

HOW TO BE AN ARTIST

stay loose. learn to watch snails.
plant impossible gardens. invite
someone dangerous to tea. MAKE
little signs that say Yes! and post
them all over your house. MAKE FRIENDS
with freedom & uncertainty. look forward
to DREAMS. cry during movies. swing
as high as you can on a swingset,
by moonlight. cultivate moods. refuse
to "be responsible." DO IT FOR LOVE.
TAKE LOTS OF NAPS. give money away.
DO IT NOW. THE MONEY WILL FOLLOW.
Believe in MAGIC. LAUGH A LOT.
Celebrate every gorgeous moment.
TAKE MOONBATHS. HAVE WILD
IMAGININGS. TRANSFORMATIVE DREAMS,
AND PERFECT CALM. DRAW ON THE WALLS.
READ EVERYDAY. IMAGINE YOURSELF
MAGIC. giggle with children. listen
to old people. Open up. Dive in. Be Free.
Bless yourself. Drive away fear.
play with everything. entertain
your inner child. You are innocent.
BUILD A FORT with blankets. GET WET.
HUG TREES.
Write love letters.

V. B. SPARK

Creating space

The playground of township theatre group Freedom Extravaganza

by Loes Berkhout

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Foreword

Utrecht 26th of June 2009

'It is good to have an end to journey toward, but it is the journey that matters in the end.'

Ursula K. Le Guin

Dear reader,

This whole process of writing my bachelor thesis was quite a journey. On the one hand I am a bit tired, on the other hand I wish I had been able to go deeper into the matter. A knowledge seeker never knows enough. My fieldwork period with Freedom Extravaganza (FeXG) was one big trip of enthusiasm and impressive stories. I could not think of a better research group/location. Freedom Extravaganza gave me hope and although my stay in Westrich sometimes knew its ups and downs, the loving people around me always cheered me up. First of all I want to thank the members of FeXG for involving me in their lives, what a source of enjoyment you are! TK, I hope not to have bothered you too much with my questions and presence, my time in South Africa has been so good thanks to you. In Holland I would like to give gratitude to some guiders along the way. Hans, my professor for his always critical view and beautiful expressions. Quirine, for her theoretical support and growing friendship. Jesse, for reviewing the language. Tessa, for sharpening my focus. And of course, my family for having the trust to let me go to the townships of South Africa.

During my fieldwork travel I sometimes felt ashamed for my legal voyeurism. Who am I to make living actors fixed characters on paper? I hope the presentation of their lives can be recognized by the FeXG group members. I realise that describing a neighbourhood ambiance, is tricky for an outsider, their experience can never fully be mine. I was just a traveller who passed by to get a glimpse of the lives of people who interest me. For that reason hopefully the voice and experience of the Freedom Extravaganza group resonates in this thesis with my research question on the background. I hope readers realise that this thesis reflects my interpretation of an image of others given by others and for that reason can only be partly correct. Despite some darksome descriptions, the people from Westrich and other townships gave me the feeling of warmth and acceptance. They made this overseas tourist feel safe. They opened my heart even more and as a souvenir I took some African friendliness with me to illuminate the Dutch street life. Now the travel has come to an end, memories stay. My personal wish is for this journey to lead to my bachelors degree. My *ubuntu* wish to all the people who crossed my path in South Africa :

Makube nokukhanya ezimpilweni zenu, nasezi mpilweni Ze Africa yonke
- May there be light in your lives-

Nomalanga / Loes

South Africa¹

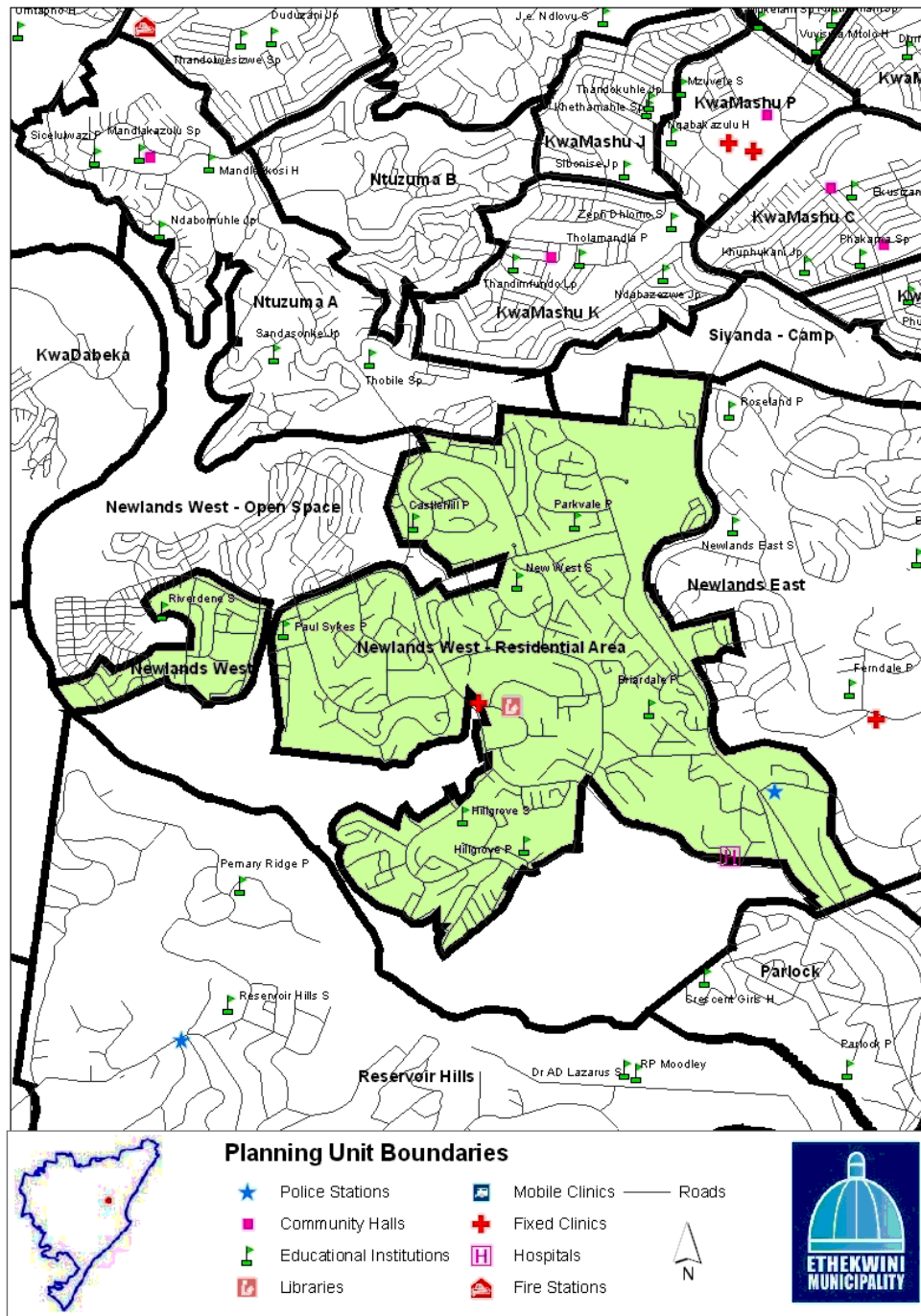


Durban²



¹ Wordtravels. Download 22-05-2009
http://www.wordtravels.com/images/map/South_Africa_map.jpg
² Sonkefoundation.org/images/maps/Durban.gif Download 17-05-2009

Newlands West Residential Area³



³ Website www.durban.gov.za checked with at 10-06-2009
<http://www.durban.gov.za/durban/wardCatalog/displayPUResults?planUnitId=PU228&planUnitDescription=Newlands%20West%20-%20ResplanUnitIde>

Introduction

With this thesis the daily reality of a unique group of youngsters from the townships in Durban, South Africa comes to life. Youngsters who try to make sense of a world while being in a challenging process of growing up and becoming. A world where traditional values and urbanism meet in both contradictory and consolidating ways. A world where ancestral spirits lay their forces upon the living while God keeps an eye on both. A world where warmth and generosity exist alongside forced equalisation and social control. A world where playing, singing and dancing are inborn qualities of expression deployed to make the world a better place. The drama of the buoyant township life and the drama of theatre are united in this thesis because that is the reality of the members of Freedom Extravaganza.

Freedom Extravaganza (FeXG) is a South African theatre group whom I was able to observe in Utrecht in 2009, not knowing by that time I would visit them a year later for an intense fieldwork project. The performers of FeXG instantly took my breath away. How could this group travel all the way to Holland? What would their lives look like? How come they are so positive, while being in such a marginalized position? I kept all those questions to myself. As soon as I heard that their artistic director Thami was willing to offer his house and group as research location I was determined to write my thesis about this theatre group. My passion to show any individual's creative ability to make something out of life perfectly fits the approach of the group. FeXG is an educational theatre group of youth from poor suburban neighbourhoods (townships) who want to empower their audiences and own group members. However the decision to focus primarily on the theatre players had practical reasons and after spending time with them this was the most logical choice. The players are more deeply affected by the empowerment process than the audiences, because of the simple fact that the members are in it constantly. They can discover themselves every time, as Boon & Plastow (2004) analysed it. Of course this process of empowerment is highly needed in the situation where the majority of the township youth find themselves.

Research about empowerment, the process of the extension of power in order for individuals, families and societies to take action to improve their situation (see paragraph 2.1), can contribute to the importance of comparable initiatives worldwide. Especially the focus on the transformation process of the performers themselves makes this research valuable as a counterpart to general research about empowerment of the audiences. The social value of this kind of research is that it shows that membership of a positive group can offer protection against the negativity township youngsters are regularly exposed to. Making educational theatre means learning about the importance of education for succeeding in life and this lesson yields more confident, stable and positive citizens. Development aid should value African ways of growing and empowering each other more, as well as the importance of community work. My main goal is to show how young people, in creative ways, try and manage to build a better future in a world where poverty and hardship are daily bread.

The wider context of FeXG is a country in transition. In South Africa the aftermath of colonisation and the apartheid regime is still highly visible. The African government has the prominent task of counterbalancing the inequality between the different ethnic groups. Different interrelated socio-economic problems like racism, unemployment, crime, and poverty are affecting all ethnic groups in the country. During the 1970's the popularity of different forms of social theatre in the African continent rose. The idea of social theatre is that theatre can, apart from being entertaining, also be informative. The main goal of this type of theatre is to empower the marginalized population. In Africa where HIV/Aids and other social issues mutilate the stability and health of people, alternative and artistic manners to tackle problems are desirable. FeXG met this urgent need with singing, acting and dancing. The theatre group offers her audience entertainment, while at the same time scenes about HIV/AIDS, crime, education and the history of the South are played out to create awareness. The group members are youngsters from the township themselves, and hence the plays they perform derive directly from the daily practice of township audiences. A closer look at the possibility to transform lives through theatre (Boon & Plastow 2004: 11) uncovers diverse ways of empowerment that have a deep impact on the lives of the members of Freedom Extravaganza. Letsego is a new member of the group who used to smoke and drink a lot with his friends. He explained the

'transformation' he went through since his participation in Freedom Extravaganza:

'The group changed me. I don't have to do what my friends are doing. I make my own decision, respect myself. I am starting to find myself, I grow and start to believe in myself. This is me.'⁴

This research focuses on the vision of the group members on their lives and the ways their participation in FeXG influences their lives. My aim is not to evaluate the work of Freedom Extravaganza or to demonstrate how the community views and/or benefits from the group. Mainly opinions of FeXG members are captured. My initial intention, which was to pay attention to the motivation of the members, was soon replaced by a focus on the comprehension of community values. An embodied community feeling expressed in the township of this thesis is *ubuntu*, a (Pan)African concept that propagates core values as sharing, respect, humbleness and hospitality (Kamwangamalu 1999). Inherent to every value system is a darker side, whereby in this case the community sense leads to obtrusive counteracts. *Ubuntu* can be considered a cultural model, i.e. a shared cognitive scheme through which persons are enabled to construct and interpret their human realities (D'Andrade & Strauss 1992). The manners in which the manifestation of *ubuntu* creates tension between community values and personal values will be examined. The agency versus structure debate is used to clarify this tension. The reproduction of this cultural model in the group Freedom Extravaganza and the promotion of each member's agency are integrated in the central question:

In which way is the African macrocommunity spirit of *ubuntu* reproduced and realised in the context of the microcommunity of Freedom Extravaganza?

This fieldwork research took place between January 25th and April 26th 2009 in Durban, South Africa. All my field data comes from Newlands West, a peri-urban area southwest of Durban. Most interviews and observations took place in one of Newlands West's townships: Westrich. Several methods were used to obtain information. Generally, the methods used were informal conversations with informants and open ended interviews. In sum, twelve in depth interviews were taken from the theatre group members. The interview took between five to seven hours. Informal conversations were held with all members and also extended to persons outside the group. Intense participant observations as well as observations without participation were used as important methods to determine how informants act. One group discussion brought up information that confirmed and/or extended my findings. For privacy reasons pseudonyms are used, except for the director TK. The English language is spoken in conversations and interviews, while some conversations between group members in Zulu were roughly translated for me. English is the formal language in South Africa. All my informants speak Zulu and the majority speaks reasonable English.

The views of the theatre members about their perception and experience of their lives gave me great insight into the complicated nature of 'their' social reality. Through examining different parts of their social world and with my conclusion of the contrasting nature of those worlds, light will be shed on the construction and unification of different sides of the social world. It shows what can be underneath the surface and what is implicit but of crucial importance in understanding cultural values.

The content of this thesis will be presented as follows. The theoretical framework where my results are embedded in will be discussed. An outline of the history of social theatre in South-Africa is needed to understand the nature of these artistic initiatives. Empowerment is the goal of many social theatre groups and this often used word will be elucidated in the context of people in a marginalized position. The complex relationship between agency and structure is useful to understand empowerment, while this relationship also effects how people collectively interpret their social realities. Through the use of a cultural model can be understood how collective worldviews manifest. In the second chapter, "Context", attention is paid to the history of South Africa in the last century, which is of crucial importance for the origin of racial equality and the forming of townships. The township where most FeXG members

⁴ Interview Letsego, 07-03-2009

live is Newlands West in Durban. Most of the inhabitants are Zulus for that reason basic information about their culture and township life in Newlands West is given. Then, the collected field data regards the description of a cultural model of the African ideal of *ubuntu*, the spirit of togetherness in chapter 3. Chapter 4 shows a contrasting side of the interaction between township inhabitants by use of the cultural model of competition which includes jealousy and mistrust. At last Freedom Extravaganza, Newlands Wests' community theatre group is a source of positivity in the township. The *ubuntu* values are strongly alive in the group, but they deal with it on their own special way using their strength as brothers and sisters of the FeXG family. The conclusion is used to reiterate the question in this introduction and gives an answer based on the fieldwork data.

Chapter 1 Theory

South Africa is a country where theatre is popular. Singing and dancing are part of the African culture, but the influence of European colonization and development ideas of the Western world brought new theatre forms to South Africa. The idea to educate the poor 'uncivilized' by the use of theatre appealed to policy makers. This led to a whole range of theatre approaches from Theatre for Development to more local input based theatre like community theatre. The aim of all applied theatre forms in developing countries is providing social tools to fragile groups or communities, in the hope they can emerge from their marginalized position. Different theatre approaches are designed for different goals, FeXG has its own unique approach and goals. Pre-eminent is the environment of communities involved in community theatre. The situation obviously asks for consideration and knowledge of community values and behavior. In every society, and even more in collective societies, the individual depends on other people. The individual has a personal frame of the world, which often coincides with the frame of the community, but not always. This structure and agency tension i.e. the norms and expectations of society/social networks versus desires and freedom of the individual, is part of human life. In the environment of FeXG members, social networks are highly important for the survival of individuals. For that reason family and other networks are met with more appreciation than individuals. To reach consensus between individuals, collective value systems are created to understand the world. The theory of cultural models, which is a cognitive schema to organize the world, can be suitable to explain the ways in which communities and individuals make sense of their complex social world.

1.1 Theatre in South Africa

Most traditional South African tribes are strongly interwoven with dancing and singing (Banham 2004). Since the colonisation era African performance is ineluctably shaped by the Western education system and urbanization. In reaction to that development performance culture became an instrument for identity, competition and self transformation for the black South African (ibid). Unequal assimilation of different group in the colonial political South African economy is a powerful, important topic in nowadays theatre expressions (Coplan 1985:5). During the colonial times Christianity, Westernisation and urbanisation were closely interrelated for Africans who went to school (Banham 2004). The Bantu education was intended specially for black South Africans, to keep them under. In current theatre expressions, to compensate for information deprivation, community theatre groups such as Freedom Extravaganza are called into existence.

From 1970 black theatre is improving inasmuch that it starts to meet the objectives of the black African population. South African writer and theatre director Zakes Mda named theatre 'an instrument for liberation' (1990:358). Coplan (1985:6) explains a new form of black social theatre that led to transformation in the townships: 'What unites all the personalities, materials, styles, audiences, ideas, and aims at work in this theatre is that the best of it is popular in the best sense; arising out of the community it serves and organic to the lives and concerns of those of all races who produce and support it. (...) This theatre gives a voice to the voiceless and a sense of psychic community to the alienated.'

In Africa many initiatives for development came in association with theatre. One should be aware of the hegemonic nature of development projects ⁵ also penetrating social theatre. Popular theatre concerns a process of performance and theatre making by which communities are involved in indicating problems, analyzing their poverty situation and working out solutions. The goal is for people to undertake action in controlling their own lives (Prentki 2000 : 8). Community-based theatre covers the widest spectrum of popular theatre and involves communication, education and social issues. The participation and autonomy of the community is important. Freedom Extravaganza is named an educational theatre group and this specification is a subcategory of both community-based theatre and popular theatre.

⁵ based on from the West to the Rest ideology

Community theatre has two general goals; efficacy and entertainment (Schechner 1988:120) which FeXG summarizes under the heading of 'edutainment'. In Africa theatre is widely used to inform people about HIV/Aids (Boon & Plastow 2000), an important issue also for FeXG in South Africa, where the disease is infecting a large part of the population. During edutainment performances the audience is provided with information and enjoys entertainment at the same time. While the format of educational theatre typically fits in the Western ideology of development processes, there are approaches of educational theatre which bestow ownership to the target group. The uniqueness of Freedom Extravaganza compared to most social theatre groups is that the idea rose *out* of the community, their members are *from* the community and the plays performed *for* the community. This is ownership to the fullest.

The relationship between FeXG members and the community are interesting to explore for different reasons. The reactions of parents and neighbours concerning the FeXG membership of their children, gives an image of dynamics in close neighbourhoods. Theatre can be experienced as a community asset and this will be discussed further in chapter 5. The transformation process that theatre can stimulate in groups and individuals is related to empowerment which will be further developed in the following section.

1.2 Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of the extension of personal, interpersonal or political power in order for individuals, families and societies to take action to improve their situation and to critically investigate their situation and environment (Gutierrez 1995). Making theatre about their community, personal experiences and/or situation forces participants to think and analyse their life. According to Ross (1984) theatre can animate awareness and discussion, this is exactly in line with the goal of FeXG. Community theatre encourages participants to develop confidence and create space for themselves. Ideally they start to question the nature of their problems and marginalized situation (Boon & Plastow 2000). Freedom Extravaganza typically integrates the personal input of her members to develop their plays. The youngsters of the theatre group reflect diverse backgrounds and are experts on the topics of social problems that their target groups face. Theatre players recognise their (own) ability to imprint their audience' heads with an image of their presence. Also, the voice provided to them as acknowledges the theatre members, enables them to speak out about important issues (ibid). Because empowerment is about agency, about getting control over one's own situation, the role of personal drives related to forces of social networks are important. Possible elements of empowerment are: access to resources, housing, work, education, stable relationships, voice and the ability to make choices concerning support and facilities. Certain elements of empowerment concerning FeXG members, will be illustrated in chapters 3,4 and 5. Empowerment is a process of individuals, as well as groups (for example households). The capabilities to be independent, to take care of one self and to focus on the individual are typically Western. In this thesis empowerment is related to the African context whereby families and communities are at the centre of society.

1.3 Agency and Structure

The agency versus structure debate keeps anthropologists and other social theorists busy. As being said before, attention to the development of agency is important in social theatre. Agency is the ability to make individual decisions and to realize goals that have a positive influence on human well being and quality of life (Giddens 1994). An actor can feel motivated from inside, but we actually can never be sure which parts of our motivation are derived from social norms and values. In this thesis agency is considered the ability to draw up an inventory of individual needs and to create space to carry out the actions to fulfill these needs. Agency is related to the use of physical (f.e.money) and non-physical resources (f.e. education), in the construction of a worldview. Andrews (in Boon & Plastow 1994 : 43) conclude that theatre can be a 'path to self-fulfillment' for undiscovered talents, personal traits

and other, previously unknown, sources of satisfaction. FeXG members are asked to analyse their own agency process and mention the revealing of certain talents and characteristics as well (see chapter 5).

Every individual is related to something outside that individual. The structures surrounding us stretch from the international political power to our families. Every community or civil society defines norms, rules and regulations. Agency can never go without the structures it is imbedded in. Our human freedom of choice is being restricted and controlled by the structures surrounding us. Nevertheless personal freedom is not only restricted by structures. In individualistic societies individual actorship is often protected and encouraged. The context of this thesis is a collective neighbourhood, in which elements of individualism figure as well. The values of macro structures that predicate black Africans how to relate to each other in a suburban community can be wrapped into a collective system called a cultural model. Individual striving is a less common life strategy in a society based on collectivism or communalism. For this reason an emphasis on such notions of communalism and togetherness in different aspects of social reality make up a framework, a model. The social structures such as community, neighbors, friends and family have to be taken into account in decision making and actions. Those macro structures cannot be experienced in isolation from the individual. In societies like the township in Westrich the existence of an individual depends on the relationship with others.

1.4 Cultural models

To an important extent our behaviour is shaped by cultures and models (Jacobson-Widding 1991). Culture is hard to theorize and one way to analyze culture is to see it as an extended, heterogeneous collection of models. A cultural model is a cognitive scheme to organize, label and interpret the world. This scheme is shared by people in a cultural group and makes individuals inside the group connected and committed to each other, because they collectively give expression to these shared notions (D'Andrade 1992). A model is constantly influenced by negative and positive feedback (Share 1996), this means a model is made out of a negotiation process that never stops. The casus of FeXG deals with the negotiation of a cultural model, one shared community system is reshaped in a particular way. Logically, cultural models have the motivational force to produce goals and desires (Strauss & D'Andrade 1992: 2).

Models can bear conflicting conceptions of the world. Models can contradict and compete with each other. We need to distinguish different cultural models as much as we need to connect these cultural models with each other. Individuals and groups are confronted with this same challenge both consciously and unconsciously (Shore 1996).

The interplay between socio-cultural structures and personal agency is vital for understanding human decisions of priorities (Jacobson-Widding 1991:23). It is possible that some members of a community are not able to internalise a cultural model, because their personal experiences are not reconcilable with the conventional model. The relevant question of is how cultural models are being tied together with the social experience of individuals and whether there is space for personal freedom under the conditions one is subjected to (Riesman 1997 in Jacobson-Widding 1991:11)?

Chaper 2 Context

South Africa has a long and rich history. 300 years ago the South African tribes came in contact with Europeans who colonised the country. The impact of colonisation and racial segregation in the forming of living areas for the natives is huge. Townships are non-white areas out of the city centre, where black people were forced to live. For the context of Freedom Extravaganza, the nowadays living conditions of black South African sub-urban communities are relevant. The improvement of public housing and other facilities for development over the last fifteen years constitute more hopeful signs. Information about the area Newlands West should give a clear image of the environment and facilities wherein FeXG members live. Despite many governmental improvements, unemployment, poverty and inequality are highly prevalent amongst black youth. Townships are having serious problems with young adults going in the wrong direction. Newlands West knows, besides many social and economical issues, also warmth and familiarity. Most of the families in Newlands West are Zulus. The Zulus consider the family as their centre and this cultural notion reflects in many elements of their society. In this chapter some macrostructures and microstructures around FeXG members are explicated.

2.1 South Africa in transition

For more then 100.000 years human beings have inhabited South Africa. In 1600 Cape Town became an important point on the sea route for the European trade market and since then European sailors, traders and others found their way to South Africa. Until 1781 the presence of European traders in South Africa was rare (Taylor 1995). Eventually the country became colonized by mainly the British (The Flemish, the Dutch and German also took 'their' share).

The country came under the regime of European settlers and they introduced industrialization and economic growth. This economic development was enforced through exploitation of black Africans and Indian slaves. The dispossession of thousands of rural black families and the industrial growth led to a massive expansion of South Africa's urban African communities (Coplan 1985). The fear for the former primitive natives competing over sources made the whites set up an unstable, inconsistent and unenforceable 'native policy'. The Native Urban Areas act in 1923 stated that 'the Native' will be tolerated in the urban areas as long he is willing to answer the needs of the Whiteman (ibid). Housing opportunities for black South Africans were opposed, slums grew due to the government's unwillingness to provide for the welfare of Africans. African misery and resentment rose as urban proletariat grew. Slums were closed to places of employment and other urban amenities (liquor stores), laundry stores and other informal essential home industries. The average wage of African male workers was not enough to provide an urban family (ibid). The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act in 1953 permitted separate and unequal access to public facilities (Beinart 2001). The government aim was to enforce in the urban residential areas an allocated place for every race. Geographic planning removed Africans from the city centers.

In 1961 South-Africa was declared an independent republic. The National Party ruled by white European settlers introduced the Apartheid system which officially⁶ segregated the white population from the non-white population, leading to brutal violations of human rights. At the end of the 1950's the urban townships grew. The proportion of the African population living in 'white' urban areas declined. Settlements were diverted to areas within the boundaries of their homeland. Few of homeland's inhabitants owned agricultural land (Beinart 2001). Homeland boundaries later became to contain existing urban locations near cities. This led to the development of large new townships. The 'dumping grounds of Apartheid' were unorganized rural slums, highly populated and lacking agricultural opportunity while at the same time deprived from urban facilities, services and employment.

The Apartheid system was abolished in 1994 allowing the African National Congress (ANC) to rise in power and win the first democratic elections with Nelson Mandela as president (Beinart 2001). In the mere fifteen years

⁶ During the British and Dutch colonial periods racial segregation was informal.

since the abolishment of Apartheid, the country has been building its new social order. The Republic of South Africa is now, wishfully, termed a 'rainbow nation' by the government. Various ethnic groups populate the country. Those groups are the Nguni people (including Zulus, Xhosa, Swazi), Tsonga, Sotho-Tswana, Venda, coloreds⁷, Indians, Afrikaners and the English (StatsSA 2004). Black South Africans account for 78% of the population, followed by Indian, coloreds and whites. Despite the abolishment of Apartheid, the majority of the black South Africa are still in a disadvantaged situation compared to other ethnic groups (Higgs 2006, Carther & May 1999). According to the study of Carther & May (1999) the material well-being of Black South Africans is declining, especially concerning inequality between different ethnic groups, which affect power relations and access to sources.

Hundreds of years of exploitation and racial oppression take time to overcome, in the recent aspiration of South Africa as a multicultural democracy. The transitional, transformational, inter-racial, inter-ethnic tensions are sources of great political concern. The political instability is based on the chaotic reformation of the social order and disrespect and hostility between different religious, racial, cultural, political, linguistic identities (Zegeye & Harris 2002). The living conditions of certain parts of the population are negatively influenced by the previous government policies on racial and gender inequality – in the areas of basic services and proper housing as well as access to education, health care and jobs (StatsSA, 1996). In the context of the already fragile position of the poor in the sense of social security and a small underdeveloped informal sector, unemployment is a major issue (Human Science and Research Council 2009).⁸

The new government was able to make some improvement in different areas, such as housing, education, civil rights and health (HIV/Aids) but inequality is still persistently present. The most fragile groups are Africans living in the rural areas, as well as women and the youth (South African Statistics 2007). A positive fact about South Africa's youth is that in 1996 most children (88%) did have formal education (Youth Rapport 1996). But, unfortunately, compared to other ethnic groups African youth are in the most disadvantaged situation regarding access to education. Concerning unemployment the statistics indicate severe conditions. In 1996 48,5 % of the young people between 15-35 were not economically active and 21,5 % were unemployed.⁹ Employment rates from 2007 do not yield a much brighter picture. In South Africa 21 % of the people are unemployed and of this group 72% (between the age of 15-64) is discouraged (SA Statistics 2007). Unemployment is seen as the most important reason for the lack of wealth in South Africa. The stimulation of employment is for that reason a high national priority (Higgs 2006: 350). The elections of April 21st, 2009, were won by the ANC under the leadership of Jacob Zuma. Zuma is popular for his empathic attitude towards the poor. Allister Sparks (former head of SABC news) elucidated the recent message from the South African government to the marginalised civilians: 'Don't wait for the government, do it yourself.'¹⁰ A positive sign is that the 'fragile' group members of FeXG have exactly that do-it-yourself attitude.

2.2 Newlands West

Newlands West is located in major city Durban or eThekweni. Durban is a large coast city of South Africa in the province KwaZulu-Natal. Durban is an industrial centre, a major seaport and a year-round resort. The national native indigenous population is as diverse as South Africa, the Indian population is high. Durban has a comfortable climate, lots of sun, and is a tourist/surfers hotspot.¹¹

The majority of the fieldwork for this thesis is carried out in the township Westrich in Newlands West, where most FeXG members live. 'Township' is the term used to indicate an urban residential area where Africans were allowed to rent government built houses, subject to the Group Areas Act of 1950. A township is distinguished from a slum yard (Coplan 1985 : 270). Newlands West is a black township and most of the inhabitants are African Zulus.

⁷ People from mixed black and white descent.

⁸ Checked with at 11-06-2009 via <http://www.hsrc.ac.za>.

⁹ Unemployment means available and looking for work.

¹⁰ Allister Sparks spoke during symposium 'South Africa in Transition' in Tilburg on the 18th of June 2009.

¹¹ See footnote 3

Newlands West is a residential community on the coastal highway near economically vibrant areas to the north of the center. The area was formerly used as a buffer between racial zones, after the abolishment of apartheid the state made infrastructural investments. In 1996 Newlands West open space was quite literally open space, unpopulated far stretching green hills (Schensul 2008). From 1996 to 2001 the government constructed more than 2600 public housing units. The community consists mainly of families living in two-room freestanding houses with a good view on the township.

Living standards in townships vary, from hardly any basic facilities to good facilities, infrastructure, water and housing. The township Westrich has running cold, drinking water (70% of the households), electricity (with intermission periods), concrete houses, flushing toilets and little (*tuk*) shops for daily groceries. The area Newlands West¹² has a population of 15831 people, of which 89% is black. ¹³ Employment rate of inhabitants from 15 to 65 years old is 21%. The household income of 35% of the households is officially zero (ibid). There are several schools in the surrounding area. Westrich has a carwash and a taxi rank. A library and swimming pool are 10 minutes by taxi.

Zulus who mainly populate the Kwazulu-Natal region, moved in the 20th century from the rural areas to the cities and this had a major impact on their lifestyle. The urbanization has influence on different aspects of society, but many values, habits, traditions and thought patterns are still present. Kinship and family are the center of the Zulu society. The closeness between people is visible in families, between neighbors and members of the same community. Township inhabitants greet each other on the street and are close with each other.

The Zulus have a patriarchal kinship system, which means that when a woman marries she (and possibly children) moves in with (the family of) the man. It also means that the (grand) father has the authority and must be shown the greatest respect. Traditionally the grandfather must be implicitly obeyed (Krige 1957:27) but this strict rule for grandfather and child relationships is nowadays declining. Most families live in extended households, which is economically beneficial but also of cultural value. Women leave the house only when they marry and this requires the payment of bride wealth named *lobola*. Nowadays *lobola* is very expensive for the average African to pay and this leads to a postponement and sometimes renunciation of a marriage. The unmarried couple, often live separately and have children together who are raised by the family of the mother.

Many Zulus believe in God (various form of Christianity are institutionalized) as well as in ancestral spirits and witchcraft. Despite fading traditions, a wedding, funeral, unveiling¹⁴ or birth are regularly celebrated through ceremonies and shows the still flourishing African values. For example, *lobola* is no longer being paid in cows but with the money equal to a certain amount of cows. These notions and surrounding ceremonies are very strong and alive in the Zulu townships despite the urbanized setting which makes the enforcing of those elements a more arduous task. Besides African beliefs, European Christianity, spread by missionary, is adopted by a majority of Zulu people.

Ancestors are deceased known and unknown relatives who are predicated powerful forces. Ancestors are the living dead who are capable of giving guidance and protection. Propitiation through offerings is an essential part of the reciprocal affiliation (Krige 1957:280). Ancestors are not necessarily favorably disposed; they can generate/induce evil occurrences.

Zulus turn to a doctor, herbalist or diviner for medicine and magic. Diviners were referred to often by informants. A diviner is considered a great doctor among the Zulus, known as *isangoma* or *isanusi*. He or she has a lot of knowledge of herbs and roots for healing and curing as well a connection with the spirits which makes him/her able to look back in the past and foresee the future (Krige 1957:299). Related to the *isangoma* is *muti*, these are traditional herbs. They are used for protection or for doing evil and frequently mentioned during conversations. Still 80 percent of the black population in South Africa regularly consults a traditional healer.¹⁵

¹² See the map on pag.4 00

¹³ Additionally 1% of the Newlands West population is coloured, 10% Indian and less than 1% white.

¹⁴ An unveiling ceremony intends to bring the deceased person 'to the light', he/she officially become an ancestor.

¹⁵ Medical Association of South Africa checked with at 09-06-2009

http://www.samedical.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=91&Itemid=229

2.3 Freedom Extravaganza

Freedom Extravaganza is an educational theatre group founded in 2001 by Thamsanqa –Thami or TK- Khuzwayo (27). Thami started Freedom Extravaganza when he couldn't finish his law studies due to financial reasons and realized something had to be done about the despair and negativity that surrounds township youth. The main purpose of the group is to educate the youth about social issues like HIV/aids, crime, teenage pregnancy and the value of education. FeXG's target group is South-African youth of all colors/ ethnicities, particularly youth from poor backgrounds.

After hard work the group became stable and made furor. They built up a network, received funding from Europe, created a foundation (Friends for Freedom), founded a venue and traveled to/performed through South Africa, Namibia and The Netherlands. Since one year the group administers a school fund which gives group members the possibility to finance their education.

Freedom Extravaganza consists of young people between 15-25 years old ¹⁶, of whom most consider themselves Zulu. Members come from surrounding townships with different socio-economical backgrounds. The group has a core of (mostly) long time members and a circle of members who are present on a more irregular basis. The amount of members in the group varies around an average of twenty. The group rehearses five days a week from Monday till Friday. The rehearsals are organised around a basic schedule. The group starts with holding hands and praying. The warming-up follows and takes about 15-30 minutes. Then time is mostly spent to improving the sound of group songs, playing theatre games, exercises for improvisation, rehearsing the new scenes and sometimes talking about social issues of the members' lives.

That the selection during the audition is not mainly focused on singing, acting and dance capabilities is remarkable. The director himself explained his vision: 'I didn't started the group for angels, for good singers. I started the group for people who want to do something positive in their lives. Thale couldn't sing, but she had passion. That is what I am looking for.'¹⁷ The message of Freedom Extravaganza is that having talent is nice, but the most important characteristic new members need to have is the passion for positivism.

Unfortunately the group is recently denied access to the rehearsing venue they occupied for many years. The rehearsal venue was a big classroom inside the school Riverdene (in Westrich) which also offered space for their office and wardrobe. Since last February the classroom is used for other purposes, which forces the group to return to rehearsing outside. TK is on the search for opportunities to obtain or build a new own rehearsal room.

The fact that the rich festival culture in Africa is a blend of Euro-American and African influences (Banham 2004:322) resonate in Freedom Extravaganza. The theatre group combines African dance and music with modern choreography.¹⁸ The group acts, sings, dances, plays instruments and directs and writes their own theatre plays. The group holds a performance every month for their own community. General performances are mainly in schools and cultural centers. The prospect is to start performances in rural areas in the end of 2009 with the project 'The Healing Journey'. FeXG has her own foundation called 'Friends of Freedom Extravaganza.'¹⁹ The foundation receives support amongst others from Impulsis, One Men and for their study fund from the Haellastichting, Minderbroeders Capucijnen and Stichting ZorgSaam voor Jeugd.²⁰ In eight years the groups has developed into a financially stable, experienced and active international theatre project.

¹⁶ With the exception of one member of 35 years old.

¹⁷ TK 19-02-2009

¹⁸ www.FeXG.com

¹⁹ <http://www.friendsoffreedom.nl/>

²⁰ With thanks to Rob Bunnig.

Chapter 3 Ubuntu Utopia

This chapter aims to give more insight in the informal social interactions between members in black townships. Westrich is the fieldwork location of this research and is characterized as a township. But it needs to be emphasized that this neighborhood, fortunately, does not fit into the stereotypical image of a notorious township.²¹ Besides differences in living standard between townships, they presumably also have commonalities. Durban's official website describes Westrichs' neighboring township KwaMashu as having, besides poverty-related negativity, a positive atmosphere 'where the community comes before individuals.'²² This emphasis on social networks illustrates the view of township community members that their lives consist primarily in relation to others. As explained in the introduction, this ideology will be referred to as *ubuntu*.

'*Ubuntu* is the key to all African values and involves humanness, a good disposition towards others, and a moral nature. It describes the significance of group solidarity and interdependence in African culture. It places great value on dignity, respect, conformity and reconciliation in the midst of conflict and hardship.'

(Mthembu 1996:216 in Kamwangamalu 1999)

Instead of narrowing this ideology to black townships inhabitants in South Africa, Jung suggested, just like Mthembu, that all sub-Saharan African inhabitants were closest to the original universality of the human spirits (Taylor 1995:33).²³ *Ubuntu* was translated by FeXG member Sizwe²⁴ as 'humanity' and 'spirit of togetherness'. Values like respect for every human being, human dignity, collective sharedness, humbleness, hospitality, caring, solidarity, obedience, loyalty, patience, and interdependence are associated with it (Kamwangamalu 1999). One FeXG member associates *ubuntu* with Zuluness. Bhekimuzi²⁵ reports about Zulus: 'Their relationship is bond. One Zulu saying goes : '*Wathinta oyedwa, usthinte sonke*' (injure one, injure all).' Besides group solidarity respect is likewise fundamental. Letsego mentioned respect in association with family and friends, according to him 'Zulu's are very respectful, they give and gain respect.'²⁶

Working with *ubuntu* as a cultural model helps to understand thoughts, perceptions, and actions as part of a collective system in communities. The *ubuntu* model consists of beliefs, customs, value systems and socio-political institutions and practices of various African societies (Gyekye 1987 in Kamwangamalu 1999). According to Makhudu (1993 :40 in Kwamwangamalu 1999) is *Ubuntu* a process and philosophy which reflects the African heritage, traditions, culture, customs, beliefs, value systems and the extended family structures.' One of those customs connected to *ubuntu* is that families in Westrich show that they find sharing food important. If a family has a visitor around dinner time, food is always offered to the visitor. The underlying notions are 'Here we share what we have, even if it's not much' and 'you cannot eat alone.'²⁷ Group members of FeXG indeed never eat alone when they are together. Every bag of chips, every kind of sweets is consumed jointly.²⁸ Another remark about *ubuntu* concerns the practice around death. Indlovu : 'When someone dies, all people from the community come to attend, to show sympathy. That is *ubuntu*.'²⁹ Calling *ubuntu* a model means that it is built up out of more than just a belief, it shows in actions and much more.

The last part of Mthembu's quotation mentions a situation of hardship and conflict as a breeding ground where such a community thinking can flourish. This is an interesting statement, because of its explanatory value and the problematic nature of togetherness in times of competition over scarce sources. The next chapter (chapter 4) addresses this topic. In stories of the members of Freedom Extravaganza, the spirit of togetherness is often

²¹ With "notorious township" I mean a neighborhood predominated by crime and violence, leading to feelings of unsafety and anxiety, a lack of basic facilities and overwhelming signs of poverty.

²² www.gov.za <http://www.durban.gov.za/durban/discover/history/our-town/introduction-to-our-town> checked with at 10-05-2009

²³ Informants attributed the *ubuntu* values as typical inherent to Zulu's, to Africans or to black communities members (compared to city dwellers)

²⁴ Interview Sizwe, 09-02-2009

²⁵ Conversation Bhekimuzi, 12-03-2009

²⁶ Interview Letsego, 07-03-2009

²⁷ Conversation Nolwazi K., 11-02-2009

²⁸ Observations rehearsals, 02-2009

²⁹ Conversation Indlovu, 22-06-2009

mentioned in relation to the experience of hardship, although it also came forward outside of the context of hardship. 'People know each other, on the street we greet. We know we are all in the situation of hardship'.³⁰

In the lives of Freedom Extravaganza members the *ubuntu* spirit is alive and manifests itself in various forms of interaction. Social structures such as the family, the community, the township, and the church often get priority over the individual. This ideology of communalism means that the welfare of each individual is dependent on the welfare of others (Kamwangamalu 1999). The references made by informants to this way of thinking and acting, are numerous.

Features of social life that help individuals to work together in order to pursue shared objectives are elements of social capital (Putnam 1995 in Catell 2004). Those features are, for example, networks, norms, and trust. On the basis of four forms of social capital – supporting/caring, closeness, respect and reciprocity – the expression of the 'spirit of togetherness' is discussed.

3.1 Support

The family is the centre of Zulu society. Living in extended households is common for black families in South Africa (Bozalek 1999: 86). Most Zulus live in extended families which are in origin patriarchal. Clark's study in a South African township and rural village about well-being, shows that 'a good family' has been put high on his priority list of 'having a good life' factors (2003 : 180). In families, care, support and love are nearby naturally. The FeXG members ³¹ ³² emphasized the importance of family often in the context of supporting each other, for example Mzamo who lost both his parents but still remembers their message about holding on to each other.

'No matter how hard it is in the family, we are not going to suffer for all our life. Even when the situation was getting worse in the family (...) Love was there and one day the situation will change.' ³³

The aspects of poverty in families must be understood in the context of inequality and racial segregation formalized by laws (The Native Urban Areas act in 1923 and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act in 1953).

The story of Sizwe³⁴

Sizwe (24) lived during his early childhood with his huge family on the farm. His mother worked in the kitchen of white families and his father worked in the mines. Both his parents didn't earn much due to the Apartheid regime. His father became a taxi driver in Durban, but was forced to flee for the taxi war³⁵. He hid in Durban and lived on the street for two years without seeing his family. Taxi gangsters visited Sizwe and his family, who lived on the farm that time, and threatened them with guns to tell where his father was. Sizwe's father didn't tell anybody. To provide for the family, Sizwe's brother started working. Finally someone found their impoverished father on the streets and after two years the family could be reunited. The family strongly supported each other in these hard times. Sizwe's mother made sure that her kids had something to eat every day by cultivating vegetables. The taxi gangsters came around again and said Sizwe's father had to pay money. Sizwe's oldest brother wanted to rescue his dad and paid the money. Members of the church also stood by the family. Especially in the rural areas, according to Sizwe, who experienced it himself, 'you see people suffering, but people do everything to help each other'.

³⁰ ibid

³¹ Interviews Khanyisile, 17-03-2009

³² Interview Mzamo 10-02-1009

³³ Interview Mzamo 10-02-1009

³⁴ Interview Sizwe 01-04-2009

³⁵ For more information on this topic: Dugard (2001) 'From Low intensity War to Mafia War : Taxi Violence in South Africa (1987-2000). Violence and Transition Series, vol. 4.

Most group members have families in the rural areas that moved to the cities and suburbs around the 1990's. Because the townships are more influenced by Western values than the rural areas, this probably leads to diluted communalism (Kamwangamalu, 1999). Even though there might be differences in the way *ubuntu* values resemble in the relationship between peasants and township dwellers, it is clearly alive outside rural areas as well.

'Richmond Farm is a very good neighborhood, but has its negativity. My neighbors are very nice. They are close, very supportive. The youth in the neighborhood is very supportive.' [Mzamo] ³⁶

Households in Westrich consist mostly of families bigger than the nuclear family. Grandmothers, mothers, brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews live together, while the father's frequent absence is prominent. ³⁷ The hardship of township life that people face on a daily (or less regular) basis leaves its marks on the family organisation. Parents perform paid labour for longer periods far outside the township and grandmothers often take care of the children (Bozalek 1999). Not having a father or mother is sadly common; the majority of the group members have lost at least one parent. ³⁸ This makes the presence of a family to fall back on even more crucial. Without a breadwinner, life is hard in the township. Ndumiso went through rough times when her mother passed away due to cancer.

'My mother died in 2007. (...) She was the breadwinner for us. Some things are hard. We still needed her. My sister was in school. My brothers weren't working at that time. Sometimes we didn't have anything to eat.' ³⁹

Ndumiso experiences her family as close, together, just like most group members. First after the death of her mother, her brothers spend the money they had on alcohol, now they buy food with the little money they earn. In this way they provide care and support.

Surprisingly, the image of father as breadwinner is declining, his absence (due to early death, separated living or rejection) is often bolstered by the grandmother. More than often the grandmother is the only person in the households who earns the money. Bozalek (1999) who interviewed black students at the University of the Western Cape found that 29 % of the students reported that their grandmothers look after the children and other members who needed help. This is a recognizable situation for FeXG members. Often granny shows to be a lifesaver and is considered a hero, a strong woman who is always there and takes care of the family. ⁴⁰ ⁴¹ The one who puts bread on the table is the one who shows to care.

Supporting and caring for each other in families yields more chance of survival. Support can consist in buying groceries, stimulating education, helping with transport, listening to problems, or giving advice. In any way, FeXG members realize that it is important to have a social network or at least a supporting family. Bhekimuzi: 'I need people for backup'.

3.2 Closeness

Zulu's believe in the idea of *simunye*, meaning 'we are one'. This feeling of unity is experienced when people of the community group together. Indlovu explains it as follows: 'We are generous, we connect.' ⁴² FeXG members unanimously describe their families as close. ⁴³ The importance of being close to relatives is one thing, the importance of extending the family feeling to a whole township is another thing. In black South African townships

³⁶ Interview Mzamo , 10-02-2009

³⁷ Conversations FeXG group 02-2009

³⁸ Conversation TK, 27-01-2009

³⁹ Interview Kholulu, 28-02-2009

⁴⁰ Interview Mzamo , 10-02-2009

⁴¹ Conversation Nomsa , 10-04-2009

⁴² Conversation Indlovu, 22-06-2009

⁴³ Footnotes 16, 17

like Westrich⁴⁴, the family feeling is mirrored in the way people address each other. In the local tuck-shop or on the street, community members call each other 'bro', 'sis' or 'auntie.' Even for a *mlungu* (white person) they make no exception and I remember the first time a guy on the street called me 'sis'.⁴⁵ An awkward feeling of acceptance and belonging descended upon me. What's in a word? In this case: the reproduction of the *ubuntu* value of closeness or, more appropriately, affiliation into the community context. The community is made into an enlarged family.

The 'everyone knows everyone'-feeling is illustrated in stories of FeXG members, who claim to know at least half of the community members.⁴⁶ This familiarity shows in daily contact on the streets with the greetings '*sanibona*' (hello) and '*cunjani*'? (how are you?), who are applied also between strangers. Another way to show this closeness is more flamboyant. Guys, who are fortunate enough to ride a car, use their horn enthusiastically whenever they can. Riding with TK in his bus gives this we-know-each-other-experience, because almost every time he passes a friend, relative, or acquaintance at least two of the following responses are interchanged: honking, waving, greeting loudly, stopping the car and making a small chat ending with 'sho sho, mi brad' (it's cool, my brother).⁴⁷

Closeness and familiarity in the relation between children and elderly in the community goes even beyond mere greeting and noticing each other. Children in Westrich are thought to consider any elderly person as a possible father or mother (Kamwangamalu 1999). This immediately means that children are under the authority of the community's elderly. This use of kinship structures can strengthen the community sense between people in the community. In the meantime it provides a framework for social control and joined responsibility for children. TK explains that his biological mother raised him with the idea that 'Every old woman in the street is your mother.'⁴⁸ He learned how to respect and listen to his community mothers.

Many examples of closeness invoke associations with kinship bonds, unity, familiarity and reciprocal generosity. The following concept related to *ubuntu* is derived from closeness in communication that marks human dignity.

3.3 Respect

Respect is probably one of the most appreciated values in African societies. For this reason it suits the cultural model of *ubuntu*. In particular, gaining respect and showing respect to other people is mentioned as valuable by black South Africans (Clark 2003). Respecting men is a traditional Zulu value, which was mentioned by some girls of the group.⁴⁹ What does respect actually mean for Freedom Extravaganza members? The moment this question was asked to the members during a group discussion⁵⁰ about my fieldwork results, it became strikingly silent. Respect is hard to 'grab'. The first thing they mentioned was 'having a positive spirit'. Freedom Extravaganza came to the explanation of respect as: showing humanity, showing the good side of you, having good communication, understanding, listening to others, respecting other opinions and humbleness. One reason why respect is highly valued, is because it can make communication smooth, according to Indlovu (an important informant who once was a group member). With paying attention to other people's feelings respect is shown. This is clearly connected to humanity. People feel good when they give and receive respect.

'When I am respected, I feel comfortable in the area where I live. It makes you go. The more you respect people, the more you respect yourself. Respect is about truth within people, being true. I know they respect me, when they greet me. When they talk about the good things I do.'⁵¹

⁴⁴ As well as in Durban town.

⁴⁵ Observation on the street Westrich 13-02-2009

⁴⁶ Interview Letsego, 08-04-2009

⁴⁷ Observations 02-2009

⁴⁸ Conversation TK 10-02-2009

⁴⁹ Conversation Ndumiso 12-03-2009

⁵⁰ Group discussion Freedom Extravaganza 01-04-2009

⁵¹ Conversation Indlovu 21-06-2009

Being respected is important because it means having a good position in the community. This has obvious benefits, besides the good feeling that derives from it – for example: being able to exert power and receive protection. Bongani, who lives in township Richmond Farm, tells about his experience of mutual respect.

‘Around here, all of the people respect me. I don't know why, maybe because I respect them. Most of the guys here have already children, they drink and they smoke. Their parents want their children to be like me. I am really different’.⁵²

The Freedom Extravaganza group members can be considered, and as well call themselves, role models. The reason for this is because they divert from the fatality of black township youth getting into negativity (more about this in chapter 4). Having a role model is important, says Bhekimuzi⁵³, young people can take a good example of how to respect others. In particular, their group leader and substitute father TK receives high praise for his respectful attitude and position.

‘A lot of young people respect our director (...) feel that TK is their role model. People ask themselves when they do a bad thing: how will he handle me? TK has this connection with the society. People know him as a good guy.’⁵⁴

The difficulty to grab onto the concept of respect because of its vagueness, does become clearer with examples of respected persons such as TK. TK is seen as friendly, a good guy, while at the same time the young people fear him a bit too. The quote ‘this connection’ refers back to good communication. Charisma combined with authority partly makes up the mixture for respect, something TK possesses and/or gained. Sizwe tells what he thought of TK on his audition. ‘He was friendly, the way he used to present himself. He was a sort of a decent guy. The community did respect him.’⁵⁵

The ways to show respect are observable in often subtle signs during social interactions. In the township, the way to respect the elderly is shown through the consequent greeting of any old person who walks by and some guys of the group resolutely take off their cap for them.⁵⁶ In the situation of a street party with some FeXG members, a clear sign of showing respect caught my eye. The girls and boys of the group were having a drink and a smoke like many adults do, while their director was also present at the party and aware of their consuming behaviour. The moment TK came near the smoking and drinking area, some members put their beers and cigarette behind their back. Slindile explained to me : ‘He’s is like my father, it is disrespectful to smoke in front of your parents’. With this example it all starts to make sense: the family terminology and affiliation projected on TK, turns this 26 year old peer into a father with additional signs of respect.

In giving respect there comes along a notion of agreement, conformity and obedience. Highly respected persons such as the elderly, parents and community leaders are approached and addressed in humbleness. Having respect is rooted in the way children are raised and showing this respect has major advantages. Khanyisile remembers a lesson of TK, to respect not only him but also other people, especially the elderly. ‘We can get blessings from them.’⁵⁷ Another reason to behave nicely, besides getting blessed, is making the community and families proud with decent, friendly behaviour.⁵⁸ ⁵⁹ My own experience is that many people from Westrich, as a result, tend to agree on things before having understood the message. This has important implications for doing research, of course. The negative consequences of this conformity and humbleness are part of chapter 4.

Respect is of crucial importance when persons live in a tight and strongly interdependent society. According to FeXG members giving and gaining respect are related, they interact. Giving respect leads to obtaining

⁵² Interview Bongani, 10-02-2009

⁵³ Interview Bhekimuzi, 01-04-2009

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ Interview Sizwe, 01-04-2009

⁵⁶ Observations Westrich, 02-2009. This greeting is done with both hands up at stomach level

⁵⁷ Interview Khanyisile, 28-03-2009

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ Footnote 20

respect, while self-respect is where everything begins. At the same time obtaining respect results in the need to give respect and to achieve a situation of more self-respect. The processes of receiving and giving respect are interrelated or even interdependent. Interdependency and reciprocity as parts of *ubuntu*, is the last concept around 'the spirit of togetherness' discussed here.

3.4 Reciprocity

Reciprocity, mutual exchanges and interdependence are values constitutive of *ubuntu* (Kamwangamalu 1999). The socio-economical benefits of reciprocity will be highlighted here. To come back to the concepts of supporting and caring discussed earlier, these values are especially in families seen as naturally reciprocal. In the situation of (relative) poverty sustenance and survival are related to caring (Bozalek 1999). The group members often referred to reciprocity in their family context. This is considered an exchange mainly from parents to child and child to parents. FeXG members need to take care of their family and feel the responsibility to make sure that their (living) relatives will be in, or maintain, a stable position. It comes very close to the idea of redeeming a debt, although it is a debt which they want to fulfill with their heart. The idea is that parents gave everything: love, warmth, food, clothes, safety and that investment must be paid back when the children are able to do so. Bongani, Sizwe, Kholulu and all the others send out the same message as Mzamo :

'I want to start seeking for a job and start taking care of my family. Now I have only one responsibility that is to finish my studies (....) I make sure when I have my diploma and a job, I take this family to a better level.'⁶⁰

Khanyisile also mentions besides respect that being there for her close family and friends is her biggest dream. Her ideal future will consist of supporting other people, taking care of her family, and getting married.⁶¹ An illustration of the value of caring and supporting each other is offered by Mzamo. He gives his household a 6 on the wealth scale (0=very poor, 10=very rich) presented to him. Mzamo 's granny is the breadwinner and his two sisters have jobs, but earn little. The family spirit is mutually supportive.

'There is a lot of work to be done. We are working together as a team, we motivate each other. We need all the support that we can give each other to reach our destiny.'⁶²

One step further is to involve the Zulu belief in ancestors in the explanation of mutual exchanges. Ancestors are the living dead family members, and hence the affiliation continues even after death. Ancestors continue to influence the daily life of the living whom they provide with guidance and assistance. (Mitchell 1977; Chinkwita, 1993 in Thwala et. al 2000). Mzamo points out: 'Ancestors are dead, but they are not gone. We will always love them. We are always with them.'⁶³ Slaughtering a cow or a goat is a sign to propitiate the ancestors. During different events (for example a wedding or birth) a ceremony is organised as part of the Zulu tradition. Families are expected to give a ceremony after the death of a family member. It is important for the family and highly appreciated by the community. During an unveiling ceremony that my host family organised for their mother, many community elders gave compliments to the organising children that they showed to be good children. With a ceremony the children display they really care about their mother, to pay respect for everything she has done for them. The blessing from the elderly, respect and a continuing togetherness are celebrated.

⁶⁰ Interview Mzamo 10-03-2009

⁶¹ Interview Khanyisile 27-01-2009

⁶² See 33

⁶³ See 33

Conclusion

Ubuntu is visible in the life of the community in Westrich, on the streets, in families and in the way people think. *Ubuntu* is reflected in value systems such as reciprocity, closeness, respecting and supporting each other. Westrich inhabitants seem to enjoy their togetherness and benefit from it. The *ubuntu* spirit encompasses the positive values of the African life, showing humanity. Humanity is crucial when people live in a deprived situation, simply because without others they won't survive. Facing the problems together is better than facing them on your own. In Dutch there is an applicable saying: 'Gedeelde smart is halve smart' (A sorrow shared is a sorrow halved). The other side of the medal is that it can be difficult to keep up with positivity and dignity in a sometimes threatening and grim world. The downside of the township life is discussed in the next chapter about the lack of togetherness between community members, arising out of competition and mistrust. In reality, *ubuntu* is like an ideal, an Utopia.

Chapter 4 Culture of competition

The *ubuntu* spirit is a romantic, collective worldview that comes alive in 'African life', such as township communities. Despite the experience and practice of the spirit of togetherness in every day social life, a closer look underneath the surface of the warmth and humanity of the township life in Westrich unveils a contrasting reality. In the mode of coping with harsh conditions, and the aftermath of apartheid, scars are left on humanity. In general scarcity of anything leads to competition over sources. The fear of not having enough and the struggle for living a decent life, are not uncommon in (African) townships.

Strong social networks can provide co-operation between community members, but a consequence of the strength of networks is the resulting entangling social control. Features of social life that help individuals to work together to pursue shared objectives are elements of social capital (Putnam 1995 in Catell 2004). Those features include, according tot Coleman (1990), obligations and expectations of reciprocity, and norms and sanctions associated with informal social control. The relationship with *ubuntu* is that some elements are consequences of *ubuntu* values. Inherent to closeness is informal social control. Most features of social life discussed here are related to unemployment, crime and despair, far away from the 'spirit of togetherness'. At the same time those are not isolated from *ubuntu*, as *ubuntu* offers hope and positivity exactly in such situations of hardship and negativity.

In this chapter a cultural model of competition will be introduced. Equal to the cultural model of *ubuntu*, is the suggestion that an ambiance of competition is expressed in values, beliefs, practices and institutions. Competition does not rhyme with the togetherness and closeness so highly appreciated in African live, but community equality and solidarity do conflict with the struggle for survival. Competition and obtaining sources are related from the perspective of the township inhabitants in Westrich. Reciprocity and mutual aid are powerful and positive in the context of *ubuntu*, individuals help each other out. At the same time reciprocity is expressed in forced remises, which have consequences when not being met.

On the basis of the *ubuntu* values, the (apparently) opposing values related to competition are explained. The tension between individualism and communalism is used to understand the frictions that exist between value systems. My aim is neither to conclude that the *ubuntu* spirit can only survive in grim conditions, nor to impute the negativity described in this chapter solely to hardship.

4.1 Restriction

'Everybody wants to stay in the township and everybody wants to leave.'⁶⁴

With this start of his talk, TK tells his group members nothing new. The township life has the comfort of togetherness and the discomfort of poverty-related negativity. Leaving the neighborhood is difficult because people are close and feel connected. Otherwise the ability to leave often holds out hope for a relief from poverty and positive change. Members of FeXG were asked to describe and judge their neighborhoods, Richmond Farm and Westrich. Despite the fact that Richmond Farm is notorious for crimes like murder, rape and knifing, Mzamo finds his neighborhood 'a very good neighborhood.' But he adds that 'it has its negativity.'⁶⁵ The difficulties of township life are often shared, but competition for status, sources and power are opposed to collectiveness. Competition is present in the townships, often superficial and sometimes clearly visible. On the basis of the cultural model of *ubuntu*, individualism and diversity are not accepted parts of the social value system (Gyekye 1987: 156 in Kamwangamalu 1999). This rejection of agency related values (striving, self-focusing) shall be termed *forced equality*. Egalitarian societies protect their egalitarianism.

One way Zulu township inhabitants enforce equality is with the help of *isangomas* (traditional healers) and *muti* (bewitched herbs). Zulus attain great value to traditional healers and are willing to use their forces to obtain

⁶⁴ Speech TK during rehearsals, 05-02-2009

⁶⁵ Interview Mzamo , 10 -02-209

control over sources. To illustrate the supportive spirit of some neighbors together with the non-supportive actions of some other (or maybe even the same) neighbors, FeXG members share their stories. Bongani, who lives in Richmond Farm, was able to rebuild his ram shackled crib to a normal home with financial support from some of his Dutch friends. In half a year Bongani lost his sister and brother, according to his family due to evil thoughts and actions from the neighborhood (enforced by *muti*). Bongani and his father visited their *isangoma* for advice and they were warned that the community members actually want to attack Bongani himself. Bongani explains the situation as follows:

'People are jealous. I was building this house and people wanted to know where I got the money. They want to hurt me, even want to kill me but I am too strong.'⁶⁶

'People like my neighbors are friendly when I show my car, but they pretend.'⁶⁷

'Most people don't want others to succeed. They will be happy, but some of my friends will be like 'shit, look where she is, I am left behind.' [Khanyisile]⁶⁸

During my stay, Bongani went through different rituals of protection, because he had been showing signs of sickness, which his *isangoma* saw as the power of *muti* used by other people. Bongani's two best friends Xolani and Mzamo are also FeXG members and live in the same township. Mzamo and Xolani both lost their mothers. Mzamo's mother is said to be killed by a very close friend. Xolani's mother past away due the negative use of *muti* by a community member.⁶⁹ Ndumiso who lives in Westrich doesn't consider her neighbourhood supportive. She has a similar explanation for the 'sending of spells' : 'If you have everything, you have a big house, big car. They are sending you spells, for you to die, to get you down.' This mechanisms that work against the improvement of household situations and enlargement of personal/family assets is probably based on fear and jealousy. A way to protect from these evil forces is through enclosure. According to Letsego : 'You must love people, but never trust them.'⁷⁰

'Lots of people want to be friends, because they want to use you to get something. You mustn't trust them, they can haunt you down. They act like they are your friends.'⁷¹

Here another contradiction can be identified. Trust is needed in close relationships, while all group members speak about their feelings of mistrust in close relationships with friends, neighbors and loved ones. The risks of being open and vulnerable are experienced as too high.⁷² The culture of distrust in love is explained by Marlin-Curiel (Boon & Plastow 1996) in relation to South Africa's poor economic condition. The acquirement of a higher status is a high priority of teenagers. Girls can obtain material goods (cell phone minutes, hair do etc.) through more then one affluent boyfriend and boys can assert their manly hood by polygamy. Indlovu gives as reason for cheating: 'because of a kind of competition between the boys. Everybody is a cheater, we all cheat in some point.'⁷³ This cultural norm around cheating, is enculturated through upbringing. Khanyisile remembers her father warning her that 'Boys only want to have sex. They bluff.' According to Khanyisile he does that because he cares.'⁷⁴

The intensity of envy and mistrust has a simple explanation in the context of deprivation. When there is scarcity people are interdependent and eager to obtain the same assets as everyone else, because that is where

⁶⁶ Interview Bongani, 23-02-2009

⁶⁷ Interview Bongani 02-03-2009

⁶⁸ Conversation Khanyisile, 28-04-2009

⁶⁹ Conversation Xolani and Mzamo , 26-03-2009

⁷⁰ Letsego, 07-03-2009

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Group discussion, 01-04-2009

⁷³ Conversation Indlovu, 03-03-2009

⁷⁴ Conversation Khanyisile, 28-04-2009

the society of togetherness is based on. The moment one person has more or something special (new house, beautiful girlfriend) others wish to have the same and feel threatened. Bhekimuzi concludes that jealousy comes from misunderstanding between different kinds of people. 'I have never seen such privilegedness as in this township, although there is only 10 percent of us who are getting these privileges.' The sharp contrasts between the living conditions of township families could explain the present reality of jealousy and pretending. The system of sending spells is identified as the negative counterpart to support. These non-supportive acts and thoughts prevent community members to develop themselves in a positive direction, and are instead contributing to some sort of 'togetherness': the togetherness of being all on the same low level of life. Envy is provoked when a person brings unbalance in the egalitarian principle. Envy implicitly indicates a different, more positive element, namely that the person who reaches out above the rest earns respect.

4.2 Reverence

Persons who inspire others with awe are respected. Respect is one of the most praised aspects of social interaction between Africans. But the consequences of interactions based on respect can be unfortunate. Respect is given to persons for different reasons, for example TK enjoys a respected position for his dedication to the community. A quite different reason for respect is because of possessions such as a car (Kuper 1965:112 in Beinart 2001), and even raw behavior like criminal offences is for some surrounded by the magic of respect.⁷⁵ The highly respected subscribed status of persons such as the elderly, parents and community leaders should not be contradicted (from the traditional African point of view). As a result, discussions between parents and children are rare. Nolwazi shares her view on respect, that it should not be confused with fear.

'Having no voice is not showing respect, you should also respect yourself and be able to say 'no'.⁷⁶

Obedience, conformity and humbleness are in line with *ubuntu*, but it may lead to a lack of voice and openness in, for example, the family setting. The group feels a sense of recognition with Nolwazi's statement. Mzamo is not disposed to say 'no' easily, but does think it is possible to say 'no' with a supportive statement. Without explanation the negation will be regretted.⁷⁷

The wish to respect each other could be related to the fact that openness about life situations and feelings is not so common between community members or family members. Moreover, respect is connected to social hierarchy based on age. The attitude of respect to elderly is not forced, it passes down from one generation to another in harmony and interdependence (Boating 1985 in Giles et al 2006 : 194) Some members speak with their parents about personal issues, but in general tricky social issues are not discussed. FeXG members often consider their families as close families, but also as broken families. The impression from the way people in Westrich talk is that fathers are regularly neglecting their family's needs and for unknown reasons refuse to take financial (e.o) responsibilities. The question here is in which way the family has the social responsibility to be tight. This reminds of the earlier discussed loyalty and obedience to parents.

TK was once involved in illegal activities. One reason for those actions, he said, was that he was constantly exposed to crime and that nobody talked with him about his future.⁷⁸ Likewise, Khanyisile usually doesn't talk with her parents about life and for that reason she wants to change that with her own children.⁷⁹ Letsego does experience closeness in his family, but he says : 'I am not used to telling people how I feel. I keep things to myself, but I'm learning now how I feel.' TK confirms that families in his township are not very open to each other. One reason could be that children don't want to make the situation worse, because most parents already have enough

⁷⁵ Interview Bhekimuzi 08-04-2009

⁷⁶ Group discussion Nolwazi 01-04-2009

⁷⁷ Group discussion Mzamo 01-04-2009

⁷⁸ Conversation TK, 12-02-2009

⁷⁹ Interview Khanyisile,

problems. The wish to make parents proud and not to disappoint them, can also contribute to the fear to open up. Even financial problems (dependency) are sometimes the reason why terrible circumstances of rape or abuse in the family setting are not openly discussed or dealt with. Girls who have the guts to stand up and tell their mother about abuse by the (step) father encounter a blind wall, explains TK. Dependency on the income of the father, can be the reason for the mother to keep her mouth shut and not bring up the family disaster. Freedom Extravaganza is a consciousness-creating group, TK intends to offer a space where members can talk about problems. Possibly, the absence of deep conversations in the family setting is a reason for members to long for talks about personal experiences and to share stories.

My own experience is that many people in South Africa tend to agree with me on things even when they did not really get the message. This might be due to politeness, fear to show misunderstanding, or a sign of respect. It has important implications for doing research, of course.

4.3 Social pressure

Westrich; Mlu's Car Wash. Soon when the local carwash opens around eight, teenage boys and men gather and settle themselves on the craggy brown crates. The carwash is made out of a wooden framework and offers place for five to six cars. To the left of the carwash stands a container plastered with the mellow smile of ANC leader Zuma. Some beers from last night lie scattered on the ground, with no final drops left as greedy mouths shared the content till the end of the bottle. In the morning the carwash men observe children bounce on the sidewalks with their coloured school uniforms, laughing and chatting on their way to education. The bunch of men sit at the road while the noise, of men and women travelling to work and pupils going to school, slowly fades out. This is when their day starts. At least their boredom is collective boredom. The ones who don't wash cars have to kill the time. They talk, smoke cigarettes or dagga (weed), drink alcohol and chase after the girls who pass the street. Every day when I cross them we greet each other enthusiastic and we talk. They always know when I leave Westrich and when I come back. When the hang-out place is desolate, I catch myself having the hopeful thought that maybe the guys were able to find a little job, to realise a second later that they maybe just run out of money for beer or cigarettes and went home.⁸⁰

The image of unemployment, uselessness and boredom is common under township youth. Because girls are surrounded by some cultural protection, problems on the street are mainly targeting boys. Many Freedom Extravaganza members have experienced the negative circle of boredom, wrong friends and being involved in negative behaviour. Mzamo : 'I have chosen some wrong friends, but I didn't realise it. We were so called friends, they started to become gangsters. They beat their girlfriends and fought with other people. They also used a lot of drugs. I also was stoned a lot for two years after my mother died.' After some time Mzamo came to the realisation, that this is not the life that he wanted to live. He distanced himself from his friends, because he noticed that he was absolutely different. He became a member of FeXG and is now proud of his decision to break with his negative friends.⁸¹

Being lost is quite dangerous in a world where a seemingly fatalistic destiny obtrude to township youth every day. Bhekimuzi and Mzamo outline the life of most black South Africans in the township without sufficient education:

'Look at the taxi rank, when you are a kid, you get shit jobs. For me if I didn't join FeXG, I know I would be working maybe at the taxi rank. (..) It can become very hard, they become drug addicts. That is again the absence of education. Some people drop out of school, because there is no food.' [Bhekimuzi] ⁸²

⁸⁰ Observations, 12-02-2009

⁸¹ Conversation Mzamo , 08-02-2009

⁸² Interview Bhekimuzi, 08-04-2009

'Most guys are sitting in the roads, sitting in the taverns, not knowing what to do in the day.' [Mzamo]⁸³

According to FeXG group members the fatality of the youth means children and adults are involved in drinking, smoking, drugs, teenage pregnancy, crime, school absence while feeling bored and depressed, because no one understands them.⁸⁴ Concerning youth problems, they arise often from peer-pressure. Selikow et al. (2009) conducted research about adolescents from Cape Town and their preoccupation with sexual risk behavior. Youngsters are particularly sensitive for social pressure during puberty. They take over the norm of their peers instead of the norm of adults. Bhekimuzi speaks about the issue of the destructive youth behaviour in his neighborhood by means of poetry. What concerns him is that freedom fighters are brought in disgrace through their behavior.

Youth Desire⁸⁵

a journey had begun
the youth of 1976
walking the street
with stones of fire
today we admire
but the question is,
what do we desire?
the intentions
of Hector Peterson
are confiscated
by your sins
you tell me who is better
Mandela or Jameson?

This (part of the) poem gives an impression of Bhekimuzi's frustration about township youth admiring their heroes (Nelson Mandela and Hector Peterson), while committing themselves into 'sins' like alcohol abuse (Jameson is a famous whiskey). Group behavior can have a negative impact on sensitive young people that makes them drift them away from personal positive growth.

Negative peer-pressure is obviously not solely an African phenomenon, nevertheless can the African Ubuntu spirit influence group thinking and acting. *Ubuntu* can be translated into belonging and togetherness. What happens is that when major groups of township youth is involved in problematic, rebellion behaviour, feelings of loyalty easily pull youngsters into those groups. Lwandle has experiences with peer-pressure that put her in a hazardous situation.

'Bad influence who are forcing you to do things you don't want to do. People can threaten you, say : 'I will kill you if you don't do this.' I only drink when I want my problems to go away. When I am angry, I feel like smoking. My cousin told me to sell drugs, she put pressure on me that she wouldn't have enough money and so on. '⁸⁶

⁸³ See 13

⁸⁴ See 11,12,13

⁸⁵ By S. Sibisi/Bhekimuzi/Peoples Poet

⁸⁶ Interview Lwandle, 13-03-2009

Eventually Lwandle found the strength to stop dealing drugs and she joined FeXG. Her participation in the group has changed her. 'It is helping me in stepping off the nonsense. It helps my reputation, I am busy.'⁸⁷ This decision to participate in the theatre group had the consequence that she wasn't 'hangin' on the road' with her friends anymore, to their great dissatisfaction. They reproached her for acting arrogantly and neglecting her friends. Despite this 'jealousy' of friends, her close friends support her and realise it is good for her career.

That the desire to belong to a group and to be popular in the context of deprivation can be detrimental for the (self-)confidence of people is concluded by Bhekimuzi.

'You live in the township but have to dress smartly. That is where black people get low self esteem from, when they don't have access to those things (...) Because of peer-pressure they steal. And that is also why you get teenage-pregnancy '⁸⁸

Poverty and negative group pressure seem to go hand in hand. Stealing and the wish to dress in a modern and hip fashion are understandable. The situation around pregnancy is more complicated. Indlovu confirms Bhekimuzi's analysis of the situation around pregnancy under teenagers. Indlovu is 21 and has an 18 year old girlfriend. His male friends put him under pressure to make his girlfriend pregnant. In this way he can 'show he has something sustainable with the girl.' Indlovu firmly objects to the attitude of his friends and wisely explains that he does not want to spoil her future.⁸⁹ All these reactions suggest that (especially) young township dwellers are embroiling each other in malign behavior under the mask of group solidarity.

4.4 Indebtedness

Reciprocity keeps families and community members in touch. Most relationships are marked by some kind of trading. Mutual caring relationships keep people strong and supportive. An element of reciprocity is the need to pay back. This is not only a need, it is a must. Parents give their children love and care, and then there is an expectation of returning love and care. Bhekimuzi tells about what his stepfather and TK.

'He spoiled me a lot. This kind of things made me feel I owe a lot to people. For example TK, for taking me to school. I have people, I have debts.'⁹⁰

Another part of family relationships that include reciprocity and indebtedness is the ancestral bond. Honoring and satisfying the ancestors is an important task for most Zulus (Krige, 1958). Khanyisile tells: 'Sometimes when I get sick, the doctors can't find it. We talk with ancestors, they are angry.' The message is clear here, don't forget the ancestors. Remembering and being faithful are attached to this. Rules are part of the tradition of communication with the ancestors. Khanyisile's cousin died, a situation she attributed to their unfaithfulness and disobedience of rules. 'Rules are hard. If I don't follow the rule, something bad happens.' A woman from the community who was busy with the organization of a ceremony explains the prominent role the community has if it comes to ceremonies for ancestors. Remember the previous chapter where children are complimented for their 'goodness' during a ceremony:

'People expect you to do it. We don't always want to do it, but we have to. You show that you still care.'⁹¹

⁸⁷ ibid

⁸⁸ Interview Bhekimuzi 08-04-2009

⁸⁹ Conversation Indlovu 03-03-2009

⁹⁰ See 19

⁹¹ Nolwazi is not a FeXG member

The obligation in reciprocal relationship can be difficult. There is a need and a desire to do 'something' back to family members and also ancestors. The consequences with neglecting ancestors are possible severe. The community controls the community regarding the organization of ceremonies. Lacks of money, time or motivation are brushed aside. The ancestors and maybe even more the communities make sure the reciprocity is maintained. 'We slaughter for ancestors. If we wouldn't, there would be a problem. Big problem is the money. When there is a need, you have to do it. Why would you not spend the money while you need to do this?'⁹²

Conclusion

Freedom Extravaganza members are dealing with a lot of outside threats from jealous community members to cheating boy/girlfriends. There lives the notion that individuals have to protect themselves from negativity through closure, putting on a mask or calling help from an *isangoma*. *Ubuntu* values are positive, but they can lead to incompatibility with the negative attitudes and actions that result from the situation of competition. Egalitarianism, togetherness, closeness, trust, respect and reciprocity put pressure on a community where mechanisms of defence are needed to protect the personal and family situation. To seclude oneself from the world full of opportunities for profoundness, leads automatically to more superficial contacts. Pretending happiness or togetherness may lead to a frustration on the personal level. When there is closeness, everybody is looking over you. Reaching for the highest (making the family life better) is supported on the family level, but not always between friends or community members. Making others proud is important and respect as well, but the fear of failure is attached to those values. Mzamo loves his neighbourhood and the people, but wants to move when he is successful. 'In the case my life becomes a downfall, I wouldn't handle the pressure.'⁹³

FeXG members receive a lot of respect and are seen a role models. Still there is unease with this success, by the actor (afraid of jealousy, a curse) and with the surrounding friends/community members who are said to experience jealousy. Extreme individualism could not thrive in traditional African culture; in spite of individual talents and capacities, the individual ought to be aware of his or her insufficiency to achieve his or her welfare through solitary effort (Kamwangamalu 1999). *Ubuntu* is paradoxical. *Ubuntu* spirit can be abundant amidst the hardship of life, because it flourishes mainly within such a grim context, but, simultaneously, harsh conditions prevent the spirit to be fully expressed. To excel in something makes a person respected, while it brings in the same time community values of equality, togetherness and understanding in unbalance. In this tension group members balance, they fall sometimes, but are lucky that someone catches them : their Freedom Extravaganza family.

⁹² Conversation Mzamo , 10-02-2009

⁹³ *ibid*

Chapter 5 A familiar playground

‘It always seems impossible, until it is done’
Nelson Mandela

Starting a theatre group in a township out of nothing can be placed in that category ‘seemingly impossible’. Freedom Extravaganza was grounded because one boy stood up in his community and was determined to do something about the problems he saw in around him. So-called grass root initiatives have their origin from within the local community. The strength of this type of non governmental organisations is the internal wish to change people’s lives and the insight information many other organisations/institutions do not possess. Especially a community production like educational theatre has the risk of being pre-planned remote controlled. A situation Paulo Freire termed banking education (1970), where imperialistic development ideas stick behind. Like pointed out in the introduction, the uniqueness of Freedom Extravaganza is their complete ownership.

Freedom Extravaganza is an educational theatre group which aims to empower the marginalized South African population, specially the youth. The group wants to educate their audience about topics they normally do not get (sufficiently) informed about: HIV/Aids, crime, teenage pregnancy, the history of South Africa and the value of education. Poor and/or poorly educated African communities should benefit from their shows through enjoyment and the hand out of information.

Working within communities asks for permission and cooperation of communities. In the case of Freedom Extravaganza, the first unease within the community about this initiative is vital for understanding social structures in the township. Opinions of parents, friends and the community as a whole are of great importance to the members of Freedom Extravaganza, because they in their context heavenly depend on what others think. The African community values of *ubuntu* are naturally reflected in FeXG. The group has her own application of that spirit of togetherness. Remarkable is the space left for individualistic values. The stimulation of agency is obviously a message of the Freedom Extravaganza.

Theatre and transformation are come together in Freedom Extravaganza. The ways theatre making acts upon actors are diverse. Here the empowerment processes, as a personal experience inside a group, are most important. Empowerment processes can be implicit or explicit for the party involved. With observations, interviews and participation hopefully a grasp of what theatre does for FeXG theatre players, can be illustrated. Theatre as a tool is interesting for anyone who wants to know what can be accomplished when there is a passion for improving your own life and the lives of the people around you. What needs to be taken into consideration is that the distinction between the effects of this type of community theatre and the effects of Freedom Extravaganza as a group is vague.

5.1. From suspicion to support

When Thami Khuzwayo came with the idea of mobilizing the youth in his township Westrich, to target their often hopeless situation, he had to overcome ‘some’ resistance. The community posed strong statements about this township boy wanting to deploy ‘their kids’ for some theatre group. TK was portrayed as a fool, a madman in the first response.⁹⁴ Reactions that members received resonate with the idea of protection against outside threats. Ndumiso’s mother warned her daughter ‘That man makes a fool out of you. Maybe this man is crazy and out of drugs.’⁹⁵ The explanation of thick and thin trust in neighbourhoods could help to understand this protective strategy. Thick forms of trust are associated with dense social networks. Density and closure are conditional for trust according to Coleman (1990 in Catell 2004). The more a community is homogenous, the closer the ties (Jacobs 1961). We can presume Westrich consist of a homogenous group of people (in this case low working class of mainly

⁹⁴ Conversation TK Ndumiso, Mzamo , Bongani 10-02-2009

⁹⁵ Ndumiso, 02-03-2009

Zulus). The supportive, dense networks can be exclusive and suspicious to outsiders (Lockwood 1966 in Catell 2004). In this case TK is the outsider and for that reason suspicious. The social order was disturbed by his unconventional ideas. The expectation that money making would be TK's underlying goal, was strongly present.⁹⁶

Besides community support, the group faced practical and financial support problems. The lacks of finance, rehearsal space, costumes, theatre experience were not the least. Luckily after some time the community came around. According to group members now every child or teenager wants to be in FeXG⁹⁷ and the group is becoming a success.⁹⁸ Most people from Westrich know director TK and for that reason they know Freedom Extravaganza as well (or could this be the other way around?). All members receive compliments from family and community members.⁹⁹ Letsego believes the group has a positive impact on the community itself. He is a new member and FeXG had already made a name when he joined the group. About the community he says: 'They love it, are supportive in every way. I never heard negative things about FeXG.'¹⁰⁰ Group members who did experience friction between family members were often able to convince them.

'We are willing to show our parents, to prove to the people who think bad things, to show we do good things. My aunty from my neighbourhood said bad things, but told me after the show : 'now I see you do good things'. People enjoy.'¹⁰¹

In the end persistence and following your dream are, according to the director, the reason for the group's success. His strength to face the challenges with FeXG, owes TK to the love and support of his mother, he narrates.¹⁰² Again family support is vital for fulfilment of personal dreams.

Support from the community to FeXG is important for the survival of the group. Support between group members is important for the closeness and happiness in the group. The group members support each other in diverse manners. Sizwe : 'we are empowering each other. The group is making a great difference in my life, it's making a brighter future for me.'¹⁰³ Especially self-confidence is stimulated in FeXG. The members develop dancing, singing and acting skills mainly during their membership. Only a few members had artistic experience before joining the group. For example Bongani, Xolani and Mzamo who once formed successful dance group 'The Champions', but they never sung or act before FeXG. Now Mzamo is considered one of the best singers of the group and Bongani is directing a new play.¹⁰⁴ The worth of improvement of theatre skills should not be underestimated, as Sizwe explains : 'Freedom Extravaganza was able to reveal another part of me. It was able to reveal how big I am in performing arts.'¹⁰⁵

The consequence of learning theatre skills reaches farther than only being more skilled in theatre. This chapter focussed on the deeper personal value behind community theatre and FeXG as a group. Becoming more self-confident is one of the most prominent psychological acquisitions group members mentioned after the question : In which way influences FeXG you as a person? Related to self-confidence members mention more self awareness ¹⁰⁶ , believing in one self ¹⁰⁷ and the guts to step on the stage. Ndumiso¹⁰⁸ a friendly, confident young mother remembers her shyness during the auditions. 'I was even to shy to say my name, I had not much confidence, but TK's manager encouraged me.' The experienced discouragement from community members expressed in envy, sending spells and talking bad is contrasted by TK's attitude.

⁹⁶ See footnote 91

⁹⁷ Conversation Thumbe 11-02-2009

⁹⁸ Interview Paki,

⁹⁹ See footnotes 5,7

¹⁰⁰ Interview Letsego 07-03-2009

¹⁰¹ Interview Kagiso 28-02-2009

¹⁰² Conversation TK, 25-06-2009

¹⁰³ Interview Sizwe 09-02-2009

¹⁰⁴ Conversations Mzamo & Bongani 03-03-2009

¹⁰⁵ See footnote 103

¹⁰⁶ See footnote 101

¹⁰⁷ Interview Letsego, 22-03-2009

¹⁰⁸ See footnote 95

'TK and other fellows are people I can trust. They give me so much hope. To have TK as my director, as my parents. He is a very encouraging person, the only person you can talk too. He gives you positive things that you can rely on. He is not jealous.'¹⁰⁹

The support from TK and other FeXg members is interpreted as encouragement, the boost to develop social skills. The mutual trust between group members as well between TK and group members leads to feelings of comfort and safety. Fear for jealousy or gossip slowly vanish when the group is together. There is space for personal success in FeXG. Mzamo is one of the lucky members to be enrolled of FeXG's school fund. He cherishes the wish to share this unique opportunity with the other group members : 'Everyday I keep my fingers cross until we finish our studies. I don't want to be the only one who gets the opportunity to study, my brothers and sisters in the group also deserves the opportunity to study.'¹¹⁰

Besides encouragement and the learning process to square up with envy or dispirit, FeXG members also show each other support during emotional hard times. In the case of death the group members lean on each other. The moment Bongani lost his sister due to jealousy of a community member, the group went to his families house. While singing African songs of hope and strength they entered the house. The mourning family listened to the songs and grieved together with the group. During the funeral the whole group was present and some FeXG members gave a small singing performance. Bongani spoke out his gratitude to the group's support a week after the funeral. Girls of the group who became pregnant ineligible mention the support and concern of the group as well.¹¹¹

Support is a great asset for the group. In general the group receives support from their families and communities which enables them to be devoted to FeXG. The support between group members seems exceptional strong. Personal growth and group solidarity are developing inside FeXG. Remarkable is the absence of negative forces that pull the members down. The environment, the FeXG playground, gives space for positivism and closeness.

5.2 Closeness with freedom

The township life is a source of community sense, feelings of togetherness and sharing. The township life is also a source of stress, where competition and mistrust are interwoven. The group members expressed their suspicion and lack of trust in relationships with friends, girl/boyfriends and some community members. In the group discussion¹¹² about the mutual relations of the group members, they told that they do not consider themselves friends. Not surprisingly, is the family terminology extended to the FeXG group members. Freedom Extravaganza is labelled a family, but with much more depth and realness than other (community, street life) context in which the family terminology is used. The denotation of FeXG brothers and sisters radiate something essential about FeXG : making each other family, means there can be trust.¹¹³ *Ubuntu* spirit is alive when there is no competition or need for suspicion.

Exercise during FeXG rehearsals.¹¹⁴ *The group is divided into couples. One partner is blindfolded the other is not. The blind person has to let him/herself guide through the room by the person who can see. The person with sight uses only one hand in the back of the blindfolded partner. TK guides the group: 'trust on each other. If you don't trust, you don't have anything.'*

To be realistic, a family is not per definition a place of safety, openness and positivism (see chapter 4). The social skills that members learn and the comfort within the group represents not just a surrogate family, but more a family

¹⁰⁹ Interview Ndumiso, 28-02-2009

¹¹⁰ See footnote 100

¹¹¹ Conversation Nomsa, 03-02-2009

¹¹² Group discussion 01-04-2009

¹¹³ Interview Letsego, 07-03-2009

¹¹⁴ Observation group rehearsals, 01-02-2009

everyone wishes to have. The basis of equality in FeXG is often not the basis of families. Hierarchy and the inability to profile an opinion are common in kinship based families. Members mentioned a feeling of belonging within FeXG, of love they cannot always receive at home. As much TK is a leader, he is also part of the Freedom family. The relationship he has with most members is durable and intense. Ndimiso explains how TK fulfills to her a parental role.

'TK knows me, he knows how my life has been, my situation. He knows this is what I need, I need to go to the top, he is supporting me. He is more to me, he is always there to listen, to encourage you.'

Talking about problems is a competence many group members learned from each other and TK. Being open makes someone vulnerable in a culture where gossip and backstabbing are experienced regularly. Freedom Extravaganza's family resemblance seems to invoke feelings of safety whereby the protective shield of the members –needed in the daily township environment- is slowly fading. Because there is a foundation of trust, there is room for weakness and there is room for strength. The fact that FeXG members show and learn to trust each other does not mean they lose their protectiveness in the 'real' world. They just learn that trust is possible, because conversations about negative things are being held without the negative consequences they would normally experience. Girls of the group say they would be pregnant (earlier), go out with more guys and be more hanging on the street without their FeXG family.¹¹⁵ The openness and trust saves many FeXG members from the fatality of most township youngsters.

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The attraction of Freedom Extravaganza on the group members, who don't get paid for their participation, is essential for understanding the group's synergy. What makes it so important for them to rehearse five days a week, travel back and forth every time without getting that one thing everybody needs so much : money? Members' motivations for doing audition were not so deep or well thought-out as I presumed when writing my research proposal. Boon & Plastow (2004: 11) point out that the use of the body, mind, voice often go deeper than entertainment, but the transformation power of fun should not be underestimated. For FeXG members it mainly comes down to three things : having fun, having passion for theatre and having passion for the group. New member Letsego:

'I wanted to be in the group so much. Even though I wasn't good, I know I had potential. I have passion for the group. I have a passion for drama. I came and watched the rehearsals some time. It was love at first sight. This is where I want to be.'¹¹⁸

Having fun and feeling good has another effect, members forget their problems.¹¹⁹ In their often worried minds, FeXG gives relief and relaxation. The force of simple joy is immense. Thus becoming a good singer, dancer or actor is not often mentioned as motivation. The realisation that there is a big potential to take empowerment steps appears to hit the members mind only during their participation, not before the audition. The desire to educate other people was not mentioned as motivation, comparable to improving theatre skill was this also something members began to value during their membership. Most ex-members or part time members I was able to speak, regret not being (full time) into the group (anymore). Reasons for leaving the group are parents who don't agree with the participation, family problems, work and other responsibilities.^{120 121} Earning no money with FeXG is an issue of concern, while it is in the same time also an element of power. You're only in it if you really, really want to.

¹¹⁵ Conversations, Nomsa , Ndimiso, Gloria 22-03-2009

¹¹⁶ See footnote 105

¹¹⁷ See footnote 107

¹¹⁸ Interview Letsego 07-03-2009

¹¹⁹ See footnotes 116, 120, 121

¹²⁰ Conversation Vusumuzi 14-03-2009

¹²¹ Conversation TK 22 -03-2009

5.3 Teachings of TK

'You don't sit down and pray until God gives you a better life. If you do that you will rot in Richmond Farm. Everybody has the right to go to school. If you have education, even when you end up in jail, nobody can take that away from you. (...) Nobody can't keep benefiting from their successful past forever. That you once played in a theatre group and travelled around the world, is not something people believe after 50 years when you are a just simple guy with no job.' [TK] ¹²²

The FeXG director is straightforward when he preaches about life opportunities in front of his group. The youngsters of Freedom Extravaganza are remarkably aware of the impact and importance of education for life success. The slogan TK often recalls is '*education is the key to success*' and this message is inscribed in every members' head and heart. The support FeXG provides is often a spiritual, mental thing. This year support could also be realized in a more concrete manner. At least half of the group members receive financial support for schooling and transport. FeXG's intention to bring education also comes back to them selves.

'In the group we have the possibility to learn, we are also thought about HIV, the killer disease. We are privileged to have these opportunities. It is a big chance, to be aware of what happens with the youth.' ¹²³

Of course teaching the audience about social issues is a merit for the members who teach, immediately they are able to get wiser themselves. Members are not getting paid, but with scholarships they are able to study which indirectly enlarges the chance on a good job. Members can even get a drivers licence through the group. Many members consider education the road to success ¹²⁴ and that without education people become poor, don't respect themselves and are more prone to negativity. ¹²⁵ That TK received great respect and is considered a real leader has the consequence that group members (and other youngster) follow up his words. The group can almost considered a school with a teacher, the kind that inspires.

5.4 Respect and equality

Respect, how obviously it may be present in the township communities, it not always self-evident. In Freedom Extravaganza respecting each other and yourself is essential. The start of an ambiance of respect lies within TK, as a highly respected person in the community. Freedom Extravaganza owes her name to the vision that everybody has the right to speak. Freedom's playground is free land, everybody can speak up. Respect and equality go together according to FeXG members. 'We respect everybody. We all have the same mentality.'¹²⁶ In practice there is hierarchy in the group as well. The director is often put on a pedestal by members, they admire him and see him as a great example. ¹²⁷ This has to do with his status as elderly, as rescuer and a rolemodel. Members maybe don't discuss with their director easily, but they do explain to experience the ambiance of equality in FeXG. In a way this fits the African politeness to respected persons and the desire of equality that can be expressed to a great extend in the group.

The message of FeXG director is that respect is what makes us human and disrespect makes the society uncontrollable.¹²⁸ The FeXG mission to stimulate knowledge and (self) awareness is directly linked to respect by two female group members.

¹²² TK rehearsals 05-02-2009

¹²³ ibid

¹²⁴ Interview Slindile, 12-03-2009

¹²⁵ Groupdiscussion, 01-04-2009

¹²⁶ Interview Letsego, 12-04-2009

¹²⁷ Observations

¹²⁸ Conversation TK, 25-06-2009

'Educations helps you to obtain knowledge, how you can take care of yourself, your body and other people' ¹²⁹

'Without the group I would maybe be like other girls. Sleeping with guys and drinking alcohol. They don't respect their bodies. Now I have confidence, I am proud of who I am.' ¹³⁰

This pride, self-worth is also extended to their Zulu ethnicity. Ndumiso tells she wished to be a white girl when she was younger, 'because every white person is successful.' ¹³¹ Since her group membership and the rehearsals of the play 'Heroes of South Africa' (with songs that Africans should be proud of their heritage), things changed for her. 'I am proud now. I love talking Zulu (...) We fought for freedom, we are free today.' ¹³² Pride and acknowledgement comes also from compliments the group members receive and the fact that they are perceived as role models by many. ¹³³ The feeling of acknowledgement and pride are closely related to this role modelship.

Respect also comes down to listening to each other and learning from each other. Group members explain that they see people from different backgrounds, with all different stories and that this learns them to be open. Acceptance is related to the freedom for diversity. One time during the auditions a boy, who clearly showed his homosexuality, was rejected by the group during his audition despite his talents. TK objected the group's decision and made his statement by allowing the boy to become a member after all. After half a year the group was fond of him and accepted the guy with his deviated sexual preference. With this action TK taught the group more tolerance and openness to people who are different and/or negatively stereotyped.

5.4 Balanced reciprocity

FeXG is actually a kind of community assets. Bhekimuzi¹³⁴ explains his community doesn't have much. Only a school, no church, no library and the clinic is far. A girl who came back to the group after the period of a year in which her parents did not allow her to be a FeXG member made her statement : 'FeXG is the only interesting thing going on in this neighbourhood. If you're not into it, get into it.' ¹³⁵ The neighbourhood benefits from the existence of FeXG. The group is loyal to their communities and other deprived groups. They are a living library, rap in important information and offer it to people who want to listen. People are best reached with information through entertainment according to Sizwe. ¹³⁶ FeXG holds into account the educational level of their audiences, because it is important for them that the message is straight. Sizwe explains that FeXG wants to give back hope after the disappointment South Africans felt when the government did not realize their promises. The group returns their share to the community, by urging on people's own strength and potential to do something to improve their lives.

'We are doing a good job. We are getting into people's heart. Because of our performances, for example Heroes of South Africa, they know more about handling things (...). They talk about what we do in our unique way, they learn from us. We are teaching them about their rights, how to handle the situation.'

'We are sharing our skills. making something together. People really appreciate what we do together.'

Group members realise that because the chances FeXG gives, they are able to better their personal and family situation. Being able to study, to get a drivers licence and to develop social skills are highly valuable in their lives. Chapter 3 explains the desire of FeXG members who want to give support and care back to their families. FeXG members believe they can become successful, but are brought up with the idea that they will never forget the

¹²⁹ Interview Khanyisile, 28-03-2009

¹³⁰ Conversation Nomsa 11-03-2009

¹³¹ Interview Ndumiso 28-02-2009

¹³² ibid

¹³³ Observations Westrich

¹³⁴ Interview Bhekimuzi, 08-04-2009

¹³⁵ Lindiwe, 12-04-2009

¹³⁶ Sizwe 24-02-2009

people around them. This is in line with their ambitions in the group and with the *ubuntu* value of loyalty, solidarity and interdependence. TK emphasizes in his speech :

‘When you get a good job, no matter what happens, you will never forget where you came from. You want your parents to be proud.’¹³⁷

The desires to get acknowledged, to gain respect and to show goodness are all part of the spirit of togetherness. FeXG offers a place where individual intents to become an artist, singer, dancer or to educate yourself are stimulated without losing the community sense and family values related to *ubuntu* out of sight.

Conclusion

FeXG members have shared objectives and are enabled to pursue those objectives under the wings of TK and their FeXG brothers and sisters. The preoccupation with agency, the process of finding out (through theatre and togetherness) what you want in life and striving to accomplish personal goals¹³⁸ is possibly a manner do deal with pressure from social networks. The agency of group members is experienced in a way as threatening for their close environment, for the community sense. In a study of Catrell (2004) about declining English neighbourhoods he found residents attributing the degeneration in co-operation, trust and participation to issues of agency, as part of a process of increasing materialism or selfishness. Deacon and Mann (1999:413) on the other side assert that agency creates opportunities for activities of deprived persons, reflecting more fully difference and diversity. In the negotiation between self development and group loyalty,¹³⁹ a new structure in the form of a dream family is used to reinforce and strengthen this process. There is no reason for a choice between agency *or* structures. FeXG gives space for the implementation of both, in a way that satisfies individual needs and group needs. FeXG provides a reproduction of the *ubuntu* ideal in a synoptic small network, in a new context. Reconstruction of the dream situation of togetherness, support, closeness, respect and reciprocity comes alive between FeXG members. FeXG is not just a resemblance of a family. It is the ideal family who gives room to grow, to play and to make mistakes, to dream, while providing the safety and shelter of a home. The group spirits gives motivation and faith in life, to accomplish dreams. Letsego translated what FeXG gives him as ‘umpf’ (meaning : power, strength, energy).

FeXG ‘my play, my house, my home’¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Observation during rehearsals, 05-02-2009

¹³⁸ which often encompass the wish to take care of the family

¹³⁹ This I consider part of empowerment

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*

Conclusion Ubuntu : the art of being human

Educational theatre group Freedom Extravaganza rose out of the township Westrich in South Africa. The goal of the group is to stimulate empowerment of township youth. Besides empowering the audiences, the group members want to empower themselves. Community based development aid for the youth is needed, because the South African township context does not always offer a stimulating place to grow up. Fortunately the African concept of *ubuntu* is a Pan African collective value system from which the spirit of togetherness flows. This *ubuntu* spirit is amongst other things expressed in beliefs (sharing is good), ceremonies (with slaughtering family members show they care about ancestors), communication (respect) and desires (to bring the family to a better standard of living). Thoughts and actions about sharing, humbleness, loyalty, and interdependence are all elements that make up the cultural model of *ubuntu*. FeXG group members can relate strongly to *ubuntu* and in many ways do they refer to the spirit of togetherness. Strong individualistic values are diluted, the individual is in every way dependent on others to live a good life. People support each other and FeXG group members are positive about their African spirit of togetherness.

The contradiction in worldviews of township inhabitants is acrid. Many values are based on humanity while concurrently many values are based on inhumanity. The situation of deprivation ties people together as a knit society and drives people apart because of competition. The competition between township inhabitants is expressed in envy, the use of witchcraft for sending spells, a lack of encouragement, gossip and mistrust. Close social networks can be restraining in some situations, instead of supporting. FeXg members daily experience the negative forces of peer pressure and collective jealousy. FeXG members mostly express positive statements about their life and FeXG definitely has influence on them by stimulating them to stay away from crime, drugs and unsafe sex. But the peer pressure and the community ideas to share the hardship and be in a disadvantaged situation together, are strong. Group member receive respect, are considered role models and generally become more proud and confident during their membership. Friends and community members are often positive, while members also are accused of arrogance ('do you feel better than us now') and craziness ('TK uses you', 'you don't even earn money'). FeXG members are often able to convince their family, friends and neighbours of the value of their theatre group when they attain a performance.

The Freedom Extravaganza group is called a family, a safe place to develop and grow. In a striking way *ubuntu* is visible in their communication and vision. The Pan African ideology of *ubuntu* is copied in the micro-society of the FeXG family and reshaped in such a manner that it is more freely and experimental. The poverty related values around competition are creatively circumvented. A basis of family trust and encouragement from an inspiring director paves the way for a playground with openness, the possibility to play, to fall, to change roles, to excel and to support each other. Freedom Extravaganza proves that *ubuntu* can be fully expressed when people loose their fear and focus more on the realization of dreams instead of negative forces like envy. The art of humanity is a learning process.

The interviews with FeXG members could be in the interest of the foundation of FeXG and for that reason, besides their vision on respect and humbleness, is it presumable that members shared their most positive stories. They are loyal to their group and leader, for that reason it is logical that the critical views are not (fully) expressed.

Further research about the effects of educational theatre group or other community development initiatives on families and the neighborhood would be interesting. The question important for people in communities who want to change their lives is : how can I improve my life in my own way, while involving my social networks and taken community values into account?

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Als ik iets heb gedaan tijdens mijn veldwerk in Zuid-Afrika dan is het wel mezelf een spiegel voorhouden. En als ik dat zelf niet deed, dan werd ik er door de situatie wel toe gedwongen. Ik geef hier kort een persoonlijke weergave van leermomenten, lastige situaties en bijzonderheden.

Werken in een compleet andere omgeving viel me zwaarder dan ik had gedacht. Een eerste keer veldwerk doen is verwarrend, je voelt de prikkels van een nieuwe context en de noodzaak om serieus aan het werk te gaan. Ik beschouw mezelf als flexibel, open en avontuurlijk, maar de afwezigheid van een normale werkplek (bureau, orde, fijne temperatuur, geen kinderen) was een behoorlijke uitdaging. Een volgende keer zou ik zorgen dat ik regelmatig kan werken in een stille ruimte, zoals een bibliotheek of universiteit. Het mooie van mijn onderzoekslocatie vond ik dat ik deze zelf heb uitgezocht en alles betreffende de huisvesting zelf heb geregeld. Ik ben er trots op dat ik iets origineels heb gedaan, terwijl ik aan de andere kant wel graag met een andere student had willen overleggen en ervaringen had kunnen uitwisselen. Afstand nemen van je onderzoek is vrijwel onmogelijk wanneer je met mensen omgaat die er zelf midden in zitten, dus feedback van een begeleider is prettig, maar ik zou een volgende andere studenten en deskundigen opzoeken die aan universiteiten o.i.d. verbonden zijn.

Er waren momenten (vrijwel iedere dag) waarop ik met de theatergroep was en ineens dacht : 'oh nu, op dit moment, moet ik observeren en allemaal slimme analyses maken.' Ik vond het lastig om me altijd in een mogelijk interessante of qua onderzoek relevante situatie te bevinden, terwijl ik de situatie zo nu en dan helemaal niet *wilde* bestuderen. Ik heb zeker ethische bezwaren tegen het analyseren van een groep mensen die hun dagelijkse levens leiden, omdat ik denk dat het labelen, interpreteren en vastleggen van jouw indruk van die levens eigenlijk denigrerend kan zijn. Het maakt dat alle spontaniteit en puurheid af wordt afgebroken tot wetenschapschappelijke kennis. Natuurlijk geloof ik dat antropologie en andere sociale wetenschappen door beschrijvingen hun studieobjecten waarheidsgetrouw en intiem kunnen weergeven, maar het blijft een moreel dilemma voor mij. De waardigheid van mensen kan in het geding zijn. Op momenten dat ik tegenstrijdigheden ervoer in gedragingen van mijn informanten en de informatie die ze mij zelf geven, vond ik het ingewikkeld om dit aan te kaarten. Ik kreeg daarbij het gevoel tegelijkertijd psycholoog en detective te zijn. Mensen hebben het recht geheimen te hebben, of voor hen zelf logische tegenstrijdigheden te verkondigen of zichzelf niet altijd te snappen. Ik denk dat een begaafde veldwerker en onderzoeker de integriteit heeft om informanten tegen zichzelf (en hun openheid) te beschermen, hun in hun waarde te laten, terwijl hij /zij daarbij toch de nodige informatie weet te verzamelen om de onderzoeksvraag te beantwoorden.

De contacten met de informanten heb ik al prettig ervaren, maar ik zag wel dat de interviews geven voor sommigen een soort belasting was. Ze hebben niet altijd energie of tijd, maar voornamelijk zagen zij er niet altijd het nut van in. Gelukkig dat TK het belang van mijn onderzoek inzag en hier ook duidelijk over was naar zijn groepsleden. Over het algemeen hebben we (naar mijn idee) fijne interviews gehad, waarbij gelachen kon worden en vertrouwen was. Ze vonden het wel lang duren en het maken van meer dan twee afspraken was soms erg lastig. Gelukkig heb ik de eerste weken in het veld besteed aan het leggen van goede contacten en daarom heb ik een vriendschappelijke band opgebouwd met vrijwel alle groepsleden. De interviews werden door sommige informanten als leerzaam gezien (o.a. als een training voor sollicitatiegesprekken) en ze noemden ook dat het leuk is als iemand veel interesse heeft in je leven en geschiedenis. Op hun theatergroep zijn ze trots, dus daar praatten ze graag over. Ik denk wel dat het lastig voor ze was om zich negatief uit te laten over de groep, ook al plaatsten ze wel kritische kanttekeningen, een paar leden gaven bij TK aan het ongemakkelijk te vinden dat ik soms zulke directe vragen stelde. Ik heb toen duidelijk uitgelegd dat ze altijd

mogen weigeren een vraag te beantwoorden, maar dat is natuurlijk vanuit hun opvattingen wat lastiger om te doen. Ik heb dit wel openlijk besproken en nogmaals benadrukt waarom ik dit onderzoek doe en waar het mij om gaat (geen evaluatie van hun groep, maar culturele opvattingen en empowerment processen).

Omdat Freedom Extravaganza mijn onderzoek misschien kan/wil gebruiken bij de aanvraag van fondsen, vond ik het weleens lastig om objectief te blijven. Weekend drinkgedrag is binnen de township behoorlijk geaccepteerd. Eén a twee jongens van de groep waren in het weekend constant dronken en alles behalve een rolmodel op dat moment. De groep kon ook op een feestje van TK (heeft als enige soms iets meer te besteden) alcohol – en fris- krijgen, terwijl ik dan dacht : maar als je arm bent dan kun je toch beter je geld besteden aan positievere dingen en de kans verkleinen dat de toch al kwetsbare jongeren gaan drinken. Zo werkt het natuurlijk niet, maar ik vond het wel lastig om te verantwoorden en heb er daarom ook niet over geschreven. Een paar keer botste ik met TK, omdat ik hem als dominant en bot ervoer in sommige situaties, hier kon ik met niemand over praten, maar gelukkig heb ik dat wel rechtstreeks met hem uit te kunnen praten. Ik zocht mensen op bij wie ik me goed voelde, als ik zelf negatieve emoties niet de baas kon.

Ik vind het confronterend dat de negatieve kanten van het sociale leven van mijn informanten nu zo hard op wit staan. Als zij het te lezen krijgen, zou het misschien een deprimerende of ontmoedigende uitwerking kunnen hebben. Natuurlijk wil ik de township niet slecht afschilderen, omdat de bewoners zo graag afwillen van het slechte imago van hun omgeving. Achteraf geloof ik dat mijn onderzoeksvraag interessant is en dat mijn thesis goed in elkaar zit, maar dat het niet erg constructief is om te benadrukken dat *ubuntu*, waar de mensen in Zuid-Afrika zo aan hechtten, vaak niet volledig tot uiting komt. Hier zit dus het dilemma van wetenschap en sociaal belang. In een volgend onderzoek zou ik liever toegepast onderzoek doen, dat bedoeld is om problemen te indiceren en de daaruit voorkomende resultaten over te dragen aan een organisatie die hier oplossingen voor zoekt. Ik ben overigens begripvoller geworden naar opvattingen over hekserij en vloeken, zonder het allemaal te hoeven begrijpen. Sommige dingen hoef je niet volledig te snappen, om er in mee te kunnen gaan of over te schrijven.

Behalve op onderzoeksvlak heb ik natuurlijk op persoonlijk vlak heel veel ervaring opgedaan. Ik was wel blij dat ik mij zo snel thuis voelde in de buurt. De mensen in de township die ik veel sprak zeiden wel eens dat ze trots waren dat hun *mlungu (witte)* vol zelfvertrouwen door de straten wandelde. Ik heb de contacten met de bewoners in de township en vooral mijn gastfamilie als ontzettend intens en hartelijk ervaren. De Zulus hebben een bepaalde waardigheid en vriendelijkheid die mij erg aanspreken. Jongens in de buurt waren ook vriendelijk en hebben mij gerespecteerd, ze waren vrijwel nooit opdringerig en ik geloof dat dit zeker ook met je eigen houding te maken heeft. Ik heb geleerd dat je ondanks een positieve sfeer in een township, altijd alert moet blijven en ook moet beseffen dat (relatieve) armoede vriendschappen kan bemoeilijken. Als ik naar de stad wil en iemand mee vraag, dan betaal ik uiteraard de reis, maar hoe ver ga je daarin m.b.t. andere sociale situaties? Mijn aanwezigheid heeft ook invloed op verhoudingen tussen township bewoners. Ik heb te maken gehad met jaloezie onder jongens, dus door met één iemand meer om te gaan bracht ik die persoon in een lastig pakket binnen zijn vriendengroep.

Terug kijkend geniet ik ervan dat ik veel leuke contacten heb opgedaan en nog steeds bel met een paar lieve mensen, al is het om even elkaars stem even te horen. De gedachte dat wij, ik hier in mijn appartement in Utrecht en zij daar in een township in Zuid-Afrika, herinneringen koesteren aan de drie maanden van samen zijn, tovert altijd een glimlach op mijn gezicht.

Veldwerkfoto



De foto is genomen op 1 april 2009 (Newlands West, Durban) tijdens een groepsdiscussie over respect, ware liefde en vriendschap.