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Ledger, Tracy Margaret

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GROWING A PERSON: POVERTY, POWER AND FREEDOM IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

By

Tracy Margaret Ledger

(8601964D)

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Supervisors: Dr Hylton White

Dr Ivor Chipkin

ABSTRACT

Thesis Title Growing a Person: Poverty, Power and Freedom in post-apartheid South Africa

Supervisors Dr Hylton White
Dr Ivor Chipkin

Department Anthropology

Degree for which this thesis is submitted Doctor of Philosophy

Abstract

Household food insecurity and malnutrition occur in South Africa at levels much higher than national economic data would suggest. Own production of food has been proposed as a solution to both hunger and poor nutrition, and is widely advocated. However, this policy glosses over the fact that there are a considerable number of food-insecure households that have the opportunity and means to produce their own food, but are not doing so. Mainstream economics' strict assumptions about how individuals will react under a particular set of circumstances effectively denies the possibility that people have, and choose to exercise, agency in adopting alternative responses. The underlying aim of this thesis is to investigate manifestations of the disconnect between the assumed reality of mainstream development policy and practitioners, and the lived reality of target beneficiaries, and to propose an alternative explanation, based on a theory of meaningful action in everyday life. This thesis

investigates choice and decision-making in the everyday lives of two groups of community gardeners in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. It aims to provide some insights into apparently paradoxical behaviours – namely, that poor persons often make decisions that appear to be at odds both with the predictions of utility-maximising models and the expectations of development practitioners and policies. This thesis asserts that even very materially poor people not only have much more agency than mainstream development discourses assume, but that they continually exercise that agency in resisting the stereotypes of poverty that development officials are so keen to reproduce.

Key Words

Food security, narrative identity, community gardens, South Africa, everyday life, development discourse, agency, Paul Ricoeur.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any university.

_____ _____

Tracy Margaret Ledger Date

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Firstly, to the community garden participants, who welcomed me into their lives and gifted me with one of the most extraordinary years of my life. Their determination to achieve liberation on their own terms, against the prejudice of South Africa's development policies, is a daily manifestation of the call *amandla awethu*[1].

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[1] Power to Us – a South African liberation struggle rallying cry.

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CHAPTER ONE

RATIONALITY, REALITY AND FOOD

1.1. Introduction: The research problem

"…development agents in general…when applying in the field…the technical methods acquired through training…are confronted with a shocking reality: the behaviours of the people with whom they enter into contact…do not coincide with their expectations."

(Oliver de Sardan, 2005, p68)

"To observe that economics is based on a superficial view of individual and social behaviour does not seem to me to be much of an insight. I think it is exactly this superficiality that gives economics much of the power that it has: its ability to predict human behaviour without knowing very much about the make up and lives of the people whose behaviour we are trying to understand."

(Lucas, 1986, pS425)

The discourses and practices of mainstream development are based on a number of *a priori* assumptions about the "objects of development" – what kind of persons they are, what their priorities are and (most pertinently) how they will respond under a particular set of circumstances (Crush (1995), p9). These, in turn, are based in large part on the utility-maximising behavioural assumptions that underpin "mainstream"[2] economic theory. Many of the disappointing outcomes of development initiatives may

[2] Throughout this thesis I have used the term "mainstream economics" to refer to the dominant neo-classical (neo-liberal) form of the discipline; the form most commonly taught at undergraduate level at universities and which constitutes "economics" as understood by most people.

be ascribed to a disconnect between these assumptions and actual events; that is, between the assumed reality of development models and practitioners, and the lived reality of the target beneficiaries of those models and the resulting development interventions (Oliver de Sardan, 2005). However, this disconnect is seldom (if ever) articulated as such by development practitioners: instead the focus is more often on attempting to explain development failures in terms of the shortcomings of the target beneficiaries themselves – their ignorance, their lack of skills or assets, or their "culture" (Oliver de Sardan, ibid, and Ferguson, 1990).

Bannerjee and Duflo's 2006 influential study *The Economic Lives of the Poor* investigated the economic choices made by extremely poor[3] households in 13 countries. One of their main findings was that very poor people do not spend their income in line with expected behaviours. Most notably, they often allocated expenditure to items such as alcohol, tobacco and entertainment rather than to food, even though their household could be classified as food insecure. The report concluded that "it is hard to escape the conclusion that the poor do see themselves as having a significant amount of choice" and exercise that choice in ways not anticipated by mainstream economic models that emphasise utility maximisation (Bannerjee and Duflo, 2006, p6). However, Bannerjee and Duflo attributed these perceived anomalies in behaviours to the fact that the poor had only "very limited access to efficient markets and quality infrastructure" (ibid, p19). That is, they opted for the kind of preferred explanation that Oliver de Sardan (2005) and Ferguson (1990) describe, rather than to any erroneous *a priori* assumptions on their part about the motivations of the poor themselves.

[3] Households where consumption per capita was less than $1.08 per day.

Lawson (2003) criticizes mainstream economics for its almost exclusive focus on "mathematical-deductivist modeling" (p3) that by and large ignores the reality of what it purports to analyse. Development policies based on this economics have a strong preference for simple explanations (Pottier, 1999) and policymakers often fail to take full account of the "plurality of experiences, strategies and outcomes" of target beneficiaries and communities, preferring to focus instead on simple narratives and explanations (ibid, p97). Development policy and strategy in South Africa (based on the behavioural assumptions of mainstream economics and thus constituting what I have referred to as "mainstream development") reflects this preference. As one example, the Development Bank of Southern Africa (2008, p17) has explained the decline in household food production in food insecure rural areas (i.e a deviation from expected behaviour) in the following way: "There are a number of reasons for this including access to agricultural land and inputs, including labour, and biophysical factors. In addition a decrease in agricultural knowledge, inappropriate extension services, poor credit facilities, HIV and AIDS, climate change and increasing water pressures have exacerbated the situation. Perceptions about the value of engaging in agriculture have also shifted with the changes in culture and livelihoods that are partly synchronous with these constraints."

Noted deviations from the central mainstream economic assumption of utility-maximising behaviour tend to be explained in terms of market imperfections or market failure (Ortiz, 2005) rather than in terms of the appropriateness of the underlying behavioural assumptions of these models. Mainstream economics' strict assumptions about how individuals will react under a particular set of circumstances

(such as changing prices or market incentives) effectively denies the possibility that people have, and choose to exercise, agency in adopting alternative responses. When the failure of development projects is ascribed to technical factors, or the ignorance or 'cultural' shortcomings of the target beneficiaries, the effective result is to deny the possibility that the people in question may have ***consciously and with good reason chosen*** a different response or course of action to that envisaged or implied by the particular development intervention.

This "agency-lite" conceptualisation is common in contemporary South African development discourse and practice, where "the poor[4]" are assumed to be a homogenous group of hapless victims, passively waiting for government or other development practitioners to provide them with the means of improving their material conditions, at which point they will respond as the underlying behavioural assumptions predict. This "ideal type" of poor is a person who is motivated largely by mainstream economic ideas of utility maximization; persons whose poverty virtually guarantees that they will be the compliant and grateful recipient of any and all opportunities to improve their material circumstances. The poorer the person in question the greater this expectation of a particular type of behaviour on the part of

[4] For the purposes of this thesis the term "poor" is intended to indicate those persons living in households whose total income would place them in the bottom 20% of South Africa's population. Household Income and Expenditure Surveys are compiled every five years in South Africa, with the 2011 Survey (StatsSA 2012a) indicating that this would correspond to an annual per capita income of R4,543 or less. South Africa does not have an official poverty line, and in any event, I did not at any point directly question any of my informants as to their incomes. However, inferences could be made on the basis of the incomes generated in the community gardens (which information I was given access to) as well as the likely value of social grants. I fully accept that "poverty" encompasses far more than just income and assets, and also that there is no homogenous group that may be labeled "the poor". In fact, one of the basic propositions of this thesis is the flawed thinking behind that assumption. However, the research also asserts that notions of identity and of being a particular type of "person" are often much more important to the materially deprived than material gain, and thus it is consistent with this argument to determine that the ethnography focused on "poor" people, simply because it is their *material* poverty that development discourse and practice assumes is directly and positively correlated with a lack of agency.

development practitioners and officials, and thus the greater the effective denial of that person's agency to respond in a different manner.

The underlying aim of this thesis is to investigate manifestations of Oliver de Sardan's (2005) described disconnect between the assumed reality of mainstream development policy and practitioners, and the lived reality of target beneficiaries, and to propose an alternative explanation, based on a theory of meaningful action in everyday life. The research aims to fill a gap in the development debate in South Africa, in line with Bardhan and Ray's (2006) observation that why people do not do something is as much in need of explanation as why they *do* do something.

This thesis investigates choice and decision-making in the everyday lives of two groups of community gardeners in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. It aims to provide some insights into apparently paradoxical behaviours – namely, that poor persons often make decisions that appear to be at odds both with the predictions of utility-maximising models and the expectations of development practitioners and policies. The central focus of this thesis is meaningful action, which for this purpose I have defined as a *unity* of what is done, what is said, and what objects are used in the process; and which is (after Dowling, 2011) to be differentiated from "mere physical movement" (p4). Meaningful action is based on intent, motivation and the desire to achieve one or more goals (ibid).

This thesis asserts that even very materially poor people not only have much more agency than mainstream development discourses and practices assume, but that they continually exercise that agency in resisting the stereotypes of poverty and being a

poor person that development officials are so keen to reproduce. That is, they are exercising their agency for the purpose of asserting their right to be, and to be seen and recognized as, a particular type of person. More specifically, they are actively defending their right be the type of persons who **have** agency, who *have* real choices and who *make* real choices about their own lives. They are pushing against a characterization of the poor in contemporary South Africa that in many ways mirrors Steve Biko's description of black South Africans under apartheid as "living in a society where they are being treated as perpetual under-16s" (Biko, 1978, p21). In this respect my research supports the assertion of Gibson (2011) that what the poor really want is not material items *per se*, but to have their humanity recognized, to be equal *persons.*

In this thesis I have proposed a theoretical framework for the interpretation of meaningful action in everyday life based on motivations centred around identity - the desire to be a particular kind of person in post-apartheid South Africa. The empirical data to which this theoretical framework is applied is derived from an ethnographic study undertaken in two community gardens (both adjacent to informal settlements) in Gauteng Province, some sixty kilometres from Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city. The thesis describes how even very poor persons exercise considerable agency in contesting and resisting the identities of "poor" and "hungry" imposed on them by government officials, development organisations and local businesses. In this way, they are demonstrating an ability "to remake the development options offered them" (Medina, 2004, pxii), in clear contrast to the assumptions of mainstream development models.

This research hopes to contribute to the debate around the need for a more democratic South African economy (a more "human economy"[5]), one where the rights of persons to define their own identities is fully recognized, no matter how poor they may be in material terms; and where the terms of their inclusion in the economy would be predicated on the recognition of them as "persons in full", rather than agency-free passive recipients of largesse.

1.2. The paradox of own food production and hunger

> *"A common image of the extremely poor is that they do not get to make many real choices."*
>
> *(Bannerjee and Duflo, 2006, p4)*

This thesis set out to investigate one particularly striking example in South Africa of the divergence between the expected (by development officials, mainstream economic theory and popular discourse) behaviour of poor people, and their actual behaviour: the fact that a significant percentage of food-insecure households do not engage in any own production of food, even when it appears that they have both the opportunity and the means to do so.

Food insecurity and hunger are one of the most visible and least socially acceptable facets of poverty in South Africa, something about which "something must be done". National food security refers to the ability of a country to produce and/or import sufficient food for the entire population, but national food security does not always

[5] As this terms is used by, for example, Hart and Sharp (2014) and Hart, Laville and Cattani 2010

translate into household food security. Access to food at a household level can be defined as the ability to obtain sufficient food of a particular quality and diversity so that all the household members are able to meet their particular nutritional requirements (Labadarios *et al*, 2011). Household food insecurity thus occurs when the resources of a household (cash, own production, transfers) are insufficient to obtain the required quantities of nutritional food (Hoddinott, 1999).

Although South Africa is generally food secure on a national basis (i.e. enough food for everyone is produced and/or available through imports), there is considerable evidence that food insecurity at the household level occurs at relatively high rates (StatsSA, 2012a). Surveys show low scores for food diversity and variety in a significant number of households, with a corresponding impact on stunting in children (Labadarios *et al*, 2011).

South Africa has a well-developed food distribution and retail sector. Access to food is thus determined primarily (almost exclusively) by affordability. Jacobs (2009) estimates that as many as 80% of South African households do not spend enough money to purchase a basic, but nutritionally adequate basket of food. The strong possibility that the majority of households cannot afford adequate nutrition was supported by research undertaken in 2012 by the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP, 2012), which indicated that the cost of basic nutrition was beyond the reach of the majority of South African households. The effects of this are considerable: South Africa is rated as one of the top 20 countries in the world in terms of the negative effects on human wellbeing of under-nutrition (Altman *et al*, 2009), although it is considered a middle-income country.

In the context of South Africa's relatively high food insecurity rates, poor nutrition levels and relatively high food prices, own production of food is often put forward as a viable mitigation strategy. The assumption is that nutrient intake and dietary diversity could be improved by own production of food to supplement what households can afford to purchase (Labadarios *et al*, 2011). The argument is appealingly simple: households that cannot afford to purchase sufficient food should be supported to produce their own. Even a small backyard garden ($20m^2$ or so) can produce a relatively large amount of fresh vegetables. This point of view is widely endorsed – home and community gardening projects are supported across national, provincial and local government, and there are literally hundreds of non-governmental organisations operating and/or supporting own food production initiatives.

Underpinning all these efforts is a set of assumptions about the rationality and priorities of hungry households, as well as how they will respond to a particular set of incentives. Basically, the general expectation is that these households (or at least an individual within these households) will always choose to engage in own production of food if they have access to the requisite assets, skills and inputs, and are physically capable of doing so. Supporting households in the establishment of food gardens is thus often seen as a good investment in creating a sustainable food security solution (De Klerk *et al*, 2004). Reflecting these views, the National Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) has included support for the establishment of subsistence/household agriculture in the national Food Security Policy (DAFF, 2002). DAFF's *Zero Hunger Programme* also has a strong focus on increasing household food production, by providing inputs, training and access to land (DAFF, 2012). Most of the responsibility for implementing these programmes lies

with the various Provincial Departments of Agriculture (such as GDARD – the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development), and these departments have annual targets with respect to the establishment of both homestead (i.e. backyard) and community vegetable gardens.

What this approach has conveniently glossed over is the body of evidence indicating that in fact there are many food insecure households in South Africa that appear to have both the opportunity and the means to produce their own food, but are not doing so. Aliber (2009) reported that 39.5% of hungry metro (large urban area) households and 41.8% of hungry non-metro households lived in a "(d)welling/house or brick structure on a separate stand or yard or on a farm" and 36% of hungry non-metro households lived in a traditional dwelling (p28) which locations presumably offer at least the opportunity to engage in some kind of own food production. However, fewer than 25% of households in South Africa are involved in agricultural activities of any kind, and almost 43% of **rural** households classified as having inadequate access to food do not participate in any kind of agricultural activity (StatsSA, 2012a, p26). The obvious question in response to this latter statistic is "why not", since food insecurity levels are higher in rural than in urban areas and poor households in rural areas spend approximately 15% less per member on food than poor households in urban areas (Aliber, 2009), suggesting that significant value should accrue to supplemental own food production. It should also be noted that the low levels of participation of rural households in own food production in South Africa contrast sharply with participation rates in other Southern African countries (Baipethi and Jacobs, 2009).

Much of the research in this area simply reports this apparent anomaly without offering an explanation: Altman *et al* (2009) highlights the low levels of participation in own food production in light of food insecurity levels, but then concludes that this is a matter for further investigation. In many instances (see, for examples, Labadarios *et al*, 2011 and Mjonono, Ngidi and Hendriks, 2009) the focus of an investigation into whether or not encouraging own production of food is a useful strategy is almost exclusively on an analysis of the *outcomes* of own production of food, rather than attempting to explain why (or why not) the activity was undertaken in the first instance. That is, there is no acknowledgement that the behavioural assumptions that underpin the expectation that food-insecure people will produce their own food are themselves a legitimate target for investigation. Pottier (1999) asks the very important question, "to what extent do high-level policy formulations of food security reflect the complex real-life experiences and perceptions of the food-insecure?" (p11), but this question is largely ignored in South African literature on food security.

Where explanations are offered for the low level of own production, the most common theory put forward is that people lack the skills and basic infrastructure required to grow their own food, and that once they receive the requisite training and inputs they will do so with enthusiasm. Baipethi and Jacobs (2009) maintain that "there is consensus that appropriate technologies requiring low inputs would significantly improve the take-up of subsistence production" (p22). That is, the low take-up of own production is a result of **technica**l impediments. South African government food security initiatives support this interpretation and have a strong (almost exclusive) focus on training people and providing them with basic inputs (seeds, tools and access to water). This lack of skills/resources point of view seems

entirely plausible, and it also underpins the activities of a large number of NGOs whose focus is "teaching" poor people how to grow their own food.

However, the empirical data doesn't really fit this particular version of events. Ruysenaar (2012) reports that government sponsored community gardening projects in Gauteng have very high failure rates (i.e. the majority of beneficiaries desert the project within the first year of operation). This is despite the considerable investment made by the Province in terms of infrastructure such as fencing, boreholes, irrigation equipment and seedlings, and training programmes for participants. My own discussions with GDARD officials who introduced me to the gardens where I conducted my ethnographic study confirmed the low success rates described by Ruysenaar (ibid). These discussions also suggested that homestead gardening initiatives have a similarly high failure rate, with the majority of those who undertake home gardening in any particular year as a result of the efforts of GDARD abandoning it in the following year. Informal conversations with a project leader in a Community Works Programme (CWP – a government-sponsored temporary work creation programme) in the same area as my ethnographic study reinforced this: she bemoaned the fact that they had in many instances "to beg and to plead" to get anyone to start a vegetable garden (to meet their own CWP-mandated targets) and that after all their (the CWP's) hard work in this regard, the activity usually halted after a few months. Provincial officials are set annual targets on the *establishment* of gardens, rather than their long-term sustainability. I would suggest that the focus on establishment is further evidence of the underlying policy assumption that the food insecure will always opt to participate in own food production initiatives if they are given the "necessary" infrastructure and technical training.

The high percentage of households who abandon their homestead gardens after the first year and the very high drop out rate of community gardening participants does not gel with the view of "rational" households whose priority should be securing sufficient food. As Banerjee and Duflo (2006) point out, the definition of "poor" almost always means a person who does not have enough to eat. However, the actual decisions and actions of a significant number of food insecure households differs considerably from what is assumed and predicted by policymakers and development analysts. Within the first few weeks of commencing my ethnographic research I had witnessed many examples of this apparently "sub-optimal" behaviour: As just two examples, participants in community gardens regularly preferred to purchase food that they could have had for free from their gardens, and casual labourers employed in the gardens generally refused to accept food as payment in kind, preferring instead a very small amount of cash (R50[6] or less a day), the value of which was considerably less than the food offered as an alternative.

As my research unfolded, and I spent more time with the informants in the two gardens, so it became clear that their actions and choices around food production, provisioning and consumption could not conveniently be separated from wider contestations around identity and the right to be a particular kind of person. The own production of food "paradox" was merely one manifestation of Oliver de Sardan's (2005) described disconnect between the assumed reality of policymakers and development plans, based on the universal rationality of mainstream economics, and the lived reality of the people in these communities. As a result, the scope of the

[6] Approximately $5.20 at the 2013 average exchange rate

research expanded, from an initial (and still important) focus on own food production to the wider paradox of development itself: that as a rule (rather than as the exception) beneficiaries did not behave as expected by mainstream development or development officials. I observed a world of ideas, behaviours and choices around economic activities and material objects that mainstream economists would be quick to label "irrational" or "ignorant", but since all of the people I spent time with appeared to be perfectly sane and usually well-informed about the likely outcomes of their choices, there had to be a better explanation for what I observed. This thesis is the result of my attempts to formulate just such a "better explanation".

1.3. Searching for a theoretical framework

"Theories are abstractions of investigators' meanings that allow the interpretation of social meanings in turn, whether those are actions, relations, or structures. Successful explanations are those that intertwine these meaning structures of investigators and actors in an effective way."

(Reed & Alexander, 2009, p21)

"No, no! The adventures first, explanations take such a dreadful time."

*(Lewis Carroll – **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland**)*

Since I was quite clear that mainstream economics and development and their technical explanations for the observed paradox of own food production were in fact not adequate for my purposes, I had to find an alternative conceptual framework within which to make sense of the growing volume of findings from my fieldwork,

many of which were unexpected and contrary to my own initial assumptions. Very early on I realized that the way in which the participants in the community gardens viewed these gardens was very different from the views and motivations imputed by the officials who had facilitated their establishment. The participants did not see them primarily as a source of food, but rather as a source of employment, and often left produce to rot in the garden rather than take it home or distribute it to other households in their community, despite their and their neighbours' visible poverty. As the ethnographic study progressed, I documented many other examples of actions and choices that appeared contrary to the utility maximizing predictions of mainstream development models. I started to see how complex the relationship between decision-making and the desire to be seen as a particular type of person was. I realized that I required a theoretical framework that could provide an insight into the dynamic and inter-temporal relationship among identity, agency and action that I was observing.

In this search for a theoretical framework with which to *interpret* my empirical findings (as opposed to simply stating them in a descriptive ethnography – what I would term an "ontological" approach) I have located myself in proximity to the same camp as authors such as Reed and Alexander (2009), who argue that the "empirical turn" in the social sciences has swung too far away from theory, and that as a result theoretical discourse has been sacrificed for ontology, with dismal implications for the social sciences: "The rationality of social science depends upon finishing with ontology, and recognizing that the truth claims of evidence are contingent upon the capacity of theories to interpret structures of extant, but invisible, social meanings" (ibid, p36). They assert that "(w)hen we do empirical research, we are in fact 'reading', not 'observing'" (p30) and that our ability to access the realities that are the

object of our enquiry, that is, to successfully *interpret* our data, is determined by how good our theories are. They differentiate between "weak" and "strong" hermeneutics, asserting that weak hermeneutics is essentially the capture of empirical data. Strong hermeneutics, in contrast, aims to uncover underlying meaning structures *through the application of theory*: these structures are not, therefore, *discovered*, rather they are *interpreted*. In this approach, it is theory – and the quality of our selected theoretical models – that allows us "to complete our specific interpretive tasks" (ibid, p36) which have only begun with the collection of empirical data.

I have also located myself theoretically with Tony Lawson, who criticizes mainstream economics for its almost complete disregard of the ontological (Lawson, 2003). This does not mean, however, that Lawson (ibid) believes that mainstream economics has sacrificed ontology for theory, but rather that it has substituted a particular **method** (mathematical deductivism) for theorizing, which method pays little attention to social reality. His proposed alternative to mainstream economic thinking is what he describes as "ontological theorizing" (ibid, p1). It is such ontological theorizing – by which I mean a robust theoretical approach that aims to provide insights into social meanings – that is the goal of this thesis.

In this search for a strong theoretical approach to the analysis of my findings I considered and discarded a number of initially plausible methodological approaches. As my fieldwork progressed I became convinced that a more theoretically nuanced framework was required than was offered by these. What I was looking for was a framework that could provide an overarching approach towards both explanation and

interpretation[7] (and, in fact, differentiate between the two); that could mediate between meaningful action and identity; that could incorporate and account for the complex layers of inter-temporal meaning making that I observed; and one that could take full cognisance of the wider relations of power that limited what decisions were actually available, and the likely outcomes of those decisions, while still acknowledging the central role of human agency.

In the following section I have briefly recounted what this thesis is *not* about from a theoretical point of view, by way of an introduction to what it *is* about.

1.3.1. This isn't really about "status" consumption

My initial point of reference was the status consumption literature, in which body of work I included the culturally biased transmission theories of Joe Henrich (Henrich 2004, Henrich, 2002, Henrich and Gil-White, 2001). There is, some (very limited) South African research which suggests that the reasons why people do or do not engage in own production of food are in fact more complex than many researchers (and policy makers) assume, and have little to do with the technical factors outlined above. Moller (2005) investigated differences in inter-generational attitudes towards home gardening in the Eastern Cape town of Grahamstown. Her research identified very clear differences in ideas about gardening between younger and older people that may provide an insight into why hungry households do not produce their own food (although the object of her enquiry was the activity of gardening, rather than food production *per se*.) An important point made in the study was that many older

[7] Using the terms as they are used by Paul Ricoeur (1991a) in his version of hermeneutical phenomenology, which I have discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

gardeners derived self-described quality of life benefits from their gardens, in addition to edible produce. In contrast, the main reasons why younger people did not engage in home gardening were expressed as a dislike for dirty work, a fear of being ostracized by their peers if they participated in gardening, and a perception that food gardening was a survival strategy marking participants out as being particularly poor. For these individuals, reports Moller, purchased food was seen as a symbol of a certain status, more desirable than that accruing to own-produced food. Moller did not, however, investigate further why younger and older people had such different conceptions.

Gross and Rosenberger‘s (2005) investigation into food insecurity in Oregon highlighted the “intersection of food and identity” (p1) in influencing the food choices that people made. Their research highlights some of the reasons why parents sometimes make “bad” nutritional choices for their children: parents were focused on giving their children what they wanted to eat, rather than what was nutritionally best for them. A lot of this was the result of not wanting their children to stand out as poor among their friends in terms of what they ate. This corroborates research showing that the choice of food can be used to signal image, prestige and membership of a particular group (such as McKenzie, 1974).

Although these findings highlight that decisions around food provisioning and consumption may be influenced by factors other than the maximization of (purely economic) utility, they had little to say on **why** this might be the case (that is, why are perceptions of poverty and status so closely integrated with particular food provisioning strategies and not with others), or why this effect did not manifest in a consistent form (not every person in similar demographic circumstances was reported

to make the same food choices or have the same attitude towards gardening). This *unevenness* of outcomes was a constant observation in my fieldwork: even within households there appeared to be different attitudes towards food gardening and different food provisioning strategies and I was intrigued by why this should be the case.

Initially, my investigation in this direction and my attempt to develop an analytical framework engaged with the literature on what could be categorized as "status consumption", focused on consumer behaviour in developing countries and/or relatively poor communities in higher-income countries. This status consumption research focuses on the question of why relatively poor consumers routinely allocate their limited resources to relatively expensive "non-essential" goods (such as branded clothing or high-end electronics) rather than to the more basic necessities of life (such as food and education) that would appear to offer higher levels of economic utility, and thus be a more "rational" choice. Research on this topic cuts across several disciplines, including economics, anthropology and cognitive psychology. At first examination much of this work appeared to provide the analytical framework that could make sense of what I was observing: the status consumption literature is based on the underlying assertion that the act of consumption is not just a way of meeting material demands, but also (and importantly) a way of signaling something about ourselves to others, including our location in some kind of social hierarchy (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996). The idea that "consumption is a communicative act" (Van Kempen, 2005, p99) I found entirely plausible. However, from the point of view of my particular research questions and early empirical observations, there are several important (and interlinked) shortcomings with these status consumption theories as an

analytical framework for the findings presented in this thesis. The first was the (often implied) assumption that "status" consumption was associated only with a particular kind of object – in the language of Veblen (2003 [1889]), a "prestige" object. That is, objects determined to be mundane, basic or utilitarian (or all three) do not contain the prestige required to qualify as the target of status consumption. This assumption did not fit at all with the findings of my fieldwork, which suggested that complex notions of meaning and identity (including social differentiation) were in fact often associated with the most mundane and everyday of items: a bunch of spinach, an overall, the label on the side of a plastic crate. These objects could not be satisfactorily categorised as "status" items in terms of the status consumption literature, but they were undeniably important.

The second (and related) area in which status consumption theories appeared to be inadequate for my purposes was the explanations advanced for why "status" consumption takes one form and not another; that is, why particular items are deemed to have status while others are not. These explanations were built on underlying (and in my assessment, erroneous) assumptions about what kind of objects *could* be considered as "status" items. In this school of thought, the explanation for why status consumption occurred in developing countries among poor populations is based on the assumption that the latter group wants to imitate the consumption patterns of rich Western countries, in order to compensate for some self-perceived relative inferiority (Van Kempen, 2005). While this may suffice as a description of observed consumer behaviour, it offers little in the way of interpretation of why and how status is associated with certain "Western" goods and not with others, or indeed why notions of inferiority are manifested in material ways. I would further suggest that on

occasion the definition of what is a "status" item and what is not is more a reflection of the author's own point of view than that of the person under observation. For example, Van Kempen (ibid) asserts that expensive television sets and sound systems are examples of "status" consumption, but that the purchase (and consequent display in a dwelling) of an expensive stove reflects a desire for "high quality products" rather than status (p57). The implicit assumption is that spending on an expensive television is somehow frivolous, while spending on an expensive stove is not, even though the implications for household resources may be exactly the same, and a cheaper stove may have exactly the same utility as a more expensive one. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this differentiation may reflect Van Kempen's own ideas about "frivolous" versus "proper" consumption. This moral judgement is reflected in his assertion that status consumption "among the poor is based on ***deception***" (Van Kempen, ibid, p1, my emphasis).

In the same vein, but in a possibly more objectionable fashion, Charles, Hurst and Roussanov (2007) conducted an investigation into conspicuous consumption by different racial groups in the United States. They proceeded from the assumption that expenditure on "visible consumption" (p1) items such as expensive jewelry, clothing and cars was primarily driven by Veblen's notions of status consumption, but added the conclusion that this type of expenditure was just as common among poor groups as wealthy ones. They asserted that Black and Hispanic households spent considerably more than their White income-equivalents on visible consumption items, and considerably less on more "productive" items such as education or the purchase of a home. They concluded that Black and Hispanic households had a higher propensity for "status" consumption, and that this allocation of household expenditure

explained differences in household wealth across racial groups, as well as education and health outcomes. That is, Black and Hispanic households were in fact responsible for long-term household wealth differentiations because their consumption decisions were often driven by a desire for status, whereas the consumption decisions of White households were more often driven by more "rational" notions of long-term wealth optimization. What this paper conveniently does is pre-judge the expenditure decisions of Black and Hispanic households by categorizing certain kinds of consumption as "visible" and thus "status" driven, and other kinds of consumption as "not visible" and thus not primarily "status" driven. The visible, status consumption items correspond to those preferred by Black and Hispanic households (jewellery, cars and the like) while the not visible and not status-driven items correspond to those preferred by White households (such as home improvements or the choice of school). Clearly home improvements or the choice of prestigious private school may be undertaken with as much status motivation as the purchase of a particular car, but Charles *et al* have not acknowledged this possibility. Their analysis and findings are congruent with a considerable body of work that is premised on the idea that poor people (particularly in developing countries) make irrational and/or uninformed consumption choices which are not in their best interests, and that there is an important role for development practitioners to educate them to behave in a certain way "for their own good". Much economic and social development policy is based on this premise.

Related to the problematic issue of how certain expenditure choices are classified as driven by "status" while others are not is the general inability of the status consumption literature to explain why these consumption patterns are not uniformly

distributed, even within family units. Van Kempen (2005) investigated consumption patterns in Bolivia's two largest groups of indigenous origin. Both groups were subjected to social exclusion, and thus, on the theory of compensatory consumption outlined above, patterns of status expenditure on expensive Western goods could have been expected across both groups. However, this was not the case: one of these groups exhibited a high propensity to purchase western-type "status-intensive" (p48) expensive items. However, the other group did not, showing instead a strong preference for spending on "traditional" events and items (such as traditional clothing). Van Kempen (ibid) was unable to offer a comprehensive reason for these divergent consumption patterns, save to suggest that the latter indigenous group appeared to value their own culture more highly than western culture, while the former group did not, without explaining **why** this should be the case.

As my fieldwork progressed I found that much of the status consumption literature did not reflect my findings in another important way: these "bad" status choices are generally not viewed as a legitimate exercise of agency, but rather as a result of ignorance or gullibility on the part of the poor (see, for example, Harsanyi, 1992). Until fairly recently status (conspicuous) consumption studies focused almost exclusively on wealthy societies and populations, which Van Kempen (2005) asserts was because of "(t)he view that the poor are exclusively preoccupied with basic needs satisfaction" which view did not admit the possibility of status consumption (p4). This view implies a certain *a priori* assessment of the agency of the poor, that is, they do not have or are unable to exercise legitimate agency. As a result, empirical evidence of apparent status consumption choices by the poor could not be accommodated in mainstream economic models of utility maximisation, and was thus usually assessed

as irrational, and in need of modification, in the best interests of those poor consumers themselves (ibid, p6).

Harsanyi (1992) extends this argument by differentiating among "informed preferences" and "actual preferences". In his analysis, the former set of preferences are those that a consumer would have if he or she had all the relevant information and used this to make the most optimal (i.e. utility-maximising) choices. However, in most instances a consumer's actual preferences are different, because of incorrect or incomplete information. Harsanyi (ibid) refers to these as "mistaken preferences" (p6) with the implicit assumption that this sub-optimal behaviour could be corrected if the consumer had enough information or was able to use that information in the most 'effective' manner. This view was not compatible with my findings, which demonstrated that materially-poor individuals generally had a clear grasp of the economic implications of their decision-making. In my assessment, their choices demonstrated a high degree of agency, not ignorance.

Finally, I found it difficult to reconcile my field observations with the idea that the visible consumption of certain material objects could function as a comprehensive analogy for the complex processes of meaning making and identity management that I was observing; or that "status" was the main driver behind apparently "irrational" material choices of the poor; or even that those choices could somehow be considered "irrational". Status consumption studies appeared to be making the mistake of confusing the *material* with *materialism*, overlooking the possibility that the desire to acquire certain material items should be understood as meaning making, not acquisitiveness (Wallendorf and Arnold, 1988).

My basic contention in this thesis is that the interpretation of a particular set of actions or consumptions choices is best approached from the starting point of a theory of how meaningful action is purposefully constituted and communicated, reflecting the agency of the actors and their construction of their *own* worlds of meaning and thus value. Individual examples of particular choices (such as the purchase of item A rather than B) may then be interpreted in terms of that overarching network of meaning, which includes far more parameters of identity than simply economic or social "status". In contrast, much of the status consumption literature appears to work in the opposite direction: using limited examples of choice and economic action as "evidence" of a particular – and greatly limited - world of meanings and motivations.

Henrich (2002) has proposed an alternative theory to what he terms the "standard model" (p256) of economic behaviour (and changes in that behaviour) in economic anthropology which attempts to explain why status consumption takes one form and not another. His contention (drawing heavily from empirical research in cognitive psychology) is that humans often selectively copy the behaviour of identified individuals, and that this "biased cultural transmission" (Henrich, ibid, p278) can result in action that is not underpinned by cost-benefit decision making of any kind. Within this theory, the concept of "prestige-biased cultural transmission" (ibid,) is based on findings from cognitive psychology showing that people are strongly biased towards copying the opinions, ideas and behaviours of those deemed to be particularly successful or prestigious.

An important point made by Henrich is that biased cultural transmission can sometimes result in maladaptive economic behaviour ("prestige-biased transmission can create errors" – ibid, p281), which could explain why individuals may adopt a course of action that is not in their "best" (in terms of utility maximization) interests.

Although Henrich's approach is undoubtedly more nuanced than many of the more basic utility-maximisation status consumption theories, his relative inability to explain the basis on which certain people are in fact deemed "prestigious" or "unprestigious", or why there should be significant inconsistencies in how and when "prestige" is determined relevant to decision-making was problematic for my purposes. Certain of his assertions about how prestige is determined did not ring true with either my or others' research findings. As an example, Henrich and Gil-White (2001) contended that older people are more likely to be deemed prestigious, whereas Moller's (2005) research shows clearly that younger people do not accord elders emulation-worthy prestige in the area of home food production. This was reflected in my own findings.

1.3.2. This isn't (only) about material culture

During the first few months of my fieldwork I was very much in favour of working within a material culture framework. Most of my initial observations and findings concerned the use (or conscious non-use) of material objects - the output from the gardens, overalls and other items of clothing, and the tools and inputs used for growing vegetables. The informants' use of these items, together with the way in which they spoke about them, was often very carefully considered and clearly imbued with meaning. It thus appeared that these objects were doing "social work"

(Woodward, 2007, p4) and that they performed an important role in the management of identities.

The focus in material culture studies is on the material (how people use objects, and the role of objects in meaning making and transmission), rather than materialism, thereby avoiding the simplistic conclusions about motivations found in much of the status consumption literature. I was particularly interested in the ways in which objects were designated as central to "the construction, maintenance and transformation of social identities" (Miller and Tilley, 1996, p5). As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) put it "(m)eaning, not material possessions, is the ultimate goal in (persons') lives" (p145) referring to the underlying driver of the acquisition and possession of the material.

I cannot deny that material objects were important in meaning making in the lives of the informants in my study, but just as importantly, I witnessed many occasions were meaning making was unrelated to or only tangentially included material objects. I thus required a theoretical framework that could incorporate both the material and the non-material ways in which people imagined themselves, spoke about themselves and engaged in meaningful action.

In addition I often found it difficult to anchor and/or fix the meanings associated with the everyday objects of everyday life that were the focus of this ethnographic study in a manner consistent with much of the material culture literature. The meanings attached to many objects were clearly fluid and malleable: in some contexts objects (such as a set of overalls) appeared to be heavily imbued with meaning, and in others

almost irrelevant, even when associated with the same person. It thus appeared to me that the larger context within which the object was used (or talked about) was often more important for meaning making than the object itself. In order to identify the location of meaning making - as the starting point for interpretation – I needed to address the tension between an object and the context in which it was used, rather than making assumptions about the location of meaning in an object.

The theory of metaphor and, most particularly, the location of meaning in the metaphor is, I believe, important in this regard, and forms the basis of how I have conceived the relationship between object and context. Anthropologists such as Christopher Tilley (Tilley, 2002), working within the framework of "linguistic analogies" (ibid, p23) have proposed that objects may be understood as functioning as metaphors – that "the artefact, through its silent 'speech' and 'written' presence, speaks what cannot be spoken, writes what cannot be written, and articulates that which remains conceptually separated in social practice." (ibid, p28). That is, Tilley asserts that metaphorical meaning is located in a material object, and that this is the source of their "communicative agency" (ibid, p25).

On the basis of my readings of Paul Ricoeur's theory of the metaphor (outlined in more detail below) and with reference to my own empirical findings, I have proposed that a metaphorical meaning associated with a particular object (which clearly exists) does not reside in the object itself, but in the context within which it is located, where "context" is defined as the world of meaning created and managed by the person in question. That is, the object has a metaphorical *potential*, but without inclusion in a particular context, that meaning is not realized. The analogy from Paul Ricoeur

(Ricoeur, 1976) is with words versus sentences and larger bodies of text, and the location of meaning. I have proposed that we may consider objects as "words" and the context within which the object is used as a "sentence". Without the sentence there is no metaphor, although the "metaphorical twist" takes place at the level of the word (Ricoeur, 1981, p166). "Metaphor has to do with the semantics of the sentence before it concerns the semantics of a word …. a metaphor only makes sense in an utterance" (Ricoeur, 1976, p49). One of the main proposals of this thesis is that it is the semantics of action (specifically the creative activity of *emplotment*) that determines the semantics of an object, rather than the other way around.

The difference between the two approaches is, I believe, critical. Much of the material culture literature (as one notable example the work of Daniel Miller) emphasizes the agency of objects in creating meaning, while an approach based on the semantics of action emphasizes the agency of persons in creating meaning. It is in this second approach that I have located this thesis.

Certain approaches to material culture (for example, Woodward, 2007, Alexander, 2004, Pels *et al*, 2002 and Harré, 2002) have emphasised the importance of "human performance activity" (Pels *et al,* ibid, p9), that is, how meaningful action together with narratives attributes social meaning to objects. It is in the context of human action and/or the stories (narratives) about those human actions that objects acquire significance. "Material things have magic powers only in the contexts of the narratives in which they are embedded" (Harré, 2002, p25). Outside of this context they are simply "stuff" (ibid).

In addition, Harré (2002) offers the important insight that apparently identical objects can have very different meanings in different contexts. However, Harré differentiates between a "practical order" and the "expressive order " (ibid, p32) in which things are located. His insistence that the significance of material objects can only be understood in terms of both brings him very close to the conspicuous consumption theories of Veblen which, as discussed above, I am not convinced are sufficient to capture the detailed nuances of identity imagination, creation and management that I believe underpin the choice and use of objects. Perhaps more importantly, he is largely silent on a therorisation of how performance activity is imagined and enacted, *prior* to the selection and inclusion of particular material objects. In addition, and in contrast to Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1991b) human performance theorists pay little attention to the temporality of human performance, save to acknowledge an analogy with a scripted theatrical performance of a temporal logic – beginning, middle and end (Alexander, 2004). However, their definition of human performance has influenced my conceptualization of an expanded definition of Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity as my interpretive framework, as discussed in the next chapter.

In summary, I observed that objects often played a central role in the imagination, creation and management of identities. Objects clearly mattered, both in terms of their physical presence and their imagined presence. However, I also observed that the consumption and use of material objects in this process was only <u>one</u> way, albeit an important one, in which meanings were imagined, constructed, restructured and communicated. My goal was a theoretical framework that could ***account*** for a particular material culture, but not be ***limited*** to a particular material culture.

1.4. Finding a starting point: explanation, interpretation and hermeneutical phenomenology

"...the central problem of hermeneutics is that of interpretation.."

(Ricoeur, 1981, p165)

One of the over-arching goals of this thesis is to provide a strong *theoretical* account of my empirical observations. Much of my assessment of the shortcomings (for the purposes of this thesis) of the status consumption and material culture approaches discussed above is based on their comparative neglect of the theoretical. These approaches focus to a much greater (sometimes exclusive) extent on the ontological (i.e. the presentation of empirical data) than the theoretical. After Ricoeur (1991a) I would differentiate between "explanation" and "interpretation" and assert that the goal of the social sciences should be both. Interpretation requires the application of theory, rather than the explanation of the empirical (Reed and Alexander, 2009).

The overarching theoretical approach employed in this thesis is the hermeneutical phenomenology of Paul Ricoeur, who proposed it as the most appropriate method for the study of human reality (Ricoeur, 1981). I have adopted Ricoeur's hermeneutical phenomenology in preference to the "weak" and "strong" hermeneutics of Reed and Alexander (2009), primarily because of Ricoeur's proposal of a dialectic relationship between explanation and understanding, which I believe is a more nuanced and useful approach for my purposes. Although Ricoeur's primary focus was the interpretation of texts, he also proposed that hermeneutical phenomenology could be applied to the

social sciences generally and thus the interpretation of meaningful action (Ricoeur, 1971), which is the focus of this thesis. There are a number of reasons why I have chosen this approach: Firstly, and in contrast to structuralists such as Claude Levi-Strauss, Ricoeur accords a central role to human agency and acknowledges the importance of history in anthropological analysis: the dialectic of explanation and interpretation expounded by Ricoeur offers the prospect of a full account of human agency, while still avoiding a degeneration into pure subjectivity (Tilley, 1990). The centrality of agency aligns with my assertion that it is the right to be a particular type of person that is the central motivator of meaningful action.

Secondly, Ricoeur differentiates between "explanation" and "interpretation": with reference to the explanation and interpretation of a **text** (which is the foundation of his work), explanation is located "in the suspense of the text" (Ricoeur, 1991a, p113) and is made in terms of its internal structure. Interpretation, however, requires that we open the text to the world, that we incorporate the idea that language is more than just "a structured totality (and) cannot be reduced to the sentences whereof it is composed" (Ricoeur, 1981, p13). For Ricoeur, people speak, or write a text, with the purpose of saying something to someone (Tilley, 1990) and the process of interpretation intends to uncover that "something". Thus, the process of explanation could be said to reveal the "semiological dimension" of the text, while interpretation reveals its "semantic dimension" (Ricoeur, 1991a, p119). Interpretation thus mediates "understanding" (Kaplan, 2003, p23).

Importantly, Ricoeur proposes a dialectical rather than an oppositional relationship between them, in the form of the "hermeneutical arc" (Ricoeur, 1991a, p121). The

dialectic of explanation and interpretation implies that we may move along the hermeneutic arc from explanation to interpretation, but equally we may move along the arc from interpretation to explanation. This approach seems much more useful for the purposes of my research problem than the more usual opposition – that explanation is for the natural sciences, and interpretation for the social sciences (Ricoeur, 1991a) – which opposition I would suggest has undermined the ability of mainstream economics to account for behaviour that deviates from its utility-maximising models.

Ricoeur proposes that more than one interpretation of the same text may be considered valid by, firstly, differentiating between "the objective meaning" of a text and "the subjective intention of the author" (Ricoeur, 1971, p547), and secondly, accepting the possibility (even the likelihood) of more than one "objective" meaning. That is, what the text "means" may be very different from what the author intended, since the act of reading opens the text to the world, and in that world multiple interpretations may be made. The immanent plurivocity of text makes multiple interpretations almost unavoidable. The aim of interpretation, then, is not "verification" but rather "validation" – assessing which interpretation is "more probable than another" (ibid, p549).

The details of the theoretical framework that I have selected for the interpretation of my empirical findings represents an articulation of Ricoeur's theories of the interpretation of texts with an expanded version of his conceptualization of narrative identity. This is set out in Chapter 2.

1.5. The ethnographic study

"..invariably my only real hypothesis is that I really have very little idea of what I am going to find when I go out to conduct fieldwork. This hypothesis has always proved correct. In going to live within another community I assume that the most important findings are going to be about things one didn't even suspect existed before going to live there. If you didn't know they existed, how could you have hypothesized about them?"

(Daniel Miller, 2010, p7)

This thesis is based on fieldwork conducted mostly between February and November 2013 (with some follow up visits during the period December 2013 to March 2014) and located in Gauteng Province, some 60 kilometres from Johannesburg. I selected the particular area because I had some prior experience working in the local municipality. I thus had some existing knowledge of the region's demographic and economic structure, although I had not had any previous contact with any of the community garden projects or the project participants who feature in this thesis. My focus was community gardens rather than homestead gardens because I believed that access to one or two community gardens would be easier than trying to find and gain access to widely dispersed homestead gardens, while still giving me access to people who were engaged almost daily (to some extent) in the production of their own food. The main difference between community and homestead gardens is that the former have a greater (but by no means exclusive) focus on the sale rather than the consumption of food, and they also receive more investment from government, most notably in the form of a borehole, irrigation equipment and electricity connection.

In order to gain access to the community gardens in an officially approved manner I approached the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD), since they are responsible for the establishment and support of the community gardens in Gauteng. I was referred to the relevant local office, where I met with the officials responsible for food security projects (the Food Security Directorate (DFS) located within GDARD). The only structured interview that I undertook was during this initial meeting, and the purpose was to collect general background information about the establishment and profile of community garden projects. These officials very kindly took me to four of their existing projects, made introductions and assured the participants that I was there with their permission. My research objectives were clearly communicated to all of the participants during this first visit, and I answered a number of questions about the purpose of my attendance at the gardens on this and subsequent visits. After that initial visit I was on my own, only occasionally meeting with provincial 'extension' officers (i.e. those who oversee and give input to the projects) who were on regular site visits to the gardens.

I wanted to focus on no more than two gardens, for practical purposes. One of the gardens I rejected immediately: it was in what I felt was a dangerous location, and I had a negative reception from many of the non-gardeners who were using part of the site for other purposes. A second garden was also rejected, but for "technical" rather than other reasons. This garden, located in a formal working class suburb, was a well-established allotment-type garden, a very unusual structure in South Africa. However, it was not really a "community" garden, but rather a retirement activity for five pensioners who lived nearby. Although I was intrigued by the operating structure of

the garden, it did not fit my research requirements, and I only made an additional three visits.

That left me with two community gardens – the first (Tshimo[8]) located in the grounds of a school just outside a small town (Steynsville), and bordered by an informal settlement on two sides; and the second adjacent to the informal settlement of Motse, in a semi-rural area about 15kms from a medium-sized town (Rooidal). For the first few months I divided my time between the two gardens, but for the last three months spent almost all my time at Motse. This was for practical reasons: the Tshimo garden was in steady decline when I first arrived and this was hastened by the sudden death of one of the most active participants in June 2013. By July of 2013 the project had all but closed down. This meant that on most days there was no one in the garden, which remained locked and untended.

My main methods were participant observation and informal conversations. On my second visit to each garden (and the first on my own) I volunteered to work in the gardens, since it seemed to me that this would be the best way both to build relationships with the participants, and to gain some first-hand idea of what was involved in being a community garden participant. The participants were at first bemused, but needed all the free labour that they could get. I was quickly accepted as part of each group and was given my own set of overalls by Motse members after a few weeks. After a few months I was well integrated into the Motse group, being

[8] I have changed the names of all the gardens, adjacent settlement, nearby towns, the garden participants and other persons, in order to protect their privacy.

allocated work tasks by the Chairperson[9] like every other member, and included in their group activities. In addition to working in the gardens, I assisted with finding suppliers and getting quotes, and I also made my car available for making deliveries, collecting supplies, etc. I worked in the gardens three or four days a week, arriving at 8 in the morning when work started and leaving at around 2 in the afternoon, when work usually ended for the day. At the end of each day I wrote up my observations and recollections. I occasionally took notes if I had sat down with one or more of the gardeners to discuss something in particular, usually during a meal break. I used a voice recorder on only 5 occasions, with the permission of the participants, to record the proceedings of group meetings.

Although I am not fluent in Tswana (the daily home language of all the participants), my basic Sesotho allowed me to follow the gist of most conversations and, save for the transcription of the voice recordings, I did not use a translator. Most of the Motse participants were fluent in English, one of the Tshimo participants was fluent in English and another in Afrikaans.

1.6. Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters, including this introduction. In Chapter Two I have described in more detail the theoretical framework that I have used to interpret my empirical findings. This is a theory of performance identity, based in large part on Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity, and incorporating many of his approaches towards the interpretation of narratives. Within this framework I have proposed that

[9] Almost all government-sponsored community garden projects require that beneficiaries organize (and register) themselves as a cooperative, each of which has a number of designated officials, with the nominated Chairperson filling the senior "management" position.

contestations of identity may be conceptualized as contestations of authorship – who "scripts" the performance of the gardeners and thereby sets the limits to who they can plausibly be.

Chapter Three serves as an introduction to the ethnographic study, describing in detail the two gardens where the bulk of my field work was carried out. This chapter provides an overview of the history and the daily life of the gardens and the people who work in them.

Chapters Four to Seven contain the main body of the thesis. I have structured these chapters to coincide with the main components of my theoretical analytical framework of performance identity, working from the macro components of the framework down to the micro components. Thus, in Chapter Four I have discussed the broader social and political context within which the community gardeners find themselves and the limitations imposed by power and power relations on the performances that are actually "available" to them or expected from them. This chapter also covers the challenges of plausibility in performances, and the contestations around the authorship of performances in more detail.

Chapter Five deals with the central issue of temporality in influencing meaningful action. I have discussed in detail the issue of temporality in identity; the central mediating role played by performances of identity in creating temporal coherence out of the temporal dissonance that is created at the intersection of the history and the expectations of the community gardeners. I discuss the challenge that temporal credibility poses to plausibility, and the use of creative emplotment, specifically with

respect to the remaking of experience, to develop and present temporally coherent performances of identity.

Chapter Six considers the physical (material) environment within which performances of identity take place. I discuss the concept of the *mise-en-scène* that frames and provides the backdrop for the action, and the importance of this in managing both temporal coherence and the credibility of performances. I describe the great lengths that the gardeners go to in order to create a physical environment that mediates the understanding of who they have been, who they are and who they could be.

Chapter Seven discusses the use of every day objects in supporting performance; the importance of seemingly mundane items in creating critical distinctions in personhood, and the many creative ways in which the gardeners use these objects to bring plausibility to their performances of identity.

Chapter Eight is the summation of my main findings. In this chapter I have also considered what alternatives might be possible; how we might go about re-making how we think about food security in particular and "development" in general.

CHAPTER TWO

IDENTITY AS PERFORMANCE: IMAGINATION, TEMPORALITY AND MEANING-IN-THE-WORLD

2.1. Introduction: Meaningful Action as a Text

".. the world of fiction leads us to the heart of the real world of action"

(Ricoeur, 1981, p296)

After completing my fieldwork I was convinced that agency and identity – rather than the "technical" factors emphasized by mainstream development - were at the heart of what I had observed during my time in the gardens and the surrounding communities. Many meaningful actions appeared to be motivated in large part by the desire (i.e. to have as a key goal) to be a particular type of person, or to *appear* to be a particular type of person, which in most circumstances seemed to be a perfectly acceptable substitute for the former. For the analysis of my ethnographic findings I thus required an integrated framework, able to mediate between the ideational world within which identity was imagined and conceived, and the world of meaningful action, where identity was made "real", and to provide insights into the agency that underpinned both. I also needed to account for the inter-temporal nature of identity that I had observed over and over again: a simultaneously present past, present and future that combined to underpin the intentions and motivations behind meaningful action, and to condition what could be imagined as future actions.

As the possible basis for such a theoretical interpretive framework I have been drawn to approaches that apply text-based interpretation models to action, most notably

those that interpret actions in a similar way to narratives – the stories that we write, that we read, and that we tell. It appeared to me that the way in which the community gardeners interacted with others, what they said, what they did and how they used material objects in these processes was most often neither random nor completely determined by external factors, but rather crafted in large part by themselves, analagous in many ways to the mindful construction of a written or recounted story. Paul Ricoeur proposed that meaningful action could be *interpreted* as a text (Ricoeur, 1971), as a form of narrative. In my estimation this is an elegant notion, for several reasons:

- A text is a "structured totality" whose meaning is more than the sum of its component sentences (Ricoeur, 1981, P13); it is a "meaningful whole" (Vlacos, 2014, p203) meant to be read and interpreted as a unity. We cannot access the whole meaning of an entire text by focusing only on one or two sentences. In contrast, mainstream economics (as a result of its preferred mathematical deductivist[10] method) tends to focus on individual parts of a whole. This method, and the regularities of form that it requires, are dependent on what Lawson (2003, p5) refers to as "a closed system". As a result, mainstream economics tends to analyse particular human actions, such as one consumption choice, on the basis of a limited and pre-defined set of variables – those that are amenable to mathematical deductivist modeling. Although mainstream economists may acknowledge that observed behaviours differs from predicted behaviours due to "variations in taste" (Michael and Becker, 1973, p380), this entire world of variables is usually assumed as given

[10] I am using here Lawson's (2003) definition of deductivism to mean "a type of explanation in which regularities of the form 'whenever event x then event y'… are a necessary condition." (p5).

(Chibnik, 2011). That is, mainstream economics deals with its inability to satisfactorily explain deviations from predicted behaviour not by adopting an alternative approach, but simply by ignoring these deviations:

> *Since economists have little to contribute ..... to the understanding of how preferences are formed, preferences are assumed not to change substantially over time, nor to be very different between wealthy or poor persons, or even between persons in different societies and cultures. (Becker, 1976, p5)*

That is, Becker is arguing that because economics is unable to explain something, it simply renders it irrelevant, thereby excluding it as a potential causal factor. It is, I would argue, exactly this kind of *a priori* limitation that makes it almost impossible for mainstream development to consider multiple social realities, in which a wide variation of choices and actions may be considered equally "rational".

In contrast to the inflexible approach to verification of mainstream economics (which then finds itself unable to provide a coherent account of apparently "irrational" actions), Ricoeur's hermeneutics is based on "the inherent plurivocity of meaningful action" (Standen, 2013, p56). Considering meaningful action as a coherent unity – like a text – for the purposes of interpretation would, I propose, provide greater insights into causality and motivation than selective isolation of its parts.

- The concept of narrative *emplotment* resonated with what I observed around the careful construction of identity and meaning in everyday life and around everyday objects, according a central role to imagination and thus agency in the interpretation of meaningful action. Although Paul Ricoeur seldom spoke directly of imagination *per se*, but rather of its manifestations (such as the construction of a metaphor) Richard Kearney asserts that imagination is central to "the interweaving of history and fiction" (Kearney 1996, p174) that underpins Ricoeur's theory of human time.

- A narrative text allows for the coexistence of multiple characters, not all of whom are required to be actual (living or dead) persons. The characters in narratives may be real or fictional (i.e. the product of imagination, either individual or collective), reflecting the way in which people present different versions of themselves in different actions in different contexts for different audiences. Not all of these versions are, strictly speaking, "real" persons (almost everyone of us has at one time or another presented ourselves as someone a little different from or more than ourselves), but in a narrative they **are** all equally real and equally present. Both real and fictional persons (as long as these latter resemble "real" people enough to make them recognisable) co-exist easily in a narrative work, and all may appear equally real to the reader.

- Similarly, multiple temporalities coexist with relative ease within a narrative. Within any particular narrative past, present and future may easily be simultaneously present – as they clearly were in the lives of the participants in

the community gardens – and temporal coherence is maintained in the emplotment of the narrative whole (Hamilton, 2014).

- Ricoeur's theory of the metaphor in narratives – most particulary his ideas around where meaning is located in a metaphor – provides to my mind the basis for a theory of material culture that emphasizes the agency of persons rather then the agency of objects in creating meaning.

This idea that models of text interpretation might fruitfully be applied to the analysis of meaningful action was certainly no special insight on my part: As Tilley (2002) points out, many anthropological studies "have exploited analogies with language to provide a fresh way of understanding what things mean" (p23). Clifford Geertz considered that "anthropological interpretation is constructing a reading of what happens" (Geertz, 1973, p18). Geertz acknowledged Paul Ricouer as the source of his own "idea of the inscription of action" (Geertz, ibid, p19), which in turn forms the basis of his approach to ethnographic description – an attempt to "fix" the meaning of a particular social discourse in a thickly descriptive ethnographic text.

I was specifically interested in interpretative theories that focus on text as a *narrative*, rather than on those based on Saussurian linguistics, such as the various structuralist approaches. Structuralists working in anthropology (probably most notably Lévi-Strauss) have focused on the analogies between the structure of linguistics and the structure of culture, on the basis that both are systems of communication (Tilley, 1990). Structural analysis is concerned with uncovering the "codes" that lie behind action or culture or material culture: "meaning" then is created through the location of

an action or an object in some already existing structure, rather than through the direct agency of the actor (ibid). I concur with Ricoeur (1991a) that structural analysis is best understood as a first (rather than the only) step towards the goal of *interpretation*: structuralism can *explain* the internal structure of a text or an action (or in Ricoeur's particular example – a myth), but it cannot say anything about what it *means*, and to ignore what it means is to reduce it "to a necrology of the meaningless discourses of mankind" (Ricoeur, ibid, p121). I was much more interested in interpreting the "meaning-in-the-world" of what I was observing than in only explaining its underlying structure, although, in line with Ricoeur, I did not discount the latter as methodological step in the process of interpretation (ibid).

Additionally, I was searching for a theoretical approach that emphasized agency, history and the multiplicity (and thus validity) of possible meanings to a far greater extent than I believe structuralism does. Paul Ricoeur was, once again, my starting point in this regard, not only because he emphasised agency and history in the interpretation of meaning, but because I wanted to work within his heremeneutical framework, which acknowledged the possibility of multiple interpretations of meaningful action – the essential "plurivocity" of action. This dialectic between explanation and understanding allows for the examination of meaningful action both in terms of its internal structure and in terms of what it "says" to a wider world – what it is "about", what it "means". Ricoeur's theory of interpretation of action as text has been widely applied in the social sciences, probably most notably in anthropology by Clifford Geertz, whose interpretive work is located within a framework of culture as text (Geertz, 1973).

However, the relatively rigid requirements stipulated by Ricoeur in order to *make an action like a text* prior to its interpretation as a narrative (Ricoeur, 1971) were problematic in several ways for my particular purposes. Firstly, the focus of my research was the everyday, the seemingly mundane details of daily life – action that was deeply meaningful for the actors involved, but which Ricoeur's criteria for the designation of an action as "meaningful" would probably have discarded as irrelevant and unimportant. Ricoeur was clear that his requirements for an action to be considered "meaningful" (and thus able to be analysed like a text) required it to have some kind of profound historical importance and relevance, to be an action that has "*left its mark* on its time" (Ricoeur, ibid, p540, emphasis in original).

I also concurred with Moore (1990) that Ricoeur's fixation requirement of detachment of actor and action (autonomisation) was highly problematic for the purpose of determining "meaning" in action, and in fact undermined Ricoeur's own views on the centrality of agency in the determination of meaning. Where is the place for the recognition of agency in action when meaning is defined as something apart from the intentions and motivations of the actor? This tension between the importance of agency as a key part of Ricoeur's philosophy and the negation of the agency of the actor in his interpretive method for action is never fully resolved: Only a few pages after specifying that the autonomization of action is a necessary requirement for the application of his model of text interpretation, Ricoeur (1971) states that "what can be (and must be) *construed* in human action is the motivational basis of this action" (p552, emphasis in original). That is, "I *understand* what you intended to do, if you are able to *explain* to me why you did such-and-such and action" (p551, emphasis in

original), which approach places agency and the motivations of the actor front and centre in its understanding.

Moore (1990) believes that Ricoeur is making "the very reasonable point" (p115) that the meaning of action cannot be limited *only* to what the actor intended; there must be a place for some kind of objective analysis of what it means to a party external to the action. In this I concur with Reed and Alexander (2009), that "(s)uccessful explanations are those that intertwine (the) meaning structures of investigators and actors in an effective way" (p21). However, that still leaves the question of the relative importance of the different *loci* of meaning: the main aim of this thesis is to interpret the meaning of various actions from the primary (though not sole) point of view of the actors in question. Although this process will unavoidably result in interpretations based on what the action meant to me (the investigator), nonetheless my goal (and hence a central motivating factor in the selection of a theoretical framework) is to allocate primacy to meanings *as understood by the actors*, rather than as understood by me, or another interpreter. In that way my goal is to "interpret" meaning, rather than to "discover" it (after Reed and Alexander, 2009). In this my views diverge somewhat from those of Geertz (1973), who differentiates between first, second and third order interpretations, and suggests that the focus of anthropological understanding are second and third order interpretations, rather than the motivations of the actors themselves (Geertz, ibid, p15). I would suggest that that this conclusion was inevitable in Geertz's strict application of Ricoeur's criteria for making action like a text, two of which are the fixation of action (detaching meaning from its event) and the autonomization of action (detachment from the actor(s)) (Ricoeur, 1971, p322). Although I would agree that many actions (and particularly

those that are connected to identity) are designed and undertaken for a particular audience, and thus that the audience's interpretation is an important part of what the action "means", (including what it means for the actor), it is also true that what an action means for the actor and how it is understood by the wider population is not always identical. Thus the possibility of the misinterpretations of the meaning of actions by development practitioners described by Oliver de Sardan (2005). I would suggest that this eventuality (misinterpretation of meaning) is more likely in the interpretation of everyday life and everyday actions, than in the deeply embedded cultural rituals that form the focus of so much anthropological analysis. Therefore, this kind of ethnographic study of the everyday requires a different idea of where meaning is located, affording primacy (though not exclusivity) to the actor.

Ricoeur's additional requirement (to make action like a text) of detachment of the action from the historical and social context in which it took place (decontextualisation) is also problematic for my purposes. It undermines my understanding of his (Ricoeur's) own stipulation that interpretation requires that we recognize the "conventions" that give one particular meaning to an action rather than another (Standen, 2013, p106). These conventions are neither timeless nor universal – they are determined in a particular place at a particular time, in a particular *context*. I would propose that it is the decontextualisation of action in economics texts, for example, that results in so many misinterpretations of those actions.

Additionally, the context within which a written text (a narrative, a story) was produced is almost always *embedded* in some way in the text, either through description, or the language and manners of the characters, or through metaphor, or

through the details of the plot, and is thus almost always "available" for interpretation within the text. Therefore, there can seldom be an absolute divorce between a text and context in which it was produced (as a rule writers do not write in perfect contextual vacuums), which context thus cannot be wholly ignored in its interpretation.

In adopting the requirement of the decontextualisation of action, Ricoeur seems to have put himself in a similar place to the structuralists, whom he criticized as follows: "(We have) two possibilities. We can, as readers, remain in the suspense of the text, treating it as a worldless and authorless object; in this case we explain the text in terms of its internal relations, its structure. On the other hand, we can lift the suspense and fulfill the text in speech, restoring it to living communication; in this case we interpret the text." (Ricoeur, 1991a, p113). The requirements of fixation, autonomisation and decontextualisation of action in order to make it like a text appear to me to run the real risk that action becomes exactly such a "worldless and authorless object". Ricoeur referred to the "surplus of meaning" that remains after the completion of an objective analysis like structuralism (Ricoeur, 1976, p45), but stripping action out of context may leave a similar residue of meaning uninterpreted. Moore (1990) highlights the contradiction: according to her analysis Ricoeur has emphasized "the construction of meaning in context" (Moore, ibid, p115), but at the same time he also stipulates that meaning can only be accessed by divorcing text and context.

Another important consequence of the proposed separation of action and context is the under-emphasis of power and relations of power in the production of meaning in the Ricoeurian action-like-text approach (Moore, 1990). In my fieldwork I realized

early on the importance of power, both in constraining what courses of action are actually available to the community gardeners, and in determining the range of outcomes from those actions. Power – political, social and economic – determines to a large extent what kinds of persons the gardeners can be, and what kinds of persons they can aspire to be. It was therefore essential that the theoretical framework used to interpret the empirical data take explicit and detailed account both of these power relations, and their impact on limiting and determining meaningful action.

In summary then, while Ricoeur's goal in making action like a text through fixation, autonomisation and decontextualisation (as described in Ricoeur, 1971) was to be able to access the *meaning* of the action, in certain important respects this has not been achieved: many of the factors central to interpreting the meaning of the action appear instead to be diminished through this process. I would assert that this is particularly the case with respect to everyday actions (as opposed to the big historically "relevant" actions considered meaningful by Ricoeur), where the actor's motivations and the context within which the action takes place are central to interpreting meaning. The rigid *a priori* requirements of making an action like a text make the application of Ricoeur's textual interpretive theories to everyday action unsatisfactory, although to my mind those theories themselves (of the interpretation of narratives) remained very relevant to my interpretive requirements. How, then, to proceeed?

Standen (2013) suggests that in fact Ricoeur did not believe that the approach of action-as-text was the *only* way to understand meaningful action: just as he (Ricoeur) was clear that there was no one way in which to interpret a text, so he accepted that

there were multiple possible ways of interpreting action. Standen (ibid) asserts that "(i)t is up to us …… to be aware of and to judge what it is that "The Model of the Text" may help us see, and to an equal extent as to what it may leave obscure" (p58). For my purposes there were certainly aspects of Ricoeur's theory of text interpretation that I wanted to retain (most particularly his approach towards the interpretation of narratives as narratives, and his views on the location of meaning in a text), but I wanted to avoid the *a priori* requirements of making "like a text" the action that I observed.

Ricoeur did not propose an alternative way of interpreting action **as a text**. However, what he did have was a theory of how *identity* was closely related to *narrativity*; that our personal identity is essentially narrative, contained and expressed in the stories that we tell in order to make sense of the disorderly experience of our existence (Hamilton, 2014). Ricoeur (1991b) described our lives "as an *activity and a passion in search of a narrative*" (p29, emphasis in original). It is through the stories that people tell that "(they) come to *imagine* and *know* themselves" (Kearney, 1996, p182, emphasis in original).

Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity has found considerable purchase across a range of disciplines, from anthropology to psychology. From the perspective of my research requirements it has a number of compelling features. Firstly, it places human agency at the centre of the creation and management of identity – in the creative emplotment of the narrative by the story teller. Secondly, it specifically incorporates notions of temporality and temporal coherence (Ezzy, 1998), which I believed were central to the meaning-making processes that I observed. Finally, Ricoeur's view (after the

similar sentiment of Karl Marx) was that "we learn to become the *narrator* and hero *of our own story*, without actually becoming the *author of our own life*" (Ricoeur, 1991b, p32, emphasis in original). That is, although we construct our narrative identities, we are not free to construct *any* narrative that we desire: "there is only a limited repertoire of available representations and stories" that we can make use of to construct our own personal narratives (Somers, 1994, p629). Power and power relations (together with social and cultural norms) are central in determining what narratives are available to whom at what time (ibid). That is, the concept of narrative identity specifically includes the limitations and constraints imposed on human action by the context (including power relations) within which it takes place, through the concept of *authorship*.

Power is a central theme in this thesis, dealing as it does with contestations of identity – the struggle to be a particular kind of person; most specifically, a *different* kind of person than those presupposed (and thus effectively imposed) by mainstream development policy, through its discourses and how these portray (characterise) the poor and the food insecure. Conceptualising identity as a narrative identity effectively conceptualizes the struggle over identity as a struggle over authorship, since the very idea of a "narrative" presupposes an author. Thus the struggle to be a particular kind of person is manifested as opposition to a particular imposed *narrative* identity and the efforts to rewrite some of one's own narrative; to appropriate a part of its authorship.

In this thesis I have drawn parallels between Steve Biko's understanding of Black Consciousness as "an inward-looking process" (Biko 1978, p29) and De Sousa

Santos' (2004) description of "the sociology of absences" that defines mainstream development (p238). I have proposed that both may be considered as constituting a *contestation of the authorship of identity*. Biko considered liberation as primarily a "liberation movement of the mind" (Arnold, 1978, pxiv) and saw as a central goal of Black Consciousness changing the belief of Blacks that they were inherently inferior to Whites; which belief he ascribed to the fact that the intrinsic identity of Blacks was determined in "White" terms, against "White" benchmarks. I would suggest that much of this imposed identity was in fact a **narrative** identity (although Biko did not use this term). The fundamental inferiority of the mind that Blacks were made to believe under colonialism and apartheid was conveyed in large part through *narratives* – the ways in which Blacks were described in White popular discourse, in official policy documents, and in the stories that were told, not just by Whites, but also by Blacks. Thus, a liberation movement of the mind required that Blacks, not Whites, became the authors of new narratives of identity, narratives that would "show the black people the value of their own standards and outlook" (Biko ibid, p30). The *narrative* component of this conceptualization of liberation is, I would argue, underscored by Biko's choice of "***I write what like***" as the title for a series of articles about his philosophy of Black Consciousness published in the monthly newsletter of the South African Student's Association (SASO) in 1970 and 1971.

De Sousa Santos (2004) describes how certain kinds of persons, and certain kinds of existence are "actively produced as non-existent" (p239), and thus as legitimate objects for the "fix" of development. This active production of absences takes place largely via the narratives of mainstream development – what is described and how it is described. For example, the failure of DAFF's *Zero Hunger Programme* (DAFF,

2012) to consider that the decisions of households not to grow their own food may be a rational and legitimate choice. Instead, these households are portrayed as "lacking" something – assets, skills or commitment to producing their own food. This policy document also fails to articulate a link between household hunger, high food prices and the long-term rise in real profits of South African food processors and retailers. This effectively "erases" the possibility that corporate rent seeking may be a cause of household hunger, and thus precludes alternative food networks as a possible remedy to food insecurity. It is thus the hungry themselves who must be "developed" by being taught the value of good nutrition and how to grow vegetables.

Thus, existence and non-existence is produced by a particular *authorship* of the narrative of household hunger; and the reversal of this (i.e. to make the absent present) requires an overthrow and replacement of author. De Sousa Santos (2004) echoes Ricoeur's (1991a) proposition that interpretation requires that we open up a world in his conceptualisation of resistance (to non-existence) as an "enlargement of the world ….. of credible experience" (De Sousa Santos, ibid, p239).

During the course of the ethnographic study that is the basis of this thesis I was constantly confronted by the key role of narratives in the management of identity: the stories that the community gardeners and other informants told me, told each other and told third parties (such as government officials) were in many instances conscious and mindful constructions. Their purpose appeared to be to present a particular version of themselves (past, present and/or future) to others, to make sense of their or others' experiences, and/or to explain planned future actions. At the same time, however, meaning-making functions were not *limited* to narrative: it was not only

what people said that mediated and organized their sense of self, but also what they did (including their thoughtful use of material objects) – their *meaningful actions*. A comprehensive "reading" of their narrative identities could not, in my assessment, be complete without incorporating these actions and the objects that they utilised – what people did, and what they chose to do it with (or, just as importantly, without) as well as what they said. This is one of the fundamental basics of conducting ethnographic research: that what people say or do should be considered together with what they do or say in order to obtain greater insight into the meaning-making process at work.

Despite its appeal to me, to the best of my knowledge Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity has only been applied to the interpretation of spoken narratives – i.e. the stories that people tell – rather than to meaningful action, and it is meaningful action that is the subject of this thesis. I was interested in much more than just what people said; I was also interested in what they did, and what objects they used (or didn't use) in that process. In fact, I did not believe that these things (speaking and doing) could be neatly separated from each other in any endeavour to interpret meaning in everyday life. My working definition of "meaningful action" for the purpose of this thesis includes actions and objects together with what is said. After all, sometimes "actions speak louder than words".

I would suggest that excluding what people do and the objects that they utilize in that process from a definition of "narrative" in the sense of "narrative identity" is in fact at odds with how Ricoeur himself conceptualized a written narrative: almost all written narratives combine what characters say, what they do, and a range of objects that they do it with in order to tell a story. In addition, it was clear to me that the community

gardeners had a *narrative intention* underpinning their meaningful actions and their corresponding use of objects. That is, they intended these actions and objects to tell a particular story about who they were (or had been) and who they wanted to be.

On this basis – the interconnectedness of saying and doing, together with the narrative intention of the gardeners - it did not seem to me to be a very big step to expand the usual definition of "narrative" used in most applications of Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity to incorporate action and objects into something closer to Alexander's (2004), Harré's (2002) and Goffman's (1959) ideas of "performance", which includes both action and speaking (story telling), and that provides the context within which objects acquire meaning. I have, therefore, proposed a theory of "performance identity" which is an expanded version of Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity articulated with his approach towards the interpretation of narrative as narrative. Ricoeur's theories of the *structure* of a narrative and the underlying *creative process* in its production are thus central features of the interpretive method applied to performance identity (i.e. a synthesis of action, spoken stories and the use of objects) in this thesis.

2.2. Performance Identity: an expanded Ricoeurian framework for the interpretation of meaningful action

2.2.1. Mediating the Self: Narrative as Performance

> *"It's like everyone tells a story about themselves inside their own head. Always. All the time. That story makes you what you are. We build ourselves out of that story."*
>
> *(Patrick Rothfuss –* ***The Name of the Wind)***

Ricouer's conceptualization of identity is based on a dialectic between *idem* – self-sameness over time, and *ipse* – selfhood, the ability to change; an understanding that the relationship between the two (i.e. maintaining an identity while still adapting to change) is mediated by narrative; and that personal identity is therefore a *narrative* identity (Ricoeur, 1991b). Central to this Ricoeurian narrative identity, and its construction, is Aristotle's theory of emplotment, which "constitutes the creative centre of the narrative" (ibid, p24).

Ricoeur (1991b) describes our lives "as an *activity and a passion in search of a narrative*" (p29, emphasis in original). This conceptualization of narrative identity is closely bound to Ricoeur's philosophy of action, which he, in turn, based on the Aristotelian idea that narrative was a form of imitation of action. Ricoeur proposed that the ways in which we understood ourselves and others were based on "an irreducible narrativity." (Dowling, 2011, p5). Ricoeur's self is a self that is fundamentally social (Ezzy, 1998), incorporating the concept of "*mutual recognition"* (Laitinen, 2011, p37, my emphasis), and the notion of a narrative reflects this: we tell

stories about ourselves *to someone*. (I would propose, as discussed in more detail further on in this thesis, that we do in fact construct narratives and performances that are intended solely for ourselves, to make sense of our lives *to ourselves*, and these are not always intended to be publicly heard or seen. However, I would also state that in most cases our narratives (and particularly our performances) are constructed in a social world, with the clear intention of having an audience.)

The stories that we construct and then tell about ourselves, our histories, our planned futures, and our relationships with others are the tools that we use to make sense of our lives – to manage our sense of who we are, who we have been and who we could be. The central characteristic of narrative identity is thus *mediation* (Laitinen, 2002) – to make sense of the contradictions in our lives and our sense of self, and Laitinen (ibid, p57 -58) identifies eight such mediating roles for these narratives:

(i) Mediation between concordance and discordance: configuring the heterogeneous parts of our lives into a unified whole.

(ii) Mediation between simultaneously living our lives and narrating it, between being both actor and narrator.

(iii) Mediation between tradition and innovation: what traditions do our narratives build on versus what our creative innovation makes new?

(iv) Mediation between fact and fiction: Ricoeur emphasized that not all of what we consider as historical "fact" is actually "true", but he was equally clear that "fiction and (the) representation of reality do not exclude one another….. fictional narrative is … mimetic" (Ricoeur ,1981, p291).

(v) Mediation between positive and normative, between objective fact and subjective judgment.

(vi) Mediation between *idem* – self-sameness over time, and *ipse* – selfhood, the ability to change (Ricoeur, 1991b).

(vii) Mediation between a *cogito* conceptualized as all-important, and one that is meaningless.

(viii) Mediation between the person's concurrent role as narrator and writer – she constructs the story (within limits, as discussed below) and she tells it (Ricoeur, 1991b).

To this list I would add a ninth: Mediation among past, present and future, that is, mediation of temporality. Laitinen (2002) has included temporal mediation under "concordance and discordance", but I would concur with Hamilton (2014) that narratives are *essentially* temporal: they anchor us in our pasts, help us to decipher the present, and assist us in imagining ourselves in the future. My observations in the field underpinned the centrality of temporal mediation in identity – the almost-constant efforts to make sense of the past and to connect that to a concurrently different, but same, present, and a shifting, uncertain future.

In contrast to the requirement of the decontextualistion of action in his theory of action-as-text discussed above, Ricoeur emphasised the importance of the particular social and historical context in determining the details of a particular narrative identity. We continually "update" our narrative identity – in order to preserve our sense of "self-sameness" over time - by reinterpreting both the past and the future: "The story of a life continues to be refigured by all the truthful or fictive stories a

subject tells about himself or herself." (Ricoeur, 1988, p246). We do this updating with (subjective) reference to the world around us (Ezzy, 1998). Narrative identity (and associated meaning making) may thus be conceptualized as *embedded* in its context, which context is social, spatial and temporal.

I have proposed in this thesis that the notion of "performance" may be used to expand and build on Ricoeur's interlinked theories of narrative and narrative identity, to provide a more comprehensive theory for the analysis of meaningful action and associated material culture. Alexander (2004) asserts that the study of culture has been "polarized" (p527) between structuralist approaches based on linguistics, and those that treat meaning as practice. He proposes the concept of "social action as cultural performance" (p529) as a bridge between the two, and draws analogies between social performances and theatrical performances. He defines cultural performance as "the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation" (ibid). Goffman's (1959) framework that he developed to analyse this aspect of social life was similarly based on a theatrical performance. He proceeded from the starting point that most individuals wish to be thought of in a certain way, in order to manage the way in which they are treated by others.

It is through social performance that identity is created and managed (Woodward, 2007). The concept of "performance" thus includes both what people say (the spoken "script"), and characters and action (the directing "script"), and is specifically intended to say something about something to someone (just as Ricoeur defined a discourse as something more than just the structure of a language – Ricoeur, 1971)

Harré (2002), further emphasises the role of material objects in social performance, which approach I have utilized in part in this thesis as a useful way of incorporating objects into the analysis of the meaning making processes that underpin action.

Making "performance", rather than just narrative, the object of interpretation in order to gain insight into meaningful action, and the ways in which identity is mediated by such meaningful action, is, I believe, very useful, since it incorporates both actions and objects into "story telling". However, in my assessment both Harré (2002) and Alexander (2004) have rather under-theorised temporality: Alexander's (ibid) notion of temporal sequence (i.e. beginning, middle and end) in a theatrical performance does not adequately address the complexity of a simultaneously present past, present and future that is so crucial to meaning making and identity. Ricoeur's conceptualistion of historical time, together with a reading of Reinhart Koselleck's theories of time action, make, in my view, a much better interpretive approach for theorizing both the temporality of identity, and the centrality of temporality in identity.

I am also not as ready as Alexander (2004) appears to be to dismiss theories of action as text. Much of Ricoeur's theory of the interpretation of narratives (in particular his theory of metaphor and his analysis of creative emplotment) is, I would assert, very useful in accounting for agency and imagination in the creation and management of identity. For these reasons (i.e. theoretical robustness and comprehensiveness), I have mostly drawn analogies between performances of identity and Ricoeur's theory of the construction of narratives rather than with the construction of theatrical performances,

as proposed by Alexander (ibid). In conceptualizing the idea of "performance identity" as an expanded version of Ricoeur's narrative identity (rather than as a type of theatrical performance) I would propose that I am able to incorporate all the mediating roles of that narrative identity to my analysis of the relationship between meaning and action. The ways in which Riceour proposes we understand both the *structure* of a narrative (plot and temporal coherence) and the *creative process* (imagination) underlying its production are thus central features of the interpretive method applied to performance identity in this thesis. From this point forward I will refer to this expanded Ricoeurian narrative identity as "performance identity".

2.2.2. Emplotment and the creative imagination: agency at work

"Are we not ready to recognize in the power of the imagination …. the capacity for letting new worlds shape our understanding of ourselves?"

(Ricoeur, 1981, p181)

My conceptualization of a "performance identity" specifically incorporates Ricoeur's theory of creative emplotment in narrative. Thus performances of identity are seen neither as completely random nor as unplanned. People *construct* and *situate* themselves in these performances just as the author of a narrative would (Somers, 1994). It is the **plot** of the performance that organizes a range of (often seemingly unconnected) actions, persons and objects into a coherent and sensible whole, thereby imposing the semantic order of causality – this happened because that happened (Dowling, 2011). In this way the plot of the performance of identity is the key mediator between the concordant and the discordant, to make sense of a life. Ricoeur

"borrowed" Aristotle's concept of emplotment (*muthos*) as the basis of a theory of the creative emplotment "of lived temporal experience" that is depicted within a narrative (Ricoeur, 1984, p31). The plot is "the semantic innovation" at the heart of the narrative, and is the product of the human imagination (ibid, pix), "an accounting (however fantastic or implicit) of why a narrative has the story line it does' (Somers, 1994, p616).

Aristotle proposed that a work of fiction is *mimesis praxeos*, the "imitation of an action" (Dowling, 2011, p1). It is not, however, a perfectly accurate representation of an observed action or set of actions, but rather a *creative* imitation (Ricoeur, 1984). Ricoeur builds on Aristotle's definition using what he termed "threefold *mimesis*" (ibid p52) - *mimesis1, mimesis2* and *mimesis3*, although all three are conceptualized as interlinked parts of one process. *Mimesis2* ("configuration") concerns emplotment, and is positioned between *mimesis1* ("prefiguration") and *mimesis3* ("refiguration") (ibid, p53). *Mimesis1* is the "pre-understanding" (Moore, 1990, p103) that is necessary before emplotment can take place. Developing a plot for a performance that will be intelligible both to ourselves and others "presupposes a familiarity" (Ricoeur, 1984, p55) with a range of actions, cultural conventions, actors, likely consequences, causality, and so on. A performance is (almost always) intended 'for others ' (Alexander, 2004, p529). *Mimesis1* (prefiguration) thus informs the "intelligibility" of the plot and is what should ensure that the performance will be interpreted by the audience in one particular way rather than another, by situating the plot in a pre-existing meaning structure that is common to narrator and audience: "every narrative presupposes a familiarity with (particular) terms" (Ricoeur, 1984, p55). Further, "human action can be narrated …… because it is always already articulated by signs,

rules, and norms" (ibid, p57). With respect to the meaningful action of performance identity *mimesis1* may thus be considered analogous to the underlying meaning structure that makes one particular action have the meaning A, rather than the meaning B (Kaplan, 2012). A performance is intelligible when the meaning structure is the same both for the actor who constructs the performance and the audience who observes it.

I have argued in this thesis that at least some misinterpretations of motivation and action (resulting in Oliver De Sardan's (2005) described mismatch between what development practitioners expect and what actually takes place) may be attributed to a divergence in the content of *mimesis1* between the actor and part of her audience. That is, there is no universal "familiarity", no "one" pre-existing meaning structure (the prefiguration of *mimesis1*) common to the target beneficiaries of development initiatives such as community gardens, and the development practitioners (or commentators) who observe their performance. In this instance, the actor has constructed a plot utilizing a particular prefiguration of action that diverges from that held by the audience. Thus the very real possibility that the entire plot of the performance will be misunderstood.

Mimesis3 "marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader" (Ricoeur, 1984, p71). *Mimesis3* is thus the point at which the performance occurs, where the plot becomes performance, where it becomes real, and where it is interpreted and becomes part of the world. Between *mimesis1* and *mimesis3* lies *mimesis2* – emplotment, which "constitutes the creative centre of the narrative" (Ricoeur 1991b, p24) and is the "organizing theme" for a particular performance

(Ezzy, 1998, p254). The plot links the theme or the point of the performance with the characters, with what they say, and with what they do (Ricoeur, 1984). The key point here is *creativity*: the plots of our performances are much more than just replications of prior or other performances, they are imagined – "*mimesis2* opens the kingdom of the *as if*" (Ricoeur, ibid, p64, emphasis in original). The source of this creativity is the human imagination – "the productive imagination" (ibid, p68). This imagination allows us to consider the possible outcomes of different actions – "if I do this in this way, then this is the likely outcome" – and allocates order to a group of seemingly disconnected events and characters. Narrative identity is thus neither given nor static; rather it is fluid, malleable and shifting: "we never cease to reinterpret the narrative identity that constitutes us" (Ricoeur 1991b, p32). The twin concepts of a creative imagination and a productive imagination are intertwined with, and are the products of, human agency. Without agency we would not have the ability to reinterpret ourselves; we would not be able to select among the imagined outcomes of different actions; and thus we would not make choices. Of course this agency is not unbounded, as discussed below, but it is present and centre in the concept of creative emplotment.

Imagination also determines what we believe is possible (Kaplan, 2012) and thus also has a temporal dimension – I imagine a future outcome of my actions while in the present. Without this inter-temporal experimentation there can be no action (Vlacos, 2014).

This is not to say that our creative imagination can create *any* plot: Not only are we limited by what narratives are actually available to us (as mediated by the context of

power and power relations), but a plot is also configured "by the interplay of innovation and sedimentation" (Ricoeur, 1984, p68). The actor may exercise innovation in certain aspects of the performance, but if the entire performance is an innovation (that is, if it has no reference at all to what has gone before) it will not be intelligible. There are thus certain "rules" for the composition of narrative (and thus performance) that limit the extent of innovation and experimentation that can take place in the process of emplotment (Ricoeur, 1991). Thus all "new" narratives must have reference to existing narratives in order to be intelligible.

2.2.3. Temporal coherence: performance, plot and temporality

The past is never dead, it is not even past.

William Faulkner

Ezzy (1998, p239) points out that disciplines like sociology (and, I would add, anthropology) generally locate self-identity in relationships, rather than in time. Hamilton (2013) asserts that the real value of Ricoeur's philosophy for the study of identity is its focus on the *fundamental temporality of identity*. Ricoeur's conceptualization of narrative identity is founded on his attempts to answer St Augustine's question "What, then, is time?" (Ricoeur, 1984, pxi). Ricoeur proposed that eternal time only becomes "human time" when "it is organized after the manner of a narrative", and that, correspondingly, a narrative may only be considered meaningful "to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (Ricoeur 1984, p3). Ricoeur's narrative identity (and thus my conceptualization of "performance identity") is a temporal identity – locating the self in a performance that

makes sense of and gives order to the simultaneously present past, present present and present future (memory, attention and expectation) described by St Augustine (Ricoeur, 1984).

The dynamic nature of Ricoeur's narrative identity forms, in turn, the basis of a temporal theory of action: action takes place in the present, but it is imagined and constructed with constant reference to both our experience of the past and our expectations of the future. The ongoing reworking of our narrative identities is necessitated by the constantly shifting relationship between the past, the present and the future: our experiences change and our expectations of the future change, and thus our chosen actions (and the pool of possibilities that they are selected from) change. In order to preserve a sense of continuity (Ricoeur's "concordance") we need to keep adjusting our understanding of the past and our imagination of the future to make the present intelligible (Ezzy, 1998). The important point here is that our past is not "given"; it is not a series of immutable chronological facts. Instead, what we consider as "the past" is a complex mix of what we actually remember (including what we don't remember), how we remember it, what we imagine we remember, collective (social) memory, and the memories of others (our parents, our friends, the books we read, etc.) In this way, much of our past may be said to be as much the product of imagination as our anticipated future.

Meaningful action may thus be described as taking place at the intersection of what Koselleck (2004) termed "the space of experience" and "the horizon of expectation" (p256). The space of experience conditions our "historical self-understanding" (Tribe, 2004, pxix) – how we understand ourselves in relation to past events, and in terms of

those past events. Experience is the past made present., viewed through a range of different filters. Expectation is some imagined future made present. The word "horizon" (rather than the "space" of expectation of Ricoeur) is intended to convey the idea of a line "behind which a new space of experience will open, but which cannot yet be seen" (Koselleck, 2004, p260). We continually reconfigure both our experiences and our expectations, based on a range of new inputs, new events or new memories, either personal, or of others or of the collective.

A central part of Koselleck's theory of time is that neither expectation nor experience exist independently - "No expectation without experience; no experience without expectation" (Koselleck, 2004, p257). Meaningful action presupposes an (imagined) expectation of something in the future (i.e. this will happen if that happens – if I do that); but we cannot imagine ourselves participating in some future event if we have no reference point at all for it in our experience (keeping in mind the definition of "experience" above, which includes much more than just direct personal experience). At the same time, our expectations for the future condition how we understand (and reinterpret) our past – our experience (Pickering, 2004). Koselleck (2004) cautions that experience and expectation "are not to be statically related to each other" (p262) in a simplistic manner. That is, a person's experience *conditions* their expectations, rather than sets clear limits and forms to those expectations. However, the relationship between experience and expectation, and most particularly the way in which this relationship conditions present action, becomes most relevant in times of great social change or upheaval.

One of the key proposals made by Koselleck (2004) is that the relationship between past and future has been fundamentally altered by modernity; that is, we no longer expect that the past will be a reliable guide to the future. Instead, modernity could be said to be characterized by a growing gap between the past and the future, which gap is generally in benefit of the future – we expect the future to be considerably better than the past, and as a result we make greater demands on that future (ibid, p3). At the same time, experience is further and further "detached" from a rapidly expanding horizon of expectation and is no longer a reliable guide for the future (Pickering, 2004,p286). That is, we do not only expect that the future will be better than the past, but also that it will be fundamentally different (Koselleck, 2004).

The idea of a better future, together with the detachment of that future from a "primitive" or "backward" past, is also the dominant theme in mainstream development theory, which is based on an underlying idea of linear "progress" towards some better future depicted by development policies and practitioners. This conceptualization of development is closely intertwined with modernity (Kippler, 2010) and articulates clear ideas about what is considered "developed" and what is considered "undeveloped" or "underdeveloped" through its discourse (Crush, 1995). These themes are echoed in the discourse of development in South Africa, which has an over-arching goal of creating "a better life" for black South Africans, which life is not only imagined as fundamentally *better* than, but also fundamentally *different* from life under apartheid. In fact, it is better *because* it is different. We could, therefore, say that development policy in South Africa is characterized by the desire to create a significant detachment between experience and expectation. The referred-to experience and expectation tend to be defined in overwhelmingly materialistic terms

in the mainstream development discourse – such as asset ownership (from land dispossession to land ownership); employment (from farm labourer to farmer); income (from poverty to prosperity); and standard of living (from shack dweller to home owner); and so on. What is missing in this materialistic conceptualization of past, present and future is how (or even if) this chasm between experience and expectation (which is essentially a *temporal* dissonance) impacts on an identity that is fundamentally temporal in nature: How do we reconfigure our identities in the face of such an enormous shift between who we were (which includes who we could have been) and who we now can be (which must be related in some way to who we were)? And how does that shifting relationship between present past, present present and present future influence our actions and choices in the present present? These questions refer in turn back to Gibson's (2011) assertion that what is at stake for the poor in South Africa is not their material circumstances, but the kind of persons they want to be.

The notion of meaningful action as mediated by past and future in the context of a fundamental divergence between experience and expectation in post-1994 South Africa is a central theme in this thesis: the community gardeners (and in particular the younger gardeners) find themselves at a complex temporal intersection: a past where possible identities (that is, the repertoire of "available" performances) was greatly circumscribed by the conditions of apartheid, and a "New" South African future where this repertoire is supposed to be greatly expanded by "freedom", but where the ability to construct new performance plots for this expanded future is constrained by (actual and imagined) experiences of the past. In addition, the actual repertoire of available performances is bounded significantly by the reality of economics, politics

and power. Performance identity is our attempt to create temporal coherence in the "now" in terms of both experience and expectation. When the gap between these two appears as great as it does for the members of the community gardens, productive imagination and creative emplotment face a considerable challenge in mediating performance identity.

Additionally, because my notion of performance identity is essentially *temporal* in nature – i.e. in constant search of temporal coherence – the struggle over the *authorship* of that identity is also temporal: performance identity requires temporal coherence, but whose version of past, present and future holds sway? As Biko put it (Biko, 1978, p29) – "the colonialists were not satisfied merely with holding a people in their grip and emptying the Native's brain of all form and content, they turned to the past of the oppressed people and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it. ….. No wonder the African child learns to hate his heritage in his days at school (and) to find solace only in close identification with white society."

This thesis proposes that it is the desire to achieve temporal coherence in the face of this profound detachment between experience and expectation that is at the heart of motivating actions and choices that development practitioners are so quick to label as "irrational" or "ignorant" or "misinformed".

CHAPTER THREE

THE LIFE OF A COMMUNITY GARDEN

"Here is the miracle. The experience as experienced, as lived, remains private, but its sense, its meaning, becomes public. Communication in this way is the overcoming of the radical non-communicability of the lived experience as lived."

(Ricoeur, 1976, p16)

3.1 A demographic overview

Gauteng Province is a place of enormous demographic range: Joburg Metro[11] (the municipality that contains both Johannesburg and Sandton) is one of the largest and wealthiest in Africa. It is home to the national Stock Exchange, huge international banking and financial services corporations, lush suburbs and expensive shopping malls. It is also home to vast informal settlements characterised by high levels of poverty and household hunger. This pattern is replicated across the province, in the smaller metro areas of Tshwane and Ekurhuleni. Urbanisation is progressing rapidly, particularly in the Joburg and Tshwane metros. However, there are also parts of the province that are far less developed and more rural in nature. It is in one of these areas that the community gardens that are the focus of this study are located. The area is predominantly semi-rural in nature, with human settlements and economic development concentrated in one relatively prosperous large town (some 30 kilometres from the gardens) and a number of smaller towns within 15 kilometres of the gardens. There are many informal settlements in the area, some located adjacent to the towns, while others are relatively isolated from the towns, usually standing on

[11] The term "metro" is used to designate a Category A local municipality – the largest urban areas in South Africa

either side of a secondary road. There is a lot of commercial farming activity in the area where I conducted my fieldwork. Around Motse there is a relatively high density of medium and large farmers growing a range of vegetables, destined mainly for wholesale fresh produce markets or formal retailers. Closer to the town of Steynsville (where the Tshimo garden is located) there is a shift towards dryland crops such as maize and cattle.

Poverty and unemployment rates in the study area[12] (as determined by the 2011 National Census) are relatively high, although by no means the highest in South Africa: The (narrowly defined[13]) unemployment rate was at a little over 26% in 2011 (StatsSA, 2012a). Around 72% of households in the study area in 2011 had an annual household income of R76,400[14] or less (http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=964).

Every day that I worked in the community gardens I traveled less than 50 kilometres from my home in suburban Johannesburg, but in many ways I may as well have been traveling ten times that distance, so great was the contrast between where I lived and the location of the gardens. Much of this difference was initially experienced as pleasant: I found it extremely enjoyable on many days to drive against the rush of commuters, away from the city out into the countryside. The summer in which I started my fieldwork had been characterized by good rain, and everywhere was lush and green. My father's family had been farmers, and I had spent most of my holidays on their dairy farm. I enjoyed getting out of town so much on a sunny morning that I felt almost guilty. This was, after all, supposed to be work.

[12] The District Municipality in which the gardens are located
[13] Excluding discouraged job seekers
[14] About $11,500 at the 2011 exchange rate

It did not, however, take much to dispel the idea of a rural idyll: Most of the locations[15] (informal settlements) that I visited while working with the two cooperatives were grim places indeed, with very little in the way of basic infrastructure, such as electricity, running water or even toilets in some cases. The towns of Steynsville (small) and Rooidal (medium-sized) where I spent some time (Rooidal as the place where the Motse group had a formal retail client and Steynsville because I drove through it to reach the Tshimo garden) are largely grimy and occasionally dilapidated places, slowly falling apart under the twin pressures of government neglect and a fading local economy. There is little sign of any progress since 1994 in the lives of most of the people who live in and around these towns. A community garden project often represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to better a life.

3.2. Food, diet and food security policy

3.2.1. The official picture

Household income data for the area in which the gardens are located seem to suggest that food insecurity rates would be high, although it is difficult accurately to estimate food insecurity levels, not least because of the lack of consistent definitions and data at a national level (Altman *et al*, 2009). There is also a difference between outright hunger (which appears to have declined in South Africa since 2002 – *ibid*) and under-nutrition, which remains a serious issue, but is often difficult to identify and to quantify.

[15] I have used the terms "location" to refer to an informal settlement from this point onward, since it is the term that the gardeners themselves used to refer to where they lived as well as the other informal settlements that we visited.

The most important factor determining whether or not a person is food insecure is how much money they have (Jacobs, 2009). That is, food insecurity in South Africa is not primarily a production issue (the country produces and/or imports enough food), but rather an access issue. Access is determined by the retail price of food relative to income; and the retail price of food in South Africa is determined to a very considerable degree by the significant market power enjoyed by both processors and retailers (Van der heijden and Vink, 2012). This market power can be seen in the simultaneous coexistence of high profitability of food retailers and processors and high levels of food insecurity, together with a steadily increasing gap between the farm gate price of food and the retail price of food (NAMC 2014, 2103 and 2012).

Therefore, household income can provide an idea of how much (nutritional) food households can actually afford to purchase. Even the poorest households do not direct all their income to food expenditure, given the high cash demands of living in a modern economy. Estimates are that the poorest households in South Africa spend between 37% (Aliber, 2009) and 57% (Martins, 2005) of their income on food, while StatsSA estimates an average South African household expenditure on food and non-alcoholic beverages of around just under 13% (StatsSA, 2012a).

Recent research by the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP, 2012) suggested that a fairly modest, but still nutritionally balanced and calories-sufficient basket of food (based on October 2012 prices) would cost R7,074 per month for a family of 2 adults and 2 children – almost R85,000 per annum. A less nutritionally balanced basket, and containing only about 60% of daily calorie requirements, would cost R2,308 per month for the same family size, which is around R27,700 per annum.

The table below indicates a range of estimated possible annual household expenditure on food in the area where the two gardens are located, for 2012. In order to be able to compare with the BFAP data, I adjusted the 2011[16] figure of household income (R76,400) by the 5.75% rate of consumer inflation recorded for 2012 (SARB, 2014), to get the rough estimate that 72% of households in the study area had a household income of R80,793 or less in 2012. I then applied each of the three estimates of the percentage of household expenditure allocated to food set out above, and using household income (i.e. R80,793) as a proxy for expenditure (which is most likely an over-estimation).

Table 1: Possible shares of annual household expenditure allocated to food (2012 estimate) – percentage of household income (poorest 72% of households)

% of household expenditure allocated to food	**13%**	**37%**	**57%**
Annual food expenditure	R10,503	R29,893	R46,052

Source: Census 2011, SARB (2014) and own calculations.

The average household size in the study area was 3 persons in 2011 (StatsSA, 2012b). If we adjust the BFAP (2012) food cost figures above for a 3-person household, we can derive estimates of "required" annual household food expenditure of R63,700 for the nutritional and calorie-sufficient basket, and R20,772 for the less adequate basket. This is, of course, a rough estimate, since the mix of adults and children will vary by household, and thus impact on the child-adult food basket mix and cost. However,

[16] Census data is only collected every five years, and other official statistical publications of household income do not disaggregate to the municipal level.

what we can see from these estimates is that there is a high possibility that a significant number of households in the study area are not spending enough money on food to consume a nutritionally and calorie adequate basket of food (even when we have used a proxy for household consumption expenditure that probably over-estimates actual spending). These conclusions support research by Jacobs (2009) that suggested that only 20% of South African households spend enough on food to purchase a basic, but nutritionally balanced basket. (It is also sobering to note that the annual income of the Motse gardeners from their garden – and they were doing much better financially than their colleagues in the Tshimo project - was no more than about R10,000.) It is thus plausible that there are high levels of food insecurity and/or under-nutrition in the area, and, therefore, a good argument could be made for government interventions in this respect.

Food security initiatives in Gauteng Province currently fall under their Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD). One of the outputs of the Department's 2010 – 2014 strategic plan is "improved access to affordable and diverse food" (GDARD, 2009, p2). Reflecting the contents of national food security plans (such as DAFF's *Zero Hunger Programme*), the Department's strategic plan indicates a very limited comprehension of the drivers of food insecurity: an assumption is made that increased agricultural production will reduce food insecurity, an assumption that fails to recognize the market realities (such as the widening farm – gate retail price gap) that make food unaffordable.

GDARD's policy is based on a limited assessment of why people are food insecure (they cannot afford to buy food because they are poor) which almost completely

excludes the reasons why food prices are so high in the first place (which would focus policy on reducing food costs, and increasing access by increasing affordability). Thus the main target of food security policy in the province is increased production of food by the food insecure themselves. In terms of how the Department plans to achieve it's goal of "improved access to affordable and diverse food", the key strategy is "(t)o provide support to ensure that household producing part of their own food (sic)" (GDARD, 2009, p27). This strategy reflects the first of the four pillars that make up DAFF's *Zero Hunger Programme* – "improving food production capacity of households and poor resource (sic) farmers" (DAFF, 2012, p10).

This approach effectively shifts the responsibility for better food access onto the poor, rather than the market structures that have made food unaffordable. The overwhelming focus by GDARD (once again reflecting national policy and the strategies of other provinces) in this regard is vegetable growing. That is, there are almost no initiatives that consider the own production of other kinds of food, such as meat (like chickens) or eggs or dairy products (although these are supported as purely "commercial" ventures). All of the GDARD officials that I discussed food security with were quite clear on the idea that production of vegetables was the key to better food security, holding fresh vegetables up as some kind of magic solution to dietary constraints and nutritional shortcomings, effectively ignoring the impact of shortages of other food groups, such as protein, on overall nutrition and wellbeing.

3.2.2. Daily diet

Although I certainly cannot argue against the merits of fresh vegetables in a diet, the vegetable-as-cure-all for food insecurity did not reflect the reality of the diets of the

people I spent time with. The main staple of their diets is carbohydrates – maize ("mielie") meal, bread and sugar. Vetkoek (deep fried balls of dough similar to doughnuts) – either home made or purchased from informal traders – are also a popular foodstuff, often eaten for breakfast. Meat is a favoured food item, but its cost means that it cannot be consumed each day, and most people eat cheap cuts of chicken or beef offal when they do eat meat. Live chickens are very popular when they can be afforded. They are seen as superior in quality to the pre-packed or frozen (IQF) chicken available in formal retail outlets, and per kilogram offer relatively good value since the entire chicken can be consumed. There is a strong preference for white chickens – often the culls or the regular take-off of the local intensive egg business – which are judged to have "softer meat" than the hardscrabble chickens seen around the informal settlements. I did not conduct a taste comparison, but the conclusion seems reasonable: a 10-week old well-fed caged cull would almost certainly have softer meat than a 16-week old highly active less well-fed "location chicken". More expensive food items such as live chickens tend to be on sale at the end of the month, as well as on "social grant[17] day", when large numbers of informal traders collect at grant payment points.

Food is sourced from a combination of formal retail outlets (which have a heavy presence in every town), and local small supermarkets and spaza[18] shops. Lillian at Motse described to me how each month she would do a bulk shop at a large supermarket in Rooidal, which has month-end packages of maize meal, cooking oil,

[17] Social grants such as pensions, disability payments and child-care grants are paid once a month, but on different dates in different places. Most small towns have one payment point, with larger towns having more than one. There are additional payment points in rural and semi-rural areas. This affords a range of opportunities for traders within a particular month to access potential consumers.

[18] Spaza shops are generally small (sometimes no more than a few square metres) located in the locations, usually adjacent to the shop owner's house. They sell basic foodstuffs, often in very small sizes or quantities, and sweets and snacks.

flour, sugar and tea at special prices. Additional daily food requirements are usually purchased from smaller shops and traders within or adjacent to the community, even though the goods tend to be higher priced, because this saves the high cost of traveling by taxi to town. Across the main road from Motse is "The China Shop[19]", a fairly large, old and very dirty, dark shop owned (or at least managed) by two apparently recent immigrants from China, who speak little English and make no attempt to hide their disdain for their mostly poor, black customers. The China Shop sells a wide range of items, from basic household goods to vegetables, cold drinks and sweets. Tomatoes cost around R10 for five, much the same as onions. Milk is purchased in long-life tetrapaks (no electricity means no fridges) for around R18 per litre. There are a number of shops within Motse itself, although I only visited one – a small spaza shop in the corner of the yard of one of the houses a few hundred metres from the garden. This shop sells mostly small impulse/luxury goods – such as sweets and chips - and small packages of basic items such as maize meal, sugar, candles, tinned goods, etc. Many of the inhabtants of Motse did not have the relative luxury of month-end bulk shopping like Lillian, and could only afford the smaller packs of staple items, despite the effective higher price. Tomatoes and onions generally cost R1 each at the spaza. In Steynsville there is a large Spar and Shoprite[20], with the latter being favoured for bulk month-end purchases. In Steynsville the impact of distance and the cost of travel is clear: prices at spaza shops for items such as onions and tomatoes may be up to 50 per cent higher at the end of the location furthest from town and the main road. Elderly people cannot walk far, and taxi costs are high in relation to R1 on the price of a tomato. Since almost no one has electricity, storage of fresh produce is virtually impossible.

[19] The name it is known by in the Motse location
[20] Shoprite is the largest food retailer in South Africa, and Spar is the third-largest

Apart from convenience, the main advantage of the spaza shops is that they may extend credit until month end if they know that you have an income of sorts. Pensioners tend to be the favoured recipients of credit. I also saw a number of bicycle traders, who fill up a basket with basics like tomatoes, onions and small foodstuffs and travel around the settlement of Motse selling door to door. I did not see them in any of the other settlements I visited, but that may just have been because I did not spend enough time there. They too fill the gap created by the cost of transport and the inability to store fresh produce.

Vegetables are not the main ingredient in meals for most people: onions, tomatoes and spinach are generally cooked up together to form a flavouring sauce or small side dish to accompany maize meal or bread with the occasional meat. Items such as pumpkin and sweet potatoes were described to me as "food for grannies" by several members of the Motse Cooperative[21] ("Co-op") and not viewed with any enthusiasm. Sugar is consumed in considerable quantities, in very sweet tea (often made without milk because of its high cost) and cheap cold drinks. The Motse Co-op members all had a strong preference for sweets and cakes when they were available. They were strongly aware of the high-energy properties of sugar – Kabelo repeatedly told me (and whoever was listening) that "sugar gives you go" and accredited his energetic behaviour to his high consumption of sugar. Banerjee and Duflo (2006) noted that as soon as extremely poor people had a bit more money to spend on food they spent it on better tasting food, rather than more or nutritionally better food. Sweet, sugary foods

[21] The group farming the Motse community garden

are a “treat”, a small affordable luxury in a life that is a daily battle to make tiny means match very modest ends.

There is also, I would assert, a more practical reason for these dietary choices. This carbohydrate-heavy diet may look unhealthy and sorely in need of amendment, but under the circumstances of daily life in the informal settlements of Gauteng it is in fact a very rational choice from a limited list of options. Life in these communities, even for the majority who have no steady employment, is labour intensive. None of the houses in Motse have electricity, and nor do they have a source of running water in their house or yard. Most people do not have a car. Even the relatively simple task of washing clothes requires hard physical work: a wheelbarrow must be pushed among the badly rutted streets to reach one of the working taps, and then around 100 kilograms of water must be pushed back home, where the clothes are washed by hand. Nearby retail outlets are reached on foot, as are social security payment points, bus stops and minibus taxi stops (the minibus taxis do not venture far into the locations because of the roads). Children walk long distances to school, and many of those people who do work on the surrounding farms normally walk most or all of the distance there. In addition, most of the work that is available to the people who live in these locations is of the hard labour variety – unskilled agricultural work, the various government employment projects, such as the Community Works Programme (CWP) and various projects around maintaining public spaces and fixing roads. All of this physical work requires calories; and in a context where the average household has nowhere near enough money to purchase a nutritious basket of calorie-sufficient food, cheap carbohydrates (the classic example is a loaf of bread and 2 litres of sweet fizzy cold drink for a labourer’s lunch) are the only real option. A plate of vegetables for

your main meal might tick all the nutrient boxes, but you would be fainting and dizzy from lack of calories before you had gotten halfway through your day. Working in a community garden is, as I was to discover, hard, sometimes very hard work. The calories required to work in a community garden are usually nowhere near the calories that can be provided by eating your own produce.

This basic calories in/calories out requirement in a world of expensive food seems to have entirely escaped policymakers, from GDRAD to DAFF, via the various entities responsible for health and social services, who cling steadfastly to the idea that the observed poor diets of bread and sugar are the result of nutritional ignorance, and require the application of a large amount of nutritional "education", as if the only reason why people choose this diet is because they are too dim to know any better. Although a more varied and nutritionally balanced diet would obviously have benefits, there seems to be little appreciation within mainstream development policy (or in fact the many NGOs who busy themselves with nutritional education and food gardens) for the reality that underpins diet and dietary choices in communities like Motse.

3.2.3. Food security initiatives in Gauteng

It is the Directorate of Food Security (DFS) within GDARD that is responsible for implementing the Province's policy with respect to food security. DFS has three main programmes – homestead/backyard gardens, community farming projects (mostly community gardens, rather than "farms") and school gardens (where the main aim is to supplement the range and quantity of the meals under the national school feeding scheme). In that part of Gauteng where I undertook my fieldwork there are four DFS

teams. Each team contains a team leader and 3 officials (i.e. a total of 12 officials who are responsible for meeting targets around the *establishment* of gardens.) There are very detailed annual targets for the establishment of both homestead and school gardens.

These targets seem to have been set in a fairy mechanical way (rather than in response to any clearly defined demand or need), and they appeared to me to be quite ambitious. It was explained to me by the local (i.e. in the study area) DFS office that their share of Gauteng's 11,000 target for homestead gardens (for the 2013 year) was 3,688. This worked out at around 300 new gardens per official for that particular year, which I considered a hefty target to meet. Officials attempt to meet these targets by convening information days and actively promoting homestead gardens in the communities within their areas. The "establishment" of a homestead garden means the handing over of a "starter pack" containing basic garden equipment (a spade, a fork, a watering can and similar items), compost and packets of seeds; and imparting some basic information about cultivation.

Although the official that I interviewed told me that there is some kind of process to determine whether the recipients of these inputs are "suitable" candidates he also acknowledged that the homestead gardens are "not sustainable". Despite the likelihood of relatively high food insecurity rates in the study area, it appears that as many as two thirds of recipients of the homestead garden starter packs do not produce food in the next year, and many sell off the tools that they received from GDARD. The official had little in the way of explanations for this: presumably lack of skills is no longer an issue since the participants had already produced for one season. He

offered a lack of money to buy seeds as a possible reason, but when pressed conceded that the cost of the subsidized seeds was probably no more than about R25 per homestead garden per year. Finally he just shrugged and left it at "they are not really committed". Since officials are incentivised on the *establishment* of gardens, not their continued existence, there seems little motivation to dig deeper than that. As far as I could establish, the DFS has not conducted any surveys of the impact of these homestead gardens on household food security.

In terms of school gardens, each region's (2013) target was 46, which worked out at about 4 per official. The school gardens are set up in the grounds of the school in question, and are worked with the support of groups like the CWP, although the school is expected to take the lead with respect to managing the garden. The DFS provides starter packs and training similar to that given to homestead gardens. The schools all have a water supply, which is used for the garden. The results of these projects are also mixed, with higher failure rates than might be expected. The official I interviewed stated his opinion that when gardens were established in response to requests from the schools themselves they tended to have a much higher success rates than in cases where officials had been the drivers (presumably to meet their targets). In these latter cases the schools often took the (not entirely unreasonable) view that "the garden belongs to the Department" and refused to make the necessary time and effort commitments.

In contrast to the detailed targets for homestead and school gardens, there is a more flexible approach towards the establishment of community gardens, mostly because the establishment of these is (supposedly) initiated by groups who approach the DFS

for assistance with starting a garden, whereas homestead and school gardens are driven to a greater degree by the Directorate themselves. That is the theory anyway. The reality is that officials do have an incentive (in the form of their performance bonus) to show that community projects have been established in their areas. According to the members of the Tshimo Co-op, they were encouraged by provincial officials to form a cooperative with certain of their classmates at a GDARD-sponsored plant propagation course at a local community college and to "request" GDARD to assist them with the establishment of the garden. All three of the Tshimo Co-op members who told me this story looked back with a certain amount of bitterness at the marketing story of the DFS official, who assured them that agricultural cooperatives were not only an excellent way to secure government money in the form of grants, but that the agricultural sector was a lucrative one. "After all", he told them "people always have to eat so you will always have customers and make good money". The reality turned out to be quite different.

At the time of my interviews with DFS officials (January/February 2013) there were "around" 8 community garden projects in the study area. In this context a "community garden" generally means a garden that is operated by and for the benefit of a local (officially registered) cooperative whose members appear to fulfill some kind of poverty and unemployment criteria (these gardens are intended for "the poorest of the poor" – Ruysenaar, 2012, p1). Most of South Africa's official poverty-alleviation "development" programmes can only be accessed by registered cooperatives, and not by individuals. There was one garden that got support from DFS which I visited that was an allotment arrangement (i.e. portions allocated to

individuals), but this was a long-existing garden, and I have little doubt that such a structure would now be acceptable now under DFS's community garden programme.

As discussed above, the DFS may sometimes be quite involved in the establishment of the cooperative. In other circumstances (such as in the case of the Motse garden) they will insist on a change and/or expansion of an existing cooperative's membership to meet mandated targets around the percentage of women or youth members. The result of this may well be that a significant number of beneficiary cooperatives are "engineered" groups, rather than groups who have come together on their own initiative. My experience in the two gardens was that there were many tensions within the cooperatives – some relatively minor, some fatal – that could be traced back to forced membership requirements imposed by the DFS.

The DFS team leader I interviewed was fairly candid about the relatively high drop out rate of cooperative members and the subsequent deterioration of the gardens (as documented by Ruysenaar (2012) in the Germiston area of eastern Gauteng). Many projects do not make it past the first 18 months with either their membership or their gardens intact. When questioned he ascribed this to "conflicts between community (i.e. cooperative) members", which conflicts seemed to be mostly around the relatively small amounts of cash earned by the cooperatives. He reported high levels of distrust among members around money, which seemed justified by the number of occasions on which members had in fact made off with or stolen cash from the projects. Another common area of conflict was whether or not the garden produce should be allocated to cooperative members (i.e. food in lieu of an income) or sold to

generate cash. Most cooperatives did not have the internal cohesion (or external support) to manage these issues.

There is much more involvement and investment from GDARD in respect of community gardens than either homestead or school gardens. Firstly, the DFS is usually heavily involved in finding a site for the garden. This is far from straightforward: the site needs to be in a position where it can be secured (theft – of produce, tools and other equipment – is a constant reality); it needs to be reasonably close by and accessible for the cooperative members (so a portion of some outlying farm is not an option); it needs to pass some kind of (admittedly very basic) suitability assessment in terms of soil and water; and it needs to be able to be reasonably easily connected to Eskom[22] (or occasionally a municipal power supplier). As a result, many community gardens tend to be located in the grounds of schools that have the space, or on municipal or other government-owned land. (One of the gardens that I visited on my initial trip was located on land owned by Eskom, under heavy voltage powerlines.)

The question of who has or who "should" have access to these pockets of land is a matter of some considerable contestation, particularly once some improvements (such as fencing and an electricity connection) have been made. Various political groups within the local community may all stake a claim to the site or a portion thereof, making the tenure of some of the community gardeners precarious. The Tshimo Co-

[22] The state-owned power utility

op in particular faced regular threats from the local ward councilor[23] that she would have them removed to install another cooperative chaired by her husband. Although it was difficult for me to determine how serious her threat was it certainly did not do much for Tshimo Co-op morale, and the DFS officials seemed to me to be very reluctant to get involved in the power struggles of local politics. (In contrast, the Motse project had enjoyed some initial support from a previous local councilor who remained popular and influential in the area, and did not face the same pressure in the early years of their garden. Their plans to extend the project, however, into neighbouring municipal land do not seem likely to go as smoothly, in part because of the success of their enterprise and related local opinions that it is now someone's else's turn to benefit.)

For community gardens DFS also makes more infrastructure and support available than for either homestead or school gardens, although most of this support tends to take place in the establishment and early phase of the gardens. The DFS generally provides the following:

- Fencing (at least 1.5m high chicken wire on metal poles) and a lockable gate;
- An electricity connection (mostly directly to Eskom). The projects need electricity to run the borehole and the pressure pumps that support the irrigation. DFS pays for the initial installation, but thereafter the cooperative is responsible for paying the bills. Basic security lighting is usually supplied as well, attached to the office/store.

[23] An elected member of the Council running the local municipality. Requests for assistance from the municipality (such as use of a tractor, or additional inputs for the garden) would usually need to be chanelled through this local councilor, giving that person considerable discretion and power over who gets access to resources.

- A borehole and associated irrigation equipment. DFS will sink a borehole, supply a borehole pump, one (or more often) two 10,000 litre tanks, a pressure pump and heavy-duty hoses and sprayers.
- One (or in the case of the Motse Cooperative – two) metal shipping containers that have been converted - by the addition of a steel door and a barred window – into an office/storeroom/store/packing space. The containers are unbearably hot in the summer and consequently a poor place to store produce for any length of time, but they are relatively easy to secure, no small thing in an environment where almost anything will be stolen if left unattended for long enough.
- Basic farming equipment – overalls, gumboots, wheelbarrows, watering cans, spades, forks, and the like, together with initial inputs such as compost and seeds (for a relatively small range of products – spinach, cabbage, tomatoes, onions and green beans are the most common).
- Some training, which focuses on the basics of production and record keeping, but is usually silent on the details of business management and accounting, and marketing.
- Ongoing "monitoring" and "support", which I saw to mean in practice irregular visits from extension officers and a range of responses to requests for assistance. Once the gardens were "established" and the initial flurry of activity over, most of the officials moved on to concentrating on achieving their remaining garden establishment targets, and were seldom seen in the gardens. As a rule the cooperative members were apprehensive about asking for things from the extension officers, even when those things were essential to the survival of the project, such as a broken borehole pump. I have

discussed in more detail further on in this thesis the intricate power relations between beneficiaries and government officials.

The land allocated to a cooperative is seldom in a state ready for the production of vegetables. In the case of the Tshimo Co-op the land (in the corner of the school grounds) was virgin veld, and in the case of Motse it was the rubbish dump for the adjacent informal settlement. If they are lucky the cooperative will be allocated a municipal tractor to assist in clearing the land, but more often it must be done manually by the members; a long, hard and difficult job.

3.3. A brief history of the gardens

3.3.1. Motse

I ended up spending most of my time in two gardens – Motse and Tshimo, and the majority of that in the former. Motse was by far the most successful of the DFS-supported community gardens in my study area, and had a relatively long history, during which the core membership of the cooperative had held together remarkably well. All of the members of the Motse Co-op live in the adjacent (across a narrow dirt road) informal settlement of Motse, which was established around 1998. The initial group that created the settlement came from nearby farms, which were laying off workers in response to consolidation and mechanization (a story repeated all around South Africa). Newer arrivals are from all over South and Southern Africa. According to the Motse Co-op members there are around 5,000 people living in the location. There is no electricity, no running water (taps) in individual properties (there are community taps), and the sum total of government services on each stand is an

outside concrete toilet (newer houses have plastic toilets). There is no refuse collection, and the roads are narrow and badly rutted. In the older part of Motse (alongside which the garden project is located) residents have planted trees and made basic (ornamental) gardens, which has softened the outline of the place a little, but not by much. Motse is relatively well located: it is in a space bounded on one side by a main road to Rooidal, and on a side 90 degrees to that by a main road to Pretoria. Minibus taxis are relatively easily accessible and there is a large primary school some 5 kilometres away. Most of the residents that I spoke to seemed resigned to the fact that they would never receive basic services such as brick houses or electricity from government, and that they had to make their own way. The members of the cooperative shunned politics, saying that voting for someone had never made any difference in their lives, and to the best of my knowledge not one member voted in the 2014 national elections.

The initial core of the Motse cooperative was four young (under 30) men – Samuel, his close friend Lesego, Lesego's cousin Kabelo (who joined the cooperative in 2010 – before that date he was in school) and a fourth young man whose name was never told to me, who had died in 2010. All four of them faced problems similar to tens if not hundreds of thousands of young black men in South Africa: although all with a good basic education (Samuel, Lesego and Kabelo all speak very good English, Samuel is a keen reader of novels, Kabelo earns extra income for the Co-op writing CVs on the group's computer, and Lesego is very good at maths) none of them had completed matric[24] or continued to higher education because of the pressure to contribute to the income of their households. Both Lesego and Kabelo had grown up

[24] The last year of secondary school

on a large ornamental tree farm were their parents worked, and which had reportedly closed down in about 2006. After that the families had moved to Motse. Samuel's father works as a labourer at a nearby Rainbow chicken farm, and both Samuel and Kabelo had previously worked as temporary labour on the same farm.

The cooperative was originally established in the realization by the members that there were few prospects for gaining full-time employment and that they would have to make their own opportunities. The site where the Motse Co-op is currently located was formerly the rubbish and general dumping ground for Motse. The initial cooperative was formed to undertake recycling, with a previous councilor assisting with access to the dumpsite. However, discussions with local and provincial officials with respect to supporting the cooperative resulted in a change of direction – towards food gardening. The Co-op members were told that food production would be a better choice than recycling. This was probably good advice since recycling on a scale that would have been possible on the dumpsite would most likely have resulted in very little income, and once the site was depleted it was very unlikely that the regular discarded rubbish of Motse would have been sufficient to keep the cooperative going.

The cooperative was promised some basic support in the form of the normal starter pack: seeds, implements, basic training, a fence and a borehole, but there were a number of conditions attached to this. Firstly, there was no suitable site available for the cooperative to produce food, and DFS did not have the money to make one available through purchase or lease, and so they remained at the dump (which was shortly to be abandoned as the council had decided that rubbish could no longer be left so close to the location, and a new dumpsite was established further away). This

they would have to clear themselves. Secondly, they were required to make their cooperative more gender balanced before they could access even that small amount of government support. As a result, four women were invited into the cooperative: Grace, who is Lesego's mother and worked in the ornamental tree nursery for many years; Mpho, Samuel's sister; Bontle, family friend and former girlfriend of Samuel; and Lillian, neighbour of Bontle and someone who had worked for a time in the wholesale nursery business. Shortly after this expansion of the cooperative the unnamed friend died, and his mother Rebecca was invited to take his place. Rebecca is elderly and not able to do much hard physical labour, but the cooperative members always make allowances for her and never mention her relatively small physical commitment to the project, even though they are constantly short of labour and a younger, fitter person would add much more value. It is clear that, as the mother of their friend, she is accorded a special place and entitled to exactly the same benefits as the other members.

The Motse Co-op then embarked on clearing the dumpsite, which by all accounts was a pretty unpleasant job. They also report getting laughed at by many of their neighbours, who would walk by and ask "what are you doing in the rubbish?" They seem not to have been deterred, and in hindsight believe that this was a necessary process to somehow "prove" that they were "worthy" of support from DFS. By the summer of 2010 (i.e. the last quarter of the year) they had a vegetable garden of approximately 200m^2 up and running. The main crop was spinach, supplemented by tomatoes, onions and cabbages. The garden provided some food for the members, plus people from Motse would purchase food directly from the garden, which is in a very good position from that point of view. It should not be assumed, however, that

this selling earned significant amounts. According to the Co-op members they seldom earned more than about R150 each in a month in this phase of the garden (and their primary goal was to earn money, rather than to produce food for themselves). A large bunch of spinach sells for R5[25], and one would have to sell 240 bunches in a month to earn even that meagre amount for 8 cooperative members. In my assessment, one of the reasons the Motse Co-op was able to hold together during a time of hard and unpleasant labour, accompanied by community derision, followed by very little return for their hard labour was because of their close family and friendship ties which predated the formation of the cooperative. I would suggest that these relationships provided the "space" for the mutual support and encouragement that was so evidently missing in the Tshimo Co-op. When I asked about the fact that the Coop had seemed to hold together so much better than so many others, Lillian said to me that it was because "we all know each other and we know how to solve conflicts".

It was clear to me that the Motse Co-op members had a clear sense both of belonging to something important and of common purpose. This was underpinned by a series of narratives, which had in common – i.e. as a unifying plot line - the portrayal of the cooperative members as having both a clear goal and the agency to determine their own futures. Samuel, the chairperson, seemed to have both a keen awareness of the temptation to leave the Co-op and a strong sense of the need for constant motivation of the group. He told me that he is an enthusiastic reader, and tries to memorise what he considers to be inspirational lines. He is a constant source of quotes like "how will you get something if you sit in a corner?" and "the future of this life is in our hands". A variation on these heroic narratives was what I have termed "deserving" narratives:

[25] About 55 US cents at that time

There was a strong sense within the group that nothing worthwhile or permanent could be achieved without hard work and a degree of "suffering". In a conversation while washing and packing spinach, Bontle talked about how Jesus suffered and how their (the Co-op's) struggles seemed "right" in that context. There was general agreement with her sentiments. The Co-op members often talked derisively of people who want to make "easy" money, using the term "easy come, easy go" to signal their belief that money that was not worked for was not appreciated and therefore seldom held on to. They felt that their deprivations had entitled them to the little that they had, and that they would not be tempted into wasting it. In these "deserving" narratives the Motse members had earned the right to material rewards through their own hard work.

These heroic and deserving narratives were balanced by narratives of failure and disgrace when someone hinted that they might want to leave the project: Samuel told me that in those cases wavering members would be warned by the other members of the likely negative result of their decision: "If you leave the project you will be a failure, you might become a thief, you will become unemployed and then you will have to ask us for a job and we will turn you away". Leaving the garden was thus strongly associated with excommunication from the group, and the consequent loss of control over your own destiny.

After the production of their first crops on the rehabilitated dump the Motse Co-op managed to get some additional money from the local municipality that went into a better fence and more inputs. From then onwards the Motse story is one of comparative success. In 2011 the cooperative won first prize in a provincial food

garden competition. Not only did this get them R35,000 in prize money, it also got them attention from the right sort of people – in this case the National Development Agency (NDA). In 2012 they received a multi-year R1.5 million grant from the NDA to fund an expansion from food garden to small farming enterprise. The money was allocated (over a 3-year period, subject to meeting targets in each year) to the purchase of growing tunnels, an expanded irrigation system, more and better equipment, intensive training in hydroponics and (in the third year) the purchase of a vehicle. The grant also included a monthly stipend of R800 per member per month for the first 6 months of funding, but the "stipend" was continued after that period out of retained income (from the 2011 competition win and another in 2013) and profits from the sale of produce (although it must be said that most of their profits were kept for future investment).

When I arrived at the cooperative in early 2013 it was a busy and happy place – the first three tunnels had been erected some months before, and they had had a good first tomato crop from these, much of which they had been able to sell to a local Spar retail outlet at a reasonable price. The Motse Co-op members felt justified – their had work and sacrifice had paid off just as they had hoped and believed, and told themselves and each other it would. Working alongside Bontle one beautiful sunny day a few months after I had started working at Motse she said to me "We are so lucky, Tracy, can you believe that we are so lucky?" On that day, Bontle was the blessed heroine of her own narrative.

That would all change.

3.3.2. Tshimo

The project at Tshimo is a different story, both in terms of its history and its likely prospects during my time there. In many ways it is an excellent example of the negative impact of poorly conceived development policies on the lives of the poor in contemporary South Africa. The garden is located in the grounds of a primary school just at the edge of the rundown, decrepit small town of Steynsville, whose main road sees a constant stream of heavy trucks. The town and its surrounding informal settlements are so far removed from the nearby luxury hotels and spas they may as well be in a different country. The school is located on a large piece of land: the garden occupies a space that looked to me to be about 7,000 m^2 and there is an additional piece of open ground within the school perimeter about one and a half times that size. The school's boundary fence is bordered on two right-angled sides by an informal settlement, and it is in this corner that the garden is located.

Who exactly has the "right" to garden on this piece of land is a constant issue of contention. The land "belongs" to the school, and the school caretaker (Beki) takes a very proprietary stance towards the garden: on my first unaccompanied visit he is extremely annoyed to find that I have been given permission to visit the garden without his approval. I make an effort to be nice, and we get along fine after that, but he never changes his stance that he is the one who should approve the use of the land. He expresses on several occasions his displeasure that the Tshimo Co-op has been "given" the land (although they have no legal title to it) and in fact allocates a portion of the garden to the local CWP work group early in 2013 for their own use, completely ignoring the objections of the Tshimo Co-op members. The headmaster of the school is a very pleasant and competent woman, but she has plenty of other

concerns and seems to have handed over responsibility for the garden to Beki. The provincial extension officers by and large don't seem interested in getting involved in these disputes between Beki and the gardeners.

The garden is bordered on two sides by the informal settlement (where all of the cooperative members I meet live) and on the other two by the school. The parts of the settlement that are adjacent to the garden are relatively new (reportedly not more than three years) and it is dusty and hot in the first few months that I am at the garden. There is plenty of rubbish lying around, scratched over by groups of skinny chickens and skinnier dogs. (These dogs, no matter how thin, never try and catch a chicken. Those who show any inclination to do so are quickly disciplined, and if they continue, just as quickly dispatched.) I meet three members of the cooperative on my first visit, and never any of the others: Jacob is a young man in his early twenties, fluent in English and very chatty and likeable during my first few visits. Sarah is a Tswana woman in her late forties who has had limited formal education, but speaks a little English and a bit more Afrikaans. She comes across at first as forbidding, unfriendly even as she watches me with folded arms and narrowed eyes, but I soon realize that her surface attitude covers an intelligent and compassionate woman who has learnt the hard way that life is mostly a series of disappointments and that starting off by expecting the worst is the best way of dealing with that. She has a sharp sarcastic tongue for all government officials, and her ward councilor in particular.

The third member is a small older woman (in her early fifties) called Elizabeth. She says that she came to this area from the Northern Cape (somewhere near Kuruman) some time in the 1980s to look for work, and she resembles the small (she is no more

than 1.50m in height) and wiry San people. She has very little formal education (she is, I learn later, attending night classes at the school with the aim of getting a Grade 4 certificate) and has spent all her life in extreme poverty, moving from temporary job to part-time job in between long periods of unemployment. She is, nonetheless, a very friendly and energetic woman, seemingly determined to believe that things can change for the better if only she works hard enough. She seems to have learnt to have very few expectations of life, and even the smallest positive outcome in the garden is received by her with enthusiasm. Sarah and Jacob seem to think that she is a little crazy, with Sarah in particular doing a lot of eye-rolling and head shaking when Elizabeth gets started on a particular topic, but I like Elizabeth a lot. There will be many days when we are the only two working in the garden and, despite the fact that we share very few words in the same language (she understands a little Afrikaans) we work well together.

About one third of the area of the Tshimo garden has been cleared of veld, a very hard task involving digging up the established wild grass with picks and shovels, and then removing rocks and stones by wheelbarrow. This work continues intermittently throughout my time in the garden as the Tshimo Co-op struggles to increase the size of the garden and hopefully the income that can be earned. There is, however, already too much work (planting, watering, weeding) for three people.

The beds in the garden are all neatly laid out, with a small plastic plaque at each end saying what has been planted and when. The planting method here (and the outside garden at Motse) reflects a fairly old-fashioned idea of what a vegetable garden should look like: Long straight (we spend a lot of time making them straight) lines of

produce in uni-crop beds. My suggestions of a more agro-ecological approach – densely inter-planted beds that require less water and are more bug resistant – are given a frosty reception: that is not "proper" farming, Jacob tells me.

There is the ubiquitous container, in which are housed a number of implements and wheelbarrows, a pile of bags of compost, a dusty pile of papers representing the Co-op's attempts at record keeping, a heap of butternuts, harvested a few weeks previously, but seemingly with no destination, and a small pile of rapidly ripening tomatoes. There is also a kettle, but most of the time no one has money for tea, milk or sugar and so it is generally unused. There is a borehole, a pressure pump, two 10,000 litre plastic tanks and a heavy duty irrigation system, but the borehole isn't working properly when I first visit, and the water supply is intermittent. (A few weeks later it will disappear entirely). This is reportedly the second borehole that has been sunk for the garden in a space of a few months. The garden is fenced and locked, with Co-op members taking turns to keep the keys, apparently based on who is coming to work and who isn't. Jacob is the chairperson of the cooperative.

The history of the garden and the Tshimo Co-op is never entirely clear to me, and there are many versions of the story that I hear. This clearly echoes Ricoeur's (1984) assertion that history and fiction are not so easily distinguished, and that what we would consider "history" is never a series of empirically verifiable facts. We constantly remake our personal history – our "space of experience" (Koselleck, 2004) in light of our changing expectations.

I got the impression that because the project was a bit of a disappointment to almost everyone involved (even Elizabeth), the retelling of the history of the garden had becomes a way of trying to understand what went wrong and assigning some responsibilities for that. In these narratives the Tshimo Co-op members tried to make sense of their disappointments and frustrations, and the growing realisation that they had little control over what was supposed to be "their" opportunity for something better. These were stories of taking every opportunity that presented itself, some small victories and many bigger disappointments. There were a number of clear villains. That is not to say that the Tshimo members have no agency, that they are just helpless victims of circumstances beyond their control. The telling of your *own* version of a series of events is itself an act of agency, a reworking of "history". The Tshimo members seemed to relish the telling of these stories, particularly Sarah, who ended one story with an emphatic "and that is what Sarah has to say!" and made sure I noted it. I don't think that they had many opportunities to vent their frustrations or even to have their version of events heard. In addition, the Tshimo members almost always told a version of events that portrayed themselves as hard workers who had achieved something through their own efforts (even if that was now slipping away).

This is the main gist of the story: There were originally seven cooperative members. Six of them (including all three of the current members that I worked with) met while attending a "plant production" course at the local FET college[26]. This was a free course, advertised in the community. There they met Charles (who turned out later to be the husband of the local ward councilor, and is a minor villain in the story, while

[26] These "Further Education and Training" (FET) colleges offer both paid courses towards national qualifications, and free *ad hoc* courses, such as this one. They operate under the national Department of Higher Education.

she is a major villain.) Charles seems to have discussed with them the benefits of being an agricultural cooperative in terms of accessing government funds, and he is the one who introduced the group to a DFS official. This official reportedly echoed Charles' positive view, telling them about the benefits of agriculture (the same "people have to eat so you will always make money out of growing and selling food" story). It seems that Charles was at that time working in some capacity at the Tshimo school, and it was he who took the DFS official to the site and set in motion the process for the cooperative to be allocated the site.

Sarah paints a picture of extremely hard work to clear the site and prepare the garden in early 2012, followed by some early success:

> *"then Shadrack (the DFS official) said he wants us to work, that's when we worked and worked, they even sponsored us with seedlings and we planted and planted and worked. That's when we were able to plant and sell, ……. we were moving forward"*

Shortly thereafter, as Sarah tells the story, the relative success of the garden (they had a ready base of customers in the school teachers and the community alongside, and with 7 members they could send two or more people off to sell while the others worked in the garden) started to cause problems. In her account Charles now insisted that the other six cooperative members leave the site so that he could bring in "his own people". He insisted that the site in some way 'belonged' to him and that he could thus determine who should have access and who could be excluded. The headmistress of the school came to the existing cooperative members' defence:

Then the principal said no it's not possible for him to make the people working here leave their job and go look for people that are working for whites, that are (already) getting money

Charles then left the Tshimo Co-op in a huff, apparently finding work as a truck driver. Shortly thereafter two other members left, one because she got a job, but one simply "went home" (they are still hoping she might return). A third member went off a few months later to take up a construction piece job[27], but says that he will return when the work is done (I never see him come back). It is not entirely clear why the members did not stay in the project, but my best guess would be that Charles' exit coincided both with the cessation of the monthly stipend payments, which are usually only made for the first six months of the project, and the end of the summer growing season (the first two members left around September 2012, at which time there would have been no stipend and no produce for a few months).

Things do not look so bright anymore: as Sarah puts it – "*so it's just the three of us in the project, we working, just the three of us, struggling, we can't do anything*". At that point in the conversation Jacob tells her to "shut up". I later realize that he is still trying to impress me at this early stage with how well the project is doing under his leadership.

Despite his withdrawal from the cooperative, the influence of Charles and his councilor wife are still felt. When I visited the project the fourth or fifth time time I saw that a portion of the land was being used by Community Works Programme

[27] i.e temporary work

(CWP) members to grow vegetables for themselves, reportedly on the initiative of Charles, supported by the school's Beki. Although the Tshimo Co-op could certainly spare the land, they felt very bitter about it, telling me repeatedly that this was their land, for their project. There was, however, little that they could do about it. The slow demise of the project and the fact that only three people were left had reduced the school principal's support. The Tshimo members took some small revenge on the CWP's "invasion" of their garden, stubbornly refusing to hand over a key to the gate, which only they could unlock and often left the CWP people waiting hours for their arrival. They also refused to allow them to use their borehole water: as David put it "at least they are not using this water". This did backfire a little when the Co-op's borehole pump stopped working and they needed the CWP members' help with getting water from a school tap (which assistance was given unhesitatingly).

Beki himself was responsible for some thoughtlessness towards the Co-op members, particularly when it was just Sarah and Elizabeth left in the garden. The group had a small planting (about 12 bushes) of chili peppers which were doing very well. (These are relatively expensive plants and not that easy to grow from seed.) They sold the chilies and also took them home. One day I arrived at the project to see that the chili bushes had been moved, and that they all looked much the worse for wear. Why, I asked, had they moved the bushes when they were doing so well? Beki said we must, they replied, he says that they look untidy over there. They all died. Nothing else epitomized for me quite so well how marginalized Sarah and Elizabeth were.

All three Tshimo Co-op members felt that they were being victimised by the local ward councilor who seems to maintain that the garden "belongs" to Charles, and that

this, together with her position as ward councilor, should mean that she gets to decide who has access to it, and thus to whom she will allocate political favours. Her signature is necessary on requests by the Co-op for municipal assistance with things like a tractor to come and help with clearing the land. She consistently refused to authorize these requests, and the DFS officials could or would not intervene.

On my first visit to the Tshimo garden the DFS official simply told me that the other project beneficiaries had left, without elaborating on why or what he intended to do about it. He seemed resigned to the fact that the project was faltering a bit, saying in respect of the three remaining members – "at least they have somewhere to go every day." The disconnect between his idea of the garden as some kind of makeshift daily destination to fill up the hours, and the hopes of having a viable business that the three remaining Co-op members still hung onto with varying degrees of optimism (but with which they had undoubtedly started the project) was breathtaking. As the months passed by and the project fell into greater and greater difficulties the indifference of DFS officials towards the Tshimo garden only increased.

3.4. The daily life of the gardens

Both of the gardens followed (in principle) the same basic routine: work starts at 8 in the morning, there is a break for lunch from 11 to 12 (during which the Motse members went home, but the Tshimo members did not, mostly because it was further to walk), and work usually wraps up at about 2, when it is too hot in the summer to continue, and there is less to be done in winter. Work is from Monday to Friday, although it may be necessary for someone to work on the weekend if it is very hot and the plants need water or, in the case of the Motse Co-op, because in the growing

season the tomato tunnels need to be opened every morning and closed every afternoon, and the plants need to watered through the hydroponic system at regular intervals during the day.

Someone (not always the chairperson) is allocated the key and is responsible for being on time (not always the case) and unlocking the garden in the morning. The allocation and distribution of work is an interesting group dynamic. Each group has a chairperson, a treasurer and a secretary, and in Motse there was additionally a "project manager" in the form of first Lillian and then Grace, while Kabelo was designated as being in charge of marketing. However, there is no real way to compel members of the cooperative to actually arrive at work every day, or to perform designated tasks (they are not "employees" in the normal sense of the word). Instead, getting the work done depends on a complex and subtle combination of incentive and punishment (or the threat thereof) carefully balanced by all the cooperative members and overseen by a good chairperson (like Samuel). If members routinely fail to pitch up for work the remaining members may vote them out of the project, but, as I later saw, this is an absolute last resort. The cooperative needs the labour of each member; they are reluctant to involve new members, who are not only untried, but are also seen as now unfairly sharing the hard work over several years of the other members; and members dropping out is viewed very unfavourably by both existing and potential funders. This creates a lot of maneuverability for cooperative members. For the first few months that I spent at Motse Bontle was seldom there, staying home to take care of her mother who had had a stroke. The other members grumbled a bit, but they understood her situation. Cooperative members in both gardens routinely took days off for family

commitments such as funerals or occasionally just because they did not feel like coming to work.

Work duties at Motse were allocated through a combination of group consensus and Samuel's decisions. There were a large number of regular tasks that needed completion at the garden – the feeding, watering and pruning of the tomatoes in the tunnels; harvesting (one day a week); deliveries to customers (particularly a nearby Spar); routine maintenance of the tunnels; and the ongoing cultivation of the "outside" garden (i.e. outside the tunnels). Even with all the Motse members present there was a lot of work to be done. The tunnels are extremely hot and unpleasant places to work in the middle of summer. At the end of each tomato-growing season the growing bags (2,700 in total in the year I spent there) need to be removed, cleaned and refilled with clean sawdust. They were then replanted with spinach for the winter months, before the entire process was repeated for summer tomatoes. The tomatoes are grown hydroponically, and so must be fed a precise chemical mix several times each day.

Once I was established as a worker at the Motse garden I was either allocated tasks by Samuel, or sometimes if he wasn't there I simply found myself something useful to do, like the endless tomato pruning. I often acted as driver for deliveries, since the cooperative did not have a vehicle and it is relatively expensive to transport 10 boxes of tomatoes by minibus taxi: you need two seats there and back for the sellers, and two seats there for the tomatoes. On the days when produce would go out for sale to neighbouring informal settlements (something that was now possible with my car) the entire group would pick, wash and pack the produce before we set out in groups of

two (all selling always takes place with a minimum of two people so that there is oversight of the cash. The same process is followed with bank deposits of cash, and any cash payments.)

Work at Tshimo was nowhere near as organized: for a start, after a brief flurry of activity during the first three weeks I spent at the garden Jacob more or less disappeared, making only sporadic reappearances during the remainder of my time there. Although he was the chairperson he took no lead at all in managing what went on at the garden, and my view is that he got the job under pressure from DFS as the most literate remaining member. The other two Tshimo members were a little like the survivors of some natural disaster, doggedly continuing at their tasks on the basis that at some point things *must* improve. Elizabeth had many moments of enthusiasm, most particularly with showing me how to work in the garden, but Sarah did not. Some days only one of the two would arrive, and then decide for themselves what they would do. Even when they were the only person there, neither Sarah nor Elizabeth worked any less hard or attempted to cut their day short. Maybe it was because I was there, but I don't think so.

I started working at Tshimo on my second visit, offering to assist a rather startled Jacob with weeding. From then on I joined in whatever work was going on, taking direction from whoever was there. Prior to starting the fieldwork I had been a very enthusiastic home vegetable gardener, enjoying my time in my garden, and recommending the activity to whoever would listen. Just a few weeks in the Tshimo garden changed my shuttered suburban view of the delights of vegetable gardening

forever. It is horrible, hard thankless work. Anybody who extols the benefits of this kind of vegetable gardening has probably never done it.

Soon after I started working at the garden the (new) borehole pump stopped working. The people who had installed it had not thought it necessary to explain to either Sarah or Elizabeth how it actually worked – they were simply instructed to flick a switch on when they arrived for work, and to flick it off when they left. They were very reluctant to "bother" the DFS officials with their problems, but even after making a few calls on my encouragement it was still two weeks before it was fixed. In the interim it was extremely hot, and the garden needed to be watered. So we walked a 500 metre round trip with watering cans to the nearest school tap for three hours each day.

Nor was there much reward for all this hard work. Neither Sarah nor Elizabeth had a plan for how to sell the relatively small amount of vegetables that they produced (and when I arrived at the project in February 2013 most of the summer crop of tomatoes was coming to an end and the spinach plants were near the end of their season). Some of the teachers would occasionally buy bunches of spinach or the last of the tomatoes, as would people from the neighbouring informal settlement, but my best guess is that neither woman earned more than about R40[28] a week from this. Elizabeth took every opportunity to try and eke out some extra income from the garden. She had planted mielies that summer, and one day asked me to help her with the dried cobs. We stripped off the leaves and then stripped the cobs with our hands. Elizabeth joked that

[28] Around $4 at the 2013 exchange rate

she is “die kooperasie”[29]. Four mielie cobs make about 1 cup of dried mielies, which Elizabeth sells door-to-door for R5. Anybody who thinks it is romantic and wonderful to produce your own food should spend a few days with someone like Elizabeth, to see the almost unimaginable grind to earn even a pittance. I used to be one of those people.

[29] A “kooperasie” (Afrikaans) is a big agricultural cooperative, normally having many very large grain silos

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BIG PICTURE: POWER, AUTHORSHIP AND PLAUSIBILITY

4.1. Introduction: conceptualising identity as performance

I have proposed that a performance of identity may be considered as a type of social performance, in the way that this latter term is used by theorists such as Woodward (2007) and Alexander (2004). Woodward (2007) describes a social performance as something "whereby people go about actively constructing and communicating meaning" (p152). Social life is made up of these performances and stories (narratives) about these performances (ibid, p153). Alexander (2004) defines a social performance as "the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of the social situation" (p529). Harré (2002) suggests that "the major mode of symbolic interaction for modern people…..(involves) the performance of meaningful actions" (p23).

Goffman's (1959) book *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* has a number of features that I found particularly useful in developing my framework of performance identity. Firstly, his framework is intended specifically to deal with the analysis of everyday life, which is the focus of this thesis. Secondly, there are a number of ways in which Goffman's conceptualization of action as analogous to a theatrical performance reflects the analogies that Ricoeur drew between real life and a narrative, forming the basis of his (Ricoeur's) theory of narrative identity. It must, however, be emphasised that there is (at least) one important way in which Goffman's and Ricoeur's approaches to the analysis of social behaviour are very different: Goffman

stated clearly that he was not concerned with "the specific content of any activity presented by the individual participant, or the role it plays in the interdependent activities of an on-going social system, (but) only with the participant's dramaturgical problems of presenting the activity before us" (1959, p8). That is, Goffman was not concerned with the *motivations* behind the construction of a social performance, but rather with the details of *how* it was done. In this way his approach would be considered in a Ricoeurian framework as a first (albeit necessary) *explanatory* step in the process of interpretation, similar to the way in which Ricoeur understood the role of structuralism in such a process (Ricoeur, 1991a).

Goffman proceeded from the starting point that most individuals wish to be thought of in a certain way, in order to manage the way in which they are treated by others. The framework that he developed to analyse this aspect of social life was based on a theatrical performance. Although he acknowledged that the former was real and the latter "make-believe" (similarly to the way in which Ricoeur stressed that real life was not the same as a fictional narrative), he felt justified in the use of this approach because it reflects the conscious way in which an individual crafts a desired "impression" (Goffman, 1959, p2) to be communicated to others. This impression might not always reflect the absolute truth of that individual's personal circumstances or social position (this latter was of particular interest to Goffman), and similarly an individual's expression of himself might be misunderstood. The goal of constructing a particular performance is to maximize the likelihood that the desired impression is created, and limit the potential for misunderstandings; that the audience to the performance "believe(s) that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess" (ibid, p10).

Goffman asks to what extent the person who is constructing the performance "believes" that the character presented is actually real. This is an important issue, one that I do not believe has been satisfactorily dealt with by much of the status consumption literature (as discussed in Chapter One above). I would argue that it is neither easy nor accurate to simply divide between "truth" and "deception" and to allocate the latter term to any social performance where the aim is to present a particular persona who is different from absolute reality (such as the goal of presenting oneself as a person who is not as poor or as food insecure as you actually are). Is this really "deception"; is there really only one "true" version of a person? Goffman (ibid) argues that there is rather a continuum between the person who genuinely believes that he *is* the persona he has created, and the cynic who pretends to be someone he is not in order to gain some kind of advantage over others. He makes the important point that the person we would like to be is as much a part of our "true" selves as who we actually are. Ricoeur's (1981) notion that various and inter-temporal "versions" of ourselves may all be simultaneously "true" provides (to my mind) a more complex and elegant account of the blurring of truth and fiction in performances of identity, but Goffman's point emphasizes that the conscious "production" of ourselves as particular characters involves much more than simply the cynical, status-driven desire to deceive others.

Alexander (2004) uses a model of "cultural performance" to analyse socially meaningful action. Like Goffman's, his approach emphasizes the importance of the ***plausibility*** of the performance - that the audience finds the characters credible and the actors believable. He postulates that the more complex and fragmented a society, the greater the challenge of plausibility, due to the "de-fusion" of the elements of

these social performances. I would agree with this point in general: it goes some way towards explaining the difficulties that the poor in post-1994 South Africa have in constructing social performances that "resonate" with the audience of development practitioners, economic theorists and government officials. However, I would also argue for a greater role to be allocated to power and power relations in determining what kinds of performances from whom are deemed more or less plausible by particular audiences. It is, I would argue, power that is the critical component in *mimesis1* – the "prefiguration" that determines whether or not a particular performance, delivered by a particular person, is believable or not.

In this thesis I have built on the foundation of these conceptualisations of social performance as a theatrical performance (particularly Goffman's (1959) analysis of everyday life as a performance) as a useful way of commencing an *explanation* of the mechanics of a performance of identity, mostly through the use of the notions of actors and audiences, "*mis-en-scene*" and physical "props". However, I have found that these approaches are not entirely adequate for the satisfactory *interpretation* of the performances that I observed during my fieldwork, in two important areas: firstly, with respect to the notion of temporality – and here I specifically mean the role of the performance in *generating* temporal coherence (as opposed to simply being *constructed* in a temporally coherent manner as described by Xu (2012) and Harré (2002)); and the mutual relationship between agency and creativity in crafting these performances. As a result I have incorporated the basic ideas of social performance as a theatrical performance with two parts of Paul Ricoeur's philosophy: his theory of narrative identity (which provides a powerful account of how narratives – and thus performances – of identity are *essentially* about the mediation of temporality

(Hamilton, 2013), and his theory of the text as a *narrative*. In this latter respect I have focused most particularly on Ricoeur's ideas around creative emplotment (which, I have proposed, forms the basis of a more satisfactory account of agency; the dialectic between observing tradition and innovating in the development of a new performance); and metaphor, which provides an elegant theory of the *loci* of meaning in a performance that includes material objects.

In the next two sections of this chapter I have focused on some of the *macro* contextual factors that shape, limit and influence the construction of the performances of identity of the community gardeners in Motse and Tshimo, and thus determine the extent of their actual agency in the creation and management of their performances of identity. These twin issues – which performances are permitted and/or expected from which kinds of persons, and the authorship of performances – reflect the relations of power within which the gardeners are located, and thus incorporate the notion of power as a central feature of my analytical framework. Performance plausibility and authorship are the main battlegrounds of agency for the community gardeners; where they must struggle daily against historically imposed conceptualisations of personhood, the modern prejudices of development officials, and the realities of poverty and small-scale agriculture in South Africa.

It is against the background of these macro constraining factors that individual performances are crafted, although each person takes a different approach towards the practical construction of his/her performance, reflecting the multiple voices that co-exist within an apparently homogenous group.

4.2. Power and plausibility: who is permitted which performances?

Central to a successful performance of identity is plausibility. Even if we proceed from the basis (as proposed by Goffman, 1959) that the purpose of a performance is to project to an audience a person who is much more who we would *like* to be than who we actually *are*, and thus that there is an element of fiction in each performance, the actor is still constrained by who she *could* be in the eyes of her audience. If she strays outside the audience's view of who she could be she runs the real risk of being seen as implausible, and thus not having that particular character accepted as "real", which undermines the entire purpose of the performance. The greater the possible "plausibility gap", the greater the planning and effort her performance will require in order to be believable, and the greater the possibility of failure.

What are the factors that support or undermine the plausibility of a particular performance by a particular person? The literature has surprisingly little content on this particular issue: Alexander (2004) emphasises the importance of a performance being plausible in order for it to be "effective" (p529), and links plausibility to compliance with so-called "performance elements" (p566). He also links the likelihood of producing a plausible performance with cultural homogeneity and constancy over time. That is, he proposes that there is a direct relationship between cultural homogeneity and historical constancy, and the likelihood that one member of that community will produce a performance that is plausible for the others. His focus is, however, much more on ritual performances than everyday actions, and he does not specifically address the challenge of plausibility in a complex and heterogeneous

society in detail, save to say that in this instance there is a greater possibility for an actor to produce a performance that is not plausible to everyone.

Goffman (1959) concentrates more on whether or not the *actor* believes in the character that is being played. He also focuses on the elements of the performance as key to plausibility, although he takes a slightly different approach to Alexander, since his focus is everyday, modern life in an industrialized country. He emphasizes notions of "coherence among setting, appearance and manner" (p16) as central to whether or not a particular character is believable. For example, someone may have a luxurious home, dress in an upper-class way and affect upper-class mannerisms, but if they then speak with a broad working-class accent the upper-class character is no longer plausible.

In this thesis I have differentiated between what I have termed "objective" plausibility (which broadly conforms to how Alexander (2004) sees plausibility as being from the audience's point of view) and "subjective" plausibility (which broadly conforms to Goffman's (1959) ideas about whether the actor believes in the character). Of course there is no easy sharp dividing line between these two notions; rather it is a fluid and mutually conditioning relationship. The more our performance conforms to social "norms" and traditions the more likely it is to be judged objectively "plausible" since these norms are part of the audience's cultural make-up. However, a performance that we ourselves do not believe in may not come across as plausible, even though it ticks all the right boxes in terms of compliance with the performance elements in question. Sometimes a performance is constructed to be "objectively" plausible (i.e. in the eyes of others) even when there is no audience (as is described in the discussion of *mis-en-*

scene in Chapter 6). In these instances the (subjective) assessment of objective plausibility seems to support and reinforce subjective plausibility: that is, it appears that it is easier to believe in your character if the scenery around you and the props that you use would be (in your assessment) believable to others. The audience doesn't have to be physically present for their presence and likely judgment to be keenly felt.

Returning to the issue of what determines plausibility (whether this is objective or subjective): although I concur with Alexander (2004) that coherence among the elements of performance is certainly important for plausibility (and coherence in performance is a recurring theme throughout this thesis), I would propose that there is a more fundamental factor that determines the plausibility of performances, and that this "plausibility barrier" in fact determines what performances and characters are available to which persons, in most cases effectively overriding agency. This barrier is power – political, economic and/or social; something that Goffman (1959) hints at in his emphasis on the desire to be a member of a particular social class, but never articulates in more detail (most likely because of his stated focus on describing the framework of social performance, rather than the details of their motivations or outcomes).

Power and power relations determine the potential playbook for each person – what performances are permitted to whom, and who is excluded. In South Africa, I would propose, the power-imposed limitations on performances are central to issues of plausibility: these limitations are both historical (apartheid-based ideas of who was entitled to be what kind of person are still deeply ingrained in many areas of the economy and society, particularly in agriculture) and new (in the pervasive neo-

liberal depictions of poverty that tend to blame the victim for her material circumstances, together with the deep vein of materialism that characterizes current South Africa.) These factors both set very clear limits on who *can* undertake what kinds of performances, and (even more detrimentally I would argue) set expectations for what kinds of performances certain kinds of people *will* produce, effectively limiting their range of possible performances.

Agriculture in South Africa is still very much dominated by white commercial farmers, many of them farming on land that was obtained from previous (black) occupants under the forced land removals of apartheid. These commercial farmers have generally enjoyed economic success. South African wines are recognized around the world; South Africa is an important exporter of citrus and stone fruit; and the country is generally food secure on a national basis. Behind this front of agricultural expertise and commercial success for many white farmers lies a history of extreme exploitation, poverty and deprivation for (the almost exclusively) black farm workers. Farm workers form (together with domestic workers) probably the single most exploited group of labour in South Africa's history. On a typical large commercial farm some 30 or so years ago there was no doubt who was in charge, and from whom complete subservience was expected. In many places in rural South Africa not very much has changed: white people are the successful farmers and extensive land owners, black people are the farm workers, exchanging long hours of manual labour for generally meager salaries. Most of the members of the Motse Co-op had either direct or indirect experience of working on big commercial farms, and understood firsthand the precarious position of farm workers: they had come to live in Motse because either they or their parents had lost their farming jobs, or in some cases still

had them, but could not afford to live anywhere else on the income that this generated.

The dominant position of white farmers is not challenged to any great extent by the current government, despite all the public noise about land reform and the "transformation" of agriculture. In official policy documents, (white) commercial agriculture is seen as the key to national food security, since it produces more than 90% of the country's agricultural output. Official policy has taken a hard line towards land reform beneficiaries who struggle to make a commercial success of their farms, from 2007 adopting a "use it or lose it policy". At that time, the then Minister of Agriculture, Lulu Xingwana, was quoted as saying the following: "No farm must be allowed to lie fallow. Those who are not committed to farming must be removed from the allocated farm and be replaced by those who have a passion for farming." (*Mail and Guardian, 08 April 2009).* This kind of approach completely ignores the impact of the deteriorating terms of trade for farmers on farm incomes and profitability, the main reason behind the steady decline in the number of farming units in South Africa over the past few decades (Van der Heijden and Vink, 2013).

Initially (post-1994) transformation efforts in agriculture focused on transferring ownership of land to black farmers, via government-assisted purchases. No more: farms purchased by government for the purposes of supporting new black farmers are now most often held by the state and leased to aspiring farmers rather than being transferred to the latter. This effectively symbolizes the official stance towards these farmers: since they are likely to fail a lease agreement makes it easier to expel them from the land and try again with another group.

Official agricultural policy is also dismissive of small-scale and semi-subsistence farmers, the category of farmers that are overwhelmingly black. These persons are so unworthy of recognition as "proper" farmers that they do not even fall under the auspices of the National Department of Agriculture; instead they have been pushed off into the Department of Rural Development. These policies have, I would assert, effectively categorized black persons as a particular type of person within the agricultural sector and thus set clear limits on what kinds of performances are available to them: black persons are expected to fulfil the roles of farm labourers or – at best - of small-scale, almost subsistence farmers. This, I would further assert, underpins the generally disdainful manner in which community gardeners are viewed by the wider community, a key theme in this thesis: if it is not plausible that a black person could be a successful commercial farmer, then performances where that is the central theme are also not plausible. Instead the "audience" will always choose to believe that the person in question is a variation on a farm labourer, a person who historically has been very near the bottom of the economic, social and aspirational ladder. In these circumstances attempts by community gardeners to present themselves as aspirant farmers will seldom be believed.

The likelihood that this racially-determined "plausibility barrier" in agriculture is in fact strongly entrenched was underscored for me by an account that Samuel (a person who seemed to me determined to make himself a "proper" farmer) gave me of the history of some of the residents of Motse when I was enquiring in general terms about the origin of the location. Some of the current residents had come, he told me, from a place he called "Portion Four", which he explained to me was a failed land reform

project. “These people had everything”, he said, ”tractors, a packhouse, everything, but they failed. Now they don’t have anything; they have to live here, in a shack. I think, Tracy, it will be a long time before us black people know how to farm properly.” In Samuel’s account it was not the declining terms of trade for South African farmers, combined with little in the way of accumulated capital to support an enterprise with unpredictable cash flows, which was responsible for the demise of Portion Four, it was the blackness of its farmers. Although Samuel and his fellow Motse Co-op members seemed determined to present themselves as potential “proper” farmers, and worked very hard on the details of those performances, they had to struggle constantly against this widely entrenched view that successful farmers are white farmers. Nonetheless, they did exercise considerable agency (in the form of creative emplotment) in contesting the *authorship* of their identities; in creating identity performances that pushed against their categorization as farm labourers, and the next two chapters describes in detail how that was done.

At this point, however, I would like to make some observations about *who* in the two gardens made the greatest efforts in this regard because after a few months I realized that this was very uneven. Not all the gardeners put the same amount of effort into constructing performances of identity that pushed against this particular plausibility barrier, although all were subject to the same stigmas and condescensions resulting from their participation in the gardens. It appeared to me that that the greatest efforts were made by the young men in each group, and the least efforts by the older women. In the Tshimo Co-op – a not very successful venture - this difference was most stark: Jacob was almost obsessed with projecting himself as someone different from an itinerant gardener; in contrast, Sarah and Elizabeth seemed largely unmoved by the

negative perceptions of others; their efforts were around working in the garden, not presenting themselves in a particular manner, at least not that I was able to observe. At Motse it was mostly Samuel, Kabelo and Lesego who were concerned about their performances (although the latter seemed much more laid back about this than the other two), while the two older women in the coop – Grace and Rebecca – seemed completely unconcerned. The three younger women in the group (Bontle, Lillian and Mpho) fell somewhere in between.

There could be many explanations for this (and admittedly the sample is probably too small to make any generalisations), but I would propose that this may reflect the particular pressure that young black men in South Africa, most of whom would probably self-identify with a patriarchal social structure where men have clear responsibilities as bread winners, feel to "get ahead", to somehow make real the promise of "a better life for all". In contrast, women of Elizabeth's and Sarah's age have lived their whole lives in abject poverty, and at the bottom of apartheid's social ladder. Perhaps they have internalized this plausibility barrier; perhaps they no longer believe another version of their lives is possible.

Another possibility with respect to the apparently lower concern with performance of the younger women in the Motse Co-op is the extension of the state child care grants over the past ten years. These have (sometimes significantly) improved the material position of many extremely poor women, thereby making real a part of that "better life" and possibly removing some of the pressure to create performances of success in agriculture.

Closely related to performances that are "forbidden" (such as being a 'proper' farmer in the context of a community garden) - and just as limiting of personal agency – are what I have termed "expected" performances - those performances that poor people are expected to produce, simply because they are poor. The expectations in this instance belong to policy makers, development practitioners (including economists) and a host of do-gooders, based on their *a priori* assumptions about the 'beneficiaries' of development interventions. These pre-determine the motivations of the poor, and in doing so effectively prevent them from plausibly having any other. The resulting "expected" performances depict very strongly how power relations determine who poor people "are" and the enormous difficulties they face in trying to depict themselves as someone different.

The most important - and invidious - of these expected performances is what I have termed *The Grateful Hungry Poor*. The cast of *The Grateful Hungry Poor* populates official food security policy documents (most notably DAFF's *Zero Hunger Programme*) and media reports, and provides the background colour for hundreds of well-meaning NGOs and charity efforts. The script is both simple and well-known. Here is an (only slightly) ironic version:

- The only priority for poor, hungry people is food. (This is usually the point where "hunger" is seamlessly transformed into "shortage of vegetables" in many narratives.)
- They wouldn't be hungry if they knew how to grow their own food. (Responsible citizens frown on simply giving the hungry food – it makes them "dependent".)

- The only reason the poor do not grow their own food is because they do not know how to do so, or do not have the necessary inputs.
- Poor, hungry people will thus be overcome with grateful joy at the prospect of having your government department/NGO/charity teach them how to grow their own vegetables.

There were a number of variations on this expected performance that I observed during my fieldwork, but all were underpinned by similar ideas of how poor people should behave. Those that do not are quickly labeled "ungrateful", "ignorant", "stupid", "lazy", or all of the above. This pre-scripted performance results in an almost-endless number of small and not so-small indignities and humiliations being imposed on poor and food-insecure people. Government officials will routinely refer to food garden participants as "the poorest of our poor" in front of their own neighbours. I have witnessed NGO officials addressing grown men and women as if they were mentally deficient half-wits, telling them "we are here to help you so you will not be hungry".

I would assert that most of the struggles to be a particular kind of person that I observed were grounded in the (often overwhelming) desire **not** to be the kind of person depicted in *The Grateful Hungry Poor*. But the agency of the poor in this regard is so thoroughly and so effectively denied that many people simply cannot grasp this concept. I had this point brought home to me personally on several occasions. When I shared some of the preliminary conclusions of my research with people who asked me about it, emphasising my belief that poor people may be eschewing home gardening because of how it impacted on their sense of self-worth, I

always got a variation on the same response, which in its own way provided an interesting, and not very flattering, insight into the way in which the total denial of the agency of the poor in South Africa has become entrenched in the general psyche: disbelief that this was actually the case mixed with no little amount of annoyance that community gardeners could be quite so foolish. One person (a woman – this distinction is important for the rest of this story) in particular was most outraged: "I can't believe that", she said. "Are you actually asking me to believe that these people would rather go hungry than have people think badly of them? What is wrong with them? How are you going to make them change?" My response to her was a variation on what I said to many others: I asked her how many of her friends and other women in the wealthy suburbs of Johannesburg did she think were currently going hungry and nutritionally compromising themselves in the interests of presenting themselves as a particular kind of person, the kind who can fit into a size 32 dress? These kinds of conversations raised a very important issue in my mind. Clearly there are a lot of people in South Africa who believe that agency like this – an "extreme" agency if you will - going hungry in pursuit of a particular identity – is the sole right of the materially wealthy, something forbidden the poor.

These responses also emphasized to me how difficult it could be to present a plausible performance of identity (to an audience of development practitioners or mainstream economists) that differed to any considerable degree from the script of *The Grateful Hungry Poor*. I would argue that it is just such a plausibility gap that lies at the heart of the development conundrum described by Oliver de Sardan (2005): development officials believe that certain performances are implausible for the poor, but the poor themselves rebel against these *a priori* limitations on who they are (or could be). It

should be noted that this is a different interpretation than Oliver de Sardan himself (ibid) offers. His account focuses more on the (neo-classical economic) constraint of imperfect and/or asymmetrical information; postulating that the beneficiaries of development are making rational decisions based on information that is either unknown or only partially known to development practitioners. I cannot deny that this may sometimes be the case, but I would also propose that this account takes insufficient account of the ways in which development discourse pre-categorises the poor as people they vehemently do not want to be, and the subsequent contestations of authorship that this creates.

Another "expected" performance that I observed is what I have termed *The Want Something for Nothing Poor*. In this performance the poor are depicted as motivated almost entirely by money, but simultaneously determined not to have to work for it. An accusation (designed to insult I was sure) that I often heard leveled at community gardeners, particularly where the project was failing, was "these people just want money, they don't love agriculture". The underlying idea was that poor people were driven by the desire for money, rather than by the desire to do a good job, or to take pride in what they produced, and this was the reason why their project failed. Similar sentiments were repeated to me by provincial extension officers and trainers/mentors working in community gardens (paid by government). At Tshimo, where the three remaining gardeners had reportedly earned next to nothing from the garden for the previous three or four months, an extension officer said to me that the project was failing because the participants "just want easy money", by which he meant they should be chastised for not realizing that they would have to work hard for a long period of time before they had the prospect of earning even R500 per month. Apart

from the rather bizarre idea that poor people should be criticised for their desire to earn money, it should be noted that the criticism was usually leveled by someone in a relatively easy and very well-paid job, compared to the community gardeners. None of the government or development officials that I talked to during the course of my fieldwork was prepared to even entertain the idea that people might have left garden projects for any reason other than a desire for easy money or an aversion to work, or both.

The characterisation of only wanting "easy money" was sometimes accompanied by wildly inaccurate depictions of laziness, and extension officers and NDA[30] officials were often openly contemptuous about the gardeners. On one occasion I was talking to the extension officer responsible for the Motse Co-op – a young (around 25) woman who herself seemed to have very relaxed approach towards responding to problems at the garden and regularly missed scheduled meetings– about how well the project seemed to be doing and how pleased she must be about that. "Yes," she said, "but these people are a bit lazy and so I have to come and kick them so that they work properly." This was said in full hearing of the Motse Co-op members. None of them commented about it. I think they were used to it.

The Want Something for Nothing Poor performance may sound a little ridiculous, and it certainly is that in parts, but this blame-the-victim story has debilitating implications for those who want to define themselves as a particular type of person. This pre-scripted performance emphasizes the differences between poor people and the officials who make those comments: the point was that poor people were

[30] National Development Agency – the primary funders of the Motse Co-op during my time there

somehow *less* than they were, somehow *deserving* of contempt, since they were not prepared to work hard for some future reward. The fact that work in the gardens was extremely hard, and that the members of the Motse Co-op had worked very hard indeed for almost three years before they got any kind of meaningful reward (which was still only a small fraction of the salary of an extension officer) was simply glossed over.

These "want something for nothing" perceptions of officials are in sharp contrast to the key motivations of the gardeners themselves. As my fieldwork progressed I began to realise that although financial gain was a motivating factor (everybody felt the pinch of poverty acutely) it was very far from the most important motivating factor for the gardeners. It seemed to me that the reasons why people joined agricultural projects were much more complex than simply financial, and the reasons why they left them were just as complex. The desire to be, and to be perceived as, a particular kind of person was a much more important factor motivating meaningful action, even for the poorest members of the gardens. And certainly no one could seriously accuse the gardeners of not working hard.

But when a pre-scripted performance depicts people as only greedy and lazy, the result is that their agency to be a different type of person – a person like the extension officer, for example – is effectively denied, since deviations from this pre-scripted performance are judged "implausible" by a wider audience. Those that choose to leave a garden because it undermines their sense of who they are effectively have that sense of who they are denied; buried under the twin weights of greedy and lazy, and

they now somehow "deserve" to be poor. They are damned if they do, and damned if they do not.

4.3. Creativity and authorship: who scripts the performance?

Authorship is related to, but a little different from, the issue of forbidden or expected performances. In the case of these latter, the plausibility gap for the community gardeners is almost insurmountable, ranged as they are against deeply entrenched power relations and historical perceptions of poor black people in general, and poor black farm workers in partiular. The result, I would propose, is that although the struggle to be a particular kind of person is based on the ultimate goal of overturning or abolishing both forbidden and expected performances, the actual day-to-day struggles over agency in this regard are focused on winning smaller victories in the area of authorship of more plausible performances.

Even within those performances deemed broadly "plausible" for the gardeners, the question of authorship is continually contested: who gets to determine the details of the plot; of how a particular character will behave; what are the mannerisms and circumstances associated with this character; and so on. These small changes may leave the overall performance unchanged in many respects, but they do effect subtle changes in characters over time, gradually creating different persons.

There is, I would propose, a constant tension for persons between being the actor in a particular performance, delivering your lines and acting in accordance with someone else's script (whether that "someone" is an actual person, such as a development

official, or a cultural tradition, or history) and being the author, improvising outside and around a given script; expanding and adjusting the performance. This is a process that may be compared in some way to Medina's (2004) observations around citrus farmers in Belize, who, although they had little control over the development options that were given them by global markets, did feel very strongly that they had the agency to remake these options in certain ways to better benefit themselves.

These are not, I would assert, minor issues: I observed that through these apparently small efforts to take charge of and change even a small part of a particular script the community gardeners in Motse were winning small victories in the struggle to be persons of their own determination. The issue of authorship is also closely related to power: *who* gets to exercise that freedom and choice, who gets to decide what kind of persons the gardeners should be in their various social performances? To what extent do the gardeners actually have the ability to write their own performances, given the constraints of the macro environment within which the producers and consumers of food find themselves?

There are various approaches to the issue of authorship: Ricoeur explicitly followed Marx's maxim that "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" in stating that "we learn to become the *narrator* and the hero *of our own story*, without actually becoming the author of our own life" (Ricoeur, 1991b, p32, emphasis in original). What Ricoeur implied here was that we although we are limited by factors such as power, tradition, culture and economics which determine what narratives are available

to us, our ability to engage in creative emplotment allows us to exercise agency in scripting the details of a particular performance, although we do not have that ability with respect to every performance that makes up a life. We have the ability via emplotment to innovate: "this difference (between narrator and author) is *partially* abolished by our power of applying to ourselves the plots we have received from our culture and of trying on the different roles assumed by the favourite characters of the stories most dear to us" (Ricoeur, 1991b, p33, my emphasis). The possibility of innovation, I would suggest, implies that the actor may simultaneously be the author of a particular part (or parts) of a performance as well as its main actor. The greater the overlap of actor and author, while still maintaining plausibility, the greater the effective exercise of agency in becoming more like one of those "favourite characters".

Ricoeur's view on the process of emplotment and innovation in narrative are instructive in illustrating the relationship and tension between tradition (in this case the pre-scripted performance expected of the actor) and innovation (the ways in which the actor adjusts the details of the script). For Ricoeur, emplotment is essentially a process of "synthesis of heterogeneous elements " (Ricoeur 1991b, p21). These heterogeneous elements are all the separate components of a particular performance, and emplotment is what brings them together into one connected whole that can be understood by a particular audience. When crafting a plot for a performance the author is limited by the expectations of the audience with respect to how the story will unfold. If he does not meet these expectations, the audience is unable to follow and the performance will be implausible because it is unintelligible. For example, the audience expects that the motive for a particular action will be contained in the plot,

either directly (through a chain of events) or indirectly (through the details of characterization), and that this motive will link to the ensuing action in a way that makes sense, from their point of view. If this convention is not observed, the audience will be unable to follow, and very likely deem the performance implausible.

Thus Ricoeur focuses on the need for emplotment to maintain a balance between what he terms "innovation and sedimentation" (ibid, p24), between creativity and observing the traditions that make a performance intelligible and plausible. The traditions are related to what Alexander (2004) has termed "performance elements", but to my mind Ricoeur's concept of *mimesis1* provides a more satisfying insight, one that is better equipped to deal with the concept of tradition in complex, heterogeneous societies. As discussed in Chapter 2, *mimesis1* is the "pre-understanding" (Moore, 1990, p103) that is necessary before emplotment can take place. Developing a plot for a performance that will be intelligible both to ourselves and others (i.e. one that will be plausible) "presupposes a familiarity" (Ricoeur, 1984, p55) with a range of actions, cultural conventions, actors, likely consequences, causality, and so on. *Mimesis1* (prefiguration) thus informs the "intelligibility" of the plot and is what should ensure that the performance will be interpreted in one particular way rather than another, by situating the plot in a pre-existing meaning structure that is common to narrator and audience

Mimesis1 is made up of a large number of "conventions", ranging from the almost universal to the very particular, that make up the "tradition" which the author of a particular performance needs to keep in the back of her mind when thinking about innovation. It is these conventions that the gardeners need to keep in a constant and

careful balancing act when they are exercising their agency to "write" a variation into a particular script. If they innovate too much, their performance will not be plausible. If they stick to the traditional storylines and expected plot outcomes, their agency is effectively diminished. It required patience, skill and extensive creativity in order to maintain the plausibility of their performances in front of government officials and their own community (including those performances that essentially required them to be lesser persons), while still slowly recreating themselves.

During my time with the Motse Co-op I witnessed the gradual extension of authorship of many of the members, particularly in Samuel, who in his role as chairperson took the responsibility of managing many of the performances of the cooperative, *as cooperative*. This pushing of the authorship limits came about at the same time as the success of the cooperative slowly grew. It was, I believe, an increase in confidence associated with these successes that facilitated a series of small victories in the struggle for authorship, catalysed by several interactions with a neighbouring commercial farmer.

It seemed to the Motse garden members that all their years of hard work and struggle were paying off: the first three tunnels had yielded them a good profit (almost R40,000) from their first (2012/2013) summer tomato crop, despite some problems with plant diseases and learning the new (for them) hydroponic cultivation system. The NDA had made available a second tranche of funding, with which they were planning to purchase another three tunnels, due for planting with tomatoes in September of 2013 for the 2013/2014 summer season. This would double the output of the relatively high-value tomato crop.

In addition, in mid-2013 they won a youth farming competition, which came with a R30,000 cash prize from the Gauteng government. This money was going to finance a planned chicken house, for raising broilers. On the back of these successes the members of the Motse Co-op started to push back against characterisations of themselves as ignorants who should passively accept the superiority of those designated by others as "experts". As they learned the process of hydroponic farming and saw that they could produce good crops, they began to be more confident of their own abilities and knowledge, and less willing to be the passive participants in their own performances. They also started to take a more proprietary view of the NDA funding, increasingly viewing the money as something they had "earned", rather than charity from government. They thus began to take a more critical assessment of how it could best be spent to benefit the cooperative, on their own assessment of what that entailed.

Against this background, the training and mentoring services that were provided as part of the NDA financing package become an area of first contention, and then outright revolt, where the cooperative members made extensive gains in authorship, effectively rewriting a significant portion of this particular script. The NDA had allocated a portion of the overall grant to Motse to pay for training and mentoring. This made good sense – the cooperative members needed training (and some oversight) to implement the hydroponic methods used in the tunnels. This is a fairly complex method of growing high-quality tomatoes in an intensive manner: the plants are fed a mix of chemicals several times a day, which chemical mix must be carefully managed at each stage of the plants' growth. The high concentration of plants (900 to

a tunnel) facilitates plant diseases and fungus infections, requiring a careful regimen of spraying with pesticides and fungicides. The plants require regular pruning and training up climbing wires to keep the fruit clean and increase yields. The cooperative members were very clear about the value that training and mentorship would add to their enterprise, and how important it was to their success. They were, however, starting to get disgruntled with how they were being provided this service.

The training and mentoring services were provided by NTC, a company specializing in providing such services to government funded agricultural developments projects. NTC had not been selected by the Motse Co-op (no one ever asks the opinion of people like Samuel on matters like these), but rather came as part of the NDA package. I got the distinct impression that NTC (owned by a white commercial farmer) was a very good business. In addition to providing training and mentoring services they supplied infrastructure and inputs to many government projects. They had, for example, supplied the original three tunnels and associated irrigation and hydroponics equipment for Motse, as well as the original tomato seedlings. Now they were providing training and mentoring (a service that was intended to be provided for an 18-month period, thereby – hopefully – greatly reducing the risk of failure of the new enterprise.)

A mentor from NTC (Ernest) was assigned to the cooperative, and the plan was that he would deliver formal training twice a week, keep a general eye on day-to-day operations, and also assist the cooperative with *ad hoc* problems, such as when a new disease appeared in the tunnels.

The plan and the reality rapidly parted ways. I first started working at the garden some five months after the training/mentoring program had started. According to the Motse Co-op members things went reasonably as promised in the first few months of the programme, but then they deteriorated. Ernest seldom arrived as often as he was supposed to (twice a week), sometimes going for more than a week without a single visit. My conversations with Ernest (I chatted to him informally at the garden as well as a more semi-formal interview at the NTC offices) indicated that NTC was probably being paid for far more training and mentoring services than it actually employed people to deliver. Ernest seemed to spend his days rushing from one project to the next, and he was always in a hurry to get things done as quickly as possible when he came to Motse.

Far worse from the point of view of the Motse Co-op was that Ernest did not seem to know that much about growing tomatoes (in our discussions he told me he was an expert on chickens, and NTC mentored several chicken projects). There was more than one occasion at Motse where he was unable to diagnose (and thus to remedy) some plant ailment or insect problem. Samuel complained bitterly that substantial losses in one of the tunnels (which happened shortly after I arrived at Motse) were due to the inability of Ernest to identify a problem in the hydroponic chemical mix. This significantly reduced the money that the Motse Co-op earned from that tunnel's plants – almost one third of the plants failed to yield tomatoes of a sufficiently high quality to sell to Spar, with whom they had negotiated a supply contract.

Ernest was quick to assign blame for problems to the Motse members for "not listening" to him, and initially this view – Ernest the expert, the Motse members the

slow students – held. This was the standard script: A significant portion of smallholder and subsistence agriculture policy is based on the assumption that small and subsistence black farmers are woefully ignorant and in dire need of training to "learn" how to practise agriculture. When a relatively sophisticated production method like hydroponics is involved, the ignorance gap is presumed to be even wider. In this narrative, the perceived ignorance of the Motse Co-op members effectively denied them the right to be able critically (and, in this case, accurately) to judge the service that they were receiving.

Although I was aware that the Motse members were frustrated with Ernest, they initially took a stoic approach – they were regular participants in this kind of performance that assigned them particular characters, and seemed unable to conceptualise that they could change it. When I asked what they were going to do about the problematic Ernest, there was a general shrugging of shoulders and "what can we do?" Ernest himself was totally unmoved by any complaints to him by Samuel. There were some – carefully worded so as not to seem too presumptuous - complaints to the project manager from the NDA, but he paid little attention. (I never saw him at the garden, never met him even once there, which says a lot about his involvement with the project). Motse had a provincial extension officer assigned to them (she of the "lazy" remarks), but she was seldom there more than a few times a month, and appeared to have little knowledge about hydroponics or tomatoes. Additionally, it was clear to me that she bought completely into the characterization of the Motse members as woefully ignorant, and appeared quick to believe a version of events that suggested that it was their incompetence and/or laziness that had resulted in the chemically-damaged tomato plants. Clearly this was the way that

things worked: the Motse Co-op was expected to be happy with their substandard service while NTC made money from the whole process and they, the extension officer and the NDA, could simply blame the Motse members for being lazy or failing to listen if and when things went wrong.

But then something changed, and this well-used script took an unexpected turn. Silver Leaf Farms is a very large commercial salad grower located a few kilometres from Motse. The cooperative members had approached the owners – brothers Brian and John – a few months before I had started in the garden to ask for their assistance with a tractor to plough some of the open land, so that they could expand their outside planting area. When I asked Samuel why they had decided to ask these particular people for assistance (the area has many commercial farms with tractors) he replied that they had learned that the brothers provided financial support to a local orphanage "and so we knew they must be good people."

The contact with Silver Leaf was sporadic during my first few months in the garden, but then the brothers decided to take a more active mentoring role for Motse, seeing the first three tunnels as an indication that the cooperative was going places. (They also supported a number of other food-related projects in the area, such as a local school food garden.) They instructed their operations manager (Retief – a very personable middle-aged (white) man who had worked his whole life in horticulture) to support the project with free seedlings and general advice, which he did very enthusiastically. As a result, the Motse members started to go to Silver Leaf regularly (usually when I was there so that I could give them a lift) and Retief would drop past the project a couple of times a month.

The Motse members were very impressed with Silver Leaf, and so was I. They plant 1.2 ***million*** salad plants each week (all of which they grow themselves from seed) and supply micro herbs and salads to several large retailers. The farm is a model of efficiency, beautifully maintained, and Retief appeared to be an affable and encouraging manager, with a good relationship with the farm employees. The Motse members said that they could dream about one day having such a beautiful place.

The important point, however, was not just that Silver Leaf was a place that the Motse members could admire and aspire to, but – much more importantly – when they were on the farm they were treated by Retief as equals, not as poor people who were the lucky recipients of his largesse. He happily spent hours taking them around the greenhouses, discussing details of growing and planting, conferring with them on what varieties of tomatoes should be planted at what times. I never witnessed him talking "down" to the Motse members. For Retief, the Motse members were fellow hard-working farmers who needed some assistance because they were starting out, not because they were ignorant or lazy.

The brothers who owned Silver Leaf, although not as often available when the Motse members visited, were extremely encouraging when they did see them, congratulating them on what they had achieved so far and exhorting them to continue their efforts. Samuel felt emboldened by all this, and one day, while talking to Brian, John and Retief made a comment to the effect that they were struggling a little with their mentor from NTC. Turns out the farmer who owns NTC is well known to the Silver Leaf team, they do not have a very high opinion of him or of his agricultural skills,

and they were quick to say so. When Samuel said how much the Motse Co-op paid (i.e. the money that the NDA paid as part of the grant package) for NTC's training and mentoring services, the brothers burst out laughing in disbelief. "That's a good business!" they said. Brian went to far as to say that if the Motse Co-op needed advice on the tomatoes they should ask Silver Leaf, who would happily provide a much better service for free.

Samuel now had allies, people who supported and affirmed his dim view of NTC, and not just any allies, but farmers whom he respected tremendously. If Brian and John and Retief all said that the man who owned NTC was not a very good farmer, and that he was effectively ripping off the Motse Co-op, then the similar views of Samuel and the other members were vindicated; they were given "meaning-in-the-world" through their articulation by those the group admired and respected. And so he and the other Motse members decided to take a harder line: after all, if they made Ernest and NTC so cross that they refused to service the project further they could now rely on Silver Leaf. (Once again, the point here was not that the Motse Co-op didn't want to receive training and mentorship - they fully realized the value of this - but rather that they wanted the right to determine whether or not they were getting what *they* considered to be a good service, and to initiate action for change when they were not happy. This may seem to many people to be an "obvious" right for them to have, but in the context of their expected performances, this represented a significant change in script.)

Samuel then took the unprecedented step of going above the extension officer's head to her boss, the GDARD manager for the area, and a very nice man (the same one

who had originally shown me around the gardens); and said that there was a big problem. Samuel insisted on a meeting with GDARD, the NDA and NTC. Somehow the GDARD manager got the wind up the NDA person, and the meeting actually took place. As a result, Ernest was replaced with a new mentor – Sundi, a recent agronomy graduate. At first she seemed the answer: she was tasked with going to the project four days a week, and she was certainly knowledgeable. Unfortunately it didn't last. Three weeks after starting (and after following a pattern of increased and unexplained absences) she resigned suddenly from NTC to take another job.

Other developments continued to show the Motse members the possibilities of life without NTC. Further discussions with Retief at Silver Leaf had ensured that they would get all the tomato plants for the next season's planting for free (rather than having to purchase them from NTC). Retief had drawn them up a detailed spraying schedule and offered to organize them the chemicals from his own suppliers at a discounted price (once again, these would have automatically been ordered from NTC, at a much higher price). At much the same time the NDA made the funding available for the additional three tunnels, but instead of simply ordering them from NTC (as they had last time), the NDA asked the Motse Co-op to get three quotations (perhaps this had been done last time around, but Motse had not been actively involved in this exercise). This tunnel procurement process further cemented the Motse members' view that they were correct to push back against NTC: I took Samuel and three others one day to one of the potential suppliers, who had a number of their tunnels set up on a small demonstration farm. The tunnels that the Motse Co-op would get from here were much smarter than the ones they already had, and came with a far superior hydroponics mixing and irrigation system. The members were also

very taken with this efficient and well laid out demonstration farm. When questioned if they knew who NTC was – as the company who had supplied the first three tunnels – the owners of the demonstration farm made no attempt to hide their view that NTC was "a lot of crooks" and not very knowledgeable about hydroponics. The final straw was when the three quotes arrived: NTC's cost was by far the highest, although they would supply the lowest specification of tunnel and the least associated equipment.

This further proof (from a "proper" source) that their perception of NTC was correct encouraged the Motse members to push the variation on this particular script even further. They told the manager from the NDA that they wanted another meeting. This time NTC was clearly in the wrong, since the new mentor had disappeared. NTC made several excuses and promised another mentor. No, said Samuel, we don't want NTC here any more, we have got our own people who will help us. He told the NDA person that the Motse Co-op wanted the money for the training to be paid directly to the Co-op so that they could purchase additional infrastructure. "It is our money", Samuel said repeatedly during this time. Although the Co-op did not get the money in question paid over, NTC's contract was terminated. The fact that the NDA had effectively taken their side in not insisting that they take another NTC mentor is testimony to how far the Motse Co-op had progressed in making a new version of the script entirely plausible.

To say that the owner of NTC was annoyed by this turn of events would be a gross understatement. For the next few weeks he threatened the Motse members with legal action and the possibility of jail. The members were concerned, but they felt very strongly that they had the moral high ground. Each time they went to Silver Leaf they

had this reaffirmed by Retief or one of the owner brothers. Needless to say I also supported them. There were a few visits to Motse from an NTC manager who told them that his boss had agreed, as a conciliatory gesture, that they could go and watch the planting of the tomato tunnels at NTC as a training exercise. Actually, Samuel told him, tell your boss that he can come and watch *us* plant tomatoes. This story was regularly recounted by the members of the Motse Co-op, to considerable mirth. The manager never returned, and to the best of my knowledge the cooperative never purchased any significant amounts of inputs from NTC again. I am not sure what happened to the money, but it probably went to NTC as a settlement with the NDA. After all, only so many things can change.

As they gained in confidence to push back against their characterisations as agency-less recipients of whatever was directed their way, no matter how substandard, their views of NTC itself changed, and became more confident and more critical. The first few times I had gone to NTC's premises with Samuel (he would sometimes ask for a lift to go and fetch something from there – NTC was located about 10 kilometres from Motse) he had been extremely complimentary about the demonstration farm: "Look at these beautiful tunnels/chicken houses", he would say, or "look how nice this place is". Later the comments became a lot more acid: "Look how they are eating our money to make themselves this nice place."

When the Motse Co-op had saved enough money for a chicken house they did not buy one from NTC, or indeed from anyone. Instead, Lesego designed and built one based on those he had seen at NTC, with a number of clever enhancements in efficiency. The fact that they had themselves built a chicken house better than NTC's, at half the

price, was a constant source of pride. They would joke that they could set themselves up as a competitor to NTC, something they could never have even contemplated nine months before. In this particular performance, the Motse Co-op had successfully wrestled authorship away from much stronger opponents.

This example of agency as authorship illustrates the relationship between subjective and objective plausibility: while compliance with certain conventions of *mimesis1* is necessary for the audience to believe, the individual must also believe in her character – her mannerisms, actions and words. As this story about NTC shows, the more the individual believes in her own modified performance, the greater the possibility of objective plausibility. This, in turn, underpins the idea that agency must not only be possible in an objective sense (i.e. that a person **can** do something), but also that agency must somehow be inspired, a product of the creative imagination. There is a moment of faith when a person believes that her agency is *possible*, that she can convincingly be someone different, a person on her own terms.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE QUEST FOR TEMPORAL COHESION: EXPERIENCE, EXPECTATION AND THE SPACE FOR AGENCY

"Hope and memory, or expressed more generally, expectation and experience – for expectation comprehends more than hope, and experience goes deeper than memory – simultaneously constitute history and its cognition. They do so by demonstrating and producing the inner relation between past and future or yesterday, today, or tomorrow."

(Koselleck,2004, p258)

"Living backwards!" Alice repeated in great astonishment. "I never heard of such a thing!"

"—but there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways."

"I'm sure mine only works one way," Alice remarked. "I can't remember things before they happen."

"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards," the Queen remarked.

(Lewis Carroll - ***Through the looking glass, and what Alice found there)***

5.1. Introduction: identity and temporality

Ricoeur's narrative identity (and thus my conceptualization of "performance identity") is a fundamentally *temporal* identity, one that makes sense of and gives order to a simultaneously present past, present and future (Ricoeur, 1984). Because of this inherent temporality, performance identities are ever-shifting. The ongoing reworking – *remaking* if you will - of our performance identities is necessitated by

our experience of a constantly changing relationship between the past, the present and the future. As the present unfolds, our experiences change, together with how we interpret and "locate" those experiences, and our expectations of the future change. In order to preserve a sense of continuity in ourselves (Ricoeur's "concordance" between what changes and what stays the same in identity) we need to keep adjusting our understanding of the past and our imagination of the future to make the present intelligible (Ezzy, 1998). The important point here is that our past is not "given"; it is not a fixed series of immutable and "true" chronological facts. Instead, what we consider as "the past" is a complex mix of what we actually remember (including those things that we are sure we do not remember), how we remember these events and persons, what we imagine we remember, collective (social) memory, and the memories of others that are accessible to us (such as those of our parents, our friends, events in the books we read, etc.), all conditioned by the context in which our past took place. In this way, a lot of our past may be said to be as much the product of imagination – in that it exists after having been "filtered" through our subjectivity and our cultural and social norms - as our anticipated future (which can never be perfectly predicted, but must be imagined).

It is the temporal coherence mediated by our identity that determines our "space" for meaningful action – "both memories of the past and anticipations of the future …. provide a coherent self concept that serves to direct current action" (Ezzy, 1998, p241). Meaningful action may thus be described as taking place at the intersection of what Reinhart Koselleck (Koselleck, 2004) termed "the space of experience" and "the horizon of expectation" (p 256). The space of experience conditions our "historical self-understanding" (Tribe, 2004, pxix) – how we understand ourselves in relation to

past events, and in terms of those past events. Experience is the past made present. Expectation is the future made present. What we "remember" conditions what we believe is possible, and both of these impact on how we act in the present – how we understand what actions are actually "available" to us, and how we "choose" among these possibilities. As we continually reconfigure both our experiences and our expectations, based on a range of new inputs, new events or new memories, either personal, or of others or of the collective, so the "now" in which meaningful action takes place also changes. That is, the pool of possible actions and/or how we assess which actions to actually implement is constantly changing. Significant changes in the space of experience or the horizon of expectation may thus impact on *latent agency*, since a person may now effectively have more possible actions to choose from (or, indeed, fewer), as well as a different understanding of what she is *able* to choose. This perception of action as taking place in a permanently shifting, conditioned present is very different to the simple causality of "*if x, then y*" that permeates the thinking of mainstream development.

One of the key proposals made by Koselleck (2004) is that the relationship between past and future has been fundamentally altered by modernity; specifically, that we no longer expect that the past will be a reliable guide to the future. Instead, modernity could be said to be characterized by a growing gap between the past and the future, which gap is generally in benefit of the future – we expect the future to be considerably better than the past, and as a result we make greater demands on that future (ibid, p3). At the same time, experience is further and further "detached" from a rapidly expanding horizon of expectation and is no longer a reliable guide for the future (Pickering, 2004, p286). That is, we not only generally expect that the future

will be better than the past, but also that it will be fundamentally different (Koselleck, 2004).

These themes of detachment and improvement are echoed in the discourses of socio-economic development in South Africa, which has an over-arching goal of creating "a better life for all". This better life for black South Africans (and particularly the poor) is not only imagined as fundamentally *better* than, but also fundamentally *different* from life under apartheid. In fact, it is better *because* it is different (although, of course, whose version of "different" holds sway is a key point of contestation, as this thesis has emphasised). We could, therefore, say that development policy in South Africa is characterized by the *desire* to create a significant detachment between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation for the poor (although, of course, not *only* for the poor). However, neither development policy nor development practitioners have fully taken into account the impact of this detachment on the fundamental requirement of temporal coherence in personal identity, and the challenges that this poses to meaningful action. If meaningful action, as Koselleck proposes, does indeed take place at the intersection of experience and expectation, how is the ability to undertake meaningful action impacted when that intersection becomes a vast no-man's land, where the past must be discarded, but there are few guidelines for the new future?

The notion of meaningful action as mediated by past and future in the context of a fundamental divergence between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation in post-1994 South Africa, and the challenges that this poses to the mediation of personal identity, is a central theme in this thesis. The community

gardeners (and in particular the younger gardeners) find themselves at a complex temporal intersection: a past where possible identities (that is, the repertoire of "available" performances) was greatly circumscribed by the conditions of apartheid, and a "New" South African future were this repertoire is supposed to be greatly expanded by "freedom", but where the ability to construct new performance plots in the present is constrained. It is constrained by (actual and imagined) experiences of the past, together with the limitations imposed by the *a priori* assumptions of mainstream development about who the poor "are". The actual repertoire of available performances (i.e the ability to engage in meaningful action in the present) is bounded significantly by the realities of economics, politics and power, as described in the previous chapter.

Performance identity is our attempt to create temporal coherence in the "now" in terms of both experience and expectation. The question is, how do the gardeners achieve *temporal plausibility* in their performances; how do they make them temporally credible, both for their audience and for themselves? For the purposes of this thesis I have defined "temporal plausibility" as referring to a coherence between who the actor was, who she currently is and who she will be in the future, all situated within the macro constraints to plausibility discussed in the previous chapter – forbidden performances and expected performances. The audience (and the actor) need to believe in the internal logic of the chronological progression of the character from then, through now and into the future.

Although temporal coherence in identity probably presents a challenge to most of the historically excluded poor who are trying to redefine themselves in terms of the

"new" South Africa, I would assert that the quest for temporal coherence is particularly challenging for the community gardeners, located as they are in the world of agriculture, where history is ranged firmly against them. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is a world where strong racial stereotypes are still very firmly entrenched, reflecting the contemporary reality of South Africa's agricultural sector. Successful commercial farmers are overwhelmingly white, farm labourers are almost exclusively black. White farmers and black farm labourers sit at opposite poles of standards of living. A key recurring theme in South African farming narratives is the "white people are good farmers, black people are bad farmers" storyline (as illustrated in Samuel's account to me of the failed land reform beneficiaries). This theme is pervasive in the popular imagination, as well as being partially reinforced by DAFF's "use it or lose it" policies towards land reform beneficiaries and emerging farmers and this sets a plausibility barrier in the form of "forbidden" performances. However, it is not only the challenge of "objective plausibility" that the gardeners must overcome (i.e. how to convince their community and government officials that they are, or can be, successful farmers), but also the challenge of "subjective plausibility" (i.e. that they themselves believe that this is possible).

The desire to be a particular person in the future (i.e. expectation) is the aspiration that is spur to action in the present. However, as Ricoeur (1984) points out, a narrative (and in turn a performance) must form a temporally coherent whole; there must be some sort of logic, intelligible to the audience, to the sequence of events presented in the performance – the interlinking of cause and effect presented in the plot. And this is where the challenge for the community gardeners lies: how to achieve this continuity of storyline between who they were (which includes who they could have

reasonably aspired to be in the past) and who they aspire to be, when in fact the gap between the two is enormous. They have exercised considerable ingenuity in bridging this gap, and in doing so are effectively creating new hybrid persons who are not easily classified in traditional historical, racial or material terms. It is this necessity for temporal coherence, I would assert, that goes some way towards explaining what seems to be another example of paradoxical behaviour on the part of the community gardeners (something I have seen examples of in many other "emerging" famer projects) – their strong preference for building relationships with white farmers, and the generally friendly tone of those relationships, which stands in marked contrast to what their history would suggest.

The possibility of reworking an identity to make it more temporally coherent (and thus more plausible) is facilitated by the notion (as expressed by both Ricouer and Kosselleck) that neither the past nor the future are composed of a finite set of completely verifiable true "facts", but rather that both are remade on a regular basis. Although this is a fairly obvious notion with respect to the future (no one has perfect foresight and so our expectations must necessarily change as the present unfolds) it is not so obvious with respect to the past, but this conceptualization of personal history as a hybrid of fiction and truth is central to the challenge of temporal coherence. After all, if it were not possible continuously to remake our past (our "experience") it would not be possible to manage the "gap" between experience and expectation, and thus engage in meaningful action. This thesis describes the efforts of the community gardeners in the remaking and reconfiguring of their experience – in effect the creation of "new" memories - in an endeavour to create a better connection between their pasts and their imagined horizons of expectation, and so meet the challenge of

temporal plausibility. The distance and details of the horizon of expectation, conditioned by your space of experience, impact on what kind of person you (reasonably, and keeping in mind the constraints imposed by plausibility) expect you may become.

In the first part of this chapter I examine the details of the horizon of expectation, the imagined future – how the over-arching theme of progress is envisioned; what the future looks and feels like to the community gardeners. I have discussed some examples of how the possibility for meaningful action (and thus agency) is in reality greatly limited by the mutual conditioning of the space of experience and the horizon of expectation. Thereafter I have considered the various strategies that are employed by the gardeners to go about remaking their "space of experience" in order to accommodate the possibility of a "better" future, and thus expand their ability to undertake meaningful action. A key point to make here is that, although there are some general over-arching themes – such as progress itself and the necessity of linking past and future in the present, the details of how temporal coherence is achieved are largely individual and contextual. For each of the cooperatives (Motse and Tshimo) and the members within those cooperatives, there were fundamental differences in how the future was imagined (limited, I have argued, by differences in the space of experience). This was not static, however: I observed that an expansion of the space of experience could result in an expansion of the horizon of expectation, and thus an expansion of what was temporally plausible in performances of identity. In this way, a creative remaking of experience can facilitate a remaking and "expansion" of the person. This dialectic reinforces the idea that there is a constant

and flexible mutual conditioning of past, present and future, mediated by performances of identity.

5.2. Horizons of expectation: "We are moving forwards"

The theme of progress, the desirability of "moving forward" is ever-present in contemporary post-1994 South Africa. That year is a temporal talisman of sort; a dividing line between a period when to be a black person was to have little expectation of the future; and a time when everyone can have a better life. This idea of a considerable expansion of the horizon of expectation is the over-arching theme that pervades all government policy, and all development planning in South Africa: The future will be different from the past, and it will be better than the past. Despite the various official disappointments in achieving that better future (most notably in the areas of income equality and employment), the conviction of moving away from the past remains strong. As President Zuma put it at the inaugural meeting of the National Planning Commission on 11 May 2010: "The establishment of the National Planning Commission is our promise to the people of South Africa that we are building a state that will grow the economy, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of our citizens." (NPC, 2012, p1).

The general *idea* of progress as forward momentum from the past is held by all the gardeners, albeit to different degrees, and imagined in different ways. Samuel at Motse describes success in tomato sales as "now we are moving." When Sarah at Tshimo talks about the brief period of success that the garden enjoyed before the fall out with Charles she describes how "we were moving forward". Now, however, "we are going nowhere, we are stuck here."

This imperative of "moving forward" mirrors in many ways the dominant discourse of development in contemporary South Africa. "Development" itself is fundamentally about leaving the past behind and moving into a new and brighter future. Metaphors of motion abound in the language of policy makers, provincial agricultural officers and community gardeners. It is, I would assert, the desire to be the kind of person who is leaving the past behind and moving forward that underpins many of the performances of identity described in this thesis. The person almost everyone wants to avoid being is someone who is "stuck" in the past. In very generic terms, the past person who must be discarded is a poor black person for whom apartheid provided no space to believe in a different future; and the future person is someone who "is going somewhere", who is on her way to getting that better future in the "new" South Africa.

The key point here is the equation of "better" with "different": it is very hard to construct a plausible performance of identity around "moving forward" when the main components of that performance appear to others to be identical to some "past" person. This is the critical issue that all the gardeners must overcome. The desire to leave the past person behind and to embrace a new person generates some particularly complex problems when you are a community gardener: Much of what characterizes a past poor black person (i.e. under apartheid) is inextricably bound up with notions of dirty work, the obligation of and restriction to manual labour (agricultural labour in particular) and the bleakness of scratching a living from the earth in a remote corner

of a Bantustan[31]. But how do you separate yourself from that past when your present and your future are based in agriculture, food production and undeniably dirty work? This challenge is, I would assert, the key driver behind the complexities of plot construction, characterisation and the choice of material "props" that make up the performances of identity described in this thesis. This desire to disconnect oneself from a past that is in fact unavoidably present in both your present and your future also has implications for the creation of temporal coherence in performances, since experience conditions expectation, and vice-versa.

Moller (2005) describes a school gardening project where students were encouraged to work in the garden in return for a free lunch at the school. This proved a powerful *disincentive*, since working in the garden (even for students who genuinely enjoyed the activity) was now associated with being so poor that you were in desperate need of that free meal. During the period of my fieldwork I met a wildlife conservation NGO field worker at a conference. He was working in rural KwaZulu Natal, and had also been surprised by the negative attitude towards food gardening that he often encountered. He told me the story of a rural school that had started a food garden, and had decided that the children should work in that garden for an hour or so each day. Parents were outraged when they heard of the scheme, confronting the headmaster with "this is Bantu education[32]. When we were at school we had to work in the garden. Our children are not coming to school to be gardeners." Clearly these parents were adamant about separating their children's futures from their own pasts.

[31] The so-called independent self-governing territories within South Africa, established under apartheid as an extension of the ideology of "separate development" and to which many black South Africans were exiled after forced removal from "white" areas.

[32] The segregated education system under apartheid was specifically geared towards excluding black South Africans from skilled jobs or the professions, and thus focused on providing only the most rudimentary level of education for those who were not "entitled" to have ambitions beyond labourer.

It should be pointed out that being a gardener was not the first choice of any of the community gardeners in either of the two gardens: instead the gardener (and developing from that the ideal of a "farmer") became an *adopted* persona out of a combination of necessity, sometimes (as in the case of the Motse gardeners) tempered by positive experience. Both Kabelo and Samuel at Motse were quite clear that their first choice of job was some kind of office job – the kind of job that would most clearly effect a temporal split between the future and the past. Very soon after I started working at Motse Kabelo said told me that "by now I thought I would have an office job, sitting at a nice desk, drinking tea", but both he and Samuel agreed that without some kind of formal qualification (which they did not have) this was not possible. And so they had adjusted their expectations, and the successes of the Motse Co-op had supported a reworking of those expectations into something desirable (although probably not as desirable as that office job). "I have learned", said Kabelo, "that dirty work can also be a good job."

There is no one universal "horizon of expectation" evident across all the gardeners. Conceptions of the future differ considerably between the two cooperatives, and among the members of those cooperatives, both in terms of the perceived temporal "gap" between the horizon of expectation and the space of experience (i.e. how **much** better will the future be than the past), as well as in the details of what that future will look like. In addition, these expectations had changed in the period before I joined the gardens (as recounted to me by the gardeners themselves), and I witnessed them changing during my time with the gardeners. My initial observations about the differences in the horizon of expectation were around the differences between the

gardens, and then among the members of each cooperative within those gardens. I would assert that these differences reflect the relationship between the horizon of expectation and the space of experience of each cooperative member, and show clearly both the conditionality of the relationship between the two, and the resulting impact on both the extent of agency, and the possibilities of meaningful action.

The members of the Motse Co-op had a generally much more positive and expansive (i.e. a further horizon) view of what the future would bring than the members of the Tshimo Co-op. They looked forward to the growth of the garden, the extra income that would come from the three new tunnels and their new chicken house. They had also invested in two entirely new businesses by the end of my time in the garden – firewood and the door-to-door delivery of paraffin. There was a general air of optimism in the garden and the gardeners often talked about how "lucky" the project was. They were also very future-oriented in their decision-making in the present: all the extra income in the garden (over and above what was spent on regular inputs and their R800 per month stipends) was saved for investment into expansion. None of the Co-op members suggested that they should instead take the money and use it to increase their monthly income.

In terms of what the future looked like, and particularly what kind of persons they would be in that future, there was a general consensus at Motse (although for the purposes of the discussion below it is important to point out that it was the younger members of the Motse cooperative that articulated this view most clearly and most frequently). At some point in the future, if they could keep "moving forward", they would have their own farm, and they would be "proper" farmers. It is important to

emphasise that, for the Motse gardeners, their horizon of expectation was described almost exclusively in terms of the *kinds of persons they would be*, rather than in terms of how much money they would have, reflecting Gibson's (2011) assertion that what is at stake for the poor in South Africa is not their material circumstances, but rather the struggle to be a particular kind of person.

As examples, when talking about their hopes for the future of the cooperative the Motse members would describe in great detail what their farm would look like (it would be big), what would be on it (there would be tractors and a bakkie[33] and a "proper" packhouse and a "proper" office instead of the converted container) and their role on that farm ("we will own the farm and we will have people to do the work.") These descriptions of material objects were intended to imply a particular type of *person,* not a particular kind of *materiality*. Not one of the Motse members ever included in the description of this future place "and we will make a lot of money".

When we made our regular visits to Silver Leaf Farm the Motse members spent a lot of time asking Retief about the details of how he constructs his growing tunnels, how he lays out the seedlings and the irrigation systems, what chemicals he sprays, and how many people he employs. They never, ever asked how much the salad was sold for, but they were extremely taken when they hear that it goes to Woolworths[34], which for them is an unattainable retail nirvana, an unmistakable indication of just how good the Silver Leaf farm is.

[33] A small pick-up truck
[34] South Africa's most up-market food retailer.

Certainly the Motse Co-op members found it very hard to make ends meet on their R800 a month stipends paid from the project (which they were now paying out of their own retained income, rather than receiving them as part of their NDA grant), and it would not be unreasonable to assume that they desired to earn more than that to ease the constant worry about money. But when they did talk about their monetary ambitions for the project, it was usually the *form* of the income that was emphasized, not the amount: "We are waiting", said Kabelo, "for that day when we can get a salary, and not a stipend". Stipends are for project participants, salaries are for people who have proper jobs.

I observed a narrative sub-theme common among the members of the Motse Co-op, related to defining what kind of people they believed themselves to be, which in turn defined a large part of what they expected from the future. That narrative theme was one of effort, sacrifice and "deserving". They often talked about "easy come, easy go" to refer to a person's inability to hold onto money that had been earned with too little effort (such as a winning lottery ticket, or from gambling in a casino). In contrast, if one had worked hard for one's money, and encountered hard times and struggled for success in the process, then that money would be properly respected, and not be wasted on frivolities. It would stay with you in the future. Once again, the basic idea underpinning this conceptualization of an aspired-to person was not that hard work would earn a person *more* money (although it certainly could), but that the money earned in this way was somehow more meaningful and more valuable than that earned through easier means. In my view, this particular narrative sub-theme supported the assessment that the community gardeners' primary motivation was not

money by any means, but rather being the kind of person who deserved what it was that they had – who had earned it through hard work and commitment.

For Sarah and Elizabeth in Tshimo there was none of the bright optimism seen at Motse. For them the possibilities of the future were envisioned as only slightly better than their present circumstances. Sarah recalled the brief period when the garden was producing enough basic vegetables to sell for a very modest income as the time when it was fulfilling its promise. For her, a "better" future was defined as a garden running in an efficient manner, with some extra members so that the work was not so hard, generating her a few extra hundred Rands per month in income. She was not enthusiastic about reinvesting too much money to expand the garden, and she never indicated that she shared any of Jacob's relatively grand plans. Elizabeth's expectations seemed even more modest. She appeared quite content to work hard in the garden every day in return for the small possibility that there might be some small financial reward coming her way some time in the future. Although we spent a lot of time together in the Tshimo garden, she never articulated any ambitions around the expansion of the garden, or having a farm, or indeed that her life could significantly change and improve.

Jacob from Tshimo fell somewhere between these two groups (i.e. Motse and his fellow gardeners). He certainly seemed to feel a very keen desire to make a break with the past, to have that promised "better life" made real. I think that this desire was strengthened by the fact that he seemed to have a number of friends who were getting ahead: he spoke of them as people who had good jobs, and with whom he would spend the weekends "having a good time." In this group his persona as a community

gardener made him firmly stuck in a past the others were moving on from. Of all the Motse and Tshimo members, Jacob was the one who seemed to feel most strongly the humiliation associated with being a gardener, and the one who would make the biggest efforts to avoid that. I once asked Jacob why he did not do door-to-door sales in the adjacent location. It was clear to me from Motse's example that there was a ready market to hand for fresh vegetables at a reasonable price. He told me that when he had on a previous occasion gone around with a wheelbarrow to sell tomatoes, his neighbours and friends had laughed at him and he had not done it again. As the chairperson of the cooperative Jacob had decided that their primary goal should be selling their produce, not growing it for their own consumption (an important distinction for him), but he could not bear the humiliation that was associated with the only sales method available to him.

Jacob articulated ambitions that the garden would expand, that the membership of the cooperative would grow, and that the garden would be some kind of commercial success. My initial impression was that he was trying to impress me with the potential success of the garden, on the erroneous belief that I was somehow reporting back to the provincial official who had first brought me to the garden. As an example, in our first few meetings he spoke a lot about the sales that the garden made in response to my questions around this, but after I had spent a few weeks in the garden it became clear that there were no sales at all, apart from very infrequent visits by teachers from the school to the garden. Once Jacob realized that I did not, in fact, have any relationship with the GDRARD manager and was not relaying any information to him, the stories about the potential of the garden largely stopped. These selling narratives were Jacob's way of presenting the garden as a successful commercial

enterprise, reflecting his own hopes and ambitions, rather than any reality. "One day", he said, "we will have a bakkie, and then we will do proper selling, and we will have a contract with Shoprite[35]." In this respect, however, I never found his performance very plausible, and I do not think that either Sarah or Elizabeth did: he had not succeeded in creating Ricoeur's concordant whole in his performances. I do not think that Jacob found his performance particularly plausible either, but it appeared to be his only way of avoiding the reality of his life as a gardener.

In defining their horizons of expectation, Sarah and Elizabeth reflected a similar worldview as they did in their interactions with provincial officials, Beki (the school caretaker) and the local councilor. They clearly did not believe that they were entitled to more than the very little they received. In addition, their expectations of the future, such as they were, were described to me largely in *monetary* terms (albeit extremely modest terms). This did not suggest to me that they were *more materialistic* than the Motse members (or even than Jacob), but rather that they did not really believe it was entirely plausible that they should be *different persons* in the future, merely the same persons with a little extra money. The could not see themselves as successful farmers, or managing any kind of commercial enterprise selling anything to Shoprite. Both Sarah and Elizabeth had demonstrated agency, and a small step towards change by signing up for and completing the plant production course at the community college; and by joining the cooperative; and by arriving at work on a regular basis. But their ability to envisage the nature and scope of that future – their horizon of expectation – was severely limited. I would suggest that this limited horizon of expectation was conditioned by their limited space of experience: there was nothing in Sarah's or

[35] South Africa's largest food retail chain

Elizabeth's lived history which supported the idea that they could make their future fundamentally better or different. This in turn greatly limited their scope for meaningful action and thus the extent of their agency. For Sarah and Elizabeth the temporal dissonance was too great to be entirely overcome by any amount of creative emplotment, although (as described below) even they could find creative ways to enlarge their space of experience just a little.

I would assert that Sarah and Elizabeth's space of experience was fundamentally limited by a combination of their personal histories, their age (late forties and early fifties) and their gender (although admittedly all the older persons in the gardens were women). Both women had lived their entire lives in abject poverty, mostly in squalid informal settlements. They had very little education, no resources and no prospects. As poor black women they had lived their entire lives at the bottom of the social, cultural and economic ladder. (Elizabeth, with her noticeably San features probably was even lower down the rungs than Sarah). Their space of experience was one of forbearance and endurance, not optimism. As Koselleck (2004) has pointed out, the ability to engage in meaningful action to change your circumstances requires that you are able, even in fuzzy terms, to imagine yourself in a particular future, as plausibly carrying out a certain future performance. Your ability to do so is circumscribed by your space of experience; this intersection is where the plausibility of identity is tested.

I would further suggest that Sarah and Elizabeth's historical barrier to seeing themselves as different persons in the future was also the reason why they initially appeared to me be so apathetic about the indifference of the provincial officials that

was threatening their project. The broken borehole episode, which occurred a few weeks into my time at the garden is a good example of the dynamics at work. One day I arrived at the garden to find that no water was coming from the borehole tanks. This was a serious problem: there were hundreds of newly planted seedlings in the garden and it was very hot. I asked Sarah what the story was (Jacob was on one of his many absences) and she just shrugged and said it was broken. A few days later it was the same story, and the next time after that. Although I helped to carry water for the plants, I was getting annoyed, not just with the lack of response from the officials, but also with Sarah and Elizabeth, for what I perceived as their "whatever" attitude. On the third visit I asked Sarah if she had phoned the GDARD manager to complain: not only had she not done so, she was clear that she would do no such thing. Once again, I was annoyed at her apparent lack of interest, and nagged her until she did call.

It was only much later I realized that her inaction had nothing to do with apathy or lack of interest. On the contrary, she was deeply concerned about the implications of the failed water supply for the garden. But she did not believe that a person like her had the "right" to demand anything at all from the government official, despite the "fact" that it was his job to do his best to make sure that her garden succeeded. She was also nervous about his perceived power to push her out of the garden if she was seen as "troublesome". The garden wasn't much, but she had nothing else. Her horizon of expectation in this regard was so limited as to be virtually non-existent. And why? Because nothing in Sarah's life had ever given her the idea that she could be the kind of person who could demand (or even politely request) that the official do his job. In her world, whether or not he assisted with the borehole was entirely at his discretion, and had nothing to do with anything she might need or require. Without

the kind of external factors that had allowed the Motse members to take charge of their performance scripts, she never would have the opportunity to expand her space of experience to be robust enough to support an expanded vision of her own future. It is the reality of this history – this downtrodden space of experience – that effectively limits Sarah and Elizabeth's agency to be equal persons with that provincial official, no matter how much "freedom" they have on paper.

I observed that it was the younger members of both gardens who were the most optimistic about the future, and who were most likely to articulate that future in terms of the kinds of persons that they aspired to be (i.e. "proper" farmers). Even at Motse, the two older members of the Co-op (Grace and Rebecca) very seldom articulated the "proper" farmer future that the younger members did. Instead they gave general versions of hopes that things would go better and that the project would "grow". At Tshimo, Jacob, although generally unconvincing in his performance of who he was going to be, also had a fairly ambitious idea of what kind of enterprise the garden might become, and his role in that. I would suggest that this age-determined difference simply reflects social and historical events: None of the younger members in either garden has a strong *personal* recollection of apartheid. Although they certainly feel the practical limitations of their colour and their poverty on their aspirations, and are regularly subjected to the kind of casual racism that has become entrenched in small towns, there is nothing legislated, nothing so final as the reality of apartheid. They may have little real chance of ever drastically changing their lives within the power structures imposed by mainstream development, but the *possibility* that they could do so now exists.

5.3. "No expectation without experience; no experience without expectation"[36]: expanding expectation by expanding experience.

Throughout the greatest part of my time at Motse the members' hopes and ambitions for the cooperative continued to increase, as did their belief that they might actually achieve these goals. They had not always been so optimistic: Samuel remembered a time when the Motse members had been "just sitting here; no resources, no connections…" I would propose that their later expanding horizon of expectation was made possible in part by a growing space of *actual* experience: as the present unfolded and they could add small progresses to their personal histories, and the history of the cooperative, so their conceptualisations of what could be possible in the future also expanded, *in a temporally coherent manner*. Their ability to remake themselves as more assertive persons in the relationship with NTC was, I would argue, supported in part by their growing experience of that assertiveness, of themselves as different persons. Each small success against NTC expanded the space of experience, which in turn conditioned the horizon of expectation, and created the possibility of additional meaningful actions. Thus the rescripting of the NTC performance was made temporally credible, achieving the necessary coherence between who the Motse members had been, who they were and who they could be.

I observed a similar process in the expansion of the Motse Co-op's horizon of expectation mediated by a widening of the space of experience in the adoption of new sales strategies. The increase in production at the garden during my time there created something of a problem: how to sell everything that was grown. All the Motse members were adamant that they would not be "one of those projects were the stuff

[36] Koselleck, 2004, p257

goes rotten", watching all their hard work amount to nothing, but there was only so much that they could sell to Spar and the nearby China shop, and neither of those would take their spinach or the smaller tomatoes (of which there were plenty). They sold directly to customers who came to the garden, but this represented only small sales at irregular intervals. The members did occasionally walk around Motse doing door-to-door sales, which showed good results, but this was a fairly small market, nowhere near big enough for the hundreds of bunches of spinach and packets of tomatoes they would soon have to sell to prevent those piles of rotting produce. In conversation with the members I raised the possibility that I could transport them to nearby informal settlements (thereby removing one of the big cost obstacles) where they could do door-to-door sales. Initially there was very little enthusiasm for the idea, based, as far as I could tell, on the issue that they did not "know" that many people in these settlements.

I continued to suggest the idea, and the spinach and tomatoes continued to grow, and one day I arrived at the garden to find big black plastic boxes (donated by GDARD and emblazoned with the GDARD logo) filled with packets of tomatoes (about 6 to a pack) and washed and tied bunches of cut spinach (big bunches – about 10cm across the diameter at the base). Samuel announced that today they would be going (with my assistance) to Maqa Hills (a relatively small informal settlement about 10 kilometres away, on the road to Steynsville). "We know some people there", he said.

Six of the members got in the car with me, together with the boxes of spinach and tomatoes. None of them seemed enthusiastic, and there was little conversation during the drive. I got the distinct impression that they were making the trip at Samuel's

insistence that something had to be done. When we arrived in Maqa Hills, stopping under a tree near the dilapidated general store, the group was noticeably nervous; a bit worried that they would not be received well and fail in their selling plan. They were all neatly dressed in their blue overalls, much more so than they would normally be at the garden. Bontle told me later that "customers like to see that you are neatly dressed." They split into 3 pairs (selling always takes place in pairs, that way there can be no argument about how much money should be handed over at the end of the selling) and Samuel carefully counted out and recorded how many packets and bunches went to each pair (for the same reason). Both the tomatoes and the spinach were to be sold for R5, a very cheap price considering the quality of the produce and the retail alternatives. I wished them luck, and said that I would be back in an hour and a half. "I hope we will sell something by then", said Samuel.

An hour and a half later I came back to find all six smiling and joking under the tree. The sales had been a tremendous success: not only had they sold everything, but they had been warmly welcomed and complimented on the quality of their produce. Thereafter selling trips were a regular occurrence, and expanded to other nearby settlements. The Motse members that went selling became enthusiastic about it, and gradually increased the amount of produce that they took with them. Near the end of my time in the gardens Kabelo had organized a deal with a number of local spaza shop owners to collect big tubs of bulk tomatoes (generally the smaller, riper ones) at R50 each. "We are known to have good tomatoes," Kabelo told me when I asked how he had initiated the deal. They had also started negotiations with a local manufacturer of tomato sauce. As their experience of selling increased, and they saw positive results, so their space of experience expanded, facilitating a corresponding increase in

their horizon of expectation: because they could now imagine themselves as successful sales people they felt confident enough to act in that manner.

I also witnessed one occasion when the cooperative tried to take a step forward that was not anchored in their space of experience (i.e. to "innovate"). In mid-May the cooperative was approached by a woman (Suzy) who had a small restaurant/craft shop on the road to Steynsville, a few kilometres from the garden. She appeared a very well-meaning person, involved in local charities, and keen to support the cooperative, which I had told her about when I stopped in for coffee one day. Samuel and Lesego and Mpho came to the shop to meet Suzy. They were very impressed, both by her shop and by her. Suzy was planning to start a Sunday market in the grounds of her place, and thought it would be "wonderful" if the Motse Co-op had a vegetable stand at the opening market (for which she would not charge them a fee), planned for late May. Samuel and the others agreed, but they had put themselves in a bit of a corner: at that time of the year all they had to sell was some spinach and the first of the second crop of tomatoes planted in one of the tunnels, but Samuel did not want to disappoint Suzy or undermine her impression of Motse as a "serious" vegetable growing enterprise. So the members decided to take R700 out of their bank account and go to a vegetable wholesaler in Rooidal and buy an extensive range of vegetables for their stand.

The market was a dismal failure. It had not been particularly well-advertised, and the chosen day was freezing cold, with a nasty wind. Samuel and Lesego spent the day standing in the cold, and sold R45 worth of vegetables. Although they managed to sell a little more in Motse the following days, most of the R700 was lost. Samuel was very

upset about it, berating himself for taking the risk. He never again would consider participating in the market, even when it appeared that it was becoming a modest success, or anything similar. This incident highlighted for me the enormous difficulties that are faced by micro enterprises like Motse in innovating to any considerable degree. The potential risk of trying something completely new (neither Samuel nor anyone else in the cooperative had ever attended a farmers' market, nor did they know anyone who had), something that was entirely unrelated to the space of experience, was clearly significant. They did not have a reference point for calculating a range of likely scenarios of the outcomes of their participation.

5.4. Something borrowed: remaking the space of experience

"And the moral of the story is that you don't remember what happened. What you remember becomes what happened."

*(John Green – **An Abundance of Katherines**)*

The relationship between experience and expectation varied considerably among the different gardeners, and I have argued that differences in the horizon of expectation were related to differences in the space of experience. This resulted in a wide variance in the actual agency of the different gardeners to undertake meaningful action. In the discussion above, about the Motse Co-op's selling experiments in the nearby settlements, I have highlighted what I have termed an expansion in the space of *actual* experience, by which I intend to mean the way in which the space of experience may be expanded by those things that are either *directly experienced* by the members of the cooperative (such as being directly involved in a successful sales trip) or shared

among the members of the cooperative in a way that makes it a "group" experience (such as discussing the details of a successful sales trip with those members who had stayed behind at the garden). These experiences are then incorporated into each person's history. However, keeping in mind Ricoeur's assertion that there is no easy division between truth and fiction in what we consider to be "history" (Ricoeur, 1984) I also observed that this was not the only way in which the space of experience could be expanded. There were also ways in which the gardeners could remake and expand "their" space of experience by borrowing and assimilating the experiences of others, (which they had not experienced either directly or indirectly) thereby effectively incorporating it into their own personal histories.

This borrowing allowed the gardeners to expand their space for meaningful action (and thereby their potential to exercise greater agency) while still maintaining the necessary temporal coherence between who they had "been" and who they could be, by means of the *creative remaking* of their experiences. They did this through a variety of methods based on imitating the events, actions and mannerisms associated with the borrowed experience (mostly because what was "available" to them was the visible, tangible and physical evidence of the experience, rather than an insight into what was "behind" this). This was, however, much more than simple imitation of those seen as more successful than themselves (such as the culturally biased transmission processes described by Henrich, 2002). Rather, the experiences in question (whether they were particular events or the actions of particular persons) were *incorporated* into the space of experience of the person, effectively making the experiences of someone else a part of their own history. They could thereafter draw

on “memory” to inform meaningful action in the present, even though that memory was not, strictly speaking, their own.

The difference between imitation and incorporation is critical. Imitation (such as copying the hairstyle of your favourite Hollywood star) is, I would assert, about changing your and other’s perceptions of yourself. Incorporation is about effectively *becoming* another person. Incorporation changes who you were, who you are and who you could be; imitation, in this example, simply makes you look different (this is not to argue that physical “props” are not important in presenting plausible characterisations, simply that incorporation is a much more fundamental process of personhood.) It is unlikely that someone who copies Beyonce’s hairstyle thereafter believes that her childhood and upbringing is now “theirs”, and that they are now able to become a multi-millionaire singing sensation. But this is what incorporation of experience does: it changes the possibilities for your future by changing “your” past.

These newly incorporated memories created the potential for greater agency: after all, if you could “remember” that you had succeeded in a particular endeavour you would feel more confident that you might succeed in another. The idea of incorporation reinforced for me both the fluidity and the flexibility of agency, as well as the importance of temporal coherence in creating the space in which agency is possible.

In order to be incorporated in this way, the experience has first to be “available”, and it also has to meet some kind of plausibility test. You cannot successfully incorporate “memories” that are not in some way connected to your existing history, and the person that you are in the present. This is another key difference between borrowing

memories for incorporation into your space of experience, and simply imitating one or another attribute of someone you admire. The plausibility test was, I observed, a *subjective* assessment (i.e. each individual had their own ideas about plausibility for themselves) but it was clearly informed by the person's ideas about *objective* plausibility; that is, how believable would this person be *to others*. For persons like Sarah and Elizabeth at Tshimo, whose lives were a story about always being lesser persons, the plausibility constraint was considerable. This meant that only a very modest expansion in the space of experience through borrowing was possible (this is not to suggest that the process may not be incremental in the long term, merely that this is what I observed during my limited time with them). However, both Sarah and Elizabeth were able to expand their horizon of expectation (albeit only very modestly) when they were able to remake their space of experience, which in turn was made possible by a series of interactions with the Motse gardeners.

Samuel at Motse became curious about the garden at Tshimo as soon as he realized that I was spending part of my time there for my research. He asked me about the details of who was working in the garden, what they were planting, how they were doing. When I told him about the problems that the garden was experiencing he seemed to feel them very personally, referring back to the time when the Motse garden had just started, and the fears that they would never achieve anything. He started to ask if he could not go and visit the Tshimo gardeners, and one day I took him there with me. The Tshimo gardeners knew from me about Motse, that it was also a cooperative gardening project, but that it had been going for several years, and that it was doing well. Samuel got a reception that could best be described as "delighted". I had never seen the three Tshimo members so enthusiastic, so animated. Samuel sat

on a pile of compost bags in the container/office and spoke to them for almost an hour; about the history of the Motse Co-op; the challenges that they had overcome; their fears of failure; and their ultimate success. He drew many parallels between the struggles that Motse had overcome, and the struggles that Tshimo was currently experiencing. He impressed on them that no government official was going to make their lives better, if they wanted something they would have to work for it themselves. Sarah and Elizabeth and Jacob might have heard this hard work mantra before, but they had never heard from someone so similar to themselves, but who had achieved so differently. Samuel was just like them (in a way that the extension officers and the school principle were not), but also fundamentally different. He was, therefore, the ideal source for remaking their space of experience.

What I saw after Samuel's visit was that the Tshimo members *interpreted* their experience of the garden in a different way, effectively making it different. They no longer remembered the problems in the garden as a bad ending to a story that had started well (with their early successes), but rather as part of a process, a painful, but necessary step towards future success. They had effectively incorporated the Motse experience of a garden into their personal histories. This remaking of their past allowed them to expand their space of expectation, albeit it very modestly in the case of Sarah and Elizabeth, and after Samuel's visit there was a renewed sense of purpose in their work in the garden. They tidied up the container/office, they made subtle changes to the way in which they constructed the garden beds, and to how they planted the plants. They were remaking their physical environment to reflect the subtle changes in who they had been, who they were and who they could become. A remade history had created a small space for them to imagine that a better future

could actually materialize from their efforts; a synthesis of their experience with Samuel's had created a new temporal progression towards an expanded horizon. At much the same time they also managed to get a new cooperative member – Violet, a friend of Elizabeth, a small success that seemed in keeping with this new storyline. Things were looking up.

A few days after the visit by Samuel to Tshimo I took the (now) four members of the Tshimo Co-op to visit Motse. There they were given a tour around the tunnels, where the winter tomatoes and spinach were growing well. Later both groups stood together in a circle in the sun, and the Motse members relived the history of their garden, their failures, their successes and, above all, their hard work. The Tshimo members were very, very impressed: never had they imagined that a group could progress from a basic garden of the type they had to this smart arrangement of tunnels; a place of business and purpose; a place very, very different from theirs. "This is not a project", said Jacob as he walked through the tunnels, "this is a farm". The visit to Motse made real in his mind a temporal connection between past, present and future. He accepted Lesego's stern criticism that he was not doing a good job as the chairperson of the group, and that he was lazy.

On the trip back to Tshimo there was lots of talk and laughter, and planning, with Jacob seemingly very enthusiastic about getting momentum in their garden. His transition to enthusiastic community gardener was short-lived, however, and after a week or so of regular appearances in the garden he largely disappeared. I only saw him again a few times, and it became clear to me that he could not see a future for himself in the garden because he really didn't want to be a gardener, even a relatively

successful one like Samuel or Lesego. Neither their history nor their future could be reconciled with his desire to be a completely different person. It seemed to me that he avoided incorporating any of their experiences into his own because that would effectively expand his history as a community gardener, making it harder to escape from.

In contrast, the Motse gardeners, by virtue of their relatively greater existing space of experience, and this applied particularly to the younger gardeners, were able to assimilate much more ambitious and aspirational memories and experiences, while still maintaining plausibility. Samuel in particular was a good example of significantly remaking his space of experience through his interactions with Retief at Silver Leaf. Initially he clearly saw Retief as his superior in the world of farming, but as they spent more time together Samuel began to incorporate Retief's recounted farming experience and his observed behaviour into his (Samuel's) version of himself. Once again, this was not simply about *imitating* Retief: instead it was about *incorporating* Retief's memories of farming into his own, remaking and expanding his space of farming experience. This expansion of the space of experience in turn facilitated an expansion in Samuel's horizon of expectation, and thus an enhanced present in which a greater range of meaningful action was possible because it was now plausible.

After a while Samuel began to act as Retief's equal, and to gain more confidence in his dealings with people like NTC, and the company that was finally awarded the contract for the three new tunnels. When this latter company visited Motse to make arrangements for the erection of the tunnels, he participated confidently in the

discussion, suggesting where and how the preparatory work for the tunnels should be undertaken. This did not reflect his actual experience at Motse (the new tunnels were of a different design to the existing tunnels), but rather his assimilation of Retief's experiences, which he was now able to "remember" as his own. During these conversations with the tunnel suppliers he did not say "this is what Retief at Silver Leaf thinks we should do", but rather made it clear that this is what he and the cooperative thought should be done, based on their experience.

Samuel's remade past had effectively made him a different person in the present. He became much more certain about the way in which things ought to be done at the garden, referring back to "his" experience. At one point Samuel told me that he would really like to learn to speak Afrikaans, because "it is such a beautiful language." Afrikaans (Retief's home language) for Samuel wasn't the language of oppression it is often assumed to be, it was the language of farming, the language of this new expanded space of experience. Learning to speak Afrikaans would add an additional layer of plausibility to these learned memories of farming.

I would also propose that a narrative sub-theme of sacrifice and deserving, which drew considerably on traditional Christian values (as these were understood by the Motse members) such as hard work and life as a struggle, had an important role to play in countering the narratives and performances of belittlement that were so much a part of the gardeners' daily lives. This narrative assisted them in resisting the negative characterisations – such as "lazy" or "wanting something for nothing" – that development officials were so keen to impose on them. The incorporation of biblical values into their self-characterisations enabled them to effectively "borrow" the

history of someone else (like Jesus) into their space of experience, and thereby effectively expand their horizon of expectation beyond the limitations of personhood imposed by others apparently more powerful than they were. They seemed to draw particular encouragement from stories that emphasized the humiliation of Jesus at his crucifixion. Bontle was the person most likely to vocalize her views on the similarities between Jesus and the Motse members, although they were all regular churchgoers. On one occasion all of us were working close to one another washing and tying spinach bunches for selling. She said something in Tswana, to general agreement, and then translated for my benefit: "Tracy, I think that we in the cooperative, we are suffering to get somewhere. We are suffering like Jesus, but now we are moving forward". She was clear that the current period of progress in the cooperative – the three new tunnels were up and planted, and they were doing regular sales in Motse and surrounding communities – were somehow "right", that the Motse members "deserved" their success as part of a correct progression showing that there were earthly rewards for suffering as much as heavenly ones. In this manner was the temporal plausibility of who they had "been" maintained with respect to who they could become.

Postscript

The visit to Motse represented a high note for the Tshimo garden which was never repeated. After a week or so Jacob more or less disappeared for good. Three weeks after the visit to Motse Elizabeth was dead, passing on after a short unnamed illness and a few days in a government hospital. I never saw her friend Violet again.

CHAPTER SIX

WHO WILL YOU BE TODAY? CHOOSING AND DEFINING A CHARACTER

"...What happens is of little significance compared with the stories we tell ourselves about what happens. Events matter little, only stories of events affect us."

*(Rabih Alameddine – **The Hakawati**)*

6.1. Introduction

Achieving temporal coherence and locating a performance of identity within the broad constraints of power, history and expectation is only the first step in presenting a successful performance. The *details* of the performance must now be carefully considered – who are the characters to be presented, and what physical objects will be used to support the plausibility of these characters? These issues are obviously closely interrelated – both experience and expectation are incorporated into performances of identity, via a range of tools of emplotment (*mise-en-scene*, characterization, the selection of physical props, etc), all designed to increase both objective plausibility (i.e. the likelihood that the audience will believe) and subjective plausibility (the likelihood that the actors believe). The next two chapters deal with these two issues – the selection of characters and the implementation of these characterisations.

This chapter discusses the challenges of character selection when the constraints of plausibility effectively limit *which* characters are available to which actors. This is not to say that actors do not push against these constraints, and may do so successfully.

But not everyone has the same agency to attempt such a rebellion, and in consequence will have only a very limited repertoire of characters to choose from. In this chapter I discuss which characters are considered desirable from the point of view of the gardeners, and which are considered so undesirable that the gardeners will go to considerable lengths to avoid the possibility that they might be mistaken as one of these. Sometimes the differences between desirable and undesirable characters appeared so small from my point of view that I could not understand what all the fuss was about. But from the gardeners' point of view these apparently tiny differences made literally a world of difference: the difference between being one kind of person and another. My initial inability to understand that merely reinforced that I (or someone like me) was not the primary intended audience. That intended audience (i.e. the community within which the gardeners lived) had the same reference points for assessing the characters as the gardeners, the reference points that I did not have, as a result of my very different history and present.

My initial confusion also reinforced for me the often-gaping chasm between how development officials and practitioners see the world, and how the supposed beneficiaries of that development see the world. Most particularly, development practitioners seldom "see" or understand, or even acknowledge, the small details of characterization that are so important to the actors in question. I have seen this result in considerable frustration with the apparent intractability of beneficiaries; with their apparently irrational obsession with things that seem utterly unimportant to the larger goals of the development initiative; with their apparent refusal to behave in a particular way. I have been one of those frustrated people on more than one occasion,

sitting across from a group of resisting beneficiaries, thinking to myself "why don't they get it?" It turns out that I was the person who didn't get it.

In order to attempt an insight into what is actually going on, I have presented not just the detail of what makes up a desirable character, but also proposed the sources of these motivations: why are some characteristics considered desirable, while others, which seem so similar, are not? The issue of motivation, I was to discover, is not so straightforward as some of the status consumption literature presents it, instead reflecting the very complex process of *characterization*. The selected characters are never one-dimensional, easily relegated to a particular box made up of a few similar characteristics. Instead they are complex, often combining a number of seemingly disparate, even contradictory components. They are also fluid, adapting and changing for changes in circumstance and audience. This in itself is not a particularly new insight: the community gardeners are simply acting in a manner common to persons in general. The real issue is that they are generally not expected to do so: for some reason most mainstream development practitioners (and indeed almost everyone who is not poor) seem to persist in thinking that there is a direct relationship between one's material circumstances and the complexity of your personality. The poorer you are, the more one-dimensional you become, reflecting the narrowing of your priorities down to the bare essentials of life (as assumed by Banerjee and Duflo, 2006, when commencing their study). The reality of the lives of the community gardeners is very different.

Even those gardeners whose agency was most limited by their space of experience and horizon of expectation – such as Sarah and Elizabeth – would at times resist being

characterized as completely passive and helpless victims of their poverty, such as the way in which they limited the access of the CWP workers to "their" garden by withholding the key to the gate, or how they took to locking that gate during working hours so that Beki the caretaker had to ask for their permission to enter the garden. They took huge enjoyment in pretending not to notice someone trying to get their attention at the gate, and made a point of never apologizing to the CWP workers who would sometimes wait an hour or more for one of them to arrive to unlock the gate. To an outsider these actions might be considered foolish, petty, even malicious. But for Sarah and Elizabeth they represented a significant exercise of agency; critical acts of characterization that could make them into different, better (from their point of view) persons.

The most complex and ambitious characterisations were undertaken by the younger gardeners in both Motse and Tshimo, particularly Jacob from the latter garden. This, I would argue, was the result of two factors. Firstly, as discussed in the previous chapter, the younger gardeners had a much greater potential (latent) agency in respect of characterization, because of their greater space of experience and corresponding horizon of expectation. Secondly, it became clear to me that Jacob was, from all the gardeners, the one most conflicted about the person he would like to be relative to the person he currently was. As a result he engaged in some extremely creative ways of attempting to bridge this plausibility gap, working very hard to try and separate himself from the unwelcome reality of being a community gardener. Ultimately this extreme characterization could not be kept up forever, and Jacob left the garden, but his efforts in this regard provided me with some of the most important insights into the apparently irrational behaviour of development beneficiaries.

I would argue that many of the beneficiaries of development initiatives are in fact – like Jacob – reluctant participants in something not of their making. Their poverty pushes them to take almost any opportunity that comes their way, but their human agency compels them to push back against the (from their point of view) degrading characterisations that usually accompany that participation.

Many of the characters presented in this chapter (and the next) are made up of seemingly irreconcilable components, patched together in a way that may seem messy and confused, discordant in the words of Ricouer (1984). This, I would argue, does not in any way suggest confusion or irrationality on the part of the gardeners. On the contrary, my experience was that their sense of self – who they were and who they wanted to be – was strongly held. The conclusion of confusion and irrationality does not reflect anything inherently discorandant in the gardeners' performances of identity, but rather the inability of certain audiences to accept the complexity of the persons they are and the persons they wish to be. From the point of view of the gardeners there is no discordance; in fact they have exercised considerable creative imagination in crafting complex characterisations that successfully mediate the apparently discordant and heterogeneous components of their performances into the concordant whole that is "so necessary for the development of a sense of self-sameness or "identity"" (Ezzy, 1998, p242). What is required to dispel confusion is for the audience of policy makers and development practitioners to correctly interpret these performances, not for the performances to change.

The analysis presented in this chapter (and the next) of the details of characterization and the likely motivations that supported these are subject to an obvious *caveat*. In the context of the gardeners' larger lives I was only present for a very small time. Additionally I was a stranger in their world. My observations and comments thereon should be considered in that regard. I do not claim to be making sweeping generalisations about who the gardeners "are"; merely to offer some observations and comments around those aspects of the persons that I observed in the gardens, without presuming in any way that this is some kind of definitive or complete explanation or interpretation of their lives in full. To do so would mean that I have fallen into exactly the same trap as those development officials that I am so quick to accuse of failing to acknowledge the right of the gardeners the be all the persons the choose to be, on their own terms.

6.2. Selecting and discarding characters: who you are not is as important as who you are

It soon became clear to me that the gardeners allocated a considerable effort to making sure that they were not characterized as an *undesirable* person. Sometimes the effort spent in preventing this negative characterization outweighed what I observed in terms of efforts to portray oneself as a desirable person. I have referred to these as "negative characters" and "positive characters" – the latter are the people we want to be perceived as, the former are the persons we are determined not to be perceived as. Although all the gardeners, by virtue of the poverty, their occupation and their race, were engaged in avoiding the negative characters that so many were quick to assign them, their relative focus in this regard was very uneven. As I have already indicated,

Jacob was the person who allocated the greatest efforts to not being seen as a person he deemed deeply undesirable – a community gardener. He did not allocate so much effort to being seen as a supposedly positive character – a "proper" farmer. In contrast, Samuel and the other members of the Motse Co-op seemed to focus more efforts on these positive characters, going to sometimes great lengths in the creation of appropriate "sets" and "props" to support these characterisations. I would argue that the difference was in motivation: The members of the Motse Co-op had consciously located themselves in the world of agriculture: they might not want to be seen as itinerant gardeners, but the persons that they wanted to be still were firmly based in farming. Jacob, on the other hand, wanted to rid himself completely of the agricultural stigma that he perceived. He didn't make any real efforts to be seen as a "proper" farmer because that would still have made him the kind of person he did not want to be. Ultimately this schizophrenia of characterization is, I believe, what led him to leave the garden.

Nowhere was the conflict between negative and positive characters so well illustrated as with respect to my very original research question: why are poor and hungry households apparently so reluctant to grow their own food? The partial answers to my question have very little to do with food itself or the mechanics of its production. As I discovered, the issue of the provenance of food, and the right to eat (or not to eat) on your own terms, is a battleground for identity, something that has completely escaped the attention of development practitioners.

My background in agricultural development had made me enthusiastic about own production of food as a viable way of addressing food insecurity. I and many of my

friends were also enthusiastic home gardeners, we all had a vegetable patch and greatly enjoyed our home-grown produce. Although we didn't do much of the work ourselves, we felt a great sense of accomplishment in eating our own food. Surely everyone else would feel the same way?

Almost the first questions I asked and the first conversations I engaged in with the community gardeners were about how much and what produce they took home for themselves, their families and their neighbours. Initially I found the answers to be both evasive and making little sense. Neither did observed behaviour make much more sense against my initial conceptions of what constituted "rational" behaviour. At neither Motse nor Tshimo did I ever actually see anyone take any produce home (although many of the Motse members said that they did, and I had no reason not to believe them). At Motse there was a steady selling activity, so there was no large-scale excessive waste of produce, although it did occur. One good example was a hundred or so (sweet) red pepper plants, obtained from Silver Leaf. The plants did very well, but the peppers were left to rot on the plants (I took many of them home – they were excellent quality). When I asked about this the Motse Co-op members simply shrugged and said that they weren't going to eat them, and they didn't know anyone who would buy them. Red peppers were not a usual part of the daily diet of the Motse gardeners, which may explain this. Also – they were selling a great deal of tomatoes and spinach, and maybe thought that trying to find an additional market for a relatively small number of peppers was not worth the effort.

At Tshimo it was a very different story with respect to unused and wasted produce. When I arrived at the garden for the first time there was a pile of about 60 or so

butternuts lying in a heap in the container, harvested some weeks previously. When I asked Jacob why he did not sell them he said that they were not "up to standard" for his customers (not, as I later discovered, an accurate story since he was not really trying to sell anything to anyone). I then asked why the members of the cooperative did not take them home; after all, they all confirmed that butternut was something that they ate (even if they conceded that "children" don't like to eat them) and it was clear that there was little or no cash being generated in the project. If the meager lunches that Sarah and Elizabeth brought to the garden were anything to go by there was precious little to eat at home either. I got some mumbling about taking the butternuts home at some point in the future, but this never materialized. Day after day I watched the butternuts first wizening and then rotting in the heat of the container. This pile lay there for about 6 weeks after my arrival in the garden, until most of them went bad and they were thrown away.

At the same time there were a lot of spinach plants in the garden that were a little past their prime, with smaller leaves than potential customers may have wanted. These too never seemed to find their way into anybody's pot at home (or a neighbour's pot). Every day the spinach plants were watered and weeded and pruned, but I never saw them taken home to be turned into a meal. When I asked if the members would take spinach home "today", the normal answer was a variation along the lines of "maybe tomorrow", "maybe Friday". (In hindsight this evasiveness seemed to me to be the result of the Tshimo members' full awareness that own food production was supposed to be the key rationale behind their project – as was emphasized to me by provincial officials – together with an initial assumption that I was somehow there as a

representative of GDRARD and did not want to say too much that might undermine that, and thereby further threaten their already precarious tenure in the garden.)

The reluctance to take food home was not, in my assessment, an issue of personal taste in food. The produce grown in the gardens (mostly spinach, tomatoes, onions and cabbages) mirrored what would be eaten at home (albeit as the supporting role in most meals) and none of the cooperative members in either garden ever said that they didn't eat a particular item (save for Motse's red peppers), although Sarah and Elizabeth did volunteer that their children and grandchildren preferred sweets and snacks to vegetables. The pressure to buy children nutritionally inappropriate food so that they will not stand out as being poorer than their peers (as described in Gross and Rosenberger, 2005) seems to be an issue in many places (Gross and Rosenberger were writing about food security in rural Oregan), but this is not exactly the same as not taking food home for dinner, as the two are not necessarily irreconcilable behaviours.

Even more puzzling, nothing in what I observed reflected the idea that there is a stigma against this type of produce (i.e. home-grown food), with people preferring to have supermarket produce which they perceived as superior (as Moller, 2005, suggested). Quite the opposite: there was enthusiastic demand in the neighbouring communities for the produce from the gardens. One of the teachers at the school at Tshimo told me that she (and most of her friends) greatly preferred spinach grown in someone's garden or a community project because it was of a superior quality and freshness than that in the local supermarket, and represented good value for money. When the Motse Co-op started selling tomatoes and spinach in the surrounding

communities they also got an enthusiastic response, and never on any of the selling trips that I participated in did they come home with unsold produce. They reported regular compliments on the quality of their produce. So what exactly was going on?

Clearly a bunch of spinach was not just a bunch of spinach with a particular value in utility. Instead the spinach appeared to play an important role in signaling what kind of person you were. But what was it about the spinach that determined what kind of signal it sent? My assertion is that it isn't the spinach as spinach itself (i.e. that spinach is perceived as an inferior food, or a food associated with a particular undesirable character) or its provenance *per se* (whether it came from a community garden or the supermarket) that is important, but rather the *relationship* (or rather the presented and perceived relationship) of its provenance with its consumer. That is, the pivotal issue is not what it is or how it was produced, but *how you obtained it*. This seemed to function as a critical identity "marker" and for basic food items consumed by almost everyone on a regular basis – such as spinach – this identity function appeared much more important than the item itself. And it was, I would argue, the relative mundane nature and cheapness of a bunch of spinach (R5 from the community gardeners, maybe R8 in a supermarket) that made it so important, in sharp contrast to the normal assumptions about what kinds of goods are used to indicate personal characteristics (such as those made by Veblen, for example).

In this respect the crucial division is between being the kind of person who can buy something as small as a bunch of spinach and the kind of person who cannot, who is a member of the "poorest of the poor" that provincial officials are so keen to identity as the beneficiaries of their food garden interventions. In communities like Motse and

Tshimo – located in a deeply materialistic society in the most unequal country in the world – your *relative* poverty position is central to who you are. From the point of view of a development economist almost everyone on Motse or Tshimo would be lumped under the category "poor", but within these communities there is a minutely calibrated scale of poverty, and most people are at pains to avoid being positioned at the lower end of this scale. Growing your own food places you pretty near the very bottom, incorporating all of the negative connotations of manual agricultural labour under apartheid with a clear demonstration that you have no money (because if you did you would not choose to publicly humiliate yourself with this kind of activity.)

During my fieldwork I was able to identify and/or hypothesise about the main factors that determine a person's location on this poverty scale. These were both multiple and complex, often involving much more than monetary factors, and what I have presented in this thesis is far from comprehensive. Mainstream development is, I would argue, largely blind to these critical markers of personhood that underpin meaningful action.

Being employed was a critical factor: having a regular job placed a person well up on the scale. Within the employment matrix, having an "office" job rated highest, with manual labour and "dirty" work rating lowest (although there was a further series of categorisations within manual labour: construction work, for example, rated considerably higher than gardening). Self-employment was perceived differently, and its impact on your position on the scale depended to a great extent on the income that you earned, as well as the kind of work that you did. Sitting behind the counter in a well-established spaza shop rated considerably higher than manual labour, but

working as an employee in someone's suburban garden (in return for a cash wage) usually rated higher than membership of a community garden. The key point here is that it is your *perceived* position on the scale that is important, rather than your actual position, and the key driving force behind much of the creative emplotment that I observed was to create a perceived person who was higher up that scale than the actual person was. This thesis documents the creation and enactment of these plots, designed to create the impression of relative prosperity, using the limited resources available. This – limited resources – is an important point, driving emplotment and requiring considerable imaginative effort. In an environment of very limited material resources, and thus limited material transactions, but where materiality is central to perceptions of poverty, each material item to hand and each material transaction must be used to maximum effect.

The community gardeners were keenly aware of what the method of obtaining food said about what kinds of people they were, and re-worked the sometimes overwhelming necessity to take food home into a different plot line in order to avoid classification as the negative character. Jacob at Tshimo exercised his agency with considerable ingenuity in this respect. He confided to me that he seldom took produce home from the garden, but that when he did he told his family members (he lived at home with his mother and two brothers) that the Tshimo members had to buy produce from the garden. Through this small deception he made the vegetables he took home into something purchased (out of earnings from the garden), as opposed to something he had grown, changed his method of procuring the food, and thereby effectively made himself into a different person. This difference in how the food was obtained was crucial, both for himself and for the audience for whom the performance was put

together: the perception of an exchange of money (that is, a narrative of purchasing something together with the presentation of the something purchased) effectively made him a different person from one so poor he had to grow his own food (the dominant perception created by his participation in the garden project). Even though the economic utility of the item in question was unchanged, the difference in identity implied by the two different performances was critical. The money performance implied several (positive) things about the lead character: that he was employed in a successful enterprise that paid him an income, and that the primary goal of that enterprise was to make money, not to produce food. Jacob was very clear about this latter point, often telling me that the reason why the Tshimo members did not take the food home was because they needed it for sales. The fact that there was hardly any selling going on was not the point; in Jacob's mind the fact that they acted *as if* this was the case was what was important. If they started to cart the butternuts home, that would shatter the credibility of the positive characters.

I would argue that the focus on money in these characterisations in fact had little to do with materiality, i.e. with money itself, but rather reflected a desire to be a particular type of person; a person who had and who could make choices about something so apparently unimportant as what to have for dinner. A person who had freedom.

The creation of this (fictitious) moneyed lead character was entirely the result of Jacob's own "creative power of imagination" (Ricoeur, 1981, p16), an exercise of his own agency to substitute one version of himself for another. The performance was carefully managed to ensure that there could be no (or at least very little) question of the plausibility of the plot. The reality was that Jacob earning next to nothing from the

garden. He had a girlfriend with whom he had a young child, and regularly mentioned that two of his best friends with whom he spent the weekends "having a good time" were regularly employed. It is thus likely that he felt daily pressure to produce cash, of which he had precious little (I did not ask too much about his other sources of income, but got the impression that they were sporadic and limited). Against this background he would have had some trouble explaining why he regularly came home with "purchased" vegetables, but did not have money for other things. This is, I would assert, why he only did it on an irregular basis. More infrequent purchases were more plausible with respect to creating concordance, and so in practice he only took food from the project about once a week.

Even at Motse, where I had hypothesized that the close ties of family and friendship within the cooperative to some extent insulated the members from the kind of ridicule from family and neighbours that Jacob and Sarah seemed to be subjected to as a result of their involvement in the garden, there were instances where the importance of being a "money person" with all that implied was paramount. Samuel, the normally practical chairperson, told me one day that on the previous Saturday he had purchased spinach for lunch from one of the bicycle traders in the location rather than coming to fetch some from the garden (a 700m walk from his house). He said that sometimes "it is just easier to buy", but his telling of the story also involved his wife, who was the person who had flagged down the bicycle trader. I don't think that Samuel wanted to or was able to tell her that she could not buy from the trader like her neighbours, but that he (Samuel) would walk to the garden to cut some spinach. This interpretation corresponded with other comments that he made about the pressure to generate cash

in the project: “you cannot”, he said, “go home to your wife every day with just spinach”.

The preference for money over food-in-kind as payment for labour, even when the end use values were likely identical or even in favour of the food, was demonstrated by the difficulties that the Tshimo members had in recruiting the extra temporary labour that they required to make up some of the shortfall created by the departure of more than half the members. When they bemoaned the fact that they did not have enough money in the cooperative to employ an additional two workers for a week or so to assist with clearing some additional land I asked why they did not offer the people food as payment. I was assured that no one would work under those conditions: They could find people to put in a day’s hard labour for R30, but not for the in-kind equivalent of R50 worth of vegetables. Nor were these potential employees selecting between this opportunity and others: if they did not work at Tshimo they would in all likelihood stay at home. Staying at home was clearly worth more than returning to it with a bag of vegetables.

At Motse the cooperative needed to employ three labourers for a period of about four weeks to assist with the heavy work in preparation for the three new tunnels. When I asked whether the labourers in question (unemployed men who lived near the garden) would take produce as payment or part payment Samuel looked at me as if I was crazy. Instead they worked for R40[37] per day.

[37] Around $4.15 at the time

Despite the lack of vegetable gardens (by my admittedly casual estimation fewer than 5% of households grew their own vegetables), many of the residents of both Motse and Tshimo kept chickens (of the extreme free-range variety), either for eggs or for meat. There was clearly no stigma attached to this activity, although it is also a form of own food production. Sarah at Tshimo – who was ridiculed by her family for her participation in the community garden, and who told me that she had never had a vegetable garden at home – raised a few chickens which she slaughtered for her own consumption. I would hypothesise that the difference between vegetable gardening and keeping chickens is around the type of labour associated with each activity, rather than its purpose (food). Vegetable gardening requires hard "dirty" labour, but keeping chickens requires practically no labour at all, apart from occasional feeding and ensuring that they have access to water.

6.3. Concordance from discordance: reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable

The following account of characterization provides, I believe, a very good example of Ricoeur's notion that a narrative identity (and thus what I have termed a performance identity) mediates among the seemingly hetereogeneous components that make up a person's life. Working backwards from this idea – i.e. proceeding from the assumption that a performance identity is in fact concordant, and not discordant – results in a different understanding of what is actually going on in a particular characterization. The gardeners have exercised considerable care and creative imagination in crafting these composite persons to ensure that they are able to pass a credibility test, to be plausible, against the complex motivations of the gardeners themselves and their perceived audiences.

While Samuel and the other members of the Motse Co-op seemed determined to make themselves "proper" (i.e. modern) farmers, they were just as determined to hold onto traditions that could easily be deemed outdated, making it clear that their desire to be a particular type of person could not easily be pigeon holed in *material* terms.

Towards the end of my time at Motse garden the cooperative was doing well financially. They had won another youth gardening competition (which came with a generous money prize), the new tunnels were producing lots of tomatoes, and they had done well enough to obtain another tranche of funding from the NDA. With this extra cash they were planning to build a chicken house in which to raise broilers for sale on the local market. It is a potentially lucrative business, but they were very concerned about losing the chickens to thieves. Theft is an ongoing problem at Motse. On the lower side of the site (furthest away from the location) there is a 1.6m mesh fence on metal poles, but it is easily traversed, and people coming from that side are not visible to anyone in the location. Two of the tunnels have had their plastic sides cut open for thieves to access the tomatoes (which are an attractive crop to steal – they are easily picked and there is a ready market). This tomato theft is, however, more of an irritation than a serious problem: Only a very small percentage of the tomatoes are stolen and the damage to the tunnels is annoying, but can be repaired. However, given the relative value of a live chicken (which greatly increases the motive) and the relatively small number of chickens planned (about 500), the prospect of chicken theft is much more serious.

While the chicken house was under construction the cooperative became more security conscious. There was a new lock on the main gate (which faces the street in

Motse), and this was kept locked – no more casual visitors during working hours. During this time I arrived at the garden one day to find that someone (or more than one person) had stolen the metal poles that supported the fence on the blind side of the property. The fence was now lying on the ground, easily walked over. The Motse members were clearly concerned about the implications of this brazen theft for their chicken enterprise, and were determined to catch the perpetrators as a deterrent to others. I asked Samuel if they had reported the crime to the police. He laughed at me and said that they (the cooperative) are going to use "chemistry" to catch the thieves. I was a bit confused for a while, stuck in my own version of *mimesis1*, and thought that he was talking about fingerprints or some other aspect of modern policing. After a few minutes I woke up and realized that he was talking about a sangoma[38], not SAPS[39]. I asked for more details.

Samuel seemed a bit embarrassed/abashed while he was explaining to me why they had decided on this approach. Does he think I will judge them badly as somehow being "backward" and believing in witchcraft? Although I raised nothing like this – I was merely listening to him – he seemed to feel the need to explain the differences between us: he said "you are a white person, but we black people have our own way of doing things." He said that the police cannot help them and they have decided to consult with a local sangoma. I asked when she is coming and he says at 10 and I say oh good, then I will see her, and he laughed at my naivety and says 10 tonight, "these people do their work in the dark." During the course of that morning I mentioned the sangoma's visit to the other members of the coop and they laughed a bit, avoided my gaze and changed the topic. In the end I did not meet the sangoma, but she seems to

[38] Traditional healer, a "witchdoctor" if you will
[39] South African Police Services

have been successful. A few weeks later the Motse members do catch someone who is trying to steal their chickens, and he is promptly taken off to the local police station (SAPS clearly has a role in punishment, if not in detection). The cooperative members are clear (and no doubt make this view known to the wider community) that it is the "chemistry" of the sangoma that has enabled them to catch the thief.

An interesting issue here was how Samuel could reconcile the inferiority of being black in one kind of situation (as a land reform beneficiary on Portion Four) with the conviction that the "black" way of solving his crime problem was superior to the "white" way. This apparent contradiction made it clear in my mind that the desire of someone like Samuel to be a different kind of person in the new South Africa was in no way to be confused with the desire to become a "white" person, although this is the usual way in which aspiration in this country is accounted for (as in the language of "coconuts[40]"), or even a completely "modern" person. Although the gardeners went to considerable lengths to copy the practices and mannerisms of white farmers (as detailed in this thesis) I do not think that it was the *whiteness* of the farmers that was the reason for emulation, but rather that they seemed to know the secret of successful farming better than black farmers. Continuing with this thread, I would propose that what Samuel and the other gardeners wanted to emulate was those things that were associated with *power*, because power implies freedom and choice. The fact that certain (many) types of power in South Africa are associated with whiteness, while many types of powerlessness are associated with blackness is the logical result of our history. Thus, it should be expected that many of the facets of a desirable person should be associated primarily with white South Africans (particularly white

[40] Brown on the outside, white on the inside

commercial farmers, as is detailed in the next chapter), but not all of them, and none of them solely because of their "whiteness". The use of a sangoma is associated with power, one of the few examples of "black" power that is available for the author of a performance to emulate, and thus a factor worthy of incorporation. The criterion of power as the basis for the incorporation of seemingly disparate actions into performances of identity has many manifestations: one of these is the apparently modern black person who has all the trappings of a "white" wealthy lifestyle, who engages in the ritual slaughter of an ox (White, 2011).

Choosing the most suitable persona for a *particular* performance is not always an easy matter and requires careful balancing of competing goals. Although there is a clear stigma attached to being the kind of person who is so poor that they need to grow their own food, there are clearly many people who are prepared to allow development officials to characterize them in this way in order to get the opportunity to join a gardening project. This performance should, I would argue, be seen as an ingenious exercise of agency, rather than a passive acceptance of a particular characterization. Although government officials seem to be under the impression that the primary goal of food gardens is the production of food, both Ruysenaar (2012) and my own observations clearly show that, for the participants, the main goal is usually income generation. This does not imply that the community gardeners are unaware of the aims of government officials, but rather that they are prepared to tolerate them in exchange for the opportunity to access resources (all garden projects carry a monthly stipend of around R800 for each participant for the first six months or so), and the possibility that the garden may turn out to be a viable business. In these performances the community gardeners are using their creative imaginations to create

a “front” persona that doesn’t really exist. This persona is easily discarded if the project doesn’t succeed (because it is no longer needed), to the bafflement and annoyance of the development officials in question.

Although the cooperative members at both gardens were all poor in material terms, they were not preoccupied with this monetary poverty to the exclusion of everything else that made them human in their own perceptions, in sharp contrast to how they are portrayed in mainstream development literature. As Banerjee and Duflo (2006) discovered, the range of choices that the poor see themselves as having is much wider than the range of choices development practitioners (and theorists) believe they have. Choice, and the freedom to choose, lie, I would argue, at the very heart of human agency. It is the right to be able to choose one particular course of action over another, even when (and sometimes because) the former has a less favourable monetary outcome than the latter, that is at the heart of the contestations of identity in the gardens.

I observed numerous times when the benchmark of what a “proper” farmer would do was clearly prioritized over the financial implications of particular decisions. This was most noticeable with respect to the preferred selling practices of the Motse Co-op. The most profitable market access channel for the cooperative for tomatoes – their largest crop in terms of output and value – was the very local market (i.e. households in Motse and nearby settlements), to whom they could sell packets of 6 or so tomatoes for R5. This market was willing to take medium-sized tomatoes, there was good demand, and they were packaged in a cheap plastic bag. There were transportation challenges to consider in accessing these markets, but that held for most of their

possible options. In contrast, the Spar in Rooidal would buy a box of about 30 of the largest and best-quality tomatoes for about R23, and the box in question cost between R3 and R5, depending on where they purchased it. In addition, they had to pay the cost of transporting the tomatoes to the Spar by taxi, which cost was not really affected by whether or not the Spar wanted 5 or 8 boxes (there was no fixed order amount). In contrast, they could take as much produce to the local communities as they could transport in one trip, and reasonably hope to sell all of it. Thus the transportation costs per item were usually lower for the very local markets.

My observations of the comparative advantage of local "wet" (i.e. fresh produce) markets over formal retail markets in terms of farm income is echoed in Chikazunga (2013). This study investigated tomato production in Limpopo and found that farmers supplying to informal/traditional markets achieved an average net income per hectare almost 20% *higher* than farmers supplying modern markets, even though the latter tended to be larger landowners with more and "better" infrastructure, and could therefore be assumed to be more productive in output per hectare terms. On the one ocassion that I accompanied the Motse members to the informal market that happens each month on social grant day in Steynsville they made a profit of almost R400, about which they professed themselves to be very happy. They did not, however, make plans to attend any other market days, and they had seemed to me to be very self-conscious standing in front of their pile of vegetables on a patch of grass near the municipal office. A month or so after the market day in Steynsville I drove with Samuel and Lesego to wholesale nursery about 5 or so kilometres in the opposite direction. Near the nursery, along both side of the road adjacent to the police station was a site of considerable activity. Lots of people milling about and lots of informal

retail activity. “What is going on here?” I asked. “It is this social grant day for this area”, they replied. I asked Samuel and Lesego why they have not come to sell – they have produce, and it is close to the garden. They muttered something vague about “forgetting”, but they didn’t say that they would come next month. We changed the subject.

Despite the clear and demonstrated advantages of local wet markets over formal market access channels, the Motse members retained a very strong preference for the latter, often keeping produce aside in order to fill an order from the Spar, rather than selling in the more lucrative local market. Towards the end of my time in the gardens Samuel and Kabelo had worked out a deal with spaza shop owners in the surrounding settlements for the bulk sales of the smaller and riper tomatoes (at a good price and the buyers came and fetched the tomotoes), but continued to insist that the best produce went to the Spar. When they talked about the expansion of the project they talked about becoming a supplier to Shoprite, with their produce branded in the stores in the same way as ZZ2 (the largest tomato producer in South Africa.) They often mentioned how “wonderful” it was that Silver Leaf supplied Woolworths. They did not ever suggest that their preference for these formal retail outlets was because of the price they would receive. Rather it formed part of their general assessment of the superiority of the modern – the new, over the old. Inclusion in this new world was desirable at almost any price. Samuel and I once drove together past the new Cradlestone Mall, to my middle-class mind 80,000m^2 of ugly and unnecessary retail space. “Isn’t it beautiful”, said Samuel, “I would love to go there.”

The Motse Co-op was located close to a busy main road that saw a lot of traffic, and the regular minibus taxi stop on this road was about 300m from the garden. I proposed on several occasions that they set up a roadside stall here, which would see a lot of potential customers. Although the Motse members made positive noises, they never did set up the stall and became evasive when I started to push the issue (which I then left alone). Although they did not put it into so many words, I believe that they resisted this relatively easy, relatively lucrative marketing opportunity on the basis that it was not something a "proper" farmer would do.

In this conceptualization of what constitutes a desirable and an undesirable person, "success" in sales is not measured only (or even mostly) in monetary income, but rather in the form of market relationships, and how these resemble or are different from a designated benchmark of successful personhood. As long as government policy and development officials insist that the priority of the poor and food insecure is food and the "opportunity" to earn a little extra cash, we should expect that community garden projects will continue to fail.

At Tshimo there was a much more extreme version of this trade-off between dignity and money. Despite the almost complete lack of income in the project, Jacob could not bring himself to do door-to-door sales on foot, even after the Motse members had taken him along on a sales trip in Tshimo itself, by way of example. This aversion to selling something, even when you are in dire need of the money, if the method of selling it presents you as a particular (undesirable) kind of person appears to be a common theme throughout community gardening projects, making government

assumptions that the gardens are a source of extra cash for gardeners naïve in the extreme.

I spent some time discussing this issue with Ernest who was the original NTC trainer/mentor allocated to the Motse project under the terms of the NDA grant. Ernest had worked with a number of community garden projects, and reported a strong aversion to selling produce, because of the selling methods that were available. None of the projects could afford a bakkie, and most did not have the prospect of contracts with large retailers or wholesalers. So their only practical market access was door-to-door, wheelbarrow or bicycle sales in their community, and this they resisted very strongly. Ernest tells of more than one project were vegetables were left to rot in the garden because the gardeners refused what they saw as the humiliation of walking around selling vegetables. He says that it is "pride" that stops people from going out and selling. I queried him in more detail about this, because it didn't seem to make perfect sense. "Hold on", I asked, "that doesn't sound right. Everywhere I go in the location and around there I see people selling lots of stuff, sunglasses and cell-phone covers and all sorts of other stuff." "Ah", said Judge, "but that is fancy stuff. No one minds to sell fancy stuff, but food is everyday stuff. People are eating every day, and it is not fancy."

6.4. The Intricate Matrix of Work

What kind of person you are is very closely associated with what kind of work you do, and thus performances of identity are strongly focused on presenting a person who does a particular kind of work. But the division of labour – with respect to its implications for what kind of person you are – is, I would propose, much more

complex than a relatively simple split between dirty, manual labour and cleaner, less manual labour, but is also determined by the context surrounding the work. As a result, two kinds of work, which appeared to me to be almost identical in every way, were in fact subtly, but very importantly, differentiated.

Jacob told me that his involvement in the community garden was ridiculed by his family, who told him that he was wasting his time "scratching in the garden". When he would say in the morning that he was "going to work" they would reply – "that isn't work. Why don't you get a proper job?" Sarah had a similar experience with her children, who often asked when she was leaving the project to get a proper job (by which they intended something along the lines of domestic work). When I asked why her eldest child (a 19-year old son) did not come and work in the garden, which really needed the extra labour, she burst out laughing: "he won't do this work", she said. He was unemployed. There was at least one member of the Tshimo Co-op who had left in order to go home and be unemployed in preference to continuing in the garden.

Choosing to be perceived as a certain person over material benefits (where there is a clear conflict between the two) is a clear exercise of agency. In a world of extreme material deprivation people fight for their dignity, on their own terms. Nowhere is this agency better displayed than in the examples of people who consciously select unemployment over participation in a community garden. This is a powerful exercise of agency, a strong push back against the policy makers and development practitioners who assert that the poor will (i.e. "should") be grateful for any opportunity to do any kind of work for any kind of reward. Walking away from work that makes you a lesser person in your and other's eyes when you do not have an

alternative is not a sign of ignorance or laziness or any of the other pejorative terms so many are so quick to assign; it is a sign – a shout – that you are the kind of person who can make that decision, who has the right to do so, who is prepared to sacrifice materiality for self.

The stigma does not, however, appear to be about physical labour *per se*, (although the overall preference in work certainly seems to be for some kind of "office" work as opposed to "dirty" work), but about the context within which the physical labour takes place. One particular kind of work (such as gardening) can have completely different implications for the kind of person you are, depending on that context. The difference between what makes physical labour acceptable or unacceptable is often so apparently small that it is hard to see at first. The participants in the various groups of subsidized public works programmes provided some possible insights into these distinctions. At the Tshimo site there was a group of Community Works Programme (CWP) employees as well as a group employed by GDARD. Essentially both groups were employed to do gardening/site maintenance at the Tshimo school, including expanding the school's small vegetable garden[41]. As detailed in Chapter Three, a portion of the Tshimo Co-op's site was "given" by the school caretaker to the CWP employees, who worked enthusiastically on this site a few times a week (I was never sure exactly what they were "supposed" to be doing instead). They grew cabbages, spinach, tomatoes and onions, which they took home. However, when I asked Jacob and Sarah whether or not any of these apparently enthusiastic gardeners were not keen to join the cooperative (CWP employment is only for a limited time) they replied in the negative. This was confirmed with conversations with the CWP members

[41] Produce from which was used to supplement the school's feeding scheme

themselves, who looked frankly surprised at the idea. I would argue that there was no problem with these CWP people growing and consuming their own food because, in a way that could easily be made plausible in their characterisations, they were being paid by a third party (the government) to do it; it was a "proper" job.

At Motse a delegation of CWP workers often pitched up to assist in the garden (the CWP mandate specifically allows for support of community projects), and certainly appeared to be competent at the work, but when I asked the group if any of them had vegetable gardens at home everyone said "no". What seemed to be the issue was not the type of labour, or even the activity of growing vegetables, but the role that you were playing when you did it: who was the character who was weeding the cabbages and watering the spinach? The CWP character was very different from Jacob, and a far more desirable role, because the CWP character had a "proper" job, with a fixed monthly income and a regular daily routine. CWP workers counted amongst the employed in the community, but the community gardeners did not. When in character as a CWP employee there was no stigma attached to growing and tending vegetables – it was simply your job. But when you got home it was a different story.

The role of work, then, in identity management is complex. I would propose that we could best conceptualise the way in which different kinds of work are ranked as a matrix of inter-linked, mutually conditioned and shifting context-dependent options, rather than a simple list, running from most to least desirable. What is considered "desirable" in one context or for one particular audience may be completely undesirable in another set of circumstances. The notion of a complex matrix of work closely connected with a range of different personas and characterisations, wherein

differences are often invisible to outsiders, may provide insights into another apparently paradoxical behaviour in the world of food gardens. Almost everyone I met who was involved in a community garden did not have, nor had they ever had, a vegetable garden at home, even when they had prior experience in growing vegetables (usually gained by working in the horticultural sector). Given the fact that most people did have an ornamental garden (usually a patch of lawn, a fruit tree or two and small patch of flowers) of some kind, this seemed a little odd: why join a community food garden, but not do the same activity at home? I would propose that it is the *structure* of the community garden and the associated activity around it that makes it an attractive (initial) option. In the first few months of the garden's life there is usually ongoing supervision by government officials, the rollout of infrastructure such as fencing and electricity, lots of training activity and typically some kind of official "opening" of the project. In addition, there is the payment of monthly stipends – each gardener takes home a regular amount of money at the end of the month. All of these factors combine to give membership of the garden the appearance of "proper" employment (with government officials and trainers in the roles of supervisors and managers) accompanied by the requisite "proper" regular income (the monthly stipend). It is when these things disappear (normally some six months down the line) that the performance is no longer plausible, and the characters are transformed from employees in an agricultural enterprise to people who grow their own food. The stagecoach is once again a pumpkin.

Creating an office job in a garden

The attractiveness of the "office job" was fairly common. When I first met Kabelo at Motse he said to me that "by now I thought I would have an office job; sitting around

in a nice place drinking tea". Even Samuel, the committed chairperson, surprised me a bit by saying that "of course" he would rather have an office job, but that he doesn't have enough schooling to get that kind of job. Both he and Kabelo mentioned on several occasions their ambition that one day the project would be big enough for them to employ more people "and then they will do the work, and we will be the supervisors". But Kabelo was pretty determined to have his office job before then, and managed to arrange matters so that he could get part of the way there.

As the only site in Motse with electricity, the cooperative had been making some extra cash by levying a fee for the charging of cell phones. They also had a computer and a printer, and sometimes charged for printing. Kabelo – despite his lack of a matric certificate or tertiary education – is highly literate, and spotted an opportunity to create his desired job for himself. Over a period of about 6 months he built up a little business writing and printing curricula vitae, job applications and similar documents. During my last month in the garden there was a client in the office with him on most days. Kabelo was responsible for marketing in the cooperative, but as long as he spent some time on this activity with acceptable results (which he did) the other members seemed happy that he spent the majority of his time doing office work rather than gardening. The income of his business accrued to the cooperative rather to him personally, so there was no monetary benefit for him. Far more importantly, he had created for himself a proxy of the kind of job he wanted, and was thus one (big) step closer to being the kind of person he aspired to be.

There were certain times that Jacob at Tshimo was very careful about what kind of person he projected, while in the garden. When the contractors appointed by the

province were (finally) working on fixing the borehole in the garden I noticed that Jacob adopted a different character to gardener. When they were there he did not put on his overalls, nor did he do any manual labour (unlike Sarah and Elizabeth). Instead he made a big show of sitting on a chair under the tree, in full view of the contractors, ostensibly working on some notes in a big blue file. When I asked to see the file it contained some documentation for the garden – attendance registers, notes of plantings, records of sales, etc – but none of these was less than three months old, and Jacob was not actually updating them. What then was he doing? He would sit leafing through the files, rearranging the papers, and get up a regular intervals to see what the contractors were doing, and talk to them for a brief period, before resuming his spot. After two days of observing him I clicked: of all the members of the Tshimo project, Jacob was the most concerned about being perceived as someone who grew his own food, who was so poor that he spent his days digging in a garden, in return only for food. He employed considerable ingenuity to present himself to his family, his friends and anyone who observed him walking to and from the garden as someone different. He was, I realized, just as concerned about presenting a particular version of himself to the borehole contractors. He could not put on his overalls and dig in the garden while he was being observed by four men who all had a ”proper” job, he could not be a gardener in their sight. Instead, by remaining in his casual “civvie” clothes, by pretending to be doing administrative work, and by a regular show of “supervising” the contractors he presented himself as the “supervisor” or “manager” of the garden. This was a considerable step up from being a gardener – as Sarah and Elizabeth were no doubt perceived.

It is not clear how successful Jacob's characterization was from the point of view of the borehole contractors (I never asked them who they thought Jacob "was"), but it appeared to be successful from *Jacob's* point of view, which I suppose was the main purpose: he had created for himself a version of himself that he could live with.

As I learned, the common view of a supervisor – which is an aspirational position – is someone who doesn't actually do any work themselves, but rather watches other people work. This is how you know who the supervisor *is* – they are the one not working. It should also be pointed out that people do not aspire to be a supervisor because they are lazy (although this is commonly attributed to them by outside observers), but because a certain type of person does manual labour and a certain type of (better) person does not. When you see the supervisor of a group of CWP people not joining in the work this is not primarily because the person is lazy (although they may be), but because to do so would completely undermine the supervisor character, and make it less important in everyone's eyes, including the CWP workers being supervised. I did not investigate in any detail the origin of the supervisor characterization, but it doesn't take too much insight to associate it with the job reservation of grand apartheid South Africa, a place where manual labour was for black people, and watching black people work was for white people.

An important point of characterization is that when you want to present yourself as a particular person, you need to do so in a way that will be recognisable *to your audience*. How does your audience (i.e. your neighbours in the location) actually know who the character "is"? This, I would argue, depends to a very great degree on their (the audience's) experience of the character. How do they know what a

supervisor is when very few of them have ever been a supervisor, but have merely observed them? Art imitates life – you become someone by incorporating their observed behaviour into your space of experience, so that you now are able to "remember" what makes someone a supervisor – standing around watching others working.

You cannot incorporate what you do not see or for which you have no existing "conventions". The idea that "office work" consists of sitting around and drinking tea may be nonsensical to me (who makes a living from sitting around typing on a laptop and considers it to be "work), but it made perfect sense to the Motse members (who would probably consider that I was not actually "working"). They could not "see" the administrative work (often hard work) that is done in an office, because neither they nor anyone around them had ever done that kind of work. All they could see on their visits to places like the municipal offices or Eskom was neatly dressed people sitting down in comfortable chairs and fiddling with papers or a computer. When developing a character that you have little *direct* experience of you have to go on what you do have – your observations of what the person does – their mannerisms, their actions and their words. Your hope is that this is sufficient to convince your audience – that you can "fake it until you make it."

With respect to being self-employed or employed by someone else, the general feeling among the gardeners was that employment was preferable, mostly because it was associated with a regular income. But there were some differences of opinion: Bontle at Motse had a strong preference for the self-employment of the kind offered by the Motse Co-op (and I got the impression she had always thought this way). After

I had been at Motse for about seven months Lillian said that she had gotten a “proper” job, working in a kitchen, and was going to leave the garden. Most of the other Motse members were visibly fed up about that: not only was she letting them down and now they would each have more work, but they could not understand why she had stuck it out for five years, and then left when things were finally (in their view) starting to come right. Lillian was Bontle’s neighbour and she (Bontle) had tried very hard to convince her to come back to the garden. More than anything she seems disappointed in Lillian: “Can you imagine”, she says, “working in a kitchen when you have a project like this?” She says that maybe the problem is that Lillian doesn’t have a dream, that she doesn’t believe enough in what they can achieve. She says that when you don’t have a dream you will take a job from someone else, but when you have a dream and you want to make a success for yourself, then you must work for yourself and build something.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHY DO YOU WANT SUCH THINGS? *MISE-EN-SCÈNE* AND THE MATERIAL WORLD OF PERFORMANCES

"eke out our performance with your mind"

*(Shakespeare - **Henry VI, Part III**)*

7.1. Introduction

The setting within which a performance takes place, and the physical props that are used by and associated with the different characters, are key factor contributing to or undermining the plausibility of a performance. I have used the term "*mise-en-scène*" to refer to these material objects – both immovable and movable – that are used to support the plausibility of performances of identity. In film and theatrical terms, "*mise-en-scène* refers to those elements of a movie (or theatre) scene that are put in position before the filming actually begins and are employed in certain ways once the filming begins" (Corrigan and White, 2009, p42). The idea of *mise-en-scène* in performances of identity reflects the long-held notion in social theory that context, the setting within which action takes place, "matters" (Xu, 2012). The crafting of *mise-en-scène* – what objects are chosen, how they are used, and how they are incorporated into characterisations are central to performance plausibility, both in terms of objective plausibility (that the audience believes) and subjective plausibility (that the actors believes), - "it provides the key to explaining the effectiveness of performance" (Xu, ibid, p116). This is not to suggest that important elements of a successful *mise-en-scène* are always prominent or immediately visible to a casual observer. In a successful performance of identity, one that achieves perfect

plausibility "script, direction, actor, background culture, *mise-en-scène*, audience, means of symbolic production – all these separate elements of performance become indivisible and invisible" (Alexander, 2004, p549). While I agree with Alexander's assertion of the indivisibility of the elements of a successful performance (that is a key to plausibility), I am not so ready to agree with the idea of "invisibility". Which elements of the performance become "invisible" is, I would argue, very much determined by who the audience is. I realized that certain important parts of the various *mise-en-scènes* created by the gardeners were certainly (initially) invisible to me, because, I would argue, my reading of the performance was not located in the same *mimesis1* in which it was conceived. However, these performances were not crafted for me, and for the intended audience these *mise-en-scènes* were very visible. I would argue that herein lies another source of the inability of many development officials to understand the social reality of the beneficiaries of development projects: their inability to "see" the individual components of a particular *mise-en-scène* as more than just "stuff" (Harré 2002, p25), and thereby correctly to interpret its meaning.

The likelihood of misunderstanding is, I would suggest, further compounded by the incomplete information that is often available to the community gardeners about the details of a particular *mise-en-scène* they wish to project; a similar challenge to the one described in the previous chapter with respect to different types of work. Sometimes the gardeners had only anecdotal or limited access or exposure to the *mise-en-scène* they wished to replicate. They would thus focus on the details that they could remember, as well as those things to which there was some kind of reference point in their space of experience (another component of the drive for temporal

coherence among the person you were, the person you are, and the person you will be.) The resulting *mise-en-scène* could thus be difficult to translate accurately, unless it was located in and interpreted with respect to the larger theme and plot of the relevant performance of identity, which, of course, was how the actor in question had conceived and created it. The "decontextualisation" of a particular *mise-en-scène* from its plot – the overarching theme of the performance – is, I would argue, one of the main reasons for the accusations of "irrationality" that are so often levied at the beneficiaries of development projects like community gardens.

I have proposed that the various components of *mise-en-scène* may be analysed under the following differentiations:

1. Immovable versus movable components: Immovable elements of *mise-en-scène* include material objects such as a horticultural tunnel, a packhouse, etc. Movable elements are items that tend to 'travel' with the actors, such as clothing. The division between 'movable' and 'immovable' elements is not always straightforward, nor does it always coincide with the physical 'portability' of the item in question. A wheelbarrow is a good example: Technically speaking it is a "movable" item, but it does not travel with the actor in the same manner as clothing. Whether it is more *like* an immovable or a movable object is determined in large part by the context in which it is used. As part of the *mise-en-scène* within the community garden it is something that contributes to the immovable "set" of the garden; used outside the garden, such as the transportation of produce, it becomes much more closely associated with the individual character, sending signals about what kind of person she is. In

this process, the meaning associated with (and implied by, which is not always the same thing, since the former is determined by the audience and the latter by the actor) the wheelbarrow also changes. This idea that the context within which the object appears is central to its "meaning" reflects Xu's (2012) distinction between "foregrounding" and "backgrounding", but I have proposed that Ricoeur's theory of the metaphor (Ricoeur 1976, 1981) provides a more nuanced 219haracterization219 of the relationship between object and context, and this is discussed in more detail below.

2. Given versus created components. The differentiation here refers to whether or not a *mise-en-scène*, either in totality or, more likely, certain parts of it, may be considered "given" or "created" from the point of view of the actor. Where a particular *mise-en-scène* is created by the actor, she often has greater control over her performance. Where the *mise-en-scène* is largely "given" (such as a visibly struggling community garden, like the one at Tshimo), the actor often has to use considerable creativity to overcome the impression of personhood created in the minds of the audience due to the *mise-en-scène*. An example was Jacob's behaviour in the garden when contract workers were fixing the borehole. The community gardeners, by virtue of their relative power position and limited material resources, seldom, if ever, had the ability to create every part of a particular *mise-en-scène*. For example, the interior of a dwelling in Motse may be considered a "created" *mise-en-scène*, but it actually is so to a far lesser extent than the similar space of a wealthy person: the actor has only limited resources with which to remake her space, and there is no getting away from its wider location in an informal settlement. This overlap between given

and created space, and the consequent limitations on the agency of the actor to present a certain performance in discussed in more detail below with reference to gardens in the location. The limitations on the extent to which any *mise-en-scène* is actually completely created by the community gardeners requires them to exercise considerable ingenuity in working with what they have to present plausible performances that transcend the limitations of a particular *mise-en-scène.*

3. Present versus absent components: It is not necessary for an object to be physically present at a particular place at a particular time in order to be an important component of that *mise-en-scène*. Shankar (2006) has described how people may form relationships with "objectifications… of objects" (p293), which objectifications may take the form of either verbal (i.e. stories about the object) or visual (such as photographs) representations of the object. These representations may refer to actual objects (owned by someone else), or to imagined objects. So an object does not have to be physically present (or even exist) to be an important part of a *mise-en-scène*. References to absent objects were I observed (and as would be expected), most common with respect to objects associated with aspirational characters. A good example would be a reference to a (not-present) bakkie owned by the project in conversation with another farmer. Jacob at Tshimo, by referring to the successful sales of produce that had never occurred, was hoping to create the impression of money that had actually never materialized.

As my fieldwork progressed I realized that some of the most important plausibility functions in the performances of identity that I observed were being fulfilled by what at first glance seemed to be the most mundane of everyday objects. This, I would assert, is one of the reasons why important messages of meaning go unread by development theorists and practitioners, because of the "ordinariness" of the objects involved. Of course any object generally considered "everyday" may hold significant metaphorical meaning in a social performance, but the gardeners were usually compelled to make use almost entirely of such everyday objects in their processes of meaning making by simple virtue of their material circumstances. In the world of very limited material resources where the community gardeners found themselves, actors have to exercise considerable ingenuity in using the most basic objects, usually available only in limited quantities, to signal a wide variety of messages about the details of different characters.

The gardeners did not always have access to all of the physical "props" that they might deem necessary to create a convincing *mise-en-scène*, and so had to exercise considerable ingenuity in making up the shortfall, while still maintaining overall plausibility. The result is that individual objects are used in a variety of ways to say different things about different characters at different times. This "multiplicity of meaning" is a key feature of the way in which I observed that objects were used in crafting a particular *mise-en-scène* by the community gardeners. I also 221haracte that even small differences in objects, that appeared to my initial examination to be identical, such as overalls or the type of shade cloth used in the construction of a planting tunnel (as discussed below), could signal significant differences in who a person was, or who they aspired to be. Sometimes those differences were only

apparent to the actor in question; in those instances the primary goal of these details was to increase subjective plausibility – to increase the belief of the actor in her own performance as a particular person.

In this chapter I discuss the various examples of *mise-en-scène* that I observed being used by the members of both gardens. Once again, there was a clear unevenness in both the utilization of *mise-en-scène* and the creative effort that was involved in its construction among the members of the two cooperatives. This, I would argue, reflected the differences in how the various members viewed their agency to plausibly be different people. Certainly, the less likely you considered it plausible that you could present yourself as a different person (like Sarah or Elizabeth), the less time and effort you spent on constructing those performances, including the components of *mise-en-scène*, such as your clothing or the details of how the garden was organized. There were also differences in the purpose of the various *mise-en-scène*. Jacob (as discussed below) put in an enormous effort with respect to *mise-en-scène*, but in his case, his efforts were more about *deflecting* a particular characterization that many people had already made about him. He was also very clearly focused on how he presented himself *as himself alone*, such as what clothes he wore on what occasions (i.e. on constructing what we could call an individual *mise-en-scène*, although of course all *mise-en-scènes* are related to notions of personhood), rather than on how the garden was presented, a very clear indication to me of his desire to separate himself from the garden in his performances of identity. In contrast, Samuel's efforts around *mise-en-scène* (almost as considerable as Jacob's in many ways) were focused almost exclusively on the details of the *garden*, reflecting in turn his incorporation of the garden in his understanding of his current and future identity. He seemed to take

little interest in the details of how he was dressed, but could obsess over the most minute *aesthetic* details of tunnel construction.

7.2. The *mise-en-scène* of the "proper" farm

The overarching theme – or ***plot*** – of the performances of identity is what determines the details of the *mise-en-scène*, which it must support in creating plausibility. At Motse, the key over-arching theme was that of "progress", of moving forward to a better future. I spent a lot of time discussing with the Motse gardeners how they understood that future, particularly with Samuel, who came to use me as a person to discuss ideas with about the garden before he was ready to share them with the other members. There was a remarkably consistent idea of what constituted "progress" across the Motse members: the components of what the better future would look like (i.e. its *mise-en-scène*) were understood in considerable homogenous detail by all the members. That better future was a farming enterprise (owned by the cooperative, not on rented or leased land, they were very clear about that). The farm would be big, it would engage in large-scale production, it would be mechanized, it would employ people additional to the current cooperative membership, and it would sell produce exclusively to big retailers. That is, the vision of the Motse members was to create for themselves a farm that was similar in almost every way to a successful white-owned commercial farm. (Of course there are a small number of commercial black farmers in South Africa, but I never heard reference to any of them, and the commercial farms that we visited during my time in the gardens were all white-owned, reflecting the racial profile of the sector. The cooperative members never indicated that their goal was to be successful **black** farmers – just that they wanted to be farmers like the ones they had visited.)

That in itself may not be very surprising. After all, these farms are generally seen as the most commercially successful across the agricultural sector by government officials and this is reflected in the discourse of agricultural policy. However, it became clear to me that it was not *commercial* success (in the form of monetary reward) that was the main driver behind the white commercial farmer as role model for progress. Not once did any of the Motse members say that they wanted to have this kind of farm because it would represent financial success. Instead, their conversations, their performances and their careful selection of material objects to accompany these performances were based on a very clear idea that white commercial farms were "proper" farms, and that their cooperative was not (yet) a proper farm. This idea of the white commercial farmer as the benchmark for what constitutes a "proper" farmer was reinforced by Samuel's recounting to me of the demise of the land reform project at Portion Four. The owners of Silver Leaf Farms presented an almost perfect role model in respect of what constituted a proper farm.

In order to support this aspiration, that they themselves could also one day be "proper" farmers, the Motse members made considerable efforts to create a *mise-en-scène* of a successful commercial farm in their garden, no simple task given the enormous differences between the Motse garden and places like Silver Leaf, and the very limited resources that they had to hand. Most of the cooperative members had worked on large commercial farms at some point in the past (Samuel and Lesego for a short time at Early Bird – a commercial broiler operation, and Grace and Lillian at a wholesale ornamental tree grower) and during this time had clearly taken notes of the physical attributes of and organization at these farms. These formed the foundation of

their space of experience with respect to remaking themselves from community garden project beneficiaries into real farmers.

Samuel in particular was almost obsessive about the smallest details at the cooperative that in his mind threatened their "moving forward" to (the appearance of) a proper farm. I recall in particular one occasion where I was helping Lesego to fix a shade cloth cover over a part of one particular open (i.e.outdoor, rather than in a tunnel) planting. This was a space some six metres wide and ten metres long between two of the original tunnels. The cooperative planted it with crops like onions, wild spinach and cabbages. It provided a good sheltered spot, in part because of the surrounding tunnels, but also because it was covered with shade netting (positioned on a high wooden frame) that kept the birds out. The shade cloth arrangement had been there from the first time I visited the garden, and it was an effective, but rather shabby structure, with lengths of torn shade cloth flapping about where it was not properly fastened. No one had ever made any attempt to neaten it up – I don't think they saw the point. But after Samuel's first few visits to Silver Leaf he insisted that this change.

As a result, on this particular day Lesego was very ingeniously "stitching" the lengths of shade cloth together. The cooperative had (of necessity) purchased a cheap variety of shade cloth, which came in lengths only a few metres wide, and thus the pieces had to be joined together to create a net big enough to fit over the planting space. Lesego was joining the strips together with 5cm cuttings of galvanized wire, woven into the shade net, and set about 15 centimetres apart. The result was a neat and finished line, that to my eye was almost invisible, and provided a strong bond between the lengths

of shade cloth. I was Lesego's assistant in this job. He was quick to make me repeat my work when I had made the distances between the wire stitches uneven, or if I had not "stitched" them in completely straight, although to my mind one centimeter either way or a slightly skew piece of wire didn't make any difference to the integrity of the structure. "Samuel", said Lesego, "is very worried that the shade cloth doesn't look like the ones at Silver Leaf Farm". Silver Leaf had about 30 structures covered in shade cloth wherein they grew seedlings before they were planted out or harvested as micro herbs. As a large commercial grower they were able to purchase much wider, speciality shade cloth, which came in lengths the same width as their tunnels. They did not have to stitch lengths together. While Lesego and I were working Samuel came past to inspect, and grudgingly conceded that it was "OK, but not so nice as Silver Leaf".

The most interesting part of this incident for me was that there wasn't really an "audience" for the redone shade cloth: it was unlikely to form the 'set' for any public performance of identity. On the location-side of the shade cloth area stood the water tanks and irrigation system, making it practically invisible to anyone walking past. On two sides it was completely blocked by the tunnels, and the path that went along the bottom of the garden was too far away to get a good view.

During my early times at the garden the main gate was closed during working hours, but not locked. People who wanted to buy vegetables could wander in, as could the occasional visitor. The cooperative had a visitors' book (which they asked me to sign on the first two occasions I was there, but looking through it I got the impression it was to record unusual or noteworthy visitors, rather than to keep a record of who

came in or out). Silver Leaf had a closed gate, with a security guard who wanted to know what your business on the farm was before he let you in. About 2 months after the first visit to Silver Leaf the cooperative started to lock the gate during working hours, and a sign was affixed to the container: “no visitors during working hours”. This further reduced the possibility that casual visitors could view the stitched shade netting.

The result was that the effort in respect of remaking the shade cloth was almost entirely for the benefit of the members of the cooperative, and those provincial and NDA officials who made (very) occasional visits. I would argue that the function of this particular component of the “proper farm” *mise-en-scène* was specifically to build subjective plausibility around their characters in the minds of the community gardeners (particularly Samuel), by expanding their space of “proper farm” experience into their present present – their daily lives in the garden. The temporal gap between the original shade cloth structure and the seedling tunnels at Silver Leaf was being narrowed.

I would assert that this desire to be a particular kind of farmer (modern and “proper”) is also the reason for the general antipathy that I encountered towards agro-ecological methods of farming, something that has been noted by other researchers (Kelly and Metelerkamp, 2015), although the reasons for this are contested. When I talked about organic farming at Motse I was greeted with a marked lack of enthusiasm. The cooperative members were particularly unimpressed to hear about chemical-free farming: they sprayed a large amount of pesticides and fungicides at regular intervals in the tomato tunnels, and maintained that this was how it was done on a “real” farm.

This was their experience as well. Those members of the Motse Co-op who had worked on large commercial enterprises in the past had no doubt about what "proper" farming looked like.

For a brief period they had a training officer/mentor (the short-lived Sundi who replaced Ernest under the NDA agreement with NTC) who also talked about the general move towards organic farming. Although she constantly made the (not entirely true) point that "big" farmers were starting to farm like this (no doubt in an attempt to make it a more acceptable option through the apparent endorsement of "proper" farmers), she found little enthusiasm among her Motse audience. This attitude towards organic farming is mirrored to a large extent in official policy. Although the national and provincial departments of agriculture includes references to organic agriculture in their policy documents, agro-ecological farming is generally proposed for smallholders, those who cannot afford to engage in the (preferred) industrial model[42]. The greatest focus of DAFF is promoting large-scale commercial farming that is firmly underpinned by modern technology and industrial farming methods. Those members of the Motse Co-op who had worked on big commercial farms knew the central role that a regular regime of spraying various chemicals took in these operations – none of those farms was embracing anything even remotely resembling agro-ecology.

This reality of how a modern farm operates may also be the reason why many projects that aim to establish former farm workers (who presumably have experience as farmers) as smallholder farmers – where methods of necessity much more closely

[42] South Africa is one of the world's largest growers – as a percentage of total crops – of genetically modified maize and soya

resemble agro-ecological farming – tend to fail: this isn't what these people know as "farming". When your job consists almost entirely of mixing up various chemicals and driving across the lands applying them, you are hardly equipped with the knowledge that you need to successfully run a small-scale mixed farm. But in the eyes of development practitioners, working on one type of farm automatically qualifies you to run another type. I would suggest that this chemical utopia is something that is clearly aspired to by people like the Motse Co-op members – a method of farming that is about as far removed from the "stuck in the past" subsistence agriculture of the bantustans as it is possible to be.

Samuel and the other Motse members were very strongly focused on having a separate packhouse for the cooperative, where they could wash and pack produce before delivery. Under their existing system they picked tomatoes once or twice a week and then packed them into boxes in and just outside the container that they used as an office. The system seemed to me to work just fine – yes it meant that the office was overrun with tomatoes twice a week, but it wasn't used for much else apart from a weekly meeting and the occasional bit of record keeping by Mpho. The tomatoes were not washed before they were packed, just given a quick wipe with a cloth. The spinach, however, needed to be washed before it was packed into bunches: the spinach from the outside garden was often extremely dirty, especially after hard rain had splashed and pushed mud up over the plants. The washing was done outside the office, around the garden's tap. Once again, this seemed to me to be a perfectly acceptable arrangement, although it was raining on one or two occasions when we were washing and tying spinach, which was a little unpleasant.

In my opinion, therefore, the cooperative didn't really "need" (in strict economic utility terms) a special packhouse badly enough to warrant the diversion of a portion of their very limited pool of resources. Ernest, the original NTC mentor, agreed with this view in one of my conversations with him: "Why do they want these things?" he asked. He said that they (the Motse members) wanted things that they did not need, and he was trying to explain this to them, albeit with not much success – they were firmly fixed on having a packhouse. The cooperative didn't have the funds for a packhouse in their NDA allocation; they would have to find the money somewhere else. They engaged in a constant effort to get the money from various provincial and local government officials. Almost every week Samuel or Lesego would talk about their apparent progress (or lack thereof) in finding someone to pay for a packhouse.

The dreamed-of packhouse (a brick structure of about 40m2 with running water and electricity) would cost about as much as an extra tunnel (in which they could plant 900 tomato plants and earn about R15,000 in a season) and I queried Samuel as to why they didn't rather want one of those instead of a packhouse. He was adamant – all the proper farms he had seen had a packhouse, and so they needed one as well. "How can we give our customers a good service if we are working like this?" Samuel asked me, waving around at the tomato-filled office. The others nodded their agreement. It was clearly an important milestone in the cooperative's progress towards being a proper farm. More importantly, I would argue, their insistence on a packhouse, in the face of opposition that they should be more "rational" about how they allocated their limited monetary resources, did not indicate any ignorance on their part about the materialistic trade-off that they were making. Indeed, the Motse Co-op members were conscious of every cent that was spent, and some of the most

heated discussions that I observed were around the allocation of relatively small amounts of money: whether to spend R100 or R150 on the expenses of a marketing trip for Kabelo would be hotly debated for an hour or more. No one could accuse them of not carefully considering exactly how they spent their hard-earned cash. But their desire to be particular persons was much more important than this: having a packhouse was a key milestone in their "becoming" different persons.

I also observed a similar pattern of the "irrational" allocation of scarce resources with respect to a bakkie. As should be clear from the description of the Motse Co-op and their daily activities, they were greatly hampered by the lack of their own transport. If they had a bakkie not only would they be able to do more selling trips to the surrounding settlements and places like the Spar at a lower cost, they would also be able to collect many of the supplies that were currently delivered, thereby saving themselves that extra fee. The members spoke often of their desire to have a bakkie. The NDA grant contained a line item for the purchase of such a vehicle, but it was only contained in the third tranche (disbursement) of funding, and so they had to wait. Near the end of my time in the garden that third tranche was finally paid into the cooperative's bank account and the longed-for bakkie could now be purchased. Samuel and the others spent a long time deciding what make and model would be best, and once they had decided those things, shopped around to find the best price. Finally the bakkie was purchased (and housed overnight at the local nearby police station to keep it safe.)

As discussed previously, the Motse Co-op was keen to expand into additional business ventures, in this case firewood (which they would cut, bag and sell to their

neighbours – there was no electricity in Motse) and door-to-door-delivery of paraffin, to the same people for the same reason. (They were already in the firewood business to a small degree, but had to pay someone to transport the cut wood back to the garden where they would chop it into smaller pieces and bag it.) This planned branching out into different activities was annoying for the provincial extension officer, who took it to mean that they were not "serious" about their main activity of farming. But instead it was a reflection of the reality of the Motse members' (and their neighbours') lives, where all economic activities held an element of vulnerability and precariousness – you could lose your job tomorrow, the farming business could collapse next month. Kabelo said to me that it was necessary to do more than one thing in case something went wrong, then you have something to fall back on.

In any event, once the new bakkie arrived I simply assumed they would use it for their firewood and paraffin businesses. After all, they did not need to use it every day for the farming activities, and there was little to no chance that the NDA officials would know what they were using it for (since they hardly ever came anywhere near the project, and when they did, it was with plenty of notice). I am not even certain that their using it for another purpose would have been a problem in terms of the NDA grant, since none of the members ever suggested this.

I arrived at the garden one day to find Samuel and Lesego standing around a relatively old bakkie talking to someone (who turned out to be the bakkie's now-previous owner). "What do you think of this bakkie?" Samuel asked me. At first I thought he was asking in general terms, and so I made some positive comment. "We have bought it", Samuel said. I was confused: what about the new bakkie, I asked, did you not buy

it after all, was there a problem? No, said Samuel, we have that bakkie (it was parked at the police station), but we want to use this one for the firewood and the paraffin. Surely you do not need two bakkies, I said, why don't you just use one for everything and use the money for something else the cooperative needed? This, it turned out, was not a possibility. The "beautiful" new bakkie was not to be used on the rutted location roads, or battered around with heavy bags of firewood, or to have paraffin slopped over it. That new bakkie was an important symbol of the Motse Co-op's success *as farmers*, an indication that they were well on their way to becoming "proper" farmers. Using it for another purpose – even though that would have made much better financial "sense" – would have greatly undermined its place in the *mise-en-scène* of a proper farm. Once again, I had been mistaken into thinking that the *only* purpose of the new bakkie was utilitarian. Of course it was extremely useful to the cooperative, and all the members saw it in that light, but this was not its only purpose, nor the only function that it fulfilled in their desire to be persons of a particular kind.

On this journey – from who they had been, via who they were now, to who they wanted to be - spending time and effort on things as "unimportant" as shade cloth is actually critical. The Motse members did not believe that they could "become" different people without the "right" *mise-en-scène* in place. In this belief they were reflecting Ricoeur's (1991b) assertion that temporal coherence was central to identity. In line with that thinking, I would hypothesise that the creation of a particular *mise-en-scène* allowed its components to be incorporated into the gardeners' space of experience, increasing the temporal coherence of their performances of identity. Creating in the garden some recognizable (to the members) version of a *mise-en-scène* of a proper farm (such as the Silver Leaf seedling tunnels) reduced the temporal

distance between who they were and who they aspired to be. Any accusations of "irrationality" or "ignorance" leveled at the community gardeners in respect of their insistence on having (or trying to get) objects that do not seem either particularly necessary or constituting the "best" use of their scarce resources would be confusing the *material* with *materialism*, overlooking the possibility that the desire to acquire certain material items should be understood as meaning making, not acquisitiveness (Wallendorf and Arnold, 1988).

7.3. Gardens and kitchens: the public and private spaces of identity

Growing one's own vegetables was clearly an activity that was associated with traits of personhood (i.e. extreme poverty) that most people in both Motse and Tshimo seemed very keen to avoid (including someone like Jacob from Tshimo who was a member of a garden). But here was another apparent paradox: I had already noted that being employed as a gardener in someone else's garden was viewed more positively than food gardening for oneself. But within Motse and Tshimo not all forms of homestead (i.e. around one's house) gardening seemed to attracted the stigma of extreme poverty that Jacob seemed so keen to avoid. Instead, it became clear to me that there was a range of things that homestead gardening could say about who a person was, some positive and some negative.

In Motse (the apparent paradox of homestead gardening was more noticeable here than in Tshimo, mostly I would argue because the residents of the former had been there much longer), almost all of the informal dwellings around where the cooperative was located had an ornamental garden of some sort. This usually included one or two fruit trees (mostly peaches), a patch of neat lawn and some ornamental bushes and

flowering plants, including irises and even rose bushes. This suggested to me that there was no negative connotation associated with the *activity of gardening* (since I could safely assume that none of these residents were employing someone else to tend to their gardens), and many of the residents clearly spent time and efforts on their gardens, illustrated in neatly edged beds and trimmed grass. They even made the effort to fetch water (from the communal tap some distance away, but free) for parts of their gardens when it was particularly dry. However, I did not see one vegetable patch, or even one vegetable plant in any of these gardens. I asked one of the neighbours of the cooperative – Wilemina – why she did not grow any vegetables (she had volunteered to me the information that she was "not working right now" and I often saw her at home, so she would have had the opportunity to do so). "Oh", she said, "we do that at home in Limpopo[43], not here". She was adamant that she purchased her food – she did not grow it, although she also complained that she was very short of money because she had a "stingy" boyfriend.

There was thus a clear difference in the minds of the residents of Motse between the activity of ornamental gardening and the activity of food growing, although to an outsider (such as myself) the two appeared identical. The former I would propose, is focused on creating the image of a typical South African suburban house – surrounded by lawn, flowers and trees – not on growing food. It seems, therefore, that it is not the *activity* of gardening that is important for determining what kind of person you are, but rather its perceived purpose – what kind of person engages in what kind of activity. Each of these types of gardening was, in fact, a completely different *mise-en-scène*, implying that a completely different performance of identity was taking

[43] A predominantly rural province in the north of South Africa, running in part alongside the border with Zimbabwe.

place. Tending your flower patch or watering your peach tree is a *mise-en-scène* associated with a houseproud person living in a permanent home, it gives your informal dwelling the trappings of a fixed, suburban home. These latter homes are, I would argue, deeply aspirational, and the purpose of the ornamental garden in the location is to reduce the temporal distance between experience, present and hoped-for future. In contrast, making your garden into a vegetable patch not only marks you out as too poor to buy your own food, but possibly also as having just arrived from some deep rural area and not yet acclimatized to urban life, a person "stuck in the past". This assessment would be in line with Wilemina's comments that homestead gardens are something that is done in Limpopo, not Gauteng.

Another important and related observation to be made here – and one that seems completely to have escaped the attention of those who design and implement food security policies and programmes based on own production of food – is the importance of whether or not a performance of identity is public or private, and the ability of the actors to control that. Gardening in an informal settlement, where the houses are close together and the fences low and relatively insubstantial, is essentially a *compulsory public performance*: there is no way to hide from your neighbours the details of what you are doing in your garden, even though your garden is, technically speaking, a private space. The reality of life in an informal settlement (very different to a household living behind 3 metre high walls in middle-class suburbia) essentially makes your garden a public space in some very specific ways. Every time you engage in an activity in your garden you have an audience, whether you want to or not, and this, I would assert, is a critical factor behind the careful choice of which character is visible in each gardening performance, and the accompanying *mise-en-scène* that is

constructed – flowers instead of vegetables, lawns instead of rows of spinach plants. I did not think it was a coincidence that I saw a different pattern in a smaller and newer informal settlement (Koedoevlei) that I visited once on a selling trip with the Motse members. After the sales were completed I joined Kabelo and Bontle (the two designated for this particular trip) in the home of Bontle's cousin for some tea. Bontle showed me two very large hubbard squash that her cousin had given her, grown in his own garden. He had a high fence around his garden, made of closely stacked tree branches, through which no one could see, with a small gate. He may have had the fence in order to prevent theft from his garden (theft is a big problem for home gardeners in these settlements), or he may have had the garden because he had the fence.

In contrast to the enforced public nature of many performances of gardening, eating is generally a private affair, with most meals being consumed inside your house, well away from the eyes of the neighbours. Everybody can see your garden and what you are doing in it, but no one can see your dinner plate or what is on it – your kitchen and your meals are usually a completely private *mise-en-scène*. It should therefore not be so surprising that what happens in the kitchen is less important than what happens in the garden. That is, eating and nutrition can, and often are, seen as different activities from the provision of food, and deemed to be much less important in performances of identity. During the course of this research I delivered a series of lectures on a public management course at the University of the Witwatersrand Business School to a group of parliamentarians and members of provincial legislatures. In one of the sessions we discussed some aspects of this issue; the importance of being perceived as a particular kind of person in even in the poorest communities, and the corresponding

impact on decision-making, with particular respect to food. Many of the class participants agreed with this point – that how you are perceived by others is important, no matter how poor you are. One person volunteered her own experience: she and her siblings had grown up very poor with a single parent mother in an informal settlement. There was seldom much to eat at home, and most meals were made up of nothing but maize meal. But her mother had told them that they did not have to let their poverty make them ashamed or limit their potential, telling them "remember that no one can see what you eat at home; no one can see that you only have pap[44] and water. When you go outside no one can see that." They learnt at an early age the difference between private and public performance; how to accept the inevitability of the former, while still exercising your agency to control the latter.

Interpreting the difference between eating food and growing your own food as the difference between private and public performances of identity recasts the apparent paradox of food insecure households not growing their own food in a very different light. For mainstream economists and development policy makers there is no distinction between food as nutritional input and food as determinant of identity. In these conceptualisations there is thus no distinction between growing the food and eating it, the one is simply a means to an end. In the eyes of the food insecure themselves, however, these are completely different and separate activities, with very different implications for the kinds of persons they are.

[44] Cooked maize meal

7.4. Movable *mise-en-scène*: metaphors and creativity in meaning-making

In additional to the immovable components of *mise-en-scène*s created in the gardens, movable components often provided the crucial "finishing touch" to the credibility of a particular character, and thus the plausibility of the entire performance. In these carefully constructed and managed performances of identity, even very small changes in the type of object used in the performance could imply considerably different things about the characters in the performance. In addition, the "performance" meaning associated with these objects was generally very different from their utility value in terms of giving "plausibility" to a particular character. Considerable creative energy was expended by many of the gardeners on getting the "right" object to match a particular character. Once again, I was struck by how very small differences in items – at first invisible to my eyes – could imply very different things about a particular performance. I also observed that movable objects served to complete a particular *mise-en-scène*, whether that was actual or imagined. The less credible the rest of the components of the *mise-en-scène* (such as the unwelcome reality of the garden at Tshimo for Jacob) the harder that movable objects had to "work" in the effort to present a plausible performance

The "use" of objects in the crafting and presentation of identity performances that I observed included both the actual presence of an object in the performance, and an allusion or reference to a non-present object – the "objectification" discussed by Shankar (2006). Sometimes the objectification referred to a completely imagined *mise-en-scène*, existing only in the mind of the actor. For example, when Jacob told his family that the vegetables which he brought home had been purchased from the cooperative, by means of that small deception he created a larger *mise-en-scène* – a

successful money-making enterprise that paid him an income – that did not actually exist. He needed it, however, in order to support his particular characterization. It is key to a plausible performance that non-present and imagined objects are made both "real" and likely to be associated with that particular character, in the view of the audience.

I have drawn parallels between the role of objects in identity performances and a theory of metaphor in language, as have a number of anthropologists working in the area of material culture. However, in this respect, my view of the material culture associated with performance identity differs somewhat from that of Tilley (2002) who asserts that the metaphorical meaning resides *in the object*. Although Tilley acknowledges the importance of context in assigning and creating that meaning, this context is presented as relatively constant within a particular culture. That is, a particular artefact would tend to have the same metaphorical meaning in a particular culture, over time. The metaphorical use of objects that I observed was quite different – much more fluid and almost entirely context-driven, since the primary goal was to support the plausibility of a particular *mise-en-scène*. Once that *mise-en-scène* was no longer present, the metaphorical meaning of the object also disappeared, and it mostly returned to its utilitarian state. When the wheelbarrow was inside the garden it became simply a means of moving things around; outside it was a strong symbol of poverty and the low standing of the community garden (for Jacob). Similarly (as discussed below) overalls worn inside the garden were simply work clothes, but worn outside the garden said something very different; when the new bakkie was parked outside Motse it was a symbol of their "properness" as farmers, parked at the police station it was merely a bakkie.

I have thus utilized an approach towards the metaphorical use of objects that is based on Ricoeur's theory of the metaphor (Ricoeur 1976), which asserts that even though the metaphorical "twist" lies in the word (which then has a meaning additional to its "dictionary" meaning), the metaphorical *meaning* lies in the sentence. That is, the metaphor only makes sense *in the sentence*. The word on its own does not have that metaphorical meaning. The analogy I have drawn is with the object and the performance: the object is the word, and the performance is the sentence. It is within the context of a particular performance that the object is given a particular metaphorical meaning. When that performance is concluded, the metaphorical meaning may disappear, and the object may resume its place as "stuff". In different performances the same object may have very different metaphorical meanings, depending on the context within which the performance takes places and/or (importantly) who the audience is. Conceiving of objects in this way helped me to make sense of the initially confusing way in which the same objects seemed to be both important and unimportant, for the same person. Once I realized that they had different roles to play in different performances, and could identify and demarcate these different performances, apparently odd – even supposedly irrational – behaviours started to make sense.

The second important component of Ricoeur's theory of metaphor from the point of view of this analysis is his understanding of a metaphor as a *semantic* innovation, one that procedes from the creative imagination. In Tilley's (2002) discussion of wala canoes, the metaphorical meaning associated with the canoes is a "cultural" meaning; it is something that comes from (is given by) and resides in, a particular culture. Thus

(even though Tilley acknowledges that the cultural meaning of the canoes is changing over time) the metaphor in this instance is given to individuals in the community; there is no semantic innovation *by the individual*. Thus, Ricoeur's theory of metaphor applied in terms of the material component of a social performance implies a high degree of agency for the actor in a particular performance in terms of authorship: although there must be some kind of pre-existing convention (i.e. *mimesis1*) that makes the metaphor intelligible to the audience of the performance – implying that the semantic innovation is ultimately limited by cultural conventions in what it *can* say – a high degree of agency, in the form of creative imagination, is acknowledged in what the object *may* say.

In many of these performances a set of overalls had (an unexpected) starring role, reinforcing the idea that the gardeners had to use every item at their disposal in the management of their identities. Overalls are the most common form of working clothes for people engaged in a wide variety of manual labour. The gardeners at both Motse and Tshimo had been given sets of dark blue overalls and gumboots as part of the initial start up package of goods from GDARD. At Motse I was given a set of overalls after about six weeks: Grace was clearly getting tired of watching me dirty my clothes at every visit (she often commented on it), and finally she went and got a set of overalls for me. They were made of a thin cotton and were not of a particulary good quality. The gardeners mostly wore a variation of the full set (trousers and a zip-up long sleeved jacket). The older women (Sarah and Elizabeth in Tshimo, Rebecca and Grace at Motse) clearly preferred wearing a skirt to a pair of trousers, and of these four women I only ever saw Sarah wearing the trousers on two or three occasions.) The women normally wore the jacket, unless it was very hot, together with a skirt of

their own. The younger women and the men usually wore the trousers with a T-shirt (which is what I mostly wore as well). Bontle, as discussed below, was the general exception. Save for her, I seldom say anyone wearing the full set of overalls.

There were all sorts of other overalls around me every day. The CWP workers had bright orange overalls, with the CWP logo prominently displayed. Most of the CWP workers I saw (including the women) wore the full set all the time. The temporary workers from GDARD had particularly smart dark green overalls of a good quality, also with a prominent logo. They also wore their overalls all the time that they were working. Most of the farmworkers in the area also dressed in overalls and gumboots (the combination is a clear sign that you are likely to be a farm labourer of some kind), usually with the name of the farm embroidered on the back of the jacket. To my initial view these were just overalls, indistinguishable working clothes, worn for convenience and to save "civvy" clothes from dirt and wear and tear. I was quite wrong.

The first indication I had that overalls in fact said very different things about different characters occurred when, very early on in the fieldwork, I went with Kabelo to deliver some boxes of tomatoes to the Spar in Rooidal. After making the delivery Kabelo asked me to take him to the GDARD offices in town: He had put together about 10 packets of tomatoes and wanted to sell them in their offices, mostly with the intention of demonstrating what good tomatoes the cooperative was producing rather than with earning money, although he did say (making a good point) that "they should support our business". The GDARD office was located in a low-rise office block in

the centre of town. I waited in the lobby while Kabelo went upstairs to do the sales. He was dressed in his full set of overalls and gumboots.

Kabelo eventually reappeared back downstairs with a women from GDARD, with whom I had a brief chat before she went off to a meeting. Kabelo says that she told him that he was correctly dressed "for this kind of work." He said that he agreed, that there is no use in smart clothes when you are a farmer. It was only at that point that I start to realize that in fact Kabelo probably felt self-conscious dressed in his overalls and boots when we came into town, but now had his farmer "performance" vindicated by someone who recognized and approved of the character.

Jacob in Tshimo had a more complex relationship with his work clothes, which reflected his conflicted relationship with the garden itself. Jacob never came to work, or left, wearing his overalls, nor in fact did I ever see him take them home. They remained in the container, to be put on when he arrived, and left behind when he went home. Of all the gardeners in both gardens he was the only one who did this. He always came to work in casual civvy clothes. I would often see him walking across the open veld to the garden in the company of either CWP workers or GDARD workers (who were all working at the school where the garden was located). I knew who these people were working for because **they** were wearing their overalls. At one point there were almost 20 CWP and GDARD people working at the school and I never saw any one of them arrive or leave without being dressed in their overalls, even at the height of summer. So why didn't Jacob wear his?

I attempted to ask the question once or twice, but he was evasive and clearly wanted to avoid the issue, and so I drew my own conclusions. It seemed to me that the overalls sent very clear signals about the kind of person you were, by signaling both whether or not you were employed, and what **kind** of job you had. Wearing an overall while walking somewhere at 8 in the morning on a weekday indicated that you were on your way to work, a desirable image in a community with very high unemployment rates. A CWP or GDARD overall said that you had a "proper" job with a regular (albeit small) monthly income. In contrast, a cheap blue overall with no logo said that you were a participant in a food gardening project – not a desirable person to be. By walking to work in civvies Jacob avoided being characterized as a food gardener by casual observers. His very casual regular outfit – bermuda shorts and sandals – probably signaled that he was unemployed, rather than on his way to, say, an office job, but this characterization was preferable to being seen by the wider community as a food gardener. By not taking his overalls home he avoided additional censure from his family, possibly managing to convince them that he worked as some kind of supervisor at the garden.

Bontle at Motse always made a point of being very smartly dressed in her overalls. For her there was only pride in being associated with the garden and she wanted to be seen as a member of what she termed "a project". She also (and unusually) professed a great preference for being self-employed in the garden, over having a job. She spoke to me about the indignities that surrounded the reality of the precarious employment opportunities that were mostly available to the residents of Motse, the humiliation of having to ask – "to beg" – people to give you work; the vulnerability of being employed – one day you could have a job, and the next the company could close

down or not need you anymore. You never knew from one month to the next whether you would still have a job. In comparison, she says, the project is “permanent”, and that outweighs the temporary benefits of a higher salary. “Here”, she says, “you can see your future.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

DUMELANG![45]

DEVELOPMENT AS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

"All stories have a curious and even dangerous power. They are manifestations of truth - yours and mine."

(Vera Nazarian – ***Dreams of the Compass Rose)***

8.1. Introduction: plurivocity, power and narrative

This thesis has described the multiple ways in which two groups of community gardeners exercise their agency through their creative imaginations to remake (or attempt to remake) themselves into the particular kinds of persons that they aspire to be. These aspirational persons differ considerably from those implied by the *a priori* assumptions about the "objects of development" contained in mainstream development discourse (Crush, 1995, p9). I have attempted to illustrate that many of the disappointing outcomes of food security initiatives in South Africa, and particularly own production of food as a mitigating strategy, may be traced directly back to a disconnect between these assumed realities of development discourse and the lived reality of the target beneficiaries, as suggested by Oliver de Sardan (2005). The question I wish to return to in this concluding chapter is that posed by Ruysenaar (2012), who asks why, if community garden projects (and, I would add, most own food production initiatives) have such high failure rates, do they continue to be advocated as a solution to food insecurity in South Africa?

[45] Polite form of greeting in Tswana (the home language of most of the community gardeners), literally - "I see you".

The resources expended in this regard are considerable: in just one province alone (Gauteng) the 2012/2013 annual report (GDARD, 2013, p54) indicated that the responsible department had established 11,004 homestead food gardens, 57 community food gardens, and 144 school food gardens during that financial year, a significant increase in all categories from the previous year (and they did not indicate how many were still in existence from the previous year). The *Gauteng 20 Year Food Security Plan* (GDARD, 2011) estimates that in the 2012/13 financial year the Province had spent almost R494[46] million on food security initiatives (GDARD, ibid, p29).

In attempting an answer to this question – why own production has become so well-entrenched as a policy response despite its clear lack of success - I have also considered what alternatives might be possible; how we might go about re-making how we think about food security in particular and "development" in general, and therefore about how we might re-imagine these to reflect the lived realities of the community gardeners.

Power is a central theme in this thesis, dealing as it does with contestations of identity – the struggle to be a particular kind of person; most specifically, a *different* kind of person than those presupposed (and thus effectively imposed) by mainstream development policy. These characterisations – such as *the grateful hungry poor* or *the want something for nothing poor* described in previous chapters – are, I would argue, entrenched in mainstream development through its discourses and how these portray (effectively characterise) the poor and the food insecure. As discussed in this thesis,

[46] $51.2million at the average exchange rate for 2013

most of the mainstream development literature in South Africa dealing with own production food security initiatives and the high failure rate thereof (which most of the research in this area is ready to acknowledge) tends to focus on technical issues (such as the skills of the gardeners, their access to infrastructure, etc). It thus, using the terms of De Sousa Santos (2004), is quite clear in what it makes visible as the reasons for the failure of such initiatives and what it makes "absent". Most pertinently, what it makes absent is the right of the poor and hungry to opt out of these initiatives, by the effective designation of such responses as "irrational". When development 'experts' like Baipethi and Jacobs (2009) maintain that "there is consensus that appropriate technologies requiring low inputs would significantly improve the take-up of subsistence production" (p22), then it is clear that those who refuse to do so are either ignorant or irrational, or both.

Ruysenaar (2012) attempts to interrogate his own question by asking why the underlying **policy** behind community gardens (i.e. that own production is a viable response to food insecurity) seems so robust, while the actual programmes are not: "Why is it that the **'**pro-poor**'** development rationale has become so ….. entirely mismatched with the reality in which these programmes are implemented?" (Ruysenaar, ibid, p26), but he does not really answer his own question, save to say that part of the answer may lie in "examining the way in which policy ideas are socially produced" (Ruysenaar, ibid). Instead much of his focus is on the way in which the (given) policies are implemented, thus reverting in part to the orthodox technical discussion.

Following this line of thought from Ruysenaar – the way in which policy ideas are socially produced - has lead me to Jonathan Crush's (1995) assertion that the "*discourse* of development" (Crush, ibid, p3, emphasis in original) is worthy of our attention, rather than just the technical issues emphasised in the South African food security literature. Crush argues that a focus on dicourse very possibly holds the key to the apparent paradox that while 'development' and development projects so often fail, the ideas of mainstream development "not only persist but seem continuously to be expanding (their) reach and scope" (ibid, p4). That is, Crush is asking a general version of Ruysenaar's particular question and, therefore, I would propose that we could start to get some way towards answering that latter question through the interrogation of food security policy *as discourse*, and how its hegemony is maintained in and through that discourse. It is the *discourses (narratives)* of development, I would argue, that are at the heart of the power relations that so effectively limit what kinds of persons the poor in South Africa may or may not be, rather than the details of the implementation of policies based on that discourse (which I would consider to be a secondary factor). It is the *narratives* of poverty and development replicated in official documents, the popular press and in everyday conversation that effectively have characterized the poor and the hungry as particular types of persons. Development projects like community gardens are simply the logical extension of those narratives, but derive their authority (and thus their longevity as development "solutions") because of those narratives.

Policymakers (and the general public) have a strong preference for simple explanations (Pottier, 1999), and, I would propose, for simple solutions to complex or uncomfortable questions. It is exactly these preferred simple solutions that underpin

the narratives of community gardens: people do not have enough food, so they grow their own = problem solved. In this way, I would argue, a *collective* problem (poor nutrition and hunger) are effortlessly transformed into an *individual* one, with corresponding implications for where solutions should be found, and where blame should be allocated when these fail.

Considering development as discourse, and thus "the power of development" (Crush, 1995) as something based on discourse (a form of narrative) dovetails with Ricoeur's proposal that personal identity is essentially a *narrative* identity (Ricoeur, 1991). It is through the stories that people tell that "(they) come to *imagine* and *know* themselves" (Kearney, 1996, p182, emphasis in original). When those narratives portray particular people in a particular (lesser) way, those people come to believe – to "know" themselves – as lesser persons. This is the essential point about subjugation, and thus liberation, made by Steve Biko, that, in order to be "free" black South Africans had to liberate their minds through "an inward looking process" (Biko, 1978, p29).

If we accept that our identities, our notions of who we "are", are *fundamentally narrative* (Ricouer, 1991b) then there is a clear relationship between the *narratives* of development and the contestation of identity. Conceptualising identity as a narrative identity effectively conceptualizes the struggle over identity as a *struggle over authorship,* since the very idea of a "narrative" presupposes an author. Thus the struggle to be a particular kind of person is manifested as opposition to a particular imposed *narrative* identity and the efforts to rewrite some of one's own narrative; to appropriate a part of its authorship. The issue then is the origin of these "knowing-who-I-am stories" – who is granted (and allowed to retain) authorship of the stories

that define how we know who we "are"? In the case of the community gardeners, the imposed narrative identities are those of mainstream development, based on very clear ideas of who has expertise and knowledge, and who, therefore, is best "qualified" to author these narratives (most assuredly not the gardeners themselves). "The texts of development have always been avowedly strategic and tactical – promoting, licensing and justifying certain interventions and practices, delegitimising and excluding others." (Crush, 1995, p5).

In South Africa considerable authorship power is allocated to mainstream economics, which accords a central role to the inevitable "logic of the market". This thinking, in turn, is inextricably linked to the deeply entrenched idea that the economy and society are separate (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]) and thus that there is (unfortunately, but inevitably) no place for what we might call "morality" in economic policy making. The hungry are thereby effectively reduced to an unfortunate, but inevitable collateral damage of a fundamentally superior system – the market economy. Gibson (2011) amongst others, provides a compelling account of the ruling African National Congress's almost seamless shift from a proposed "populist" economic agenda (clearly based on 'moral' imperatives around notions of redistributive justice) to a fundamentally neo-liberal one after 1994, which neatly incorporates this economic-social divide, and renders notions of morality superfluous to the logic of the market.

South Africa's food system is characterized by a high concentration of formal food retailers (the top four retailers control around 60% of the total market) and also a very high concentration of food processors (Van der Heijden and Vink, 2013). Food retailing and processing in South Africa is a highly profitable business – the combined

2013 financial year trading profits of the four largest food retailers and the largest food processor amounted to some R10.7 billion (just over $1 billion).[47] However, when the opening lines of the Gauteng Province's *20 Year Food Security Plan* (GDARD, 2011) are the following – "Food insecurity is caused by inadequate access to enough food (due to inadequate household production, insufficient income and weak purchasing power)" (GDARD, ibid, p2) – it is made quite clear where the "fault" lies. It is the hungry themselves who must carry a large portion of the responsibility for their hunger, since they have not produced enough to feed themselves. The income of the hungry is only "insufficient" and their purchasing power only "weak" in comparison to the retail price of food, but nowhere in this policy document is this issue explored. Not one of the six components of this Gauteng food security strategy includes an examination of the way in which South Africa's dominant food system contributes to food insecurity, through a steady widening of the farm gate – retail price of food, and the corresponding increase in corporate profits (Van Der Heijden and Vink, 2013). In this manner, the interests of the few (corporate shareholders) come to be presented as the inevitable reality for everyone and a particular hegemonic order is granted legitimacy (Tapscott, 1995, after Giddens 1979).

In a similar vein, the same *Gauteng 20 Year Food Security Plan* contains a component referred to as ***Nutrition training for beneficiaries*** (GDARD, 2011, p48), once again implying that the reasons for poor nutrition lie primarily with the ignorance of the hungry themselves, rather than with the realities of the over-arching

[47] Shoprite, Pick n Pay, Spar, Woolworths and Tiger Brands. Each of these companies has a different financial year-end, and thus the figures do not represent the 2013 calendar year. In addition, all of the retailers sell non-food items in addition to food, but only one specifically reports food sales. Data collated from annual reports.

food system in which they find themselves. (That is, poor nutrition is an individual problem requiring an individual solution, rather than a collective one.) This current thinking around where the "blame" for poor nutrition lies (and South Africa does in fact have much higher levels of malnutrition and under-nutrition than its national income data would suggest – Altman *et al*, 2009) mirrors in many ways how the malnutrition of black children in apartheid South Africa was blamed on the "cultural" ignorance of blacks, rather than the poverty created by the policy of apartheid itself (Wylie, 2001). Wylie (ibid) recounts the following anecdote told her by a white South African woman in 1979: "We are trying to teach them (i.e. black South Africans) to eat brown bread, but they insist on white" (pxi). These sentiments – the burden of having to correct the behaviour of those less knowledgeable on the subject of nutrition - don't seem very far from those expressed by GDARD's food security plan. The fact that the "black" persons in the former anecdote have been replaced by the "poor" in the official policy document some 30 years later has not really changed either the underlying sentiment, or its targets.

8.2. Producing invisibility

"Without cash in a market society, you're free to do nothing, to have very little and to die young. In other words, under capitalism, ***money is the right to have rights****."*

(Patel, 2009, pp 112 – 113, emphasis in original)

The power of development narratives to render certain things invisible and certain other things visible (and thus to confer existence itself) is the basis of De Sousa Santos' (2004) opposition to the hegemony of mainstream development. He describes how certain kinds of persons, and certain kinds of existence are "actively produced as

non-existent" (ibid, p239), and thus as legitimate objects for the "fix" of development. In the case of the community gardeners, what has been "actively produced as non-existent" is a full acknowledgement (i.e. legitimization) of the kinds of persons the gardeners are, and the kinds of person that they wish to be. When food security officials describe the abandonment of community gardens by the beneficiaries as evidence of their "lack of commitment to hard work" what they are effectively doing is producing as non-existent the gardeners' desire to be considered as equal persons. When development theorists suggest that the poor should be happy to have the "opportunity" to grow their own food, they are effectively substituting for that desire a very basic kind of materialism, and therefore effectively making the poor into persons not of their *own* making. In this way, the poor really do become "those who have their reality officially defined for them by others" (Wiley, 2001, p4).

The dominant discourses of food security in South Africa have effectively erased the possibility that the gardeners may in fact be perfectly rational in their actions, by creating an "absence of personhood" and substituting it with what may be referred to as "the presence of the material". That is, these narratives encourage us to think of the poor and the hungry only in **material** terms – such as how much food they have, and the nutritional quality thereof – rather than in personhood terms. It is the power of these narratives to render certain persons "absent" or somehow "less", by reducing them to no more than the sum of their material attributes (or shortcomings), that, I would argue, effectively negates the ability of the community gardeners to achieve Biko's ideal (1978) that liberation is analogous to "complete freedom of self-determination" (p21).

Thus when Jacob and his fellow gardeners at Tshimo leave produce to rot in the garden rather than take it home and face the ridicule of family and neighbours, or when the Motse Co-op insists on allocating their limited resources to the purchase of a second bakkie, mainstream development cannot interpret what the action *means* to the actors themselves. In the language of Bardhan and Ray (2006), this mainstream discourse is unable to interpret why people do not do something in any way relevant to those people's *own interpretation of their own actions*, precisely because this discourse has effectively made those interpretations invisible, and thus unavailable.

The presented reasons (in mainstream South African development narratives – such as the *Gauteng 20 Year Food Security Plan*) for why certain households are food insecure in the first place reflects a clear set of power relations. By simply ignoring the dominant food system in South Africa (which generates enormous profits for large corporate food processing and retailing companies through high food prices) the mainstream discourse has effectively excluded it as a possible contributor to hunger and poor nutrition, *and thus as a legitimate target in order to address these issues.* The fact of high corporate profits generated from the sale of food in a country where around 80% of all households cannot afford to purchase a nutritionally balanced basket of food (Jacobs, 2009) is not judged as morally reprehensible, but rather as "given". That, after all, is "the way in which the market works."

By deflecting attention onto the shortcomings of the hungry themselves (they "choose" not to grow their own food – because of their laziness or their ignorance - and thus solve their "own" problem), the beneficiaries of this exploitative food system are able to justify its existence, and its growth. It therefore becomes "true" that food

insecure households could solve their own problems with nothing more than a little effort and a little external support, and those who "choose" not to do so somehow deserve the results. As Wiley (2001, p3) puts it – "It is not enough to enjoy these riches; people must be seen to deserve them. Conversely, social suffering must be satisfactorily explained." She was describing grand apartheid in South Africa, but the analysis is just as easily applied to food security policy in contemporary South Africa.

Through the discourse of mainstream development, the poor appear to have been "integrated" into an economic system on exactly the same basis that Biko (1978) objected to in terms of racial integration: "If by integration you understand…. an assimilation of blacks into an already established set of norms and codes of behaviour set up and maintained by whites then YES I am against it." (Biko, ibid, p24, emphasis in original). Biko's claim that "liberal" anti-apartheid organisations were perpetuating a black sense of inferiority by creating a situation where "whites (are) doing all the talking and blacks the listening" (ibid, p20) very neatly reflects current mainstream development practice, where designated "experts" (like the provincial extension officers or the mentors from NTC) do all the talking, and people like the gardeners at Motse and Tshimo do all the listening. As Wiley (2001) puts it, "the experts were never the hungry themselves" (p4). One of the "definitive" studies on food security in South Africa is Altman *et al* (2009), together with its underlying reports. As far as I am able to assess, this study did not at any point consider the hungry themselves, save as data sets extracted from national statistics, and certainly never solicited a hungry person's point of view.

I have purposely drawn analogies between the power relations implied in the discourses of mainstream development in post-apartheid South Africa and the discourses of apartheid itself, echoing the views of Chris Tapscott (Tapscott, 1995). These, in turn, reflect Ferguson's (1990) points of view about the political goals of apparently 'apolitical' development. In many subtle and important ways, the community gardeners are as effectively trapped by the characterisations of the poor in post-apartheid South Africa as their parents and grandparents were by those characterisations of "blackness" implied and imposed by the apartheid state. In certain instances they are subject to an even greater denial of their desire to be equal persons by current mainstream development narratives based on the assumption that the failure of projects is usually the fault of the beneficiaries; their "lesser personhood" is underscored by the fact that, despite all the "benefits" that they now have by virtue of their "freedom" in the new South Africa, they have still failed.

Diana Wylie, in her study of apartheid food and nutrition policy (Wylie, 2001) has emphasized how the justification for apartheid within the ruling White community was "refined" from a crude biological form of racism to a more sophisticated "cultural racism" (p2). She makes the very relevant point (ibid) that this cultural racism (i.e. that there were certain fundamental "cultural" differences among the various races that translated into different abilities to advance in economic terms) provided the basis on which Whites were able to justify their relative wealth and privilege, and thus prevented their having to examine too closely (or at all) other explanations, like power. Like Tapscott (1995), she also draws parallels between this South African discourse of cultural differences and the general tone of international development discourse.

I would agree wholeheartedly with Tapscott (ibid) that the "sphere of influence (of the discourse of development) is more extensive and its impact on South African society has been more far-reaching than that of any conventional academic discipline" (Tapscott, ibid, p171). Its main function, he asserts, has been to legitimize the apartheid policies of separate development by, mostly very successfully, depicting black South Africans as "underdeveloped", thus neatly substituting a more 'palatable' definition of inferiority than those based on biology, while still achieving the same goals – denial of black South Africans' right to be persons in full. In addition, this language of "underdevelopment" made it clear who should be the "developer" and who should be the "developee"; who, in the words of this thesis, would get to be the author of narratives of development by virtue of their more "advanced" state of being.

It is now mainstream economics (through development policies) that legitimizes a particular set of power relations in contemporary South Africa, by means of a very similar set of assumptions about who has the right to script these narratives. It is via these enduring assumptions that the "expertise" of people like Ernest from NTC was firmly established at the Motse garden, despite the daily evidence that the gardeners were in fact much more knowledgeable than he was on many key issues. This knowledge on the part of the gardeners was rendered invisible by those narratives, which thus very effectively set the limits to what kinds of persons the gardeners "could" aspire to be.

It is clear that the community gardeners are considered "inferior" by almost all development officials by virtue of their poverty, which poverty is often assumed to be analogous with "ignorance". They are made, by virtue of their material circumstances,

into Biko's "perpetual under-16s" (Biko, 1978, p21). Those in positions of power vis-à-vis the gardeners, which power is determined in large part by how the discourses of development portray the expert and the ignorant, thus feel completely justified in referring to the gardeners as lazy or ignorant or "not wanting to work hard". And some of the gardeners, by and large, accept this as the correct order of things. Sarah and Elizabeth – struggling with the infrastructure in their garden – genuinely did not believe that the kind of persons that they were had the "right" to demand anything at all from the persons that the provincial extension officers were. It is testimony to the success of mainstream development narratives in South Africa that Sarah and Elizabeth could not imagine themselves equal persons with that provincial official, no matter how much "freedom" they may have had on paper.

Like Tapscott (1995), Manzo (1995) also draws parallels between apartheid and development in arguing that "development (in South Africa) established continuities with both colonialism and apartheid" (Manzo, ibid, p226). She draws conclusions about the role of modernity in maintaining racial stereotypes via the discourse of mainstream development, something echoed by Gibson (2011), and visible everywhere in South Africa. Gauteng has as its logo "*the smart province*", while Joburg (its largest metropolitan municipality) aspires to be "*a world class African City*". It is not hard to see that there is little (if any) conceptual space in these world class, smart places for people like Sarah and Elizabeth. It is through these narratives of progress, I would propose, that Sarah and Elizabeth are rendered almost invisible and largely irrelevant, despite their "freedom". Their "backwardness" in 2013 denies them access to this shiny new world as surely as their blackness would have done 30 years previously.

The drive to modernity in South Africa – under the guise of "development" - continues to displace poor people like the community gardeners. In this thesis I described how the gardeners had traveled to one of the informal markets that spring up each month in the surrounding communities on social grant days. These are the days on which the recipients of South Africa's various social grants receive their payments at a particular pay point, and so have cash to spend in a particular location (around the pay point). These market days provide opportunities for many small informal traders to access a large group of customers, and it provides the major source of income for many of them.

In 2012 the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) announced a new social security grant "smart card". This new system allows the monthly grant to be automatically uploaded onto the beneficiaries' cards, thereby effectively removing the need for beneficiaries to congregate in one place each month to receive their grant. The new card can also be used as a debit card within formal retail outlets, and cash withdrawals using the new card at a formal retail outlet are free, while a fee is charged at a bank automatic teller machine.

According to the Minister of Social Development (in her September 2013 speech at the inauguration of the Advisory Committee on the future of payment grants in South Africa) "(t)he previous antiquated system indicated that beneficiaries were able to receive their grants only on specific dates and at specific pay-points". That this "antiquated system" provided income-generation opportunities for many of South Africa's poor does not seem to have been considered at all. The reality is that this new

(modern) social grant payment system will greatly undermine the critical mass of customers in one place at one time that created the incentive for the informal markets, and thus probably cause them to disappear. Another avenue for the poor to generate livelihoods will be closed by "progress".

Where then is the space for that freedom promised to people like Elizabeth and Sarah? As Gibson (2011) points out, the racially-based discrimination of apartheid has been replaced by the poverty-based discrimination of the new South Africa, and the victims are more or less exactly the same. This is the great "irony" pointed out by Tapscott (1995, p186), - " that traditional opposition forces in South Africa are themselves appropriating the language and idioms of 'development' for their own ends." That appropriation, some 20 years later, is complete. The community gardeners will testify to that.

8.3. *I write what I like*[48]. Freedom, authorship and moving beyond development

"Economic democracy means nothing if not trusting the people to identify and express their own interests."

Hart and Sharp (2014, pviii)

"The tide of history only advances when people make themselves fully visible."

Anderson Cooper

The "post-development" literature has grown out of a general disenchantment with the widespread failure of mainstream development. In contrast, however, to more orthodox critiques of development (which have tended to focus on the technical details of particular approaches and project designs), post-development criticizes the very concept of "development" and its assumptions of "superior and inferior knowledge" (Gibson-Graham, 2005, p5), and calls for alternatives to development itself (Escobar, 1995).

As Ricoeur referred to the "surplus of meaning" that remains after the completion of an objective analysis like structuralism (Ricoeur, 1976), and before interpretation of "meaning-in-the-world", so Gibson-Graham (2005) refer to the "surplus possibilities" that are revealed when a "sociology of emergences" is applied to a poor community, in response to De Sousa Santos' sociology of absences produced by mainstream development (Gibson-Graham, ibid, p8). Gibson-Graham's conceptualization of a new "community economics" is based on De Sousa Santos' (2004) call to "enlarge

[48] Biko (1978)

the field of credible experience" through the creation of a "post-development discourse" as just such a means to achieving that enlargement (Gibson-Graham, ibid, p6). As I proposed in Chapter Two, we may draw parallels between De Sousa Santos' (and thus with Gibson-Graham's) ideas about what may constitute a viable "post-development" as being premised on a particular notion of **narrative identity.**

Although none of these writers used this term in this context, Gibson-Graham utilised what they called a 'language project' as a central part of their community economics research in the Philippines. This involved community members articulating in their own words what their community had, rather than focusing, in the language of development, on what it didn't. This latter "analysis of lack" resulted in a list of things that needed to be fixed by the experts of development; the former highlighted the ways in which the community itself could construct an inclusive "community economy". The research highlighted the "discomfort and uncertainty" that community members experienced during this process (Gibson-Graham 2005, p20), which process I would describe as analogous to authoring an alternative narrative. In this alternative narrative the community members had to assume different characters from the normal 'ignorant poor' chracterisations imposed on them by the mainstream narratives, and thus could be said to be struggling with achieving plausibility of their performances against this background.

Manzo (1995) has argued that the black consciousness articulated by Steve Biko and his contemporaries in South Africa provides a viable alternative to the power relations implied by "development". The black consciousness movement measured progress in terms of the ability of black South Africans to achieve liberation on their **own** terms,

rather than on the terms of Whites. It encouraged blacks to recognize their *inherent* value, and not to define that value in the terms of others. Black consciousness, in the words of this thesis, may thus be said to make very particular claims about who is "entitled" to author narratives of progress.

In line with the arguments of Gibson (2011) and Manzo (1995) and drawing on Gibson-Graham (2005), I would suggest one way of conceptualising post-development, based on the following porposals that I have made in this thesis:

1. That what people really want is not material wealth *per se*, but to be recognized as equal persons of a particular (subjectively defined) kind, i.e. that the contestation for "freedom" is primarily a contestation around personhood, not material wealth;
2. That identity is fundamentally narrative, and that contestations of identity may thus be conceptualized as contestations of authorship; and
3. That it is through its discourses (narratives) that mainstream development achieves it hegemony, most particularly through what it makes visible and invisible, relevant and irrelevant, inevitable and impossible. As I have argued in this thesis, it is power and power relations that are key to determining what kinds of performances from whom are deemed more or less plausible by particular audiences.

Thus, I would propose that one kind of post-development thinking might begin with thinking about the issue of **authorship** – whose experience is considered "credible"

enough to make them a plausible author of an alternative "narrative of change"[49]? Put another way, how do we make alternative narratives of personhood – such as those of the community gardeners or those of the Jagna community described in Gibson-Graham (2005) – *plausible*, on both an objective and subjective basis, and thus "visible"? As I have argued in this thesis, there is a vital temporal element to performance plausibility: we have to believe that who a person is now and who she aspires to be is linked in some plausible way to who she was before. The great power of the discourse of development, I would argue, is in its ability to set limits to both the space of experience and the horizon of expectation (Koselleck, 2004) of the poor, and thus to effectively render implausible a wide range of meaningful action in the present.

Biko (1978) states categorically that one of the critical issues in achieving the "liberation of the self" is directing attention "to the past, to seek to rewrite the history of the black man and to produce in it the heroes who form the core of the African background" (p29). Biko appears to be arguing for an expansion in the space of black experience, in order to expand what can be plausibly imagined as meaningful action in the present. In the case of the community gardeners, this expanded experience might focus on the fact that black farmers, rather than white farmers, were the most important suppliers of food to many frontier towns in rural South Africa at the dawn of the twentieth century. Their displacement by white farmers reflected the results of racist politics - forced land removals and job segregation – rather than any inherent inabilities due to their "blackness", the assumption made by Samuel when referring to the failed land reform beneficiaries at Portion Four.

[49] I would also suggest that "change" might be a better choice of word than "development", implying as it does merely some kind of difference between then and now, now and then, without making any presumptions about the superiority of any of these.

However, I would argue that while a rewriting and a rereading of history may be a necessary precursor to the development of new narratives of change (i.e. a genuine post-development) it is probably not sufficient: as Ricoeur (1984) points out, history and fiction are not so easily distinguished, and what we would consider "history" is never a series of empirically verifiable facts. We constantly remake our personal history – our "space of experience" (Koselleck 2004, p256) in light of our changing expectations. It is not, I would assert, the production of a particular *version* of history that impacts on whether or not a particular performance of identity is plausible or not, but the way in which that version is generally understood. For example, the documented fact of successful black farmers 100 years ago may be interpreted as meaning that black people have latent potential to be good farmers; or it might be interpreted to mean that black farmers were only any good in the days prior to the modernization of agriculture; that they are in fact inherently "backwards" and not as modern as their white contemporaries. Progress has marched on and they have been left behind. It is only one of these interpretations that has the power to fundamentally alter the performances of identity that are considered to be "available" to the community gardeners in the present. If this interpretation is not commonly held, then we will simply have created another version of Oliver de Sardan's (2005) described disconnect between the assumed reality of development practitioners and the lived reality of the poor. And, I would argue, it is much more likely that mainstream economics (and thus development) would assign the latter ("backwards") explanation to this particular set of historical events.

This brings us back to Ricoeur's *mimesis1* – the prefiguration that is necessary before emplotment (i.e. the crafting of a narrative) can take place. It is in prefiguration that the power of authorship is established or denied, since prefiguration determines to a considerable extent the **plausibility**, and thus the "acceptability", of both the plot and its author. *Mimesis1* is the "pre-understanding" (Moore, 1990, p103) that is necessary before emplotment can take place. Developing a plot for a performance that will be intelligible both to ourselves and others "presupposes a familiarity" (Ricoeur, 1984, p55) with a range of actions, cultural conventions, actors, likely consequences, causality, and so on. *Mimesis1* thus informs the "intelligibility" of the plot and is what should ensure that the performance will be interpreted by the audience in one particular way rather than another, by situating the plot in a pre-existing meaning structure that is common to narrator and audience.

It is through the gaze of *mimesis1* that one version of history is deemed more "true" than another; it is through the gaze of *mimesis1* that a particular performance of identity is judged plausible; and it is through the gaze of *mimesis1* that the possibilities for the future are imagined. In short, it is *mimesis1* that grants visibility and invisibility to persons, power and possibility. And it is the power to define the *mimesis1* of poverty and hunger that we have handed effectively over to the "experts", through our acceptance of the division of the social and the economic.

It is thus, I would argue, in recrafting *mimesis1* that we should focus our efforts to make visible what has been made invisible by the hegemonic narratives that divide the social and the economic. A new *mimesis1* requires that we expand "the world ….. of credible experience" (De Sousa Santos, 2004, p239). Recrafting *mimesis1* requires

that we critically rethink the way in which we have effectively handed over the authorship of narratives of personhood to mainstream economics; how we have created a situation where (to paraphrase Biko) the well-fed are doing all the talking and the hungry are doing all the listening. Constructing a new *mimesis1* for interpreting food security and hunger requires not that we accord legitimacy in the narratives of poverty and hunger to the accounts of those who are living these realities, but that we cede them authorship.

If we acknowledge in this manner that economic and development policies are constructed in a social context, and that the role for morality in these policies is in fact to be negotiated, and not given, then the real question to be asked is not *why don't hungry households grow their own food*, but rather *how did South Africa become a place where the poor have to choose between their dignity and their stomachs?*

ENDINGS

Bontle, at Motse, had always been the person most overtly proud of the garden, most proud of what the cooperative had achieved, and most convinced that the Motse gardeners were lucky and blessed because of their hard work and commitment. I think I could safely say that she was my favourite person to work alongside at the garden. I was very surprised to discover, then, on one of my very last visits to the Motse garden that she had left the group. "She has left us, she had gone to take a job", Samuel said, and both he and Lesego were obviously very disappointed. I phoned Bontle: What's going on I asked? Have you really left the project? Why? She was in tears – you know how much that project means to me Tracy, you know how much I love it. Why? I asked.

The reasons – as I should have expected – were complex, and had nothing to do with the monetary attractions of her new job: Bontle had always been Samuel's champion in the project – she always defended him if the others complained about him, and she was quick to talk quietly to him aside from the others if she wanted to make a point, rather than in front of everyone. I was told that Bontle and Samuel had been an item in high school, about 6 or so years ago. Samuel was married now, but it wasn't hard to see that Bontle was still very fond of him. But she seemed content with her role as his confidant and supporter. This, it turned out, was what had changed, certainly from Bontle's point of view. She told me that Samuel wouldn't listen to her any more, that he no longer wanted her advice. Instead, the decisions were being made by Samuel, Lesego and Kabelo. She was particularly upset about their insistence on buying a second bakkie, instead of investing the money directly back into the garden.

No one will listen to me, she said. Bontle felt herself ignored, pushed aside in her beloved garden; and instead of becoming that lesser person she believed she was being made into, she walked away.

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