# AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFELONG LEARNING AND TRANSFORMATION IN AN INDIVIDUAL'S LIFE: A LIFE HISTORY STUDY OF A 67 YEAR OLD BLACK FEMALE ADULT LEARNER FROM KWAZULU-NATAL

By

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# ABSTRACT

Biographical accounts constitute an important source of information about the experiences of black women under Apartheid. This study focuses on the life of an elderly black woman and presents the various life experiences she was exposed to in her various lifelong learning contexts, as told by her. It highlights the impact of the diverse learning contexts that she was exposed to throughout her life, and develops an understanding of how her meaning perspectives were shaped and transformed by her lifelong learning experiences.

This research study is qualitative in nature and employs a life history methodology, which focuses on the meanings that people attach to their experiences. It draws on three of the major interpretive paradigms that structure qualitative research, namely the interpretivist, critical and feminist paradigms. The theoretical framework contains elements of two key theories of adult learning, namely that of Transformative Learning and Critical Consciousness. It also draws on elements of Feminist Theory.

The research method consisted of six open-ended life history interviews, which are special types of field interviews, in which I gathered narrative accounts about the respondent's life. Every interview was audio-taped. Although there was a 'pre-interview' agreement on some possible issues that could be discussed, I did not bring a series of predetermined questions or theories into the interview process, but rather used open-ended questions that generated themes from the respondent's lifelong learning experiences. The participant knew that she was an equal partner in identifying the major

themes. My own reflections on what I heard and observed during the interviewing processes also became an important source of information in constructing the research findings.

The narrative analysis approach was used to analyze and interpret the interview data. A biographical life history was constructed. This was followed by a process of negotiating the possible main themes embedded in the biographical life history, and then analyzing those themes, which were subsequently interpreted individually for their meaning.

This life history study illustrates that Madelwa constructed her identity through the various discourses and lifelong learning contexts that she was exposed to. The study also found that experiential learning is central to the theories of adult learning referred to above.

The transformation that happened in Madelwa's life is the outcome of a practice of critical reflection that already started in her childhood. A crucial finding was that critical hermeneutics in this case offered Madelwa a method for investigating the conditions of her existence, and led her to challenging of the status quo.

This life history study suggests that there is a definite relationship between lifelong learning experiences and transformation in an individual's life. Linked to this transformation is the fact that this study shows that each biography has its own truth. Her life history still continues…

**April 2007**


**DECLARATION OF OWN WORK**


**With the signature below I, Rachel Beatrice Balie, hereby declare that the work that I present in this thesis is based on my own research, and that I have not submitted this thesis to any other institution of higher education to obtain an academic qualification.**



<u>**2007**</u>

**R.B.Balie**                                                          **Date**

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- The community of friends who walked this path with me, offering support, motivation, insightful conversations and belief in my ability to complete this study.

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**INTRODUCTION**

**1.1  Rationale**

I would like to introduce the metaphor of 'beading' as an important part of the rationale for doing this study of the life history of Madelwa, an exceptional Black South African woman, whose mother-tongue is isiZulu. 23,8 % of the South African population speak isiZulu as their mother-tongue (Burger: 2006). There are many groups in Africa and India who are known for their elaborate and intricate beadwork, but according to Schoeman (1996:1), Zulu beadwork is unique because of the code by which they select and combine colours and geometrical designs to shape messages.

According to Schoeman (1996:2), the colours and geometric designs have particular significance and the craft of beading forms an intricate communication system about feelings, expression of ideas, social behaviour, social status, political importance and relations between the sexes. Beadwork, being the exclusive terrain of the Zulu woman, is also used as an educational tool by mothers to educate their daughters about their traditions and customs. Zulu beadwork thus illustrates the way in which a society could be constructed and organized around the 'beads' of religion, social norms, traditions and customs, relationships, gender roles, economics, education, technology, communication, recreation, law, politics, marriage, death, art and other institutions. It also illustrates how these 'beads' are inter–related and mutually supportive.

Madelwa's lifelong learning can be equated with the metaphor of the 'string that threads the beads', with the 'beads' being the lifelong learning themes or inter-related discourses that will continue as long as she is still alive.

I met Madelwa at a time when she decided to add formal higher education to her 'string of beads'. She was admitted to a course offered through Fair Share, where I was employed as an educator at the time. Fair Share is a unit of the School of Government at the University of the Western Cape. For approximately five years Fair Share offered a community-based training course for working adults called Economic Literacy and Education. Because of an urgent need for a nationally accredited qualification expressed by the communities that it was involved in, Fair Share decided to have the course accredited as a university-based certificate course at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 5.

The National Qualifications Framework has five important objectives, but especially important for adult education and lifelong learning, as well as for this study is objective number 5, namely "… to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large" (SAQA Act No. 58:1995).

The course, which was initially offered to community members with the objective of promoting active participation of communities in governance, was then registered as the Certificate in Economic Development in 2001. Besides the normal university entry requirements that learners now had to adhere to, they also had to have at least two years proven, practical experience of being involved in some aspect of community development work. (Fair Share 2004:1). The first intake, consisting of 40 students, all

working adults, males as well as females, attended the Certificate in Economic Development Course at the University of the Western Cape.

I was one of the lecturers at the time, and I became increasingly more interested in the diverse learning patterns of the women in the group. These women differed greatly in terms of mother-tongue, age, cultural and language background and life experiences, as they were recruited from four different South African provinces. Madelwa, then 61 years old and significantly older than the other women in the group (the $2^{nd}$ eldest woman was 48 years old), stood out in terms of academic performance. She attained the highest aggregate in that year's group.

She also stood out in the way she guided and helped the younger women, by showing them how to integrate the more difficult academic learning tasks with examples from real life. In the process she made them aware of the importance of experience and critical thinking for learning throughout life.

As I listened to and observed her interacting with the other learners, she came across as fully aware and deeply involved in her particular cultural world, but also involved in and informed about current issues that affect her community and the nation at large, like HIV and AIDS. She stood out as being a critical thinker, very articulate and able to verbalize her thoughts, but in a deeply humble way.

Her interaction with and guidance of the group reinforced my belief in the value of experience in adult learning, which is supported by Clandinin and Connelly (1999:414):

> The social sciences are concerned with humans and their relations with

themselves and their environments, and as such, the social sciences are founded on the study of experience. Experience is, therefore, the starting point and key term for all social science inquiry.

Madelwa's statements about her lifelong learning experiences in various time-frames, changing environments and contexts of her life and their contribution towards her growth and transformation, were closely linked to the ideas of Dewey (1938) (cited in Clandinin and Connely 1999:415). Dewey states that education, experience and life are inextricably intertwined, to the extent that the study of experience is the study of life. The rituals, routines, traditions and other actions are experiences that constitute a life journey.

Miller & Boud (1996:8) define experience as "… the totality of ways in which humans sense the world and make sense of what they perceive". These definitions of learning and experience are echoed at a different level by Ian Martin (n.d.:1) in his paper "Reconstituting the Agora" that "… lifelong learning should be about enabling people to develop to their full potential as 'whole persons' or rounded human beings". In his paper Aitchison (1995:5) argues that human beings live in a constantly changing environment "from the cradle to the grave" and that therefore our learning needs to equip us with the capacity to grow and adapt accordingly.

Other literature on experience in qualitative research seems to suggest that experience is the stories people live and by telling those stories, they reaffirm them, modify them and create new ones. This definition links very well, in my view, to Jack Mezirow's (1991:168-169) Transformation Theory of Learning, namely that "Learning is defined as the social process of

construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experiences as a guide to action".

Engaging with the students, observing their diverse learning patterns, as well as engaging with the literature on the relationship between experience, learning and life stories became the rationale for the decision to do a life history study, and to ask Madelwa to share her learning experiences over time. The focus of the study would be on the telling of her story, because as Carr (1986) (cited in Clandinin & Connelly 1999:415) argues, "… stories are the closest we can come to experience… A story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of a personal and social history". This argument by Carr (1986) became my point of reference for firstly imagining what lifelong learning is and reflecting on how it might be studied and represented in a research study.

It was a challenge to find a definition of lifelong learning that meets the purpose of this study, because of the ambiguity of the term in the academic literature that I engaged with. Field (2005), postulates that the precise meaning of lifelong learning has been 'elusive', in spite of the fact that lifelong learning is a key concept in contemporary adult education research. He further states that lifelong learning as a concept also promotes a broad understanding of learning as a life-wide process. Lifelong learning in Madelwa's case refers to various sites and sources of her learning (like her parental home, her institutionalized and formalized learning, through to her past and ongoing informal and non-formal learning experiences). It also refers to the associated possibilities and consequences of her learning as they unfold through the life history that she tells.

The definition that thus best suits the purpose of this study is found in Jarvis 2004:65, in which he maintains that learning is 'life-wide' and incorporates formal, informal and non-formal learning as equally valid modes of learning.

This study is therefore not simply a *story* about a woman's life, but is simultaneously focused in four directions, as stated in Clandinin & Connelly (1999:417):

> ... inward i.e. on her internal conditions and feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, her moral disposition, and so on; outward, i.e. on her existential conditions, her environmental reality; backward and forward, i.e. on her past, present and future. To experience an experience is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way.

My principal interest was to focus on her lifelong learning experiences and the growth and transformation in the life story that she told.

I deliberately mention Madelwa's racial classification in the title as it is important for the purpose of this study. South Africa has a unique history of racism that has had a profound as well as a tragic impact on her life. The issue of race also links to what is said in Weiler and Middleton (1999:48) that in California, in a way that is similar to South Africa in this study, education was profoundly defined by racial categories from its founding. They say that "… for Black women, race shaped their lives far more overtly than did gender, but that race privilege was accepted as natural and was not even mentioned in the white teachers' narratives …".

Another reason for specifically naming her racial classification is because "… it is important to emphasize that those who have been marginalized also

need to be seen as active subjects, who often challenge the oppressive representations and processes in which they are located" (p.113).

Thiam (1986:55-56) adds her voice to this difference between the struggles of white and black women by stating that black women have to fight against colonialism and neo-colonialism, capitalism and the patriarchal system, whilst white women only have to fight capitalism and patriarchy. She further states that little has been written about the black woman, especially not poetry, and that very few black women have been immortalized as role models in literature, something which is common in Western literature.

Madelwa was born and grew up in an era during which South African women played a crucial and very courageous role in the fighting of a cruel political system. In September 1955, the then nationalist, apartheid government of South Africa decided that all black women should join their male counterparts in carrying reference books. This law did not go unchallenged, as women were tired of being discriminated against "primarily because of their race, but also because of their class and their gender" (Light, Baloyi & Theron 2006:1). Consequently, exactly 50 years ago from the time of writing, on August 9, 1956, approximately 20 000 South African women of all races marched towards the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest against the repressive pass laws.

In his life story Dr. Albert Luthuli, South Africa's (and Africa's) first Nobel Peace Prize winner, gives credit to the courage of those women who in 1958 showed militant defiance against the regime. They also protested against the men who supported beer halls, because it encouraged alcohol abuse in families and communities. He also commends the millions of women who

had to stay home to be both mother and father to their families, while the men had to go and work in the cities as migrant laborers. Other women stayed home and sacrificed their own career dreams, while their husbands were fighting the struggle against the cruel apartheid system, either on the run from the apartheid government, in prison or in exile (Mayibuye Afrika: 1993).

Another form of courage in life history writing is that of the 'author' of the narrative who has to 'reach across boundaries within him–or her self' and to make her or his (own) voice heard. Telling or writing a life history is a difficult and daunting task, therefore the link to the term 'courage' (Tierney 2000:550).

Linked to the issues of race and courage is the concern about the virtual absence of African women from the field of research. This concern is very aptly expressed in a book by Qunta (1987), which contains a paper by Dabi Nkululeko called "The right to self-determination in research: Azanian women". In this paper she argues that women of South Africa should research and write up their histories. She explores the factors that restrict indigenous research as well as the effects of colonialism on black and white women.

Bloom & Munro (1995:100) further highlight the advantages of studying the histories of women's lives, by postulating that life history narratives illustrate the relationship between the individual and society and they show how women negotiate their 'exceptional' gender status in their daily lives.
It is within the above framework that this research study is located.

## 1.2   The aims of this study

The main aim of this study was to investigate how Madelwa's meaning perspectives were shaped and transformed by her lifelong learning experiences. The study therefore focused on an analysis of her life history as told by herself. The main purpose was (1) to find out how Madelwa remembers and reflects on the past (Neuman:2000), (2) whether she identified those life experiences that led her to a "… new and revised interpretation of the meaning of such experiences…" (Mezirow 1994:222-227) and (3) whether she could show, through the study, that those new interpretations or perspectives led her to transform and consequently act differently throughout her life.

A further aim of the study was to contribute in a small way to the field of research by having a South African woman who experienced many of the changing socio-political contexts and the extraordinary courage of the women of her race, speak in her own voice on issues and contexts that have shaped her personal life, traditions, indigenous practices and her place within the world of lifelong learning.

## 1.3   The key research questions

The key research questions for this study were
1. How do lifelong learning experiences shape and transform an individual's meaning perspectives?
2. How do diverse contexts impact on an individual's learning through life?

**1.4 Design and Methodology**

Life History Methodology was used to conduct this study. Madelwa was asked to assist with the identification of the major themes. The main basic technique was six open-ended interviews that aimed to collect narrative accounts of Madelwa's life history. The site of the interviews was Madelwa's home. The interviews were conducted over a period of four months. The narrative analysis approach to life history interviews was used to analyze the interviews.

**1.5 Outline of the rest of the thesis**

Chapter 1 outlines the background to the study, the rationale for selecting a particular research method, the aims of the study and the key research questions. Chapter 2 is the literature review and an explanation of the theoretical framework(s) within which the study is situated. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology that was utilized as well as the rationale for selecting a particular methodology. The results of the interview process are presented and analysed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 concludes the research study with a discussion of the main findings, the challenges and reflections that arose from the study, as well as an indication of possible areas for further research.

**THE LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

## 2.1 Introduction

The initial part of this chapter provides a context for firstly identifying the key concepts and debates on life history studies, through an overview of the literature that relates to this field. The chapter also justifies the decision made for this study through an exploration of the literature on the characteristics and value of life history studies for the social sciences. The aim of the literature review is to create an understanding of the important similarities and differences between the lives of other and especially black women authors on this continent, as well as on the role, place and contribution of women's voices to the field of life history writing. This approach assists in providing a framework for understanding the issues that are vital for achieving the purpose of this study.

The second part of the literature review explores the different theories that relate to the life history study and to transformative learning within the lifelong learning context specifically. It discusses the various theories with their differences and similarities and their relevance to the outcome of this study. These theories, in conjunction with the above key concepts, are then subsequently developed into a theoretical framework which guides this study.

The terms that are central to the research study are clustered into themes or key constructs. The clusters of themes relate to life history, life history

research methodology, lifelong learning discourses, women's writing, theories and theorists of adult learning.

## 2.2  A discussion of the thematic cluster of terms

### 2.2.1  Life History

The first theme that was reviewed was life history, and the key terms like narrative, experience, story, life story, identity, language, autobiography, discourse, meaning and debates related to it, like poststructuralism and postmodernism, as well as key ideas and how they relate to the research project.
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One of the key challenges for the life history researcher is that the concept of life history  is denoted by a plethora of terms which could be quite confusing (Plummer 2001:19). The literature search revealed that the term 'life history' has different meanings for different people (Tierney 2000:539). It is also called the biographical method (Schwandt 1997:82).  It is also said that life history is a whole or a part of an individual's retrospective account of his life. It could be in written or oral form and has been prompted or elicited by another person (Watson and Watson-Franke 1985:2). According to Denzin (1989:48) life history is "… an account of a life based on interviews and observations".

Although no one specific definition has been applied for the purpose of this study, the argument by Hatch & Wisniewski (1995:125) that "Life history work emphasizes the importance of the researcher in the process of gathering, interpreting, and reporting biographical information", has been

particularly helpful for this study. The authors further state that when the researcher analyses the historical, political, social and economic contexts of a life story, it is turned into a life history. The above definitions made me aware of the importance of 'listening' for the respective contexts while interviewing.

Although this is not a literary study, it is important though, for the outcome of this study, to explore the role that language plays in the construction of this text. Whilst one 'listens' for the respective contexts as stated above, one should also 'listen' for language usage, as language is the agent through which the discourse on autobiographies, biographies, "testimonios" (which is further explained on page 25 of this review), and life histories is produced. Schwandt (2000 191-192) argues that there are many games played with language, like giving orders, greeting, testing hypotheses, (and in the case of this study, 'telling' your life history or autobiography, which Madelwa does). He states that every game has its rules and criteria which will make it meaningful for those who participate in the game and who have a system of meanings that govern their "language game".

Gubrium & Holstein (2000:487-508) add their voices to this debate with their article on Michael Foucalt's (1972) discourse analysis in which he explored how historically and culturally located systems of power and knowledge construct subjects and their worlds. He refers to these systems as discourses. He claims that discourses are not just talk, ideas, ideologies and words, but that discourses are also working attitudes, terms of reference, and paths of action that result in social practices. Foucalt maintains that these practices systematically form the objects and the subjects which they talk

about. He sees the subject as an active person who shapes discourse and puts it to work.

Post-modernism, however, disputes the validity of the foundations of discourse and is a style of philosophy which is anti-foundational and sceptical of all forms of authority, in this case the authority of language. Post-structuralism, also known as the discourse of deconstruction, and which falls under the heading of post-modernism, rejects the structuralist tradition of thought, has an anti-foundational bias, and a total dislike of authority. It rejects the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, who argued that language is above all a system of signs, has meaning, and is relatively stable and structured.

De Saussure's argument was a problem for the post-structuralist, who argued that the structuralist leaves little room for surprises, the unexpected, chance or creativity. Jacque Derrida then engaged with deconstruction, which was against the system building nature of structuralism. He wanted to illustrate the instability and unreliability of language, the fact that there was no such thing as unproblematic language and the occasional 'slippage' of meaning. Derrida sees meaning as a fleeting phenomenon, that evaporates as soon as it is uttered or written and not as something that lasts over a period of time and creates meaningfulness in an individual's life. One should not conform to the norm or to systems building – this is characteristic of deconstruction and of the postmodern philosophical ethos (Sim 2001:3-8). One can thus summarize deconstruction as a method employed by post-structuralist writers like Derrida and De Mann to pull apart texts, and show their endless deferrals of meaning.

The reason why concepts like post-modernism, post-structuralism and language are included in the literature review has to do with the fact that one cannot look at the writing of autobiographies and biographies, as well as life histories, without commenting on the role and influence of language and discourse. The deconstructionist claims that autobiography is not in itself truthful, but that it is determined by "discourses" prevalent at the time  and that the identity of the author is simply "fiction" (Daymond 2003:3-5). I agree though, with Daymond, who argues that identity is never fictionalised, but that we can "…adapt our given identity in such a way that we can add others to it". The same author argues that one should look at South African autobiographies differently, especially in the way identities are constructed, as we have had a history of "identities denied and enforced" (p.8). She quotes an author called Thengani Ngwenya who claims (and I agree), that it is "…simplistic to simply adopt European-derived post-structuralist emphases" when studying South African autobiographies. In my view the same argument would apply to biographies.

Daymond (2003:8) lastly challenges post-structuralist critics in the following way: "For thought to be, there must be a consciousness shaped in turn by culture expressed through language. To attempt to uncouple the two is reductive".

It is further said that identities are constantly recreated and not something fixed and predetermined, and that it is the stories of the past that help construct the future (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:550). Individuals manage to become their own persons over the course of time. According to Freeman we start out by being imitative, other-driven beings and we eventually come to be just ourselves (Freeman 1993:66). These debates imply that identity is

linked to the lifelong learning experiences that we make. "If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. In short, identity is a Life Story "(McAdam 1985:19).

The above authors' arguments on identity are further reinforced by Griffiths (1995:1-2), who introduces the "web of identity" in her book. She argues that there is an explosion of interest in self, identity, narratives of self, autobiography, and the politics related to all of these. She calls it the "coming of age" of the politics of identity. No longer is identity politics based on the simple-minded assumption that personal identity is determined by the fact that one is a woman, or a black person, or a black woman, or a white working-class man. She maintains that people nowadays rarely think that gender, race, class, sexuality are not linked to an individual's beliefs and attitudes. Her key argument is "…that a discussion of self and identity must be highly political and highly personal".

Griffiths uses the metaphor of the web as a tool to make the reader understand the idea of the self and its politics:

> The metaphor of a web can throw light on the idea of the self and its politics. It, too, is made of nearly invisible, very strong threads attached to the circumstances of its making and under the control of its maker, but the circumstances of the making are not under her control. It, too, is intricate, entangled and interlaced, with each part connected to other parts… (p.2)

Because this study investigates the relationship between lifelong learning experiences and transformation in an individual's life, I explored the debates within the literature that would eventually lead to the most appropriate tool to conduct this investigation. I therefore focused on narrative and its place

within the field of life history research, as the narrative is seen as the most elegant tool that exists to describe the human condition. It is the tension – the identifiable in endless transformation – that constitutes the currency of narratives, because the complexities and currencies of human life are revealed through these narratives (Shostak:1989). The literature search, however, revealed the difficulty of distinguishing between the terms life history and narrative, as these terms fit into a larger category of related terms such as autobiography, biography, interpretive biography, autobiographical narrative, life history narrative, oral narrative, life narrative, personal narrative, stories, life stories, self stories, personal experience stories, auto-ethnography, ethnographic fiction, personal history, oral history, case history and case study (Hatch & Wisniewski 1995:124). Each of these terms carries traces of other terms and their meanings spill over into each other (Denzin 1989:47).

It thus became necessary to work through the plethora of terms by firstly exploring the various debates on narrative in order to justify the decision to use it as the most appropriate tool to conduct the investigation into the relationship between lifelong learning and transformation in Madelwa's life.

Narrative activity provides tellers with an opportunity to impose order on otherwise disconnected events, and to create continuity between past, present and imagined worlds. Narrative and self are inseparable. This is grounded in the phenomenological assumption that entities are given meaning through being experienced, and the notion that narrative is an essential resource in the struggle to bring experiences to conscious awareness (Cappa & Ochs 1996:19). In some debates this process of tying together past, present and

future in an individual's life is referred to as a story. The story helps to provide unity and purpose and to classify individual identities.

This study does not aim to just simply tell the story of a person's life. Several sources in the literature warn against the use of the word *story,* as the word carries a "… connotation of falsehood or misrepresentation, as in the expression "That is only a story" (Polkinghorne 1995:7). However, for the purpose of this study I used the word narrative and story interchangeably, as, at its simplest, narrative is a story with a beginning, middle and end. Thus temporality is a key feature of narrative and this pertains to the placing of events in a sequence. Causality, which concerns the relation between events, is also an important feature of narrative. A third feature relates to social context: who is telling the story, for what purposes, in what situation, and to whom (Clandinin & Connelly 1999: 414-416).

S*tory* does not refer to fictional accounts only. It also describes ideal or real life situations, like biographies, autobiographies, life histories (as in this study), and other remembered episodes that have occurred in an individual's life and is often referred to as storied narrative, which is described as "… the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts" (Hatch & Wisniewski 1995:7). The authors further assert that it is becoming the accepted practice among qualitative researchers to use the storied narrative in life history work.

One of the most fundamental reasons for studying human lives historically through the narratives that people tell, is the concern about the exercise of,

and resistance to, power (Freeman 1993:231). Life histories often serve as testimonies of the narrator's power to challenge power and the will to create their own freedom from social and political oppression.

Another argument in favour of the life history narrative is that it helps us to identify our own truth (Dominice 2000:6; Freeman 1993:231). We organize our lives according to our own unique ways of learning and therefore construct our own reality. Each biography thus has its own truth. The two above-mentioned authors further maintain that a life history focused on learning can also clarify the interdependence of biographical themes and major life transitions. Life history narratives can also reveal formerly hidden influences, such as cultural traditions and beliefs. The life historical inquiry therefore opens the way towards an enlarged understanding of self and world.

A gap that was identified from the literature review is the fact that there is little detailed agreement in the literature as to what narratives are (Plummer 2001:185). It was a concern, because the literature review had to provide me with a definition of narrative that would justify the methodology that would be employed. The following definition was therefore particularly useful for the purpose of this study: "Narrative is … both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study" (Plummer 2001:185). Finally, narratives also represent an interpretation or evaluation of the meaning of the events that are narrated.

### 2.2.2 Life History Research Methodology

The second theme together with its related cluster of terms that is reviewed is life history research methodology. Life history research methodology was chosen to investigate how the respondent's meaning perspectives were shaped and transformed by the experiences she was exposed to in her various lifelong learning contexts. The literature was therefore carefully reviewed to evaluate its appropriateness of characteristics, the roles of the researcher and the researched, subjectivity, bias, stereotyping, context and language.

A key concern in narrative theory is the fact that the storying genre is not socially and politically neutral (Goodson 1992:90-95). The literature on life history gives an interesting perspective on the characteristics of life history research: the focus is on the individual; the research is of a personal nature; there is a practical orientation as well as an emphasis on subjectivity. The focus on the individual can be potentially dangerous, as it could be exploited to promote cultural capital and elevate certain individuals. According to Goodson (1992) this often happens in the media where stories live out a "prior script" and examples from especially the American media show that story-telling is often promoted in a de-contextualized way to meet political, social and especially economic agendas. A good example is the biography of Ronald Reagan who came to the White House after a lifetime as a professional actor. The fact that Reagan was an actor before becoming state president was central to his concept of what the presidency is and gives some insight about the political landscape at the time.

The above example of Ronald Reagan (and others not mentioned here) gives the impression that life stories located in a social, political as well as in a

historical context, i.e. life histories, do not fall into the trap of disempowering those whose voices need to be heard, according to Goodson (1992:94). I find this very debatable and quite a generalization, as it could be quite easy to disempower those whose voices need to be heard. It would depend on the researcher's motive for doing the study, his or her own social and political context, usage and or manipulation of language, researcher subjectivity and bias throughout the interviewing and writing up processes, as well as the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

The literature revealed various differing arguments around the mutual relationship between the researcher and the researched. In some instances authors advise that the life history researcher should be relatively distanced, objective and unattached, and that the subject or respondent should be relatively involved and subjective. Others argue that intensive involvement between researcher and subject is seen as a must (Plummer 2001: 208). Life history work is emotional, inter-actional and personal and can have implications for the self of the researcher as well as of the researched.

My concern about the importance of the motives of researchers for doing life history research and subjects for agreeing to be part of such a process is based on the fact that the "testimonio" of Rigoberta Menchu (1984) is currently embroiled in much controversy.The roles and motives of both the researcher and the researched, as well as the truthfulness of some parts of the life history are being scrutinized, in terms of the way in which such stories can be used by different players in the political spectrum. Researchers should be honest and not 'make up' life histories, but accurately describe a real life. Plummer (2001:218) argues that the life history "… is specifically

gathered by researchers with a wider social science goal in mind. The role of the researcher is crucial to this activity".

Another key concern in life history research is that of deception (Plummer 2001:221). Research subjects should be told the true nature of the experiment, especially when, in the case of life history research, respondents are expected to share very personal details as well as documents of a life. On the other hand the authors warn against the fact that revealing to the research subjects precisely what one is looking for, may bias the outcome to a great extent. One would not want to become involved in a controversial life history such as *Roots* by Alex Haley (1977), which caused ripples in the academic world. Haley, who was subjected to a long trial in 1978, was accused of plagiarism, fabrications and imaginary responses to interviews.

The above paragraphs focused on those debates and arguments dealing with the nature, characteristics and concerns related to life history research methodology and how they relate to this study. Another concern that comes through quite strongly in the literature is the need for documented research in the field of life history writing (hooks 1981) on the lives of black women. She warns against similarity in choice of subject matter, style and the fact that the linear narrative story is easier to write and more acceptable to the public than experimental work, and that there is the possibility of a stereotyped image of black women writers. Although this comment is directed at black American women writers, it links well to the plea by Qunta (1987) to black South African female writers, for a balance between life story writing, like biographies and autobiographies, and the formal academic writing of life history research.

The engagement with the debates around the writing of formal life history research brought another concern to the fore, namely that it is not possible to detail every aspect of a woman's life when writing up her life history (Weiler & Middleton 1999:115-128). They argue that the life history researcher should not attempt to establish all the "truths" in their lives, as the researcher has to respect that there are areas of privacy in so much of the women's lives that they may not want to share. They advise to consider taking into account the "kaleidoscope" effect, i.e. you look and you see one fascinatingly complex pattern.

The literature brought an important argument about the differences between qualitative, and in this case life history studies specifically, and quantitative data to the fore. Miller (2000:8) argues that the information obtained from a life history study spans all aspects of a person's lifetime, or a whole network of family members instead of a variable based quantitative dataset based upon a probability sample of individuals taken at a "…single cross-section of historical time and place".

### 2.2.3   Women's Writing

This theme and its related cluster of terms deal with the writing of women and the key debates and concerns surrounding it. The reason why a section of the review is allocated to the topic of women's writing is because this life history study focuses on the life of an exceptional black woman in South Africa and the way in which her lifelong learning experiences shaped and transformed her meaning perspectives. The study also explores the ways in which diverse contexts impacted on her learning through life. The literature is thus explored with the aims of the study in mind.

I also wish to ascertain the differences and similarities in the experiences of these women's lives, as well as the relevance of their writing for the investigation into Madelwa's life. The literature also explores the place of African women in the field of life history research on the African continent. The cluster of terms that forms part of this theme includes autobiography, biography, "testimonio", change, transformation.

One of the key concerns revealed in the literature review is the gap in the field of life history research in South Africa and on the African continent generally. This point is argued in a book by Qunta (1987), which consists of a series of very interesting papers, interviews and biographies in which African women speak in their own voices. The focus of the book is on the contribution African women have made to the world, as well as on the reasons for the African woman's virtual absence from the field of research. She wants women on the African continent to not only write their stories, but to do more research on issues that have shaped their personal lives, traditions, indigenous practices and their place within the academic world. This study aims to answer her plea in a small way.

Especially interesting and relevant for this study was the paper by Dabi Nkululeko in Qunta's book, called "The right to self-determination in Research: Azanian women". One of her statements links very well to one of the aims of this research, namely to use Madelwa's learning experiences to investigate the relationship between lifelong learning experiences and transformation in an individual's life. She says: "… women themselves within the nation must produce knowledge required for their own emancipation and do so through research which takes their experience into account" (Qunta 1987:88-92).

In a previous section of the literature review I referred to the concerns around deception and honesty in life history writing and the controversy currently surrounding Rigoberta Menchu, the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner and her researcher. It remains, in my view, one of the best and most famous examples of a life history. Beverley (2000:555) calls it a "testimonio". Although the "testimonio" is not seen as a literary form that is encased by normative forms, it is a perfect example of how the socio-cultural and political contexts in a woman's life transform her to become a fighter for peace in her country. The difference between the "testimonio" and the life history, the biography and the autobiography, is that the "testimonio" is most concerned with changing oppressive structures than with literary structures. The "testimonio" is seen as 'resistance literature' and the author of the "testimonio" is called the 'activist'. The author "testifies" in the "… hope that his or her life story will move the reader to action in concert with the group with which the testifier identifies" (Tierney 2000: 541-542). In spite of the difference between the life history and the "testimonio", it served as a useful source and guide towards the construction of this life history study.

The link between the "testimonio", in this case that of Rigoberta Menchu, and the life history study which I undertook, is the fact that the "testimonio" very clearly spells out the various themes, like identity, race, class, gender, socio-economics, culture, religion, marriage and childhood in this Guatemalan woman's life. These factors led to her learning, led her to change her meaning perspectives and contributed to her transformation into a freedom fighter. In the first chapter she writes extensively about her parents and their contribution to her changed perspectives. She writes from a place of deep respect for her culture and customs and the role that the church played in shaping her perspectives about humanity. She shares her early

perspectives on socio-economic and political oppression and how those forms of oppression made her realize that she had to change her perspectives. There is, though, also the deep commitment to preserve the customs laid down by her ancestors so as not to let them lose their meaning to her and make her lose her Indian identity.

She was driven very strongly by the realization that "…we shouldn't lose faith in change" (p.149). Her 'theory' is that real change comes from "… inside people" (p.246) and that once that change happens those "…people, the masses, are the only ones capable of transforming society" (p.246). Her 'theory' (based on her experiences) thus was that all the experiences people make throughout their lives change them, change their meaning perspectives on contextual issues and ultimately lead to a transformed society.

A paper by June Purvis (1985:179-205) reflects on her historical documentary research from a feminist perspective, in which she tries to capture women's personal experiences and their voices in order to "… help women to understand their situation and perhaps change it". She argues that as a woman and a feminist she has come to realize that the feminist research that she undertook, gave her a better understanding of her own life and of the lives of the women that she was researching. She emphasizes the importance of an awareness of the changes and continuity between past and present when doing life history research.

Another concern is that women often understand what is happening to them in a particular context and know that things have to change, but find it extremely difficult to engage with their own immediate context critically,

because it would entail "de-familiarizing  particularly those things one would like to take for granted" (Daymond 2003:6). Daymond argues, and I agree, that "Seismic cultural shifts are under way in South Africa at present" and that critics, and here she refers to feminist critics, have to play an active role to provoke and nurture such change.

Many stories of exceptional black women in South Africa have been written thus far. The changes and continuity between past and present, as well as critical thinking on issues within their immediate contexts referred to above, emerge quite clearly from these stories, but very few are in the form of historical documentary research. An example is the autobiography of Ellen Kuzwayo (1985) in which she eloquently and beautifully describes her journey towards the wholeness attained by the transitional woman – her experiences of lifelong learning and how her perspectives on issues like crime, tribalism, marriage, the church and ethnicity changed throughout her life and subsequently transformed her as a person.

Throughout her autobiography she describes very eloquently the traumatic experiences that led to her rebirth or transformation into a woman, e.g. the night that she had to sleep in a graveyard to hide from the tyranny of an abusive marriage, the guilt about leaving her children behind and the new roles she took on, as a transformed person, after those experiences..

A key theme in her autobiography is the role of the Church in the lives of black women in South Africa and the ways in which this institution has influenced the lives of the black community, and " … in particular the lives of the women in that community" (p.287). According to her there is " … no doubt that mission schools played a very important role in preparing black

women to develop the confidence to stand side by side with men …" (p.288). She laments the destruction by the then Nationalist Government of "fountains of knowledge, progress and Christian values…" like Lovedale, Healdtown, Adams College and others (p.289).

She regrets, however, the fact that the white missionaries belittled the customs and traditional practices of black people and judged those as heathen and primitive. She continues to discuss the detrimental consequences this attitude and practice had on the lives of a whole people, and how, sadly, they succeeded in dividing the so-called Christian black people and their non-Christian brothers and sisters. She uses excellent examples throughout her book to illustrate how women who had accepted the Christian Gospel had to grapple with the transitional problems of the two overlapping cultures. The author clearly sees the inter-relatedness between past experiences, its impact on the present and the possibility of reshaping issues of religion and culture in future.

In the foreword to the book Bessie Head describes it as one of the books that will one day be the 'Bible' for the younger generations. This is a very debatable statement, as this country still suffers from a lack of a culture of reading. Having this kind of book out in the bookshops makes it accessible only to those who can afford to buy books. If it had been documented research that would catch the eye of academics and educationists it could possibly have been a prescribed book at high schools and universities, as it fits into different disciplines.

Khuzwayo's book is, however, being used quite extensively by especially

feminist critics and English literary scholars who wish to engage with the English fictional and autobiographical texts of black South African women writers like Khuzwayo and others, some being referred to in this review.

Thanks to the fact that much academic research has been done around the work of Bessie Head, she (Head) has become an internationally known writer whose works are prescribed at many learning institutions across the world and whose life remains a source of research by many students. An important work on the life of Bessie Head is her biography by Gillian Stead Eilersen (1995), in which she describes Head's extraordinary creative energy, and her often grinding circumstances. Bessie Head produced books like *When rain clouds gather (1968), Maru (1971), Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind (1981),* and many others, as well as articles and chapters in books, which led to her international acclaim.

Another author whose life history is also a source for feminist and literary critics, is Sindiswa Magona (1990). Had her life history been academically researched and documented, and made available to other audiences, another rich source for the understanding of the Xhosa culture and specifically the role of a woman within that culture would have been available. She describes in a fascinating way how her experiences had led her to change her perspectives on many things in life and how those perspectives, some born out of very painful experiences, made her grow and become the strong, talented woman she now is. She thought that after having trained as a teacher she would be able to live a dignified life and raise her children well, but was cruelly disillusioned. She was faced with a series of painful experiences, like the loss of her job as a teacher, because she dared to fall pregnant before she was officially married. She suffered the pain and humiliation of

unemployment, poverty and hunger and having to resort to domestic work, of which she says: "More than anything, however, being a domestic servant did more to me than it did for me. It introduced me to the fundamentals of racism" (Magona 1990: 145).

The cruel practice of the fundamentals of racism is the key theme in the life history of Miriam Makeba (1988) in which she so clearly describes her life, using the four directions referred to in the focus on page 6. The links between lifelong learning experiences and adult learning theories start emerging gradually from the content of this book, e.g. she describes her life – going to prison at the age of eighteen days with her mother, her feelings about losing her father at the age of five years, her childhood years of growing up under apartheid; how, halfway through her school years, Bantu Education was introduced, and the Group Areas Act was passed. Although she emerged as a talented singer, she continued to be harassed by apartheid laws. Her marriages ended in divorce.

The biggest trauma in her life was the death of her mother while she was in America and the refusal of the South African authorities to allow her back, neither to the funeral nor to visit the grave. She was exiled from the country of her birth. This changed her life and her perspectives on the political situation in South Africa. Her fear of speaking out against apartheid then changed to anger and courage – and in 1963 she spoke to the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid. The woman who grew up in fear, and was raised to "be quiet" was now transformed into a fearless fighter. She became "… a spokesperson for my people. My appearance before the UN Special Committee changes my life…" (pp.111-113). Makeba clearly identifies and

explains those life wide experiences that led her to "… a new and revised interpretation of the meaning of such experiences" (Mezirow 1994:222-227).

Makeba's autobiography challenges some of the considerations of white feminist critics about the writing of black women in South Africa. Her story transcends the "horizontal line" which some feminist critics like Lockett (1990:19) refer to in their critique of black women writers. Lockett postulates that black women's writing is primarily socio-historical and that its purpose is to record the experiences of black people in South Africa under apartheid.

Central to the writing of the afore-mentioned women is the abuse of power in the relationships between African men and women. Motsei (2007:160 -161) states that the spiritual liberation of African women and men is intertwined, and that African women can therefore not afford to give up on African men. She cautions, however, that supporting men does not mean remaining silent when they act in a way that contradicts the age-old practice of respecting a woman's integrity and humanity, and is detrimental to her physical, spiritual and psychological wellbeing. Motsei urges African women to focus on their primary relationship, which according to her is their relationship with themselves. She postulates that they should rebuild a loving, caring and nurturing relationship with their bodies and their souls (p.161).

## 2.2.4   Lifelong Learning

This study investigates the relationship between lifelong learning and transformation in Madelwa's life. Through an exploration of the literature I wanted to establish those aspects of lifelong learning which would best meet

the outcome of the study, justify the broad definition of lifelong learning in Chapter 1, and identify the terms related to the concept of lifelong learning.

 The concept of lifelong learning, which is crucial to this study, can be very confusing, as it combines individual learning and institutionalized learning (Jarvis 2004:65). There are many and varied definitions of lifelong learning. In his paper on Lifelong Learning (1995:4) Aitchison views the articulation of the purposes, aims and potential of lifelong learning as expressions of possibilities rather than observed realities. In the next two paragraphs I will explore and compare some of the debates around lifelong learning. Although I have given a broad definition of lifelong learning for the purpose of this study, I do not wish to promote one particular definition of lifelong learning, as they are too varied.

Although lifelong learning is a much debated concept, it is certainly not new. Longworth & Davies (1996: 39) quote the following words, already written in 1609 by Jan Comenius:

> Just as the whole world is a school for the whole of the human race, from the beginning of time until the very end, so the whole of a person's life is a school for every one of us,  from the cradle to the grave.

Another author maintains that learning happens right through life, that the human being is an active participant in this lifelong learning process, and that she or he seeks for meaning in the learning experiences (Jarvis 1988:10).

There is a concern in the field of adult education that lifelong learning is simply seen as an equivalent term for adult education (Aitchison 1995:5). He

claims that, for lifelong learning to be viable, its foundations should be laid in childhood and in youth as well as in schooling systems. Jarvis (2004:315-333) postulates that there are many sources and sites of lifelong learning, like state-provided institutions of learning, non-governmental and other organizations, business and industry, organizations involved in lifelong learning and adult education, self-directed learning, the media and the World Wide Web.

At a national expert meeting on the Delors Report by UNESCO (1996), Mrs. Marie-Angelique Savane (1998) from Senegal emphasised that the main thrust of the message from the Delors Report was that "Lifelong learning has its four pillars, learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be". She maintained that this definition of lifelong learning "…is a plea for a transformation culture which encourages people to change their lives and adapt their way of thinking, wherever they may live, be it in Latin America, Africa, Asia or Europe". This meeting also powerfully re-asserted a fundamental principle, namely that education should contribute to every person's development at all levels – mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality.  The outcome of this kind of learning should be the ability to think critically, and to make independent judgments in terms of the best courses of action in the different contexts of their lives.

An interesting perspective on lifelong learning is that of ageing (CONFINTEA V 1997:161-162). The authors of this document postulate that the negative meaning of ageing, namely that there is normally a decline in physiological capacity as people grow older, especially once they retire, is changing. They refer to the fact that a transformation of the notion of ageing has occurred over the last two decades within the social sciences and

gerontology. They maintain that the way older adults remain active learners is influenced by the quality of education they received during their childhood and adult life, and refer to lifelong learning as a "cumulative process". In their view older people have different strategies of learning, like relying on their prior learning experiences, which includes their ability to structure and analyze information.

A key argument in the debates on lifelong learning is one by Miller (2000:22) that the concept of age is strongly linked to the concept of time and time-related issues, which in turn gives one an overview of the whole life course and especially of the historical events that have shaped a life.

The literature on lifelong learning reveals a link between time-related issues and change. Life history research, unlike many other research methods, assists to attain a proper focus on historical change and therefore a life history cannot be told without constantly referring to historical changes. The central focus on change is one of the greatest values of life history research: "Invariably the gathering of a life history will entail the subject moving to and fro between the development of their own life cycle and the way in which external crises and situations (wars, political and religious changes, employment and unemployment situations, economic change, the media and so forth) have impinged on this" (Plummer 1983:70).

According to Medel-Anonuevo (2002:170), the most important contribution of lifelong learning should be to create an understanding of patriarchy and the consequent male-biased lifelong learning that dominated education throughout the ages.

Because this study aims to investigate the relationship between life long learning experiences and transformation in an individual's life, it is important to look at the term 'transformational learning' and its link to life long learning experiences, before situating it within a particular theoretical framework. Transformational learning can occur gradually or through a sudden, powerful experience and it can change the way one perceives oneself and one's world (Clark 1993:16). Much of the learning that is done in adulthood adds to our existing knowledge, i.e. to *what* we know, while transformational learning '… changes … *how* we know (Kegan 2000:49).

### 2.2.5    Towards a theoretical framework

The main aim of this study was to investigate how Madelwa's meaning perspectives on life were shaped and transformed by the experiences she was exposed to in her various lifelong learning contexts. The above sections of the literature review explained and justified the decision made for this study by explaining the key themes or concepts, which were life histories, women, lifelong learning, research methodology, and their related terms. The links between some of the key concepts like lifelong learning and transformation already became clear, without being developed into a full-blown theory (Vithal and Jansen 1997:17).

The literature review reveals the need for theories that would take the main aim of the study, the key research questions as well as the following concerns into account: the socio-cultural environment as a significant factor in the learning process; the value of the process of critical reflection; recognition of the fact that humans have the ability to 'sift and evaluate' and act on the external stimuli received from their experiences; experiential

learning should be central to the theories of adult learning, based on their belief that adults learn most effectively when a learning process is based on a problem or need in their lives (Jarvis 1988:108). Other considerations were that the theories should be sensitive to issues of feminism and gender.

There should be an understanding of not only the external stimuli received from experiences, but also of the internal stimuli like emotions and feelings. I am aware that this consideration conflicts with the fact that Western epistemology was based on the belief that there is no place for emotion and personal feelings in the process of knowledge production. Postmodernists responded to this by promoting the use of the first person in life histories (Tierney 2000:548), and in so doing opened the way for vulnerability in the life history text. The theories should thus make provision for these kinds of developments within life history research. Lastly, the theories should also be falsifiable: able to be proved wrong by counter-examples (Gilbert: 1993).

The literature reveals interesting arguments on epistemology and ontology. What I found most interesting and applicable to this study, was Ladson-Billing's (2000:257-258) statement, which I agree with, namely that the "…concept of epistemology is more than a 'way of knowing'." She says that an epistemology is a "system of knowing". She further states that there is a strong link between epistemology and worldview, and that the conditions under which people live and learn shape both their knowledge and their worldviews. This statement is especially relevant to Madelwa's system of knowing, as analysed in the findings.

An important argument around the construction of knowledge and the interpretation of the world is raised by Paulo Freire in Kincheloe and

Mclaren (2000:290). He argues that our interpretation of the world is both an ontological (referring to being) and an epistemological (referring to knowledge) act. He maintains that on an ontological level we have to interpret the world so we can become more fully human. It is epistemological in the sense that critical hermeneutics, which puts interpretation at centre stage, offers people a method for investigating the conditions of their existence. This often leads to challenging or disrupting of the status quo, be it in a religious, personal or political context.

The key challenge in the writing of this life history study was to find those theories that would more or less meet the above considerations or requirements, not losing sight of the fact that Neuman (2000:146) states that the theory should ideally develop during the data collection process. This makes qualitative theory flexible and allows data and theory to interact. It also prompted further exploration of additional perspectives on transformative learning in the literature.

A number of theories that addressed the concerns and considerations raised in the previous two paragraphs emerged from the literature review. The most applicable ones were Jack Mezirow's Transformative Theory of Learning (Mezirow:1994) and Paulo Freire's Theory of Critical Consciousness (Freire:1970). It is also clear from the reviewed literature on women's voices in the construction of life history research that, although this life history study is framed within the theories of adult learning, it certainly also fits into the framework of Feminist Theory, which emerges from and responds to the lives of women (Personal Narratives Group:1989:4-5).

As the data collection and analysis processes progressed, I became aware of the interconnectedness of the respective theories, and thus these three theories became the overarching theoretical framework which guided this study, as illustrated in the following diagram:

**Diagram 1: The theoretical framework**
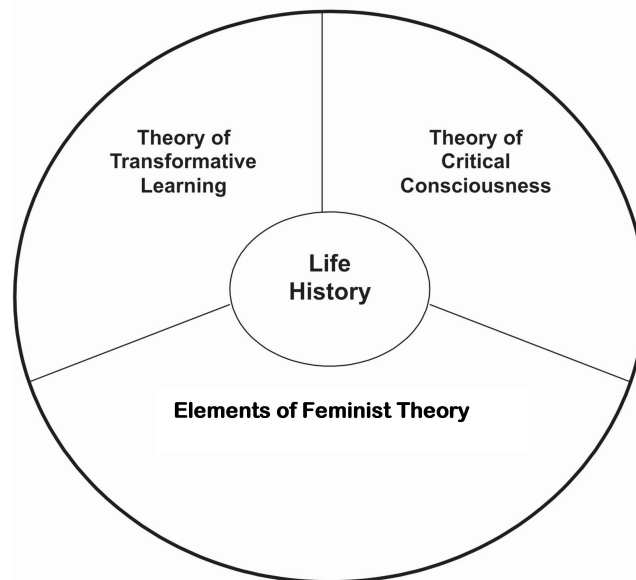


The specifics of each theory and its relation to the life history study will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs:

2.2.5.1 Jack Mezirow's Transformative Theory of Learning

This theory assumes that everyone has constructions of reality which are dependent upon reinforcement from various sources in the socio-cultural world. Mezirow calls these constructions of reality 'perspectives' and claims that these perspectives can be transformed when an individual's perspective

and his experience are not in harmony with each other (Jarvis 1988:102). In this state of disharmony, the individual starts reflecting on the experience and plans new strategies of living because of his / her re-evaluation of assumptions and beliefs. Mezirow states that this process leads to a transformation of the individual's meaning perspectives, such as specific beliefs, attitudes and emotional reactions (Jarvis 1988:102-108). This occurs especially when people experience life crises or dilemmas, like "…death, illness, separation or divorce, children leaving home, being passed over for promotion or retirement". Eye-opening discussions, books, poems or any major challenge to an established perspective can lead to a transformation and, according to Mezirow (1991:168) "…these challenges are painful". They often make one question deeply held personal values and threaten one's feelings of self-worth.

Mezirow conducted a national study of women returning to college after an interruption in their studies. The outcome of this study suggested that the above process of perspective transformation involves ten phases:
 "1.  A disorientating dilemma (which is often a personal crisis)
  2.  Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
  3.  A critical assessment of epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic assumptions, when they realize that something is not consistent with what they perceive as 'truth'
  4.  Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
  5.  Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions
  6.  Planning of a course of action
  7.  Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
  8.  Provisional trying of new roles

9.  Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective" (Mezirow 1991:168-169).

Through the above phases Mezirow emphasizes (1) the fact that it is not enough that the new perspective is *seen* or *recognized*, but that it should be *lived* as well, and (2) that "The most significant learning involves critical premise reflection of premises about oneself" (Mezirow 1994:224).

Besides Mezirow, other researchers like Morgan (1987), Williams (1986) and Hunter (1980) also conducted studies to determine the role that perspective transformation played in the lives of displaced home makers, abusive husbands and people experiencing ill health, respectively. Their studies, together with that of Mezirow, attested to the fact that perspective transformations were not easy for the respondents and that the biggest difficulties were experienced especially at the beginning where the respondent critically analyses his / her ideas, values and assumptions and the feelings about these. The other difficulty is at the point where one would expect reflective action to happen, but this took time, as the respondent required emotional strength and an act of will to move forward in a transformed way. Although differences in the responses of the above groups were noted, the transformation process, according to Mezirow (1991:174), showed basic similarities.

The literature revealed some challenges to Mezirow's theory, especially those that surfaced during a study by Musgrove (1977), an English sociologist. His respondents were people, men and women, who had moved

into abnormal life roles, e.g. those who had become blind in adult life, those who had contracted incurable physical disabilities, and so on, his focus being on the modification of consciousness in adulthood through the experience of marginality. He found that these dilemmas did not in themselves result in a major transformation of identity.

He summarises his findings as follows: "Finding new recipe knowledge, does not necessarily sustain a new reality: it supports and even strengthens the old "(Musgrove 1977:14-15). He also asserts that these processes of change normally happen to adults in their twenties and early thirties. Mezirow (1991 177- 193) disputes this, and argues that the ability to transform meaning schemes, which is integral to the process of reflection as well as the ability to assess or reassess our basic premises and find them unjustified, coupled with a process of perspective transformation, which may lead to major life changes, exist throughout adult life. He states the various contexts in which this is possible, e.g. in individuals, in social movements, the workplace, in group work and in marginal situations. This statement creates concern, as not everybody develops as a result of their experiences, nor may they necessarily learn from it (Jarvis 2004:132).

Key to debates on transformation is the belief that a life is shaped by key critical turning-point moments or moments of revelation in a person's life called epiphanies. These events could leave permanent marks on an individual's life. Therefore biographical texts "…will typically be structured by the significant turning-point moments in a subject's life". (Denzin 1989: 22).

Rigoberto Menchu's 'theory' links very strongly to that of Mezirow, namely that "Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world" (Mezirow 1991:167). Mezirow further states that perspective transformation can either happen through a gradual growth of transformed meaning schemes, due to a series of dilemmas or externally imposed dilemmas, such as in Rigoberto Menchu's case. Death, cruel child labor, political and economical oppression were eye-openers to her and made her challenge her previously accepted establishment. They assisted her in reintegrating new roles into her life, e.g. that of freedom fighter, on the basis of "…conditions dictated by one's new perspective" (p.169).

Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation gradually unfolds in the most interesting way in the various phases of the life of one of the women whose life history is discussed in this review of the literature. Ellen Khuzwayo identifies the disorientating dilemmas, as well as how those dilemmas made her change her meaning perspectives and the various ways in which she consequently negotiated her 'transformed' life with those close to her (Khuzwayo 1985:139-153).

A key criticism of Mezirow's work is that he tends to focus too much on the individual, and does not pay sufficient attention to relationships as stimuli and support for perspective transformation. In his most recent work, however, Mezirow acknowledged the important role that social interaction plays in the learning relationship (Baumgarten 2000:17).

Another interesting perspective to transformative learning is currently being researched, namely that of spirituality and learning (Dirkx 2000:1). He refers to the work of Robert Boyd (1988) and his colleagues, which maintains that this way of knowing is mediated mostly through images instead of through concepts or known forms of rationalism. It is further said that these images are not derived from our memories of past experiences or from our perceptions about things, but from a kind of psychic representation that does not correspond in the outer reality. This is called the mytho-poetic view of transformative learning, because it relies on images and symbols, which is the language of poetry. It is thus said that it is learning which includes not only rational or cognitive thought, but also dreams, intuition, rituals, symbols, imagination, fantasy and insight.

Dirkx (2000:2) warns that the research of Boyd and his colleagues is in the beginning stages and that much of it is grounded in the research of depth psychology, with many theoretical and methodological challenges. Mezirow (1991:83) also briefly mentions that one cannot understand the unknown without using the imagination and that one has to be open and reflective to the perspective of others. If this happens "… the richer our imagination of alternative contexts for understanding will be". This literature study does not reveal any further development by Mezirow on the role of imagination in transformative learning.

The emotional upheaval that could result from critical self-reflection on personal psychological beliefs or assumptions about social context is a concern for some authors. This confirms Dirkx's argument in the previous paragraph to a certain extent:

> …the most difficult challenges were at the non-rational level… Immersed in pain and confusion of my own and others' doubts I tried to understand what was happening within myself while cognitively searching for patterns and relationships. Vague, confused and varied feelings, ranging from shame to anger, surfaced … Loneliness was enormous… I became a powerful learner in this non-rational world. Images, feelings, intuitions, dreams and bodily sensings led me to a knowing which went beyond a factual knowing and which I increasingly trusted and came to value (Dirkx in Cranton 1994:18-19).

I was especially interested in the developments of this research around deeper emotional and spiritual dimensions of transformative learning, as it became particularly useful when the role of spirituality within the African context arose from the life history interviews.

It is clear from the above literature that there are some similarities as well as some differences between Mezirow's work and that of other theorists. The various excerpts (above) from the literature made me curious to explore whether Mezirow's theory works in the same way for all people. This life history study explored the theory in relation to Madelwa's life history, which will be analysed to (1) secure the meanings of 'epiphanies' throughout her life and (2) to ascertain how (some of) the meaning perspectives that she has acquired over a lifetime have become transformed.

## 2.2.5.2   Paulo Freire's Theory of Critical Consciousness

In Paulo Freire's major work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (*1970), he propounded the theory that education / learning should emancipate people and lead them to transform their world. The central concept in his theory of learning and education is that of conscientization. According to Freire this is

a process by which individuals "… achieve a deepening awareness of both the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it" (1970b:27).

According to Freire there are four culturally conditioned levels of consciousness. He later moved away from using the word consciousness, but its implication remained the same (Jarvis 2004:119). First, there is intransitive consciousness, an awareness of basic biological needs only and a lack of understanding of history and socio-cultural situations.

A second level of consciousness is that of semi-intransitivity or magical consciousness. He also calls it the 'culture of silence' by which the oppressed accept the oppression, internalize it and have low self-esteem. The third level of consciousness Freire calls naïve or semi-transitive consciousness where people understand their socio- cultural reality and the fact that it is determined by human beings. This group is easily impressed and manipulated by populist leaders (Freire 1970b:123). Freire further asserts that the individual can reach a fourth level of consciousness through conscientization. Once conscientized, he encourages dialogue during which individuals 'test' the validity of assumptions that underlie ideologies, cultural practices and social norms that lead to oppression and dependency. Through the praxis of critical reflection, which he says "…is also action", social change could be brought about.

An important point in Freire's thought is the fact that he juxtaposed two opposing cultures into the understanding of his theory, namely that of the oppressed and that of the ruling elite (Jarvis 2004:120). The crux of his argument therefore is that education can never be neutral. This statement by

Freire links very strongly to the nature and culture of Bantu Education and Christian National Education in South Africa, which, as Clifford (1997:9) asserts "…did not promote critical or creative thinking …".

The one similarity between the theories is that Freire and Mezirow both believe that learning is a liberating force and that this liberation happens when there is reflection and subsequent action upon an experience. Through Freire's lens it is a process of releasing the individual from the prison of false consciousness created by the dominant culture of the oppressor (social-justice oriented), while Mezirow clearly sees that freedom from a psychological (cognitive-rational) perspective (Jarvis 2004:133). Baumgarten (2001:16) maintains that both theorists take a constructivist approach to transformative learning by asserting that "… knowledge is not 'out there' to be discovered but is created from interpretations and reinterpretations in light of new experiences" (Mezirow:1996).

Both theories link very closely to the Theory of Experiential Learning which defines learning as "…the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" Kolb 1993:153). Kolb further describes learning as a human process that encompasses all life stages, from childhood through to old age. It emphasizes the process of adaptation and learning; that knowledge is continuously created and recreated and is therefore a transformation process; that learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective forms.

### 2.2.5.3 Elements of Feminist Theory

Because Feminist Theory covers such a broad field, and because this is not a study on feminism specifically, I have only looked at certain elements of feminist theory that are applicable to this study. My approach is based on the notion that there are multiple levels of oppression of women in the third world, based on race, class, gender and imperialism.

Feminist theorists argue that listening to the voices of women, studying and interpreting their writing and learning from their experiences are crucial components of the feminist reconstruction of the way we understand the world. Since feminist theory is "…grounded in women's lives and aims to analyse the role and meaning of gender in those lives and in society, women's personal narratives are therefore essential primary documents for feminist research" (Personal Narratives Group 1989:4-5).

There are many ways in which these narratives can present and interpret women's life experiences, the life history being one of them. Feminist theory claims that a woman's story is seldom told without reference to the dynamics of gender. Proof of this is found in all the life stories discussed above, where the dynamics of power relations, and in particular the power inequalities between women and men as well as the subtle inequalities like the gender division of labour, form a major part of the content of every book. These issues are major concerns of feminist theory.

Key issues are to be taken into account by women doing research on women. The assumption is that most of these researchers are driven by commitment to women and not merely pursuing their own careers or adding knowledge to

the world. If feminism or feminist theory is to be of any meaning "…it must involve a critique of traditional concepts and structures that have marginalized women, materially and psychologically, in the world and even in their own souls. It must also ultimately aim at social transformation" (Gluck & Patai 1991:118).

This study also explores the role that feminist theory plays in producing women's histories. Initially, in the late 1960's, feminist writers began to explore the lives of women who had been "hidden from history" (Weiler 1999:44). This literature review explores, to a certain extent, the relationship between feminist theory and Paulo Freire's Theory of Critical Consciousness, especially since feminist theory focuses very strongly on the oppression of patriarchy and on studies of women's resistance to the dominant order. hooks (1988:24-26) argues that feminists should engage dialectically in a committed way in order to come to 'critical consciousness', which demands giving up set ways of thinking and being, shifting paradigms, and opening up to the unknown, the unfamiliar. This is said in relation to sex, race and class as systems of oppression. It is also said in relation to the fact that feminists often reinforce and perpetuate these structures. In order to do this, women have to change their consciousness, in order to change their actions or to demand change from others, as the main agenda of feminism has always been the transformation of individual consciousness and ultimately, of society.

A key concern in feminist theory is the analytical principles that are present in (Western) feminist discourse on women in the Third World and the yardstick by which the cultural other is encoded and presented. The concern is also about how power is exercised in discourse. Mohanty (2004:18-22) is

highly critical of the distinctions made between Western feminist representation of women in the Third World and Western feminist self-presentation. She argues that "these distinctions are made on the basis of the privileging of a particular group as the norm or referent".

The literature search revealed many interesting approaches to feminism that could contribute important elements to the outcome of this research. One such approach is the Modernist woman-centred approach to gender difference writings. Beasly (2005:48) postulates that "The overall spirit of Modernist woman-centred thinking, has been to acknowledge and give credence to women's 'ways of knowing, being and valuing". Beasley further states that the Modernist variant of Gender Difference Feminism is also termed 'Identity politics' feminism, because it focuses especially on women's difference from men, women's commonality with each other and the positive content of marginal identities (woman). Griffiths (1995) further explores this approach in her 'web of identity' discussion, referred to in this literature review.

Because this study aimed to investigate the relationship, if any, between lifelong learning experiences (within their diverse contexts) and transformation in a woman's life, it focused on the ways in which the three theories, with their differences and similarities in mind, as well as their links to the other perspectives and theories discussed above, are applicable to Madelwa's life history. These three theories thus form the theoretical framework of this study. The study also drew conclusions as to the relevance of these theories to the outcome of this research.

Chapter 3

# Research Design and Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the processes employed in conducting the life history research study. The first part of the chapter describes the methodology, as well as the research techniques employed in this study. It focuses strongly on the researcher / participant relationship, the design of the interview instrument and the actual interview process. The second part of the chapter explains the process of interpretation and analysis of the data.

## 3.2  The methodology

This study employs a life history methodology. Bertaux (1981:136-137) views this approach as a meaningful and often most suitable way to analyse history, as it "gets back to history and it gets back to the individual". He does, however, caution about an important epistemic disadvantage, namely the use of retrospective data that may be biased, distorted, inaccurately collected or re-shaped by the respondent. He further advises that the researcher should try to get involved in the life of the respondent, at least for a short while, to closely observe the possibilities of the above happening. Life history methodology's main strength is its emphasis on the subjective reality of the individual, on process and on the totality of the individual. The focus within life history methodology is on the meanings people attach to their experiences (McAdams 1993:11).

A key issue in qualitative research is the fact that a researcher is simultaneously guided and constrained by the highly abstract principles and research perspectives that inform qualitative research. These principles combine a researcher's beliefs about ontology, epistemology and methodology. They also inform a qualitative researcher's world view and actions flowing from it (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:19). The interpretive researcher's epistemological, ontological and methodological beliefs are called an interpretive framework or a paradigm (Guba 1990:17). I noted throughout the study the demands the paradigms relevant to this study made on me in terms of planning the open-ended interviews and interpreting the data afterwards.

This life history study falls within three of the four major research paradigms that structure qualitative research, namely the interpretivist, critical and feminist paradigms. According to Neuman (2003:75-81) the interpretive social science approach sees social reality as consisting of people who construct meaning and create interpretations through their daily social interaction. Interpretive researchers want to discover what actions mean to the people who engage in them. Although this paradigm contains concepts and limited generalizations, there is no dramatic departure from the experience and inner reality of the respondents. Interpretive research is relativistic regarding values, "… and sees values and meaning infused everywhere and in everything… uses techniques that are sensitive to context, and that are more concerned with achieving an empathic understanding than with testing laws of human behaviour" (p.79).

I found it difficult to align this study completely with the interpretivist paradigm, as it raises questions about my role in this particular study. The

interpretive social science researcher does not see any group or person's values as wrong, only different. She or he would describe a group or person's meaning system without critiquing it in any way. Janesick (2000: 384-385) argues in support of the above argument that "There is no value-free or bias-free design". Other authors argue that the age of value-free inquiry for the human disciplines is over (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:19).

I therefore argue that, although life history methodology falls within a broadly interpretivist paradigm, it may also be strongly underpinned by the critical paradigm or critical social science approach. There are some similarities between the interpretive social science approach and the critical social science approach, e.g. the critical social science approach agrees with interpretive social science that positivism fails to deal with the meanings of individuals and their capacity to feel and think.

There are some very important differences as well. Some of these differences are important for this study, e.g. Freire's Theory of Critical Consciousness (Freire: 1970), which forms an important component of the theoretical framework of this study, also falls within the critical paradigm. In line with Freire's thinking, critical researchers believe that interpretive social science is passive, even immoral, as it does not take a strong value position and does not encourage people to question, challenge and act on their reality in order to transform it, in contrast to critical social science which is action oriented, with a clear purpose of changing the world. The role of the critical researcher is that of "transformative intellectual" (Guba & Lincoln 2000:115).

I further argue that life history methodology, as I employ it, is underpinned by a third epistemological approach, which is less well known than the two

previously discussed paradigms, but important for this study, namely the feminist paradigm. The feminist paradigm "…attempts to give a voice to women and to correct the male-oriented perspective that has predominated in the development of social science" (Neuman 2003: 88). It is also seen as a highly diversified and contested site, but most authors agree that "feminist inquiry is always dialectical and always committed to action in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:159). It rejects sexism in concepts and research questions. Like critical social science it is action-oriented and aims to facilitate personal and societal change. It also encourages empathic connections between the researcher and the researched and recognizes the importance of human feelings and emotions.

In designing the research study I came to the careful conclusion (from the literature) that there is no one, absolutely correct approach to social science research and that elements of all three of the above-mentioned paradigms are applicable to this study. I thus decided to utilize elements of the critical paradigm and the feminist paradigm in this study, in addition to interpretivist elements, especially when formulating the research questions. The reason for this is that this life history study aims to investigate how the lifelong learning experiences have shaped and transformed the respondent's meaning perspectives. The interpretive social science approach aims to understand and describe meaningful social action, but does not suggest or empower people with tools needed to change themselves or the world, as is done by the other two paradigms. Neumann (2003:90) argues that most researchers operate primarily within one paradigm, but many also combine elements from the others.

## 3.3  Research techniques

The primary means of obtaining narrative accounts within the narrative or life history research context is through interviews. One of the important strengths of the narrative interview is that it gives the research participant much more central control in shaping the research agenda. In contrast to the standard interview in which the researcher brings a series of questions or theories for exploration through the interviews, the narrative interview researcher asks the participant to assist with the identification of the major themes (Murray 2003:101-102).

I used the life history interview, which is a special type of field interview, in which the researcher interviews and gathers documentary material about a particular individual's life. (Neuman 2003:372). I envisaged that other sources related to her life history would also be provided, like photos and letters as well as interviews with friends, siblings and children, but this did not materialize. The reason for this will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on findings of the study. Silverman (2000:829) maintains that researchers should guard against having too much data, as it is imperative to have a limited body of data to work with to achieve effective analysis. The qualitative researcher should explore different kinds of data, but should establish the data set with which to work. I thus used the interviews as the only sources of data.

I felt that the interview, in this case the open-ended interview, was the best way of implementing the 'life course paradigm' as the interview involves direct personal contact with the participant. According to Bless & Higson-Smith (2000:104-106), interviewees are free to expand on the topic as suits

them, to share their own experiences and to focus on specific aspects of the topic under discussion. The interviewer does not intervene to give directions or confront the interviewee with probing questions. She only intervenes when it is necessary to ask questions for further clarification or explanation or to direct the flow of ideas.

Coupled with the afore-mentioned is the fact that in African culture there are certain questions that a younger interviewer would simply not ask an older interviewee, as it would be deemed disrespectful. I was mindful of this fact throughout the interviews. I did not want to create a situation where Madelwa would not want to express her real opinions or feelings because she felt disrespected.

One way in which I attempted to generate questions about Madelwa's life was by using the inter-disciplinary branch of social science analysis known as 'the life course paradigm'. This paradigm directs us to think about five key elements: "the location of lives in time and space, the linking of different lives, the importance of human agency, meanings and individual goals, and the timing of lives" (Giele & Elder 2001:123). I conscientiously bore these five elements in mind while negotiating the themes with Madlewa. Most of the themes, listed in section 3.6 on the interview process, were subsequently generated with these five elements in mind.

Jansen, Herman & Pillay (2004:79-82) postulate that researchers should guard against the design of research questions that assume certain inevitable outcomes, are suggestive or are 'leading questions' instead of being open-ended and exploratory. This was said in the context of doctoral students researching their own learning within a formal post-graduate research

process, but is also applicable to the design of research questions relating to life history research, and served as a 'cautioning' guide to me throughout the design of the interview questions.

## 3.4 The role of the researcher as well as the researcher / participant relationship

A key concern in qualitative research is the importance of the relationship between the researcher and the researched in the interview process. What is told as well as the meaning of what is told is shaped by this relationship (Clandinin & Connelly 1999:420). " Life history research, perhaps more than any other, involves establishing and maintaining a close and intimate relationship with the subject …", but at the same time the same author cautions that this may lead to a potential tension between friendship and professionalism (Plummer 2001:136-137).

In the case of this study Madelwa and I negotiated the more sensitive aspects of this kind of relationship beforehand, e.g. the focus and potential aims of the research, interviewee access to the envisaged interview schedule and interview transcripts, discussion of the transcripts, and what will be done with the final product. These discussions were not difficult, as Madelwa had herself been involved in a research project at university (certificate) level. She has also been doing community–based research for years and could therefore identify with most of the terminology. She was in full agreement with the aims of the study, and the potential it had to contribute to life history research within South Africa. An agreement was also reached as to the degree of control she would have over the contents. This lent a formal character to the research process.

Rubin & Rubin (1995:41–42) state that the interviewer is an important actor in the sense that her self-confidence, adaptability, willingness to hear and change direction or discover a new theme, is important. The interviewer always has to stay prepared for multiple possibilities and be ready for new discoveries, while at the same time allowing for mistakes.

Thus the life history interviewer has to be very flexible, something that I found one of the biggest challenges, but also the strongest learning experience of the whole process.

## 3.5  Design of the interview instrument

Rubins & Rubins (1995:83) maintain that one major goal of interview design is for the researcher to ensure that she gets the detail, depth and nuance that are seen as the strengths of qualitative research.

The reason I therefore made a definite decision for the open-ended format as the best choice of interview for life history research was because I had also had real and firsthand experience of why the structured interview does not work for life history research. The M.Ed. class was asked to write an assignment on 'Designing and testing a research instrument relevant to the research project'. At that stage I thought that a structured interview would be suitable to get the life history narrative going.

I thus designed the following questions for the structured interview:

1. What is your date and place of birth?
2. What is your position in the family – are you the 1st, 2nd, last sibling?

3. Where did you attend primary and high school?

4. When did you finish school?

5. What was your career goal when you were at school?

6. Did you realize that goal?

7. What kind of work did your parents do?

8. Did your mother work while you were growing up?

9. Describe in one sentence:

   9.1 The social status of the family in the community of your childhood

   9.2 The economic status of the family

10. Describe in one sentence the political context that you grew up in.

11. Did you study after Matric?

12. If yes, what did you study?

13. Did you complete your formal post-school studies?

14. What was the nature of your first employment?

15. When did you get married?

16. What did your husband do for a living?

17. How many children were born out of the marriage?

18. Did you work while they grew up?

19. When did your husband die?

I found the design of the structured interview instrument problematic, so that it is a "… neutral and even clinical instrument" (Henning 2004:54). Already I sensed that the questions were of a personal nature and would be difficult to answer without any feeling or desire to elaborate or reminisce. On the other hand, although this was a structured interview, it had an important strength, namely that Madelwa showed great interest in the topic. I did also not get the impression that she felt threatened by the questions that were posed. Mouton

(1996:154) states that, "It has been empirically demonstrated that the more interesting the respondent finds the topic, the more highly motivated he or she will be and this in turn results in an increase in the response rate". The enthusiasm with which she answered the questions and the 'extra' information that she constantly gave, made me decide that the structured interview would not be used in the actual design.

The structured interview was problematic for the life history interview, as it was not possible to get short and to the point answers about a life that spans more than sixty years. Madelwa could not give straightforward answers as to where she completed her high school education, as for her, high school life was linked to Bantu Education policies and stories about the power of Roman Catholic Schools. She had much to elaborate upon and it took quite some time, much more than was originally planned for the interview.

Closed questions can limit interaction and the creative exploration, as well as the opening up of the interview. This could hamper its richness (Wisker 2000:17). This definitely applied in the case of the structured interview, as I also wanted to probe and hear more, but was bound by the kind of instrument that was being administered. It was a valuable learning experience, but also a justification of and support for theorists who maintain that the open-ended interview is best suited for life history research. I then decided to start off with a set of topics on which to base the open-ended interviews.

The main basic method was the interview. The technique was to administer it as a series of open-ended interviews, and to make audiotape recordings of every interview. These interviews served several purposes. They would

assist Madelwa to reconstruct her life memories and to create new qualitative data on the life cycle, the development of self, and how people experience events. The open-ended interview also enabled me to expand with prompting and follow up with questions when there were misunderstandings (Wisker 2000:19). Henning (2004:4-5) states that interviewers should be sensitive to the way interviewees see themselves in an interview situation as it could influence the data that will be elicited from the interviews. One should bear in mind that the interview setting is an unnatural and somewhat artificial situation. In this context Madelwa had to share the meaning that she makes of her life. I thus had to work hard at creating trust and showing empathy while simultaneously 'controlling' the situation.

According to Rubin & Rubin (1995:27) life histories focus more on the experiences of a person and what she or he felt while passing through the various stages of life. Whilst they tell us about life's passages, they also provide a window on social change. Participants therefore shape the accounts of their experiences within the framework of the kinds of questions asked and the ways they are structured. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions that generated themes and contexts from Madelwa's lifelong learning experiences that were analysed afterwards. This technique is based on Freire's Theory of Critical Consciousness which contributed to the development of a critical hermeneutics, because he understood that the generative themes of a culture are central features in a critical social analysis.

Rubin & Rubin (1995:174) postulate that the role of the life history researcher is to examine "… how people experience and understand life stages – schooling, marriage, first job, sexual encounters, retirement, frailty'. I therefore put together a life history interview schedule (pp. 74 & 75) that

she envisaged to cover during the open–ended interview sessions. These topics were adapted from Plummer (2001), and were also submitted for ethical clearance purposes.

## 3.6 The interview process

Janesick (2000:384) argues that the researcher needs to select an interview site and develop a rationale for selecting that site, as access and entry are sensitive components of qualitative research. It was especially important in the case of this life history study, as Madelwa has to make use of public transport. She is elderly and cannot walk long distances. It was then decided that I would go to her home for all the interviews. The times and duration of the interviewing sessions, according to her family schedule and her involvement in community development projects, were then negotiated. She was comfortable and in her own home. This greatly contributed to the trust, rapport and good communication in the researcher – respondent interaction during the interview process. At times the schedules and interview times had to be readjusted to suit Madelwa's changing circumstances, like the funeral of a neighbour who died suddenly.

Before the interview process started, I had a session with Madelwa to explain the purpose of the research, tell her more about what a life history study entails and to negotiate the issues that would be addressed through the interview process. It was agreed that every session would start with informal conversations, during which we would pursue various topics and discuss various phases of her life as they come up. There would be no attempt to record her life story chronologically.

Research ethics were strictly adhered to during the research process.  The process of informed consent was followed, which means that an agreement was signed between Madelwa and I, in which she agreed to participate in the study. We also agreed that her identity would not be revealed and that she could withdraw at any point. I guaranteed the accurate transcription of the data. In order to ensure that this happened, I committed myself to sending her a copy of each transcription. This was done throughout the interview process, ensured total transparency and reinforced the relationship of trust and respect between us.

The literature reveals interesting and conflicting views on the informed consent issue. Some view the informed consent process as sitting at the contradictory base of the institutionalization of research. They argue that although research participants sign a form that 'protects' them and gives them the freedom to withdraw whenever they wish, it also effectively frees the institution from liability and gives all control to the researcher (Fine, Weis, Weseen & Wong:2000). I experienced the opposite, though. Throughout the research process I was very aware of the terms of the informed consent form and was constantly guarding against overstepping the boundaries of trust and privacy.

I also argue that the use of informed consent depends on how the research subject understands and interprets and ultimately uses it to her advantage as well. I found some bias in the literature against 'poor men and women' or 'women on welfare' (Fine, et.al:2000). It is assumed that they would not understand the informed consent process and would then be exploited. This was certainly not the case with Madelwa, who understood and certainly made sure that we honoured the agreement. I rather side with Stacey

(1991:109-131) who refers to the "…potential treacherousness of this relationship… without making the assumption that all people will simply sign the consent form without reading it". The integrity of the researcher becomes questionable in such cases, as we have to read and explain the processes, and ensure that everybody understands before embarking on a research relationship. The argument is supported by Christians (2000) that the agreement must be based on full and open information.

Although the interview time was loosely set at between 45 and 90 minutes, most of the interviews lasted longer, as Madelwa had much to share, and often the discussion of one topic elicited memories of a related topic. Madelwa had a set way of preparing for our interview sessions. She prepared tea and delicious homemade scones for every session, which were enjoyed at a tastefully set table with fine china. Each interview was either preceded by a session of tea and scones or she would indicate a tea-break midway through the session. Serving tea in this way was something she was naturally comfortable with, and to me it was an indication of the way she was brought up. (Her biography in Chapter 4 expands more on this aspect of her life).

It set the tone for the rest of the interview session and assisted in creating a relaxed, though very serious discussion afterwards. When a family member appeared in the kitchen or another part of the house, she or he was called in. The tape recorded was switched off, the family member was introduced and then left again, knowing that we were not to be disturbed. This reinforced the theory that life history interviews should not be restricted to set time-frames. Douglas (1985:657) calls this "creative interviewing", stating that interviewers must out of necessity be creative and adapt to the ever-changing situations that they are confronted with.

I recorded and transcribed all interviews, except the one that dealt with her marriage and the death of her parents and her husband. They were conducted, but not recorded, as I sensed that especially the topic of marriage was very personal. Madelwa later faxed me a written version of these two topics in which she expanded more on our discussion. This was an interesting new learning experience for me and a sign of her sense of 'ownership' of her life history, as well as of her 'partnership' in the research process. In my view the writing up of certain events was possibly a way of indicating her right to reveal only those sections of her life history she felt I needed to know.

At this point in the process Christians's (2000:133-155) argument that

the mission of social science is to enable people to come to mutually held conclusions, became real to me. He argues that communities can be transformed in that way. He further states that Denzin (1997) promotes the feminist communitarian model for research ethics. In this model participants have a say of how the research should be conducted and a hand in actually conducting it. Although this life history study is not based on that model, the interview process contained exciting elements of it. Madelwa's approach to some of the interviews certainly answers to the maxim of the feminist communitarian model, namely that persons are the arbitrators of their own presence in the world.

She was also given some background about the theories within which the study would be framed, as she asked very probing questions about the aims of the study. We then collectively decided to reflect on the following themes. We also agreed that these themes would just be a guide and that other themes would emerge on an ongoing basis throughout the interview processes:

- Birth and family of origin

- Cultural settings and traditions

- Socio-economic and political factors and their effects on your life

- Education

- Love and work

- Marriage and children

- Historical events

- Ongoing and informal learning throughout and because of the above events

- Inner and spiritual awareness and choices

- What was the awareness of the women in your life – mother, grandmothers, sisters, daughters and other women?

- Formal Adult education: what motivated you?

- Has how you were raised, influenced the way you raised your children?

- How have you seen yourself through the years: identities, self-image, self-esteem, an adult learner, at different stages in your life? Who are you now and how have you changed? How has that change contributed to changes in others / the community/ the people you interact with? How has the interaction with them (maybe specific people) changed you?

- What were the most important turning points in your life?

- What were / are the happiest moments in your life?

- What were / are the saddest moments in your life?

- Could you reflect on what and how you have learned from the above?

- What does your life look like from where you are now? Does learning continue? Are you more aware of the 'learning moments' now that you are older?

The six interviews were conducted at Madelwa's home over a period of four months. The data collected during the structured interview referred to above was a good starting point, as it provided me with some important data about her life. The first open-ended interview could build on it. This was a good approach, as both actors had an idea of what the other's expectations were and Madelwa had a clear idea about what content she wanted to share.

The interview process was also an interesting learning experience for me, as I had to learn to listen, in a "new way", as Gluck and Patai (1991:18) call it, and to hold in abeyance the theories that told me what to hear and how to interpret what she was saying. I had to learn to listen to an interview without immediately leaping to interpretations suggested by the theories I envisaged would frame this study and to understand her story from her vantage point. I constantly had to remind myself that Madelwa was constructing the interview and that she should express her uniqueness in its full class, racial and ethnic richness.

A limitation was that I knew Madelwa before this research study. I had experienced her as an extremely intelligent adult learner and I have great respect for her. That made it difficult, initially, to listen carefully and objectively to the logic of the narrative. Only during the third interview I started listening for consistencies and contradictions in her statements about recurring themes and how these themes relate to each other. There is also the culture of respect that makes one careful to ask questions that could be

perceived as personal and private and therefore disrespectful to ask about. During the third interview the process became more structured. I plucked up the courage to ask very specific questions relating to the theories, as by then there was the fear of conducting the interviews and not linking them to the objective of the study.

I also had to learn to make the shift in methodology from data gathering to interactive process and to focus on the process, that is, on the dynamic unfolding of Madelwa's viewpoint. I had to learn to interpret the pauses, the laughter and to explore the meaning behind it.

I went back to Madelwa's house on 20 November 2006 for a follow-up session in order to get more in-depth answers on important issues that emerged during the last interview. This strategy of follow-up questions is advised by Rubin & Rubin (1995:212–213), who maintain that this strategy is also useful to explore newly discovered avenues, and to test and modify emerging themes. In this case I needed to find missing details in order to complete the personal narrative, especially around interview six. Another limitation emerged from this process, namely the fact that there was not an opportunity to interview two of the children, whose contributions would have enriched this study greatly.

After the interviews I then proceeded with an analysis and interpretation of the data, using the narrative analysis approach to life history interviews. Life history research must be closely linked to narrative analysis, "…which takes the very narrative of the life itself as the topic of investigation" (Rubin & Rubin 1995:186). The authors also say that a key element of life story narrative is themes, as there are key themes that start to organize a life. This

proved to be true in the life story that Madelwa told – she organized her life into various major themes while telling her story.

## 3.7  Interpretation and analysis of the data

### 3.7.1  Rationale behind the data analysis procedures

I did not wait until all the interviews were concluded and all the data collected before commencing the analysis. By analyzing the data from each interview immediately after conducting the interview, I obtained information that assisted with directing the open-ended questions for the next interview in a more focused way, i.e. I reached a point where I started asking questions that were directly linked to the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. In the case of this study, this approach was followed from the 3$^{rd}$ interview, but especially for interviews 5 and 6.

Miller (2000:130-131) sees the narrative analysis as having a triangular structure – the one apex being the respondent with her pre-existing subjective and negotiated view of her social reality. The other apex would be the interviewer with her agenda of research interests and goals and the third apex contains the responses to the interviewer's questioning. He further stresses the importance of the researcher / respondent relationship - how they perceive each other, the effect the respondent thinks her responses will have, the goals of the researcher and how she frames the questions and evaluates the answers. Miller sees these considerations as forming the conceptual underpinnings for the narrative approach to the analysis of life history interviews.

I used the narrative analysis approach as described in Miller (2000:133–149), supported by various other authors on the topic, to guide Madelwa through the process. Firstly, the biographical life history was constructed, by clarifying and ordering it into a temporal sequence. This first step is suggested by Rosenthal & Bar-On (1992:10). I was assisted in this process by the first structured interview which was conducted as part of a class assignment. This interview yielded much information about Madelwa's life in more or less chronological order, although the questions were not structured in that way.

The responses to these questions assisted both Madelwa and me with the next step, namely to negotiate the possible main themes that could evolve from the interviews. This then led to the second stage of the analysis, namely the thematic field analysis. We negotiated the possible main themes and focused on the ones most important to Madelwa, but also to me, for the purposes of the research study. The interviews revealed a cross-section of themes, e.g. the issue of gender was discussed at length in interview 1 and surfaced again in different ways in all the other interviews, thus reinforcing the fact that "The narrated life story thus represents a sequence of mutually interrelated themes, which, between them, form a dense network of interconnected cross-references" (Rosenthal & Bar-On 1992:111). The interviewer can influence how the material is related. Miller (2000:133-149) further states that these considerations, the interviewee/interviewer relationship, and the quality of their interaction could make this method truly qualitative.

I then embarked on a process of micro-analysis, having identified the mutually interrelated themes across the interviews. These themes were then

explored in depth and 'blocked together' into units to be scrutinized to gain insight into the topic of the research as well as into the key research questions. "After the thematic field analysis … the task is to reconstruct the perspective of the past, to reconstruct the biographical meaning that the experiences had at the time they happened"(Rosenthal 1993: 68 – 69). These units were then interpreted individually for their meaning.  Hatch & Wisniewski (1995: 7-8) call these units "members of a category".

I then undertook a second level of analysis that identified the relationships between the established categories. The aim was to show how the categories link to one another and to the broader social narratives. This method is suggested in Hatch & Wisniewski (1995:9-11), as well as in Murray (2003:108). Once I completed this process, I had to go back to Madelwa to get more information on the text in some of the interviews to enable me to complete the interpretation. It happened for the themes on Marriage and Death specifically.

The main foci of this chapter were on the methodology and the processes employed towards obtaining the results of the analysis of the themes identified in the interviews. These results are presented and discussed in detail in the next chapter.

*Chapter 4*

**RESULTS: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE DATA**

**4.1  Introduction**

This chapter documents the results of my fieldwork. The first part of this chapter starts with a short biography of Madelwa, the subject of this research project. This is done to provide a contextual framework for understanding the discussion of the findings in Chapter 5. The second part of the chapter consists of a discussion of the themes, and is highlighted with quotations from the interviews to illustrate Madelwa's understanding, and her contribution to this study from the point of view of the research questions.

**4.2  A biography of Madelwa, the research participant**

Madelwa was born in 1939 as the fifth of seven children, and the youngest of four girls. Both her parents were qualified teachers, but her mother did not teach after getting married, because she had a very demanding life, having to raise seven children, run the local post office and take care of the farming as well, which she loved. Her father stopped teaching around 1936, and was equally busy in the community as the Headman or Chief, encouraging community development, providing leadership, and motivating the youth. He was also very heavily involved as a political activist, which Madelwa sees as another dimension of community service. His political involvement later took him beyond the region that they were living in. Eventually, when the struggle for liberation of the oppressed in South Africa became very

intensive, the children became aware of how demanding his political work was. His times away from home became more frequent and extended as well.

It is within this family context that Madelwa grew up. She remembers her mother as a strong woman, who organized her family and her household in a very conscientious manner. She taught them that there was no such thing as gender specific roles and tasks in any household. The boys had to learn to perform the tasks that were traditionally seen as women's work, like cooking and washing, and the girls had to learn how to work in the fields and clean the yard. All sorts of housework chores were rotated within the family's work schedule. She maintains that it taught them to be self-reliant and disciplined to meet life's challenges with commitment and dedication. Her mother set an excellent example in this regard.

Madelwa remembers with fondness the fact that her mother was not a 'kept' woman. Besides being mother and wife her mother also managed the local post office and planted the fields in order to generate income for the family.

The family lived in a very highly Christianized village community. Madelwa maintains that her parents were third generation Christians. Sundays were days of worship and Saturdays were spent cleaning up and preparing the home so that they could go to church on Sunday. The village was predominantly Congregationalist. At that time it was still called the American Board Congregational Church. It later became the United Congregational Church of South Africa. She remembers Sundays as a 'chore-free' day with a festive lunch, relaxation and entertainment of visitors who came for tea. It was a happy day, based on Christian guidelines.

There was a marked separation, though, between Christians and non-Christians. She remembers that the centre of the village was called Emakolweni. That was where the Christians lived. Right towards the border of the community there were few, if any, Christians living. This did not mean that there was no social interaction between the two groups at all. It was just that one group's lives were based on tradition and custom, and the group that Madelwa belonged to was based on Christian culture.

As a result she learnt very little traditional Zulu culture in her early childhood, except in the case of transition ceremonies, marriage and death where there was a good mix of the Christian and the traditional, like paying Lobola, which is an age-old African custom. Smith (2002) describes Lobola as a complicated, formal process. Two families negotiate in order to reach a mutual agreement that the man has to pay in order to marry the woman of his choice. It is a process which is conducted with mutual respect and dignity. Many of these traditional rites were not acknowledged by the Christians.

Madelwa was a sickly child. She suffered from some form of rheumatism, and was often quite ill as a child. She had to spend long periods of time confined to a bed, and subsequently had to spend her first year of formal schooling in bed, being home-schooled by her mother, who was a qualified, though not practicing teacher. She remembers her mother's commitment to taking care of her, teaching the lessons that the teacher sent daily, whilst at the same time meeting the demands of her other activities and responsibilities. This taught her about self-discipline, planning and scheduling at an early age.

Madelwa feels that her mother was also instrumental in teaching her about identity and being comfortable with who she is. Madelwa is left-handed and grew up during a time when teachers forced learners to write with their right hands. When her mother took her back to school she made it quite clear that Madelwa should not be forced to write in a different way, as being left-handed was 'who she is'.

She attended primary school in the same village that the family lived, then went to another town to attend a Catholic school for black girls only, and completed her matric at a well-known Catholic College. As a child she wanted to become a teacher like both her parents, but by the time she completed high school, the Bantu Education Act had been introduced, and she decided that she did not want to be a part of the Bantu Education system.

This principled decision was based on the fact that she grew up in a family where the children were taught to think critically from a very early age, and where they were invited to voice their opinions. She describes the family dinner table as the main 'site' of conversation. Her father sat at the one end of the table, her mother at the other end and the children would arrange themselves according to age around the table. Her father normally led the conversations, eliciting information from the children about school and their daily activities. It was also a loving way of getting in touch with each other's lives around the family meal.

Crucial to this gathering was the structured family prayer, with a Bible reading first. She recalls with humor how some of them fell asleep during the family prayer because they were exhausted. They knew though, that when they woke up, they would still have to do their schoolwork, which was

supervised by their father, who was always writing until the early hours of the morning. She remembers that specifically as her father's role. She thus grew up in a home where family and religious values were established and lived, and where education was seen as central to their lives.

The religious values that she lived as a child were seriously challenged when one of her daughters experienced a major spiritual change, which made Madelwa question the kind of Christianity which she had been living thus far. She came to life-changing conclusions about what spiritual truth really is and realized that there is a place for both religion and culture in a Christian's life.

Madelwa also remembers that there were many political discussions during the meal times. Because her father was a committed anti-apartheid political activist and leader, it was required of him to give regular talks to varied audiences. He would read his talks to the family and request the opinions of the older ones and especially that of their mother. She says that he saw them as his testing ground, whilst at the same time educating them politically. Humility was a leadership quality which he also displayed in his family, illustrating to them that their mother's (a woman's) opinion as well as theirs (his children's), were valued by him.

Although she entered a tertiary institution and stayed there for a short while, Madelwa did not obtain any post-school qualification. The reason for this was not elaborated upon. She got married in 1961, at the age of 22 years, to a laboratory technician who belonged to the Catholic Church. True to the tradition of the time that a 'good' woman leaves the church that she grew up in and joins the husband's church, Madelwa became a member of the

Catholic Church. She then raised her own children in the same way she was raised, namely in the Christian tradition. The couple had six children, five girls and one boy. Madelwa was mostly at home, raising her children. She only started working again in 1978 as an administrator for a welfare agency. All her children went to university and are well established in their respective careers.

While she was at home, she became very involved in a number of community development projects, like HIV and AIDS caregiver training. She also did courses in alternative wellness therapies, like aromatherapy and reflexology which she practices in her free time. Issues of spirituality and natural medicine also filled a big part of her interests, which she had time for as her children were gradually beginning to leave home.

She maintains that she now uses all her lifelong learning experiences at a pace that she herself determines. Although she values lifelong learning of all kinds very much, she stresses the fact that she sees formal education as a crucial component of lifelong learning. At the age of 61 she went to university to complete a Higher Certificate in Economic Development, her motivation being that formal learning gives one the possibility to 'dig deeper', to apply theories and to assess one's own involvement. Although she was a seasoned community development worker, she felt that it was not enough. She had to go and develop her knowledge and skills at a different level and come and plough it back into the community. She was the eldest student in class, did exceptionally well and got a distinction at the end of the course.

Madelwa stopped working at the age of 55. She was working as a finance administrator for a non-governmental organization in her community. By then she had lost her husband and both her parents. She felt great anger at the death of her father who died in a very mysterious way. Madelwa felt that the ruthless machinery of the apartheid state had finally achieved its goal. She suffered terrible grief over the loss of her father, but also grief at the wastefulness of the ruling party. Her anger was directed at the fact that human beings could so needlessly be eliminated. The family suspected that it was a politically motivated death (possibly assassination), but decided not to make a case against the Apartheid government. They felt that it would have been a fruitless exercise, given the culture of oppression and injustice at the time.

Her husband was murdered during the time of political unrest in 1985, while he was walking home from a nearby shop not far from where they lived. Her anger was once again directed at the apartheid government, which she felt had made life in the townships so cheap. She was equally saddened by the death of her mother, who died of natural causes.

Madelwa's commitment and belief in the healing role of the church, in this case the Catholic Church, was seriously challenged when one of her children needed spiritual help from the church. The church did not provide it, as her daughter's experience was linked to African tradition and custom. This made her see the church and its role in a different light, and she became critically conscious of the shortcomings of the church and the deep discrepancies between theory and practice, especially in relation to the role of women. It also made her aware of another shortcoming, namely the failure of the church to establish a link between Church and African culture. She remained

a member of the church, but is now much more critical, and determined to address the above-mentioned issues.

Madelwa experienced more painful dilemmas in her life. She lost her left leg at the age of 61 and had to negotiate a completely new way of living and working, which she did masterfully, as she had no intention of being labeled disabled. She moves slower, and now restricts her community development work to the local township. She previously worked province-wide, but still works as much as ever, especially in the field of HIV and AIDS care-giving and training. Her dream is to learn more about natural medicine and to go to India to gain more knowledge on alternative healing methods. On a more formal level she may even study theology to deepen her knowledge about that discipline. Madelwa believes that learning never stops…

## 4.3   An analysis of the themes identified in the interviews

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between lifelong learning and transformation in an individual's life. The key research questions focus on the way in which diverse contexts impact on an individual's learning through life, as well as on how lifelong learning experiences shape and transform an individual's meaning perspectives. I tried to establish responses to these questions by analyzing the themes, which depict the various and diverse contexts that she was exposed to throughout her life.

I chose to separate the analysis and summary of the key themes that emerged from the interviews in this section, and the main findings into two sections. This is done by presenting the theme and using the data to illustrate it. This is

done to show how Madelwa understands these themes and what light she sheds on them from the point of view of my research questions. The main findings are summarized in the next chapter.

A number of key themes were identified through the interviews. An interesting pattern in the data is that many of the themes are inter-related, and that she could see opportunities for learning in every experience that she made in the various contexts that she found herself in during her life. The influence of her childhood learning from both her parents within the family context is very powerful and the effect thereof is a thread that runs right through all the interviews.

The first theme that cuts across most topics within the narrative is that of **gender**. I am aware of the discourse around what the term gender really means or should mean, but in my analysis of the gender theme, I use the word 'gender' as defined by Kemp & Squires (1997:11) in Debate 1 of Beasley (2005), namely the "… analysis of sexed identities and practices – that is, for discussing social relations within and between groups identified as men and women". From the interviews and the relating of her experiences it became clear that Madelwa understood it in that way as well.

Many issues of gender affected Madelwa in the various contexts and stages of her life, e.g. in the family as she grew up, in the church, in her marriage, in the political context, in tradition and culture. These gender-related issues are referred to as categories in chapter 3. I have chosen to integrate these categories and to analyze them in terms of their relation to each other within the broad theme of gender, as well as to the outcome of this study.

Her first experience of gender equity was in the family. In the social context within which Madelwa grew up, there were marked differences between the roles and identities of men and women, but she grew up in a home where gender specific roles were not enforced and everybody had to learn all the life skills their mother deemed necessary for them to have in order to adequately meets life's challenges as they grew up. The boys and girls were effectively being prepared for a life beyond the parental home and were taught that it was not enough to theoretically know how a household should be run, but that they should learn to do it themselves first. Knowledge about running a household was thus constructed, not just by being told, but by actually making the experience of running the household themselves. When they then eventually left home, they had the opportunity to "… continually test and modify those constructions in the light of new experience" (Schwandt 2000:189).

The above is illustrated very aptly in the following extract from interview 1:

> Then she (my mother) would say to the boys: 'If you move on to the city, who is going to be running your household for you, because you will have some kind of household to be run there. Now: who will be doing your cooking? Who will be doing your laundry? Who will be doing your housecleaning, if you don't know how? Then if you employ people to assist you in the house, they will do no more than you can instruct them to do. If you don't know what your demand for housework is, no one is going to do more for you.

This was not just theoretical learning, but the parents set an example in every way. Although they grew up within the constraints of a powerfully gendered society, her parents actively challenged conventional gender roles, which were also very powerful in their family's life. Their father worked as the

political agent, chief and community developer outside the home in the wider world, and their mother had to keep the home fires burning and raise the children. In spite of these realities, her mother taught them that there was no such thing as gender specific roles and tasks in any household.

The father was the one who did the grocery shopping, took her to the doctor when she was a little girl, and watched over them doing their homework, while her mother was held up with other chores, like managing the post office and working the fields. These tasks were performed by her mother, because she was not a 'kept' woman. She believed that she had to contribute to the economic wellbeing of the family.

The theme on gender reveals Madelwa's clear understanding of gender-related issues, as well as her ability to identify those issues in her various lifelong learning experiences, and how they shaped and transformed her meaning perspectives.

The next theme, which is closely linked to gender, is that of **patriarchy.** Their family, according to Madelwa, was not the kind where the father ruled by the system of patriarchy, which, according to Beasley (2005:254), means "In Feminism, systemic and trans-historical male domination over women". She maintains that her father, who was a committed anti-apartheid activist, valued especially his wife's opinion and/or criticism of the political speeches that he had to deliver on a regular basis, as the following extract from interview 1 illustrates:

> Yes, during the meal times there was a lot of political discussion as well, like he would read his talks to us, wanting to get to what the older ones and especially my mother thought.

Madelwa's powerful parental role models laid a strong foundation for dealing with many disorientating dilemmas that faced her through her lifelong learning experiences. She had to negotiate a new way of living her own truth after a traumatic experience in her **marriage**, another theme that emerges from the interviews. She says that when they set up home, her husband became obsessed with having a boy child. She, on the other hand, felt that they should be grateful for a healthy baby, irrespective of its sex. This desire for a son eventually became out of hand:

> … the sixth pregnancy was highly traumatic. He accused me of infidelity and wanted to know the father of my unborn son. This question turned out to be a recurring nightmare of endless interrogation. One night I resolved that I had had enough… I got up the following morning and left him. When I was admitted into hospital for the birth of the baby, it turned out to be a boy. When he visited, he fell in love with 'his' son … (Interview 6)

She shares her feelings about this experience and states that she simply could not accept and pretend that everything was fine after the birth of the baby. Madelwa dealt with this matter in a way that must have been a challenge to her husband. She subsequently demanded that she be treated as an equal partner in the marriage, and as a woman who decides for herself when she has had enough babies:

> … before my discharge from the maternity ward, I put my terms for returning home to him: There would be no more babies. I would have myself sterilized before leaving hospital… (Interview 6).

Madelwa's experience with her husband and her response to it, is supported by Motsei (2007:160) who argues that "… while it is important that African women are supportive and protective of their husbands and children, this should be done in a way that is not detrimental to their health and well-being".

Linked to male domination over women are the issues of political power, race and class, which Madelwa reflects on and analyses in relation to the theme of **Apartheid** in South Africa. The political power in this country was "…grounded in non-mutuality", was "interventionist power" and it sought to be in total control (Christians 2000:148). She remembers that black women were always at the losing end during the apartheid years as well. They did not have the right to home ownership, as only males were registered as migrant labourers. When the male died, ownership of the house was terminated. She says that many of the laws discriminated against the wives of migrant labourers:

> Those laws were made by men in the Apartheid system – it was influx control at the time. All the headmen were men – whether they were living in rural or urban areas. We had our own headmen in the townships. They were called councillors at the time. All councillors were male. (Interview 2)

Keteyi (1998:24) states that "In 1948 when the Afrikaners came to power, what had been racist attitudes on the part of the white community now became a matter of policy and ideology…., they started to curtail the political expressions of black people …".

An analysis of the data reveals that she has lived through most of the main historical and political changes in South Africa. She was born in 1939. Eight

years after her birth South Africa experienced the birth of apartheid. She was very conscious of the role that race played in the lives of all South Africans. When she was 14 years old and just entering high school, the Bantu Education Act was introduced. She experienced the introduction of all the cruel apartheid laws and their effects, especially on her life in the family context. Yet the interviews reveal that she saw every experience, every changing context as an opportunity for her ongoing learning and transformation.

Throughout the interviews Madelwa looked at politics from various interesting perspectives, one perspective being that of race. She argued that many white people in South Africa were also dehumanized by apartheid. She made this statement by comparing white households with that of the household within which she grew up:

> They could not live their lives without this 'band aid' which is the black person. It was totally against the way I was brought up, namely that every human being can be self-sufficient (Interview 1).

Although this could be seen as a generalization, it was the order of the day during that time that black mothers had to leave their families at home to take care of white families, even on a Sunday. So in Madelwa's view many white people were, in some ways, disempowered by apartheid.

At the same time she laments the total lack of value that was attached to the marital relationships and family life of black families under racist apartheid rule, especially in relation to newly-wed couples who could not start their marriages in a normal way. Migrant labourers had to obtain 72

hour passes from the magistrate via the councillors to get permission for their new brides to visit them. So before they even started a family, they knew that there would be no normal family life for them:

> …so when that 72 hour permit expired, she was expected to be out of the house (Interview 2).

She maintains that amidst all the apartheid 'power games', she learnt from her father what the qualities of good leadership are. She learnt that one has to know the community that one wants to lead, and one has to show people that they are accepted and appreciated. She acknowledges the role her father played in creating awareness of **class** structures in any community:

> … dilute the natural development of class structures. (Interview 1)

Her father had representatives from all walks of society in his headman's council and by setting the example of showing appreciation and respect for each person within the council, others learnt to do the same:

> I have learned that you cannot lead a community that you don't know. One can't isolate yourself from a community and feel that you are still leading that community (Interview 1).

Her ability to reflect critically on issues of race, class, politics and leadership is the consequence of a family life where the skill of critical thinking, the right to an opinion and analysis of relevant topics were encouraged, especially by their father, who led the discussions on diverse topics around the dinner table. He often asked for their opinions about topics that he had to deliver papers on.

Closely linked to the themes of gender, patriarchy and marriage, is that of **religion,** with special emphasis on Christianity and the church, and its link to tradition and culture. Madelwa, true to the way she was raised, entered into dialogue with her husband, instead of quietly accepting what the church, in this case the Catholic Church, prescribes in terms of birth control, and what a very patriarchal society still prescribes in terms of the role of a 'good' woman.

Later in her life she joined a religious program called 'Reading the Bible with Women's Eyes' and through in-depth and critical engagement with the Bible discovered how strongly Christians were influenced by texts that had been written by men. Madelwa refers in the interview to Elizabeth in the New Testament who fell pregnant very late in life, because she was barren, according to the biblical author. She humorously reflected on why it was assumed that Elizabeth was the barren one and not her husband, and said that even today, if a couple does not have children, it is mostly assumed that it is the woman who can't have children.

The ability to reflect critically and without fear, and to take action on the issues that she reflected on, was also a quality that she learnt at home, and not at school, as schoolchildren were not allowed to have an opinion in the classroom. Therefore she could challenge her husband, the church and the religious practices that she grew up with. She maintained in one of the interviews that she never questioned her religion until someone close to her was traumatized, and until she began to read the Bible critically. She started linking biblical stories to gender issues and the rightful place of women in the Christian world, and especially in the church that she belongs to. The

outcomes of those reflection processes made her even more critical of the church.

The data reveals Madelwa's concerns about the fact that some women are afraid to express their inner conflict about the relationship between religion, tradition and culture. She concluded that they have a long journey of self-acceptance to travel and that "… they are negating themselves" (Interview 3).

Mugambi (2002:65), an African theologian, asserts that spirits as believed in within the African religious heritage were considered evil in Christianity. Missionaries taught that Africans who converted to Christianity had to abandon all their beliefs about those spirits. The focus in these themes thus is Madelwa's deep reflection on the relationship between Christianity and culture, and her sadness that the church that she belongs to is so cautious about integrating the cultural and spiritual aspects of people's lives with the life of the Catholic Church. She raises the possibility that Christianity would have been

> ... so much enriched if the current trend of 'inculturation' that is sweeping the church would have come in when the church was introduced to our people. It is a late moment now to try and redress that mistake of the past. Even though the church is now saying 'inculturation', they are still very cautious about how much of it they bring into the life of the church… the Catholic Church. If the Pope says '… this is the church law', you cannot say 'but **I** feel the spirit moves me in this direction'. So many people are distressed by cultural and spiritual experiences, and our priests are simply not able to cope with these things. But for me the drastic turning around happened a few years ago…(Interview 2).

Her daughter had a deeply spiritual experience in which she discovered that she was psychic, and that these extra-sensory powers were guiding her life. She did not understand what was happening to her, nor did her mother, because in their upbringing they had never come across that kind of experience. She went to the bishop and to their parish priest. They did not know what to do and said that they would pray for her.

A priest who recommended that her daughter goes through an initiation process in her own custom that would release the good spirits to work in the way that God is commissioning her to work, was ousted from the church …

> It was traumatic for me not to be able to find the answer in the church, because I had been brought up in the 'old school religion'. That religion did not give the answer, and what was invading my daughter's life was not going away, anyway. So I had to find a way which was "non-Christian" to help my daughter to live with herself.
>
> My perspective now is that the church will have to evolve to accommodate the cultural aspects of our lives. And before I used to think that a lot of things that are traditional are mysterious and even demonic, but I am getting to learn, like with any gift in life, you can abuse it or you can use it with integrity. I now also believe that a lot has been discarded by religion, like 'umsamo', the family spiritual centre, a spiritual place or family altar. But when the missionaries came, they rejected it as demonic – anything to do with tradition was demonic. The family altar is where everything spiritual happens, like problem discussions, reconciliation, celebrations and forgiveness (Interview 2).

Madelwa says that she did not just change her perspective on tradition and

culture in relation to religion, but she also has a new way of living it. She sees it as a transformation of her personhood, of her religious, Christian being. She has discovered that traditional practices were very much like Christian practices, but were rejected because they came

> from a subservient culture. So I find these synergies between the two, it kind of affirms both streams of belief to me that they point to the one-God orientated religion (Interview 3).

She says that her new perspective on Christianity is nurtured by ongoing discoveries and new learning. She says that meaning lies in the fact that she sees herself as a more fulfilled Christian who looks into the teachings of the Word of God and draws out the truths from there, and not from people's (who could be priests) practices. She maintains that one is transformed when finds out what **truth** really means (Interview 3).

Sojourner Truth, a slave who gained her freedom in 1827, made a speech at the second annual convention of the women's rights movement in the USA and coined the famous phrase 'Ain't I a woman' which has become world famous and is paraphrased as follows in hooks (1981:159-160). "…You cannot exclude me. I am the Truth. My identity is the Truth you cannot deny". It captures Madelwa's construction of her own identity throughout her life.

The interviews revealed that the themes of **truth** and **identity** are sources of great reflection for Madelwa. Like Sojourner Truth, she refuses to suppress her difference. The learning experiences gained from the ongoing daily practices of living made her learn from an early age that her identity is

worthy of everybody's respect. This confidence in terms of her identity emanates from the fact that her mother, who was her first teacher, told teachers that she should not be forced to write with her right hand. Her life experiences reflect her construction of what she perceives 'her truth' is, and she lives that truth, be it in opposition to her church's dogma, patriarchal customs or marital conflict.

The debate about truth occupied her for a long time as she was grappling with the change in her daughter's life, as well as with her own paradigm shift. Her daughter is studying natural medicine and will become a traditional healer, but has not given up the Christian faith. Madelwa now realizes that there is no demonism about natural (traditional) medicine. She herself values herbs, as she does aromatherapy, which uses powerful oils that come from natural herbs.

Madelwa thinks very critically about her church's aversion to traditional healing:

> And there is such a belief by Western people in the power of homeopathy, which is nothing but natural healing. It is just not practiced by Black Africans and therefore, for me, the question about racial prejudice is very strongly linked to Westernized people's non-belief in traditional healing (Interview 4).

Another theme from her sites of learning was the experience of the **death** of loved ones, especially the death of her father:

> My father's death came on suddenly through some 'accident'. There was a strong case for political assassination, but it was futile to investigate, considering the justice system and the political climate at that time…(Interview 6).

She suffered feelings of loss, grief and anger at the fact that

> …invaluable human beings could so needlessly be eliminated (Interview 6).

Her mother, however, died of natural causes. Madelwa was sad that her children would never

> …enjoy the warmth of a grandmother like her, and that they had to face the reality that …the family had no one to keep it together' (Interview 6).

Her husband's death was sudden and cruel. He was a victim of the senseless violence of the mid-eighties. She experienced feelings of shock, grief, a sense of irreparable loss and anger, especially at

> '… the apartheid state that had made township life so cheap' (Interview 6).

Very inspiring views on the theme of **ageing** emerged from the interviews with Madelwa, who stopped working at the age of 55. She saw work as a means to an end, namely a way of providing for her family. She now finds real pleasure in the community development work that she is involved in since her retirement. She feels quite motivated about this phase in her life, in spite of physical constraints, like the inability to walk fast, but that does not deter her at all:

> Old age has brought me some real rewards. I can use all the lifelong learning that I have accumulated. I can even acquire more knowledge at a pace determined by me. I am able to experience contentment and have no need to be competitive against other people. And the quest for knowledge never ends. I am curious to know more

ways of healing the human body, other than using pharmaceutical medicines. I want to become more spiritual… (Interview 4).

A powerful statement from the interview on ageing is that she believes that one can still transform after retirement.

The loss of a limb (one of her legs) made her childhood learning from her mother about self-sufficiency and meeting the demands of life's call a reality. She had to decide to use an artificial limb and continue living her life's dreams:

It was no use fighting reality. I just had to plan my life differently. I refused to consider myself physically handicapped (Interview 5).

Madelwa values **learning**, whether formal or informal, very highly. She emphasizes the fact that the two ways of learning belong together, and that we need to be more conscious of the link between the two. She sees lifelong learning as an ongoing, but challenging process that cannot be stopped like a physical exercise, and therefore ageing is not a matter of 'stopping'. She sees it as a door that opens to new contexts of learning.

Madelwa sees herself as having been transformed on an ongoing basis, because of the impact that the diverse learning contexts have had on her. She values especially those experiences that have been traumatic. They have led her to critically reflect on them, and to take action by renegotiating a different way of living than before. She states the example of living without a limb or living your spirituality differently, not just within the context of religion and the church, but much deeper than that:

There is no recording, no timing, and no packaging of informal learning. A lot of it happens during your childhood years. You learn about relationships, religion, culture, you learn about things that make a home a home. Informally one also learns that there is no limit to learning, no field where you can not apply what you have learned. You don't have to be in a classroom to be a teacher … the community is a classroom … and as long as my brain functions, I don't think I'll stop being curious to know more. What is important is that the knowledge that you are pursuing, relates to your life (Interview 4).

The summary of the data analysis illustrates the interconnectedness of the themes and the links between the various lifelong learning experiences that Madelwa has been exposed to throughout her life. Another conclusion from the analysis of the data is that lifelong learning experiences shape and transform an individual's meaning perspectives. How this is done will be further explored in the next chapter on the findings from the study.

**CONCLUSION**

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter revisits the research topic, aims and research questions, and briefly summarizes the methodology employed in the study. It contains a discussion of the main findings that have been obtained from the analysis of the data in the previous chapter. It also attempts to outline how the data relates to the literature and the theoretical framework reviewed in Chapter 2. This chapter is also a reflection on some of the challenges and learning that arose from the study for me as a life history researcher. Finally, it also contains an indication of areas for further research.

## 5.2 The research topic

This life history study was an investigation into the relationship between life long learning experiences and transformation in an elderly woman's life.

## 5.3 Aims of the study

The main aim of the study was to investigate how Madelwa's meaning perspectives were shaped and transformed by the experiences she was exposed to in her lifelong learning contexts. A further aim was to contribute in a small way to the field of research by having a black South African woman speak in her own voice about issues and contexts that have shaped

her personal life, traditions, indigenous practices and her place within the world of lifelong learning.

## 5.4   The key research questions

The key research questions were:

1. How are meaning perspectives shaped and transformed by lifelong learning experiences?
2. How do diverse contexts impact on an individual's learning through life?

## 5.5   The research methodology

The study employed a life history methodology. The main basic technique that was used was the open-ended life history interview, based on themes from the respondent's lifelong learning experiences.

## 5.6   A summary of the key findings of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between lifelong learning and transformation in an individual's life. In order to achieve this aim, the key research question focused on (1) the way in which diverse contexts impact on an individual's learning through life as well as on (2) how meaning perspectives are shaped and transformed by lifelong learning experiences.

The study was conducted within a combined framework of Paulo Freire's Theory of Critical Consciousness and Jack Mezirow's Transformative

Theory of Learning, elements of Feminist Theory as well as concepts like Spirituality and Learning, Lifelong Learning, Life History, Experience, Identity, and the contexts they relate to.

This section contains the key findings that have been obtained in the study, and builds on the analysis of the themes in the previous chapter. It is organized around a summary of findings about life history methodology and findings about the plethora of lifelong learning themes. It also outlines how the results relate to the literature and theoretical framework reviewed in Chapter 2.

### 5.6.1 Findings on life history methodology

Although life history methodology was not identified as a research question, it played a crucial role in identifying learning which results in transformation. A crucial finding was around the relationship between the researcher and the research participant. The finding revealed that life history research is quite a personal experience and involvement for the researcher, and that it is quite difficult to remain objective when experiences are shared. There is also a constant awareness, as stated in Miller (2000:104), that life history interviewing is invasive and that great care should be taken to be as sensitive as possible, as old hurts or traumas could be reopened. Should this happen, the life history process may not be a therapeutic process, but another disorientating dilemma that the respondent will have to deal with once the researcher has left. This finding confirms the important role of the life history researcher as emphasized by Rubins & Rubins (1995) and other authors in the literature review.

An important finding was that the relationship between the researcher and the research participant should be an ongoing process of evaluation, negotiation and agreement between parties. When potential issues of conflict relating to confidentiality, ethics, morality, ownership and intellectual property are agreed upon in a formal way before the research process officially starts, one can be quite sure that the research process will progress well.

Another finding was around how much I (the researcher) should reveal to the research participant. My argument, based on the learning experiences made during this study, is that research subjects should be told the true nature of the experiment, as researchers should not make assumptions about the subjects' level of understanding of research processes and outcomes. Madelwa knew what research processes entail, as she was employed as a community researcher before. She asked very pertinent and intelligent questions about the nature and aims of the life history study. I thus found that it was important to tell Madelwa what I was looking for, but to conduct the ongoing research process in a professional way.

I was continuously aware of the possible pitfalls involved in any research process, and found that I had to actively and conscientiously try to avoid them. The active processes that were followed in this study thus bore the debates about the sensitivity of the relationship between the researcher and the researched that the literature review revealed, and all it entails in mind. I therefore found those debates to be credible.

It is said that the themes can be negotiated, that the interviewee "… must choose which themes to concentrate upon" (Miller 2000:133). The finding in

this study, however, was that in praxis I had a much more important role to play in terms of directing the interview process to situate it within the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that underpin the study. In this case I steered the interviewing to become more focused by the third interview.

A second finding around the role of the researcher is that this life history meets, on the one hand, many of the requirements as to what a life history study actually is and on the other hand, I had to be very alert not to focus too much on the individual. This caution was linked to Denzin's (1998) and Goodson's (1995) warning that the attention on the individual can be potentially dangerous. There was also the issue of reflexivity. I was very aware of my role in shaping the narrative, and I therefore engaged in in-depth self-reflection after every interview. I also grappled with issues of subjectivity that were not addressed with Madelwa and therefore not resolved. I then decided to leave out certain parts of the interviews, as they needed more research and more discussion with Madelwa.

I found that all the rules and guidelines for conducting life history studies from the literature review were extremely helpful for the planning of this study. Every life history study though, is unique, and the life history researcher should be guided by an honest motive for the study.

I found the argument by Miller (2000:8) about the difference between life history research data (specifically) and quantitative data extremely valuable. That the information obtained from a life history study spans all aspects of a person's lifetime is a key argument which I found to be true in Madelwa's case. Her life history will be presented as incomplete, as she still has plans and hopes for the future, which came out very clearly during the interview

sessions. This study finds, in agreement with Miller (2000:75), that the life history "…expands the time span of the biographical perspective from the past *through* the present into the future".

An important component of life history methodology, especially in the field of feminist theory, is the role of language and discourse. I found that there is much value in Foucalt's argument referred to in the literature review that subjects shape the discourses that have been an important part of their lives, and that they actively put it to work. A core finding of this study is that the themes of gender, religion, culture, politics, learning and many others referred to in this study shaped Madelwa's life and her identity from a very early age. She experienced an oppressive regime, and was a victim, as stated by Daymond (2003:3-8) of a system that "denied and enforced identities" on black people at the stroke of a pen. Madelwa very aptly and critically referred to those experiences, and identified, through articulate language usage, how those experiences have created meaningfulness in her life, have shaped her identity, and have transformed her in many ways. I found this a direct challenge to Jacque Derrida's theory of deconstruction, which argues that language and meaning are 'fleeting phenomenons', determined by the discourses prevalent at the time, and have no depth.

Both of the paragraphs above confirm the statement by Daymond (2003) in the literature review that it is reductive to attempt to uncouple culture expressed through language. An important finding therefore is that narrative has a very definite place in life history research. The study confirms Cappa & Ochs's (1996) assertion that narrative activity provides tellers with an opportunity to impose order on otherwise disconnected events, and creates continuity between past, present and imagined worlds.

My argument is that the afore-mentioned 'rules' were extremely helpful for the planning of this study, but that every research study is unique. Potential issues of conflict relating to confidentiality, ethics, morality, ownership and intellectual property should be agreed upon in a formal way before the research process officially starts, as was the case in this study.

Life history researchers are cautioned by Weiler & Middleton (1999) to bear the metaphor of the kaleidoscope in mind when describing the pathways and subjectivities of a woman's life. This piece of literature was of great help to me, as I constantly had to guard against the desire to 'fill the gaps', probe deeper and discover the 'ultimate truth' about particular experiences that Madelwa described. Reading this text helped me see and understand how telling their life histories bring out their subjectivities.

I argue that the 'testimonio' is a very useful guide for researchers who embark on life history research on women who have been victims of oppressive regimes, such as Guatemala in Rigoberta Menchu's case and South Africa as in Madelwa's case. The relevance of Menchu's 'testimonio' for the study of Madelwa's life is the fact that Madelwa also clearly identified the themes as she was telling her story, but her reality is different: she is much older, married with children, has had formal schooling, reads widely and has to divide her time between different activities within the social, political, family and religious contexts, whereas Menchu is single, childless, illiterate and fully involved in the struggle for political oppression. I argue though, that in spite of the different realities, there are also many similarities in their life histories and the way in which they constructed their knowledge through their life experiences.

I found, in agreement with Bloom & Munro (1995), that there are a number of important advantages to studying the histories of women's lives. Life histories help to illustrate the relationship between individuals and society, and they demonstrate the ability of women to negotiate their exceptional gender status in everyday life. Life history narratives also help to examine the links between the evolution of subjectivity and the development of a woman's identity.

### 5.6.2 Findings on lifelong learning themes

This part of the discussion focuses on the findings related to the diverse contexts, also referred to as themes that have thus far impacted on Madelwa's learning.

The study found that Madelwa could quite confidently come up with her own definition of lifelong learning, which is very closely linked to that of Jarvis (1988:10) who calls the human being a 'meaning-seeking' animal. Madelwa said that lifelong learning never stops as 'long as the brain functions' and finds it crucial that the knowledge we pursue should relate to our lives and our interests. Her descriptions of learning and knowledge acquisition throughout her life, reinforced Ladson-Billings's (2000:257) argument that "… the concept of epistemology is more than a 'way of knowing', but that epistemology is a 'system of knowing'".

She described a whole system of knowledge acquisition throughout her life. It started in the family: knowledge of effective housekeeping, knowledge of relationships and gender issues, knowledge of leadership and politics, knowledge of tradition and culture, knowledge of natural medicines,

knowledge of pain and joy, as well as academic knowledge. All these ways of knowing in her life are interrelated and she saw and described the links very clearly, without realizing that she was describing her 'system of knowing'. The study found that her 'system of knowing' answers to the call of Dabi Nkululeko (1987) referred to in the literature review, namely that "… women themselves within the nation must produce knowledge required for their own emancipation…".

An important finding is that gender is a crucial theme that ran right through the interviews, and therefore through the life history of Madelwa. It played an important part in all the learning contexts in her life. She attached great meaning to the issues of gender that emerged in her upbringing, but also later in her life as an adult woman, and maintained that it influenced the way she raised her own children to a great extent. This reinforced the statement in the literature review of this study that the focus within life history research is on the meanings that people attach to their experiences.

The study also found the way in which gender roles were lived in her family very meaningful. The parents themselves were good role-models, because the mother did the farming, which was considered a man's job, and the father did the shopping, which is supposed to be a woman's role.

Madelwa also eloquently and critically related to the issue of patriarchy and the role that it played in her childhood and adult life and made it an important component of this study. In spite of the good example the parents set, their roles also included the typical patriarchal traditions, as the father worked outside the home, and the mother was responsible for the household and raising the children during his long absences. The study found this to be

contradictory to Madelwa's assertion that the household was 'non-gendered'. In spite of this contradiction, I found the attempt towards eradicating gender-biased living a valuable learning experience and an important contribution to Madelwa's construction of her life history.

Her narrative continued to tell about gender discrimination in a political system, where the wives of migrant labourers were not seen as South African citizens and could not own their homes should the husbands die. She chose not to become a teacher, as she did not want to be part of a system that discriminated against women.

Her view on gender roles in relationships continues with the experience of the importance of bearing a male child for your husband. She now reads the Bible critically and through the eyes of a woman, and feels much more fulfilled in the process. The study found her narrative describing how she freed herself from these 'gender bondages' by challenging and negotiating a different way of living in society, in her marriage and in the church, very powerful.

Another finding that is particularly relevant for this life history study is the fact that Madelwa, although not a formal feminist writer or critic, looks at her fellow female churchgoers critically. She sees them missing the opportunity to challenge the established meanings of church and culture and how they relate to especially black women in South Africa. In the process, according to Madelwa, these women also miss out on exciting change and growth in their own lives and subsequently in their broader community as well. Madelwa's critique of the uncritical women in her community is an assertion that is wholly in agreement with Daymond (2003:6). Daymond

postulates that challenging their circumstances would entail de-familiarizing in particular those things they would like to take for granted, like church dogma and certain cultural practices that affect the lives of women specifically.

I found that this freedom from gender stereotypes relates very well to Freeman's (1993:66) statement that one of the most fundamental reasons for studying human lives historically through the narratives people tell, is that "… some of the texts we read will be tales of freedom,". An important finding thus, as indicated in Freeman, is that Madelwa has freed herself from prescribed and socially acceptable behavior and has used her own power to challenge power – the power of religious tradition, of patriarchy in a marital relationship and the power that gender discriminatory interpretations of the Bible often have over people.

In the literature review Dominice (2000) states that life history narratives reveal the connections between the personal and social aspects of life and that each (auto) biography has its own truth, because we organize our lives according to our own unique way of living. This statement holds true for the life of Madelwa, as the interviews clearly reveal her 'web of life'- from her childhood, major life transitions and formerly hidden influences such as cultural traditions and beliefs. Dominice's statement links to a  crucial finding in this study, as Madelwa grew up as a third generation Christian with little traditional Zulu culture being practiced in her upbringing, although cultural practices like Lobola and certain rites around marriage and death were honoured. She lived her life as a Christian, and raised her children in that way as well. Madelwa and her family lived their lives until a traumatic experience, linked to culture and tradition and a different kind of spirituality,

changed her reality and her thinking about religion. The study finds that this has led her to a new way of living her religion, which has now become **her** truth, which is different from the 'truth' that she was brought up with and which she raised her children with. She argues very strongly that one is transformed when one finds out what truth really is and that truth is more powerful than relying on the practices of leaders.

Another finding from the study is in agreement with Denzin & Lincoln (2000:550) and Freeman (1993:66) that identities are constantly recreated and not something fixed and predetermined, and that it is the histories of the past that help construct the future. This is particularly true in the case of Madelwa who has managed to become her own person over the course of time. She is highly critical of women who do not accept, but negate themselves. This was said in the context of women who are "… imitative and other-driven beings…" especially within the church context, as stated in a previous paragraph. In the process they deny who they really are (Freeman 1993:66). The lifelong learning experiences that she shared through the narrative clearly confirm the two authors' argument that identity is a process linked to the lifelong learning experiences that we make.

The study found that early socialization plays a crucial role in the shaping of identity. Right through the interview process she spoke with her own voice, and not with that of either parent, because she was taught that her identity is unique, that being different is normal, e.g writing with your left hand is normal. Her identity was shaped by the context of the family home, the encouragement to participate in critical discussions and not to be afraid of voicing her opinion. Out of this context her identity was born.

The statement by Daymond (2003) in the literature review about identity could be applied to Madelwa's life: her identity was certainly shaped in the parental home. She adapted her given identity and added others to it, namely those parts of her identity that were shaped by the political system in South Africa, her Christian identity, that part of her identity that was shaped by the traditional discourse, also her educational and lifelong learning experiences and of course her self-acceptance.

Her identity is not 'fictionalized', as some poststructuralists argue about identity, but for her, identity is based on the truth of who she is. The interviews clearly indicate that she does not change her identity to suit a particular context, like in the case of her marital problems, when she decided that she is her 'own person'. She decided on issues that affect her body and her life as a woman and a mother. I found that the metaphor by Griffiths (1995) on the web of identity could quite effectively be applied to Madelwa's life history and her belief in the self.

This study also found that Madelwa needs to be admired for the courage to create her own truth, a quality many black South African women under apartheid were credited with, as asserted in Mayibuye Africa (1993), quoted in the introduction to this thesis. An exceptional act of courage is the moment she decides that she has had enough children.

Another finding from the interviews confirms the experiences that Khuzwayo (1985) so eloquently writes about in her autobiography, namely the transitional problems of the Christian and the traditional culture. Just like Khuzwayo, Madelwa sees the inter-relatedness between religion and culture and the possibility of reshaping issues relating to it in future. She shares her

own traumatic experience in this context and how it shaped her perspectives and transformed her. She states that her perspectives on religion have changed drastically in comparison to the way she looked at things and believed when she was growing up.

Earlier on I stated that, for the purpose of this study, the term lifelong learning refers to learning that is life-wide and incorporates formal, informal and non-formal learning as equally valid modes of learning. One of the sites of learning that emerges in the life history that she tells is that of the family. She spontaneously states that her learning started in the family and not in class or grade 1, as is normally said. This is a very important finding around lifelong learning and confirms the statement that learning takes place from the cradle to the grave.

A range of diverse contexts that have impacted on Madelwa's learning throughout her life are revealed by this life history study. It is clear from the interviews that she could identify the learning that she has gained from being situated within those contexts, like the family home, the contexts of gender–related issues, the contexts of religion and culture, marriage and some others as discussed above. She could also illustrate, through some examples from her learning, how these contexts have affected her and shaped her growth and transformation. She grew from a young person who followed religious practices uncritically to a critical thinker who questioned the interpretation of the Bible within the church and gender contexts. Madelwa has found a way of integrating religious practices with traditional customs, and still be a person with her own identity, living her own truth as a fulfilled Christian.

A key finding is that the concept of age is strongly linked to the concept of time as argued in the literature review. In the case of this study Madelwa's life spans a period of living memory that stretches back from the end of World War 2, through the period of apartheid and all that it stood for, like Bantu Education, the nation's liberation from apartheid and the birth of a new democracy in the country of her birth, to the reconstruction and transformation processes that are required from a new dispensation. This is indeed life-wide learning with all the changes that it entails. Griffiths (1995) aptly calls this kind of construction of a life history through different inter-related discourses a 'web of identity'.

The argument about ageing in the lifelong learning context was especially valuable for the purpose of this study, as Madelwa could illustrate that her learning was indeed a cumulative process. She illustrated it practically in the way she assisted other (younger) students who were doing the university-based course with her. The study showed how her life and activities after retirement reinforced the statements about ageing, made in the CONFINTEA V (1997) paper. There is now the possibility of 'successful ageing,' which includes possibilities of personal development, such as her interest in and practice of aromatherapy and reflexology, and the possibility of studying theology at some stage, as well as potential socioeconomic and cultural contributions. This confirms Aitchison's (1995:4) argument on the issue of 'possibilities'.

Closely linked to the findings on ageing, is an important finding on work, namely that one could be in a career for a long time without enjoying it, but that one perseveres, knowing that real work satisfaction could come after retirement, as in Madelwa's case.

She sees ageing very positively and states that she can now use all the lifelong learning that she has accumulated, reinforcing the arguments on ageing by various authors in the literature review of this study. She celebrates the fact that she can do things and acquire knowledge at her own pace. She argues that one can still change and transform after retirement, that one can take time to stop and reflect, and that one is the master of one's own time. Madelwa sees it as a time of turning inward, of devoting more time to the spiritual. I found that her views on ageing confirm the statement in the literature review that the negative meaning of ageing is changing.

Some of the sites of learning that Madelwa refers to are not mentioned in Jarvis's list, e.g. the family, where learning happens as a mother, a lover, a daughter, a grandmother, as well as in other sites of life, like the church, the community organization. She also learns as a patient and as a citizen. This is indeed life-wide, even life-deep learning, as it concerns all aspects of an individual's life.

This part of the conclusion thus argues that diverse contexts indeed impact very powerfully on an individual's learning through life.

### 5.6.3   Findings relating to the transformation in her life as well as to the theoretical framework

The next part of the discussion focuses on the findings that relate to the ways in which lifelong learning experiences shape and transform an individual's meaning perspectives, using specific themes from Madelwa's lifelong learning experiences. It also looks at the findings in relation to the theoretical framework.

The research problem is an investigation into the relationship between lifelong learning and transformation. The guiding question here is how lifelong learning experiences shape and transform one's meaning perspectives. The first step in conducting the investigation was to identify those learning experiences in Madelwa's life where her perspectives were transformed, because they were no longer in harmony with the identified experience(s) (Jarvis 1988:102).

The study found that one of her experiences relates to her perspective on religion and its link to culture and tradition. In her case it was a major, very painful challenge to an established perspective that led to a transformation and made her question once deeply held personal values. I used Mezirow's phases of perspective transformation, referred to in the theoretical framework, to illustrate the argument (Mezirow 1991:168–169): The disorientating dilemma in her life was the fact that her daughter discovered that she had extra-sensory powers that guided her life and had to give up a very secure career. This was very disorientating for both mother and daughter, because neither of them had come across that kind of experience in their upbringing.

The discovery of her daughter's gift led to critical self-examination by Madelwa. She was not ready to meet the challenge on her own and identified people in her church whom she could turn to. The first priest said that he would pray for her. She never heard from him again. The second, who recommended that she undergoes an initiation process in her own custom that would release the good spirits to work in a God-given way, was ousted from the church.

Madelwa consequently engaged in a critical assessment of epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic assumptions, when she realized that something was not consistent with what she and her daughter perceived as 'truth'. She had been brought up to think that the field of spiritually initiated by traditional healers is shrouded in mystery and demonic powers, although she had much respect for herbal cures. It was also traumatic for her to realize that the church does not have all the answers. Another source of trauma for her was the fact that she had been brought up in the 'old school' religion, and that religion did not have the answer. So she had to find a way which was 'non-Christian' to help her daughter live with herself.

The study found no evidence that Madelwa recognized that her discontent and the subsequent process of transformation are shared by others. She does not indicate that she has shared this with people, especially mothers, as well as other members of her congregation or community, who have made the same experience, other than with her daughter. When she attempted to share it with the church, there was no understanding. One can thus conclude that this phase in the process of perspective transformation does not necessarily apply to all forms of transformative learning, as stated by Mezirow. This confirms Gilbert's (1993) assertion that research theories should be falsifiable: able to be proven wrong by counter-examples.

This experience led Madelwa to the exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions. She came to the critical realization that the church will have to evolve to accommodate the cultural aspect of their lives, and that not all things traditional are mysterious and even demonic. Madelwa believes that the Catholic Church will have to take the process of inculturation more seriously. She believes, as postulated by Keteyi (2002) that inculturation is

based on the understanding that both Christianity and culture have their own validity.

Madelwa's planning of a course of action is born out of a deeply critical reflection process, and the subsequent realization that action is needed to bring back the good that was discarded by religion, like 'umsamo' the family spiritual centre or family altar, which was rejected by the missionaries as demonic. This family altar is the place where everything spiritual happens, like problem discussions, reconciliation, celebrations and forgiveness. Rather this than the idea of a confessional when one is at loggerheads with one's brother and goes to a confessional to be given absolution … that horizontal aspect of reconciliation is lost to a parishioner.

Madelwa now thinks differently about the relationship between religion and culture and has a new way of living it. I found that she is committed to acquiring the appropriate knowledge and skills for implementing her plans, and has started a process where she engages in a provisional trying of new roles. She has reached the stage where she shares the learning; she looks for synergies between religion and culture, and she challenges Christianity to undo the damage that they have done in the minds of most Black people.

An important finding is that she is competently and confidently reintegrating these new roles and responsibilities into her life, on the basis of conditions dictated by her new perspective. Madelwa now lives as a more fulfilled person, having resolved the inner conflict that lives with many a Christian person as they grow up. Her daughter is now studying natural medicine and will become a traditional healer, but is still a practising Christian, because she believes that you can be both. This belief confirms the assertion by

Mogambi (2004) and Keteyi (2002) that inculturation – the dialogue between living faith and living culture - is possible, although it is a huge challenge. Madelwa practices aromatherapy and reflexology and uses oils that come from natural herbs, and is an active Christian at the same time.

This disorientating dilemma in Madelwa's life and the resultant feelings, emotions and actions that accompanied it, are described as transformational learning in Clark (1993:16), quoted in the literature review "…transformational learning can occur gradually or through a sudden, powerful experience and it can change the way one perceives oneself and one's world.'

Madelwa's telling of her life history was very explicit about the nature of the emotional abuse that she suffered when her husband wanted a boy child. She was not afraid to say how angry she was, nor was she afraid to openly say that she defied him in a way that is unique to a black woman, and especially one who is Catholic as well. Mezirow's phases of perspective transformation apply to this incident in her life as well, as she was severely traumatized by the fact that her husband accused her of infidelity. She described this experience as a 'recurring nightmare'. At some point she felt that she had had enough, and left him.

She described at length her feelings of anger – she experienced her anger 'as a corrosive illness' that she could not 'exorcise' out of her. The way she was treated was not her 'truth'. When critically assessing the situation, and after an intervention by a church group, she reflected on the situation, and decided to negotiate roles and terms for her marriage, should she go back to her husband. She planned a new course of action, which was to put her terms for

future living very clearly to her husband. She would have no more babies, and she had already decided to have herself sterilized before leaving hospital. Notable is that she did not negotiate it with him or discuss it with others. She thus reintegrated this new condition into her marital life, but admits that their relationship was never again as it had been before the pregnancy. This experience in Madelwa's life history confirms the importance of internal stimuli like emotions and feelings in the process of knowledge creation. The life history also confirms the strong link between epistemology and worldview, namely that the conditions under which people live and learn shape both their knowledge and their worldviews. This is especially relevant to Madelwa's system of knowing.

The finding from the study in relation to the autobiographies that I analysed in the literature review, is that Madelwa's life history is different from the others. She sees herself as worthy of personal development, of engaging with her dreams to become more spiritual, learn more about natural healing and she does not feel that she has to do for 'others only'. In so doing she challenges the stereotyped analysis of black women's writing by white feminist critics, that their work is primarily socio-historical and that its purpose is to record the experiences of black people in South Africa under apartheid. This is true to a certain extent, but Madelwa's life history makes the shift into the 'self' and the importance thereof. It is also a celebration of her right to be true to herself, whilst at the same time serving her community. She believes that she should have a loving and nurturing relationship with her body and her soul, as urged by Motsei (2007).

The study reveals her transformation from someone who grew up with little knowledge of the traditional Zulu culture and whose life was based on

Christian culture, to someone who has embraced certain aspects of her culture, like the deeper emotional and spiritual dimensions of learning, as argued for by Dirkx (2000) in the literature review. What happened in Madelwa's life is supported by Mezirow (1991:83) who briefly mentions that one cannot understand the unknown without using the imagination and that one has to be open and reflective to the perspective of others. If this happens "… the richer our imagination of alternative contexts for understanding will be".

Madelwa's experience of the role of religion, and specifically Christianity, in her life as she was growing up was her truth for the best part of her life, and thus reinforces Dominice's (2000) argument referred to in the literature review, that each biography has its own truth. The emphasis on religion and Christianity did not include the cultural traditions and beliefs that her ancestors believed in. I therefore argue that in her case her truth eventually changed through the experiences that she made and that truth is therefore not necessarily constant in an individual's life.

Another sad experience in Madelwa's life was the loss of a limb, a leg, at the age of 61. It was a disorientating dilemma – emotionally as well as physically. She had to re-negotiate a new way of living and working. She was not going to allow herself to be disabled. She had to plan her life differently and sacrifice certain joys, like taking long, invigorating walks. This is another example of perspective transformation as described in the literature review.

The senseless death of her husband after 25 years of marriage, was another disorientating and traumatic dilemma. Besides having to negotiate a new

way of coping as a single mother, it made her reflect very critically on the repressive political regime that led to the senseless deaths of so many people, including those closest to her.

The study found that Madelwa was not going to be a prisoner of false consciousness created by the dominant culture of the oppressor as stated by (Freire: 1970). Her lifelong learning experience of critical reflection and action to transform herself as part of society happened in the home from an early age through critical political discussions, examples of good community and political leadership by her father, and critical analysis of her observations of apartheid laws and their devastating effects on the lives of black people.

In one of the interviews Madelwa lamented the fact that some women do not change, because they do not understand some of the issues linked to the relationship between church and culture. By doing this she raised an important concern around transformation and change in women's lives, a concern that is also addressed in some of the literature as well. She engaged with her own immediate context critically, although she knew that it would mean 'defamiliarising' herself …

Madelwa has for a long time been engaging in critical reflection on life in the church, and before the above-mentioned dilemma, she realized that the church will have to evolve to accommodate the cultural aspects of our lives. This is an outcome of a practice of critical reflection that already started in her childhood and which supports Freire's theory, namely that through the praxis of critical reflection, which he says is also 'action', social change can be brought about.

The above experiences and Madelwa's responses to it confirm Paulo Freire's assertion that our interpretation of the world is both an ontological and an epistemological act. A crucial finding was that critical hermeneutics in this case offers Madelwa a method for investigating the conditions of her existence, as postulated by Kincheloe and Mclaren (2000). In her case it led to challenging of the status quo, especially in a religious and personal context.

Another finding from Madelwa's 'telling' of her life history is in direct conflict with some white feminist critics' positions on black woman writers. I find that the stereotyped, and in my view, often arrogant view that is expressed of black women writers needs to be challenged, as is done by Chandra Mohanty in the literature review. Some Western feminist critics maintain, as asserted in the article by Natrass (1995), that they can equip the South African feminist with valuable tools and insights. French feminism, for example, relies on the concepts of poststructuralism, which focus on the hidden and the repressed. This 'offer' to assist is based on the impression in some Western feminist circles that black South African women writers don't always honestly and /or explicitly write about their suffering at the hands of men, which is true in some cases, as Khuzwayo's autobiography illustrates.

The reflective actions by Madelwa support the theories of Freire and Mezirow that education and learning is a liberating force and that this liberation happens when there is reflection and subsequent action upon an experience.

The findings reveal that the combined framework of Mezirow's Theory of Perspective Transformation, Freire's Theory of Critical Consciousness and

the elements of Feminist Theory that were discussed in the theoretical framework take the main aim of the study and the key research questions into account. I also found that the theories took the socio-cultural environment as a significant factor in the learning process, the process of critical reflection and subsequent action, as well as recognition of the fact that humans have the ability to sift and evaluate and act on the external stimuli received from their experiences, into account.

Feminist theory focuses very strongly on the oppression of patriarchy and throughout the study Madelwa clearly indicated her critical reflection on gender issues and the kinds of action she took as a result of that reflection, especially around the demand for a boy child by her husband.

The study also revealed that experiential learning is central to the theories of learning. Madelwa's life history proved that, right through her adult life, she learnt most effectively when a learning process was based on a problem, need or dilemma in her life. This finding confirmed Jarvis's (1988) statement on the importance of experiential learning in the literature review.

I argue that the various lifelong learning experiences that the respondent was exposed to, have shaped and transformed her meaning perspectives, as illustrated in the examples from the narrative.

The following diagram illustrates how Madelwa's identity, her life history is constructed from the themes that emerged from her life, and how these themes shaped her discourses and put it to work. The diagram also illustrates and gives credibility to Foucalt (1972), Daymond (2003) and other authors'

definitions and arguments about discourse and identity and their links to life story and life history writing as discussed in the literature review.

Griffith's metaphor of the 'web of identity' links very well to the metaphor of 'beading', referred to in the introduction as well as in the poem that concludes this study. I found a major difference, though, between Madelwa's 'string of beads' and the beadwork that forms such an important part of her culture. The colours and shapes and their resultant messages have remained the same thoughout the ages, and depict, in my view, a resistance to change, seeing that humans live in a constantly changing environment. Although Madelwa hails from the same group, she is open to change. She challenges and questions, changes and transforms, thus further shaping her life history. She adds new 'beads' when necessary and takes old ones out. This process is linked to the fact that life histories are constantly reaffirmed, modified and recreated.

**Diagram 2: Madelwa's construction of her 'web of identity' / her life history through various inter-related discourses** (Based on Griffiths's :1995) argument on the 'web of identity').
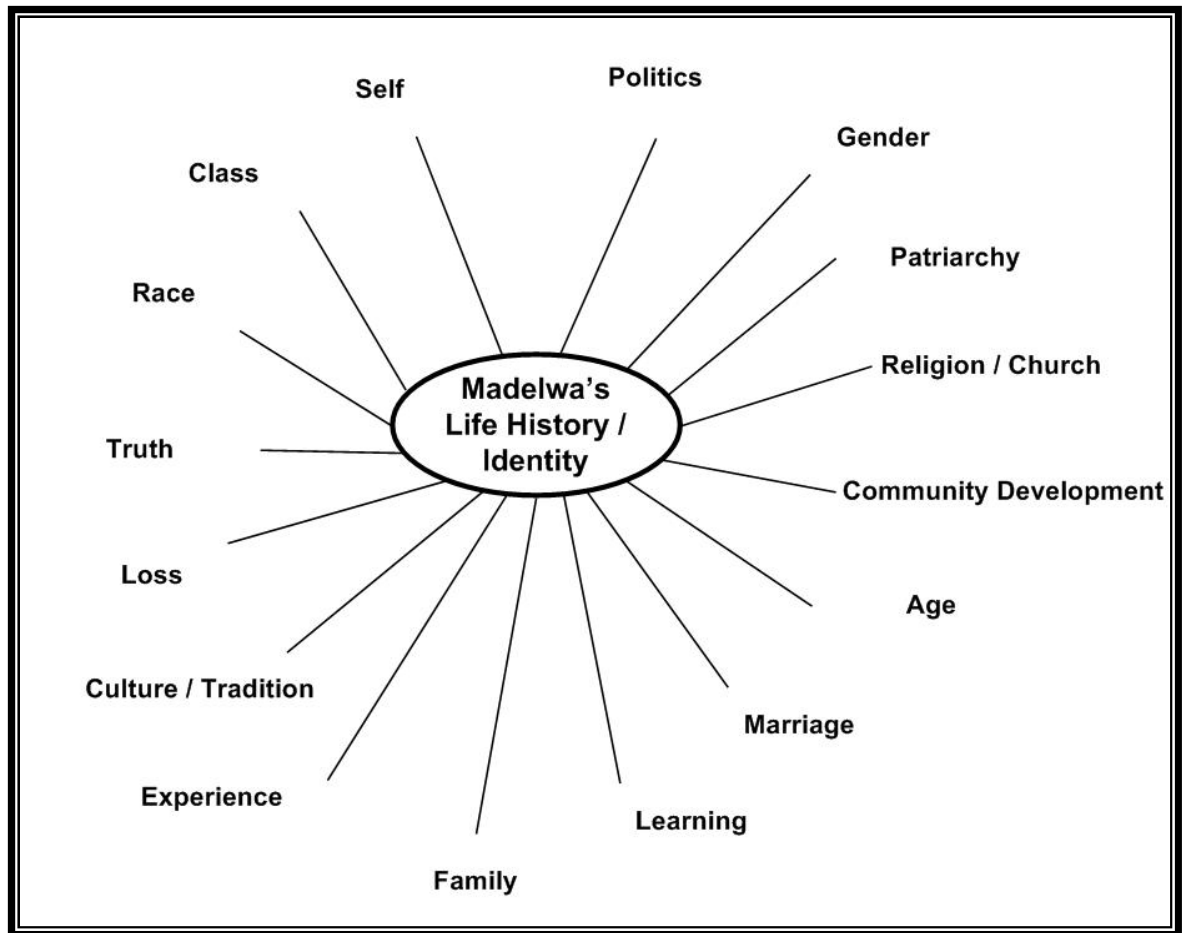


## 5.7 Key challenges

One of the limitations was that the life history study was not exhaustive, as there was no input by other actors, like siblings, children and friends, who would have been able to tell me more about Madelwa. I also did not request

permission to use other documents like photos and letters as appendices. This would have compromised the anonymity agreement, as Madelwa comes from a very well-known family. It would also have compromised her voice, and her right to identify those discourses that she believed necessary for the construction of her identity. I do not, however, feel that this has hindered me in meeting the objectives of the study, as she is an extremely honest person.

The assertion by Weiler & Middleton (1999) that it is not possible to detail every aspect of a woman's life when writing up her life history, was a great help for me, as I constantly had to guide against the desire to 'fill the gaps', probe deeper and discover the 'ultimate truth' about particular experiences that Madelwa described. I thus had to accept, as postulated by Weiler & Middleton, that the life history researcher has to respect the areas of privacy that women may not want to share.

A key challenge was the fact that I was in a different province as Madelwa. I felt that I could have spent more time with her in other contexts, like observing her in her community development work, during political discussions, in her Bible study circles and with her family. Access to those kinds of sites would have assisted me to look at her from a more objective angle.

## 5.8  Areas for further research

An area for further research is the impact that her life and example have had on her children, and how they now live their lives. Interesting would be the impact of her growth and transformation on the ways they live the relationship between Christianity and African culture. This experience in

Madelwa's life and in that of her daughter confirms the need expressed by Keteyi (1998) for further research into inculturation.

Another possible area for further research would be a comparative study of the life histories of black South African women, situated within a unique South African feminist discourse. This study would consider all the existing theories and critiques of the writings of black South African women by feminist critics from America, England and France. According to Nattras (1995) these feminist critics postulated at a conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa that no South African feminist discourse that met the requirements of the above countries has yet evolved.

The life history of Madelwa proves that more research needs to be done, and not only on the lives of well-known black South African authors and women who are normally quoted by white feminist critics, but also on those women who have been hidden from history, as asserted by Weiler (1999). This kind of comparative study would need to continually move within and range beyond current considerations about the writing of black women, and should take care not to constitute black women as a single monolithic subject, as asserted by Mohanty (1984).

## 5.9   Concluding statements

I would like to conclude by stating that this study has illustrated how lifelong learning experiences shaped and transformed Madelwa's meaning perspectives. It also illustrated that the various learning contexts that she was exposed to throughout her life definitely contributed to that ongoing growth and transformation. She managed to constitute into a coherent narrative all

the episodes from her different life-wide learning experiences, as well as from her subsequent growth and transformation. In the process she constructed a self, an identity, based on a strong understanding of her 'self'.

Her life history confirms the sentiments of the Delors Report (1996) for UNESCO that lifelong learning indeed has four pillars – 'learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be'(Jarvis: 2004).

I find that Madelwa's life history continues. New themes, based on the plans that she still has for herself and her life, will be added, and will subsequently contribute to her further lifelong, life-wide and life-deep growth and transformational learning.

Finally I find that the following poem from a sequence of poems called *' i is a long memoried woman'* by Grace Nichols, a poet from Georgetown, Guyana, aptly concludes who Madelwa is right now:

*Holding my Beads*
Unforgiving as the course of justice
Inerasable as my scars and fate
I am here
a woman …with all my lives
Strung out like beads

<p style="text-align:center">before me</p>

It isn't privilege or pity
that I seek
It isn't reverence or safety
quick happiness or purity

                          but

the power to be what I am / a woman

holding my beads in my hand

                                       (Nichols, 1984:63-4)


Madelwa is still beading…

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