

Hope-fully Present:
Knowing My Story so that I May Understand Yours
Querying the Concept of Hope in Applied Theatre in a Postcolonial Context

Varshini d/o Pichemuthu
MA Applied Theatre
The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
October 2017

Abstract

From May until the end of June 2017, I embarked on an applied theatre project together with another student, in Greater Noida, India. As part of the project, we were required to live in a care home for abandoned and orphaned young girls and conduct drama workshops for two hours each day, during the weekdays. While the project was not intended for research, the experiences from it have given rise to this enquiry.

Two questions that the girls from the care home asked subsequently sparked my interest in investigating the concept of hope in applied theatre in a postcolonial context (India). The questions raised concerns over the danger of false hopes that may be unintentionally dispensed. I became interested and curious as to how the concept of hope can be imbued into an applied theatre praxis and what that meant for the practitioner.

The autoethnographic approach serves as a framework for the analysis of my research centred on the concept of hope and hope management in the postcolonial context. By considering my unique position of being both an 'insider', connected by ethnicity, and simultaneously an 'outsider', by definition of being a non-resident and non-national at the care home, I am able to illuminate on and evaluate issues surrounding the concept of hope. I hope that my reflections will help readers explore and develop their own practice.

Plagiarism

I understand the School definition of plagiarism and declare that all sources drawn on have been formally acknowledged.



Signed: Varshini Pichemuthu
Date: 3 October 2017

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Udayan Care and everyone at Jagshanti Udayan Ghar, especially the girls, for allowing me into your home and treating me with such kindness. I will never forget the wonderful moments we shared.

To my tutor Catherine Sloan, for never giving up hope on me. No more panic stricken midnight emails from me over the weekend. Thank you for your patience, incredible insights and unwavering support.

To my course leader Selina Busby, for sharing the same lift with me before my interview in Singapore and not speaking to me because you knew I was nervous. Thank you for your relentless support all throughout the course and in India. I wonder where in the world we might meet again.

To my mentor David Glass, for sharing with me, the importance of observation and being authentic. Thank you for believing in me and inspiring me.

To my teacher and friend Kamil Haque, for always cheering me on. Thank you for your words that got me here and for opening doors for me.

To my friend, Susie Penrice Tyrie, for staying in with me touch across the seas and being thrilled with the power of theatre. Thank you for your emotional support, pictures of Alice the Cat and your hopeful outlook of the world.

To my friend, Rebecca Shaw, for regularly checking in on me and inspiring me with your super-human powers gained from juggling a PhD, two kids, work and still finding the time to proofread my paper. Thank you for your wisdom, friendship and kindness.

To my sister and brother, who put up with my rebellious nature but secretly appreciated me paving the way for you (I know you did). Thank you for allowing me to learn how to be a big sister to you through your love and kindness. You should have gotten more piercings and tattoos though. Never too late. I always hope the best for you both.

To my parents, who never stopped me from asking the question 'Why?' Well, you did try and soon realised I was a relentless child. Thank you for always believing in me and supporting me as I adventured to find my own way of being in this world and continue to do so. Thank you for teaching me about love, and more importantly about hope.

Last but not least, this dissertation is dedicated to the street children of India, the ones still lost. I wish that you can carry hope in your hearts and that you will find your way home, somewhere safe and comforting, soon.

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Introduction

I was raised on stories of hope. My grandparents narrated stories of the search for a better future for themselves and their future generations, when they left South India for Singapore. My parents speak of the time when I was an only child and our extended family of nine people moved into a flat together. It was not easy but they managed. My parents' hope was to get their own place, however that changed when my grandfather passed and my father decided to stay in that same flat to look after my grandmother. This flat still exists in Singapore with my family living there. It is a space that holds abundant memories and most importantly, hopes for the future. I include this because it is where my fascination with stories of hope stems from and has undoubtedly affected the decisions I have made in life, creative practice and this dissertation.

The flat is where my parents placed great importance on education and mastering the English language (see Chapter Two), where I rebelled as a teenager and was constantly running off to rehearsals for a drama or dance performance. When I started to love the arts more than I did science, it probably came as no surprise to my mother who knew she had planted the seed when she encouraged me to be part of a school show at the age of five. Growing up in a culture and family that loved narrating stories, I became interested in the stories people had to tell. With my experiences of studying Sociology, investigating employment related cases to help foreign domestic workers, telling stories to children as a librarian and being a freelance actor, it is easy to understand my choice to situate my creative practice in the field of applied theatre. My siblings and I were raised on the ethos that hard work pays off, that we should dream big and work towards achieving them. We were also taught never to forget where we came from and to give back to our community at large.

While we were exposed and encouraged to follow Indian culture and traditions, we were very much influenced by Western culture as well. I grew up on the sounds of Motown and the likes of the Carpenters and the Beatles; I dressed like the kids on Sweet Valley High and experimented with speaking like people on TV did (usually emulating the American accent). We also

consumed Indian culture by the way of observing the festivals, rituals, and the numerous Tamil and Hindi language movies shown on television. Still, my parents never spoke about relatives in India and I suppose I was too young to be concerned about my roots to ask them anyway. As far as I knew, I was born in Singapore and that was all that mattered. In retrospect, it seems as if when my grandparents left, they had cut all ties with India, a classic case of out of sight, out of mind. I grew up identifying first as being Singaporean and then as being ethnically Indian.

In term three of the course, we were presented with the opportunity to engage in international projects. My course leader informed me about the project she led in India where a co facilitator and I would deliver drama workshops for orphaned and abandoned girls in a care home. While I knew I was interested in working with female related issues, I felt somewhat of a resistance to do that work in India (see Chapter Three). Although it is vulnerable to admit, I realise now that the resistance was due to a slight cultural bias I had developed over the years as a result of my ignorance. As complex as it sounds, I embraced my ethnicity and my culture but I had shunned the geographical location of where it came from. It feels uncomfortable to admit now that I had not wanted to be associated with a country where countless stories of abused women and children sprung from, especially since my forefathers were from there. This rhetoric of distancing is reflected in John Solomon's explanation of how the Tamil ethnic identity in Singapore was a means for 'transcending caste' as seen in *The Subaltern History in the Indian diaspora of Singapore* (2016). It seemed there existed a desire to be seen differently when you are an Indian in Singapore, actualised through rejecting backward practices such as the caste system, now that you are part of a cosmopolitan society. I suppose in a similar way, I subconsciously distanced myself from India.

Yet at the same time, I developed a curiosity to experience India for myself, to see where my roots came from. Although the project would be situated in Northern India where the predominant language is Hindi and not Tamil the language found in the Southern region where my family originates from, there was a strong pull to be there. With this dichotomy of feelings, I came to the conclusion that my ignorance and cultural bias was potentially

harmful. If I felt a discomfort about the treatment of women and children in India, I needed to be there to understand the situation better; I needed to understand their stories. I had to step out of my 'received frame' in order to deepen my understanding as Sally Denshire (2014) posited when writing about autoethnography. I expand on Denshire's idea in Chapter Three.

I will briefly introduce the driving force behind my desire to query the concept of hope. While I was in India, the girls in the care home asked two questions. The first, directed to me, was, 'Are you always this happy?' and the second, directed to myself and my co-facilitator was, 'Is it hard to get into a London university?' Both questions caused me unease. Underneath those seemingly straightforward questions, were others, which I saw as questions embedded within the concept of hope. How did you get to be so happy? How did you get to England from Singapore? How did you get to do these things? How did you get out? I understood that I was both an insider and outsider in this context and this meant that I represented more than just being the 'other' as Edward Said terms it (1978). I expand more on my complex position within the context in Chapter Two. I was the product of certain privileges to which the girls had no access. That made me slightly uncomfortable.

It tugged at my heartstrings. I wanted to tell them stories of hope; that they should dream big and they could achieve anything but that would be naïve of me. Ethical considerations urged me to be mindful. Simply saying 'have faith' or 'have hope' felt empty. It was from this place that the desire to understand hope and where the discourse of hope sits within the field of applied theatre, arose. This very idea of questioning hope feels contradictory in my mind. I believe in hope being a positive emotional force that helps direct our actions. Yet, I am questioning its very use in my practice. I am aware of the risk of problematising a concept that many hold dear, wondering if this could just all be in my head. This questioning is borne out of my observations and awareness of my role as a practitioner and being critical can only mean that I am committed to cultivating an ethical, respectful, meaningful and hopefully, beneficial practice for my participants. In doing so, I aim to develop a personal way of being as an applied theatre practitioner.

As the enquiry arose from the conversations I had had and based on my personal connection to stories, it seemed natural to approach this enquiry

through an autoethnographic methodology. Since I did not go to India specifically to embark on a research about the discourse of hope, my data sources are my personal experiences supplemented by the journals that I had kept while I was there.

In Chapter One, I look at some theoretical underpinnings of hope by way of key theorists such as Ernst Bloch (1986), Ghassan Hage (2003) and Oliver Bennett (2015). While the discourse of hope is not as prevalent in applied theatre, Baz Kershaw expands on it in his article, 'Pathologies of Hope' (1998) and defines it as a form of 'transcendent radicalism' (1998: 69) where an individual is able to formulate a vision of hope for herself through the collective. Bloch adds that 'genuine hope' is what we should aim for (1986: 5). Hope to me represents a means to staying grounded and focused especially when circumstances seem dire, such that dreams can be achieved. When I refer to hope in this paper, I attach this positive quality together with the idea that hope requires action to be actualised.

In Chapter Two, I explore the chosen autoethnographic methodology and its relevance to my enquiry. I share other discomforts and a crucial heartbreaking moment I experienced while I was in India influenced this enquiry. I also posit why my position of being a Singaporean Indian woman studying in a British institution and working in a context located in North India, provides a bedrock for unique personal observations and how that might add to my field. I explore the sense of displacement I felt growing up and what my diasporic Indian position meant for the enquiry through the works of theorists such as Gayatri Spivak (2006), Edward Said (1978) and Priya Srinivasan (2012).

In Chapter Three, I analyse the concept of hope through the two questions raised earlier and explore how ritual featured as a way of negotiating the concept of appropriate hope. I focus on the discovery of a personal process that could be used to affect a liminal space, as presented by Victor Turner (1982) for the imagining of realistic hope.

Finally, I conclude with what this process has helped me to learn, how my biases have shifted and what that means for my practice moving forward.

Chapter One: Theoretical Analysis

In reality, hope is the worst of all evils, because it prolongs man's torments.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human* (1878)

Hope is a subject that can either be met with great fascination for scientific research or with ambiguous emotion. Most people see hope as a positive emotional force that drives people to fulfill their dreams or hold on when everything else seems bleak. However, as Nietzsche put it, hope can also be evil if it does not bring about a desired outcome.

Querying both hope and my intentions as a practitioner is important if I want my practice to be ethical and hold integrity. Working with the girls in India showed me that careful considerations needed to be made when referring to hopes for the future. To understand the concept of hope in applied theatre better, I reviewed the discourse of hope as it stands today in the field and some theories of hope. It is impossible in this essay to consider all of the works written on the subject of hope. For the purposes of this essay, I will focus on the works of a select few such as Ernst Bloch, Lauren Berlant and Ghassan Hage.

Applied theatre work usually refers to work that is geared towards 'aspects of social change' as Helen Nicholson describes (2006: 90). In the same article, *Applied Theatre/Drama: an e-debate in 2004*, Franc Chamberlain agrees that such work has the intention of bringing about social change, usually with one that 'we' agree with but he questions the inconsistency in language when we speak of work that utilises theatre to bring out changes that 'we disagree with' (2006: 90).

I would suggest that there is a hopeful nature about the way practitioners create their intentions for applied theatre projects – they hope that it may bring about some form of 'transformation', a contentious word in itself if we think about whose values upon which these intended changes are based upon and how relevant and ethical they might be for the group. However, at the same time, much like Chamberlain points out, what happens when intentions do not pan the way we had hoped for? What then is this hope

that we are offering to the communities that we work with? Similarly, Judith Ackroyd in her article, *Applied Theatre: Problems and Possibilities* (2000) plays devil's advocate and questions the assumptions that we sometimes make when constructing the ideologies of applied theatre. She raises awareness towards the possibility that theatre can be used to advocate causes that practitioners may not agree with such as working with corporate companies selling tobacco. Similarly, when we think of the hope that we wish to bring about through applied theatre projects, we must be willing to ask ourselves if there can be such as thing as – false hope. I expand on this idea of false hope later.

In Greek mythology, Pandora goes against Zeus's instructions and out of curiosity opens a box that Zeus had entrusted with her. In doing so, she unleashes all manner of evils and diseases upon the world. She quickly closes the box managing to trap hope, just as Zeus had intended. There are many versions of this story but essentially it was to depict that mankind still had hope to overcome the evils with. My thoughts are inclined with psychology professor, Christopher Peterson (2010) who questions why hope would exist in the same box as all the other evils that Zeus intended for mankind, if it did not inherently have a dark side as well.

In *The Principle of Hope* (POH), Marxist philosopher, Ernst Bloch reveals to us the complex theory of utopia and how it can be achieved through the POH. Bloch references Pandora's box in his first volume of POH and states that the first version of Pandora's box, as presented above, posits hope as having a 'deceptive aspect' when it is seen as 'unfounded hope' that has links with that which is possible and attainable in reality (1986: 333).

A central concept for Bloch was the idea of the 'not-yet consciousness' which he explains as the 'preconscious' of what is yet to happen, where the 'New' will come into being (1986: 116). According to Peter Thompson, in *The Privatization of Hope: Ernst Bloch and the Future of Utopia*, Bloch's idea of hope was about the way in which our wish to close the gaps and discover what is missing crystallizes (2013: 3). The 'not-yet' would then take us from the 'static concept of being' to one where our desires, hopes and dreams will help us reach a state of 'becoming' (2013: 4). Bloch's offering was that hope needed to be grounded in the material world. This idea forms the basis of how

I view hope; that it is not one of daydream, but one that requires action together with the visions of the future.

Bloch's vision of hope is useful when considering my practice because it helps me to ground an esoteric concept in the material world. It shows me that while I can enter the field as a practitioner and intend to provide the 'good products' of applied theatre such as confidence and self-esteem as well as boost their hopes for the future, I have to be aware that these hopes need to be firmly established in the current political, social, historical context of the lives of the girls in the care home.

This is important for me as a practitioner because the last thing I want to do is add to the 'cruel optimism' that exists in modern day society, as articulated by Lauren Berlant (2011). Berlant argues that people tend to project their fantasies of a good life to an attachment of the concept of 'cruel optimism' for the purposes of 'safe-keeping' and still believe in 'compromised' conditions of possibility such that no matter how cruel these attachments are, it helps people get through their day-to-day lives (2011: 23). When this occurs daily activity is then 'revealed as a vehicle for attaining a kind of passivity' which helps people to 'sustain a coasting sentience', or in other words, inaction, in an attempt to avoid acknowledging the depth of their own power (2011: 43). Berlant's position is not dissimilar to that of Bloch's idea of 'fraudulent hope' and Ghassan Hage's concern with the inaction that follows hope, which will not actualise peoples' dreams. In his book *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, Hage adds that hope can be evil because hoping in a life that is dealing with all the ills is a 'depressed version' thus creating anguish (2003: 7). I consider the idea of cruel optimism as central to my querying hope in this dissertation as I want to raise awareness against presenting false hope to the participants I work with.

Just as Bloch makes a distinction between 'fraudulent hope' and 'genuine hope', Oliver Bennett in his book *Cultures of Optimism*, makes a case for 'realistic hope' through the analysis of psychotherapy models. For Bennett, 'false hope' can lead to temporary defense mechanisms but are ultimately detrimental (2015: 151). He sees optimism as being tied to concrete circumstances as opposed to hope as arising from personal experiences. This idea is central to my enquiry where I attempt to posit

appropriate hope, as opposed to false hope, as a way of being in the world both for practitioner and participant, influencing how they each negotiate their experiences in the world.

My thoughts about a way of being have evolved by considering Jill Dolan's idea of utopia in that it is borne out of the delineations of 'what if' instead of 'what should be' (Dolan, 2005: 13). Dolan speaks of performances becoming a 'doing', which I suggest is not dissimilar to Bloch's idea of learning hope, and based on these concepts, lead me to see it as a way of *being* in hope. Dolan quotes Joseph Chaikin, founder of Open Theatre as saying that offering such concentrated interpersonal, and 'wish'-oriented moments, theater, '[b]ecomes a privileged, intimate area of human experience' and in this area one can expect the 'promise' of a different version of living to be created (2005: 6). The word we need to pay attention to here is privilege. Is hope more easily available depending on privileges one has access to? Selina Busby, in her article *Finding a Concrete Utopia in the Dystopia of a 'sub-city'* (2017) sheds light on the Dharavi project and questions the ethics of offering hope within the context. She comments, as she speaks of the objective that participants learn English, hope 'both confirms and contests colonial attitudes' and this 'paradox' posits that change could be possible (2017: 97). While it may seem slightly cruel to impose a fleeting version of hope upon those whose circumstances are lacking privileges to begin with, the way in which we imagine these hopes together with them could offer an alternative. I expand on this in Chapter Three.

To understand some of these ethical concerns mentioned above, I look at Henry Giroux's idea of 'educated hope' in his article *When Hope is Subversive* (2004). Giroux makes a case for 'educated hope' where he sees hope as the pre-requisite for 'individual and social struggle' (2004: 62). He stresses the importance of locating hope in the larger politics that addresses the socio-economic and cultural conditions existing in the 'present' that makes the idea of 'agency' possible (2004: 62). This line of thought helps me to locate my practice in India with more groundedness as it does not assume that hope will exist or that it can exist for the girls. Rather, it urges me to understand the larger political discourse within which the girls are situated and

then aiding them to create their own discourses about their hopes for the future and thereby activating their agency.

Giroux also references Bloch's idea of hope as a 'spark', which suggests that hope is a catalyst of sorts that will activate action. However, it is hard to provide hope to a group of vulnerable participants when we are dealing with esoteric concepts of 'could', 'should' and 'maybe'. Likewise, theorists such as Bloch and Giroux seem to suggest that the very existence of the concept of hope in its esoteric forms, give rise to possibilities, to the 'not-yet' which, given the right circumstances, can come to life and give life. This leads me to my belief that hope needs to be negotiated appropriately within a context for it to be part of an ethical practice.

While I am not against the idea of giving hope, I am wary about false hope. We should not be the ones deciding what hope is for a group of people. However, what an applied theatre practice might offer has a 'ripple effect' (Busby, 2017: 101) and by bearing in mind an Giroux's 'educated hope' we can hope to disrupt the normative and create spaces for our participants to question their present situation and visualise an alternative.

Busby, in her article *A Pedagogy of Utopia* puts it succinctly when she summarises that

'[T]he thrust of the theatre is also to change reality, or at least to create an environment that invites the kind of reflection in which change is both desirable and conceivable' (2015: 415).

The word 'conceivable' directs our attention again to earlier discussed notions of agency and educated hope whereby the change that participants might seek, should then be a concrete and achievable idea such that having hope for that desired change does not sit in the realm of falseness.

Working with the girls in the care home in India not only led me to question my role as a practitioner but also of what my very presence, my very nature of existence could mean. I am referring to the fact that I am an ethnically Indian woman, born in Singapore, a place vastly dissimilar to India, being educated in a British institution and entering an Indian context, bringing with me values of the applied theatre world.

In Chapter One I have presented some of the theoretical underpinnings of hope, made the distinction between realistic and unrealistic or false hope and explained why these are useful considerations for this enquiry. In Chapter Two, I analyse the autoethnographic method and posit why my identity location is important for the analysis of this enquiry.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The Method to the 'Madness'

“In order to write autoethnography you can't feel completely at home in your discipline (Burnier, 2006) and the discomfort experienced at stepping outside your own received frame is part of the autoethnographic task” (Denshire, 2014: 833)

Apart from the discomforts I mentioned earlier in the introduction, there were others worth mentioning. Reflecting on my assignments throughout my year at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (Central), I see a clear through thread. The central tenet being the issue of sustainability within which I examine different facets of it such as ethics, negotiating goodbyes, dependancy and the emotional labour of a facilitator. In my first paper, I considered the work of Clean Break and the effects of dependency in applied theatre projects where most have a set and clear deadline (Pichemuthu, 2017a). I queried sustainability by looking at how Kazuum theatre company negotiating goodbyes (Pichemuthu, 2017b). In my next assignment of which half was written while I was in India, I turned the focus inwards more where the focus shifted from the 'self within the other' to the 'self' giving weight to my own subjectivity (Srinivas, 1996: 656). By considering emotional labour in practice, I questioned how a practitioner might negotiate her ways of being while working and living with a group of people, in a different culture and society. It is not surprising that I have now turned that gaze further inwards and have chosen to examine the role of the practitioner again, this time querying the concept of hope in a postcolonial context. Srinivas's call to turn the gaze from the 'self within the other' to the 'self' becomes more pronounced in this enquiry. During a casual conversation with our course leader, she mentioned that there would most likely be one line of enquiry that will be your bugbear throughout the year at Central and quite possibly, the rest of your applied theatre career. Perhaps I am onto my applied theatre bugbear, concerned with sustainability of projects and the role of the practitioner.

There seems to be a lack of Asian voices, particularly South Asian or Southeast Asian voices in the applied theatre field. I felt it was important to have my voice, that stems from a body with a complex identity, heard. I have come to understand that my personal experiences, presented from a heightened self-reflexive position, can and do count as part of a valid academic enquiry. As Ellingson and Ellis (2008) contend, the autoethnographic method allows for the critical engagement with regularly unchallenged binary notions of 'the researcher and the researched', the 'self and the other', the 'personal and the political' and 'objectivity and subjectivity'. In this way, the method allows for my subjective experiences to have a voice because no one else would have had the same experience as me in that context due to my own socio-political, historical and cultural backgrounds. As bell hooks states in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, there is a need to 'disrupt and challenge the simple acts of privilege' and one of the ways to do this is by 'listening to and acknowledging those for whom such acts are not so simple' such as a coloured person compared to a white, heterosexual male (2003: 105). My voice becomes a means to disrupt and challenge privilege so that I might understand concepts of hope in applied theatre for those who have lesser privileges than me; to show that through compassion, empathy and deep consideration for the lives of those we work with, a deep sense of community is possible (hooks, 2003).

According to Ellis and Bochner,

'[a]utoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural.' (2000: 739)

Sally Denshire proposes that in autoethnographic writing, the autobiography 'goes beyond the writing of the selves' (Denshire, 2014: 2). Linda Brodkey builds on this idea and offers that the autobiographical writing goes beyond when the 'depersonalizing tendencies' that researchers have interacts with the 'social and cultural spaces that have asymmetrical relations of power' in 'contact zones' (1996: 27). When the fieldsite contains 'asymmetrical relations of power' and when the work is being done with a group of people suffering the brunt of that relation, I suggest that the 'deliberate' self-reflexive and introspective tool in the autoethnographic

method allows for 'a way of opening into what is still unknown and mysterious' (Neumark in Koppers & Robertson, 2007: 143). In this sense, the autoethnographic method allows me to explore in a deeper and nuanced way, an understanding of the myriad challenges during social encounters in contact zones.

Indeed some critics of autoethnography have questioned its validity and credibility as a research methodology citing researcher bias, fictionalising of stories and 'incomplete' stories (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 745). However, Bochner argues against this by asking 'why should caring and empathy be secondary to controlling and knowing?' (Bochner in Denzin, 2000: 746).

In a similar vein I would add that my unique voice, constituting of my embodied experiences adds to my social inquiry, which is concerned with caring about and having empathy for the people I work with, rather than diminish its quality. Ellis adds that the goals of the autoethnographic work then is to inspire compassion and encourage dialogue (Ellis and Bochner in Denzin, 2000) and that 'validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude' in that it creates 'in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible' (Ellis, 2004: 124). Thus, the autoethnographic method enables me to make academic social inquiry a little less intimidating and more accessible to readers, evoking emotions and connection, developing a humanness about a discipline that centres around working with human beings. In telling this story through my chosen method, I am able to situate myself within the context of my enquiry so that I may understand others through a different way of knowing, as opposed to traditional, canonical ways of researching which tend to be a white, male, middle-classed perspective (Ellis et al, 2011).

I employ the use of reflexive analysis of my time spent in the care home as a participant-observer together with journals embedded within my 'messy texts' as Caroline Fusco who borrows from Denzin (1997) has posited (Fusco in Gallagher, 2008: 175). Fusco explains that 'messy texts' mean that the researcher is aware of the narrative voice and how any writing will 'frame reality (ibid). Similarly, my narrative voice ebbs and flows with the academic voice in a rhizomatic fashion, where a 'polyvocality' (Dinesh, 2016) is invoked through open ended texts without a necessary theoretical closure, in an effort

to analyse the enquiry and make sense of human lives which are inherently messy. Denshire quotes Tai Peseta from her PhD thesis *Learning and becoming in academic development*, University of Sydney (2005), who suggests that autoethnography is a useful tool for those 'interested in offering accounts of professional practice that are committed to acknowledging a humanness to the work' (2014: 837). 'Humanness' is more often than not messy and might seem like madness but there can be perhaps, I would suggest, a method to that madness.

As mentioned before, I am coming from a place of 'discomfort' (Burnier, 2006) to address the sense of displacement I feel within my discipline such that the 'voices of the researcher and the researched' can be heard (Ibid). My enquiry here is a journey, one that moves from 'roots to routes' as Stuart Hall (2005) suggests, that helps me locate the project in focus and my praxis through decolonising my lived experiences of being in between cultures and locations.

The Postcolonial Lens

Another nagging unease I feel is that of displacement. Growing up in multicultural, multhiethnic Singapore, though undoubtedly brilliant and fascinating, has always had me wondering what my true identity as a Singaporean with Indian roots is. In London, I get queried as to how my English is 'so good' by unsuspecting individuals who do not realise that Singapore is an English speaking country with many of her people having English as their first language. We studied our Mother Tongue, in my case, Tamil, as a second language. In fact, my mother focused all her efforts in ensuring that her children spoke 'good' English so much so that my first day of Tamil class went something like this:

Teacher (in Tamil): Each of you stand up, introduce yourselves by saying your name and your age.

Six year old me (in English): Sorry, I am not Tamil, I don't know Tamil, please don't ask me to speak Tamil.

Of course, my mother received a call from the Tamil teacher, who encouraged her to speak to her daughter in Tamil. My mother's obsession for her children to speak well in English aided us tremendously in school especially when I aced English aural and written tests. It also opened more doors for me. The idea of someone in a postcolonial location using the language of the colonial started to become more apparent to me since embarking on this Masters. As Gayatri Spivak (2006) contends, perhaps the only way the subaltern can speak out is through the use of the colonial language. However, can that still be considered as empowering? Hari Stephen Kumar in his Masters thesis, *Decolonizing Texts: A Performance Autoethnography* shares my sentiments when he questions why his 'body insis[ted] on colonizing itself with American English and thereby betraying its ethnic mother tongue?' which he terms the 'third rail of multiculturalism' (2011: 114). I too identify with this charged and contentious 'third rail' by focusing more on speaking a colonial language and failing, until now, to be conscious of and challenge the dominant culture. Srinivas comments on how the concept of the 'other' was always a Western one (1996: 656). When Western anthropologists or social scientists speak of 'the Other', it usually refers to 'a non-white population' and commonly regarded by westerners, 'as inferior, ignorant and needing their protection and guidance' (ibid).

However, in the context of the care home, this 'self-other' dichotomy is disrupted as while I am of the 'Other', the opposite is also true as I am also ethnically Indian and by virtue of that, not 'Other'. In speaking of the 'Other', Edward Said (1978) has argued against the myth of the 'Oriental' that promoted a distinction rooted in political power between the East and the West. He also argues that there is no simplistic way to disentangle oneself from the effects of colonisation and that neither is decolonisation a simple task. In a similar vein, I am aware of the rather contentious nature of locating my enquiry through a postcolonial lens which contains the danger of a 'complicit postcolonialism' (Mishra and Hodge in Williams & Chrisman, 2015: 276-290). As Nicholson suggests, there is a danger of 'exporting' our own values and assumptions when we work with a group that is culturally distinct from us (2005: 69). In a related and yet more complex way, it is worth checking if I am 'recolonising' the group of girls I worked with by bringing with

me my mash up of Eastern and Western upbringing and cultural values, using applied theatre methods to engage them in theatre and teaching them English. The postcolonial lens aids me in confronting and making sense of this complexity.

Postcolonial theory has a weighted presence in my enquiry as a result of the desire to explore the 'subaltern' as having authority and a 'primary role in colonial discourses' and 'in the attendant domestic versions of these discourses' (William & Chrisman, 1994: 16). Therefore, it is important to me in my attempt to understand the concept of hope in applied theatre, that I do not overlook the role that the participants I am working with play, especially if they might be referred to as 'subaltern' because of their colonial past and current circumstances. Furthermore, having come from a colonised location and being an ethnic minority myself, the term subaltern might also be applicable to me. It is important for me to consider how my experiences – to be in London studying, to travel to India to create theatre – are instances of my particular privilege and how that might affect the idea of hope in my praxis. A discourse on the complex theories of the postcolonial will require more pages. I will for now simply bring awareness to the need for considering the enquiry through a postcolonial lens.

Postcolonial theory is about finding ways to speak about how the non-western world exists independently from the western world. Established in the early 1980s, postcolonial theory has been concerned with demystifying and regaining an image of the people from the non-western world as one that is not coloured by theorists from the western world (Young, 2003: 2). This lens is a necessary one for when looking at the examples I wish to present because of India and Singapore's colonial history. Though I did not live through it, my experiences have been shadowed by the remnants of a colonial past, intertwined with the underlying desire of differentiating ourselves as Indians different from those in India.

Spivak (1988) used the term 'subaltern' to refer to communities that are 'socially, politically and geographically' outside of the hegemonic power structure. The girls in the care home were very much outside of the entire power structure. They were socially disadvantaged by virtue of their histories, politically excluded by virtue of age and lack of access to participate in a

political process that could benefit them and as a result of their gender, excluded as a result of 'son preference'.

The dual use of the autoethnographic methodology and the postcolonial lens, allows me to approach this enquiry from my multilayered background, by way of being a Singaporean Indian woman studying in London and having embarked on a project in India. Again, I am positing that my lived experiences, history, memories and current positions have an authoritative voice in helping me understand and develop my praxis. Postcolonial theory, together with theories about hope, will feature in my autoethnographic research and help me engage with matters of class, ethnicity and privilege to help me navigate my experience. I acknowledge that gender has a huge impact on understanding the concepts of the subaltern and the 'Other'. However, for this research, I will focus on class and privilege and my lived experiences. I further add, that by acknowledging my own position as a brown woman with multiple layers of identities, my research and interactions have an intersectional feminist¹ stance embedded within.

I acknowledge that my experiences are 'not impartial' in a similar vein that Priya Srinivasan argues for her performance ethnographic research in *Sweating Saris* (2012) where she references Kedhar (2011) to reflect upon the 'intimate relationships between women' (2012: 26). In my case, my enquiry stems from the close relationships I had developed with the girls by virtue of living in their space for seven weeks. Like Srinivasan, my project is also 'embedded' in the social relationships I have cultivated and is 'affected' by my 'emotions, desires and choices' therefore rendering my enquiry less than impartial (ibid.). However, I have to acknowledge that it is through these close relationships that this enquiry was borne (Chapter Three).

I also rely on Srinivasan's experiences of straddling the dichotomy of 'insider' and 'outsider' - a concept Nicholson discusses (2005) as well as Victor Turner who terms it as being 'betwixt and between' (1964) - which help inform my experience of negotiating my position contextually in India. Srinivasan, of South Indian origin, who speaks fluent Tamil and English and is

¹ I understand Intersectional feminism as an understanding that inequities are the 'outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences' (Hankivski, 2014:2)

also an Indian –Australian and later a U.S. citizen says that she has ‘many selves’, a concept that is very familiar to me (2012: 19). I have explained my ‘many selves’ in the preceding paragraphs and it is from these locations that I attempt to understand the concept of hope within a specific context. While Srinivasan negotiates the tricky terrain of ‘authenticity’ as a subject that ‘plague[s] diaspora and diasporic subjects’, I translate those considerations, from my diasporic position onto the concept of negotiating appropriate hope, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

Difficulties, Vulnerabilities, Rewards

Though I had a sense of the personal exploration autoethnography would entail, I did not expect the level of vulnerability it would require. As Ellis recounts, the exploration ‘generates a lot of fears and doubts’ and sometimes even ‘emotional pain’ (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 738). I experienced these ‘doubts’ and ‘emotional’ journeys when I uncovered certain biases I had strangely misplaced within myself. Uncovering this led to a deep desire to understand the situation within myself better because the desire to work with the girls in the care home was greater. Reliving ‘emotional pain’ was probably the greatest when I recalled a night in my room at the care home, where I sat on my bed full of tears. This was the result of having imagined my life as a child on the streets if my grandparents had not left India for Singapore. That pain pushed me to want to do right by the girls I was working with and to ensure an ethical and meaningful exchange was achieved between us. Above all, writing all of this, – where once written, these words will live on – ‘revealing myself’ and not ‘having any control’ over how my readers would interpret the work, have made the experience much more vulnerable (ibid).

Nonetheless, there are rewards to this type of research methodology. Ellis and Bochner sum it quite beautifully when they say,

“... you come to understand yourself in deeper ways. And with understanding yourself comes understanding others. Autoethnography provides an avenue for doing something meaningful for yourself and the world...” (2000: 739)

Though the process itself was vulnerable and exposing, it created a space for self-exploration into my assumptions and values and in doing so, empowered me to engage in and develop a deeper critically reflexive praxis for myself. Having this self-awareness is useful because I can now negotiate it purposefully rather than mask it, where it could be a barrier to developing my practice.

I borrow Srinivasan's term 'murky' to describe my role of being 'between and betwixt', an 'insider and outsider', which disrupted traditional notions of primarily white and Western applied theatre practitioners conducting work with marginalised groups of people. I hope that my 'murky' and messy body as a site that contains all of my cultural, socio-political, racial and class position will bring a different perspective and voice to the field and that those who can relate to my experiences might find inspiration to engage with their practice in similar ways.

'The truth is that we can never capture experience.'
(Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 750)

Experience is the essence of human existence and yet writing about it is only ever lacklustre performance. Nonetheless, capturing as much detail as we can about an experience makes it possible to share those stories with others and in doing so, build community and the space for inspiration, desires, and perhaps even hope. As we move on to Chapter Three where I attempt to 'capture' my experiences as effectively as possible, I end Chapter Two with Tzvetan Todorov's contentions about cultural confrontations that Dwight Conquergood engages with,

"Can we really love someone if we know little or nothing of his identity, if we see, in place of that identity, a projection of ourselves or ideals? We know that such a thing is quite possible, even frequent, in personal relations; but what happens in cultural confrontations? Doesn't one culture risk trying to transform the other in its own name, and therefore risk subjugating it as well? How much is such love worth?" (2007: 62)

By way of querying hope, I wish to confront these risks that Todorov mentions which are dangerously present when working with another culture.

Hope, like love, is easy to give and share but in 'cultural confrontations' especially in a postcolonial context, a practitioner must be aware of her positions and constantly be reflective of her methods. In Chapter Three, I analyse these methods and the concept of hope further by focusing on specific experiences in the care home.

Chapter Three: Understanding Hope

Jagshanti Udayan Ghar

“Practitioners have to ask, what do you think you are doing? In whose interests are you acting? And keep on asking those questions.” (Seymour, 2009: 29)

Though writing from a drama therapy perspective, Anna Seymour succinctly sums up the imperative questions that theatre practitioners need to be asking. It is from this space of questioning my motives and consequentially, my way of being in the care home that led me to this enquiry.

In Chapter Two, I framed the autoethnographic methodology through the postcolonial lens and its relevance for this essay. In this chapter, I will attempt to understand the concept of hope in applied theatre further by focusing on two key moments of the project in the care home. I will also look at a ritual that was created for the workshops and how that can be translated as a way of creating the space for appropriate hope to be imagined and experienced.

The project, which was part of our Masters programme at Central, took place in Greater Noida, India where my colleague and I spent seven weeks living in the Jagshanti Udayan² Ghar,³ (care home) delivering drama workshops for two hours each weekday. Living at the care home meant that we were subject to the structure of the home such as mealtimes and being back at the home by 7pm. This meant that we had access to the girls most of the time and could retire to our individual rooms when we wanted. We chose to use the weekends to venture out to other parts of Delhi partly because we did not want the girls to become dependent on our presence at the home. This concern was slightly alleviated by the knowledge that the girls had experienced similar workshops with other Central students and knew the drill. However, we were still mindful of certain privileges that we possessed and

² Udayan is a Sanskrit word meaning 'Eternal Sunshine'.

³ 'Ghar' means home in Hindi.

tried our best to be considerate. I will comment on privileges later in this chapter.

The care home is run by Udayan Care, which is a public charitable trust set up in 1994. Its aims include empowering vulnerable children, women and youth. The first Ghar was set up in Delhi about 18 years ago and there are now 13 Ghars in Delhi, Jaipur and Kurukshetra where 352 children - boys and girls - have been cared for (Udayan Care: 2015). To contextualise this in the larger social setting of India, I turn to Udayan Care's 2015/16 Annual Report that stated that India has the largest child population of 430million in the world and in 2011, there were 20 million orphans and that number is projected to rise to 24 million by 2021 (2016: 6). There are also over 18 million street children in India and that over 50% of the children have suffered verbal, physical and sexual abuse (ibid). These alarming statistics give us but a snapshot of the importance and value of organisations like Udayan Care whose primary aim is to recover, rehabilitate and reenergise these children through its programmes.

We worked in a care home that was specifically for girls who had been orphaned or abandoned by their families and ranged in age from six to eighteen. The care home also arranges for those above eighteen years of age to remain should they face difficulties in living an independent life. An exploration into the background of the girls exposed histories of neglect, child labour, escaping potential sexual and physical abuses and abandonment. The abandonment of predominantly female children - nine girls homes compared to four boys home in Udayan Care (Udayan Care, 2016: 2) - arises from the gender bias in the culture that prefers boys to girls, although there seems to be some improvement. In *Son Preference and Daughter Neglect in India – What Happens to Living Girls* (2006), a report conducted by Rohinda Pande and Anju Malhotra, it was found that when Indian women were asked about the ideal sex composition of their families, it was clear that boys are generally preferred over girls indicating that 'son preference' was strong.

From a verbal conversation we had with the counsellor attached to the care home, we found out that all of them experienced some sort of trauma and a large number of them suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD)⁴. Our directives were to help the girls with self-confidence and self-esteem. We were also asked to tutor the younger girls in English for about two hours daily during the weekdays.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, prior to entering India and the home, I was aware of my position as a Singaporean Indian studying in a British institution. I am what Nicholson terms, a 'cultural outsider' (Nicholson, 2005: 69). She remarks that working in a context that differed from her own, in the village of Seelamunai, Sri Lanka, made her 'acutely aware' of how entrenched her 'own cultural values and experiences' informed her practice, usually on a subconscious level (2005: 67). I too started becoming keenly aware of my own cultural values and lived experiences and what that meant for myself, my work and for my participants.

Firstly, there was the obvious divide between my background and those of the participants. My parents had not abandoned me nor was I subjected to a traumatic childhood. Secondly, my understanding of Indian customs varied slightly as my roots were from the South not the North and English was my first language, not Hindi. Hence, though I looked like them, I was also a 'cultural outsider' – a pseudo insider, I am 'Indian, but not 'very' Indian'. I draw upon Srinivasan's astute description of the 'many selves' and the holding of 'insider and outsider status simultaneously' to understand my situation (2011: 19). Her 'many selves' were brought about by her being born in South India, speaking fluently the Tamil and English languages, learning Indian classical dance in Kolkata, being an Indian- Australian and later a U.S. Citizen. This is something that my own lived experiences mirrored as well (ibid).

What then does my complex, non- binary existence imply as I try to bring about positivity and hope into my praxis? Chamberlain argues against a practice that pigeon holes itself into a particular vision of 'transformation' where potential of the work is then limited and addressing the 'complexity of the world' and of the communities we work in becomes harder (e-debate, 2004: 94). He directs our focus to that of 'intention' and stresses that '[t]he

⁴ "Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder caused by very stressful, frightening or distressing events. Someone with PTSD often relives the traumatic event through nightmares and flashbacks, and may experience feelings of isolation, irritability and guilt" (NHS, 2015).

[applied theatre] practitioner must 'intend' appropriate ends' and understand that 'good intentions' do not guarantee change and that it could even result in adverse outcomes (2004: 94). It also 'masks' ethical considerations where one type of transformation might be favoured over others (ibid). I apply this concept of 'appropriate ends' when thinking about my practice. While I have hope as one of the central tenets in my practice, I wish for it to be appropriately located, an appropriate version of hope.

In finding appropriate ways to locate hope, I also explore the ways in which I tried to cultivate a way of being amidst 'normative prescriptions about the future' as posited by Lisa Duggan in conversation with José Esteban Muñoz in their article *Hope and hopelessness: A Dialogue* (2009). Duggan claims she is 'suspicious' of hope and that for her, hope stands alongside happiness and optimism, which she links to race and class privilege amongst other normative conventions (2009: 279). I bring my reader's attention back to the idea of realistic hope as suggested in Chapter One. I suggest that the girls in the care home are stuck in a situation where their social status of being abandoned or orphaned has rendered them vulnerable and marginalised. However, their hopes are not in any way less important or valid. Therefore, on the part of a practitioner, a negotiation of how realistic hope and not false hope is presented is key.

Appropriate Hope

For the purposes of this enquiry, I focus on two specific moments in the project, which are in the form of questions. The first question was posed to me directly when I had been having a friendly chat with some of the older girls in the dining room before retiring to my room. One of the girls then asked me, "Are you always this happy?" All eyes were fixed on me, waiting for an answer. I felt a certain tension creeping up in my body and gravity of the importance of what I would say next became apparent.

The second question was directed to my co-facilitator and I, again after lunch by another older girl. She had informed us sometime earlier about her desire to study fashion design during a casual conversation and had applied to two reputable universities in Mumbai. Clearly, she was excited about the

prospects of studying and the future that that could equip her with. She asked, “Is it hard to get into a London university?”

Both questions stumped me. The first was asking about my emotional state, which felt personal but I wanted to give an honest answer nonetheless. The second was searching for facts and hope; hope that they too could study in the U.K. My answer to the question seems reflective of Giroux’s ‘educated hope’ and Bloch’s idea of hope as a spark, which Giroux also references (2004: 62). I paused for a while before telling the girls that I am not always happy, bearing in mind the importance of addressing that unhappy moments occur for everyone. I added that the way I deal with it was to take the unhappy moments with the happy ones and know that I can choose to be happy, that I could make the choice. At the same time, internally, I knew this was a question of agency and I wondered if they felt this same level of agency given their circumstances. I suggest that, though not a shining example, this was a version of ‘educated hope’ where I chose to answer in the best way possible while taking into account the girls’ histories and socio-political circumstances. Like Bloch, I had endeavoured to portray a hopeful picture of the ‘not-yet’; that unhappiness can turn into something positive, something hopeful while being realistic. As detailed in Chapter One, my intention was for the girls to develop their versions of what might hope and happiness might look like for them and reminding them they had a choice to alter their emotional state, if they could not change their social circumstances.

At the same time I was aware that my answer might not change anything for them. However, as Busby maintained, creating an environment in which the choice to make a change is ‘both desirable and conceivable’ is what drives the work (2015: 415). I knew I was in a position that did not allow me to fully grasp the extent to which the girls might be feeling unhappy or dissatisfied with their lives but the very fact that most of them were still active participants in the home showed to me, some level of desire to effect a change. It was on this basis that I sought to channel their attention to how they might be hopeful of a future that is conceivable, given their circumstances and resources. Though the conversation might have been ‘fleeting’ (Dolan, 2005: 8), that small moment could enable them to perceive

the possibility of change instead of focusing on the 'obstacles' to their potential (2005: 2).

The question of "Are you always this happy?" is in my opinion entrenched in the future while suggesting the 'pregnancy of the present' (Hage, 2003: 7). I was being questioned about how my current 'happy state' has come to exist, which points to the past and which also suggests a hopeful vision for the future where this 'happy state' will 'always' exist, in the 'not-yet consciousness' (Bloch, 1968). My answer was also an attempt to break the illusion of 'always'. The question seemed carry with it a desire to hear that happiness was possible, from someone they addressed as an older sister, *Didi*⁵. In the capacity of an older sister, a depiction of hope needed to be informed by the realities of the world at large. The 'not-yet' has to be carefully considered and concrete actions need to be taken before the hope can be achieved. I was aware that the seemingly simple question had layers of sub-text. They were not just asking me about my emotional state but also perhaps questioning how I got to be where I am and whether that was possible for them. Knowing that I had certain privileges that they did not have access to meant an even bigger responsibility as a practitioner and a *Didi* to ensure that the version of hope I presented, was appropriate.

Privilege

With the second question, my co-facilitator saved the day while I remained tongue-tied. She answered that there were many different ways to get into a university in the U.K. and that it was better for the girls to check with their schools about it. The question had made me uncomfortable because it pointed out my privilege. Nicholson considers the history of colonialism and surmises that the participants in Sri Lanka 'would have been right to be suspicious of British people bearing gifts' even if the workshops came with good intentions (2005: 69).

Though not British, I was still representing a British institution in my capacity as a practitioner and student from Central. I pondered over whether the girls might have projected that someone like them, could make it to an

⁵ *Didi* is the Hindi word for older sister, which was how the girls addressed me.

institution to the U.K upon meeting me. In a way, my very being could thus be seen as an instrument of hope. We were also tasked to teach the girls English because the language was seen as the way of success, a paradoxical process that could still acknowledge change (Busby, 2017: 97). Spivak (1988) writes extensively about the subaltern voice being silenced and that if using the language of the colonisers meant that was the only way they would be able to speak out and up for themselves then they really had no voice at all. While I do agree with this, I am also of the view that the English language has opened up doors for people in a way that other languages have not primarily because of its extensive use in the world of business and education. As this is the reality, at least for now, it seems that one has to have a grasp of the language in order to find some form of upward social mobility in the present day. As I mentioned earlier, this is part of accepting the realities of the world at large and therefore negotiating hope within these realities.

Hoping for social mobility within such realities is shadowed by inequalities rife in the present, which are governed by a patriarchal hegemony and capitalistic modes of production (Hage, 2003: 13). Hage comments that the capitalist society 'distributes hope... through its ability to maintain an *experience* of the *possibility* of upward social mobility' (2003: 13). In my interactions with the girls there were always curious questions about my upbringing, my lifestyle, and my current situation in London. I felt that same acute awareness that Nicholson referenced towards a need to downplay and even curate descriptions of my lifestyle because I understood that I was a product of certain privileges. I felt stuck in a paradox, as I could have also represented the possibility that Hage speaks of. While I am of the view that the girls should aim for the stars, I knew I could not be the one engendering a false hope.

The girls in the care home have big dreams including becoming a fashion designer, a hairstylist, a doctor and getting married, as we found out through casual conversations. It is not my place to say which dreams of theirs are more realistic and therefore more achievable. I could not answer questions regarding upward mobility, with an optimistic, "Of course you can, have hope!" and offer a 'fraudulent hope' to those girls (Bloch, 1986). In light of this, I believe the answer my co facilitator gave was appropriate. Anything else

would have run the risk of us creating 'hero narratives' as posited by Neelands (2004) and McDonald (2005).

Neelands warns against 'hero narratives' of change and that practitioners have to be mindful when making grand claims of 'miracles' because they are often generalised, claiming that a positive impact had been achieved when in actual fact the problems still exist. My entry into the lives of the girls at the care home did not make their lives any better. It offered a temporal, liminal space, in the words of Victor Turner (1982), where they could perhaps, through the process of participation in creative projects, articulate a vision of hope for themselves (Ackroyd, 2000, Bloch 1986). McDonald (2005) shares similar sentiments when he argues that the facilitator identifying as 'cultural missionary' needs to be eradicated. This is especially significant when working in a postcolonial landscape and with participants affected as a result of residual subjugation from decades of dominant culture ideology.

McDonald stresses that practitioners are the ones who need to reassess and become aware of their representation of 'international or global values' which are 'at odds with local responses (2005: 70). He states that as practitioners, we need to credit and recognise the tools that the 'subalterns' use to challenge, survive and sometimes rise above the dominant culture as bearing importance and sophistication and that an authentic and representative dialogue that encompasses shared values and 'ethics of practice' is developed with the cultures (2005: 70). As Balfour suggests after referencing McDonald as well, the call for practitioners is then 'to break the assumption' that theatre and 'change' have 'an obvious partnership' (2009: 355). The girls in the care home might be of the dominant culture by way of being Indian in India. However their social circumstances have subjugated and relegated them to the peripheries of society.

In a casual conversation with the director of the care home, it was mentioned that one of the reasons the care home was situated in a fairly middle class neighbourhood was so that the girls could aspire to reach that class level. This is a method of using stories of success to encourage the girls to 'learn' hope as well. As a practitioner, it is my duty to acknowledge that this was the subaltern's personal knowledge of applying their tools to create a positive future vision. If as practitioners our hands seem tied by way of myriad

ethical considerations, how can we incorporate appropriate hope in our practice?

Inspiring Hope with the Golden Cloud

A distinct feature of our workshops in the care home was that of the golden cloud ritual, adapted from the Golden Hoop exercise developed by Michel Chekhov (Britton, 2013: 88). We adapted the hoop into a cloud as we had used the story of *Cloudette* by Tom Lichtenfeld, about a small cloud with big dreams, as our backdrop for our workshops and devised work. At the start of each session, the girls and us would stand in a circle and perform this ritual. There is a moment after they bring the cloud down from the Universe where they go into child's pose (Yoga Journal, 2007). When in child's pose, it was offered to them that they could use the time to reflect upon their intentions for the day's workshop and if they wanted, hopes for the future. While we had to facilitate the ritual in the beginning, the girls managed to do it without much facilitation after about a week. It almost had a therapeutic effect to it. During reflections, some of the girls commented that it made them feel calm and at peace (Appendix A No. 1). By the second week, the girls could lead the ritual for others and enjoying it (Appendix A No. 2 & 3). Victor Turner defines ritual as a 'sequence of activities involving gestures, words, objects' that is designed to influence 'preternatural entities or forces' on behalf of one's interests (1977a: 183).

Mathieu Deflem who analyses Turner's processual symbolic analysis states that symbols 'reveal crucial social and religious values' and that they are 'transformative for human attitudes and behaviour' (1991). The ritual was not a way to make a grand claim towards a transformative experience. Rather it was done to gather the focus of the girls and ready them for the workshop. Upon reflection, I am now clear as to how this could be a way of getting closer to that 'spark' that Giroux (2004) speaks of, in hopes that the girls might be able to conceptualise what they want their futures to look like. In creating and holding the space for the girls through the ritual, it was a way of allowing time to reflect upon their hopes and dreams.

While thinking about how rituals could create a space for inspiring hope, I saw a pattern emerge, reflective of my own life motto. I highlight this pattern as a personal way of being as a practitioner. Baz Kershaw speaks of 'transcendent radicalism' where he posits that theatre practices should allow for the construction of an alternative to current oppressive structures (1998: 69). My motto of 'Explore, Create, Transcend' (see Figure 1) helps me navigate life and my creative practice and to constantly negotiate alternative stories to what might be. I strive to explore the world and new ideas, create good artistic work and aim for that work and life to transcend obstacles. Similarly, I see that in setting up the ritual during the workshops, the space was created for the girls to 'explore' their hopes for the workshop or lives. Following this, they could then 'create' their versions of hope by giving voice to their desires and placing it within the circle of the golden cloud. While the first two stages are probably easier, I would argue that the third stage of 'transcend' is tricky. Nonetheless, this is the space where the 'not yet consciousness' can be actualised. The process can then begin again, as new spaces and new hopes are created and imagined. The key would be allowing the space for an individual journey of hope.

Additionally, doing the ritual as part of a larger community mirrors Kershaw's offering that creative processes that 'create community' can also 'strengthen the autonomous subject' (1998: 73). In the care home, there was already an established community. By locating hope within a ritual in such a community, where there is support and trust, individual imagination of hope and cultivating the desire to actualise those hopes could be strengthened.

While I did not use this as a major part of my analysis, it is useful to mention the devised play that arose out of a dialogic process between the girls and us, the practitioners to understand how the community can support. The play was about a girl called Bella who overcame many obstacles to save her dragon and make her family proud and happy. It was a story that had hope pinned to it. There were points where the girls felt they were not going to be able to put a performance together. However, we kept encouraging, constantly setting the space up with the ritual each time we began. The community spirit and support enabled them to bond, create and ultimately perform together. In such a way, I would argue that the play was a metaphor of their own vision for

their lives where struggles are overcome and a happy ending is achieved in a 'liminal' space, which creates access to achieving Kershaw's idea of transcendence (1998). In other words, hope was imagined and achieved in the play represents a quality in the girls that would enable them to similarly imagine an alternative reality and achieve their hopes and dreams through 'embodied action' (Kershaw, 1998: 76).

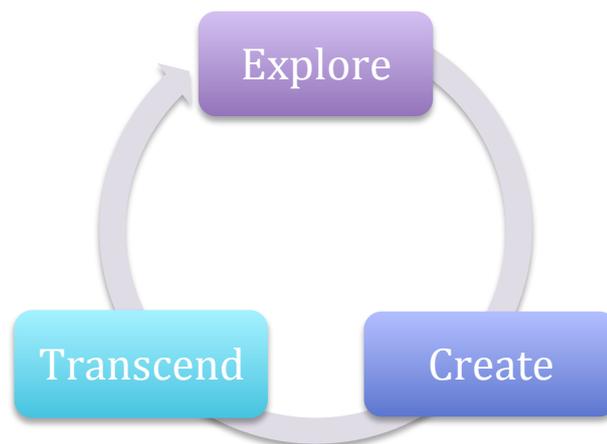


Figure 1

While the ritual can be seen an attempt to inspire hope in the girls, there was no way we could guarantee that they would or could take action that would translate to a realisation of those hopes and dreams. This was important for me as a practitioner because the last thing I wanted to do was add to the 'cruel optimism' that would keep the girls hoping for something that might be only be fantasy (Berlant, 2011). Furthermore, the short duration of the project did not allow us much leeway to check in on the girls after leaving. However, while the students from Central who go to India change every year, the girls return and participate again and again in a theatre making process. In doing so, their 'normal organisation of everyday life is disturbed' by the arrival of the students and a possibility of change or hope is likely to be sparked as theatre has a ripple effect (Busby, 2017: 101).

As applied theatre practitioners, that is as much as we can do. In my work where I posit hope as a crucial element, it is essential that I at the very least engage in 'sparking' the path towards a participant's own imagination of what hope looks like for him or her.

The Liminal Space

Before concluding this chapter, I wanted to bring attention to the position I occupied within the liminal space during the workshops. The term 'liminal' refers to a transitional state, a state of ambiguity that one passes through, commonly seen in the initiation rites of tribal societies (Turner, 26: 1982). Being *Didi* also meant that I was dancing in the realm of the liminal. I was working in a state of the 'in-between' as described by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2011).

In Srinivasan's case, she likens her position of a participant-observer to that of the three main "characters"⁶ in Bharatanatyam⁷, understanding it in a 'triangulated framework' instead of considering just the 'self' and 'other' dualities (Srinivasan, 20: 2012). The triangle represents the possibility for a queer reading of desires to exist within the dance framework. Similarly, a queer reading can be applied to this enquiry in terms of my position within the care home, where my 'in-betweenness' disrupted normative binary readings of the insider –outsider dichotomy. By way of this disruption and dancing in this liminal space, perhaps having a shared cultural connection might have enabled me to actualise a 'dialogical' process with more ease. Dwight Conquergood, in his article *Performing as a Moral Act* states that creating a 'dialogical' space is a 'way of having intimate conversations' with people from different cultures (Kuppers & Robertson, 2007: 61). I suggest that in setting up a space for the girls to explore their own versions of hope and by allowing a dialogic process to lead our devising process of the play, we managed to have 'intimate conversations' with the girls.

In the same way I existed in an in-between space, so too were the girls, dancing in the liminality of the seven weeks that the creative process offered. The girls created the possibility of desired futures in that liminal space. Whether that dance will extend outward and become something other than itself, remains to be seen.

This chapter linked the theories of hope and ritual to my lived experiences of working with the girls in the care home, in an attempt to bring

⁶ The three main "characters" are the *nayika* (heroine), the *nayaka* (hero) and the *sakhi* (female friend) (Srinivasan, 20: 2012)

⁷ Indian classical dance

light to the tricky business of hope within 'cultural confrontations' in a postcolonial context (Conquergood, 2007). It showed the constant awareness and reflexivity that a practitioner needs when working with participants if her praxis is to have integrity, be authentic and inspiring. By focusing on the importance of understanding unrealistic hopes, I discovered a simple process that helps me embody my intentions within my praxis in relation to the context within which I work. 'Explore, Create and Transcend' is only one method for me to invite my participants into a space where they may imagine (explore) and construct (create) hope for themselves, thereby increasing their level of agency and acknowledging their own lived experiences and current realities, in order to gain access to a life they want to achieve (transcend) for themselves.

Conclusion

'...what often shines through is a facilitator's willingness to bring their own identity into the process, not just a professional 'facilitator' identity but one that is reflective of their own approach, style and humanity' (Balfour in Preston, 2016: 152)

Entering the care home in India, I was aware that it was to be a complex 'contact zone' (Brodkey, 1996). Given my close proximity to the participants I worked with, we shared more than just a facilitator-participant role. It was one that shifted between positions of mentor-mentee, older sister-younger-sister and facilitator-participant. As these relational qualities of the work developed, my awareness of how critical my position as a facilitator was also heightened. What I said and how I conducted myself carried weight, as it was being observed and maybe even looked to for emulation or inspiration.

Much like Nicholson (2005) problematises the 'gift' of practitioners offering Western notions of drama to a group, I did not want to become a 'cultural missionary' (McDonald, 2005, cited in Balfour, 2009). I understood that there was a risk of perpetuating recolonising discourses given my own cultural background. I thus embarked on this enquiry in an attempt to critically engage with the drive behind my praxis through reflecting upon my own identity within the context. This 'willingness' to explore my own vulnerability, was so that I could address any biases and assumptions, allowing me to then reflect and channel them purposefully into my praxis, instead of them becoming an obstacle to developing my practice (Balfour in Preston, 2016: 152).

By situating hope within Balfour's vision of practitioners bringing their 'humanity' to their work, I discovered through critically engaging with hope, that a practitioner is able disrupt the normative spaces that hold 'asymmetrical power relations' (Brodkey, 1996) in order to create a space where appropriate hope where the 'not-yet consciousness' can be imagined (Bloch, 1986). My entry into the care home disrupted the normal routines and the ritual embedded at the start of each workshop was another disruptive catalyst where the girls could activate an imagining of hope for themselves.

On part of the practitioner, my aim and desire through this enquiry, is to pay attention to 'realistic hope' or as I have come to term it, appropriate hope

as it is not our mission as applied theatre practitioners to promise unrealistic hope (Bennett, 2015). This enquiry has enabled me to consider my responses and reactions to the two questions raised by the girls in Chapter Three. Through it, I have found that appropriate hope also stems from the facilitator's own identity, humanity and way of being especially when situated in a context playing multiple roles. With the first question, I chose to expose my vulnerability by telling the truth; that happiness is subjective and comes from within (Balfour in Preston, 2016). I feel as though I have failed with my non-response when it came to the second question. It was uncomfortable precisely because as much as I had wanted to encourage them, it was not my place to offer unrealistic hope.

My motto for life, 'Explore, Create, Transcend' is one method guiding my process of creating that space for my way of being, first as a fellow human being and second as a facilitator and also for my participants. It allows for the conceptualisation of a ritualistic space wherein the participants 'explore' the notions of hope, conceive and 'create' it for themselves and hopefully, spark the possibility of 'transcend'-ing their current predicaments.

I turn to Turner's concept of 'liminality' (1964), which I extend to the position of the practitioner existing 'betwixt and between' to situate where I think the process of 'Explore, Create and Transcend' could operate. The practitioner herself enters the liminal space with the participants by creating the ritual and existing within it. She also shifts in and out of that space in order to be present with a reflexive ethos as she negotiates the way she curates the workshop and, such as in my case, interacts with the participants outside of the workshop space. By addressing the dialogic process during the ritual as one that could spark hope (Chapter Three) and my multiple roles and complicated identities within the care home such as being both an insider outsider, I extend Srinivasan's (2012) 'queering' and Fischer-Lichte's call to disrupt and challenge the binary oppositions of insider and outsider roles (2010). In challenging and resisting these sterile, binary oppositions by way of my unique position in the care home in India, I have developed a more nuanced appreciation of how a practitioner can exist in the 'in-between'.

This leads me to conclude that perhaps I may have found a way to exist within a 'third space' with my participants in India. Janinka Greenwood

(2001) who draws from Bhabha's idea of the 'third space (1990), asserts that it is in this space that 'new imaginings of existing binary relations' can be negotiated. It is where limiting binaries can melt away and offer an approach that sits in the liminal and practitioners can exist and 'work the hyphen'-ated spaces, as Michelle Fine suggests in Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1994). Indeed, this will be useful knowledge having embodied this experience that I can now carry forward into my praxis.

The idea of appropriate hope within applied theatre as mentioned before has not been deeply explored and requires further analysis. Moving forward, this research could benefit from interviews with practitioners and participants discussing their relationship with the concept of hope at various points in a project. Mapping the idea onto different contexts will also help to expand and develop it. I hope that my unique experiences can be an addendum to our field, which tends to have predominantly Western perspectives. I would suggest that the applied theatre curriculum could include more diverse texts to expand our understanding of the field as it is conceived around the world.

As I sat in the plane departing India, watching the movie *Lion* (2016), about a young Indian boy who gets lost on the streets of Calcutta, and as I wiped relentless tears streaming down my face because the story reminded me of the girls I had just worked and lived with for seven weeks, I realised how India, the land where my roots came from, had stolen a piece of my heart. Though I never ventured much into the other parts of India this one experience was paramount in gifting me reconciliation; my cultural bias has shifted to one of understanding, curiosity and an even deeper desire to do more applied theatre work. I believe strongly that attempting to understand others without understanding ourselves is futile. This process of knowing oneself is a continuous journey. Applied theatre, in my experience, is a collaborative process and being ready to acknowledge my assumptions and biases is the first step in creating a better praxis. I now know I will be back to visit India, as a tourist, a practitioner, a sister, a friend.

I seek to continuously create a praxis where I am 'hope-fully present' such that genuine experiences for both participant and practitioner can be cultivated. I carry with me the importance of self-reflexivity and the knowledge

that the willingness to be vulnerable serves to create a practice that comes from the heart and imbue it with integrity. I walk towards the next chapter of my practice with stories of hope.

Vanakkam⁸, Namaste⁹.

⁸ Vanakkam, a Tamil greeting used to recognize and respect the presence of another person (<http://test-ie.cfsites.org/custom.php?pageid=363>, accessed 29.09.17)

⁹ Namaste, a Hindi greeting used to acknowledge a soul to soul greeting (<https://www.yogajournal.com/practice/the-meaning-of-quot-namaste-quot>, accessed 29.09.17)

Appendix A: Extracts from Personal Journal

1. 16 May 2017

Thereafter, we did the Golden Cloud ritual. I think I did this well and gave ample space and time for the kids to start to get into. While personally it felt slow to me I had to understand that they needed that time to get into the activity. When we finished I asked them how they felt, and they said they felt good and at peace.

2. 29 May 2017

█████ started off the session by welcoming everyone and sharing what we would do for the day. She then asked if someone would like to lead the Cloud today and █████ said she would like to. So she took the group through taking the Cloud from the sky and bringing it to the ground and then instructed everyone in Hindi, to put their intentions for the class and their hopes and dreams into it.

3. 24 May 2017

When we were doing the cloud at the end, when the girls released their hopes, dreams and achievements for the day, █████ said in passing that "the cloud will be heavy today because of how much she had said today!" Which was wonderful to hear.

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