ABSTRACT

This Practice-based Research, entitled ‘Trauma on Stage: Making theatre about xenophobia in South Africa using the ‘structures’ of trauma, explores the challenge of theatre-making when encountering trauma narratives. The research consists of an original new South African play called *The Line* and a written reflexive component.

The reflexive research component introduces the reader to the structures of trauma, the theories of trauma and traumatic enactment. The reader is then introduced to the foundation of the creative research through the ethnographic study of victims and perpetrators of the March 2008 xenophobic violence. Through the intersection of actual testimonies, the construction of a script and the researcher’s personal and creative reflections, the study attempts to demonstrate the complex challenges and dramatic elements that underpin theatre-making focussed on capturing traumatic narratives and the interpretation of traumatic events for an audience. The study highlights the necessity for theatre-makers to engage with traumatic subject-matter with considerable insight into its structures and its relationship to the dramatic medium. This study asserts the need to respect the role of the subject in the making of theatre and offers possibilities for theatre to talk back to pressing issues in South Africa today.

This research finds, in its conclusion, that the ‘structures’ of trauma hugely impacted the interview process, the scriptwriting process and the structure of the play. The research further acknowledges the influence Verbatim Theatre and the psychological insights Dr Jonathan Shay espouses regarding the passage from neighbour to violent foe.
This research affirms the role of theatre as a container and representation of complex human experiences.