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Investigating performance poetry as a medium for addressing HIV/AIDS stigma

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CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter introduces the research. It spells out the area of research and sets out the aims and objectives that this research seeks to achieve. The rationale or motivation for this research is also clarified in this chapter. I then spell out the theoretical framework of this research and also include a brief literature review that guides this research.

1.1 Area of Research

This research focuses on using a concept of performance poetry called 'Debate in Sung Poetry' to unlock the silence around HIV/AIDS issues so that the stigma created by this silence can be reduced. The concept of 'Debate in Sung Poetry', which I choose to call 'The Poetic Debate' originates from Palestine. The concept of the Palestinian Debate in Sung Poetry as envisaged by Dirgham H. Sbait in his essay ***Debate in the Improvised – Sung Poetry of the Palestinian*** (1993: 97-117) presents a strong platform in performance poetry that can be used to address social issues. The poetic debate as described in Sbait's work happens when two or three poets get involved in a friendly argument that focuses on serious issues affecting the society. Sbait describes this debate as 'friendly rivalry' (Sbait 1993: 1).The poetic debate is improvised as poets respond spontaneously to what the other poet has said. Poets should be in a position to create verse spontaneously. It is important for poets to create spontaneously so that they can also incorporate audience responses in terms of contributions, interjections, engagement or lack of interest in the debate. However, written poems will also be used to form the backbone of the debate upon which improvisation will be built. The poetic debate as described by Sbait recognizes and acknowledges highly the availability of audience members in the space. They are not there as passive objects of research but are active participants involved in the debate and playing a central role.

Performance poetry possesses within itself a potential to unlock silence in a community or group of people. This is because it is a highly communal art form. O-lan (1986) argues that 'The strength of [performance] poetry is always mediated by the strong, underlying principle that it is custom – built by the people for the people' (Colin and O-lan 1986: xiix). This makes it a highly appropriate art form to be used by a group of people to address problems that affect them as a community. Colin and O-lan go on to argue that performance poetry adapts to its audience by introducing a fresh stream of arresting similes and metaphors. Thus it can always be adapted to suit its subject and also to appeal to its audience. In this research it can therefore be adapted to include the language that is understandable

and popular among the workshop participants. This adaptability and flexibility in performance poetry makes it a powerful medium of communication and thus it can work well to address any social problem, including HIV/AIDS stigma which is central to this research.

Poetry is the language of emotions (Heywood 1976: 122). Performance poetry refers to poetry that is intended for performance for a live audience. Performance poetry is a societal art form that has the potential to elicit audience participation. This potential can therefore be explored through the poetic debate concept and also by having a facilitator to guide the debate and offer a platform to the audience to voice their views.

1.2 Aims of the Research

This research aims to achieve the following objective:

To explore performance poetry as a medium for addressing HIV/AIDS stigma at both individual and community level. A poetic debate concept will be used in this exploration.

This objective will be achieved through the following:

1. Investigating stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, both at individual and community level so as to reduce or dispel such stigma through naming and identification which has a potential to reduce the power of stigma.

2. Using performance poetry as an approach to provoke the audience members to critically think about serious social, personal and health issues that affect people at individual and/or community level with particular emphasis on HIV.

3. Exploring the therapeutic qualities that can be found in performance poetry.

4. Exploring effective ways of engaging the audience through performance poetry so as to propel them to participate in raising problems and offering solutions.

1.3 Rationale and motivation

Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist (1908 – 1970) considered the founder of humanistic psychology came up with a theory that shows Human Needs in their ascending order. He argues that people have lower order Needs that in general must be fulfilled before high order Needs can be satisfied

(Maslow 1943). As a person moves up this hierarchy of Needs, eventually they will reach the summit – self actualization. Self actualization is the full realization of one's potential (Gleitman and Reisberg 2004). At the base of the hierarchy are Physiological Needs such as water, air and food. At the second level are the Security Needs that include shelter, employment and safety. The third level up the hierarchy comprise of Social Needs such as love, intimacy, sex, belonging and family. The fourth level is that of Esteem Needs such as recognition, respect and accomplishment. After this stage comes self actualization. When a person is stigmatized s/he loses Social Needs that include love, belonging and family because of the resultant discrimination. The Esteem Needs are also affected when people fail to recognize and respect someone because s/he living with HIV. The first and second level Needs may also get affected. Stigma therefore affects the hierarchy of people's Needs and consequently prevents them from reaching the level of self actualization where their full potential is realized. Stigma needs to be dispelled to enable people to reach the level of self actualization.

Jones (1996) argues that theatre is necessary to living and that drama and theatre processes are essential, a part of the maintenance of well-being or a return to health (Jones 1996: 4). He further elaborates that for more than two decades now it has been fully acknowledged that drama itself is the therapy. The drama does not serve the therapy but the drama process contains therapy. According to Jones, life experiences are given added validity by depicting them dramatically with, and in front of others. An individual's dramatic work is recognized and understood by others, the feelings and experiences they depicted empathized with and responded to by others. This understanding of the relationship of the dramatized life and real life and its potential to heal is essential in this research. What happens in the poetic debate is thus related to real life and the potential of therapeutic healing that lies within poetry as a theatre form could be explored. Thus through the poetic debate, performance poetry can be used as an avenue to achieve self actualization as envisioned by Abraham Maslow.

This research targets the 15-29 age group in South Africa. This age group is targeted because it has the highest number of HIV infections in South Africa (AVERT.org). It is hoped that performance poetry that is highly energetic and uses language that includes slang will appeal to this group. It is during this age group that many people make major life decisions such as choosing a marriage or sexual partner, choosing a career and getting a job and thus it is hoped that addressing HIV stigma at this stage of life will lead to informed decisions and broader opportunities in life. AVERT.org defines HIV stigma as the prejudice and discrimination directed at people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and the groups and

communities that they are associated with. It can result in people living with HIV and AIDS being rejected from their community, shunned, discriminated against or physically hurt (AVERT.org: 28-07-09). Stigma directed at PLWHA makes it difficult for people trying to come to terms with and manage their illness on a personal level and also negatively affect attempts to fight the AIDS epidemic as a whole. According to Avert.org opinion column, stigma, on a personal level can make individuals reluctant to access HIV testing, treatment and care and on a national level it can deter governments from taking fast, effective action against the epidemic. AVERT.org quotes UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon saying:

> Stigma remains the single most important barrier to public action. It is a main reason why too many people are afraid to see a doctor to determine whether they have the disease, or to seek treatment if so. It helps make AIDS the silent killer because people fear the social disgrace of speaking about it, or taking easily available precautions. Stigma is a chief reason why the AIDS epidemic continues to devastate societies around the world (UNDP 2008).

It is this background of fear and stigma about HIV/AIDS that this research seeks to investigate and dispel. HIV/AIDS is seen by some as 'death' and thus feared and stigmatized. For a society that stigmatizes, some form of therapy is needed for healing. This research therefore seeks to use performance poetry as a source of healing for both self and community, to provide a platform to talk about HIV/AIDS issues in a way that will lead to the displacement of stigma attached to this subject.

HIV/AIDS has remained a sensitive issue long after the first cases of people diagnosed of Human Immunodeficiency Virus and full blown AIDS were reported. Many people are still not comfortable to discuss HIV issues. People living with the virus have been stigmatized. In some cases even those who are caring for a person with AIDS are shunned. Of major concern is the self stigmatization that people inflict on themselves. This self stigmatization is seen in the way people shun testing for HIV and avoiding talking about HIV issues freely. Many people still prefer not to go for an HIV test and they often have their reasons for not wanting to do it (Soul City 2008). One of the reasons for people not to want to test for their HIV status is stigma about getting tested. There seems to be the fear of what might happen after one gets to know that they are HIV positive (Soul City 2008). The primary fear and stigma is about

testing positive. At the heart of the problem is the troublesome prejudice associated with HIV/AIDS. Though people do not usually say it openly that they have strong reasons not to test, the reluctance suggests that there might be strong reasons for some people to prefer not to know their HIV status. According to a Soul City Institute research on stigma about testing among South African footballers there is fear to test among players just like among South African citizens in the larger context. The research notes:

> Not surprisingly, players reflected the range of emotions normally encountered in HIV testing research. Almost all were frightened of the experience…those who chose not to test mostly indicated that they were afraid. The knowledge of their status, they said, would lead to a quick death. Further, the stigma associated with being HIV positive made footballers reluctant (Soul City 2009: 28).

The research proceeds to quote one of the footballers who expressed his views on why he did not want to go for HIV testing. The footballer says:

> Sometimes people do not want to be tested because your life will change. The next day that person is finished. Like you, that's because we view ah, HIV positive is so bad. Your life will change, people will look at you in a different way. That's why we don't want to [speak about it]. We don't want to tell, we don't want to speak about it but I think we must talk about that (Page28)

Many people are so afraid of HIV that they would even prefer to die without knowing their status than to go and test for HIV. Even if such people were to go for testing if they test positive they will be the most hopeless because they have already concluded that to be HIV positive is to be almost dead. In such a case these people will die of stigma that they themselves have created. Such stigma which comes from inside the very individual is like cancer in the bones. It needs to be gotten rid of and thus some form of therapy is necessary to achieve healing.

It is important for people to know their HIV status so that they can make informed decisions about their lives (Onelove 2009). Such decisions include getting married, having children and engaging in sexual activity with their partners. Having an HIV test will also help those who are infected to protect their sexual partners through the use of condoms and other methods. It will also help them prevent infecting people who live around them. Knowing one's status early also affords those who will have tested positive to start taking antiretroviral drugs. However, because of the stigma that is attached to HIV and AIDS some people are not willing to know their HIV status. They are afraid of what people around them will say and they are not even prepared to accept it themselves. Such a community that stigmatizes HIV/AIDS is not a healthy community. It is as though there is some form of cancer in this community. That cancer, which is stigma, has to be healed. Some form of therapy is needed to heal such a community.

This research therefore seeks to use performance poetry as a source of healing for both self and community. It seeks to provide a platform to talk about HIV/AIDS issues in a way that will lead to the displacement of stigma attached to this subject. If knowing one's HIV status is said to be so good and necessary why is it that many people will still choose not to know their status? This suggests that there might be a lot that has remained unsaid here. People are aware of the advantages of knowing one's status but the reluctance to do so is fuelled by the stigma that is attached to HIV/AIDS. Some people are afraid to even talk about HIV or AIDS. It is thus necessary to create an environment that will provoke people to look into their inner selves and willingly share their thoughts and inner feelings as individuals and as a community. Talking about issues can help in dealing with them because talking about them is an acknowledgement that these problems are there and that is a good starting point in dealing with problems.

According to an article in the Wits University newspaper, Vuvuzela, of May 15 2009 'Many [people] avoid testing and live with the fear of being positive' (Vuvuzela: 15-05-09: 5). An HIV councilor who chose to remain anonymous says anxiety can be as detrimental to psychological health as being tested positive. A common reason given by people for not testing is 'Why would I want to know if I am dying?' This is an example of self stigmatization that people do to themselves even before they test positive for HIV or they are diagnosed of having AIDS. In response, Vinoba Krishna, an HIV counselor at the Counseling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU), says people die of ignorance. In other words stigma has led to people's death as it even prevents them from seeking early treatment. They leave testing until

it is too late and learn their status when they are too ill for antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) to work. Zinhle Masondo, also from CCDU emphasizes that it is a common misconception that people only need ARVs when they are very ill. People need to know their status so they can choose to stay healthy and also to be able to make appropriate decisions regarding their sexual lives. It is this background that has motivated me to do this research project. It is my sincere hope that this project will help to dispel HIV/AIDS stigma and offer therapeutic healing to those that are stigmatized and also to those who stigmatize.

Motivation to do this research also arises from the realization that people are currently in search of a solution to stigma. Many different methods have been used to handle this social problem (Vuvuzela: 15 May 2009: 5). Knowing about one's status and communication about HIV and testing is very important, especially for those in a relationship (One love 2009:9). The poetic debate is not necessarily about coming up with contradictory points but arguing about issues with the aim of bringing to light many angles of viewing it. This debate is like a friendly wrestling or tennis match. The idea is to propel the society into a strong debate in search of solutions and answers that work for itself. Solutions that are imposed on the community may not work as people may not identify with them. I choose to use poetic debate in this research because the debating allows for different views to be raised. The nature of debate acknowledges that different views can be raised and argued for or against. According to Summers B. H.:

> When lawyers in a courtroom argue the guilt or innocence of a prisoner on trial, they are engaging in a form of debate. When our representatives in Congress discuss the merits of some proposed law, they likewise are engaging in debate. And when Mr. Brown and Mr. Smith meet on the street corner and argue with their friends about disarmament or the government debt, or which team will win the World Series, they too are engaging in debate. Debate is simply a discussion in which two or more speakers give opposing views on a a subject to a group of listeners (Summers 1940: 14)

If I were to add to this statement I would say poets exploring issues of HIV/AIDS stigma through performing written and improvised poetry that brings up different views are engaging in a form of debate. The difference here is that in this poetic debate the audience is part of the debate. This poetic

debate is centered on the poets in a bid to outdo each other in poetry presentation. Each poet's goal is to deliver creative, convincing poetry that engages the audience more than his rivalry. The audience members have a chance to debate during intervals where they are given a platform to speak. During this time they can agree or disagree with what has been raised by the poets or they can bring out a different view of theirs. Their views have to be incorporated in the improvised poetry that follows. The role of the facilitator during the debate is explained in the methodology.

The poetic debate is dramatic by nature and thus it also has therapeutic elements that are inherent in Drama. It seeks to get people talking by creating a relaxed environment where people can be free to speak their minds. Performance poetry as an art form gives people the license to say those things that they would find difficult to say in public. The involvement in the poetic debate thus offers the audience and performers an opportunity to explore their inner feelings, beliefs and prejudices in a safe environment. The environment is safe because reality is disguised as fiction and it can be experimented with and explored. According to Jones 'this aspect of constructing dramatic therapeutic controlled experiments is an important way for [people] to find meaning in their world' (Jones 2007: 14). Here Jones was talking about drama therapy but performance poetry also offers the performers and the audience a chance to explore for themselves so as to achieve self understanding and understanding of the community. Within this understanding lies an opportunity to discover the stigma that is either within individuals or around and from then it can be addressed with the view of achieving both individual and societal healing. Thus poetry has therapeutic healing qualities within itself. Poetry can be a source of therapy. Therapy is defined by Irwin as planned application of drama/theatre techniques to aid in remedition, rehabilitation, or personal or social adjustment and it is a specific form of intervention to bring about intrapsychic, interpersonal, or behavioral change (Irwin 1979: 23). There is need for rehabilitation of the individual or society that is stigmatizing HIV so as to promote tolerance, respect and support for each other without any form of discrimination.

1.4 Debate in Sung Poetry meets Poetry Slam

This research borrows from slam poetry, a movement originating in the United States that involves setting poets against each other in competition and allowing the crowd to participate. Slam performance poetry is relevant in this research because, like the poetic debate, it allows the audience to participate. It is not only for the performer alone but for the whole community present. HIV does not only affect particular individuals but it may also affect the whole community in different ways. Slam

poetry therefore acknowledges the communal fibre against individualism and thus encourages people to come together to solve communal problems that may include HIV. To borrow some notions of slam poetry deepens the focus of this research. Slam poetry puts more emphasis on the spoken word. The power of the spoken word is on voicing it out, saying it aloud and saying it openly. This is in line with Jones's assertion that experiences are given added validity by depicting them dramatically with, and in front of others (Jones 1996: 4). Performance poetry makes such a platform available and gives a strong ground for the power of the spoken word to be explored. Such power would be appropriate for addressing HIV stigma which is embedded in the culture of silence. The silence has to be unlocked and through the spoken word the potential for this is high.

According to Smith K. M. (2004: 1) slam poetry is a competition at which poets recite original work or, more rarely, that of others. Smith further describes slam poetry as '…a festival, a carnival act, an interactive class, a town meeting, a con game and a poetic boxing match, all rolled into one' (2004: 1). These performances are then judged on a numeric scale by judges selected by members. In this poetic debate, like in the poetry slam, audience presence plays a central role. Poetry presentations have to appeal to the audience and thus the performances need to be of high quality. This is the reason we spent quality time doing a series of workshops with the poets so that this work is of a deep depth and of a genuine nature, not just a single moment of poetry presentation. Marc Smith is credited with starting the poetry slam in Chicago in 1984. In this research the poetic debate borrows mainly from 'Theme Slam', the one in which all performances must conform to the specified theme, which in our case is HIV/AIDS stigma. We also include improvisations which poets do spontaneously. In Theme Slam poets can sometimes be allowed to break traditional rules, which is why we are not focusing on a 'competition with selected judges' but on a 'debate' with every audience member having a say. We do this through maintaining an open structure which allows the audience to be directly involved instead of being passive observers. In 'Island Style' slam poetry is written on the spot. Each participant is given words to use in the poem and a short time to write it. Some aspects of Island Style are being used in this research. During the workshops I gave poets words to build the debate on. For the final workshop, which was presented as a performance, the audience members gave poets the words through voicing out their views.

Poetry slam is closely linked to hip hop, a musical genre which developed alongside hip hop culture, defined by key stylistic elements such as rapping, Djing, sampling, scratching and beat boxing. Hip hop

denotes the practice of an entire subculture while rapping is a vocal style which the artist speaks lyrically, in rhyme and verse. Hip hop and rapping are popular among the 15 – 29 age group that this research is targeting. The poetic debate, however which forms the core of this research is rooted on the traditional oral literature of the Palestinians. It is of utmost importance to note that in this research all poetry genres are welcome. This is common both in the Debate in sung Poetry and in Slam Poetry. It gives all performers the platform to express themselves in the genre they are best at and it also embraces the audience with its diversity. This is important especially in South Africa, the 'Rainbow Nation' where the population is made up of people from diverse backgrounds.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Augusto Boal provides a theoretical framework within which this research is being carried out. His theory of the 'Spec-Actor', which centers on audience involvement, has been influential in this research. Boal argues for a theatre where the spectator offers solutions to his problems. Boal says of himself:

> I… want the Spectator to take on the role of Actor and the character and the stage. I want him to occupy his own space and offer solutions (Boal 2008: xxxi).

Although Boal was referring to the forum theatre actor this technique is relevant to this research. It is the aim of this research to provoke the audience to join in the debate and offer solutions. Boal goes on to argue that when an audience member gets on stage he transforms the fiction which is a representation of reality. In the process he transforms himself (Boal 2008: xxi). In this research the poetic debate is a representation of the inner conflict and also the outer conflict that people face due to HIV/AIDS stigma. Fiction penetrates reality (Boal 1995: 184-185). In this research the whole theatre experience is just like a 'staged rehearsal' of real life. It is hoped that the things that people saw as not good in this theatre experience they will avoid doing in real life. Boal writes about theatre being a mirror of the society where a society can look at itself and see the undesirable elements in itself. When this happens it is like what happens to an individual who looks at their image in a mirror, there is usually an urge to make up that which seems distorted. When the society's weaknesses are reflected back to it through theatre the society realizes the negative things it has always overlooked and is urged to make them right. Such can also happen with HIV/AIDS stigma at individual and society levels.

Jonathan Fox's concept of Playback Theatre has also been vital in framing this research. According to Fox, playback theatre provides a platform for everyone to tell a story. In this research it is poetry that was used to provide that platform. As poets fused audience responses into their improvisations they were playing back these stories to the audience. Poets were acting as channels through which the audience could share their views. Playback Theatre is rooted in oral literature and so does poetry. This commonality makes borrowing from each genre easy. Thus some aspects of playback theatre were employed in this research. It is however vital to note that whereas playback theatre is largely 'visual' performance poetry is largely 'oral', thus , whereas playback theatre puts emphasis on playing it out performance poetry focuses on giving it a voice, saying it out or speaking out.

1.6 Literature Review

Furness G. and Gunner L. have influenced the shaping of this research. They write about the power of art in society and also its roles with emphasis on oral art which includes performance poetry. According to them, 'oral art appeals at both intellectual and emotional level' (Furness G. and Gunner L. 1995: 24). It therefore educates, informs, convince, or persuade an audience for or against an issue or individual. They also argue that in the popular theatre art is used effectively by people to analyze for themselves their socio-economic conditions. In this way art is used as a channel through which serious issues of the society can be addressed in a relaxed manner. It also offers people an opportunity to address their problems on a more neutral stand. Poetry is a way in which individuals can comment on themselves and people around them. This commenting also goes on to questioning and also to offering solutions. Performance poetry is used to create a platform for social interaction and the workshops in this research have been structured in a way that seeks to achieve social interaction. This is necessary so that social problems like stigma can be effectively addressed.

Oatley K. writes on the notion of therapy. He defines therapy as becoming involved in a relationship which might become healing. According to him therapy 'can allow the self and relationships to become more whole, less a set of fragments…' (Oatley 1984: 2). A society that stigmatizes is in fragments and the idea of a 'whole' for me translates to a society free of stigma, united and living in harmony. A society in harmony is what I seek to create during workshops.

Muller-Thalheim (1975) argues that when real fear is converted to fictional fear it becomes easier to be faced, talked about and dealt with. HIV Stigma can also be addressed in this way. He believes in the arts as a counterbalance of 'sense and order' against the 'non-sense and disorder that many people experience in distress and illness (Muller-Thalheim 1975: 166).

Finally, one of the scholars who have influenced this research is Mtshali Oswald, a South African poet and writer. Mtshali argues that 'poetry is the language of emotions … we love, we hate, we despair, and we aspire' (Chapman 2007; 106). This means poetry is closely connected with what we feel and how we feel. The issue of stigma is also closely linked to our feelings. Most of the times people do not want to go for an HIV test because they fear the unknown that may happen should one's test results come out positive. People often fear that which may happen to themselves, their relationships, their marriage, their job, their children and their social position. They are sometimes afraid how others will feel about them. This fear is what also builds self stigmatization because if such a person finds out that s/he is HIV positive then s/he will logically fear her/himself, start seeing him/herself as not normal. The result of this is a traumatized person. To rehabilitate this person therefore becomes necessary so that the person can see him/herself as normal. This fear of HIV has also led people to distance themselves from those who are suffering from AIDS. This creates stigma. Thus fear, intolerance and denial lie at the centre of stigma.

On the other hand those who go for an HIV test do so because they feel it is important and even when the test results are positive they still feel hopeful. Those also who manage to care for their loved ones who are having AIDS do so because they have strong feelings that this is what they need to do. Thus our feelings are central in the HIV stigma and poetry, a language of emotions, is the best art form to address issues that are so close to our emotions like HIV stigma.

CHAPTER TWO: AND NOW WE SPEAK!

2.1 The Power of words

Poetry as an art form thrives on the power of words to communicate effectively. Describing this power Rodenburg P. argues:

> I believe that we love hearing good speaking in the same way that we love listening to good music. As with a well played Sonata a well read poem can move us in ways we cannot easily explain. Words, like note, strike a resonant chord. In moments like this we find ourselves willing to trust in words completely. (Rodenburg 2001: 6)

Rodenburg goes on to say that words, after all, make and shape us. Words are powerful when used with purpose and conviction. The power of words makes poetry an effective way to address HIV/AIDS stigma. Boal A. (2006: 14) added some emphasis on the power of words and their use when he wrote that 'Words are a means of transport, like buses and lorries. In the same way that buses transport people and lorries cargo, words transport our ideas, desires and emotions'. Our project is thus entitled 'And Now We Speak!' We believe that through speaking out on HIV issues stigma surrounding HIV can be dispelled.

2.2 Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this research I conducted a series of performance poetry workshops for four weeks with a selected group of students aged between 20 and 24 years, one from the Division of Dramatic Art and one from the Law department of the University of the Witwatersrand. The other poet who was part of the group is working. The workshop participants were chosen through auditions and the group was made up of poets who can both write and perform poetry. Poets went through a series of workshops before the final workshop was presented as an interactive theatre performance. The workshops which we did had their focus on taking the poets/participants through a journey of learning, exploring and reflecting on personal and societal experiences with HIV/AIDS stigma.

The last workshop, which was a performance culminating from the previous workshops, was designed to include an audience so that the poets could learn, explore and reflect together with the audience. During the workshops, including the final one, we performed both written and improvised poetry. The subject of discussion and poetry was HIV/AIDS and stigma surrounding it. During the final workshop /performance poets started by performing written poems and then moved to the zone of improvisation. The use of written poems was to provide a solid framework for the debate so that the subject of the debate, which was HIV stigma, could be rightly captured.

After the poets had presented their written poems, the audience was given a platform to voice their views and then the poets improvised based on audience feedback. After this there was another interval again for the audience to give feedback on the improvised poems. This was aimed at getting the audience to comment on the product of their views and then this was followed by the last stage of the debate where poets improvised again. After this stage the facilitator/joker/train master gave a neutral closing poem that aimed to give concluding remarks to the debate and to remind everyone, both the poets and the audience, that we were taking a journey together, we were in a friendly debate and our aim was one – to speak to silence so we can reduce HIV/AIDS stigma. This was followed by all poets coming together in the centre and affirming loudly that 'And Now We Speak'. This was the title and theme of our creative project and it emphasizes that we are no longer silent, we speak.

In the poetic debate the highest level was to achieve the freedom of expression. This encourages people to speak out and there lies a potential to reduce stigma. This envisages the self actualization that Abraham Maslow talks about. When people are free to express their views and feelings and they are respected regardless of their HIV status then they can live their lives to the fullest, achieving self actualization.

The theatre experience during workshops brought the poets together as a community in search of solutions to HIV stigma and at the same time hoping to explore the possibility of some form of individual and communal healing in performance poetry, a kind of healing that is 'freeing' for both the stigmatizing and the stigmatized. The aim was to create the kind of theatre experience that was envisioned by Peter Brook which he described well when he said 'both sides, actors and audience relax to the point where judgment and defense melt into shared experience' (Fox 1994: 64). Boal even went further and developed what he called 'simultaneous dramaturgy' in which audience suggestions shaped the ending of the piece (Fox 1994: 65). The poets and the community/ audience were to explore their journey

together. This journey was aimed at gaining more understanding of self as individuals and as a community. When self understanding is achieved, understanding of the surrounding, the community, is achieved also. This is where problem solving begins, with understanding of self and one's surroundings. Understanding of self and the other leads to acceptance, tolerance and respect. This is essential in building a healthy community and dispelling stigma.

During the performance poetry workshops the environment that we always aimed to create is that which gives a platform for both telling and listening. During the performance, poets were to act as channels through which to tell stories. I would like to call them the 'mouthpieces' of the community. The poets were also there as special ears of the audience. They were to listen to what people say, interpret it and then pass it on to the audience through poetry. As a facilitator I monitored the process and it was my duty to introduce the performance to the participants. At a certain stage during the workshop I asked audience members to share their views through writing down words and phrases on papers which I then collected and handed over to the poets to use the words and phrases in their improvised poems. This was done after my realization that due to the sensitivity of the subject of stigma and HIV/AIDS some people may not feel comfortable to say their views within the hearing of everyone present. Therefore writing the words down would make them feel more secure to share their views as the words were not said out by them but by the poets. The audience was there as listeners and witnesses to each other's stories being told through poetry. When people have a problem they often look for someone who is willing to listen to them. Saying out one's problem to an attentive listener or giving it to them on paper is a way of releasing that pain or bitterness or worry that is inside. Talking about problems is generally regarded as having healing elements in it. Laurel, quoted in Jones P. argues that:

> Essentially, therapy is about the presence of a willing witness/listener... as well as being witnesses, we can also be co-creators (Jones 2007: 14).

This research is a qualitative research project and so its success is being determined not by numbers or quantities of any sort but is determined solely by its quality which is based on whether the work showed the potential to unlock silence and provoked people to speak out on HIV stigma. Thus this research looks at how to effectively use performance poetry to engage people in an exchange of ideas on HIV/AIDS stigma, real or imagined that they have encountered in their lives or observed in the lives of those

around them. The exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences was all aimed at creating an environment that will allow problem identification and offering of solutions.

During the process of this research I documented the proceedings in a journal. I also recorded the workshops on video so as to use these sources to reflect on the workshops and to inform the structuring of my other workshops, including the final one. Each session/workshop always started and ended with relaxation games and exercises. This was to prepare performers before the workshops so that they were ready to recite both written and improvised poems with a high degree of creativity and excellent presentation skills. The warm down at the end of the sessions was for performers to get out of character and also to release any unnecessary energy from the sessions.

At the end of workshops/rehearsal sessions we always had reflections where workshop participants either discussed or answered a few questions asked by me or wrote their evaluation of the research on paper where they were free not to include their names if they wanted. At times I used these evaluation techniques simultaneously. The reflections were meant to give performers an opportunity to speak out on their experiences of the workshops/sessions. Their views helped in the shaping of the following workshop and also indicated the progress we were making. During one of these reflection sessions one poet commented:

> This project has made me look closer at this HIV issue. I have always brushed it aside but now I even check HIV stuff on the internet. Of course I need to be up to date for this project but it's surely giving me more insight personally. I have just realized that this is something we need to look at as young people (Workshop participant 2010)

Such feedback showed me that we were on track and we were accomplishing what we set out to accomplish. Notably, such sessions have a potential for therapy. This goes for the process workshops and the final workshop. Rodenburg P. observes that when we have discussions during reflections:

> …we'll be working with words – as a form of physical release that clears the brain of pressing weight of what must be said. Confessional speaking is also like a purging. We empty ourselves of burden in order to feel better…As you

> can imagine, I find speaking to be a means to health. Like laughter or sobbing, speaking is one of the best means of releasing that I know (Rodenburg 2001: 17)

As we built our work we gave room to improvisation and spontaneity. This however does not mean that there was no plan for the workshops. I devised a workshop outline that specified the aim(s) of the workshop, ways of achieving the objective(s), games and exercises to be done and duration of the workshop. These workshops ran from 10 February to 11 March 2010 which was the day for our final workshop/performance. The workshops ran for four hours a day with a 30 minute break in between from Monday to Friday each week. On 12 March 2010 I met with the three poets to reflect on the whole process.

2.3 Series of workshops

The series of workshops in performance poetry that we did as part of this research were structured to also train the poets in the following:

1. Group/Team building
2. Discovering the self as a poet
3. Freeing the natural voice
4. Controlling breathing
5. Relaxation
6. Grasping the fundamentals of debate, the Poetic Debate and of slam poetry
7. Improvisation and Spontaneity
8. Bringing it together: Culminating in a final workshop/experience/ performance

CHAPTER THREE: THE JOURNEY

Introduction

It is of great importance to reiterate at this stage that this work has been highly experimental. Undertaking this research has therefore been a journey in many aspects. First, it has been my journey as a researcher, exploring the art of performance poetry as a medium for addressing HIV/AIDS stigma. Within that journey that I took as a researcher I also found my own personal journey as an individual, examining my own beliefs, perspectives and opinions as regard to HIV/AIDS. Thirdly, our coming together as poets symbolized the beginning of another journey, that of exploring and creating together. Last but not least, when the audience/final workshop participants joined us it was a communal journey. We were coming together as a community to ask questions and offer solutions, to debate, to explore issues of HIV/AIDS stigma so we may better our community. As Lessac A. (1997: 3) says, 'theatre should enhance the desire, and strengthen the capacity - to live'. This, I can say, was our ideal destination which we were journing towards. Addressing HIV stigma and possibly dispelling it has a capacity to improve human life and therefore make it possible for people to reach self actualization which is at the top of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of Human Needs.

3.1 Group/Team building, Discovering Self as a Poet and Research Background

When we came together for the first time as poets it was clear that we come from different backgrounds as far as poetry is concerned. We had our similarities and differences. With these similarities and differences we had to build a well coordinated team. The first thing that I did was to explain the concept of Poetic Debate, the research being done, its aims, the methodology and the background. After a lengthy explanation one poet exclaimed 'Yes that's a good idea but why HIV/AIDS?' Before I could answer another poet added 'The idea is interesting but this idea of AIDS, no, it's boring stuff, why do you have to research on AIDS by the way?' These were poets, young people aged between 20 and 24 years, fitting well in the age range of my research and there they were completely bored by the mention of HIV/AIDS on the very first day.

This confirmed the assumptions of this research, that young people do not want to discuss about HIV/AIDS because they say it is boring. The problem here is the method that has been used in teaching them. Freire P. (1968: 58) discredits what he calls the 'banking concept' of education whereby the teacher is a depositor of knowledge whilst the student is a passive listener. He argues that with this

system at the end '…it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of, creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system'. I persuaded them not to leave but to see this point, to understand that what makes the AIDS lessons boring is because there is lack of creativity, no transformation and lack of inquiry that the art, particularly performance poetry can bring into this field. I pointed out that learning is about inquiry and that is what we want to do using the Poetic Debate for Freire P. (1968) argues that:

> Apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, men cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re –invention, through restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, and with each other (Freire 1968: 58).

Everybody finally got to understand what we were doing though it took some days for it to be fully grasped. We began our inquiry. We did team building games to break barriers between individuals, we played trust games and right from the start we started to improvise. Though we were focusing on building the team we did not overlook the individual poet to the point of drowning him, that is, we wanted each poet to still keep his individual style of poetry presentation as a unique part of the bigger whole, the group. I encouraged them to find their place as poets, who they are and what do they bring to the group and fit well in the team. Thus we also recited our individual poems not related to HIV/AIDS stigma.

From the second day I took the team to the top of the university corner building and everyone was happy to be there on the roof, improvising poetry as cars pass down as if they were a swarm of ants. The rooftop venue provided a poetic atmosphere. To be there on top of the roof gives the feeling that you have been given a stage to speak your poetic verse. During one of the sessions one of the poets remarked, 'To be here makes you feel you are on top of the situation, you feel like the world is ready for you to deliver…its inspirational'. We decided to use that space more often after that. Building the team also entailed coming up with group rules and a workshop schedule convenient for everyone.

It was of utmost importance for every team member to understand the scope of the research at this stage so I explained it to them and we also agreed that each individual will go and do a thorough research on HIV/AIDS stigma and on the Debate in Sung Poetry of the Palestine. Research was to be

based on written sources, internet, interviews and personal experiences. Each time we met we updated each other and improvised poems based on the feedback from the research.

3.2 Voice training

Linklater K. (1976: 2) argues 'To free the voice is to free the person, and each person is indivisibly mind and body'. During the workshops that we did we therefore did some voice training with the understanding that as poets our voices are our instruments for expressing ourselves. We did voice exercises, breathing and relaxation exercises. We also sought to train the voice as part of the body and not as standing on its own. Therefore we also did games and exercises for the body and the mind.

3.3 Improvisation and spontaneity

During the first workshops improvising was challenging so we would work more with written poems and then build from there. The idea of improvising spontaneously was not that much familiar with the poets so we had to do a lot of work. The rooftop venue worked to our advantage as we would pick things like buildings, cars, the city towers and other structures and improvise on them. We also did improvisation games very often, for example, the one word story. Building on someone's word stretches your creative faculties and sharpens the ability to improvise spontaneously. As time went on the improvised poems became longer and longer until we were confident that the poets could now handle it.

3.4 Bringing it together

After three weeks doing the workshops we started bringing together what had come up during the workshops. We wove everything together into a storyline in preparation for the final performance. When I talked about rehearsals one poet objected saying, 'I do not rehearse poetry, I just write it and go to deliver it'. This could have been his style of doing things but now we had to rehearse so we are ready to improvise on the final day. Some new ideas came up during the rehearsal stage. The story was always becoming richer day by day. One thing which seemed to worry the poets was the fear to run out of words during the improvisations on the final day. One of the reasons they cited was that their class mates would laugh at them should they fail to deliver. I quickly pointed out that such a kind of laughing would be tantamount to stigma, the very thing we were trying to combat. Rescue came from the idea of having the poet asking the audience to prompt them. In this way the audience and the performer would be creating together and failure means failure for all and victory is for all also. We all came to a

conclusion that if stigma was addressed this way, collectively at community level then we will surely combat it. We kept polishing our work as the final workshop day approached.

CHAPTER FOUR: CAN THE PEOPLE IN THE TRAIN SPEAK?

Introduction

This chapter is centered on the final workshop which was done at the Nunnery at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa on 11 March 2010. This chapter will explain metaphors used in this performance so that the performance can be read and understood in the metaphoric context. The chapter will go on to give a detailed structure of the performance, give a commentary, reflections and evaluations based on the performance. The full performance/workshop is included on a DVD submitted with this research as Appendix A.

The performance/workshop was titled 'And Now We Speak'. Having done several workshops with the poets I was now convinced that we have reached a stage where we can speak out on the so called sensitive issues surrounding HIV/AIDS. This performance was a bit different because now the journey was to involve the audience/participants who had not been working with us in the process. This meant the community would be bigger and full of new faces too. As the day approached I said to the poets with whom I was working, 'Look, we have been on this journey for some time, in this train for some time, we now know each other , we can argue now and debate but then on the next station where the train will stop we will pick up some passengers there. They are part of us, lets journey together with them'. So when the day arrived and new people jumped into the train the question that hung in the air was 'Can the people in the train speak, can we speak?'

4.1 The final workshop/Performance

Our final workshop was a culmination of the workshops we had been doing. The work was presented as a performance. After taking an exploratory journey with the poets we then wove together our experiences and poems which came out of workshop sessions into a performance. The audience/workshop participants were students from the Wits School of Art of the University of the Witwatersrand. We rehearsed for a week preparing for this performance, the great experience, the diving into the deep, the launch, the great journey, all rolled together into one.

As the day approached there was a visible sign of excitement among the poets, the kind of excitement I found very similar to the one I usually experienced as a child when I was told that I would be going on a trip during the school holidays. This excitement used to be more intense especially if the trip would be

to a place I had never visited before. I would start to imagine what kind of place it would be, what kind of people will seat next to me on the bus or train, how far is the journey, all those things. Such imaginations would fill my mind until I became a bit anxious, pondering on whether I will enjoy the journey or not, whether the people I will travel with will be friendly or not, whether we will get there tired or not. I could sense such anxiety among the poets at this stage. The question which the poets frequently asked was 'What if the audience coldly sits there and refrains from participating?' I thought about this and on the following workshops I spent a great deal of time working on building the poets' confidence, I assured them that all will work out well, that the audience was not against them but working together with them, that even if the audience remains withdrawn we can always break the ice and create an inviting atmosphere that will engage them and immerse them in the theatre experience. This concern made us to revisit the whole workshop structure, starting with the entrance of the audience members, up to the games all the way to the time we bid them farewell. We worked on making the whole structure audience-friendly.

4.2 Metaphor

This work was very rich in metaphor. It is of great importance at this stage to introduce the metaphor concept to make the reading of the whole performance easier. Boal A. (2006: 26) defining metaphor, writes 'Metaphor, in its broadest sense as translation, includes all symbolic languages, among them the Word, the Parable and the Allegory. It includes all the Arts which represent rather than reproduce – realities'. Though this work deals with real issues it was not my aim to reproduce reality as it is but rather to give a representation of reality, to disguise reality in fiction. According to Boal, when reality is disguised as fiction men can interact with this reality and identify any existing problems and offer solutions and by doing so improve his own well being. Boal goes on to expound on metaphor by saying:

> All metaphors are translations or transubstantiations, i.e. the creations of new realities. The human being is the only animal capable of creating metaphors. The more it "metamophorises", the more human it becomes. All the arts are metaphors and only human beings are artists. Without an autonomous metaphoric activity – which is what the Aesthetics of the Oppressed seek to develop – the intelligence is paralyzed …' (Boal 2006: 26 – 27).

Poetry as an art form uses a lot of metaphors. In its best form poetry aims not just to tell a story but to do so through painting strong images/visuals in the human mind. This is the reason why I chose to use metaphors in this project. It gives the poetic debate a thorough depth that can touch and move the audience and engage them at a high level of involvement. Rodenburg P. describes this quality of poetry by saying:

> In order to express horror or joy, fear, love, hate or the incredible experience of feeling alive, poetry serves us better…stronger images focus the thoughts. We reach for simile, employ metaphor, attempt through onomatopoeia to reproduce the sound and sense of the experience itself in order to possess it (Rodenburg 2001: 55)

When we possess certain experiences such as love or hate we bring them closer to our own inner worlds and we thus make them accessible for our exploration. Above this we are bringing out the emotions, beliefs and opinions associated with such experiences in our own world.

4.3 The Final Performance/Workshop Outline

Below is the summarized version of the final workshop/performance. It aims to give an idea of what transpired on the performance night. The poems and audience contributions and comments are not included in full in this section and thus the reader should refer to the enclosed DVD (Appendix A) for the complete version of the performance/workshop captured on video. The performance has three poets and the facilitator who is the train master. I, the researcher was playing the role of the facilitator/train master/joker. The poets were acting as the hosts in the train.

AND NOW WE SPEAK!

Chairs are arranged on the sides of the hall in a train set up. Three suitcases are visible on the other end of the hall which has flats arranged in a way that gives an illusion that it's a train door leading to the next couch. Soft music is playing and two poets are standing on each side of the hall ushering the audience to their chairs as they walk in. The train master/facilitator/joker is standing next to the

doorway leading to the next couch, writing on his note pad and moving here and there to check the luggage and that all is well in the train.

Every audience member is seated. The two poets take their places, one on each side of the hall. The audience members in the hall are practically divided into two camps by their seating arrangement, each camp with one poet/host. As the music fades out the facilitator steps up, greets the audience and welcomes them to the performance venue. He introduces the performance 'And Now We Speak' and welcomes everyone to the performance. The facilitator goes on to ask the audience to switch off their cell phones and then welcomes them to the train, the 'Poetry Express Train'. The train master goes on to encourage the passengers (audience) to freely participate in the exploratory journey that is looking at HIV/AIDS stigma issues. He assures everybody that they are safe in the train.

The train master gets the train engine rolling by asking the passengers/audience to make coordinated train sounds. After the train sounds, the train master introduces a Hunter/Kudu game. This is a hand game similar to the rock/paper/scissors game. It is played by two or more people and it's about using the hands to display the choice of image made. In this game there are three images; the kudu, the wall and the bow. Each group/camp decides which image to display/give. The game is played through random selection of an image but when the game is played for a long time it is possible to use a high degree of skill to exploit the non random behavior of the opponent. Each camp gives its chosen images through their poet /host who turns towards the centre at the count of three with the image agreed on by the whole camp.

The poets/hosts/representatives turn towards each other at the same time with the image of their group. A kudu image on one side and a bow image on the other side gives a point to the side with the bow image (the kudu is shot). A kudu image on one side and a wall image on another side gives a point to the side with the kudu image (the kudu jumps the wall). A bow image on one side and a wall image on the other side gives a point to the side with the wall image (the bow hits the wall and becomes blunt). Displaying the same image from both groups at the same time is a no point. Many chances are given. The poet from the group that does not win the game switches to a fighting mode and goes to take fighting sticks prompting the other poet to also go and take up the fighting sticks.

The two poets engage in a stick fight and then freeze. At this moment the third poet, with his mouth covered with a bandana, comes through the doorway reciting a poem entitled 'A moment of Silence'.

The poem laments how silence has created stigma around HIV, how silence about HIV has badly affected us. The poem ends with '…this silence makes us sick, and thus now we speak!' As the poet utters this last line he pulls off the bandana which had been covering his mouth.

The two poets remaining at the centre start to retreat backwards, they put down their fighting sticks and remove the bandanas covering their mouths. There is silence before they engage in a poetic debate. The other poet is arguing about his uncle who was HIV positive who did not tell anyone about it until just before he died because he feared to be stigmatized and he believed that he will be considered not man enough if he tells his relatives that he has a problem. The other poet argues from the standpoint of one whose aunt has lived with the Human Immune Virus (HIV) for a long time but has led a healthy life due to taking drugs (ARVs) and support from her husband, relatives and the community.

After an intense debate, the train master steps up and asks the audience to write words or phrases on papers which can move forward the stories that the poets have been telling or introduce a new story related to HIV/AIDS stigma that the audience members may be wanting the poets to tell. The audience feedback is given to the poets who use this feedback to build poems spontaneously through improvisation. This is incorporated into a game whereby the poets can ask the audience members to prompt them if there is need.

The train master concludes the improvised poetic debate by asking the passengers/audience to clap hands for them. He then announces that the train has arrived at Figtree station. He looks outside the imaginary window and spots an imaginary familiar man standing outside. He draws the audience's attention to the imaginary man and goes on to tell them that he has often seen that man playing on the park with a young lady. He says the man seems to be waiting. Some romantic music fades up…

The man enters the acting area carrying a red rose and constantly keeps gazing at his watch. Much to his expectation, a young lady turns up and taps him from behind. There is hugging and the man wastes no moment to tease the lady with the present – the red rose. As they play romantically the man grabs the lady's necklace, with the flower still in his hand and violently rips it off her neck. The lady is shocked and runs to him but the man pushes her away. He goes on to crush the red rose there in front of her eyes – what he wanted, it seems was the necklace. This represents rape. There is silence.

A poetic debate ensues with the poets moving from the prepared poems to the improvised. One poet who witnesses the rape story acts as the narrator. The poet playing the rape victim laments that the man has given him stigma and pain. She trusted him but he abused her trust. The poet playing the rapist defends himself by saying that is how society brought him up, he was raped in prison and that's when he contracted HIV. The debate gets heated as the poets question each other, if one is raped should he then go on and rape?, whose fault is it for these rapes?, did the girl solicit for it?, why did she give him her trust in the first place?, Did he ever love her?, Did he not have a choice other than being a rapist?. The argument gets heated – it's the poetic debate!

The train master steps in and asks the audience for their views on the unfolding debate. The audience views are woven into poetry and the debate goes on – now we speak!

As the poetic debate gets heated to a climax the train master steps in with a neutral poem that reminds everyone, both the poets and the audience that we are in a friendly debate, that we are all winners, that what we want is to be able to express ourselves – to speak. This poem ties together the loose ends, and concludes the debate. It ends with the chanting of 'And Now We Speak' which is joined by all the poets and also by the audience/passengers. Surely, now we speak.

The train master facilitates a reflection session. Both audience members and the poets share experiences of their journeys. Problems fuelling stigma are traced to culture, politics, social structures, economy and individual prejudices. Solutions are suggested. The strong point that comes up clearly is that the society should work together to dispel HIV/AIDS stigma and to prevent the spread of HIV but most importantly people need to take responsibility as individuals both to dispel HIV/AIDS stigma and to prevent the spread of HIV. Social structures and cultural practices that promote stigma should be revisited and challenged. There is a resounding agreement that we need to speak about those issues that cause HIV stigma so we can dispel this stigma.

The train master asks audience members to leave any unnecessary baggage in the suitcases provided and pick up what they want to take home from another suitcase. People flock to the suitcases and then converge on the centre of the train. The train master announces that the train has arrived at the final station. He wishes safety to those rushing to take other trains and driving and he concludes with a well crafted joke that sends everyone off the train laughing.

4.4 Commentary and reflective evaluation on the final workshop

4.4.1 Reflection of the metaphors

The final performance which we presented was wrapped up in a train metaphor. Poetry, by its nature uses metaphor, imagery and symbolism. We therefore used metaphor to form the backbone of this final performance. The whole performance takes place in an envisioned train. The poets and audience members are all passengers and the facilitator is the train master. The train symbolizes a journey in various aspects. It symbolizes the journey we have been taking through a series of workshops that have culminated into the final performance and it also symbolizes the journey that we are all taking during the final performance. It is a journey of self exploration and reflection both at individual and communal level. When people board a train they meet people whom they know and those they do not know. It is possible for them to engage in chats and debate on certain social points. This is an environment we created; a relaxed environment where the audience members would feel welcome and also feel that it is okay to argue with others, to debate and suggest solutions to problems being raised.

Trains generally travel through diverse places on a single trip. The train may pass through a tunnel, pass in a rural area, and pass through a crowded city and so on. Thus when traveling in a train one is likely to look out of the window there and observe life in its different states. While this is happening there are also diverse people in the train coming from different life backgrounds. Some develop friendships in the train, some argue, some share secrets and so on. Such an environment is likely to make people to be freer to interact.

Added to this is the idea to disguise reality as fiction, which according to Boal (1979) is necessary for people to be more open, because they are addressing the real life as fiction. By offering solutions for characters in the fictionalized world they are offering solutions to themselves. During the workshop the train set up worked out well, people were seated facing each other and not behind each other like what usually happens in the theatres. Communication was natural. One workshop participant who spoke to me after the workshop said ‘Yeah, the train idea was great…you just feel you can say anything, formal or informal, it’s like you feel you are not restrained by anything, you are all passengers and so you somewhat feel free to answer someone seated next to you, you are travelling together after all’. During reflections people spoke freely and actively contributed to the debate going on. I attribute this to the train metaphor, other metaphors and other reasons that will be discussed in this research.

The train metaphor created a condition conducive for the poets to create and also for the audience to participate. This was evident in the smooth flow of the improvised poems and also in the readiness of the audience to make contributions. It was not a situation where the poets are performing for the audience but it was collective effort; we created together as a community. It was a natural audience that was envisioned by Peter Brook in The Empty Space. It created what Boal A. described in detail when writing about the Aesthetics of the Oppressed. He wrote:

> We concentrate our efforts and focus our attention on the creation of conditions in which the oppressed can develop fully their metaphoric world – their thought, their imagination and their capacity to symbolize, dream, and to create parables and allegories, which allow them to see, from a certain distance, the reality they want to modify – without diminishing their participation in the social concrete world. We cannot see the real if our noses are glued to it – some aesthetic distance is necessary (Boal 2006: 40)

The train metaphor and other metaphors used in this project thus serve to create the aesthetic distance and also to enrich the poetry. The Hunter/Kudu game as a metaphor worked well in creating a debate environment. Sbait D. (1993) emphasizes that the Poetic Debate is done in 'friendly rivalry' and the audience partake through chanting the chorus and making interjections. With this game the spirit of friendly rivalry was introduced and thus the game worked to introduce the debate mood. It was interesting to note how each side tried to win the game. At the same time the game worked well to break the ice, the boundaries and bring together the audience. I watched in amazement as the audience members who had walked in as individuals, suddenly melting into one group, leaning on each other's shoulders, making constant eye contacts and giggling as they put their heads together to decide which image to display. When a point was scored success was celebrated as a group with clapping, laughing and joyous outbursts. When the group lost the point to the other side you could also notice shared loss. No doubt, we were now a community and the atmosphere was set for the debate.

The Hunter/Kudu game was played in the early stages of the performance. It is a metaphor representing a happy community full of playfulness, creativity and strategy. It also fosters a sense of friendly rivalry

that characterizes the Poetic Debate. The purpose of this sense of rivalry and competition is similar to that of slam poetry as noted by Smith M. (2004) who says it is:

> '…a theatrical device intended to stoke the competitive fires of the performing poets, encourage audience participation, and pump some fuel into an entertaining evening of poetry, friendship, and camaraderie. When the poetry is great, when the performers are inspired…all involved, the poets/performers, the organizers and the audience – walk away winners (Smith 2004: 9 -10).

The Hunter /Kudu game set the environment for creativity. It also set an environment for spontaneous responses from the audience as deciding which image to display in a short time does not require much thinking. This spontaneous responding becomes vital as the debate unfolds. According to Fox J. (1994):

> Conversely, when a group of people really do let their spontaneous responses flow, I have found they often turn quite childish, scatological and often creative. There is tremendous energy in releasing taboos (Fox 1994: 86)

Thus, right from the beginning we released taboos so that the audience would be in a position to create and participate during the debate. The game also served to free poets from tenseness so they could be ready to give their best during the debate. It created a mood of playfulness, which I believe, is necessary for the thriving of this kind of theatre. Exploring should have a light sense to it and some playfulness otherwise tense people tend to hold back, choosing to withdraw and observe. This game also helped to establish a connection between the audience and the poets. Since the poets were going to be acting as the mouthpieces for the audience later in the debate, it was quite necessary to build this relationship and trust right from the start. This relationship was also fostered through having the poets welcome the audience at the start of the performance and ushering them to their seats. This kind of theatre requires a relationship between the audience and the performer that is based on trust.

The stick fight that happens between the two poets just after the Hunter/Kudu game symbolizes the blame game and the confusion that happened in relationships, marriages, families and the society when HIV/AIDS cases were first diagnosed in human beings. In Africa, Southern Africa in particular, some

people associated HIV with witchcraft, some viewed it as a death sentence and some even denied its existence. Such a background created a lot of stigma around HIV/AIDS and the stick fight is a metaphor that captures this kind of individual, family and societal unrest.

The stick fight metaphor, done with poets in skin costumes serves to take us down memory lane to a glimpse of history. We brought this up so we may understand stigma from the time HIV/AIDS was first diagnosed. Most of the myths surrounding HIV/AIDS came up during this period. Some of these myths, for example, say HIV/AIDS is a disease for gay people. This myth was probably fuelled by the fact that HIV and full blown AIDS cases were first diagnosed among gay people in San Francisco, USA. Such a myth could be among the reasons that made many straight men hide their HIV positive status. We thus decided to take a look at this period in history so that during the performance we may also see the differences between the kind of stigma rife then and the stigma that is prevalent now.

During the stick fight the poets had their mouths covered with bandanas. The bandanas on their mouths were a metaphor symbolizing the silence that surrounds HIV issues. This silence has contributed to HIV/AIDS stigma as it is the norm for those things that people do not want to talk about to attract stigma. This silence could be by the victim of stigma or by the community. In both instances this silence is unhealthy. Part of the poem that is recited during the 'silence' goes:

> A moment of silence and victims of silence
>
> Who died standing because they were voiceless
>
> And the poets were heartless…
>
> Those tortured by the society's claws,
>
> Those who hid behind closed doors…in fear of the stigma that baffles the enigma
>
> …we will be the light that shines through the dark night…
>
> This silence makes us sick and thus now we speak! (Philani 2010)

At the end of this poem the poet removes the bandana that has been covering his mouth. This is a symbol for breaking the silence. It is meant to encourage people to speak out, to encourage those in the audience to speak while at the same time discouraging everyone from being silent on HIV issues that cause stigma. Using art this way suits Gunner. L. and Furness G.'s (1995: 24) assertion that art serves to convince or persuade an audience for or against an issue. In the same book they argue that with art '…a

number of boundaries previously solid begin to dissolve' (1995: 2) Thus at this stage we sought to dissolve the silence. This metaphor is accompanied by strong words also inviting people to speak. Rodenburg P. (2001), lamenting the passivity of oracy notes that:

> Over the last fifteen years, for example, I have noticed my own students grow quieter, less willing to challenge and more willing to submit, precisely at a moment in history when voices need to be raised against the new perils that assault us each day. And yet voices are retreating into silence. The response to famine or war, for instance, seems to be 'What can you say? What weight does my voice carry?... (Rodenburg 2001: 25).

I believe this attitude of giving up on speaking and retreating into silence is the same attitude that has created the conditions for HIV/AIDS stigma to thrive. Thus the last line of the poem makes reference to the silence making us 'sick' and then declares that now we speak. Obviously if the silence is making us sick then it is not good for us. This is what the poet implies with this metaphor of sickness which means stigma.

The metaphor of removing the bandana from the mouth presents a potential for therapeutic healing. Speaking with a masked mouth may be somewhat choking or uncomfortable to the speaker. To the audience it presents a picture of someone who is distressed and who can be pitied. Thus when the person removes the masks there is a potential for therapeutic healing to take place as a result of the relief. This relief of the performer can also be shared with the audience who are watching and pitying this performer. There is therefore a potential for healing to take place during this part of the performance. According to Jones P. (1996: 1) '…drama and theatre are ways of actively participating in the world and are not merely an imitation of it…within drama there is a powerful potential for healing'. This is the active participation we sought to achieve and the healing potential which we sought to explore. The removal of the mouth cover by Philani (poet) inspires the other poets, Juliet and Masterpiece to also remove their mouth covers.

The rape scene is presented as an acted out story. It is one of the extreme cases through which a young person can contract HIV in South Africa. It is vital at this stage to point out that the scene referred to

here is in itself a symbolism for many relationships that have been affected by HIV/AIDS or have perpetuated the spread of HIV. The story can be anyone's story, with more or less similarities. Within this story there is a metaphor of the red rose. The young man went to meet his girlfriend with a red rose that he wanted to give her or rather pretends he wants to give her. What is striking here is that the red rose is never given to the lady but is used as a bait to take advantage of her. The red rose is known here in South Africa as a symbol of love. The color red is actually viewed by many as a romantic color and hence it is common to see people in red during the Valentine's Day which is regarded by many as a day of celebrating love.

The red rose in this case is therefore a metaphor for love. The question we were posing here was 'Did the man love the woman in the first place?' There are many instances where people contract the virus from those who purport to love them and at times it is possible that the person with the virus will be aware but go ahead and have unprotected sex without informing his/her partner. Centered on love also we were posing the question of going to test; can someone have unprotected sex with someone without them going to test first just because they love each other? In this scene it is the man who even destroys the flower. It's something that we observed during the process workshops that some people at times hide behind love and infect others with the HIV.

During the scene of the young man and the young lady under discussion, the young man forcefully grabs and pulls off a necklace worn by the lady. This whole act is a symbol for rape and the tearing away of the necklace symbolizes the breaking of her virginity. The necklace of the lady symbolizes her stolen virginity, dignity and respect. It is meant to show the things that people usually lose during rape situations. These situations also leave them with a stigma tag on their neck. Here theatre also served to warn people to watch against being used or taken advantage of by people who purport to love them yet they just want to take advantage of them for the fulfillment of their sexual desires. Since such people's love is hypocritical, trust and care is not there and such people cannot emotionally and spiritually give support when HIV becomes an issue.

The red color, which is represented by the red rose, is known in South Africa and other parts of the world as a symbol for solidarity against HIV/AIDS. The fact that the man in the story crushes the red rose symbolizes a betrayal of the efforts to combat HIV/AIDS. Instead of choosing responsibility he chooses negligence, instead of caring he chooses violence, instead of loving he chooses to hurt. Such choices are breaking away from the solidarity against HIV and are thus perpetuating the spread of the virus and

stigma. If as communities and as individuals we can ponder on the choices that we make in life then we can be in a better position to dispel HIV stigma and to reduce the spread of the virus.

From the beginning of the performance there are three travelling suitcases on view. Two suitcases are old and are placed on one side and one newer suitcase is on the other side of the train door leading to the next couch. Apart from serving to reinforce the train atmosphere the two old suitcases are a symbol of stigma as an unnecessary baggage that people are carrying around either as individuals or as a society. The newer suitcase symbolizes new ideas and insights that people can take home from the workshop experience.

4.4.2 Therapeutic Healing Potential

Towards the end of the performance the facilitator/train master asked the audience members to drop any unnecessary baggage in the suitcases on the stage and also to pick something from the other suitcase. All these suitcases were practically empty and the leaving behind and picking up of something were aimed at providing a potential for therapeutic healing. This was done so that people do not go out of the workshop feeling guilty of their own beliefs, prejudices and opinions on HIV/AIDS which may be possibly stigmatizing in some way. Besides this, after the experience of the rape scene and other scenes that have a potential to weigh down the performer or the audience we felt there will be need for such therapy. It began the after workshop warm down. If the reactions of people are something to go by, then the way people playfully carried imaginary luggage to drop into the boxes and also the way they picked the imaginary 'desired elements' shows that such an act was quite necessary at the closing of such a workshop that had been dealing with sensitive issues.

According to Jones P. (1996):

> …Participating in drama and theatre allows connections to unconscious and emotional processes to be made. Participating is seen to satisfy human needs to play and to create. The festive act of people coming together through drama and theatre is seen to have social and psychological importance. Theatre is both an activity set apart from everyday reality, which at the same time has a vital function in reflecting upon and reacting to that reality (Jones 1996: 3).

The workshop offered this therapeutic healing potential that comes with participation and connecting to unconscious and emotional processes. Mtshali (2007)'s assertion of theatre being a language of emotions becomes vital here. I believe the poetry connects effectively with our emotions in a way that makes possible therapeutic healing. As the audience members joined in the poetry by listening to it and then offering words to be used in improvisations they were reflecting upon and reacting upon their own reality, which is therapeutic in itself. John P. goes on to add that theatre is necessary to living. Drama and theatre are essential, a part of the maintenance of well-being or a return to health. Jones asserts that Drama therapy is not a psychotherapy group or behavioral therapy programme which has some dramatic activities added to it. The drama does not serve the therapy. The drama process contains the therapy.

As we came together to create together we sought to create a society that does not stigmatize. Oatley K. (1982:2) emphasizes that therapy make self and the relationships to be 'whole' and not 'fragments'. During the reflections one participant noted that we are living in a world where people point fingers at each other instead of finding a common solution to the problem. The whole group echoed her sentiments; that if we take collective responsibility and face reality we might bring a change. To build a society without HIV stigma will be creating a society that is more of a 'whole' because stigma divides people and causes social unrest. This envisioned 'whole' society was created in the workshop as we came together and shared our views in order to restore order to our society. Such an experience is therapeutic.

4.4.3 Improvisation and Spontaneity

Boal, referring to what Thespis did when he stepped out of the chorus and answered back in impromptu speech, says, 'Improvisation is life' (Boal A. 1979: xiv). This statement sums up what improvisation brought to our workshop – it brought life. One workshop participant commented on this during the reflection session by saying 'I like the way you brought in improvisation, the sincerity of the poets, the truth presented as it is… I think that is the point to begin from…' (Workshop participant: 2010) Improvisation made the performance to be alive and highly engaging. It also created a platform for the audience to be involved as they gave the poets material to work with for improvisation. When poets got stuck they asked the audience to prompt them. This gave the audience an avenue to tell their stories. What resulted was what Boal calls 'simultaneous dramaturgy' where the audience shaped the direction

of the performance. During the Poetic Debate there was a moment when as the facilitator I asked the audience members to provide improvisation material to the audience by writing their views on papers and the following words and phrases came up:

- Lets speak and more than speak – ACT
- Confusion, fusion
- Rise Up Rise Up Rise Up
- Trumpets blaring
- Loneliness, Afraid
- Afraid of the unknown
- Within – Around – Without – Them
- My mind fights my body
- Rejection
- Depression
- Hope
- Uncertainty of hope
- I loved him, now he is dead
- I am a mother with a child that I want to protect
- Hatred

These words and phrases came from the audience after the poets had recited their prepared poems that tell the stories of a man who lived with HIV and told no one until just before his death and the woman who has lived positively with the virus for many years. The poets then improvised poems in a poetic debate style based on audience words and prompting. The environment was filled with a sense of sincerity, the words of the poems were coming up on the spot and the poems were improvised

spontaneously. I believe this created the right environment for creativity, truthfulness, trust and sincerity which is required to handle sensitive issues like HIV/AIDS stigma.

Poetic debate, as practiced in the Palestinian Debate in Sung/Improvised Poetry is associated with spontaneity. According to Fox J. (1994: 79) 'Spontaneity is associated with action'. Poetry as an art form is capable of galvanizing people into action. There has been a lot of talk about HIV stigma but what people want now is the talk that is accompanied by action. Smith M. (2004) describing the power of performance poetry that is action centered, writes:

> One fall night, in this place, poetry did something…It rose off the page and wafted into the lungs of its passionate creators. It jumped up on the bar, right along beer bottles and half-empty glasses. It embodied itself in the very poet-performers who created it. And it screamed. It whispered. It pranced and danced. It cried and laughed. Most importantly, it engaged the audience, entertained it, and deeply affected it. And it hasn't stopped since (Smith 2004: xxiiv).

What I like is that Smith ends this by saying 'And it has not stopped since'. On the day of our performance I witnessed the continuation of this kind of experience. It has not stopped. It was there. I believe improvisation and spontaneity gave the poetry this kind of life. Such an atmosphere was also made possible by the fact that during the process workshops I had worked on training the poets on improvisation and spontaneity. During the final workshop they were able to express without holding back. Fox J. (1994: 50) says 'Persons who do not hold back and are able to express themselves directly convey a sense of aliveness. They move, they laugh, they surprise, they shine'.

This sense of aliveness was also caught by the audience and we created together spontaneously. After the rape scene, for instance, the poets recited improvised poems and after the debate had gone on for some time I asked the audience to intervene. I asked them what they were feeling towards the rape victim. I asked them to sum it up in one word or a phrase. One audience member said 'Butterflies come take me away'. The poets used this phrase to build their improvisations on and the audience followed the debate closely, interjecting here and there with giggling, clapping, laughter and sighs. The workshop had life and I believe this is the kind of workshop that is appropriate for the 19 – 29 age group who want 'life' and who view low energy workshops or kinds of teaching as boring. This was echoed by one of the

poets during the reflection session. She said '…as a young person honestly, I am just being honest here, I get bored, like we do get bored by the issues to do with HIV/AIDS and whatsoever stuff because as young people we are not interested in things like politics, news and all that stuff. We are more into lifestyle' (Poet/Performer 2010). She went on to add that what then made this project interesting for her is that it uses poetry which she loves as a young person.

Because of improvisation and spontaneity the poets were not restricted on what to say. They were building on what is made available to them on that moment and this makes the artistic work to be sincere. According to Moreno J. L. (1945):

> The spontaneous non scripted actor, unrestricted by a playwright's lines,
> can say whatever comes, often producing word and action as stunningly
> a propos as it is unexpected. Thus an actor with a trained imagination
> and with full access to his or her full senses has available a wide range
> of expressive possibilities. (Moreno 1995: 8)

It was interesting to hear poets trace HIV issues to politics and other structures of the society. I also noted here that the poet's creative possibilities are sometimes influenced by the poet's lived experiences. An example is Masterpiece, one of the poets who, during rehearsals, would mention that he has never written a poem about HIV/AIDS. This came up during the improvised poems. It also indicates the sincerity with which this work was approached. Poets draw from their surrounding world. This drawing from their world makes each poet to have their unique way of delivering poetry which makes the whole performance a rich experience – like a rainbow whose beauty is in its different colors, performance poetry by a group of poets is enriched by the uniqueness of the style of presentation that each poet brings. Stallworthy J. (1973), commenting both on the uniqueness of each poet and on poets drawing material from their surrounding world says:

> Poets speak most piercingly when they speak most personally,
> and because they speak personally their statements are as various
> as their finger prints…the poet assemblies words into the likeness
> of his world, whether it is that seen from his window or seen
> with his inward eye (Stallworthy 1973: 19 – 20).

I would like to note that as the workshop progressed the poets became more confident and thus spontaneity began to come somewhat naturally. This also goes for the audience. In the beginning they were a bit reserved but as the performance progressed they became more settled and began to respond spontaneously. I attribute this to the playfulness environment that was created. Spontaneity is strongly associated with playfulness for when we become playful we become creative and we also become absorbed in the experience. Moreno J., describing this experience says:

> Spontaneity is a kind of ecstasy, an attunement which encapsulates thought. The artist becomes "like a medium - you try to cross over into that part of you that's always there but is only alive when you are playing". It is related to "the power of creating beyond oneself without losing oneself" It is like a light breath…a presence as power…there is a strong connection between spontaneity, playfulness and even eroticism. Spontaneity is juicy (Moreno 1945: 85)

This spontaneity became a shared experience between the poets and the members of the audience. During the reflection session a member of the audience became spontaneous and, like Thespis of the Greek, gave her feedback in a well crafted improvised poem. This confirmed Rodenburg P.'s assertion that:

> All of us, at some time in our lives, have spoken poetry. As the routine events of life suddenly become more urgent and vital, normal language is no longer sufficient to our needs. At such moments the quality of our language changes and we probably speak poetically. In order to express horror or joy, fear, love, hate or the incredible experience of feeling alive, poetry serves us better than prose…poetry needn't only reside with professional poets, be studied in university courses or heard in the theatre, or grace the pages of the well read. It is territory we all know and traverse daily (Rodenburg 2001: 55 – 56).

Mtshali A. (2007) echoes these sentiments when he says that poetry is a language of emotions. Since all human beings have emotions it means poetry is an art form that possess some universally appealing qualities and this makes it an appropriate art form for addressing social issues in a multicultural society like that of South Africa. The above is a testimony of how poetry unlocked the silence surrounding HIV/AIDS stigma and gave a platform for people to speak. This is what we sought to achieve by this performance.

4.4.4 Breaking Boundaries between the Performer and the Audience

Growtoski J. (1968) declares that theatre should not, because it could not, compete against the overwhelming spectacle of film and should therefore focus on the core root of theatre, that is, actors co-creating the event of theatre with its spectators. This he calls integration or discarding the mask or the revealing of the real substance. Growtoski goes on to say:

> Here we can see the theatre's therapeutic function for people in our present day civilization. It is true that the actor accomplishes this act but he can only do so through an encounter with the spectator – intimately, visibly, not hiding behind a cameramen, wardrobe mistress, stage designer or make-up girl – in direct confrontation with him and somehow "instead of" him. The actor's act – discarding half measures, revealing, opening up, emerging from himself as opposed to closing up – is an invitation to the spectator. This act could be compared to an act of the most deeply rooted, genuine love between two human beings – this is just a comparison since we can only refer to this "emergency from oneself – through analogy. This act, paradoxical and border line, we call a total act. In our opinion it epitomizes the actor's deepest calling" (Grotowski 1968: 1)

The theatre experience described above is what we sought to create and we succeeded in doing so. Our reward was a lively theatre experience where the performer and audience are all creators of the art. HIV/AIDS stigma needs both individual and collective effort to dispel. It needs a communal action.

4.4.5 The Role of the Facilitator

In the Boalian theatre he is called the joker or facilitator. In the Poetic Debate of the Palestinian Sung or Improvised poetry as described by Sbait (1993), he is referred to as the neutral poet. In the slam poetry Smith M. (2004) refers to him as the slam master. In the high school or college debate Boyd H. (1940) calls him the chairman. In my theatre I call him the 'Train Master'. This is the role I was playing. I was facilitating the whole process and making sure the Poetic Debate goes on well from the moment the audience came in to the point of thanking them and biding them farewell. Sbait D. (1993) notes that at the end of the Poetic Debate, as practiced in Palestine, a neutral poet comes up to improvise a neutral poem. This poem ties the loose ends together and reminds the debaters/poets and the audience that the whole debate was done in a spirit of friendly rivalry, no matter how it got heated, it was just like a friendly wrestling match, and it was for the good of both sides and for the community as a whole. This is the role I played and the neutral poem was entitled **And Now We Speak!**

4.4.6 Unlocking the Silence

The attributes described above created the right platform to unlock the silence and the silence was unlocked. The poets recited both written and improvised poems while the audience gave them the words for improvisation, prompted them, cheered them on, laughed, giggled and clapped. During reflections people spoke out boldly and identified problems that cause HIV/AIDS stigma, they questioned and offered solutions. This is what Boal envisioned of his 'Spec –Actor', it was the natural audience envisioned by Peter Brook and there was 'simultaneous dramaturgy' where the performer and the spectator create together as envisioned by Grotowski. As I recited the poem And Now We Speak, the other poets joined me at the centre and we started to chant 'And Now We Speak!' and the audience joined in the chanting. We achieved our aim – to be free to speak or express our views and opinions regarding HIV/AIDS. Thus we can say we reached the summit – self actualization as envisioned by Abraham Maslow in his hierarchy of human Needs.

CHAPTER FIVE: NOW THAT WE SPEAK

Introduction

This chapter concludes this research. It notes some vital observations from the research and goes on to give some recommendations that may be useful to those who wish to enter into this kind of work, and also to those who are already involved in this kind of work who want to sharpen their skills and deepen the quality of their work. The recommendations may not work exactly the same way for everyone who puts them into practice but I believe a lot can be gained from them. Now that we speak, I believe we can share experiences, opinions and ideas as artists and work together to better our communities by dispelling HIV/AIDS sigma and working towards a permanent solution to HIV/AIDS.

5.1 Observations, Recommendations and Conclusions

Rodenburg P. (2001) notes that:

> Debate is a key means of allowing new words to circulate through our system. Debate is probing and questioning. We relentlessly purse an issue and not just sniff round it. We confront another speaker with the urgency of our needs and sometimes compromise when challenged by a need that is vital than our own. Our ability or inability to debate is formed by the openness or lack of it in our lives. If it is not encouraged by parents, teachers, political leaders or even employers the yearning for discussion and openness to opinions other than our own withers (Rodenburg 2006: 26)

This is what I have noted in Poetic Debate and in issues to do with a sensitive subject like HIV/AIDS. This nature of theatre requires openness, sincerity, truthfulness and integrity. All these should begin with self before one ventures to involve the public. Sometime in 2009 when I started this project I decided to go for an HIV test. I could not handle issues of HIV and testing when I have not been at the testing centre myself, it would be tantamount to insincerity. As Rodenburg suggests, I am also of the view that debate should be encouraged, particularly Poetic Debate that is so strong and engaging and can work well in teaching young people about critical issues such as HIV/AIDS.

I have noted that playfulness, spontaneity, improvisation, games and the breaking of audience - performer boundaries all work well to create an environment that is inviting for the audience to participate and create together with the performer. Those venturing into interactive theatre should seriously consider creating such an environment during their performances. Such an environment also promotes creativity.

Those considering doing work similar to this one that I did should work on having a longer time for workshops before the final workshop that involves an audience or having more performances with the audience as this will build the confidence of the performers. This is because I noted that the poets in this workshop still showed room for improvement. I believe this is because the final workshop was their first performance with the audience. We met after this performance for reflections and they were all feeling so confident and eager to take the work forward so we will definitely work on that because that means we go to the next performance as an experienced team.

The Poetic debate, as done in this research creates a strong platform for addressing HIV/AIDS stigma. It is such a unique and engaging way of HIV/AIDS exploration that has shown to work well especially with the 15 – 29 age group that wants lively methods of learning and discussion. When structured well and with the right people this concept offers both the performers and the audience/participants a rich experience of self and societal exploration with the view of raising questions and offering solutions. The art form also presents participants with a potential for therapeutic healing. The Poetic Debate offers a strong platform for interaction; exchange of ideas, questioning, arguing, confessing and offering solutions. It is not a passive art form but an active medium full of energy and room for creativity.

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APPENDIX A: AND NOW WE SPEAK (DVD FOR THE FINAL PERFORMANCE/WORKSHOP)