Community Engagement as Liberal Performance, as Critical Intellectualism and as Praxis

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This article aims to illustrate that engagement is a dynamic and evolutionary process, moulded by contesting ideological, social actor and contextual forces. For purposes of illustration, I draw on a university-affiliated, participatory enactment of community engagement as a case example. The case illustrates that community engagement may assume a form of action, critical intellectualism and praxis. As action, community engagement is oriented towards performance of liberal democracy. Community engagement, as shaped by the critical intellectualism of the Black Consciousness philosophy, reflects community self-affirmation, autonomy and intellectual independence. Community engagement as praxis may be characterised by reflexivity, vision-making and the building of interpersonal relationships. Community engagement is marked by a dynamic interplay between race, power and counter-hegemonic ideology.

Keywords: community engagement, action, critical intellectualism, praxis, interpersonal relationship building

This article is organised around two themes, namely that community engagement is a dynamic, shifting and complex process, and that it is a form of action, liberatory thought and praxis. As a complex, non-linear, shifting and messy process community engagement is shaped and reshaped by creative social forces, academic traditions, liberal intellectual thought and social actor styles that are dialectically interconnected. For the purposes of elucidating these themes and creating an analytical anchor for this article, I begin with an overview of selected relevant literature concerned with community engagement. The literature review serves to situate the meaning of community engagement within particular theoretical traditions. I draw on Black Consciousness, as a form of critical intellectualism, to introduce a distinctive theoretical reading of community engagement that may be rare in the psychological literature. I then describe the empirical, social and intellectual factors that shaped the emergence and subsequent contested development of a university-affiliated, community-based, violence-prevention initiative. The initiative, which embodies a specific participatory oriented enactment of community engagement in South Africa, is used to illustrate community engagement as a dynamic and shifting process that contained three ‘moments’2. In its first moment community engagement, informed by the empirical, social and intellectual elements that fashioned the beginning and growth of the university-affiliated violence-prevention initiative, was a performance of liberal democracy. In its second moment, community engagement shifted to become a psycho-political exercise in community self-affirmation and agency. This second moment was primarily produced by the philosophy of Black Consciousness, a form of ‘critical intellectualism’ (see Ally & Ally, 2008, p. 172), and a voice of liberation that prioritised race in its social and theoretical articulations. The third moment, which was a creative response to the critical intellectualism of Black Consciousness and influenced by social actor particularities, showed community engagement to be a manifestation of praxis. Praxis included imagination, reflection, action and the building of community connections through the establishment of interpersonal relationships. This third moment, which emphasised the facilitation of community-agency partnerships and connections, represented a further shift in the articulation of community engagement. In conclusion I attempt to reiterate key observations about community engagement arising from the illustrative case example.

I adopt a personalised narrative style and draw on published and grey literature, as well as my own location within the violence-prevention agency, to reflect on community engagement as performance, as critical intellectualism and as praxis. So in many respects the article reads like a story about community engagement. I also choose to name some individuals who shaped this story about community engagement. The personalised narrative style and naming of individuals are a deliberate break from the orthodox detached modes of academic writing and an attempt to register a personal voice and to demonstrate the dialectical links between the personal and the social in community engagement. The article is therefore positioned as an endeavour in self-reflexivity which requires a consideration of the means and outcomes of community engagement, the power dynamics inherent to engagement and the possible disenabling influences of the discourses of community engagement (see Cooke & Kothari, 2004). Reflexivity is intended to facilitate ongoing dialogue about the methods, discourses and outcomes of community engagement (see Henkel & Stirrat, 2004).

Modes and Meanings of Engagement

Typologies and Engagement as Action

Enactments of community engagement may assume various forms, styles and purposes. Located on a continuum (see Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, & Herremans, 2010), community engagement may take the form of consultation, consent, in-
volvement and participation, each assuming different purposes and levels of interaction with communities. Engagement in the form of consent is about obtaining stakeholder approval for a particular initiative. Engagement assuming consultation seeks to interact with communities for the purposes of obtaining feedback without direct community participation in project design, implementation and evaluation. Community involvement enlists stakeholders as volunteers and/or consumers of an envisaged project and its associated services. Participatory forms of engagement go further than obtaining consent, comment and involvement. Participatory engagement aims to involve community members in the planning, implementation and overall assessment of development initiatives (see Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, & Herremans, 2010; Brenner & Manice, 2011; Herbertson, Ballesteros, Goodland, & Munilla, 2009; Miao, Umemoto, Gondo, & Hishinuma, 2011). While participatory forms of engagement do not necessarily preclude consent, consultation and involvement, they are distinguished by their emphasis on community knowledge, agency, control and ownership, which are defined as the ideal outcomes and drivers of community-centred development (see Cooke & Kothari, 2004; Wallerstein, 1999). Participatory engagement recognises how power differentials may entrench systems of oppression and unequal relationships (see Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007).

The typology of engagement strategies put forward by Bowen et al. (2010) includes transactional, transitional and transformational modalities, and helps us to systematise the continuum of community engagement as action and to discern the intentions, processes and interactional styles embedded in such action. This typology arises out of a systematic review of over 200 academic publications that represent multiple disciplines in the human, economic and health sciences, and focuses on the drivers and outcomes of community engagement strategies (Bowen et al., 2010, p. 297).

Transactional engagement may include various actions: financial donations; skills transfer; investment of time through volunteering; and providing technical and expert advice. As such, transactional engagement is marked by one-way communication and transfer, namely from corporate entity or academic agency to community. Even though both parties benefit, albeit separately, from such a process, interaction is occasional, trust is limited and the agency retains full control of the engagement process.

Transformational engagement, representing proactive forms of action, is characterised by joint learning and value-generation, the co-management of projects and the inclusion of community leadership in decision-making processes. Communication is therefore a two-way process involving both the agency and the community in frequent interaction. Control over the engagement process is supposedly shared by the agency and community and trust assumes a relational form as it is developed through personal relationships and shared understandings. Transformational engagement, framed as moving “beyond talk into action” (see Bowen et al., 2010, p. 306), is contingent on active dialogue, listening, critical reflectivity (Balmer et al., 2007, cited in Bowen et al., 2010) and the co-creation of shared organisational language.

Transactional engagement transcends the one-way communication inherent in transactional approaches, but stops short of the co- framing of priority issues and sense-making evident in transformational approaches. Transitional engagements, underpinned by the idea of building bridges, incorporate consultations and collaborations and so involve repeated community–agency interactions. However, while resources may be shared within the purview of the consultations and collaborations, they remain in the control of the agency. In such forms of engagement trust is evolutionary in nature because it emerges as the result of repeated exchanges between the parties involved.

Despite the conceptual sophistication of the typology, and irrespective of the purposes and intent of these various forms of engagement (see Bowen et al., 2010), the typology tends to position engagement primarily as action. Engagement is a form of action and practice in the encounter between community and activists, consultants, university professors and other categories of social actors. In engagement as transformation, ‘dialogue’, ‘critical reflectivity’ and ‘listening’ seem to be means of taking action. ‘Reflexivity’ and ‘action’ remain dichotomised. Transformational engagement, which champions participation, is also silent about what Cooke and Kothari (2004) call the ‘new tyranny’ of participation, referring to the unjustified and illegitimate exercise of power. In this respect there is no explicit exploration of psycho-political validity, that is, the influence of power differentials on community wellbeing (see Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007). Power may be exercised illegitimately and unequally through both the discourse and the practice of community engagement (Cooke & Kothari, 2004). Even though transformational engagement is underpinned by the idea of a changing society, there is silence about the potential for the unequal exercise of power inherent in community–agency interactions.

Such considerations prompt us to locate transformational engagement within a critical community perspective. From within a critical location and following Kothari’s (2004) Foucauldian analysis, power is something that circulates and as such it is “found in the creation of norms and social and cultural practices at all levels” (p. 141). From a critical perspective community engagement therefore goes further than including marginalised voices and engendering community participation and control in the design, implementation and assessment of development initiatives. Informed by counter-hegemonic discourses and methodologies, critical enactments are mindful of the potential to exercise power unequally and committed to destabilising unequal power relationships. Critical enactments aim for liberatory forms of community agency.

**Black Consciousness, Critical Intellectualism and Praxis**

At this juncture I introduce Black Consciousness, a form of critical intellectualism (see Ally & Ally, 2008), because it represented a distinctive liberatory reading of community engagement and so serves to broaden the organising framework of this article. Black Consciousness shaped the South African intellectual landscape and influenced debates about the relationship between race and class in explanations of the South African apartheid sociopolitical structure (Ally & Ally, 2008). As such it may be illuminating to locate critical community engagement within the wider intellectual landscape and the influences of the Black Consciousness philosophy. Ally and Ally (2008) write that the mobilising slogan of Black Consciousness, “Black Man, You Are On Your Own”, embodies its underlying liberation philosophy directly, while collectively addressing the black majority, those other-than-white. In this regard the slogan represented a call for revitalising and centering black intellect and black agency within liberatory discourses and transformative actions.
The organising slogan reflected the psychological dimension emphasised by the Black Consciousness model of liberation politics and as such indicated two significant elements:

Firstly, authentic social transformation and humanisation were to be attained through the formation of counter-hegemony that resisted and dislodged the dominant “values and practices of the white superstructure” (Ally & Ally, 2008, p. 172). Blacks were collectively called to confront internalised oppression, perpetuated through self-denigration, self-hate and low self-esteem, and structured by the dominant ideology of arrogant white superiority and black inferiority (also see Biko, 1978). Transformation required blacks to define themselves as active and generative agents.

Secondly, the slogan focused on the oppressed collective and called upon blacks to free themselves from a dependency on whites in the struggle for emancipation. Recognition, self-affirmation and agency were intrinsically linked to deconstructing and reconstructing the politics embedded in the dynamic of dependency between blacks and whites in the quest for liberation. Ally and Ally (2008) remind us that Black Consciousness targeted its criticism at what it called the “white liberal establishment”, referring collectively to whites who defined themselves as anti-apartheid activists and supported the liberation struggle. White liberalism was constructed as a significant barrier to autonomous black initiatives, organisation and overall agency, and hence as a barrier to black liberation. In the context of the racialised superiority-inferiority dynamic, the instrumental and ongoing influence of whites in the liberation struggle under the rubric of integration was viewed as a key obstacle to the exercising of black agency and autonomy and a contributor to the cycle of dependency. As long as blacks and whites lived in two diametrically different experiential worlds, the Black Consciousness philosophy reasoned that whites could never fully comprehend and identify with the world of the oppressed. Black Consciousness questioned and dismissed the participation of whites, no matter how well-meaning, in black liberation and transformation initiatives. It was reasoned that whites, by virtue of their privileged location in the apartheid system, would always reflect unequal power dynamics and never fully commit to totally dislodging a system that benefited them (see Biko, 1978). Therefore white involvement and participation in transformation politics and initiatives had to be viewed with scepticism, and suspicion; it had to be resisted strongly (see Biko, 1978).

So through Ally and Ally’s (2008) framing of Black Consciousness as a form of critical intellectualism, we discern a very particular reading of community engagement: Community engagement is a liberatory process, driven and informed by black agency and black intellect. Community engagement is a psychological exercise in self-affirmation and introspection about the internalised oppressor, and a political act of resistance to the inordinate influences of white involvement in black community affairs. Community engagement is a counter-hegemonic act of political and social resistance. Engagement is a philosophy, an articulation of the black experience, a vision for resistance and a call to action. Such an articulation of engagement was evident in the community-focused work of organisations affiliated with Black Consciousness in the 1970s (see Seedat & Lazarus, 2011). Such work, which may be viewed as the precursor to the formalised radical enactments of community psychology in South Africa, inserted the psychological dimension into the political arena (see Hook, 2005). As such the work was characterised by a quest for self-empowerment, identity and solidarity in social action, as well as a refusal to accept the social structures, ideals and norms of apartheid (see Seedat & Lazarus, 2011).

Following the Black Consciousness framing, I suggest that critical community engagement is an embodiment of action, reflection, reflexivity and imagination. In critical enactments, theory and action are dialectically connected and so community engagement is best approached as a gestalt. As a gestalt it is virtually impossible to separate the constituent parts of community engagement from the whole. Thus, in a critical reading, community engagement is praxis. As praxis engagement is not a unidirectional process. Instead, as will be demonstrated in the case illustration below, it is dynamic and undergoes shifts that are formed, informed and reformed by contextual forces, social currents, liberatory intellectual thought, and social actor values and interactional styles.

The Illustrative Case: Origins, Social Actors and Shaping Influences

The illustrative case, presented below in a form of a story, refers to the Centre for Peace Action (CPA), an initiative of the Health Psychology Unit located in the University of South Africa. The Centre was first known as the Eldorado Park Violence Prevention Programme (EPVPP). Eldorado Park is a township south-west of the city of Johannesburg and was historically reserved for people classified as ‘coloured’.

The Centre was established by a core group of social actors as a primary prevention response to the high levels of interpersonal violence, including child abuse, intimate partner violence and gang-related aggression (see Seedat, Terre Blanche, Butchart, & Nell, 1992), that was masked by the public and political focus on collective violence, especially since the 1976 student revolts.

The core group of social actors included black and white psychologists who represented diverse political and academic thought. These social actors were ensconced in a context marked by a surge towards democratic practices and drew on different political and academic traditions to formulate justification and obtain public support for the establishment of the Centre. White public health psychologists like the late Victor Nell and Alex Butchart relied on liberal political views and findings from an epidemiological study, conducted by them, to craft evidence for the establishment of the Centre (Butchart & Brown, 1991; Butchart, Nell, Yach, Brown, Johnson, & Radebe, 1991). The hospital-based epidemiological study (Butchart et al., 1991) indicates that people classified as ‘coloured’ within the apartheid racialised nomenclature experienced high levels of interpersonal violence. During the period 1989 to 1990, the incidence per 100,000 population of violence-related non-fatal injuries in the greater Johannesburg area was 3,821 and 1,527 for ‘coloured’ and Africans respectively. Young males, aged 20 to 24, were most at risk of sustaining violence-related injuries (Butchart & Brown, 1991; Butchart et al., 1991).

Black activist psychologists such as Zubeida Dangor and Thandeka Mgaduso, who influenced and were influenced by the critique of mainstream psychology, drew inspiration for the Centre from critical community psychology and black feminist thought. Dangor and Mgaduso emphasised the importance of engaging community voices in developing the rationale for the Centre. Thus Zubeida Dangor obtained data from a survey that included information about female residents of Eldorado Park to highlight gang violence, intimate partner violence, unemployment and substance abuse as priority community concerns. The survey pointed to the need for psychosocial services, in-
cluding women’s shelters, responsive policing, child enrichment programmes and medical and emergency care in Eldorado Park (see Dangor & Seedat, 1992). The expressed call for psychosocial services resonated with the epidemiological findings (Butchart & Brown, 1991; Butchart et al., 1991) and aspects of the larger critique in South African psychology at the time. Among other issues, the critique raised questions about the ethnocentric, classist and gendered forms of psychology, and the invisibility of blacks as producers of knowledge (see Berger & Lazarus, 1987; Dawes, 1986; Hayes, 1984; Nicholas & Cooper, 1990). The critique included debates about the relevance, appropriateness and form of clinical and counselling psychology, and underscored the absence of mental and social services for the majority population. Such critiques were embedded within the larger project to transform teaching, research and training modalities in the social and health sciences (see Nicholas & Cooper, 1990). This transformation project arose in the context of the broader struggle to dislodge apartheid social structures and the national campaigns for democratic forms of community engagement.

To summarise, the Centre’s origins may be traced to the thoughts and actions of a group of socially conscious psychologists, some of whom were inspired by critical psychology and black feminist thought. These psychologists used findings from an epidemiological study, a small-scale survey and the critiques levelled at mainstream psychology (Berger & Lazarus, 1987; Butchart et al., 1991; Dangor & Seedat, 1992; Dawes, 1986) to marshal empirical, financial, social and political support for the establishment of the Centre.

Engagement as Liberal Democratic Action: The First Moment

The Centre was formally inaugurated at a public meeting in April 1990. Endorsements from various people and organisations were read out at the well-attended public meeting. These endorsements were, obtained by the black activist community psychologists from civic and faith-based groups and organised anti-apartheid political formations, including the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Azanian People’s Organization (AZAPO). At that stage, community engagement was ‘performed’ as a liberal democratic act to obtain consent, endorsements and approval for its intention, vision and commitment to the prevention of violence. The inaugural public meeting was also the first annual general meeting of the Centre; a board of trustees was elected to provide policy direction, to facilitate community control in the medium term and to enable the creation of project committees. The project committees were established to inform the planning, design and implementation of local services to families, women and youth (Butchart & Seedat, 1993; Seedat et al., 1992). The board and the project committees were defined as the structures that would facilitate and obtain community involvement, participation and ultimately ownership. In an unpublished analysis written at least two decades ago, Butchart and Seedat (1993) suggest that this form of engagement would locate the Centre within the discourses of democracy evident in South African community psychology and the anti-apartheid formations at the time. The discourses of both the anti-apartheid formations and critical community psychology emphasised social justice, equity, and community participation and control, and called for democratic engagement between university-affiliated professionals and communities.

In resonance with Butchart and Seedat (1993), I suggest that the Centre, initiated and conceived by activist and socially-conscious psychologists of diverse political persuasions, used transformational and democratic enactments of engagement to create its own democratic identity for itself. The public inauguration of the Centre embodied a specific enactment and articulation of community engagement, which in many respects echoed the transformational forms of engagement presented in the typology formulated by Bowen et al. (2010). The establishment of a board of trustees and project committees, and the endorsements from anti-apartheid formations and local civic bodies established the Centre as a legitimate, people-led service initiative committed to the prevention of violence through participatory community engagement. The endorsements from ideologically diverse stakeholders implicitly positioned the Centre as a non-partisan, service-oriented community entity in a contested public space in which anti-apartheid groups vied for hegemony. Anti-apartheid formations, representing diverse political orientations and ideologies, strove to obtain maximum legitimacy, representivity and voice. The contest for control, legitimacy and representivity sometimes produced polarisation and vitriolic forms of conflict among activists and within counter-hegemonic communities.

Slippage and Engagement as Critical Intellectualism: The Second Moment

Even though the Centre had a democratic identity that complied with the norms and principles of social democracy (see Butchart & Seedat, 1993), and committed itself to democratic engagement, subsequent developments tell another story. The Centre obtained international and local municipal funds without board and committee participation in decision-making and resource mobilisation processes. In effect the Centre therefore retained total control over its financial and resource mobilisation functions. In addition, in the context of the wider emerging national dialogue between the apartheid state and the largest of the anti-apartheid formations, namely the ANC, the Centre presented a case for working with the local police. Such work was viewed as necessary to transform the authoritarian and militarised nature of the apartheid police establishment and to facilitate community-centred policing services for a democratic South Africa.

Most members of the board and project committees interpreted the use of municipal and foreign donor money and the intention to engage the police as insidious attempts to de-radicalise and compromise local community resistance to state oppression. Many who were weary of international donor and municipal funds suggested that such funds came with prescriptions that ignored local priorities and perpetuated imperialist modes of engagement meant to entrench economic inequity and political exclusion (see Butchart & Seedat, 1993).

The afore-mentioned criticism created tension among board and committee members. The criticism was a reflection of the broader South African intellectual and political cleavages that presupposed class, racialised, ideological and philosophical dimensions. For formations such as the PAC and AZAPO, voluntary contact and engagement with the apartheid state and its structures represented the granting of legitimacy and credibility to an illegitimate state. More specifically, voluntary training interactions with the apartheid police establishment were interpreted as a reformist project that would diminish the revolutionary goal to dislodge apartheid state apparatuses and replace them with democratic and humanised systems.
Some local activists aligned with AZAPO were inspired by the critical intellectualism of Black Consciousness philosophy and regarded the violence prevention strategy and resource mobilisation logic of the Centre as an illustration of the influence of white academic intellectuals on the transformation agenda of the black community. They also raised questions about the role and functions of university-affiliated professionals, especially white professionals, in community-based initiatives. The group opposed the Centre because it was led by white liberal university-affiliated academics. In addition they viewed black professionals guardsly by virtue of their academic location and professional affiliations, disregarding their activist histories, anti-apartheid political work and working-class backgrounds. The Black Consciousness philosophy prioritised race and critique of white intellectual involvement in black community affairs. As such the above-mentioned criticism differed from the criticism voiced by another reactionary group that organised itself around the idea of a ‘coloured’ identity. This group was dissatisfied because the Centre was staffed by black professionals, referring to those who were classified as other-than-coloured in the apartheid nomenclature and who were not residents of Eldorado Park. This focus on ‘coloured’ identity may be read as an attempt to mobilise resources and obtain social recognition (see Garson, 1993; Lupton, 1995).

Drawing on the unpublished analysis by Butchart and Seedat (1993), I suggest that the slippage of the Centre into transitional engagement through its control of resource mobilisation and intervention strategy may be interpreted from within the critical intellectualism of Black Consciousness in very particular ways.

Firstly, the contestation and rejection of the intervention and resource mobilisation strategies employed by the Centre may be read as an exercise in agency by members of an oppressed and disenfranchised community (see Butchart & Seedat, 1993). As gatekeepers the board, committee members and local AZAPO activists acted to resist and regulate the nature, course and flow of what was viewed as hegemonic political, economic and academic influences into the catchment community of Eldorado Park (Butchart & Seedat, 1993). In South Africa, as in other parts of the world, the social and health sciences have enacted disciplinary power alongside their human welfare function (see Foucault, 1977; Butchart & Seedat, 1993) by using epistemological, anthropological and psychological techniques in the service of colonialism and apartheid. For instance, the architect of South African apartheid used double-bind theory to justify and naturalise segregationist and exploitative policies (see Foucault, 1977; Butchart & Seedat, 1993) by using epistemological, anthropological and psychological techniques in the service of colonialism and apartheid. For instance, the architect of South African apartheid used double-bind theory to justify and naturalise segregationist and exploitative policies (see Nicholas & Cooper, 1990). Another example is the use of public health sanitary techniques to justify and naturalise housing those other-than-white in segregated townships some distance from the city-centres that were to be inhabited, enjoyed and managed by whites (see Manzo, 1992; Nicholas & Cooper, 1990; Swanson, 1977). Even though the members of the Centre did not share the ideological underpinnings of the colonial and apartheid sciences, the very act of excluding community members from decisions about resource mobilisation was experienced by activists as a continuation of the racist legacy of disciplinary power.

Secondly, the contestation may be read as a mark of resistance to the inordinate influence of white liberals on black community affairs and a criticism of the noted difficulty among white academics to relinquish control.

Thirdly, the resistance was intended as a call upon black professionals to take the initiative and direct the Centre in line with the ideas of self-affirmation, autonomy and intellectual independence, notwithstanding the fact that most of the black professionals in the Centre at the time subscribed to Black Consciousness philosophy. It was a pointed call upon black professionals who were also activists to think deeply about the black–white power dynamic in the country and to resist white involvement in black community matters. In addition to the implied call upon black professionals to exercise agency, autonomy and critical intellectualism, there were doubts about the Centre’s commitment to democracy and pressure on the white liberal university-affiliated leadership to exit the community.

**Community Engagement as Praxis: The Third Moment**

The prioritisation of race obviously produced a crisis for the white liberal academics who had begun wondering about their specific roles in transformation politics and development. In addition there were robust debates between black and white staff members, and the black staff raised doubts about the legitimacy of the Centre and its credentials as a community-sensitive and participatory agency. Their doubts emerged at a time when the Centre also faced pressure from donor contracts that required service delivery and the university that tended to devalue community engagement and expected research-related publications. The pressure provided significant impetus for key actors to rethink and reconsider the initial conceptualisation of community engagement, producing further shifts in the centre.

The Centre took several measures to rebuild its community connections, legitimacy, democratic identity and non-partisan orientation, as well as its service focus on the prevention of violence. It regarded continuous engagement as a community-supported consensus-building process. At the time it was still known as the Eldorado Park Violence Prevention Programme, but the name was changed to the Centre for Peace Action to embody the promotive principles of community psychology. It established an organisational structure that placed blacks and women in the leadership and management strata of the Centre. However, blacks and women still only occupied mid-level leadership positions in the overall structure of the Health Psychology Unit. Other actions included the formulation of a mission statement and elaborate objectives; the development of a stakeholder-based evaluation model; the employment of local residents as paid community workers and volunteers; and the appointment of a new cohort of community-minded researchers, including Martin Terre Blanche, myself and others. Terre Blanche and the black psychologists, including Zubeida Dangor and Thandeka Mgoduso, introduced a critical community psychology and class analysis into the work of the Centre. The critical perspective offered substantive support for a focus on the gendered, patriarchal and power dimensions inherent to the internal structures and working arrangements of the Centre at the time.

The elaborate mission statement and objectives (see Table 1) repositioned the Centre as a community-responsive entity focused on the prevention of violence “through community development and self-empowerment” (see Terre Blanche & Sesel, 1992, p. 23). The mission explicitly repositioned the Centre as a non-partisan initiative, and members of the Centre were expected always to “advance the interests of the community as a whole” (Terre Blanche & Sesel, 1992, p. 23) rather than any single anti-apartheid formation or political party. The mission of the Centre was to supersede those of any party, community group or vested interests. This was an attempt to extricate the
Table 1

Mission Statement

The Programme is dedicated to meeting community needs with regard to violence prevention through community development and self-empowerment. The Programme subscribes to the principles of non-sectarianism, social transformation and the eradication of all forms of oppression and discrimination. This is inclusive of the emancipation of women, other marginalised groups and individual choice to religion and sexual preference. The party-political and organisational affiliation of trustees, elected committee members, trainees, volunteer workers and Programme staff are at all times secondary to this mission. In this way, individuals will remain accountable as individuals to the organisations or political parties of which they may be members, but will administer the Programme and conduct themselves as Programme workers so as to advance the interests of the community as a whole.

Source: Terre Blanche & Seseli, 1992, p. 23

Centre from the dynamics of polarisation prevalent at the time. Perhaps it was also an attempt to de-politicise the Centre.

All of these obviously merit analysis in their own right because they were integral to the response to the contestation as informed by Black Consciousness. They were also integral to the attempt to restore community credibility and regain democratic credentials. However, in line with the focus and intentions of this article, I now turn to examine the work of Terre Blanche and Seseli (1992) on the evaluation model, because it represents a significant, serendipitous and radical moment in the meaning and articulation of community engagement for the Centre.

The Terre Blanche-Seseli Assessment Model

The Terre Blanche and Seseli (1992) model, viewed as a contribution to larger efforts to develop democratic accountability mechanisms, was intended to trace long-term changes in the incidence and prevalence of violence as well as the short to mid-term process effects of violence. While the model recognised the primary importance of epidemiological data in tracing the impact of the interventions of the Centre to prevent violence, it specifically emphasised the incorporation of stakeholder views into the formulation of evaluation criteria. Such an emphasis echoed the original participatory ideals of the Centre and the recommendations of scholars like Guba and Lincoln (1988), who called for evaluation approaches that were sensitive to stakeholder concerns and priorities. The model would also enable the Centre to meet local demands for meaningful engagement.

Terre Blanche and Seseli (1992) obtained insights into stakeholder concerns through conversation interviews with the board, committee members, staff and donor representatives. These stakeholders represented a very small convenient sample of possible community voices. During the interview conversations stakeholders were encouraged to elaborate on short to mid-term and long-term criteria for the success of the Centre. Terre Blanche and Seseli (1992) followed a process of thematic categorisation that enabled them to detect a shared understanding among stakeholders. They used this to develop and formulate a five-tier model of prevention (see Table 2).

The model that emerged as the result of stakeholder conversations aimed at giving substantive meaning to the principles of critical community psychology. The model emphasised the inclusion of community voices in project planning and implementation, and the public health logic that focuses on evidence-led interventions. The model was premised on the idea that community-centered prevention of violence, and therefore safety, was best promoted through both process and outcomes-directed actions. At a process level community engagement was to assume an organisational path, beginning with achieving a presence and rootedness in the selected catchment area followed by community involvement, community development, ideological change and eventually the reduction of violence. The model was to be viewed as a pyramid with public presence, which was the most important level at the time, at the bottom and violence reduction at the top (see Figure 1). The figure was to assume a diamond shape when the focus moved to community development and ideological change. Eventually, when the primary focus moved to the reduction of violence, the model would be depicted as an inverted pyramid.

The reduction of violence was depicted as a process journey, with the focus shifting from one level to another. However, there was never to be a total departure from any of the preceding levels in the movement towards interventions aimed at the reduction of violence. Public visibility, the informed utilisation of planned services and endorsements of the vision, mission and objectives of the Centre were viewed as markers of community presence, acceptance and rootedness. Once a presence was achieved, the emphasis would shift towards community involvement. According to stakeholders, community involvement meant that the Centre would mobilise residents for seminars, training and skills development workshops and volunteer committees. In addition residents would get the opportunity to render recreational and other services to youths. If community involvement was to thrive, the offices of the Centre had to be structured as a public space, welcoming a through-flow of people. Another important indicator of community involvement was an increased focus on group work. Such involvement was thought to lay the foundation for community development and a significant shift towards establishing autonomous organisational structures such as childcare and youth support groups, small business enterprises and funding streams independent of the university-affiliated Health Psychology Unit (HPU). During this phase of the engagement process the Centre would be fully controlled by the community and the ideal was that it would have its own identity separate from the university unit. During this phase the Centre would play an instrumental part, alongside other civic groups, in lobbying government for services and formulating a local social welfare, health and public safety policy and agenda for Eldorado Park.

Community presence, involvement and development provided the platform for ideological change and ultimately violence reduction. Ideological change meant a de-glamorisation of discourses and behaviours that celebrated and justified violence. Ideological change also included a public de-stigmatisation of survivors of violence, especially sexual violence, and the
dissipation of feelings of hopelessness and disempowerment that tend to fuel the cycle of violence. Public deconstructions of the corrosive meanings attached to violence, together with a sense of collective hope and agency, would ultimately pave the way for a decline in the reported rates and incidences of different forms of violence and associated risky behaviours.

A reduction in violence was to be assessed through both subjective and objective criteria. Thus, increasing perceptions of safety was as important as objective decreases in the rates of violence. In this respect other parallel articulations (Seedat et al., 1992) emerging from the Centre and building on earlier rudimentary ideas, suggested that violence prevention was to be obtained through a combination of macro- and micro-level interventions. It was assumed that ultimately violence could be reduced, contained and prevented by way of addressing its social, economic and psychological dimensions (Terre Blanche & Seseli, 1992; Seedat et al., 1992).

A careful reading of the process of creating the model shows how the developmental journey recast community engagement as reflection, inspired by the very same contestation that it sought to extricate itself from. Thus Terre Blanche and Seseli’s (1992) work embodied an important moment in the Centre’s trajectory: a reflective moment when the Centre conceptually considered how to systematise the performance of engagement; a contemplative moment that enabled stakeholders, the voices of the community to visualise and systematise engagement in the journey towards violence reduction; and an imaginative moment that prompted stakeholders to envision

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Table 2
Impact Assessment Model

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<th>V. Violence reduction</th>
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<td>Reported violence should increase, then peak and decline.</td>
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<td>Actual incidents of violence should become fewer relative to baseline measures and statistics from surrounding areas.</td>
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<td>There should be an increased perception of personal safety. Individuals should indulge in risky behaviour less often.</td>
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<td>Particular kinds of violence (e.g., women abuse, corporal punishment, gang violence) should individually decrease.</td>
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<th>IV. Ideological change</th>
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<td>Feelings of hopelessness and disempowerment which may exist should subside.</td>
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<td>People should have stronger feelings of self-esteem and dignity.</td>
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<td>There should be greater awareness of and willingness to prevent women abuse.</td>
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<td>The stigma attached to rape and battery should disappear.</td>
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<td>Women should be able to define the kind of oppression to which they are subjected.</td>
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<td>Gang violence should lose its glamour.</td>
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<td>Violence should no longer be ‘cool’.</td>
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<th>III. Community development</th>
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<td>There should be a growing sense of community pride and power.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The community should develop shared objectives; political divisions should become less important.</td>
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<td>There should be numerous civic structures and groups, e.g., support groups, income groups, childcare groups, youth groups and small businesses functioning autonomously from the Programme.</td>
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<td>Existing structures should function more effectively or (in the case of gangs) become involved in more beneficial activities.</td>
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<td>The Programme should develop a separate identity from Unisa, becoming fully community controlled and possibly state funded.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Programme should play a leading role with other community structures in developing a comprehensive health, social welfare and public safety policy for Eldorado Park; it should lobby the state for facilities.</td>
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<th>II. Community involvement</th>
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<td>The Programme should offer numerous seminars, workshops, etc., geared towards community involvement.</td>
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<td>There should be numerous volunteer committees or groups that meet regularly, receive training and are enthusiastic about their work.</td>
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<td>Individual counselling should become less important and group work more important.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There should be a high through-flow of people from the community at the Programme offices; people should feel comfortable about coming to the Programme.</td>
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<td>Staff should spend much of their time outside the office.</td>
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<td>The Programme should be seen to be offering facilities, particularly recreational facilities for youth.</td>
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<th>I. Achieving a presence</th>
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<td>The Programme should achieve a higher profile in the community, becoming better known among both individuals and organisations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The residents of Eldorado Park should understand the types of services offered. More clients should report for counselling.</td>
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Source: Terre Blanche & Seseli, 1992, p. 22
a safe community. In that moment, community engagement as reflection, imagination and introspection was dialectically linked to community engagement as performance. The reflection process yielded a model for 'performing' engagement as part of a violence prevention programme located in a marginalised community where social actors were contesting the meaning of engagement and university-community partnerships.

The imaginative moment produced a vision for building a community of interest and participation for and around the Centre. The process, from achieving a presence to violence reduction, may be viewed as a visionary journey towards a supportive and affirmative community. At base level, 'community' would be sparked by disseminating information about the Centre, and creating awareness and an understanding and utilisation of the services offered by the Centre. Community involvement would give momentum to activities; the level that would see individuals engaged as groups and in groups centred around skill acquisition, recreational activities, volunteer activities and other social exchanges in a public space regarded as a comfortable zone. Such momentum would then give rise to the formation of a network of connections generated by a “sense of community pride and power” and driven by interlinked civic structures and supportive groups that offered psychosocial support, lobbied for state facilities, facilitated consensus and formulated local policies. Electrified by a network of autonomous civic and social groups, the level of ideological change also implied a communal rejuvenation drive, a departure from the corrosive discourses and actions of violence, and a birthing of individual and collective positive “self-esteem and dignity” (Terre Blanche & Seseli, 1992, p. 22). Community was ultimately visualised as a vibrant entity in which violence was contained and actively prevented, and feelings of safety thrived. Here we witness community engagement as idealisation, as vision-making and as hope. Community engagement was an enactment of praxis.

Interpersonal Connection: A Feature of Praxis

At this point it may be useful to note that the utility of the Terre Blanche and Seseli (1992) study, which produced the evaluation model, is located in the nuanced and qualitative shifts it produced in the Centre’s understanding and articulation of community engagement. The study was an embodiment of praxis.

As praxis it presented the beginning of a long-term transformational engagement effort to establish open and strong personal relationships with individuals and groups in the community. This shift towards forming sound interpersonal relationships was supported by the black staff at the Centre and my return to the Health Psychology Unit and its Centre after an absence of two years. I, for instance, drew on the relationships I had established in the community, where I had worked as a school teacher. I recruited my former students and colleagues to participate in the initiatives of the Centre. Other members of the Centre, including Zubeida Dangor and Thandeka Mgoduso, also drew on their friendships and professional networks to enlist support for the Centre and its services. These relationships broadened the site and mode of engagement as praxis for the Centre. Engagement was no longer just a cerebral interaction with organised anti-apartheid formations, the board and project committees. Engagement as praxis was extended to establish personal relationships with young professionals such as teachers and medical doctors who were community activists. The process and strategy of forming interpersonal and meaningful relationships gained significant substance when Gerald Williamson, a former student of mine and psychology graduate who lived in Eldorado Park, was recruited as a community engagement worker for the Centre. Gerald Williamson drew on his networking abilities, his own location and his ties to the community to build significant relationships with local schools, faith-based entities, and youth, recreational and sporting groups.

While debates about and opposition to the Centre’s earlier form of engagement did not dissipate all together, this shift towards establishing interpersonal relationships with residents and select groups of professionals directly helped to reproduce a space and legitimacy that enabled the Centre to continue working in the community. The significance of sound interpersonal relationships in community engagement was also documented by Hailey (2004) in his review of the experiences of South Asian non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In his review of various examples of South Asian NGOs, Hailey (2004)
suggests that successful community engagement and negotiations arise from long-term efforts directed at forming meaningful personal relationships with individuals and groups in communities. According to him formulaic approaches to participation are marked by operational limitations, cultural inappropriateness and a tendency to perpetuate external control over communities. While I concur with Hailey (2004), it must be noted that the focus on building interpersonal relationships may sometimes lead to the exclusion of dissenting and challenging voices. Notwithstanding such criticism it may be useful to reiterate a key point here: the shift towards praxis, embracing the start of a long-term process to build sound interpersonal relationship, recast engagement as a non-formulaic exercise.

The Centre continued with community engagement as a form of praxis until the late 1990s. However, decreases in donor funding, changes in staff composition (including the exit of some of the activist psychologists) and the philosophical alignment of the Centre with the public health emphases on evidence-based intervention produced a fourth shift in the articulation of community engagement. The fourth moment was characterised by a return to transactional and transitional modes of community engagement, when community stakeholders and groups were defined as informants and resources in attempts to produce evidence and justification for violence and injury prevention. The Centre continued to exercise transactional and transitional modes of engagement until 2001. In 2001 the Institute, along with the Medical Research Council, assumed co-directorship of the National Presidential Lead Programme on Crime, Violence and Injury, which resulted in a subsequent range of organisational changes including the closure of the Centre for Peace Action. In 2004 the Centre was repositioned as a virtual structure and its research-focused prevention initiatives were incorporated into the Lead Programme, which was redefined as the Safety and Peace Promotion Research Unit (SAPRU) at the end of 2010. All of these organisational and programmatic changes also produced a fifth shift in the ISHS’s expression of community engagement. The focus of this article and space constraints prevent a detailed examination of the fourth and fifth moments. However, the reader is referred to several contributions to this issue for an elaboration of the ISHS’s current articulation of engagement (see Eksteen, Bulbulia, van Niekerk, Ismail, & Lekoba, this issue; Kramer, Amos, Lazarus, & Seedat, this issue; Lazarus, Taliep, Bulbulia, Phillips, & Seedat, this issue; Suffla, Kaminer, & Bawa, 2012).

Concluding Reflections

The case illustration described herein allows one to register several observations about community engagement. Community engagement is a messy and non-linear dynamic process shaped and reshaped by social forces, intellectual currents, social actor orientations and acumen, and the quest for both community connection and community. When the Centre was founded, community engagement seemed to have been cast as a performance; as a set of actions directed at community-based actors and organised anti-apartheid groups to obtain consent for as well as community involvement and participation in its formation and envisaged development and service-oriented trajectory. Community engagement, intended as action, was inspired by liberal democratic ideals. Through the public act of inauguration, engagement was enacted to obtain a democratic and non-partisan identity for the Centre. At that point engagement as action emerged as a consensus, participatory and community-support building exercise. The exclusion of community stakeholders from resource mobilisation decisions, a slippage into a transitional model, was read by Black Consciousness aligned activists in particular as a racist application of disciplinary power and a mark of the inordinate and unwelcomed influences of white liberals in black community development. In this second moment the slippage to a transitional model and a continuation of what may be defined as the ‘tyranny of participation’ (Cooke & Kothari, 2004) reshaped engagement as conflict, opposition and resistance. Engagement therefore shifted from consent, consultation and involvement to resistance. The slippage into a transitional model produced resistance to transitional engagement and vigorous exhortations by stakeholders to reformulate engagement as a liberatory process driven by black agency, autonomy and intellectual and psychological independence. This resistance was an expression of counter-hegemonic power, which echoed Kothari’s (2004) Foucauldian construction of power as something that circulates and is evident at different levels and locations of society. In this article critical intellectualism enabled a rare and distinct reading of community engagement; community engagement is a quest for liberation. The challenge, presented primarily by Black Consciousness, served as the generative force in the reshaping of community engagement as contestation and resistance, and then as reflection, imagination and action. In the context of resistance the Centre undertook various actions to reclaim its liberal democratic identity and continue engagement as a consensus-building exercise. In the third moment the process of developing the pyramidal model heralded another shift in the Centre’s understanding and articulation of community engagement. The model embodied a serendipitous enactment of engagement as praxis, dialectically linking imaginations of safe communities to visionary community-building strategies. Imagination, action and reflection were produced as a gestalt. Engagement can sometimes assume a non-formulaic dimension. In the case example presented here the shift to praxis also reflected the start of a process of building interpersonal relationships with individuals and groups in order to grow community connections and linkages. The process of building interpersonal relationships was facilitated by social actors who drew on their established personal networks and their ability to forge ties with the community.

In conclusion, the analysis presented in this article, an exercise in reflexivity, shows that community engagement is a dynamic and messy process marked by distinctive shifts. The shifts are continually mapped, shaped and reshaped by creative forces, liberatory intellectual thought and social actor values and styles that are dialectically interconnected. Thus this article may be viewed as a call on readers to be reflexive and reflect on the shaping influences, means and outcomes of community engagement work.

References

Bowen, F., Newenham-Kahindi, A., & Herremans, I. (2010). When suits meet roots: The antecedents and conse-


**Endnotes**

1 Throughout this article the term ‘black’ is used to refer to all those classified as other-than-white according to apartheid terminology.

2 The idea of moments was inspired by a reading of Ally and Ally (2008) and McDonald (2009).

3 The slogan reflects the gendered nature of language in Black Consciousness. See Mangena (2008) for further readings on Black Consciousness and gender.

4 The Health Psychology Unit incorporated the Institute for Behavioural Sciences in 1996 and was renamed the Institute for Social and Health Sciences (ISHS).

5 The use of racialised terminology does not constitute acceptance of the racist assumptions underlying such labels. These racial categories are social constructions and remain contested.

6 Martin Terre Blanche was a conscientious objector who resisted conscription into the apartheid military.

7 I thank all my colleagues for their engaging, profound and incisive comments on and assistance with earlier versions of this article.