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**Building Cohesion among Bakgatla Male  
Adolescents: A Performance as Research Approach**

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## **Introduction**

At the beginning of this year, I embarked on a journey, a journey towards the *son*. The journey towards the son is about finding the light and the dark, the known and the unknown about the many sons of the Bakgatla<sup>1</sup>. The term son is used to describe anyone who is male, young or old, boy or man, child or chief. Sons are male and are born to a family. The term son, carries with it relation. As a son you have or had a mother and a father- there are those who came before you and through them you came to be.

This journey is about travelling to and exploring the son. The particular sons' being the young men of the Bakgatla and how they relate to other sons in their tribe and those who are of relation to the sons. The term son also serves as an ideal this journey strives for, where all men are put together and can relate to one another as sons.

By embarking on a journey towards the son, I wanted to find an answer to a question that has been on my mind for the past two years. How can I, as an artist trained in the craft of performance and applied theatre, use my skills to help others better understand themselves and the world they live in? This question as it stands is layered with many possibilities. So for this particular journey, I chose to explore how I could use the process of creating a play to help a group of young men engage with issues of masculinity. These questions stemmed from my desire to take what I have been taught in theatre and expand on it, challenge it, explore how I can develop it further and make it more effective. In short my journey looked to critique aspects of applied theatre that need to be addressed and improved. Applied theatre is seen as a lesser art because it often neglects the art within theatre when it applies aspects of it to help communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Bakgatla – a tswana speaking tribe, found in parts of South Africa and Botswana. I focused specifically on the Bakgatla Ba-ga-Kgafela in the village of Mochudi in Botswana.

As I looked towards the *son*: to where he rises (his light and all that is known), and to where he sets (his dark and all that is unknown), I thought of how I would travel through this journey and what vehicle would help me through it. The answer was to use a vehicle that I know well – a performance. This vehicle has taken me on many a journey and has always benefited me. For the purpose of this process, the vehicle was modified into an intervention, an intervention that used an adapted form of ‘Image theatre’ where images were used to explore one’s reality-‘actual image’, one’s dreams- ‘the ideal image’, and the ‘transitional image’ from reality to the ideal (Boal, 1979:112). The route I chose necessitated the use of practice-based research. The words of Dwight Conquergood succinctly articulate the vehicle and the route I took. He says;

...think of performance (1) as a work of imagination, as an object of study; (2) as a pragmatics of inquiry (both as a model and method), as an optic and operator of research; (3) as a tactic of intervention, an alternative space of struggle (Conquergood, 2004:318).

The above quote best describes the different aspects of performance. In this particular journey the vehicle I used served as a ‘work of imagination,’ as a method of inquiry and as a ‘tactic of intervention’. Having chosen the vehicle and route, I then went on to consider who I would be travelling with, the young men. I chose to travel with a group of young men from the tribe of the Bakgatla in Botswana. I chose them because I am from the same tribe and I have some understanding of their background, a background of living in Mochudi and the society there. I also felt they would be more willing to embark on this journey with me as I am not a complete outsider.

I then looked to answer another question, ‘what defines a man? But this question would be in the context of the situation that the young men are in. This question would serve as a focal point to help the young men to interrogate themselves and their society because it explores themes of masculinity and identity. This question would also help with gathering of material for the performance.

On this journey I was assisted by a co-researcher. He travelled along with us to help objectively witness our journey and document in writing all that happened. He was also there to assist me and the young men throughout our journey. I had multiple roles in this journey; I was the researcher, facilitator, actor, theatre maker and artist. In this journey we all travelled together and fulfilled different but vital roles day to day, step by step. All of us were involved in contributing towards fulfilling the objectives of our journey and learning as we went. We had no set destination, set path or set time. On this journey we were also 'accompanied' by the voices of people I engaged with around the various relevant topics. The voices were those of the academics, practitioners and theorists who I engaged with through readings, journals and books. I spent many hours engaging with these voices around key issues relevant to the topic of exploration.

Along the way we recorded in words and expressed through our bodies what we discovered. This was a journey through experience. The 'tacit knowledge' we discovered, we attempted to make explicit through various offerings (Nelson, 2006:112). As I mentioned above, the vehicle used in this journey was performance. I created a performance in the form of a play in collaboration with the young men using their stories. Thus far the play has only been performed for the group. It is at a stage where it is only for the group's viewing with the potential for further development if it is to be offered to the public. We also have a collection of other offerings such as poems, short stories, songs, written reflections, letters and journal entries, all of which are ways we used to document experiences of our journey.

In this journey of exploration we were transported from one place to another. The mode of transport was Applied Theatre. We used a vehicle of performance that is usually used to transport actors from the rehearsal space to the stage. In our journey though, it transported a group of young men, not from the rehearsal space to the stage, but for the experience - the experience of using the reality of their lives to create possibilities for personal growth.

From the above described journey, I will share a research report that reflects on the journey undertaken thus far. This report intertwines the personal narrative combined with

relevant academic and creative writing. It captures key discoveries that came out of the journey by using words that create, through description, a picture that best expresses the experiences that came out of this journey. I chose to work with a non-linear structure as a metaphor of the journey towards the *son*, a journey that consists of episodes that best evoke how this process was like. Also, by adapting the conventional structure and style of writing a research report, I hope my report becomes accessible to both academics within my field of inquiry and anyone who has an interest in the topic. I sought to develop a performance as research approach that would build social cohesion amongst young Bakgatla men.

When I look back at the journey thus far, I do so through the lens of an actor-facilitator, who kept asking himself the following questions; ‘How did that help?’ ‘What can I do to improve the process?’ ‘What worked and what didn’t?’ ‘What informed the process?’ This inquiry looked to find the best way to put into practise theories that have informed my craft as a performer and a facilitator.



## **1.Episode One:**

The journey we embarked on, was inspired by my desire to answer a question. What led me to take action and go on this journey was something else, a problem that needed to be addressed. This problem presented me with an opportunity to make an inquiry into questions that I felt had to be answered. In this episode I discuss the problem statement and rationale of my study. I answer the question, “why a journey towards the *son* through performance?” This will give a clearer context of what this journey is about and justify the need for such a journey.

### **1.1 The problems the journey looked to address**

A theatrical performance can be a powerful tool, a tool that can evoke emotions and insight within its audiences. Theatre can transport people to a world where their perceptions are challenged and questioned. It can inspire a desire to change and stimulate audiences into action. Theatre can be used positively within the context of social change and to aid social development. This is why in many applied theatre interventions, elements of theatre are used and applied to situations outside of what is considered traditional mainstream theatre. Applied theatre consciously seeks to bring about some form of change (Nicholson, 2005)

Through this journey I used a theatrical performance as an intervention to tell people’s stories. I addressed the use of personal narrative as a way to help individuals in the participating group to come to terms with certain issues such as masculine identity, relationships and culture. Having studied applied theatre and trained as a facilitator, I often encountered problems around interventions that presented performances based on stories sourced from a community to assist that community. The biggest problem is that the performances created are made with little or no input from the people whom the stories are about. Those whose stories are re-told through performance are only involved in so far as to

tell their story. After the performance they speak back to what they have witnessed or they get involved in a discussion regarding the issues that came up.

In Playback Theatre the teller of the story is allowed to accept or reject what they see in the performance. However, this input is problematic as it is based on a once off performance. Also, the choice of how the aesthetic is constructed is left to the performers which means that the forms of expression are often simplified, don't have a thoroughly considered form and never fully challenge the teller or the audience. There is no detailed and a carefully crafted aesthetic to engage the audience on a deeper level. The process is too short and doesn't allow for a deeper reflection. Then there are issues of input in the moment - not enough time is given to really engage with the tellers about the performance of their narrative. These problems are also true in Forum Theatre where the audience is allowed to accept or reject what happens during the performance. They are only allowed to give alternative outcomes to the scenarios that are performed or even take the part of one of the actors and play out the scene as they see fit. All this is done within the day of the session, so the time given for the audience to engage with the performance is minimal.

To investigate how the problems identified in Playback Theatre and Forum Theatre could be mediated, I worked with a group of young men from a village called Mochudi in Botswana, to embark on an intervention. Our focus involved finding out how young men deal with the transition of 'becoming' men, the transition between boyhood and adulthood. There has been a re-introduction of *Bogwera*<sup>2</sup> within the Bakgatla tribe. This refers to a traditional rites of passage ceremony. The practice was revived after an absence of over 20 years. The *Kgosi*<sup>3</sup>, along with other elders in the village, felt that a lot of social problems, specifically excessive drinking, violence, unruly behaviour amongst the youth, the spread of AIDS and

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<sup>2</sup> Bogwera- a Setswana word which means the rites of passage ceremony for boys.

<sup>3</sup> Kgosi – Setswana title for the leader of a tribe. The word Chief was used but has since been abandoned due to its colonial connotations

teenage pregnancy are rooted in the lack of guidance among young men. Thus in 2008 the traditional rites of passage ceremonies of the *Bakgatla* were brought back into practise by their current *Kgosi Kgafela*<sup>4</sup> II.

..there is a movement towards reviving these traditional practices owing to overwhelming levels of juvenile delinquency; irresponsibility on the part of the youth (Makgala, 2009:iii).

Above are the words of *Kgosi Linchwe II*<sup>5</sup> (*Kgosi Kgafela's* father) while he was chief of the *Bakgatla*. These words demonstrate that the re-introduction of rites of passage ceremonies is a solution prescribed by the elders, not the youth. Initiation is important socially and symbolically as it marks the development of an individual from one state to another (Ottenberg, 1989:xii). Traditionally, the initiations occur during rites of passage ceremonies. 'Through these rites, an individual earns his/her social identity in the community' (Bahemuka & Brockington, 2004:246). Through these initiations and rites of passage elders are able to teach boys (and girls) about changes they will be going through as adolescents and how to cope with them. They are also taught about their responsibilities as men (and women) and the roles they are expected to fulfil in society, hence assisting them in the development of their identities and giving them guidance. In many instances, these traditional initiations and rites of passage ceremonies are either discontinued or are practised by few. The youth now live in a more modern world which presents its own forms of initiations and rites of passage ceremonies with very strong influence in the development of the young men, something which the elders have neglected to try and understand. This is a problem that has been observed by other researchers about youth in Africa. Ampofo and Boateng noticed that, 'less attention has been paid to understanding how young people construct their gender identities and how these constructions might be related to sexual and other lifestyle choices' (Buikema Ratele Shefer Strebel Shabalala, 2007:52). It was

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<sup>4</sup> *Kgosi Kgafela* – the paramount *Kgosi* of *Bakgatla*, son of *Kgosi Linchwe* and heir to the *Bakgatla* chieftainship. He took over after his father's death and re-introduced *Bogwera* and *Bojale* (Rights of passage for females).

<sup>5</sup> *Kgosi Linchwe II* – the *Bakgatla Kgosi* who passed away four years ago. Since chieftainship is hereditary, he has been replaced by his son *Kgosi Kgafela II*

my intention to develop a performance as research approach that pays attention to how gender identity was being constructed amongst the sons of the Bakgatla.

## **1.2 The rationale behind this journey.**

With this study I wanted to look at the young men's views about the re-introduction of traditional rites of passage ceremonies and their views on masculinity and identity in a contemporary Botswana context. Masculinity is a social construction of the gender role for men and what defines men (Connell, 2000:17). Connell goes on to say that there are 'different masculinities. Different cultures, and different periods of history, construct gender differently.' But with these 'patterns of conduct [what] society define as masculinity may be seen in the lives of individuals... Masculinities are defined collectively in culture, and are sustained in institutions' (Connell, 2000:18). Institutions such as the ones my participants study at and their tribe. Through my research and the performance, I highlighted and challenged the young men's ideas around masculinity.

Reflecting on my adolescence growing up in Gaborone, Botswana I realised that when it came to personal relationships, sex, drinking, image and teen culture I had no guidance and support. I was raised to be like a man, to fend for myself when it came to my personal issues as an individual and as a teenage boy. I was raised by Batswana parents who were raised with traditional Setswana values, values that they raised me with and felt were adequate to guide me through my adolescence. In hindsight I see that my upbringing negated a lot of who I was as a person. I longed for what Nelson (1988) refers to as a, 'life-giving connectedness between our sexuality and our spirituality' (p.14). As a teenage boy, my parents believed that emotions were not important, something attributable to their own upbringing. I was too young to be involved in dating. I never related with girls on a personal level. Hormonal changes and shifts in my body would only be addressed at school in Biology class. Sex and anything sexual was never discussed. A social life was meant to be confined to family and home. My parents would not address drinking, partying and going out at night. Their way of dealing with this was giving me a curfew. So I missed out on appropriate guidance when it came to aspects of my life that greatly

affected me and were influential in my development into adulthood. This was at a time when I was in transition from being a 'boy' to becoming a 'man'. I was also going through a stage of self discovery where I was dealing with issues of identity.

Identity represents the intersection of individual and society. In framing identity the individual simultaneously joins self to society and society to self. As a result, identity comes to serve not only as a guardian of integration and continuity of self-experience, but also as a mechanism for shared meaning-making that embeds the individual with those with whom life will be lived with (Archer. 1994:12).

This idea of identity is a crucial one when one is growing up. Adolescent males, who are in the process of becoming adult men, grapple with the question, what is a man? What makes a man? How does one become a man? So there are issues of identity, of how identity is constructed, how identity is shaped within a society, and how an individual becomes conscious of and responsible for his or her identity.

Traditional Setswana values place a lot of emphasis on the community and often the individual is neglected, especially amongst adolescents. There's a Setswana saying, "*Motho ke motho ka batho.*" Which means, 'a person is thought first of all as a constituent of a particular community, for it is the community which defines who he/she is and who he/she can become respectively' (Makgala, 2009:361). I found myself confused about my identity. I struggled a lot with my father. He expected me to play a particular role within the family, that of the eldest son; strong, independent, responsible, the upholder of traditional family values and the head of the family in his absence. I found myself being socialised to play and fulfil a particular role within my family and Batswana society. 'African tradition is a building block. It is used to discipline and shape the personality of an individual' (Makgala, 2009:361). The gender roles for young men in Botswana are rooted in traditional Setswana culture but with a new generation of youth who are greatly influenced by Western culture there is a clash and hence social issues of teen pregnancy, substance abuse, violence and crime by young men are rising.

What I have observed as a key issue of gender is that it is a social construction that is perceived and/or accepted as the natural way of behaving for men and women, based on their

sex (Van Huyssteen, 2003). One assimilates the behaviour linked with signifying a gender they are meant to fulfil. In this way gender is a performance, learned over time. As Butler says, 'one does one's body' (Bial, 156:2007). So one is born as a male or female, biologically, then by falling into one of the gender categories one is socialised into performing certain gender roles within society. These gender roles are either feminine or masculine; one is forced into belonging to one of these categories. The individual is 'compelled' into becoming/being a man or a woman (*ibid*). The gender role that one performs is an assumed role, one takes on that role, meaning there is another state of being before one is historically 'situated' (Bial, 156:2007). Society constructs this role in order to dictate how individuals should act. So the entire constitution of how one should behave which seems rigid and cast in stone is not a given reality. In our journey we explored the gender roles of men in the Bakgatla tribe and created a 'platform,' that allowed for the deconstruction of stereotypical masculinities and the reconstruction of possible new norms (Morrell, 1998: 605-630). 'Many forms of theatre-making in applied drama have an interest in how fictional narratives might illuminate lived experiences' (Nicholson, 2005:22). In this journey I focused on the performance of personal narratives because of theatre's ability to 'illuminate' and assist individuals and communities to view their story in a different 'light'. A theatrical performance allows people to view their stories from a different perspective that is represented in another way. I created a performance that explored issues relevant to the young Bakgatla men.

When using theatre to tell people's stories one must be careful because good storytelling combines 'aesthetics and ethics' (Nicholson, 2005:20). This combination of aesthetics and ethics I believe to be very crucial, especially when telling people's personal stories. Too often have applied theatre interventions that use theatre performances derived from peoples personal narratives compromised on either ethics or aesthetics. Often the aesthetics are not thoroughly thought out and considered. They are over simplified and done quickly. The performance becomes one dimensional and misses out on the complexities of the personal narrative. Then there are times when ethics are compromised, such as in some Theatre for Development (TfD) interventions, when research is carried out, narratives are

sourced and then the group goes away to create a performance that they then stage for the community. This separation means that the tellers of the story and the community whom the performance is for, has had no influence in how their stories are told. The performance may be aesthetically well done and it may capture key issues and the essence of what was important in the people's stories. But this does not address the power relations, representation, cultural awareness, and how the community gains ownership of the performance. For it to truly affect change the community must be involved in some way throughout the whole process of creating the performance; providing an authentic platform for stories and issues relevant to them, having a say in how their stories are constructed in performance, giving them a chance to reflect on the 'mirroring' process and the benefits from the final performance. My use of a performance as an intervention can be more effective than Playback, TfD and Forum Theatre because it allows the beneficial processes that occur during a performance to happen over a more extended and focused period of time.

By creating a method where the intervention is a performance of the group's stories, where the group is involved in some way throughout the whole process, I feel that the best combination of ethics and aesthetics will be found. Also the final method created can serve as a model that can be applied to other interventions that use storytelling. To the greater body of knowledge in the field of theatre and its use in social development, I will contribute greater insight into how an aesthetically strong performance can be created and still be used in interventions. This method will strengthen the case that applied theatre is not a lesser art, and that artists can get involved in interventions and still create work of high quality that is artistically creative. It can still make a difference in people's lives. Artists can create work of exceptional aesthetic value that speaks back to the heart of a people. This aesthetic can ultimately shift perception, move the person and evoke empathy towards those whose stories are told.

My reasons for this journey in the form of practice led research have been made clear. This study attempts, through the use of a new method of using performance as research as an intervention, to firstly address the problem of giving equal attention to ethics and aesthetics in

applied theatre, and secondly to address the problem of the need for young Bakgatla men to be given the appropriate support to explore issues that affect them.



## **2. Episode Two**

Before beginning any journey one must plan. I had to take into consideration many things before we went on this journey. The two things I would like to discuss now are the aims of my study, what I intended to do through this journey and how I planned to go about the journey. I will speak about my aims and then give the step by step, overall plan of how I was going to go about my study. Thus providing a background of what pre-planning was done before we embarked on this journey.

### **2.1 The aim of this journey**

My intention with this journey was to create a new method of using performance as an intervention within a group in a specific community. This intervention used the personal narratives of the young men of the Bakgatla tribe to create a performance that speaks back to the rites of passage for adolescent males into adulthood. This performance was meant to create distancing that would allow for problems to be discussed and viewed objectively. I wanted to create a model of performance that raised awareness and challenged people to deal with an issue that is pertinent to them. Throughout the creation process I was both the facilitator and performer. My method aimed to allow for greater involvement by a group over the creation of the performance of their stories and greater input into what is most important in the story. The young men influenced aesthetic choices, such as use of local praise poetry and the structure of the performance. This involvement was meant to lead to the creation of a performance that honours the teller and speaks back to complex adolescent male issues that really affect the young men. As the performer and facilitator I retained the right to make choices regarding the creation of the performance in order to challenge the young men to view their stories differently, allowing for distancing and to evoke debate. The process was a collaborative one where dialogue was important and it was based on the principle of open, transparent dialogue between performer/facilitator and participants.

Thompson's assertion is that,

'story creation and story narration are vital parts of creative work within communities in crisis, but that the exhibition or valorisation of a story has no automatic connection to the liberation of the teller' (Thompson 2005:5).

I agree with Thompson's assertion. It was my intention with this method to provide a performance that engaged more with the participants and those whose stories were told. The performance was meant to be more engaging through its process of creation, by getting the audience/participants involved in a different way. A way that was far more beneficial to them than just experiencing a once-off performance. By creating a method based on a creation of a performance, allowing input from the group that it is being created for, I hoped they would find ownership of the performance even though it wasn't performed by them. My suggested approach was meant to differ from conventional TfD.

The other intention of my research has been to tell the story of adolescent males in Botswana who are from the tribe of the Bakgatla. I wanted to find knowledge about them that had previously not been known or documented; I wanted to find out how they saw themselves within society and the role they felt they had to play in the future of their country and how they felt about being in a transitory phase from boy to man. By telling the story of adolescent men and creating a performance out of my findings I hoped to do two things. Firstly, I hoped to assist the young men, through performance, to address their issues and find a greater understanding of themselves. Secondly, I hoped that through the performance, society may be challenged to view adolescent males with a greater understanding and empathy, thus enabling them to assist in solving issues that involve adolescent men.

## **2.2 The method of how we travelled**

Before beginning the journey I made a plan as to how I would go about achieving my aims. I planned to use performance as research (Conquergood, 2004). This method of research is practise led research. Through the application of knowledge that I had learnt practically, I looked to learn more and expand on that knowledge.

Art is inherently reflective and reflexive.... research sufficiency may lie in sustained and structured reflection to make the 'tacit knowledge' explicit (Nelson, 2006:112).

This quote from Nelson speaks back to the importance of reflection during and after a process of practise. Practise used as a method of research. This journey has been one deeply embedded in art; my approach has been that of an artist.

As practitioners we know that practice is the most important aspect of our art. Through it we create fundamental processes from which we learn more about the form and the material explored within it (Somers, 2002:100).

This quote from Somers reiterates the importance of practise for practitioners. As an actor and theatre maker, I find practise crucial within research in the field of acting and performance. To create my method and by embarking on this journey, 'practice' was important and only through the doing did I discover how to go about creating the method and exploring how well it can work. I put into practise the knowledge I had around ways of creating a performance using the personal as an archive and also my knowledge of applied theatre to facilitate the process of creating the performance. Below is the initial overall approach I planned to take with this journey.

The *first step* of the journey was to do background research to assist in the setting up of the trip; this included the planning of all the logistics. Here I looked at what other literature could inform my approach, costs of the journey and how long I imagined it might take.

The *second step* was to set up a group. I worked with a group of young men from the Bakgatla tribe in Botswana who live in Mochudi<sup>6</sup>, a village just outside the capital Gaborone. The young men were aged between 18 and 25, a mix of young men who have and have not gone through the re-introduced rites of passage ceremony of *Bogwera*. To set up this group I planned to secure a space that we would meet at regularly, a place close to them in the village

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<sup>6</sup> Mochudi- the capital of Bakgatla. It is located about 30km from Botswana's capital city Gaborone. It is surrounded by other smaller villages that make up the Kgatleng District.

and also a space that I could use for creating and working on the performance. The space was to be one that allowed for the participants to feel safe and comfortable. I would source a group of individuals who fit the criteria. I was looking to have a group of 8-10 participants.

The *third step* was to find and create cohesion within the group and with myself and my co-researcher. I would give the group an overview of what I intended to do, why and how I intended to take them on a journey. There would also be an agreement with the group and all individuals on what is shared in the sessions. Forms would be filled and signed by the participants allowing me to use their stories and whatever information I get from the journey. I would also include use of recording equipment such as video recorders, photographs and voice recorders. I would also ask that journals be kept by all participants and I would also keep a journal.

The *fourth step* would be the sourcing of stories, recording them and analysing them. From the findings I would begin the process of work shopping and creating the initial performance: The performance that I would provide as a first offering for the group. The choice of style and form would be dictated by the findings. I would be the sole actor and my co-research would assist with direction.

The *fifth step* would be the dialogue about the performance and the process of the group giving input into what they feel should or could be changed and what is effective or not about the performance. I would then go on retreat, re-work the performance then return again for further dialogue. This would go on until a point where all involved felt the performance had reached a point where it best speaks back to all concerned in the making of the work.

In the *sixth step*, the participants would invite the people in their lives who they wish to witness their stories. This would be followed by a 'Kgotla'<sup>7</sup> with the participants and the invited guests to dialogue around the performance, facilitated by myself. This part would be included

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<sup>7</sup> Kgotla - This is a Setswana word used to refer to a gathering place where tribes people gather to discuss issues of importance.

so that any issues raised (particularly those that effect family members and close friends) can begin to be resolved within a more personal space before it is performed for the greater public. Once the participants feel comfortable with the performance being viewed publicly, it would then be taken to the greater community in order that they can also learn and dialogue around it.

The *seventh step* was to have a feedback and final reflection session with the group. To get their overall responses and feeling towards their process, but also to find out how they benefited or didn't from the whole process.

The *final step* was to write-up my findings and critically reflect on the process. Then hopefully formulate a method from the study. I would also look at how best to document the entire process and my findings from it. Throughout the process I would be constantly evaluating and shifting my approach according to what best suits the group and my intention. I would also find things out through doing; my inquiry would be done primarily through practice before embarking on this journey I had clear aims and an overall plan of how to go about my research. I felt I had sufficiently prepared to go out and find the answers to my questions and find possible solutions to the problems I had.

### **3. Episode Three**

Now I will discuss literature that I reviewed before the journey, engaged with during the journey and 'dialogued' with after this part of the journey. I will then move on to discuss the knowledge that I discovered. The literature I will refer to will give a picture of where the knowledge I have discovered in this journey will fit in.

#### **3.1 The Voices I dialogued with about this journey**

During this initial part of the journey I found the voices of various theorists very helpful. Firstly they gave me an idea that I expanded on during the journey, secondly, they helped to make sense of what was discovered, and lastly, by serving as advisors that assisted in guiding me at different parts of the journey. I also looked at concepts and methods that could help me engage with multiple perspectives through the journey. One of these being, the concept and method called 'auto-ethnography'.

Auto-ethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth auto-ethnographic gaze, first through an ethnographic wide lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:739).

I applied this concept by practising 'self-reflexivity' throughout the journey and by allowing for the various roles I played in the journey to dialogue with one another in my different reflections. This concept also helped me negotiate between the different boundaries of 'the researcher's subjectivity, the academic field and the framework of the society' in which my research took place (Aslop, 2002).

In my attempt to develop a performance methodology I used performance as 'a deliberate effort to represent, to say something about something' (Schechner & Appel, 1990: 208). In being 'deliberate' I used the process of creating a performance to help the participants,

in a way that is aesthetically considered and best serves the purpose of our journey. Every step of the journey I looked to source material as detailed as possible to ensure that when creating the performance it can be as detailed as it needs to be and I also challenged the participants in their expression of views and sharing of stories. I challenged them to be as detailed as they can, using effective questioning, considered facilitation and my abilities as a director to guide them when it came to expressing themselves.

When it came to performance studies and a definition of performance studies, I found Richard Schechner to be the main theorist whose words echoed throughout the journey. He provided me with a definition of performance that I kept referring back to. The definition of performance I worked with was:

A performance is a dialectic of 'flow' that is, spontaneous movement in which action and awareness are one, and 'reflexivity,' in which the central meanings, values and goals of a culture are seen, 'in action' as they shape and explain behaviour. A performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures. We will know one another better by entering one another's performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies (Schechner & Appel 1990:1).

I took this definition and broke it down to key words and phrases that I then expanded on, in various ways, to use in the process. I constantly looked to find 'flow' throughout the sessions I had with the group, flow in the sense of cohesion within and amongst the group. But to get flow, there must be no blocks- these hinder the flow of the process. So whenever we encountered a lack of 'flow' in a session or an exercise, I would either shift the direction of the session or adapt the exercise or address this during a reflection with the group. To monitor possible blocks and things that were hindering the process I constantly asked myself, "is there flow? What could be hindering the flow? Are there any blocks?" I also ensured there was always 'reflexivity', through playing within the boundaries of games, learning to listen and respond during improvisation exercises, through constant reflections in various ways, the group and myself were always reflexive in what we did thus we were learning to fuse 'action and

awareness'. I ask myself, "How do we show the 'central meanings, values and goals of a culture' within the performance we create? "

To address this, I ensured that I listened in every way possible to the young men's stories... I listened in detail to the various ways they spoke and expressed themselves- what they wrote, drew, performed, said and what they kept silent about. I also asked myself, "how do we 'declare a shared humanity' and what is 'unique' about their 'particular' culture?" This question in particular was there with me throughout the analysis of the material discovered during the sessions and when I began creating the performance. So the definition of performance that I used helped inform what I did.

When one looks at our journey it could easily be put under the umbrella category of applied theatre, more specifically under what is called Theatre for Development. But I have avoided labelling it as that, because this journey was focused on performance as an art not just as applied theatre. Also my approach was as an artist, an artist who believes art is not only about expression but also about challenging dominant ideologies and expressing subtle nuances about life that may be overlooked but define humanity. Theatre for Development (TfD)<sup>8</sup> is generically defined as:

...a range of theatrical practices and participatory methods to engage marginalised members of communities in dialogical process aimed at enhancing awareness of political and social issues, building up social cohesion and stimulating the participation, awareness and organisational strength of groups and communities (Epskamp, 2006:43).

An aspect of TfD. that I found useful is how it can be used as a 'research instrument... and is all about discovery, learning and empowerment' (Eskamp, 2006:45). Also its processes aim to answer a question, solve a problem or improve something. Our journey aimed to achieve the same as T.F.D. but my approach was that of an artist. This approach of an artist has with it an

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<sup>8</sup> Theatre for Development



appreciation and understanding of theatre as an art, hence I look to use it as best I can. Also, with this approach I look to address the issue of aesthetics.

In the field of applied theatre I also reviewed what is called Playback Theatre (1993). Playback Theatre uses improvisation and storytelling techniques to playback to the audience a story told by one of the audience members. Part of 'Playback's healing efficacy comes from peoples need to tell their stories. It's a basic human imperative. From the telling of our stories comes our sense of identity, and our place in the world, and our compass of the world itself' (Salas, 1993:111). So what I did in our journey is similar in that I tell the participant's stories through performance - their story is 'played' back to them, thus fulfilling a basic human need. But the key difference being that my method is over a longer period of time, allowing for much more input from the teller of the story and this allows for the aesthetics to be more detailed and considered. Also in my process there is more collaboration with the teller of the story.

Storytelling was another aspect of the study that I have read into and I have encountered various approaches and uses of storytelling. This quote below, speaks back to the true power of storytelling and its part in creating identity:

"Definitional ceremonies" as a kind of collective "autobiography" a means by which a group creates its identity by telling itself a story about itself, in the course of which it brings it to life (Schechner & Appel 1990:9).

This quote speaks of the cyclical nature of telling stories and how, by telling a story over and over its effects are far deeper. The cycle of telling stories over and over becomes a ceremony that helps define one's identity. Our journey involves re-visiting the performance over and over as it is evolved. But the story the performance tells is the same one, over and over, be it in different ways. In this repetition there is a form of ritual or ceremony that can help one define and gain clarity on their identity. Some of the young men said that a regular meeting of the group like this could become a ritual within their lives over time; a ritual that they feel they could carry on without me and one that they feel would evolve over time as old members leave

and new members join. So this intervention could become a ritual that would be inherited and evolved by the group.

Throughout the journey I incorporated a 'constant evaluative component' (Mda, 1993: 37) this way I was able to constantly monitor how the journey was going. This also helped me aware of any ethical issues that may arise and this allowed me to always be aware of ethics. By having regular reflections with the group during sessions, with my co-researcher and with myself through journaling, I was able to critique how I facilitated the group and how the process was going. I could also attend to various problems along the way. Whatever didn't work I changed.

I worked with the group on various issues as a researcher, facilitator and artist. I identified various issues and problems that affected them. In discussions and interviews I was always aware of Paulo Freire's 'culture of silence' something I initially encountered amongst the young men, where some of them didn't talk about their issues (Mda, 1993:42). But the further we travelled together those who were quiet opened up. The participants stories, comments, feedback, responses, issues ...etc, are all crucial for qualitative research. "Ownership of information and the nature of the process is generated, analysed, owned and shared by local people as part of a process of their empowerment' (Chambers, 1994). Taking note of Chambers' words, I am aware that the information I gathered is owned by the participants and they assisted me in the collection and analysis of it. Also I noted and recorded information with their permission.

Lastly, one of the major voices I dialogued with around this journey was concerned with the method of research I used, which is practice as research. This kind of research is popular amongst creative arts based research, this is because this form of research 'is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge.' (Barrett, 2007:4) I used this kind of research because the questions I looked to answer and the knowledge I looked to discover could only be gotten through the experience and documented in reflection after having

experienced this journey. Also this method of research allows for more subjective research, research that challenges the boundaries of traditional research and it 'generate[s] personally situated knowledge and new ways of modelling and externalising such knowledge.'(Barrett, 2007:1) Through practice as research I was able to take previous 'models' that I had been taught as an actor but then apply them to a situation within a community thus discovering new knowledge and being able to creatively report back on my experience in a way that best reflects on my study.

## **4. Episode Four**

The journey unfolds. You have a context of how the journey came to be and what theory was engaged with around it. Now I will share with you how the journey went. What I will offer in this episode is the method I used during the journey. I will explain what I did and how I put into practise what I had been taught. I will then go on to reflect on what worked, what didn't and how the process was for those who embarked on it. But I will discuss this in a way where I keep revisiting the journey, as in I will discuss the journey in stages, then in steps, and then speak back to a specific session. I will not discuss everything that happened in detail instead I will give more of an overview, with detailed descriptions where I feel it is necessary.

### **4.1 The path we walked during the journey**

As I mentioned before I have been trained in performance and Applied Theatre. During our journey I used what I had been taught and adapted it. To begin with I took into consideration who I would be working with, the young men. In my applied theatre training I was taught that my participants are the focus of any intervention and they are the most important part of any process. I must do my best to ensure that my work with them is ethically considered. This was done through careful planning of what I did and by being an aware, open, clear and sensitive facilitator.

I then looked at what my intervention aimed to do; it looked to explore issues around masculinity and identity amongst the group of young men I worked with. So I had to strategise how I would approach the enquiry into such issues. I chose to use image theatre as a base, but I adapted it. Most of the exercises I used got the participants to create images, either through drawing, writing, using their bodies, the space, songs or the bodies of others. The images created would also be brought to life, through performances in the form of short sketches, dances, scenarios, poems or monologues. The images would either show the reality of the issue (the real image), how the participants would like things to be (the ideal image), the image of

participants in action shifting from the reality of the issue to how they would like things to be (the transitional image) (Boal, 1979). This is how I used what I was taught about image theatre in my process during the stage of sourcing material to be used in making the performance.

At the same time, during the process of sourcing material for the performance, I used my training in performance studies. During my Transformation course, I was taught using methods based on Richard Schechner's Environmental Theatre. I used various aspects of Environmental Theatre. Firstly, I considered the space I would use for my sessions, 'the fullness of [the] space, the endless ways [the] space can be transformed, articulated, [and] animated' (Schechner 1994:1). All this was taken into consideration when deciding which space I could use.

During this process I also strived 'for a means to penetrate or surpass the mask of daily life in order to reveal the essential man' (Schechner 1994:126). I then, within each session, adapted the four steps to the performer's process that Schechner speaks of in Environmental Theatre.

The four steps are life-rhythms- like breathing, eating, sleeping- they sustain a performer without exhausting him. The four steps are:

1. Getting in touch with yourself.
2. Getting in touch with yourself face to face with others.
3. Relating to others without narrative or other highly formalised structures.
4. Relating to others within narrative or other highly formalised structures (Schechner, 1994:129).

These steps happen simultaneously during the performer's process. During my process I adapted this, I looked to ensure that these 'steps' happen during the participants' process. During the stage of sourcing materials I made sure that the exercises I used would 'sustain' the participants by always adhering to one or all of the first three steps. Exercises I used would either help the participants get in touch with themselves, get in touch with themselves face to face with others or relate to others without narrative or highly formalised structures. (I interpreted 'without narrative' to be exercises that allowed for improvisation, impulse and

spontaneity. 'Highly formalised structures' being the traditional and cultural laws that govern how members of society are to behave, I created a space and environment that was very informal and individuals were allowed to behave more freely and express their individuality without infringing on others).

What is particular and unique about my method is that I am a facilitator with the ability to perform. I used my ability to perform as a means to embody the group's stories; I then carried their stories in performance and that helped create distance; this strategy helped me create a reflexive method. A method where the group told stories, role played with me, sang, and then I would go away and analyse, select, the shape their stories into a performance and offer it back to them. An offering for reflection and I would give them space to speak back, shape and engage in the developing of the performance.

When it came to the stage of creating the performance and offering it back to them, I took over the role of the performer and the participants became the audience. The switch that I speak of here is that during the sourcing of materials stage the participants performed their stories and views to other members of the group and myself, while I facilitated and guided them. In the next stage where I created an offering of a possible performance, I then became the performer; I performed their stories back to them. This is when the fourth step of Schechner's performer's process was used.

The participants then began to relate with others (being the character's that I played, who carried their own voices, voices of those close to them and voices of their community) within the narratives woven into the performance. Another switch that happened here is that, during the sourcing of the stories the participants were actively involved, but then when it came to me offering the performance to them they became seemingly more passive in that I performed the performance and they observed. This was done to allow for distancing and for the young men to view their stories objectively. While the young men observe the performance, internally they engage with what they are watching. While I perform, they are watching as creators, as scriptwriters, as people who have had a chance to tell their stories and

have them reflected back to them, like playback, but only here the 'playback' or the 'forum rehearsal' is not a one off, it is a sustained, considered and developed process.

#### **4.2 Re-tracing our journey, step by step.**

I will now relate to you what happened during our journey, but from another perspective. I will speak about the journey in steps and how far we actually got. The step by step overall approach that I outlined was my initial proposed method for the journey. From *step one to step three* everything went accordingly. I only had a few challenges of securing a suitable space to work in and also finding a time that the group could meet at on a regular basis. But once a set place was found the group met regularly, every Saturday or second Saturday at 9am till 1pm. Depending on what commitments the group had that Saturday. Every Friday participants would confirm if they could make it or not. I was only able to have six sessions with the group from mid February till March. This drastically altered my overall plan for the process because I had intended to have a minimum of ten sessions. But I carried on because my study was more focused on the process and how I went about it.

The next major challenge I encountered was when I got to the *fourth step* and I began sourcing the stories and exploring the groups views and feelings towards Masculine Identity and initiation. What I planned to take two sessions ended up taking four sessions. I used a lot of different theatre sports, creativity exercises, warm-up exercises, image theatre and different writing exercises to get the group to share their stories, views and feelings around the question, 'what makes a man?' I also used the playing of games and singing songs as a group to help in building a bond amongst myself and the group. But the overall idea I used consistently throughout the process was that of Image Theatre (1979). This step of the journey took longer than expected and I found that this part of my study was important for the performance and to build cohesion amongst the group. By spending more time in sourcing the stories, this allowed for a lot more material to be sourced and also the group was able to creatively tell their stories which was already helping in the process of devising the performance. This part of the process, where the group shared their stories, helped build a sense of group belonging. They became

more trusting and opened up to me, sharing more personal stories. So here the ethics of confidentiality, trust, sustained relationship were abided to. The group also learnt various dramatic skills and began to express themselves better. The final session, session 4, of this step culminated in them creating a short performance for me that included all of what they wanted to be highlighted and used in the performance I would create. The group also provided me with a structure that I then based the performance I offered to them.

I then moved to the *fifth step* where I began creating the performance. I created an open ended performance that could be expanded with the groups input and responses to the first offering I would give. Also in this way, any new stories that may come up can be incorporated. I created a performance that began with the character of an old man speaking a praise poem, which was a combination of parts from different praise poems the groups had written about animals they would be if they were to be likened to a particular animal. The old man served the purpose of a narrator throughout the performance – later becoming the dramatic shaman, the soothsayer of the community. To help the character of the old man to begin the performance I would ask the young men to start off with a song. This would help get the young men to actively be part of the performance and I would also begin getting into character. This is where I take on the role of what Schechner refers to as, ‘the one who is transformed...the one who connects different realms of reality....the one who by changing himself helps others change’ (Schechner 1994:180). Then from their song I would perform for them. From the old man I would shift character to become a fictional young man who had issues similar to those of the young men in the group. The performance was structured in a way that the stories of the young men would be heard through the different young men I would play in the performance. Each young man would share his problem and pose a question for the audience. Then the old man would return and comment on what has just been witnessed. For the first offering I just created one character and the old man.

The performance was 15minutes long but the group responded well to it and they agreed with the structure I had chosen for the performance. It captured the core of what they had offered me in their performance. What was most important for the young men was the



dialogue between the older man and the young men. The performance, as it was structured, allowed for the young man's views to be shared and the old man would witness and respond. At the same time the group of young men, as an audience, would engage with the character of the young man's story, which has similar issues to their stories, more objectively. As for the character of the old man, his role is to question and challenge the audience of young men to have a deeper engagement with what the performance evokes. But this stage is still one that requires more time to find the best way of how to further develop it and how it can be most effective for the group. This is how far the journey has gone thus far.

#### **4.3 Our exploration from one session to another**

Now to break down our journey further and relate back to you what happened in the journey from session to session. The group met for the first time at their school, the Brigades, this is a government institution where youth who have finished high school get practical training in carpentry, design, metal works, leathery, construction or forestry. I introduced myself and told the young men what I propose to do and why. 13 were interested and signed up, so I got a group of young *Bakgatla* men aged between 18 and 25 who were a mix of those who had been through initiation and those who hadn't. They were unclear about what exactly I would be doing with them. Next session we met and all was made clearer to them and through working on the 'floor' they began to understand how I would be working. But there was still confusion over where and when we would meet regularly.

During our first session we explored the *kgotla* using image theatre. This was because the *kgotla* is a meeting place in the tribe where the *kgosi* and the men of the village meet to discuss and address issues of importance to the tribe. This is a place where women and young men have no power or authority or voice. The *kgotla* is a symbol of power, privilege and the patriarchy. –In this session we focused more on the image of how things are in reality. It became clear that the group saw the *kgotla* as a place where serious matters are discussed amongst men and a place where there is strong traditional law. I got a feeling that the group was still 'sitting on the fence' observing me and gaining a better understanding of what the

process will be like. The group and I were still establishing a relationship. I also observed that when the group spoke of themselves there seemed to be a reluctance or shyness to express themselves- this could be because they don't really know how, have the confidence to, still don't trust me or it's something they don't usually do. When they spoke of their culture or tribe on the other hand they found it much easier to discuss and share and express. The group showed that they have a clear distinct understanding of traditional life and stereotypical roles. It is clear they live in a world where fear is used to maintain control. Being a young man also means you are reckless and untrustworthy, always viewed negatively and suspiciously. It is also clear that the group accepts and reinforces stereotypes and dominant ideologies. This includes the belief that women are of a lower status and they are there to serve men. This was most telling during the skit when they young man performed their version of a *kgotla* for women. "Can we please rush because we have to go home and take care of the children," this was said by one of the young men when they played the part of a woman. They made it very clear in this skit that women were meant to be home bound.

In session 2, we moved on to exploring issues relevant to the young men and looking at relationships. We began building a stronger relationship as a group. The group connected well to meditation and enjoyed finding stillness, something that is not usually associated with young men. The group also showed an intuition of performance. "When you own the character you can be more creative," this is feedback from one of the young men when we reflected on the short performances done by them of each other's creative writing. Another young man commented, "Directing is interesting because of how people interpreted [the writing]." Their strongest form of artistic expression seems to be in praise poetry and song- with these forms they expressed themselves very well. This could be because culturally praise poems or '*Maboko*<sup>9</sup>' and songs are used a lot within the tribe.

By session 3, the group had found its rhythm. Some members had stopped coming, due to constant commitments on weekends, but there remained a core number of six who always

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<sup>9</sup> Setswana word for praise poem.

came. They became more open minded and began viewing things outside of what is the norm, individual voices began to emerge through song and poetry. Below is an extract of part of a praise poem one of the young men wrote. He was praising a sheep. It was written in Setswana:

*“Konyana konyana, ya modimo. Monko one gare bue,*

*O tlhapa ka perfume go oka makgarebe....”<sup>10</sup>*

The group began to offer skits that challenged the traditional structure of the *kgotla*, where everyone had a voice and equal status. They began voicing issues that they found relevant to them as individuals.

In session 4, the group began to express themselves as individuals more, during warm-ups and different exercises. The group revealed that the majority of them confide in and are close to their girlfriends, their relationships are a big part of their lives. They have clear dreams and ambitions, but these are centred on money and they seem to have a lot of pressure to provide financially. The session ends with the group performing a skit that they created which encompasses all that has been most important for them during the previous sessions. In reflection, one of the young men wrote, ‘....uncles addressing their nephews. They were open *go sena mo go tweng o seka wa botsa se*<sup>11</sup>’ this was in response to the skit they performed for me. These words capture the core of what the young men would like from older men, open dialogue where they are not restricted from discussing issues. This was one of the things I got from their performance to incorporate in the offering I would make for them.

Session 5, an offering in the form of a performance is made to the group and they experienced the performance as spectators, they seemed moved by seeing their stories told back to them in a different way. It is clear that the performance encompasses their shared views and speaks of issues relevant to them. One of the group members opens up and shares a

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<sup>10</sup> Oh Lamb, oh lamb of the lord. Your smell we dare not speak

You bathe yourself in such ‘perfume’, to attract the ladies

<sup>11</sup> There was nobody saying don’t ask this don’t ask that...’

more personal story. So the performance is creating a space for opening up more and also helping them begin engaging in deeper discussions around issues. The group seems to be at a place where they are made more aware of their present situation, problems and issues are revealed, all through the performance. This is the stage of revolving and evolving of the performance so that it grows through discussion and collaboration with the group. As the performance grows, so will the depth of dialogue and analyzing issues, leading towards a resolution and ultimately getting problems addressed.

Session 6, I gave the group a second offering of a possible performance. I carried on with what worked from the previous session and extended the performance. I have included in my appendix my session plan for this particular session, a draft of the scripting of the first performance I did for them. This will give a more detailed description of the last session and will also serve as an example of how I plan my sessions and also the performance I am using.

As this was the last session I had with the group I will give a more detailed analysis of this session and then I will go on to describe how I would take this journey further if we were to continue. From this session I found that the structure of the performance works well. The weaving of the character of the old man throughout as a narrator and facilitator in role helps the performance engage directly with the audience of participants and can guide them, to help get them to actively engage with the performance through song. I also found that the use of the letter in the performance is a device that has potential as a way to link what goes on in the performance, the group and those who are outside the group who are dear to the group members. This device needs to be worked on more, in order to be used clearly and more effectively. I found that the session and how I structured the transition from performance to reflection needed to be adjusted in order to be more effective and get the group to reflect on a deeper level. I also felt there was less engagement with the performance on my part as the actor. This was because of the nervous energy amongst the group, brought about by the presence of outsiders observing the session. The outsiders were part of this research report evaluation process. The group had been made aware of those who would be observing and they had given me permission to use the session as a presentation. The nervous energy we

experienced showed that the group and I were at a stage where we are engaged in a deeply personal and private journey.

If I was to take the journey further we would carry on building the performance but I would push the young men to engage with issues raised on a deeper level during the stage of offering. Something I feel the group is more than ready for, as one of the young men told me that in my performance I should go deeper into the emotion and connect more with the character in order for it to move them even more. This also shows that the young men are beginning to own the performance and the process. They have given so much of their time, energy, creativity, views and personal stories as material for the performance. Yet they are still willing to push further and direct me in how I can give a better more accurate performance.

Post the final session I had a feedback session with the group. They gave me overall feedback on our journey thus far and I addressed any issues they may have had around the process. The young men also told me what worked and what didn't for them. They also told me how the process has impacted their lives and how we could carry on from where we stopped.

The group said that they enjoyed the process and found it very beneficial. The process helped them find relief from the pressures of being a man and it also helped them become more aware of their issues and be able to view them from various aspects. They agreed that over time such a process would help them change their negative behavior habits. One participant found that he has begun to find his voice, he is getting more confident and able to express himself. Another found that during this process he began to participate more in family events and make an attempt to be more involved with family affairs. The group saw the process as an active 'men's talk'. Something they want to maintain and carry on even without me. *"Majita ke batho ba go diragatsa,"*<sup>12</sup> this is what one of the participants said during the feedback session. This group of young men made it clear that this process for them has helped them discover the desire to take action in their lives.

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<sup>12</sup> Guys are people of action.

What I have done thus far during this journey serves as the beginning of what will be used in creating a new method of how one can use the process of creating a performance as an intervention.

## **5.Conclusion**

This journey has been a challenging and fulfilling one. I will conclude by sharing what has been discovered during our exploration and then I will move on to the closing of our journey for now. In the closing I will offer my recommendations and mention the limits of this particular part of the journey.

### **5.1 What we discovered while travelling towards the Son.**

During this journey we were able to document new knowledge about young *Bakgatla* men in Mochudi, who study at Brigades. The young men strongly believe in and value their culture and traditions. They also have a strong sense of respect for their elders. But they feel there is not enough dialogue between the youth and the elders, dialogue that could help bridge the generation gap. They also feel their issues of love and relationships are being neglected. The group would like to share with their elders their stories around love, and thus get guidance from those who are older and more experienced. This would come as a result of dialogue and better understanding between the different groups of older men in the village and the younger men.

I also found that love is a major part of the young men's lives. The young men showed an awareness and open acknowledgement of their emotions and vulnerabilities- something that is traditionally not addressed or accepted amongst men in Setswana culture. I observed that this is adopted from western culture, which strongly influences the youth in Botswana through the media and what they have learnt in English medium schools that have a British based education system. This idea of expressing love has come about through the western influence. So now it is part of the youth culture, along with sex and greater emphasis on intimacy between men and women in relationships. So the young men believe that love is an important part of a relationship, along with emotional and physical intimacy. But they have also observed that love and emotional attachment comes with its own problems and challenges. Problems that the young men are struggling to deal with and resolve, problems

such as heart break, pregnancy, violent behaviour, substance abuse and AIDS. So the young men acknowledge that they have these problems and they would like, through guidance and dialogue with those who are older than them, to openly and safely address these in order to find the best solutions, without using the obstacle of culture and tradition as a way to block or hinder the process of dialogue.

During this journey I also found that using the young men's own words during the performance, helps them reflect back on and be aware of their own wisdom and knowledge. The answers or possible solutions to their problems and issues can be found amongst them. They just need to have the courage to speak up and trust in their own abilities or if they are in doubt ask for guidance from those who can assist. They also need to be helped by being given the space within society, to explore amongst themselves as men- young and old, what shortcomings exist in society. Then by acknowledging and addressing these issues they can be dealt with. Using the words of Nelson, '...there are distinctive experiences that boys and men have precisely because of their male bodies. [But]... these body-grounded experiences never fully determine one's spiritual contours, they do exercise considerable influence. And these intimate body-spirit connections deserve more exploration than they have received' (Nelson, 1988:21). Here Nelson speaks back to his observations and experiences with men in America. My findings through this journey show that there is a need for further 'exploration' into the 'spirituality' of men in Botswana. Spirituality as defined by Nelson, 'the ways and patterns by which the person-intellectually, emotionally and physically- relates to that which is ultimately real and worthwhile for him or her' (Nelson, 1988:21). An exploration of all men, that takes into account the past and the present, what is traditional and modern. '... Some of the problems our ancestors faced were a result of inter and intra-tribal strife the legacy of which still haunts us to this day' quoted in Makgala (2009: iii). These are the words of the previous *kgosi*, *Kgosi* Linchwe II. Problems of the past may be similar to those of today and answers may be found in the past, in that the youth need guidance. But there has to be an acknowledgement that culture and society has changed drastically and other 'spaces' need to be created 'where boys could be socialised in ways that diffuse the harmful notions of masculinity and help them transform their



understanding of multiple meanings of manhood to a responsible adulthood.’ (Buikema Ratele Shefer Strebel Shabalala 2007:72)

I found further development into how the idea of playback theatre can be taken further and adapted, using the process of work shopping/devising a performance. This development can enhance what part of playback theatre looks to do. I found that by taking more time and going more in depth with the process of getting stories from people and their views, then using the material in collaboration and with carefully considered facilitation, the people would get more from the experience. Greater validation can be achieved, more in depth dialogue and reflection, performers can gain deeper insight thus give a more accurate and moving performance, can also challenge the audience to view their story differently. All in all with the approach I took one is able to better address issues of ethics and aesthetics. Also more time is taken to effectively address issues and find a way forward that benefits the group or community best, in collaboration.

In relation to other interventions that use performance, I found that using the ethos of the artist- in that one uses their skills, talents and craft to the best of their ability, to truly help a group out and do it with honour. But also in using the ethos of the artist, one can take note of the words from Julia Cameron, ‘The position of the Artist is humble. He [or She] is essentially a channel’ (Cameron 1994: XV). So there must be humility in how the interventionist goes about entering and working with the community. By being a ‘channel’ one must understand that one is at the service of the community or group and do what best serves them, through advice from the group and one’s own knowledge. Also by being an artist one must have the ability to inspire, evoke, express and activate. All these skills must be used to best help the group. Finally, as an artist, one respects and honours the art and the craft being used. But they also respect and honour what the art aims to do. Not what the funder or N.G.O. wants to be done.

Theatre- through the actor’s technique, his art in which the living organism strives for higher motives- provides an opportunity for what could be called integration, the discarding of masks, the revealing of the real substance: a totality of physical and mental reactions.... This opportunity must be treated in a disciplined manner, with a full

awareness of the responsibility it involves. Here we can see the theatre's therapeutic function for people in our present day civilisation (Grotowski, 1968:217).

These are the words of Jerzy Grotowski, they summarise what has been my experience of theatre as a performer and how I view the art of performance. As an actor the quote above captures what I look for within theatre, what I strive for and look to achieve. The 'integration', 'discarding of masks', 'revealing real substance', 'disciplined manner', 'awareness' and 'responsibility' are all core ideas that I have taken from my experience as an actor and attempted to transpose from my training as an actor into my practise as an applied theatre practitioner. The method I have gone on a journey to create, contains within it these principles as ideals that the method looks to provide for those people it looks to help. So those who follow my method will have to adhere to such principles. The method I am creating is thus far based on principles but it is still in creation and only once the whole process has been experienced can it be completed and made explicitly clear.

## **5.2 From this journey, where to?**

This journey has been a four month process; we travelled through the process as a group. But within it we had our own personal journeys. Experience has been gained and some growth has happened. There may have been limitations of time, as this process could easily take a year. Limited in numbers, I worked with a small section of the young men in the tribe. Also this report in itself had its limits of how much one could write; hence I could only share the core of what was discovered. But, what has been most vital about this journey was that we all made a choice to embark on it and by taking that first step we chose to act.

The journey was about putting what we felt or thought or aspired for into action, action to create something together; action to move forward towards something that mattered. This touches on what process is about and one of the core philosophies on life that I have gained from studying performance and being involved in the art of theatre. In this philosophy, one may

never find all the answers, one may never achieve all their dreams, one may never find perfection... but, by striving for the ideal and working towards doing the best that one can do, one embarks on a journey that in itself has fulfilment and gives experiences that may be positive or negative yet still contribute towards growth. Growth from experience and with that growth one can be better positioned to take a step further in a journey that can go on and on. The point of this journey is about being present, being aware of and acknowledging where one is in the moment. One then uses what has been experienced and learnt from the past to move on to the future, moving on towards bettering the self in order to have a better life that will be lived with others, who are also on a journey. This journey only touched on possible answers to the questions that began my enquiry. But only once I have travelled the whole process with my group will I have clearer and more defined answers. For now, the answers I have found show that the process of a performance has the potential to be an effective method of intervention, even though it'll be a method that takes far more time and effort than most interventions. This intervention will also be one that doesn't address one specific issue, but many inter-linked complex issues.

What I would recommend for leaders within the *Bakgatla* tribe is that they must support young men and provide them with spaces for them to meet as young men to engage in issues that affect them and through processes that involve them using different arts to express themselves, so they are actively able to be productive and active in addressing issues amongst them. Also by having spaces, such as a *kgotla* for young men, where they can engage in activities that they enjoy and are beneficial to them, they are less likely to get involved in problematic behavior and habits, which have a negative impact in the community. I also recommend to the young men that they should take it upon themselves and find a way to help themselves and address issues that affect them.

As for recommendations to fellow artists and applied theatre practitioners I would recommend that they get involved in interventions that they find personally fulfilling, where they have a desire to and are able to work at the best of their ability, using theatre as an art not just as a tool to fulfill a purpose at its basic application. I would also challenge applied theatre

practitioners to be rigorous in their work, to work with a sustained focus and to use their craft to the highest level with integrity.

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