemployment, a lack of education and HIV/AIDS, leads to many subsequent effects for elder women. The AIDS pandemic has altered the structure of motherhood because so many mothers are dying during the time that they would be investing in child rearing. This demographic reality has reshaped the role of GAPA grandmothers, who are often forced to assume extensive caretaking responsibilities at the time in their lives when they have expected to be cared for (Smetherham 2011, 33). While associations about African women's roles as "other mothers" in wider communities and families reflect the core strengths and capabilities of elder women, they also reinforce a misperception about elder women's seemingly natural capacity to remain caretakers for the duration of the lifespan—without consideration for the larger structural burdens they experience as a result of the dual impact of the AIDS pandemic and massive security concerns in South Africa. May Chazan (2008) conducted research on grandmothers' caretaking in the Warwick Junction of Durban. One participant in this study linked traditional caretaking to the increased demands of the AIDS crisis by stating:

Many children have been left behind. It's us grandmothers who are taking care of them. This is nothing new, we have always done this. It is our duty. But the cause of death now is HIV/AIDS. (Chazan 2008, 945).

Monica Ferreira and Sebastiana Kalula (2009, 3) address this issue by stating:

The HIV/AIDS epidemics are thrusting many older women back into the role of primary child care provider to sick adult kin and vulnerable and orphaned grandchildren. Up to two-thirds of people living with AIDS are cared for by a parent in their sixties and seventies.

The burden of these caretaking roles is even heavier when we consider the efforts grandmothers make to serve as agents of security within the post-apartheid context.

Many of the GAPA grandmothers in this study echoed similar experiences about the increased caretaking demands they faced with the AIDS pandemic. When asked about the reason for the changing role of grandmothers, the majority of participants connected the high rate of HIV/AIDS with increased parenting role expectations placed on elder women, which destabilizes the traditional family structure. Thelma⁴ attributed this increased burden to the economic situation and the history of wide patterns of rural to urban migration in South Africa:

No, before when there was no HIV our grannies raised us. My mother was always working and my grannie raised me. I grew up in the Eastern Cape there were cows for children, milk, fields to grow but not everything has to be bought in the shop. So the grandmothers now have to have money.

As this reflection suggests, while grandmothers have always taken on central caretaking roles in the history of South Africa, the demands of maintaining family livelihoods in urban spaces, with the increased costs of HIV/AIDS place expansive economic demands that substantially increase the expectations placed on grandmothers.

All grandmother participants in our interviews agreed that HIV/AIDS, while posing increased demands to support and provide for their children and grandchildren, has not changed the social perception of grandmother caregivers that has long been part of communal and family living. Georgina shared her perceptions of how the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS have changed the historical reliance on women for childcare and family maintenance:

It's different than the old days because of HIV/AIDS because they leaving the children with us when they die and the responsibility with us. They depend on their parents and they are no longer working.

This caretaking responsibility has only increased as HIV/AIDS takes hold of families and leaves younger generations in the care of elder ones.

Our research sheds new light on the relationship between traditional respect for elders and the contemporary dimensions of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Nompumelelo explained that elder caretaking roles are now more difficult because of a general lack of respect children have for their grandmothers:

We grandmothers we were listening to our parents but now in our days there is this new system of thinking. The kids at early ages get pregnant and from that they think they are women. So they don't think that we are also coming from that stage. A child of 11 years at eight o'clock is not in the house, she is outside and if you ask her why she is outside she will say she is chatting with friends. Sometimes it is a boyfriend. If I am not around her she will not listen to another grandmother. There is no respect.

Grandmothers repeatedly referenced this decreased respect as a core dimension of their perception of the existing core problems within South Africa's strained social, economic and public health context. Nompumelelo explained that the only way for the continued spread of HIV to be halted was for respect for grandmothers to be renewed:

If one child can take responsibility of herself and look straight for what my grannie is doing for me and then maybe some children will say no. She will be open and say no. I will do this on the right time and I will get the right person because my grannie is suffering. Our children, some of them, they are proud of what their grandmothers are doing for them—some of them don't care. They even steal their grandmother's money to give to the boyfriends. If they can respect there will be less HIV. We are not scared of HIV.

Like many of her peers, this participant identified a need for increased respect as the main factor in decreasing the rates of HIV/AIDS.

Two other grandmothers also related the higher rate of HIV/AIDS in the community to the inability of younger generations to heed the practical warnings of grandmothers. Nomonde reflected on her own daughter's resistance to her knowledge and the outcome it rendered:

My last born she was born in 1990 but if she gets sick I have to take care of her child. You see that is too much. The more they learn about HIV the more careless they are. Our children are getting pregnant too much. Pregnant means no condom and this means infected children. My eldest daughter is sick and keeps having children. She doesn't want to learn. Now she's got three children I have got a fear one day she will fall ill and die. That is too much. The more she knows she is sick the more children. At the

end of the day I will be a mother. That means she does not practice safe sex.

When asked if her grandchildren are HIV positive as a result of the mother's behavior, Nomonde responded, "The children are safe, no HIV/AIDS. She is too much clever for that." The reality that Nomonde's daughter did and does not practice safe sex has led to her contraction of HIV. Interestingly, however, her own knowledge regarding protection for her unborn children saved them from the same diagnosis. This example reflects a general perception grandmothers shared about the central link between increased sexual risk behaviors and a general decrease in respect for life among younger generations in Khayelitsha. This combined attitude and behavior creates a delicate balance for youth, and a costly predicament for grandmothers. Mary talked openly about this lack of respect as an apparent change in generational thinking:

Our children now don't want to listen carefully. If you tell them you mustn't do that they say, "We have rights" but last time when we were the children we didn't have rights we know what we must do. If you tell the children now they say no that is my right. It is hard for us to grow our children. They have no respect. They go out and get HIV and then they want to talk and they talk and get HIV and then I don't know what she must do. That's why they died.

These narratives reflect a core contradiction. As GAPA grandmothers are educated in HIV/AIDS protection, prevention and survival and carry traditional roles, they exist within a larger context of severe social inequalities, poverty and insecurity that have led youth to often choose to disobey the teachings of their elders and engage in unsafe relationships. Olivia and Gladys also correlated the lack of respect to children's denial of HIV/AIDS and unwillingness to follow best practices:

No, they refuse, they don't accept it. If they can accept it—it's the same as the other sick. Like me, I am high blood pressure and must take tablets for the rest of my life. What is the difference? I don't see a difference. They don't want to accept it. So that's why our children die. They make things difficult for everyone. It's getting worse because they do not want to accept it.

In some cases, children refuse to take the life-saving ARV medications, leaving grandmothers with an immediate predicament and a long-term caretaking burden, as an entire generation dies off.

Many youth, in the midst of poverty and crime, resort to drugs and alcohol to escape the larger severe structural disadvantages that so strongly influence their life chances. Florence talked to this issue in her interview and explained GAPA's role in assisting grandmothers facing these issues:

The drug abuse and alcohol because the grandchildren are getting these drugs and that is the burden for grandmothers. (For) a grandmother it is not easy to see this child is using drugs now. They don't know the symptoms. GAPA is empowering them. That lady came to tell the grandmothers the symptoms of the drug abuse and now they are aware.

As these narratives reflect, the demands of the HIV/AIDS crisis, and its related social issues such as drug use, force grandmothers to step out of traditional roles and talk about sex, addiction and abuse. While GAPA empowers grandmothers with vital and comprehensive education on HIV/AIDS prevention/awareness and the warning signs of abuse and drug addiction, the application of these skills requires a shift in communication patterns. With the realities of the AIDS pandemic and the role grandmothers play on the front lines of this battle, elder women are now encouraged to transcend generations to discuss the intimate dimensions of sex and personal behaviors. In many respects, the very livelihood of South Africa's next generation depends upon their ability to do so.

While elder women provide vital HIV/AIDS prevention knowledge, yet are so often denied respect from younger generations, the realities of the crisis place serious economic and survival demands on grandmothers. The spread of HIV/AIDS contradicts a traditional support process that assures the long-term care of grandmothers by their children and grandchildren. In the existing AIDS context, South Africa's elderly can no longer anticipate assured support from their children (Kristofferson 2000). Rather, the roles of elder women are "shifting from 'supported' to 'supporters' as they embark on strategies that contradict prevailing cultural norms, in an attempt to cope with the widening care challenges" (De la Porte 2007, 135). As director of GAPA, Vivienne Budaza explains:

HIV has taken away their children. They raised them with the hope that once they have obtained their degree they will immediately access employment. Yes, there has been a shift since the intro of ARVs but still unemployment remains an issue. It isn't helping the grandmothers and their biggest concern now is that I am burying my children who will bury me?

As Ms. Budaza reflects, this core concern from grandmothers is linked directly to the larger socio-economic context within South Africa's transition. As these lenses into grandmothers' experiences repeatedly

illustrate, HIV/AIDS is a gendered crisis, with a racial and economic dimension that places the toll of this pandemic on black elder women in South Africa. The mandatory caretaking and economic resources required to cope with the AIDS crisis fall most directly on grandmothers in South Africa's poorest communities. Within this existing social circumstance, the history of collective social movements and the strength of civil society organizations in South Africa provide a vital current to "Change the River's Flow" through women's organizing at the community level.

GAPA: Organizing for Empowerment and Human Security

In our interviews with grandmothers, the larger community struggles with severe violence, and its disproportionate impact on women emerged as a top concern for participants. In this section, we look at how GAPA as a civil society organization responds to larger issues of human security. In the Khayelitsha context of severe poverty, unemployment and HIV/AIDS, GAPA serves as a secure place of safety and support for elder women who confront the daily violence that stems from larger socio-economic inequalities. At the same time, the organization's core training on violence prevention, child security, HIV/AIDS prevention and income generation provide grandmothers with economic resources and knowledge skills as core tools in the larger struggle to redress sharp socio-economic inequalities and the related human insecurities.

As they provide for a younger generation, grandmothers are often targets of the larger forms of gender and structural violence that continue to define South African society. Even though South Africa has committed to "non-sexism" at the public level, as reflected in the Constitution, sharp gender inequalities persist in the private households, where women are most likely to experience violence (Britton 2005). Scholars suggest that South Africa's high levels of violence against women may express a form of "policing" the new structural norms of gender equality (Gobodo-Madikizela, Fish, and Shefer 2014; Moffett 2006). As one grandmother leader expressed:

Someday when I was doing the abuse thing there was a man. When I told him the man must ask permission to sleep with women they mustn't just take you for granted and the man was here and he took his things and march out and didn't come back saying "that woman was so silly saying how our wife must handle us."

This notion of men's "handling of women" reflects the lingering patriarchal assumptions that limit women's access to the promises of

gender equality in South Africa. In the larger circumstances of persistent human security concerns, including high rates of crime and sexual violence, such assumptions and practices dramatically increase women's risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, as well as their need to cope with its consequences as caretakers and economic providers.

Given the social realities grandmothers face, GAPA's efforts as an organization focus on redressing violence against women and promoting gender equality through workshops that reach a larger group of women in Khayelitsha. Empowered with this training, the model intends to draw upon the strengths of women and the remaining levels of respect for elder women to infuse awareness, shifts in perception and behavioral change among the next generation, including men. In a personal interview with Constance, a GAPA grandmother who conducts monthly workshops on abuse and human rights, we see the role educational programming plays in challenging norms and promoting elder women's awareness of the intersecting layers of abuse:

In the workshop I am telling about the abuse, about sexual abuse. I tell them that there are different kinds of abuse. There is sexual abuse where somebody wants to take your body by force and you do not agree. This is rape. I am talking about physical abuse where somebody has got marks. If somebody has beaten you maybe sometimes you come from work with your eyes right then the next day your eyes are blue and it shows that you had physical abuse, you have been beaten. The marks are showing. The marks show the abuse. I told about incest abuse where there is a man in the house and he gives the children pills. The children do not know what they are doing. When (he) is in the house he wants to sleep with his niece or his sister. That is incest abuse because it is happening to the family. There is financial abuse where there is sometimes the husband is working and instead of coming to the house he comes to shop and waste the money and when he comes home there is nothing to be eaten and he beats the wife.

Through the education and experience Constance has acquired in GAPA, as well as her own life experience, she is able to connect particular threats to women with larger sexual, physical and economic patterns of abuse. Like many other leaders within GAPA, Constance is educating the wider community of grandmothers to see their own relationship to these issues, while providing insight into how to gain support from GAPA members and access to larger legal protections.

Throughout this study, our exposure to GAPA reinforced the notion that human security is a gendered phenomenon, with a nuanced impact that falls disproportionately to elder women. Within this particular juncture between apartheid and a new democracy, South Africa's

grandmothers are organizing to both gain personal support and take part in a collective resistance to the structural inequalities that define HIV/AIDS through such sharp systems of inequality. GAPA, like:

most projects dealing with HIV/AIDS, aims at some sort of behavior change, not through force or legislation but by convincing the target population that it is in their own best interest and within their power to change their own behavior in order to reduce their risk level. (Hubbard, Suzuki, and Koryu 2008, 24)

Given South Africa's history of women's collective organizing, this investment also reinforces a vital link between personal empowerment and collective mobilization. Through awareness and public action to redress gender inequality, women take more control of their own lives and choices, leading to a decreased infection rate for both men and women. For example, in 2010, GAPA developed a major slogan piece entitled "Changing the River's Flow" to highlight the cultural gender norms and prevailing patriarchal systems that needed direct re-evaluation by a collective of elder women. This gender-mainstreaming project sought to highlight the harmful aspects of women's subordination in Khayelitsha by providing knowledge and insights about the benefits of women's empowerment, equality, and contributions to peacebuilding. When 300 grandmothers confront daily behaviors of abuse and gender-based violence in a consistent manner, their impact on communities is that much more effective and wider in reach. Furthermore, with the levels of training GAPA delivers, grandmothers link prevailing assumptions at the micro household level to larger issues of human security, violence, socio-economic inequality and HIV/AIDS.

Grandmothers in this study identified two key areas of structural inequality that led to their experiences of added burdens, violence and insecurity in their daily lives: gender inequality and poverty. In her individual interview, Florence articulated the double reproductive and domestic expectations placed upon women, stating:

Women have more work in Khayelitsha than men because women are the ones that are living with kids. Men go and seek another woman. That is the thing that women carry a lot of work that makes life more difficult. Women stay with so many children without a father. She must look after the kids and go look for work and the father is outside looking for other women.

This dual burden women experience is heightened with the onset of HIV/AIDS in the community. Women continually struggle to raise

additional children and support the family economically, as primary parents are dying at the hands of AIDS. Florence perceived that men in the community often fail to uphold family responsibility and seek multiple partners, putting women at risk of infection. Thelma links Florence's statements about men and goes on to explain the gender difference in her own words: "Men are lazy. The people that are working are women. Women are always going to work but men stay at the house. Most of the women here are working."

The social construction of male/female roles is evident even at a young age. Many young girls often work alongside of their mothers to maintain the household. In their shared interview, Olivia and Gladys spoke to the vital need to teach youth in the community respect for women by encouraging young men's participation in household labor. When asked about the extent to which women should teach boys to help at home, Olivia responded:

You must. Yes, Yes, they cannot say I will not clean or cook because I am not a girl. Girl or no girl, because one day when you are not here what will he do? You are not here forever one day he is going to be alone. What is he going to do if you don't learn him to do these things.

By talking about these daily practices and their power in reinforcing the gender divide and larger patriarchal systems of violence and community insecurity, GAPA is taking a major step to confront traditional gendered practices that heighten the AIDS pandemic and its disproportionate impact on girls, women and grandmothers.

Throughout these interviews, grandmothers repeatedly connected the HIV/AIDS crisis to the larger context of poverty and unemployment in Khayelitsha. Nompumelelo linked joblessness, severe underemployment and gender inequality to a pervasive fear of men that is so apparent for many of the grandmothers in GAPA. She identified poverty and the cyclical problems of unemployment as the major causes of physical and sexual violence inflicted by men:

I am still scared of men in Khayelitsha. I don't blame the men because if the men in Khayelitsha could get jobs. Its poverty that makes it, the women are busy doing things, looking after the kids. The men have nothing to do in our location. If you sit there doing nothing you cannot think straight. You just think evil. You are hungry. If I can just grab that white lady I can get the purse sometimes that white lady is just a student like you and has no money and then you go to jail for nothing. If you are hungry you don't think straight.

Nompumelelo's response reflects her understanding of how gender roles, economic hardships and poverty mutually reinforce a prevailing threat of violence within her community. She shifts the blame for violence away from men to the root cause: a jobless community. These direct narratives express grandmothers' interwoven perceptions of the core relationships among micro levels of daily violence and the larger and persistent threats to human security in Khayelitsha.

Similar to Florence's assessments of the underlying causes of violence, Nompumelelo asserts that women are kept busy by the confines of the double burdens of reproductive and productive labor, while men linger without parallel outlets for productivity in the midst of massive unemployment and food insecurity. This creates a pervasive threatening environment for women in Khayelitsha. Doris's response imparts these realities, while tying in the additional responsibility of motherhood:

Yes, women are different because when you wake up in the morning you straighten your house no matter you working or not working. When you wake up in the morning you know what to do. The men go out and you saw them sitting and talking or go to taverns and sit all day. Some of the men aren't working and do nothing in the house and when the woman comes home she has to start from scratch. That is very difficult for a mother.

Doris identifies the increasing emotional and economic responsibilities of care women face while living in poverty. The persistent patriarchal norms that free men from household reproduction and caretaking responsibilities often leave women as the sole breadwinners and caretakers for children.

Through its inclusive woman-centered approach, GAPA addresses the economic and psycho-social needs of its members. With a recognition that women are serving as the primary breadwinners, while facing increased household costs of up to 80 percent with the demands of HIV/AIDS care, GAPA emphasizes income generation programs, such as sewing, vegetable gardening and beading. At the same time, the GAPA philosophy provides simultaneous attention to the psycho-social needs of grandmothers, such as grief counseling and support groups, HIV/AIDS preventative training and life skills. The organization also emphasizes the physical wellbeing of grandmothers through Nia dance and weekly exercise programs. Through this applied work with women in Khayelitsha's most under-resourced communities, GAPA empowers grandmothers to serve as community leaders, educators and even peacebuilders. At a collective level, GAPA's programs address the core

dimensions of the human security crisis, with a distinct feminist emphasis on elder women's needs.

Grandmother Advocates of Child Security

While participants in this study repeatedly spoke to the severe burdens of gender injustice and poverty as systemic barriers to their ability to experience human security, through their collective force in GAPA, grandmothers upheld a very central collective commitment to assuring child security within Khayelitsha. Many stated their roles as both mothers and grandmothers, along with their position as community leaders, served as a central rationale for this focus on child advocacy. Georgina reflected upon the gendered expectations of mothering and explained the pride that comes from these defining roles:

Women are proud of being women. A home without a mother is nothing. So much is coming from the mother; a mother is like a cheetah protecting her own babies.

The analogy of the mother cheetah can be directly paralleled with the collective commitment to protect children against the high rate of sexual violence in Khayelitsha—a pressing reality referenced throughout our interviews. While they confronted the daily circumstances of risk and violence, grandmothers simultaneously exhibited pervasive hope for the next generation. This motivated much of their investment in children's livelihoods, safety and development. As the rates of sexual violence in Khayelitsha continue to rise, many grandmothers have taken a firm stance to protect children within the community through education and the implementation of an Aftercare program focused on preventing sexual crime and HIV/AIDS transmission. Because of the rising statistics of child rape and sexual violence in the community and surrounding townships, GAPA's Aftercare program strives to provide a place of safety, particularly for children who would otherwise be left unattended during these hours. At the same time, this Aftercare program relieves grandmothers of their immediate caretaking responsibilities, as they are so often left to care for parentless children, as they lose their own children to AIDS.

This frequent phenomenon of child security became evident after speaking with grandmothers about their perception of security within the community. When asked about GAPA's role in providing security, grandmother Thelma spoke to the severity of the child rape situation as a

result of some lingering and dangerous assumptions about HIV/AIDS transmission:

There is that thing that people say when you are HIV positive and are with a young child (sexually) the HIV is gone. So it puts everybody in danger. The children in the Aftercare so they can be here for safety because outside there is rape. Now you cannot let your child play you have to see your child.

Like Thelma, many of the other grandmothers directly correlated the idea of “security” with the Aftercare project as both one of GAPA’s main contributions and a vital reflection of the links among sexual violence, children and the securitization of the next generations.

Elder women’s narratives in this study denote a shift in the discourse of human security. Grandmothers’ repeated emphasis on securing a space where children can be protected from the crimes of violence reflects how individual women are taking on the role of securing the next generation. As a 2006 United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA as cited in Aboderin and Ferreira 2008, 59) report states, “political stability, social solidification, and economic prosperity [in Africa] lie in harnessing the capacities of the youth.” Grandmothers within GAPA seemed to see one of the primary roles of the organization as protecting the children from the larger context of violence, HIV/AIDS and insecurity within their daily lives. Olivia underscored the importance of raising children correctly and protecting them from outside violence:

To grow up children what must they do with a small child to keep them safe? What they must do and not do? You tell them that the mother must look after the children you mustn’t leave your children with anybody. If you go you must know where is your child now. You cannot leave them outside for the whole day because there are many things. There is rape there is everything. People are cruel now. So you learn them you must do this do this to keep your children safe like me. I have got my grandchildren, is not here at school but here afternoon they come here for the Aftercare because I don’t want him at the location. You see? You must sit here because this is a safety place. Tell them this is a safety place. Many of the children that are here, many of them, their parents are at work. So you see, they stay here until their parents are coming from work. So they are safe here. Not going up and down the streets. This is a place to keep your children safe and to learn everything.

Olivia’s statement shows how GAPA represented a larger place of safety that specifically serves children through the Aftercare program. This child advocacy role GAPA plays echoes yet another dimension of the organization’s systemic approach to human security, with a focused effort

on the empowerment of the next generation. Participants' frequent illustration of their conceptual connections between the contributions of a civil society women's organization in the larger context of social and political insecurity reflects one of the most important findings in this research. The impact of GAPA as a place of security, within a larger structural system of severe marginalization, provides a conduit for individuals to identify with making a contribution to the vital need to assure human security in South Africa's ongoing reconstruction process and protect the next generation of youth.

Through their own understanding and experiences with HIV/AIDS, grandmother participants continually drew from this core knowledge base to influence change within a community grappling for resources while facing severe overarching insecurity. Nompumelelo made a profound statement during her interview. In sharing her personal experience of education within the larger mission of GAPA, she claimed that *no other child within her home will contract the disease*. Through the skills training and support GAPA has provided, Nompumelelo believes her entire family has benefited:

If a child said I am HIV positive, you say ok it's not the end of the world you must do this and this and that but first you must go to the clinic. HIV/AIDS is not a problem it's a program. I am also HIV positive I am on ARVs. I started in 2006. In my house I don't think I will have another HIV child. Nobody will die in my house of HIV because I know what to deal with HIV now.

In her eyes, AIDS is a "program," not a pandemic. The education that GAPA has provided regarding the medication, support and health required for HIV-positive individuals to continue to survive has enabled grandmothers and families to remain healthy and strong, even as they live so directly with the crisis.

When we consider that 300 grandmothers acquired such capacities through GAPA, another layer of the organization's structural impact emerges. Grandmothers who can maintain their own livelihoods in the face of HIV/AIDS contribute to the economic development and social cohesion of Khayelitsha because they are more able to generate income and provide for the increasing household needs that accompany HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, the wellbeing of grandmothers plays a central role in promoting the livelihoods and increased life chances for children within the organization's Afterschool care program, as well as the household of GAPA's individual members. Here again, we see the central

connections between grandmothers' empowerment at the individual level and the organization's structural impact within the larger community.

Reflecting on Scholar-Activist Research among Grandmothers

Throughout this research journey, we sought to document the stories of grandmothers at this critical juncture between South Africa's transition to democracy and the swelling wave of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. By practicing a scholar-activist stance, we undertook an obligation to serve the organization we studied, while pursuing the larger purpose of "giving back" in ways that attempt to promote gender, race and class justice, in the spirit of the 1994 vision of a democratic human rights-focused South Africa. With this approach, we divert from some standard social science research perspectives on objectivity and research design. Yet, our commitment to this merger of research and action responds to a larger movement in academe toward public scholarship—the creation of a dialogue that is accessible and meaningful to the wider community and able to contribute to applied initiatives such as policy, legal and activist pursuits. In this closing section, we discuss some central moments in our experience of scholar-activist research, in hopes that these applied instances will generate ongoing discussions on public scholarship and feminist action research.

Our most pronounced consideration in this research involved "getting in" to the organization, particularly as US-based scholars. The sensitive nature of HIV/AIDS prioritized important measures of trust and intent at the onset of this relationship. As white North American scholars, we continually contemplated our own potential reification of the prevailing dynamics of outsider/Western researchers operating in black communities within developing countries. Furthermore, we spanned between approximately ten and forty years' difference in age from the population we interviewed. These identification differentials intersected in ways that impacted grandmothers' perceptions of our roles, as well as the expectations we planted in the wider community by showing up and asking for life stories. From an organizational perspective, while we went into the project with a heightened sensitivity to the demands we would place on GAPA, our presence required additional time and resources of the leadership, the staff and the members who took part in our study. Here, we offer some approaches that mediated these realities, with the intention of integrating the intimate relationship between the scholar-activist research process and the findings that emerged from these encounters.

To conduct this research, we drew from the seven years of former contact established by the end of the data-collection period. Through annual consecutive service-learning university classes where US students provided direct support to GAPA on projects that the organization defined as priorities, the shift to community-based research seemed generally fluid for both the faculty-graduate student team and GAPA's membership. As students painted income generation project containers, planted gardens, developed outdoor murals, designed public relations materials and initiated fundraising for GAPA, they solidified vital relationships between the organization and the university. As the South Africa Study Abroad program returned to work with GAPA each year, while different students participated, the overall partnership established a vital foundational presence that solidified intent, a larger NGO-university partnership and a longer-term commitment to contributing to the organization's goals. These practices served as central transferable components of scholar-activist research, particularly when working with community-based organizations.

A second consideration in this approach involved the balance of seeking out particular thematic areas of emphasis in interview research, while allowing space to discuss the everyday lives of grandmothers in ways that reflected their own lives. As researchers, we sought to contribute to the theoretical body of knowledge by bringing grandmothers' narrative accounts into a wider scholarly dialogue within the field of international relations and women's studies. Accordingly, our efforts focused on expanding the human security conversation through a focused emphasis on how elder women experience this theoretical concept at the juncture of South Africa's post-conflict rebuilding and the growing HIV/AIDS pandemic. Yet discussing "human security" framed our conversations in ways that favored scholarship and potentially limited grandmothers' ability to tell their own stories, in their own words. By asking questions about safety and daily life, we hoped to gather data that would speak to human security frameworks. To a certain extent, however, we needed to resign from the power and control embedded in the standard structured interview process, where researchers define the conversations' priorities. In our case, the narrative data that emerged did speak to human security in powerful ways, often when we did not pose questions with this direct thematic prompt. While in the field, we reminded ourselves to "trust the process," with confidence that the narratives grandmothers offered would feed into our larger theoretical frameworks in ways we might not have imagined in a standardized structured interview format. With this approach, we intended to provide avenues for elder women to gain a powerful voice as experts in the development of new knowledge within

the academic discourse. By positioning ourselves as a conduit between grandmothers' narratives and analytic theories of international development, we sought to "use our credentials as a tool for social change"⁵ by contributing to the larger causes of GAPA while we documented the lives of its membership base.

As we captured these complexities of grandmothers' stories, at times we asked that participants re-live traumatic experiences so that we could place their lives in context. In some instances, grandmothers offered willingly, in others, our prompting led to a revisiting of longstanding pains from the apartheid era, coupled with profound grief surrounding the repeated losses of AIDS deaths. As researchers, we walked a fine line in asking for lived experiences while maintaining our commitment to allowing grandmothers to drive the research process. The content that emerged from this study forced us to contemplate repeatedly the dialectic relationship between trauma and transformation, in both the individual narratives that emerged in this study, along with our overall analysis of GAPA's organizational impact within South Africa's ongoing transition.

As we analyzed the data that emerged from these stories, we continually questioned our own tendency to emphasize hope in suffering, strength in power, and the promise of social change in women's organizing. We confronted our own biases, our admitted positive affiliation to GAPA and our wish to situate this civil society organization as a model of the potential for women's collective activism to resolve the most severe social concerns. At times throughout our analysis, our colleagues asked if we might be "too optimistic" about GAPA. Perhaps our close working relationships created a bias, they suspected. How could we legitimately critique the organization while maintaining such personal connections? This question rests at the heart of feminist activist research. As the literature supports, we acknowledge this bias, and work within it. At times, this means processing the extent to which members of GAPA would support our writing and analytic findings. In many cases, we evaluated our academic goals in close relationship to the larger activist considerations surrounding elder women's experiences of daily life in Khayelitsha. What remains underexplored in the work on scholar-activism, however, is a conversation on the more concrete undertakings between community-based organizations and researchers. As we found in this process, at their core, these very relationships can weave together written publications, public awareness and social change surrounding the core social concerns that guide both the organization and the research process.

As we continue our working relationship with GAPA, our engagement with three key projects anchored the dual goals of scholarly contributions

and the promotion of grandmothers' stories in a wider public dialogue. We close with a short overview of these projects to widen the scope of applied feminist scholar-activist research. First, our work with GAPA provided a foundation to apply for grants and resources that strengthened the organization's capacity to address its goals. Through our NGO–university partnership, we transcended standard lines between scholar and activist worlds. GAPA has presented at a series of academic conferences, for example, where its leaders took central roles in sharing research. Based upon the partnership we developed, GAPA earned a US Ambassador's grant, to develop public HIV/AIDS education campaigns and widen the impact of grandmothers as community leaders. This award provided financial resources that allowed GAPA to strengthen its work, while fortifying the felt benefits of partnership for the organization.

As we delved into capturing grandmothers' stories, and listened to the leaders of the organization, we felt compelled to expand awareness of this GAPA model through a series of public events, photographic exhibitions and writings on South African grandmothers' experiences. The affective impact of the stories we captured best conveyed through a combined visual-narrative approach. Eric Miller, South African photographer and former anti-apartheid activist, captured a series of grandmothers' portraits, along with family images that depicted the extent of caretaking grandmothers provided in South Africa. Jo-Anne Smetherham, a leading national journalist, conducted additional narrative research with grandmothers, who later wrote short excerpts from these interviews on the final photographs for the installations. We raised funds to exhibit this collection at the Khayelitsha Community Hall and the District Six museum in Cape Town. This public event series featured 17 leaders of GAPA as "The Nevergiveups." As a collection, the exhibition emphasized the resounding resilience and hope grandmothers carried in the face of such severe structural obstacles and tragedies. From these extensive public events, our narrative research on GAPA turned into an educational public photography series that depicted grandmothers' narratives in creative, affective and visually impactful ways that are unavailable in standard scholarship venues alone.

The wide success of these public scholarship events motivated an international tour for three members of GAPA, along with journalists Eric Miller and Jo-Anne Smetherham. With this expansion to an international level, we launched *TheNevergiveups* photo-journalist book containing six in-depth stories, along with an original collection of Miller's images of South African grandmothers. This international media tour substantially widened exposure to GAPA, while providing a felt sense of international

solidarity for the organization's mission. With their contact in a number of community organizations, universities and faith-based organizations in the US, GAPA received generous donations, and expansive invitations to promote their work internationally. This photo narrative book and the existing photo installation received public acknowledgment from the South African Embassy and Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, while the US Embassy contributed to the seeds of the project's initiation. In this sense, these bridging public scholarship events took GAPA from the community to the national and international spheres. Indeed, the GAPA stories became the site of cultural ambassadorial initiatives that contributed to interstate relations and public relations for both embassies. After these events, Executive Director, Vivienne Budaza, proclaimed that GAPA is now "on the map" in the global community.

With this international exposure, GAPA continues to reorient to respond to the growing level of interest generated from this global contact. At the same time, our role as researchers has expanded considerably. We became fundraisers, tour operators, public events coordinators, book promoters, international ambassadors to GAPA and hosts to its leaders within the US. Through these encounters, our work expanded beyond the organizational space where we initially drew research material, to the wider imagined and literal global sphere. At present, we continue to evaluate our scholar-activist commitment and potential to serve GAPA. At the same time, our research investment in this organization maintains a central position in our larger inquiry on the relationships among elder women, human security and HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

Study Limitations

This research drew upon one organizational site as the source of narrative data to explore how grandmothers are central human security agents within South Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis. We draw upon the longstanding relationship with GAPA to collect data and understand women's lives within this complex landscape of apartheid's socio-economic residue and the new demands of HIV/AIDS. Although our relationships provided a heightened level of trust and familiarity among participants, the reliance upon one organization presents limitations and potential bias. This study is situated within a very particular context, where grandmothers have access to resources through the GAPA structural model. Yet, these results do not speak to the larger situation for elder women in South Africa. Furthermore, our analyses rely upon grandmothers' perceptions of their experiences with HIV/AIDS. With a

sample of 22, our analyses rely heavily upon one existing group. While this is the case with all qualitative data, the connection to GAPA focuses a certain level of specificity that links this research to those grandmothers involved in GAPA.

Our further study would explore the more tangible impacts of women's collective organization in fighting both human security concerns and HIV/AIDS. While grandmothers talked at length about their commitment to protecting children, and the safe space GAPA provides, we do not know about the extent to which grandmothers' empowerment—through education, the psycho-social support of GAPA, improved wellness, income generation and a wider safety net—has expanded to the wider communities in which they reach. If grandmothers can access the traditional levels of respect granted to elder women from their own cultural backgrounds and utilize this status to increase the reach of the HIV/AIDS prevention, conflict resolution, women's empowerment and peacebuilding skills they acquire at GAPA, the impact of their contributions to social change would be maximized.

Conclusions

As the HIV/AIDS crisis creeps into the national vision for democratic transformation, South African grandmothers shoulder the weight of this severe impediment to social justice, as well as its daily sufferings. In the existing context, grandmothers sit between a cultural history that held reverence for elder women and the new national landscape that expresses the chaos of HIV/AIDS through socio-economic violence and insecurity. The communities in which the participants in this study live manifest the most extreme levels of these crises of poverty, violence and HIV/AIDS transmissions. In this context, civil society organizations meet the gaps in government delivery, while mobilizing the voices of those who suffer most severely under the residue of apartheid. While drawing on the former strength of historical resistance movements, GAPA represents both a collective response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, as well as an approach that works at the individual level to empower grandmothers and expand their capacity to shoulder these disproportionate burdens.

As grandmothers are bound together through the tragedy of HIV/AIDS and the upheavals of the social transition to democracy in South Africa, GAPA provides its members with vital tools and resources to face the daily impacts of this crisis at the individual and family levels. At the same time, through civil society organization, grandmothers are presenting a collective force to fight the onslaught of the health crises and its intimately

interwoven human security threats. Through the educational tools and empowerment trainings GAPA offers, grandmothers can provide for their families and teach younger generations the importance of awareness, advocacy and education in their own lives; thereby and ultimately decreasing the HIV/AIDS infection rate in their community. This model not only benefits grandmothers who continually struggle to support generations on government pensions, it also reaches larger family units through GAPA's contact with youth and men throughout the community.

This organization of grandmother activists is situated as a distinct response to the urgent socio-economic conditions of this particular community in Khayelitsha. Through GAPA, grandmothers are afforded an opportunity to share their voice—both individually and collectively. In their personal experiences and traumas, GAPA provides direct outlets for grandmothers to connect with others who are facing parallel challenges in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As an organization, GAPA sustains and reinforces the authority of grandmothers within their communities, during a time when former levels of respect for elders are under threat. At a collective level, this authority and support for grandmothers gives impetus to their cause, even as they face dire straits, ill health, violence and related issues. Rather than existing within an isolated space, GAPA presents a highly visible community force that demonstrates the collective power of women's organization, while inherently demanding respect from the wider community. When grandmothers show up in numbers to sing as they hand out condoms at taxi stops, indeed GAPA confronts the existing social and cultural norms that ignite the threats of HIV/AIDS. As a result, through the collective agency of 300 grandmothers who gain increased authority in their households and communities, GAPA intervenes in the larger context of severe human security threats that characterize the daily compromises to wellbeing and livelihood for the entire Khayelitsha community, as well as the nation's restorative path to democracy.

The HIV/AIDS crisis constricts the jugular of the 1994 vision of South Africa's democracy. For elder women, who lived under the most severe oppressions of apartheid, the life-altering demands of bearing the economic and caretaking burdens of HIV/AIDS, within a context of severe violence and insecurity, manifest as the most egregious violations of the promise of South Africa's democracy. Within this gripping reality, women exercise agency in ways that express their individual and collective strength, while confronting the structural conditions that perpetrate their ability to access safety, security and economic stability. The GAPA model recognizes the distinct forms of trauma and grief grandmothers face, while redirecting these collective struggles into an organizational response that

addresses the vital links between HIV/AIDS and human security. As one grandmother repeatedly expressed, “GAPA is keeping us alive.”

The complexities of these circumstances pronounce the need for new forms of scholarship that capture the fabric of grandmothers’ lives, while offering valuable contributions to the larger human rights struggles at the core of these individual narratives. Scholar-activist research works in partnership with communities to contribute to knowledge and social change. GAPA provides a model that captures the potential to work at the borders of these dimensions, while applying scholarship to larger social activist efforts to improve the everyday lives of women and address severe socio-economic divides. The most challenging social, economic and security circumstances reveal how Khayelitsha grandmothers develop innovative forms of collective action by drawing upon the legacy of resistance movements so central to South Africa’s historical struggle for democracy. In their individual lives and their collective presence, members of GAPA serve as powerful agents of social change, community education and peace. Just as they are on the frontlines of the HIV/AIDS crisis, through this research, we contend that grandmothers are the most viable and impactful existing force to confront the larger human security threats that pose the greatest barrier to human rights and social justice in South Africa’s democracy. Our hope is that the growth of public scholarship on elder women, HIV/AIDS and human security in South Africa would begin to unwind the structural conditions that shape the daily circumstances of grandmothers’ lives, while strengthening both the organization and the academy through concrete expressions of solidarity in each stage of the process. The documentation and enactment of GAPA’s overarching plea to “respect the grannies” is vital to the restoration of the human rights democracy vision of 1994, the attainment of human security and an eventual end to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

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South Africa's grandmothers, while striving to contribute to the betterment of the conditions that defined their life stories.

Notes

¹ The research relationship began in 2005, when Jennifer Fish made contact with GAPA to establish a mutually beneficial service-learning placement for U.S. university students in an international course on social transitions in South Africa. Over the past ten years, student-faculty contributions to GAPA shifted to more extensive community-based research projects, mainly in the form of interviews. This chapter emerges from an in-depth graduate study led by Savannah Eck Russo and Jennifer Fish. The ethical agreements of scholar-activist research were established in the initial contact with GAPA in 2005 and renewed each subsequent year.

² We recruited interviewees from those members present at the GAPA organizational space, beginning with the core leaders. Our familiarity with the organization and invested time over the years provided a smooth segue to approaching grandmothers to take part in our interviews. In some cases, participants approached us to be part of the process. We conducted interviews in English, which limited our sample to those grandmothers with at least conversational language skills. Throughout this process, we took several measures to be sure that interviewees were aware that their participation in our research remained separate from their role with GAPA.

³ In South Africa's existing social grant program, grandmothers over the age of 60 are eligible for the "old age pension." Their demonstration of primary care for young children merits qualification for the foster care grant and the child support grant.

⁴ All participants in this study are identified with pseudonyms.

⁵ This concept is coined by Bette J. Dickerson, who serves as a mentor and pioneer in scholar-activist work. We reference it from several personal and teaching conversations.

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