



Wits School of Arts

Drama for Life

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RESEARCH TOPIC: Practice as Research: What Role Can Image Theatre and Photography Play in Co-Knowledge Building and Cultural Preservation among Marginalized Ethnic Groups in Botswana?

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ABSTRACT

This research addresses Botswana's disenfranchisement of non-Setswana-speaking ethnic groups, as evidenced by constitutional exclusion, political disparities, and the delayed reintroduction of mother tongues in schools. Through the exploration of Image Theatre, members of diverse marginalised ethnic groups were inspired to use their bodies as vessels of communication. Photography was employed to document the preservation of culture, embodied in the physical representations of participants' respective cultural identities.

Practice as Research (PaR), framed through the dual lens of decolonisation and social constructivism, facilitated the structuring of the inquiry and yielded insights into the application of Image Theatre. The practice, inclusive of artefacts symbolising participants' cultures, established Botho as a value shared across ethnic groups. The PaR focused on fostering participant agency through non-verbal communal communication and collective knowledge construction.

This study demonstrates how Image Theatre, the body, and cultural artefacts—combined with photography—serve to validate memories of culture and language. The work illustrates how stories may be unearthed and reflected upon, with a view to preservation through photographic documentation, thereby immortalising cultural attributes and creating opportunities for future reflection and meaning-making.

Keywords: *Marginalized, Ethnic Groups, Botswana, Image Theatre, Practice as Research*

DEDICATION

To the marginalized ethnic groups in Botswana; your voices are valid.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and introduction

Prior to Botswana's independence from the British colonials, the predominance of the English and Setswana languages was established. When the nation officially became a self-governing republic in 1966, the disenfranchisement of every language other than Setswana was formalised. Chebanne (2016) highlights, "Other ethnic groups and languages such as Shiyeyi, Subiya, and various Khoisan languages, Afrikaans, Nama, OtjiHerero, ThiMbukushu, Ndebele, Setswapong and Sebirwa were completely overlooked territorially and linguistically." The Setswana speaking ethnic groups make up only eight of the over thirty existing ethnic groups in Botswana. According to several sources, Setswana is spoken by approximately 78% of the population, making it the most spoken language nationwide. Interestingly Bagwasi (2021:43) states, "Most bilinguals in Botswana are speakers of minority languages who feel obliged to learn English and Setswana. There are not many speakers of English who also speak Setswana and not many speakers of Setswana who also speak the minority languages." One of the reasons that minoritized ethnic groups feel obliged to learn Setswana and English is because as Mogara & Chebanne (2023:1) state, "Setswana and English were the only school languages." dominance is pronounced in the way of political and social backing which has resulted in an indefinite reign over the non-Setswana speaking ethnic groups. Nyathi- Ramahobo (2008) wrote, "The consequences of this colonial arrangement are still seen in Botswana today. Eight Tswana tribes (a numerical minority in the country,) continue to enjoy the privileges associated with official recognition, whilst many of the other 38 tribes have experienced culture and language loss, disproportionate poverty, and invisibility on the national scene." That said it was not up until 2023 that the languages in education policy began to take effect and a few marginalized mother-tongues begun being reintroduced to pre-primary and early primary schools.

Between 2016 and 2019 I wrote, and performed a solo theatre play about the legacy of my grandfather, Gobe Matenge, who was a Kalanga man that used his influence as a civil servant to advocate for the equality of BaKalanga (one of the marginalized ethnic groups). In my acknowledgement of being part Kalanga and Morolong (Setswana speaking) and not being satisfied with the still unhindered status quo, I pursued a research focus in 2022 that incited a discovery of my perception of Botswana's (and my own) passivity in fighting for the marginalized language of Ikalanga. Following a second presidential inquiry (that culminated in a report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the review of the Constitution of Botswana in 2022) within the last two decades aimed at addressing, "perceived tribal inequality between the dominant Botswana and the smaller minority tribes"; there haven't been adequate material changes to the tune of marginalized ethnic groups, their

languages and status being given the same treatment as Setswana speaking people, thus perpetuating the sidelining of natively non-Setswana speaking persons. In all fairness the languages in education policy has started a forward momentum in realising the dream of language equality and Mogara & Chebanne (2023:1) proclaim that, “it marks a big milestone in the incorporation of languages in education in Botswana.” All things considered however, it will take time for marginalized languages to make tangible progress due to the fact that not all of them have substantial materials and teachers to teach them. Additionally, some of these languages are endangered and thus under-documented. Take for instance Sekgothu, a dialect of the Nama ethnic group. According to statistics shared by Mogara, Ramotlabaki and Chebanne (2023:199), in 2001 there were 690 speakers of the language and a decade later there were none. It is unclear if the language has resurged in the contemporary. Consequently, I proposed through this research that the method of Image Theatre be employed as a means of expressing with the body what words cannot. Perry (2012:103) states, “Image Theatre invites participants to play in the space between aesthetic representation and social reality for the purpose of developing counter-hegemonic stories, identities and subjectivities.” Contextually speaking, the marginalized began to discover a new language through which they grappled with making meaning based on what was revealed from their respective internal worlds as was influenced by culture. The hoped outcome of the aforesaid was to emulate what Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o terms “awakened peasantry”. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o is a Kenyan author, academic and playwright who has written extensively about language and decolonisation. Awakened Peasantry is essentially the deliberate distortion of an imposed language upon natives, in order to create a new one that only the natives speak, thus making it their own language as a protestation, and as a means of holding on to a semblance of their identities. My curiosity then became how “awakened peasantry” could be explored through the body as a form of protest and bodily neologism. ‘Neologism’ is defined as the coining of expression. The latter took the position of offering an alternative avenue to speak within a country that has fundamentally silenced the voices of the marginalized.

1.2 Rationale

Beyond traditional theatre, dance, music and literature, there are no published works surrounding non-verbal communication and the extraction of knowledge through bodily language, particularly in Botswana. My interest in unearthing knowledge through the memory of the body led me to pursue this means with the hope of making discoveries not yet articulated, and to tap into learning how to listen to what the body is saying about internalised biases, oppressions and in re-remembering lost gradations of culture and language. Boal (2008:106) writes, “In our culture we are used to expressing everything through words, leaving the enormous expressive capabilities of the body in an underdeveloped state.” This is premised on the notion that the body keeps a record of what it has experienced throughout a human’s

lifetime, even if the mind forgets. I argue that this makes a person, and in particular their body, a living archive through which lost and new knowledge could be exhumed. Churchyard (2013:16) affirms, *“Experiences and the related memories and emotions are held within the body itself and it is from the body that they can be accessed.”*

She further quotes an assertion:

“The body is the primary site for creation and development of theme, narrative, character and movement vocabulary (Fraleigh, 1987).”

While the latter quote refers to a physical theatre and dance context, it remains relevant to the point of the body being a living archive from which lived experiences are imprinted upon it. Thus, unconscious knowledge can be exhumed from it through a creative practice such as Image Theatre.

The hegemony of English and Setswana continues to place people who primarily speak other(ed) languages under subjugation. The sustained impact of elevating English and Setswana—which make up the official and national languages respectively—has meant that ethnic group languages spoken by non-Setswana-speaking natives are excluded in places of influence such as *kgotlas* (traditional meeting places), Parliament and significant social and business setups, as well as in schools. In exclusively naming Setswana tribes in policies that affect land ownership, tribal territories and languages of instruction in schools, those who are not Setswana-speaking are treated as second-class citizens. Despite the recommendation by the Presidential Commission to urgently implement a Languages in Education Policy, whereby marginalised languages get taught in schools, as of December 2022, it was reported that delays were due to the government of Botswana insisting on first carrying out a piloting and training programme, likely with the view of testing the feasibility of this venture’s implementation. As stated earlier, the Languages in Education Policy has since taken effect. Mogara & Chebanne (2023:1) confirm this in writing:

“At the beginning of 2023 some of the indigenous languages have started being used in schools, and the phased introduction of remaining ones will be done after necessary developments are undertaken to resource and capacitate them.”

I note that the beneficiaries are learners at the pre-primary and early primary phases of education. The Languages in Education Policy was mentioned as far back as 2000 during the first presidential inquiry called the Balopi Commission, but did not materialise. In response to the initial delay, some concerned members of the public approached the University of Botswana and collaborated with the institution to start a course that introduced learning Ikalanga (one of the marginalised languages). The university posted on its official social media page on 26 March 2021 that it would start teaching the beginners and intermediate courses from 12 April 2021. One of the most replied comments on this post read:

“It’s either you are genuinely marketing your programmes or doing damage control on behalf of government.”

This was in reference to the government reacting to the long-term groaning of citizens of marginalised ethnic groups who have in the past and present sought the opportunity for their languages to be taught. During an interview in 2016, which formed part of my personal research for a solo theatre performance that focused on bringing awareness to the plight of marginalised tongues, former minister and businessman Charles Tibone stressed that children who speak a particular tongue growing up, such as Ikalanga, become disadvantaged when they start school. The reason being that they are obliged to start learning a language that they do not naturally speak, in the hope of understanding what is being taught, or else their success in school will be jeopardised. In making reference to Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o, Khan (2019:151) shares:

“Ngūgĩ had to go to a colonial school and his harmony was broken because the language of his education was not the language of his culture.”

Khan (2019) expands:

“The African students could not get good jobs or university admissions if they did not pass the secondary English subject even though they might have been toppers in other subjects.”

In the present day, people’s proficiency and literacy in English and Setswana is high; however, it is at the expense of native tongues not being embraced or practised unless within the personal circles of the marginalised. Interestingly, it is only in situations when a Setswana speaker finds themselves in an area where Setswana is not the common tongue that they might learn the language spoken there. It comes down to the privilege of personal preference, due to Setswana being widely spoken and promoted across the country. Conversely, within their native territories, non-Setswana speakers are pressured into speaking Setswana. One of the reasons behind this is due to the language used in policies to invite strata and differentiate between Setswana and non-Setswana-speaking ethnic groups, such as labelling the former as “major” and the latter as “minor. This practice is embedded in the Language in Education Policy. Botswana’s attitudes aligned with the aforesaid and the manifestation has been preferential treatment toward Setswana speakers over non-Setswana speakers. Due to the fact that non-Setswana-speaking ethnic groups do not enjoy the benefits of having their languages supported nationally or even accorded official status, I view this as being tantamount to silencing them. If the voices of the people are then muzzled, what remains is the body from which to express, and one of the unique ways of doing so is through Image Theatre, of which it is written, has “extraordinary capacity for making thought visible” (Uppal & Vachon, 2018:9). Considering that there is no documentation of Image Theatre being used in Botswana, and that applied drama and theatre practices, while not completely peculiar to the Botswana landscape, have mainly been experienced through imported projects that aimed to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, there arose an

opportunity to introduce a practice through which silenced marginalised communities could use their bodies as they normally would their words, to speak out—while also tapping into the memory of the body to elicit uncolonised aspects of culture that aimed at the result of unhomogenised expressions through the act of the practice.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

This research aimed to explore Image Theatre as a tool for diverse marginalised ethnic groups to use their bodies as a different conduit through which they could express their respective cultures within a forum whereby they would be speaking across cultural boundaries. Additionally, in conjunction with the use of photography, the aim was to examine how to preserve the evoked hidden aspects of culture through this visual medium. Throughout the embodied and visual explorations, the hope was to achieve the unearthing of hidden knowledge, meaning-making and thus communal building of knowledge as they understood it collectively.

“Of course those images don’t replace words but they cannot be translated into words either – they are a language in themselves.” (Boal, 2002:175)

In agreeing with the above, I also went ahead and extended this notion to invite the participants into interpreting what the bodies communicated following the dynamisation of the images—which consisted of embodied storytelling—and the final image itself. From the above, various stories emerged, evoking resonance with the witnessing and interpreting co-participants, leading to interconnectedness, cross-cultural empathy and a shifted perspective in meaning-making.

The aims of the research included the following:

1. Exploring Image Theatre through which marginalised ethnic groups could discover new expression through the body.
2. Decolonising universally established gestures/signs to allow for different meanings to emerge.
3. Combining Image Theatre with digital photography as a means of cultural preservation.

The objectives of the research were laid out as follows:

1. Guiding games and exercises focused on “knowing the body” and “making the body expressive”, through which the vocabulary of the body arose.
2. Inviting various artefacts into the space that engaged all the senses to help elicit forgotten or hidden knowledge as pertained to the participants’ respective cultures.
3. Facilitating post-embodied image and photograph reflections as an invitation to extract and make meaning.

Below are the questions that guided my exploration:

1. In what ways can the practice of Image Theatre unearth the nuanced challenges faced by the diversely marginalised?
2. How can Image Theatre facilitate co-knowledge building?
3. How can the body be used to re-remember concealed facets of culture in order to preserve them?
4. In what ways can an embodied language unify and spark intersectional dialogue between speakers of different tongues?

1.4 Method

In my understanding, practice as research means that the creative process is in itself the research, without the need for a written or otherwise post-expressed analysis or report. About practice as research, Skains (2018:85) wrote:

“The research consists entirely of the creative practice, with no explicit critical exegesis deemed necessary. The creative artefact is considered the embodiment of the new knowledge.”

The practice within the method for my research inquiry is Image Theatre, wherein: *“The participant is asked to express his opinion, but without speaking.”* (Boal, 2008:112)

The group I conducted this exploration with is linguistically diverse and presented knowledge through using the body as a language from which meaning was made and the hidden, unmasked. Herein lies the practice as research, in that it was only when this process was undertaken that the theory was put into practice and data emerged that affirmed the theory but, more interestingly, informed future theory in the context of Botswana. Ironically, the lingua franca used for ease of facilitating the process was the combination of Setswana and English, which I, as facilitator (along with the participants), am fluent in. The irony that the languages of contestation are the ones we relied heavily on is not lost on me and reminds me of the words of Bagwasi (2020:43), who said:

“The pattern of bilingualism that is found in Botswana does not support multilingualism, instead it is detrimental to it.”

At least five marginalised ethnic groups were represented in this workshop, but the national (Setswana) and official (English) languages reigned supreme. This was a testament to none of us ever having had the opportunity to be formally taught in our respective mother tongues. Only one of the participants could claim to be multilingual, as they are fluent in Shekgalagari in addition to Setswana and English. Fortunately, the research was not based on the spoken word and required an exploration through the body using artefacts as catalysts for unearthing memories and latent knowledge.

The participants were asked to bring a tangible article and to ponder on a smell or memory based on what they each brought into the space. They were invited to tell a story non-verbally about what was impressed upon their minds, which culminated in an image that they froze in as a way to immortalise that re-remembered aspect of themselves in the context of their respective culture. Additionally, it was from these images that communal and personal reflection ensued. To further immortalise that expression, and in the spirit of collaboration and witnessing, they decided which fellow participant would take that photo with a camera for the sake of preserving the moment, but also for future analysis.

It was important that while each participant was on an individual journey, they walked it together, bound by the thread of marginalisation, towards liberating themselves and the group as a whole by working out through the body how to transition from what was lost, to what can be remembered, and finally preserved.

“The innovative and critical potential of practice-based research lies in its capacity to generate personally situated knowledge and new ways of modelling and externalising such knowledge while at the same time, revealing philosophical, social and cultural contexts for the critical intervention and application of knowledge outcomes.” (Barrett, 2007:2)

For these reasons, I deemed it important to explore ways in which people of varying mother tongues collaborated with one another, using this practice that considers embodied non-verbal communication to create inclusive works and knowledge sharing. It was refreshing to witness the process evolve organically and include collaboration during moments that I did not expect nor guide for there to be. Through the practice, the participants found cohesion and agency that I could never have anticipated, which in itself indicated a positive response to practice as research.

The collaborative nature of my research involved people from different marginalised ethnic groups in Botswana, particularly those whose first languages are not Setswana—namely Chiikuhane, Ikalanga, Sebirwa and Sekgalagadi, as the speakers of these languages were present in the workshop. The participants were sought in and around the greater Gaborone area via an open call on social media, due to my personal and professional contacts not bearing fruit in the desired time.

1.5 Ethical considerations

From the onset, the participants that I sought were informed that photography, video and audio would be used to collect data. At that point, they decided that they wanted to be a part of the research. However, if participants did not want to be photographed or recorded in any way to maintain anonymity, a secondary measure was put in place, i.e., trained actors/applied practitioners would take their place at the moment a photograph was to be taken of their embodied image. Also, as an alternative to the recording of their voices, a journal entry was made of their contribution.

It was also made explicit that those who agreed would have their names omitted from the final report, and that the media recordings would not be published or screened. It was communicated that these were tools for data collection from which to reference, by way of assisting in my analysis.

The following were implemented as part of my ethical responsibilities:

1. Participant information sheet
2. Participant consent form
3. Password-protected laptop for storing recorded media
4. Presence of a trained psychologist during the entire duration of the participatory workshops

1.6 Structure of the research report

The structure of the research is as follows:

- **Chapter 1:** General Introduction
- **Chapter 2:** Theoretical Framework
- **Chapter 3:** Literature Review
- **Chapter 4:** Methodology
- **Chapter 5:** Research Process
- **Chapter 6:** The Discovery
- **Chapter 7:** Analysis of Transcriptions
- **Chapter 8:** Analysis of Photography
- **Chapter 9:** Conclusion and Recommendations

1.7 Conclusion

Botswana is endowed with a rich diversity of ethnic groups, cultures and languages. That only one of the languages is accorded official recognition and national support has left all non-Setswana-speaking ethnic groups sidelined, and their languages in states of erasure. Through the proposed practice of Image Theatre, the idea is to excavate hidden knowledge, nuanced challenges faced by non-Setswana speakers, and provide a non-verbal expression through which they are able to communicate and strategise ways towards their personal and group liberation. The amassed knowledge will then be used in the real world to challenge the status quo around tribal disenfranchisement, and the practice could find its place in contemporary

Botswana as an alternative practice for communicating inter-culturally while celebrating diversity and acknowledging commonalities.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM AND DECOLONISATION

2.1 Personal lessons highlighting Social Constructivism

Between 2004 and 2013, I was an active skateboarder, influenced by a fellow classmate at high school who convinced me to buy a board. I recall travelling to the empty parking lot at Gaborone's oldest mall, known as Main Mall, every weekend to practise. This endeavour was initially done alone. While I learnt how to ollie (make the board jump with you), it was all I could do for the longest time. Over time, I was joined by other skateboarders from around the city, who, like me previously, were teaching themselves how to skate in their parents' backyards.

Our weekly gatherings, while immensely enjoyable, also constituted moments of learning and encouragement. It was through this newfound community of skateboarders that my catalogue of tricks grew. The above affirms that learning occurs through interactions with others in various contexts.

"Social constructivism suggests that successful teaching and learning is heavily dependent on interpersonal interaction and discussion, with the primary focus on the students' understanding of the discussion." (Prawat, 1992, quoted in Davis et al., 2017)

Social constructivism posits that the understanding an individual develops is shaped through social interaction. Lohman & Hurst (2023) argue:

"Social constructivism is the view that learning occurs through social interaction and the help of others, often in a group."

Grounding this understanding in my research: bringing together people with diverse cultural heritage to co-participate in the same space was bound to evoke untapped knowledge within the individuals and the group as a whole. In the words of Freire (2005:62):

"They have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men."

In the same spirit, Freire (2000:90) wrote:

"At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know."

Having been a boxing fan for years, I learnt that the way to punch is by turning the wrist to be parallel to the ground. However, through a student of mine during an informal conversation before class in late 2024, it came up that having the wrists at roughly a 45-degree angle was most apt. She explained that in this way, the wrist would not be at risk of getting injured as much as if the punch was thrown the other way. Also, the pressure point is more concentrated around the index and middle finger knuckles, which translates to more potency.

I share this story to further emphasise how learning can occur between people, while also illustrating the dismantling of the teacher–student dynamic that this occasion presented. That is to say, while I was the person’s teacher, before class even started, in the context of a candid conversation, I—the teacher—learnt from the student, and during our discussion she also learnt something from me. Additionally, the thinking around the context in which a punch is thrown in boxing (wearing gloves) versus a punch thrown in a different contact sport that perhaps uses different or no gloves was evoked.

I mention this to say that the learning moment gives birth to thinking about the lesson beyond its occurrence. This goes to prove Freire’s philosophy right when he said: *“Education must begin with the solution of the teacher–student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.”* (Freire, 2000:72)

2.2 Decolonisation

Decolonisation within this construct was positioned as a co-framework through which this research exploration was undertaken. Perry (2012:103) writes:

“I understand decolonisation as a process that involves not only the political transformation of nation-states, but also the articulation and transformation of dominant ideologies at the level of communities and individual bodies.”

Considering this point, and through the aim of bodily neologism, it makes sense that decolonisation was considered as a means to remake, reimagine and re-celebrate lingual and cultural differences and commonalities in the face of marginalisation.

The very languages of instruction and communication during the workshops were English and Setswana—the colonial and dominating languages respectively. By acknowledging that the only way to understand one another was through using them, I argue that exploring a non-verbal bodily way of speaking, i.e., Image Theatre, was an act of decolonisation. Much like how “awakened peasantry” from a linguistic perspective, in its defiance against colonial tongues, birthed the likes of pidgin English and Creole, the body through Image Theatre in the context of the workshop brought forth ways of communicating and sharing ideas that did not rely on the spoken word, let alone the domineering English and Setswana.

There remains, however, an unspoken acknowledgement that these languages have taken root in us whether we like it or not, and through a decolonial lens, the question asked was: how can the marginalised make something that is theirs within the reality of these languages that sideline their own? Because the truth is, they are not going anywhere, and whether we like it or not, we are all products of having learnt them.

In speaking about the body as a solution to decolonisation, it must be articulated that our bodies too were colonised by our daily habits, vocations, exercises or lack thereof. Boal (2000:103) illustrates this:

“Compare the muscular structure of a typist with that of a night watchman of a factory. The first performs his or her work seated in a chair: from the waist down the body becomes, during working hours, a kind of pedestal, while arms and fingers are active. The watchman, on the other hand, must walk continually during his eight-hour shift and consequently will develop muscular structures that facilitate walking. The bodies of both become alienated in accordance with their respective types of work.”

Grounding this in the context of this research, one participant shared their experience of living in the village, riding horses daily to rear cattle and on occasion spending entire days looking for lost livestock. While on horseback for most of the time, they also walked considerable distances in thick sand. In addition to this, cows were milked daily and other labour-intensive tasks made up their day. This person's muscular structure adapted to their work.

This participant has since moved to the city in pursuit of opportunities that would help them earn a living, and their vocation has shifted substantially. They now do more administrative tasks and far less physical labour than before, thus their body has been colonised by a capitalist endeavour that dictates their survival in the environment they have migrated to. Speaking on their body, their muscular groups no longer being engaged as before has meant that they are alienated in accordance with their far less vigorous work.

I further argue that through Boal's games, exercises and Image Theatre, we were able to begin the process of decolonising the body through full engagement with the aforesaid. Boal (2008:104) writes:

“If one is able, in this way, to disjoint one's own muscular structures, one will surely be able to assemble structures characteristic of other professions and social classes; that is, one will be able to physically ‘interpret’ characters different from oneself.”

Why is it important that the body is decolonised? Because its daily way of being is affected by words, thoughts and actions that are in part from colonial education, interactions and what has become the modern way of life that we live. By deconstructing the muscles and breaking this muscular alienation, the participants put themselves in a position to allow for personal bodily expression to emerge.

In tandem, the two frameworks through whose lenses I explored this research tell a story of how people from diverse marginalised ethnic groups were able, through social constructivism observed in Image Theatre, to learn collectively and from each other. Additionally, by attempting to decolonise their bodies to allow for new or extended expressions, their mindsets shifted to embrace a practice that communicated that they are not necessarily tied down to Setswana and English as mediums to express opinions and thoughts, let alone verbal communication.

CHAPTER 3: INSIGHTS FROM LITERATURE ON LIBERATION, DECOLONISATION AND THE ROLE OF THE BODY

The focus of this chapter is to break down various literature relevant to my research topic, including but not limited to challenges, intersections and questions. By unpacking these texts, I highlight the role and impact the body has in decolonising itself from learned oppressive behaviours, in order to liberate the personal and communal through reflecting post-Image Theatre.

3.1 Boal on Image Theatre

The pioneering work of Augusto Boal played a significant role in my research as it is his method, Image Theatre, that guided my research enquiry, through which I learnt how to harness the body to reveal hidden knowledge. Image Theatre offered insight into developing a practice that not only surfaces what is internal but, in conjunction with digital photography, preserves that which might not be possible to articulate verbally.

Boal's philosophy is that:

"All people are theatre and we all have the capacity to act."

The inspiration I gained from this is that while ethnic groups are muffled in the societal context of Botswana, Image Theatre during this workshop provided a channel through which to be differently expressive—speaking out loud with their bodies—in preparation for the ongoing revolution aimed at their existence no longer being ignored, and the cry for their languages to be acknowledged and heard.

3.2 Freire on humanization

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and in particular his writings on dehumanisation and humanisation, along with liberation through cognition, had a direct bearing on my research. I explored the extent to which participants realised their perceived and unknown oppressions and how they might liberate themselves through the body.

Additionally, the striving toward liberation as their joint, commonly misjudged diversity was embraced, and there was a realisation that they collectively carry knowledge that could aid in challenging the banking concept of education, which has resulted in apathetic compliance.

Freire (2000:48) writes:

"This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation."

3.3 Perry on Image Theatre as decolonisation

Adam Perry's *A Silent Revolution: 'Image Theatre' as a System of Decolonisation* is a seminal text that partly informs my theoretical framework through the lens of decolonisation, while also speaking directly to the counter-hegemonic practice of Image Theatre.

In it, Perry explores notions in the postcolonial era around liberatory pedagogy as expressed by the writings and works of bell hooks and Roxana Chu-Yee Ng. The connections to Paulo Freire's pedagogy as well as Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed made this a cohesive and potent source for my research, and also affirmed my chosen methodology.

Throughout his paper, and drawing from bell hooks, Roxana Chu-Yee Ng, Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire, Perry distils the importance of not merely focusing on intellect as the be-all and end-all, but by including the body, emotions, spirit and experience of people, counter-discursive narratives and identities can emerge—especially in the context of Image Theatre, which is grounded in liberatory ideology and pedagogy.

"Within the context of decolonisation, theatre is a cultural practice which highlights the primacy of embodied knowledge where intellectual, emotional and spiritual encounters occur physically between bodies, and enactments and re-enactments become fodder for reflection, dialogue, articulation of counter-discursive identities and rehearsal of strategies for social transformation" (Perry, 2012:106).

Furthermore, he echoes Boal in saying:

"Image is language, and dealing with images, in contrast to words, prioritises a way of knowing that necessarily involves the body as well as the intellect." (Perry, 2012:107)

Perry's writing about the body directly speaks to one of my aims: the decolonising of gestures to give birth to a more expansive bodily lexicon, enabling those who practised Image Theatre in this context to access unlimited expression. This dismantles the limits placed upon the body by homogenous understandings of what certain gestures mean, moving towards non-verbal free speech through the body.

Similarly, Augusto Boal terms this undoing of posture and/or habitual movements as "muscular alienation", which he states must be broken in order for people to begin their journey to liberating themselves from oppression—first through their own bodies.

In his paper, Perry draws from Roxana Chu-Yee Ng's understanding of decolonisation, where Ng argues that:

"Individuals become locked into fixed patterns of hegemonic behaviour and that change is only possible when people develop the capacity to step back and observe these patterns through critical reflection."

Ng's observation brings to mind an ethnographic inquiry I did in 2022 concerning my perceived passivity of Batswana when it came to fighting for the rights of a minority ethnic group known as the Kalanga. While there was an absence of an embodied investigation, what did come up was a conformity to the status quo as a result of hegemonic suppression, which led to, among other things, people from marginalised ethnic groups having to learn in the prescribed languages (English and Setswana), being subjugated by Setswana-speaking nationals on lands and in territories native to the marginalised ethnic groups, leading to a dilution of culture and identity.

Even though formal complaints by way of national inquiries have led to court proceedings surrounding these phenomena, I note the absence of the body as a site of knowledge and expression, from which critical reflection could have taken place.

3.4 Aposhyan on the body, mind and spirit

Susan Aposhyan (1999) argues from the lens of body–mind psychotherapy that present-day human beings' holistic potential for being and thriving has become impeded by:

“Rationalism, empiricism, materialism, mechanism, and reductionism.”

She states that as the 18th century progressed and scientists became increasingly confident in their ability to impose their practices and outlook upon the natural world—both external and internal—“power over nature easily translated into inhibition of the body: self-control to the point of self-repression.”

For instance, rationalism foregrounds reason and logic over experience, observation and metaphysics. René Descartes' well-known notion that *“I think therefore I am”* further supports this and has had a profound impact on culture.

I note the danger that emerges from this philosophy, being that it suggests the inverse is absolute. If you lack the ability to think due to cognitive incapacity, or perhaps you are somatically inclined, does that mean you do not exist or are not fully human or valid?

The emphasis on thinking, logic and reason disregards experience and intuition, widening the divide between body–mind and spirit, consequently putting restraints on what the human being is able to do with and through their body.

Aposhyan underscores that during Victorianism, certain human impulses were labelled “immoral” and clothing became considerably conservative, restricting bodily movements. She writes:

“It is during this period that Western culture became thoroughly entranced in repulsion toward the sights, sounds and smells of human physiology.”

This connects to Botswana's colonial history, where English became the official language post-independence, materialistic ideology was impressed upon her people,

and the Westminster system in legislature was adopted. The Cambridge curriculum remains common in private schools across Botswana to date.

Interestingly, it was the British settlers who, in 1961—five years prior to Botswana's independence—established the bounds of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), which was *“intended to ensure that there was sustainable numbers of game for the Bushmen to hunt”* (Survival International, 2005; Mikalsen, 2005:12). In other words, while the colonial impact of Botswana from a materialistic standpoint had since taken root, they encouraged the Khoisan (referred to as Bushmen above) to preserve their way of life.

Ironically, it was the newly independent Botswana government that began to impose hunting sanctions on the Khoisan in the CKGR, until eventually banning them from doing so altogether. Furthermore, the Khoisan—namely the Gana and Gwi—were forcibly removed from their native land and allocated small plots of land outside the CKGR, where it is said that they had become reliant on the government for food and water due to no longer being on their native land where they could hunt for food previously.

It is said that:

“These settlements have become for many international observers ‘places of death’, due to the rise in alcoholism and HIV/AIDS.” (Gall, 2001:236–239)

A number of Botswana and international witnesses articulated the detrimental effects of this forced assimilation, which also included the change of attire, initiation into modern alcohol and exposure to other ethnic groups who mistreated them. The effects of their displacement resulted in their primal expressions being stifled and for them to operate within the bounds of the new environment under the subjugation of people who were inclined or perhaps conditioned in the ways of life inherited from the colonisers.

Aposhyan (1999) recounts watching a television programme in which she saw a sixty-year-old South American native dressed in a small loincloth, with most of his body exposed, effortlessly climbing a fifty-foot (15.2 metres) tree using his hands and feet equally engaged, to retrieve a monkey that he had previously darted with a poison arrow from below. She describes the motion of his upward movements as: *“Reach, pull, reach, pull...”* even as he descended the tree with the monkey.

In musing about the possibilities of the human body's potential after observing the above, she writes:

“Imagine if we joined this same tremendous physical aliveness, which is our birthright, with the visions and insights of our culture.”

Aposhyan's concept of reconnecting the body–mind and spirit serves as a core reminder of how the fracture of the aforementioned elements that make up our being have left us in latent states. Thus, our potential to move, create and make new meanings as a matter of reflex or wholly being is apprehended, making us a people

assimilated to the dominant culture as influenced by rationalism, empiricism, materialism, mechanism and reductionism.

3.5 Hall on identity and culture

Stuart Hall's writings on language, identity and culture contest my way of thinking about the aforesaid in that:

"Instead of asking what are people's roots, we ought to think about what are their routes, the different points by which they have come to be now; they are, in a sense, the sum of those differences."

("A conversation with Stuart Hall," quoted in Laurencin & Roy, 2014)

This helps me to shift from looking at language and culture historically, to viewing them as belonging in the now and the future, acknowledging the ways in which they transform but still remain. That said, there is still much to learn from the aforesaid historically, and it is the body that carries the histories of culture within it—something that was taken into account during this research exploration.

3.6 Wa Thiong'o on decolonizing language

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's writings in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* interest me in my research, particularly when speaking on how Africans, when forced to speak the colonisers' languages and not their own, created new African languages.

This presents an interesting opportunity to use Image Theatre as a ground on which a new malleable bodily language could be invented by the marginalised to contest the prescribed Setswana and English.

This aligns with Boal when he encourages the invention of neologisms, particularly regarding the connotations that arise from the body through Image Theatre. He states:

"Words have a denotation which can be found in dictionaries and a connotation which can only be found in the hearts of each one of us."

Similar to Boal, I asked the question of how this connotation could be found—but not through words; instead, through bodily images.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY PRACTICE AS RESEARCH

In this chapter I delve into the methodology of practice as research, through Image Theatre as the practice used for the research inquiry while simultaneously being the method being researched. Furthermore the participants and their roles will also be expounded upon as they were the ones fully engaging in the practice. The ethics concerning this research will also be shared.

4.1 The participants

The workshop I conducted in Gaborone, Botswana consisted of five participants—four women and one man. The marginalised ethnic groups that they collectively represented were Babirwa, Kalanga, Vekuhane and Kgalagadi.

Their selection was based upon the following criteria:

- The native language spoken by the participants, or at least one of the parents being non-Setswana. This was to ensure that the people in the room had a biological connection with the marginalised ethnic groups for whom this research is focused on.
- The age group was between 26 and 33 years of age, which falls within Botswana's youth age range of 15 to 35 years. The significance of this was to attempt capturing how people at this age median—even on the cusp of and after tertiary education—might not have, or are still grappling with, issues of culture and identity, and in what ways that shaped their educational journeys as pertains to having to first learn English and Setswana to begin with.

4.2 Ethics and data collection

Prior to the research workshop, during the period of responding to interest from potential participants, it was clearly articulated that the research was on a voluntary basis and that no form of remuneration would be offered. The same was expressed on the Participation Information Sheet (see Appendix A), which each participant had before agreeing to be a part of the research.

After their initial consent, they were each handed consent forms, two kinds of which were produced: one for the participants who were directly engaging in the research process (see Appendix B), and a trained psychologist who was in the room to assist with providing any emergency psychological first aid that may have been needed (see Appendix C).

The data was collected photographically and via short video clips for post-workshop reflections to ensure the accuracy of the data in terms of the words spoken by the participants, and for the reading of their body language for nuanced interpretations.

4.3 Practice as Research

Early on in my journey, I was quickly reminded that research in this context was not about affirming my biases. Instead, it was about putting the practice of Image Theatre to the test with an openness that personal biases might be refuted and that new knowledge about the practice, its effects or about those who engage with it would emerge.

In the words of Nelson (2011:109):

“Play is a method of inquiry, aiming not to establish findings by way of data to support a demonstrable and finite answer to a research question, but to put in play elements in a bricolage which afford insights through deliberate and careful juxtaposition.”

Thus, my position swiftly shifted from knowing what this practice will do, to being curious about what this practice can do for people who engaged with it within the framing of this research, whereby attempts at bodily neologisms, learning about various disenfranchised tongues and preserving culture were the hoped results.

When defining practice as research, Skains (2018) attested to the research consisting entirely of the creative process without the need for formal explanations in the form of a report at the end of the research, for example. She posits that:

“The creative artefact is considered the embodiment of the new knowledge.”

The act of doing is what unearths latent knowledge, and the doing—in this context—is done by the participants through Image Theatre, from whom stories emerged and memories about their respective cultures were triggered. Furthermore, what led to the images were games and exercises that readied the participants’ bodies for the creative exploration.

I add that while the aim of the games and exercises was to prepare the participants, they equally constituted the overall creative artefact that Skains refers to, as from them knowledge emerged. It is through engaging in this process that the bodies of the participants produced a tangible—albeit transitory—form, from which reflection was possible and thus knowledge was produced.

In qualifying what I mean about the form being transitory: once the created image by the participant has been witnessed and absorbed by those who are not in it, the sculpted bodies return to neutral stances, ergo the image is no more. It is critical to note that in order for the reflection to have not been a once-off or strictly situational, the medium of photography was used to immortalise those images for future reflection and preservation.

Regardless, the exercise of playing, image-making and the bodies engaged in it remain the sites of emerged knowledge.

4.4 Why Image Theatre?

In considering the methodology of practice-as-research (PaR), there is a deliberate shift away from being theory-based and conversely, experiential and experimental to inform theory.

The opportunity that this presented me was in finding a practice that is steeped in the empirical mode of discovery in order to explore how, in a room of people whose diverse languages are marginalised, they can partake in a method that would have them engage in a form of communication that is indiscriminate, encourages agency and has the potential to facilitate co-knowledge building and meaning-making on their own terms.

Adding another layer to this, what I needed to answer in opting for the practice was: what would challenge the participants to engage critically from a creative exploration in protesting against the fact that their languages—and thus, their voices—have been silenced?

It occurred to me in responding to the above that a non-verbal process would be apt, hence Image Theatre. Image Theatre makes thought visible and removes the restraints that words would otherwise impose upon an idea, feeling or thought that arises from a bodily expression, by way of assigning definite meanings.

Image Theatre presents an extended way of expression that words cannot exceed or emulate due to them being confined to the bounds of a lexicon and its defined meanings. In other words, there is no dictionary containing the meanings of what the body expresses through images, the way words are defined and tied to meanings in existing dictionaries.

“The meaning of an image is the image itself. Image is a language.” (Boal, 2002:175)

And a language, I might add, that can mean one thing in one moment and something else in another. Furthermore, the practice—as is the applied drama and theatre umbrella—is considered emergent and thus uncommon in the African region.

In fact, there is no evidence that Image Theatre has been documented in Botswana, let alone used as a method of inquiry, which reveals an opportunity for this specific non-verbal exploration to be utilised as a tool for an alternative mode of civic engagement.

Also taking into account that the diverse languages have been discriminated against by policies which has translated to societal hegemony, Image Theatre offered an uncharted ground upon which the participants engaged in a new language that they began to make sense of together.

4.5 Capturing voice through Photography

As a photographer with over 12 years' experience in the field, I found that my stylistic through-the-lens preference gravitated towards documenting the world as it is. This produces unfiltered, real images—not to be confused with Boal's "real image" from Image Theatre that shows *"the image of the oppression"* (Boal, 2002:185).

The latter centres the body of the participant expressing a social issue or their feelings toward it by freezing their bodies in an image of that feeling or thought. The real image focuses on the problem(s) about the world, as the viewer perceives them.

My approach in photography, which has come to draw from the "real image" above, uses a more open framing, which does not necessarily focus on oppression but whatever is being witnessed in real time. It is essentially capturing the being of the world and all that is in it at a particular moment—problems, solutions, joy, angst and everything in between.

The point here is that no parameters are set, meaning no expectations are imposed and thus free expression is encouraged and captured, leaving room for the story in the image to speak.

Wylie (2012), in quoting Chris Wright, offers:

"What intrigues us about a photograph? What holds us? It is often the absence of a single, limited, controlled meaning, and rather, the excess of possible meanings. The photograph can seduce us by inviting us to create a meaning or narrative for it."

The intention behind the style of photography I practise and facilitate—especially in the context of this research—is in part to create meaning but also to see the meaning emerge from the photograph of the image taken.

In the absence of speaking, the voice cannot be heard but seen through the body, and the body expresses what it means to in that moment.

Prior to the research exploration with the participants, I spent an afternoon with our research workshop photographer and shared my vision with him regarding how I would like the images to be captured. Our conversation was ensued by a rehearsal on the documentary style of photography envisaged for the research process with the participants.

It was essential that this was articulated and practised because it translated to the documenting of the organic emergence of the participants' bodies speaking. Ergo, the photographically captured image of the embodied image revealed the unfiltered expression that words might not have been able to express.

What aided in this was the prompt for participants to make images with their bodies following their impulses and not giving them time to think long about making these images. The danger of having given them time to think about what images to make would have meant that they would be imposing a spoken language (which people think in) onto their bodies. Therefore, their expression would have been informed by

words and the photograph would show a person expressing words through their body.

As Boal (2002:129) says:

“The use of words would interfere with the language of images or superimpose itself on top of that language.”

CHAPTER 5: THE PROCESS: JOURNEY OF THE RESEARCH

5.1 Introducing games and exercises

The participants didn't have a background in the performing arts or in applied drama and theatre. As a result, I eased them into the workshop process through games and exercises focused on engaging their bodies, which were instrumental to the entire process.

When learning a spoken language, there needs to be an acquainting with phonetics, mouthing of words, etc. Similarly, speaking with the body also requires that as many body parts as possible are activated in order to begin to learn to speak in a bodily language.

Inviting the participants to introduce themselves and embody their names, as well as milling and seething (see Appendix D), were some of the introductory exercises that helped them warm their bodies up for what was to come.

Boal (2002:241) stresses that:

"In order to encourage them to participate, they need to be 'warmed up' beforehand with exercises and games."

5.2 "Who am I? Where am I?"

One of the first games played following the initial milling and seething—in which the participants were guided to walk around the space and take note of themselves, each other and the space itself—is a game called *"Who am I? Where am I?"*

The aim of this game is to challenge the individuals playing it to break their "muscular alienation". Boal (2008) describes "muscular alienation" as the undoing of muscular structures that have maintained—through conditioning of one's vocation—a rigid form or mechanical way of being.

The result of the undoing of these structures is that a person would then be able to move and contort their bodies in ways they could not before, also awakening latent muscles they may not have been aware were dormant or underused.

In leading the game, I called upon the participants to form a circle in which they would each get a chance to perform in the centre. I then whispered in each participant's ear two things:

1. A location.
2. An occupation.

The object of the game was for them to embody both these things for up to 45 seconds non-verbally, and for the witnessing participants to guess who they were and where they were.

The idea behind the game was to challenge the participants to begin to learn the language of the body by pushing themselves to see how they could use their bodies to say what their words (which for this game were taken away from them along with their voices) could not.

In setting high-stakes precedence from the onset, I decided to make the occupations and locations unusual and contradictory. That is to say, I did not want to give them typical options that would cause them to make logical connections between location and occupation, so that they could lean into trusting their bodies more than just solely processing with their minds rationally and relying on what they already knew.

Some of the examples of the two elements I whispered into the respective participants' ears as far as occupation and location were concerned were: a nurse in a swimming pool, a priest in a nightclub, a soldier in a library and a hunter in a cathedral (see Figure 1 below).



Figure 1: A depiction of a hunter in a cathedral. Photograph: Pesalema Bogwasi

Once a participant took to the centre of the circle to show an occupation and a location as listed above, the witnessing participants would then take turns guessing who they were and where they were.

During the showing of a hunter in a cathedral, one of the witnessing participants exclaimed:

"No! You can't go to church with a bow and arrow."

I note that the guessing by the witnessing participants was done during the showing (non-verbal movements) and even if someone guessed correctly, the participant in

the middle would continue until 45 seconds had elapsed. Afterwards, the person in the middle would reveal who they were and where they were.

Going back to the quote above from one of the participants, who had actually guessed correctly, it is interesting to note their incredulity and thus denial of the possibility that a hunter could be in a cathedral because it does not “make sense”.

That, however, was the point of the game in part and I shall elaborate on it in the next chapter.

For now, and what was vital, was that the participants began to speak with their bodies to try and express what they likely would have found much easier to do if they could have just said it. Also, their logical way of thinking was put to the test by being invited instead to trust what they were seeing and not lean heavily on their perception of it making sense.

Furthermore, and equally as important, as they took turns in the centre to share through the body, they began to challenge their muscular structures, which opened them up to possibilities they may not have been aware their bodies could express.

5.3 Colombian Hypnosis

Another game we played is called *Colombian Hypnosis*, in which the participants paired up and took turns to lead each other using a single hand. One person starts with their hand up with their palm facing their colleague's face about 20 to 40 centimetres away (see Figure 2).

The person looking at the palm would then have to follow it wherever it goes at whichever pace dictated by the one who is leading. I encouraged those leading to not hold back on how high or low or how far to the side they could move their palms (see Figure 3 on the next page).

This was to ensure that the ones being led were able to:

“Put in motion a series of muscle structures which are never, or rarely, activated.”

(Boal, 2002:51)



Figure 2: Participants with their hands up 20 to 40 centimetres away from their fellow participant's faces before leading them. Photograph: Pesalema Bogwasi

As the game continued, it was interesting to notice how reserved the leading participants were to begin with. This was because, in my experience of using Colombian Hypnosis in a classroom set-up, learners who were leading in the game first also exhibited a reluctance.

I deduced that the novelty of the game in both instances—learners in a classroom and participants in the research workshop—challenged their comfort zones.

As the game progressed, there came moments when some people stumbled or fell short of tracking the palm they were following, and everyone responded in laughter. It was as if something shifted in the room and they were now playing the game after being activated by the mistakes that led to the laughter.

The leading participants then started experimenting with levels and pace more liberally than when they had started. Much like the *Who am I? Where am I?* game, it was not until the participants felt they could be silly and make mistakes and laugh about it that they gave themselves permission to fully invest their bodies into the game.

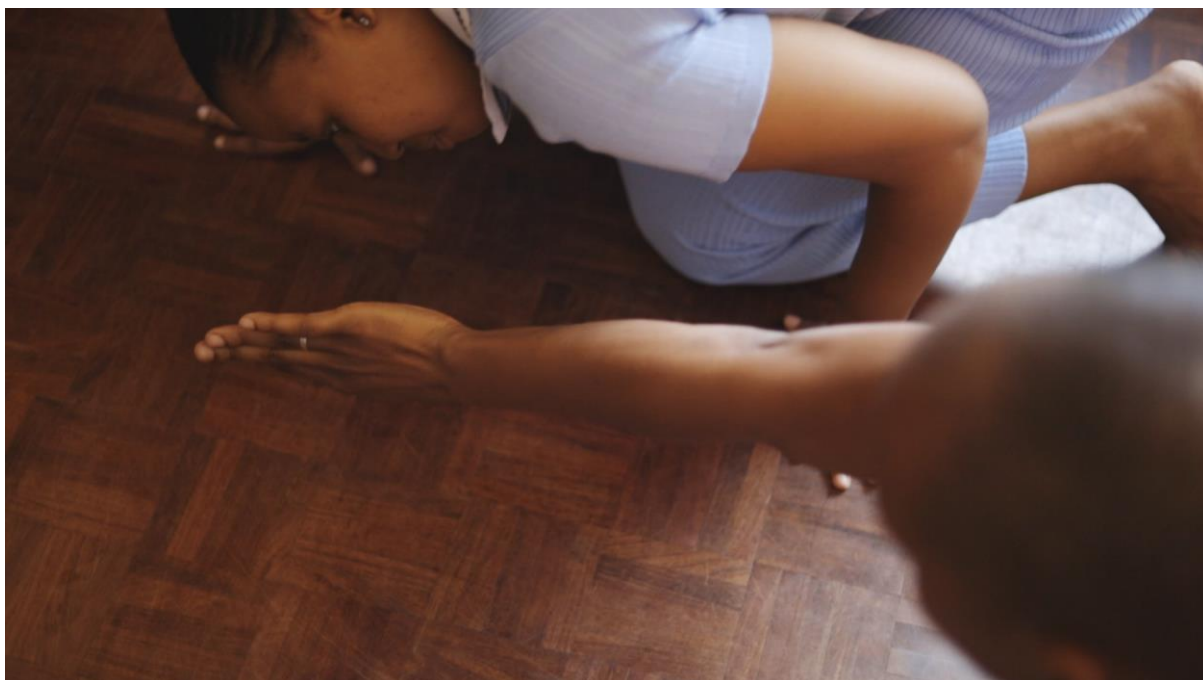


Figure 3: One of the participants being challenged on the floor. Photograph: Pesalema Bogwasi

After a few minutes, I directed the participants to switch roles, and the ones who were initially leading became the followers and the converse applied for the followers in the first round.

The energy in the second round was a lot more boisterous, with the new leaders really challenging their counterparts to get low, or to get onto their tiptoes, etc., at paces that had me as a facilitator a tad worried at times that they might clatter into one another or into the book shelves on the sides.

I took this moment to remind them of the responsibility of safety they held for each other that we had agreed upon prior to the exercises, and to continue to be aware of the space.

More laughter ensued at a few moments, but no talking took place—which, aside from having been one of the rules of the game stipulated before we began playing, in some way reflected how much more comfortable the participants had become with bodily expression.

I assert this because during the first round there were a couple of instances where I had to remind the participants not to speak or give verbal cues.

Following the conclusion of this round of Colombian Hypnosis, we proceeded to engage in a rich reflection about how the participants felt in their bodies and what themes arose. More on this in the following chapter.

5.4 Warming up the body's vocabulary

It was planned for there to be a brief 15-minute reflection following a second round of milling and seething during which the participants began to explore making images. However, the reflection that ensued was rich and considerably longer than what was planned.

Before I speak about the reflection, it is essential for me to detail what led to it. The participants walked about the space (milling and seething), contorting their bodies into tableaux/images based on prompts that I, as the facilitator, called out.

As the exercise continued, I encouraged them to take a bit more time in being deliberate about the ways they were getting into the images so that their bodies were telling a story that crescendos into the image that encapsulates what they felt would most accurately represent the story holistically—without the benefit of words to explain, and movements to mime what was taking place.

The invitation was also for them to witness themselves as their motions culminated into a freeze frame, for the sake of their consciousness going toward the detail in which they were engaging in the action of their stories. Additionally, I asked them to take note of every single muscle that was being engaged in going into the image and to note for themselves which ones were dormant.

On the latest occasion, the participants' consciousness was guided toward the members of their bodies that were involved in shaping and moving the body, as well as sustaining it to tell the story in the image that they ended up in.

Following the preliminary images, which warmed the participants' cognition, bodies and awareness (to self, other and the space), I asked them to each show me an image representing what they have experienced, witnessed or heard as regards their cultures.

I note that each phase of image-making was done collectively, but all participants, while in their individual images, had a moment to witness each other.

5.5 Initial reflections on Images

A reflection took place afterwards in which each participant spoke back to their colleagues' images concerning what they saw and, through their interpretation, what it meant. In each round, one person's image was reflected upon by each of the four witnesses before the image-making person would share what they were portraying.

By the end of the reflection, all five participants had had the opportunity to have their image spoken to and also express their intentions prior to making the image, and how they saw it afterwards.

The image that resonated unanimously with the group was that of a participant who had her arms in a cradling position with her gaze downward (see Figure 4 below). It

must be noted that this image was initially done strictly as a tableau, by which an image is constructed immediately after a prompt, and then again as an image resulting from fluid non-verbal movement that tells the story of how one ends up with the final image.

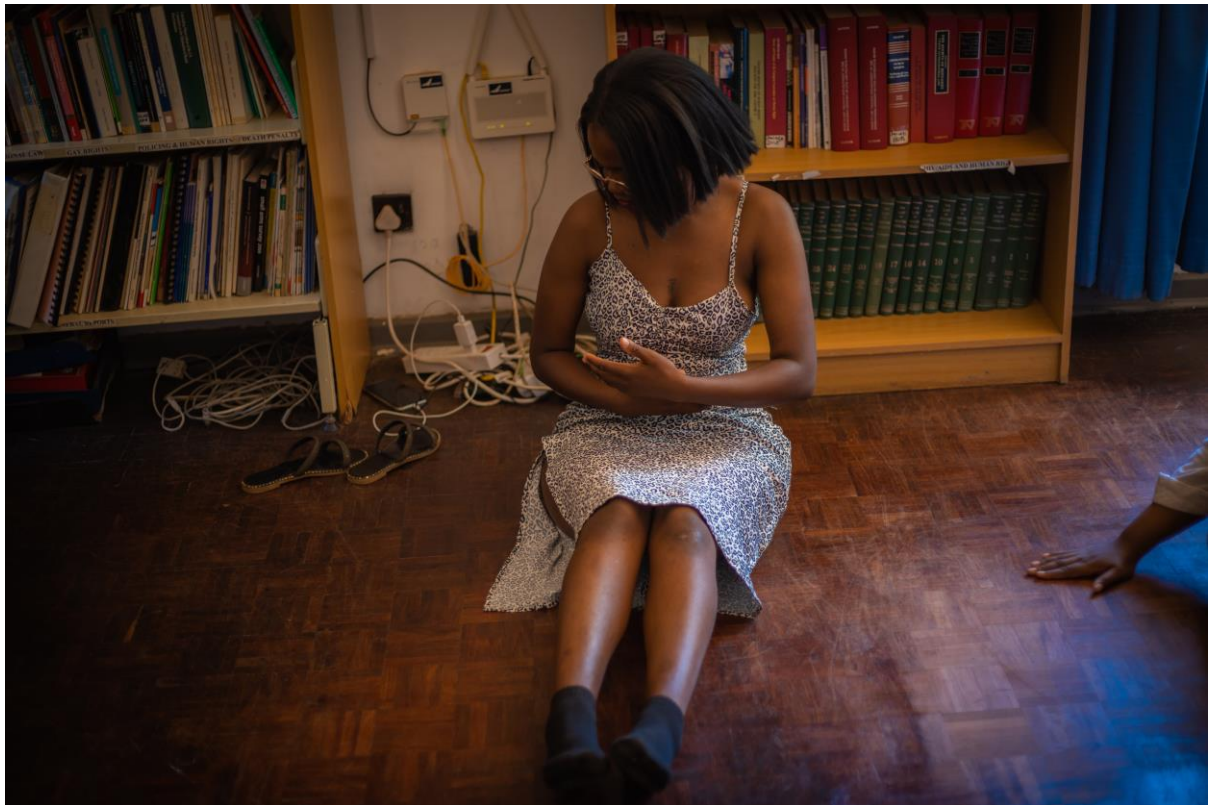


Figure 4: Young woman with hands and arms cradled. Photograph: Pesalema Bogwasi.

In response to the initial image, some of the different words that surfaced from the witnessing participants were: “baby”, “child”, “mother”, “confused”, “curious” and “judged”. While most of these words rang true for the image-maker, there were some that came about as new information and also gave language to what the young woman was feeling and expressing through the body.

Boal (2002:175) asserted that:

“This multiple reflection will reveal to the person who made the image its hidden aspects.”

Therefore, a deeper understanding of the language of the body begins to emerge, and for the one making the image, the challenge toward cognitive and bodily awareness is further established.

The reason being, one becomes more intentional about how they make the image and witness themselves making it, thus not only being actors separate to themselves as witnesses, but both.

“The skill of learning to see, learning to observe, learning to see things as they are, that is the superior skill... That skill requires patience. It requires restraint. It requires withholding yourself so that you don’t just act.” (Ebrahim, 2010)

5.6 Emerging stories from the Images

Insofar as embodying culture is concerned, the reflection about the image (Figure 4) represented a story in which a woman from a marginalised ethnic group married into a family that is exclusively Setswana-speaking and was shunned by them. However, they wanted to keep the baby at the mother’s exclusion only because the baby was also their son’s child as well.

It can be argued that one of the reasons for this entitlement is due to the fact that all Setswana-speaking people adhere to exclusive patrilineality, unlike marginalised ethnic groups such as the Herero, who are said to practise a “*double descent*” system that traces relationships and inheritance through both male and female lines (Denbow & Thebe, 2006:136).

What then ensued was the mother taking the baby and shielding them from people who wanted to put them asunder. This constituted an example in which someone was discriminated against due to being a part of the marginalised ethnic groups by one of the so-called “major” Setswana-speaking tribes.

In a different image, a participant is seen seated with their right hand stretched out and touching the floor (see Figure 5 on the following page)



Figure 5: Participant with right hand on the floor. Photograph: Pesalema Bogwasi

The words that came up from the other participants about the image above were “cleaning”, “wiping” and “freyfa”, of which the latter word is borrowed from the Afrikaans word *vryf*, which means to rub. However, in the context of its use in Botswana, it denotes shining or polishing a concrete untiled floor.

The above interpretations were not too far off the mark. However, the young woman who embodied the image shared that it represented the venerable and presently scarcely practised building and decorating technique that involves the use of cow dung and mud to plaster a traditional house known in Botswana as *rantafole*. Again, a word borrowed from the Afrikaans word *randowel*, which describes a circular hut that has a thatched roof and is common across rural Southern African settlements, albeit to a lesser extent in the modern day.

The two pictures of the participants above evidence the ways in which the body incites responses about what is witnessed, as well as how the body is capable of capturing the essence of culture while also allowing for meaning to be made from the story that the image represents.

A deeper delve into the analysis of the aforementioned will come in the following chapter.

In the same section of this image-making exercise, the participants were called upon to—without planning or verbalising—allow their individual images to interact with each other, engaging in a bodily dialogue as it were. Instead of placing themselves next to each other in their original images, what took place was that the other two participants completely changed their images to complement the original image of the young lady who was seated with her arms cradling what we now know to be a baby.

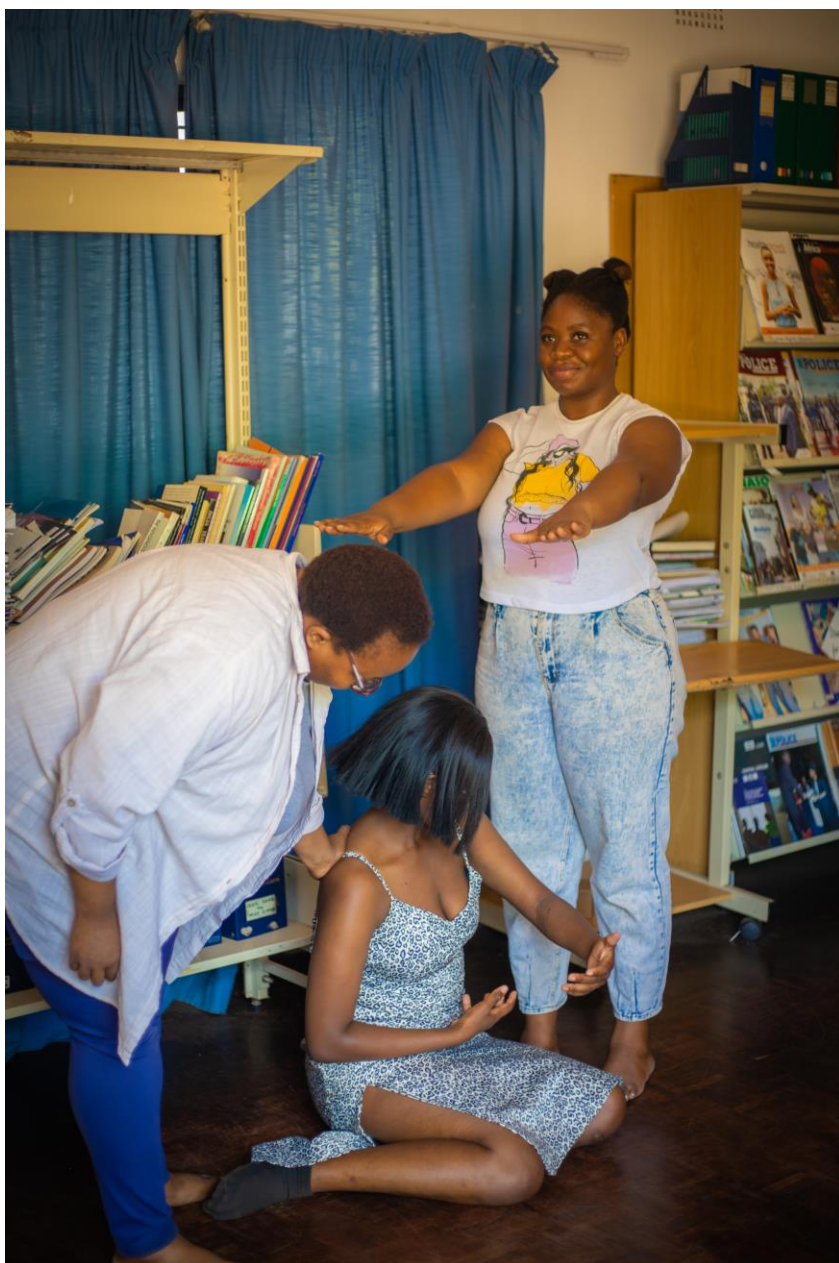


Figure 6: A social vision of images. Photograph: Pesalema Bogwasi

An exercise in deconstructing typical gestures ensued. The participants were invited to think about commonly used or witnessed gestures and to each show them while we stood in a circle. In briefly describing what the gestures represented, there were unanimous agreements about their meanings.

Examples of the universal gestures included the middle finger, a salute and inverted commas, all shown by the participants using their arms and hands for the most part.

Unfortunately, not much came from this segment of the workshop by way of deconstruction of the gestures to birth new suggested ways of expressing them. Hence, further investigation is needed to give this particular exploration and the

engaging participants more time to sit in the idea—especially when speaking in images (through the body) itself was a new concept to them.

5.7 Engaging with artefacts

On the second and final day of the research workshop, the participants were invited to bring in items that, according to them, conjured up or reminded them of aspects of their respective cultures. Admittedly, I had preconceived thoughts about what might be brought into the space, such as phane (mophane worm), which is common in north-eastern Botswana and is harvested by the Kalanga. It is a typical yet somewhat problematic thought to have, as I have observed how there is a culture in Botswana where people tend to associate certain foods and objects with particular ethnic groups.

In fact, during my Honours research, I questioned the synonymising of a particular bag which Botswana commonly refer to as “moZimbabwe” to Zimbabwean nationals; the same bag is referred to as ‘Shangani’ in South Africa. Additionally, Kalanga people are regularly referred to as “lenoko”, which means peanut, just because Kalanga people farm, sell, and infuse some of their traditional dishes with groundnuts.

That said, it was refreshing to see the different artefacts that the participants brought in, causing me to become aware of my internal biases and thus disillusioned in the moment they were revealed. The articles brought into the space were an empty two-litre Coke bottle, a container with baked goods, a cup of madila (fermented thickened milk), and a pair of sandals.

The participants were invited to witness one another’s artefacts and to choose one that they were drawn to. Each participant at this point had the privilege of knowing about each other, their respective cultural backgrounds and languages, insofar as what was shared in the room the previous day. From that standpoint, they entered a moment that constituted an opportunity to embody, by way of moving into a frozen image, what they thought that chosen artefact represented from the person’s (to whom it belongs) culture.

I observed how the participants organically joined in the image-maker’s image during a process when each one of them was to take turns showing their image individually. Thus, the social vision of images resulted. It occurred to me that one of the reasons the participants organically drew towards one another to create these social images was, in part, because of the presence of these artefacts. The acts of sharing and connecting were apparent in each of these images.

The Coke bottle artefact was used for pouring into a mimed cup of another; the bread in a container was being offered to another; and the sandals were held by each participant standing side-by-side. Each of the social images centralised the artefacts as uniting components among the ethnically diverse.

The memory induced for me here is how, across many ethnic groups in Botswana, it is normally during traditional weddings, for example, that the ethnically distinct come together to break bread and celebrate together.

5.8 Learning moments in brief

Choosing to invite new gestures for the sake of deconstructing them broke the through-line of having used gestures that emerged during the images the participants had already been exploring. For example, the image of the cradled hands of the woman could have been deconstructed instead of introducing a completely novel one.

Testing to see what would happen if there was pushback during the Colombian hypnosis could have been considered, to explore how one might use their will and body to challenge the hand that leads them. As is the objective in the Theatre of the Oppressed, people must take up the agency to re-write the script of their reality.

CHAPTER 6: THE DISCOVERY

What I will be sharing in this chapter is the findings of the research, with a particular focus on the two-day workshop, and an interpretation of the data that was excavated from the games and exercises that were engaged with, as well as the practices of Image Theatre and photography. Furthermore, testimonies from the participants will also be explored to assist in tracking the transformations that occurred cerebrally and physically as they engaged in this session.

6.1 The meaning behind the games and reading the body

Milling and seething was done often during the process as a way to bring awareness to the space and the people within it, while also acting as an exercise that served as a precursor to games and practices such as Image Theatre, and as a way to reset after these core engagements. According to Stroker & Davidowitz (2021), milling and seething is “theatre-speak for when actors randomly walk around, trying not to bump into one another.” Additionally, and how it was implemented during the workshop, the participants were guided to look at their surroundings and take in as much detail as they could. Likewise, they acknowledged, in a non-verbal manner, who was in the space and the boundaries of the room we were in.

Initially, it was as explained above by Stroker and Davidowitz—just walking around randomly—but they began to consider one another in the space, negotiating how to walk past each other without causing harm and, when prompted to move faster, how to navigate safely. Simultaneously, they were guided into becoming aware of their own bodies as vessels that hold them and enable them to do what they need to do. Milling and seething was foundational in what was to follow.

Consider Figure 7, where we see one of the participants embodying a hunter in a cathedral. She has some sort of grimace upon her face; however, in switching to the depiction of the location (which is a cathedral), not only do her gestures change, but so too does the facial expression. This is important to flag because, in engaging the body as a medium through which to communicate, it is important not to disregard any parts of it, no matter how small. It is through these additional (facial) muscles that you are able to emotionalise, nuance, contextualise and strengthen your communication.

If we viewed the different body parts as words, then the facial muscles might be seen as the words or sounds that add tonality and/or pace to highlight the context of what is being said. International public speaking coach and author Lenny Laskowski writes, “appropriate facial expressions are an important part of effective communication.” While this reference is made in the context of supplementing what

has been spoken, I argue that it also applies to the augmenting of non-verbal communication done through the rest of the body, i.e., facial expressions.

To further underscore the importance of the face, I choose to focus on two aspects of the face and what they might be communicating. To help me with this, when looking at the forehead Navarro (2018:17) states:

“This small space between the bridge of the nose and the hairline reveals to others, in real time, how we are feeling. It is a remarkable part of the body closely connected to the brain, which allows us to communicate sentiments quickly, accurately, and prominently.”

Considering this sentiment and following its logic, when we look at the photograph of the young lady depicting a cathedral, we notice that her facial muscles on her forehead are relaxed due to the skin not being creased, and this could suggest a sense of peace—especially when we consider her smile and hands held together to signify prayer.

When referring to the eyes, Navarro (2018:25) says:

“In an intimate setting, closed eyes say, ‘I trust you, I am blocking everything else out, and I am in the moment with my other senses.’”

Again, looking at the closed eyes of the participant and considering the prayer-hand gesture still, it might be assumed that the other sense, as stated by Navarro above, is the young woman’s hearing. The question becomes: hearing what? Or hearing who? Also, in the context of what the participant was trying to convey with this gesture, could she have been trying to hear from the deity to whom she was praying?

All of this is to say that, by focusing on as many details of the body language, we are able to get a picture of what is being conveyed in the same way we understand what is being said when we listen intently to every word that is being uttered.



Figure 7: A depiction of a cathedral. Photography: Pesalema Bogwasi

6.2 Lessons from Colombian Hypnosis in relation to Botswana's discriminatory sections in the Constitution

During our post-Colombian Hypnosis reflection, *power dynamics* was named by the participants, and in particular, the word “control” was used by most of them to describe what they were grappling with during the game. One participant expressed that it made her think of a cat impulsively following a laser beam around to no predetermined end. Another, agreeing with this participant, built on this by talking about her experience of following the hand, saying:

“I wasn’t thinking of where the hand was going next because I am just following it. Me not following it doesn’t change what the hand is doing – it doesn’t affect anything.”

This experience was echoed by the other participants as well, and it brings up *passivity* in the ways each of them was following the respective hands that led them. Why doesn’t it matter or have an effect on the leading hand whether or not the follower is following? This suggests the power and control in this dynamic between the one leading and the one following.

The invisibilisation of marginalised ethnic groups came to mind because, for years, as the government and policy developers have led in matters of language and recognition of chiefs, the population of Botswana followed. Even if people became passive, conforming to the status quo, this had no effect on those leading. The point I am making is that, like in Colombian Hypnosis, whether you allow yourself to be led or stop, the leading continues.

Furthermore, the carelessness with which power is wielded was brought up by one participant, who remarked in shock at how the one moving the hand could just be doing so out of boredom or fatigue without exerting themselves, yet waving their hand about unconsciously has great effects on the entire body of the one following that hand. The same participant expressed:

“I fear having that kind of power.”

This is because the power that one wields effortlessly and reflexively can impact one or more people severely without the one exercising the power so much as breaking a sweat or noticing.

What comes to mind is how the national legislators in Botswana included polarising words in the Constitution such as “minor” to refer to non-Setswana-speaking ethnic groups and “major” to refer to the minority eight Setswana-speaking ones.

Furthermore, Sections 77, 78 and 79—which many believed perpetuated tribal inequality—affected marginalised ethnic groups in that the rights to tribal territory, land and identity were adversely impacted (Nyathi-Ramahobo, 2008).

In giving a brief background from which an example about the aforesaid can be articulated, the eight so-called “major” Setswana tribes are the Bangwato, Batlokwa, Balete, Barolong, Bangwaketse, Bakgatla, Batawana and Bakwena. The listed ethnic groups benefit most from the Constitution, and the behaviours of Batswana reflect their perceived superiority in terms of land ownership and language rights.

The example that follows relates to how power, as experienced by the persons leading in Colombian Hypnosis, is reflected in the consequences of what legislators in Botswana had written down in the Constitution. Nyathi-Ramahobo (2008) wrote:

“If an individual is allocated a piece of residential plot in the Central District, the certificate would read, ‘Situated in the Ngwato Tribal area’. In this way, the Tswana identity is projected and preserved even though over 20 other tribes reside in the Central District.”

The Khoisan (also referred to as Basarwa in Botswana), who are believed to be the first people of the land and, in particular, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), have been reported as recently as October 2024 to still not be accorded their rightful land rights. According to a Ghanzi native and national blogger:

“Today the government of Botswana continues to uphold policies that keep the Basarwa people marginalised from their ancestral lands within the CKGR. One such policy, the Rural Area Development Programme (RADP), was initially designed to support minority tribes, including the Basarwa, by improving their access to social services and economic opportunities. However, RADP operates on a model of relocation and integration into settled villages, which often separates ethnic group communities from their traditional lands. By encouraging these relocations, the

programme unintentionally undermines the cultural and territorial rights of the Basarwa, as it fails to acknowledge their deep connection to the land” (Kodie, 2024).

The above examples indicate how the stroke of a pen on 20 September 1966 (when the Constitution commenced), just as easily as the swipe of a hand in the game of Colombian Hypnosis, can have immense consequences on the existence of ethnic groups and the bodies of participants respectively, with reverberating effects felt by the marginalised ethnic groups in present-day Botswana.

Again, I remind that it is the ones wielding the power to write laws and enforce them—or the ones leading the followers in the game of Colombian Hypnosis—that determine the direction, pace and contortion of those who are ‘othered’ in this circumstance.

I circle back to my Honours research in which I aimed to find out why I perceived Botswana as being passive in fighting for the rights of the marginalised, namely the Kalanga. However, it refers to all marginalised ethnic groups due to the fact that the needle on the status quo has only barely shifted. Following a second presidential inquiry on reviewing the Constitution, which concluded in September 2022, the Constitution of Botswana has not yet been amended to reflect the recommendations (The Secretariat, 2022).

In comparing the two positions of following and leading that each participant had a chance to play, one of them shared that when they were following:

“You can’t do anything; you just have to follow the hand wherever it goes.”

And about leading, she revealed:

“You’re in authority, it’s like you’ve got them, so you can do whatever you like with their lives.”

There is a parallel between this latter statement and the initial presidential inquiry into the discriminatory Sections 77, 78 and 79 of the Constitution, called the ‘Balopi Commission’. How I see it, in July 2000 when the Balopi Commission was set up, the voices of those who had been marginalised had a platform and sung in unison against the discrimination they all faced partly because of the sections noted above.

Following the recommendations from this inquiry, however, the changes made were cosmetic at best, and this was reflected in what was reported following former President Mogae’s visits around the country post the Balopi Commission, from which it was concluded that “the consensus among citizens remains dissatisfied” (Ditshwanelo, 2008).

The point I am making here is that those in authority did very little to make tangible changes, thus doing as they pleased to maintain the status quo; hence the need for another presidential inquiry 22 years later. It would not have been needed if those in

power over three presidential administrations had actually listened to their constituents and shared their power within the framework of national governance.

Likewise, none of the participants, when they were in positions of power, abated their hand motions to allow their counterparts to recover their balance or afford them a moment of respite. Yes, that might not be the point of the game necessarily, but each one has a will, and to the one that is in control, they have the ability to stop and, through their body, negotiate the sharing of power.

They also had the right to stop when they pleased, but it is critical for me to note that, as the facilitator, I gave instructions that they all followed. For example, those who chose to be the letter 'A' would be the followers and those who elected to be the letter 'B' would lead, and I encouraged them to really challenge each other because my intention was for them to begin to break their muscular alienations (Boal, 2008).

That said, if we look at this dynamic hierarchically and make a comparison to national governance, as facilitator, I was the president, participant As were the members of parliament and participant Bs were the everyday citizens.

I take this moment to introduce Freire's banking concept of education, which essentially speaks to the conditioning of students to only know what they have been taught by a teacher, and thus their personal intellect and the knowledge they would otherwise be able to attain from interacting with other learners is not considered (Freire, 2000).

This exercise, juxtaposed to the marginalised in relation to the government of Botswana, proves that we are conditioned to be passive followers and leaders who abuse power. I might add that it was deliberate that I made A followers and B leaders because alphabetically, and how we tend to see things, A is first and B is second. By subverting the roles, I subtly invited the idea of the first being last and the last being first, to bring to the fore the question: *"What would you do if the tables turned and you were in power?"*

The answer manifested in a revenge-like manner when the participants switched roles. Let us take, for instance, the experience of another participant when she shared:

"When someone else is in control, all that you can do is to follow suit. Because there is nothing you can do about the (leading) hand situation. But also, what I got to pick as far as power is concerned; when you are in control you feel as though you are the one, you're running the show, not knowing that when the same power has been vested upon someone else they get to somewhat control the narrative or the way things are going and in that situation you are as powerless as maybe they were before they took over the power from you. And maybe they get to do the same thing to you or even worse."

By way of agreeing with this statement and also posing a warning that comes with this experience:

“The oppressed must not, on seeking to regain their humanity, become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both” (Freire, 2000:44).

In not so many words, Freire is suggesting that should the followers take on a vengeful stance against their leaders, they become the very people that they were subdued by and continue the cycle of oppression, which robs both parties of their humanness.

How then, through the embodied practice of Image Theatre, could the participants explore ways to dialogue and appeal to their humanistic qualities in order to liberate themselves and one another? The next exercise, in which Image Theatre was combined with artefacts, attempts to answer that.

6.3 Co-knowledge building and communal meaning making through Image Theatre and artefacts

With regards to participants bringing in artefacts from which they embodied what they felt represented the particular cultures they are from, it was not about guessing right or interpreting correctly, but for the participants to attempt to speak with their bodies following their impulse based on what comes up for them when they witness the chosen artefact.

Not surprisingly, their interpretations, in my view, were safe in that they leaned on common sense and not exploring other possibilities which may have been controversial or abstract. I note this to highlight the colonial way of thinking that is inherent in the group of participants, as reflects the reality of most Batswana youth. That being that there is a particular way of thinking that is informed by the “banking” concept of education. Admittedly, this form of education affects all Batswana whether Setswana is their first language or not. Freire (2000:72) writes:

“The scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits.”

In explaining this further, the banking concept of education places the student as a lesser vessel who awaits filling from the supposed “greater” vessel being the teacher, and the student’s intelligence is measured by how much or how well they can regurgitate what the teacher has taught them. This gravely confines the student’s ability to think critically and allow themselves to fully feel for fear of being “wrong”.

Ergo, the embodied interpretations of the artefacts by the participants were confined to what they knew insofar as it was taught to them. I express this not to invalidate their respective offerings, as they do come from what they know and have experienced—which was absolutely welcomed in the space—however, the familiarity of the images as embodied explanations communicated a self-consciousness to ensure that what was shared was “correct” and easy for everyone witnessing to understand.

This then brings into question the authenticity of the manifestation and whether or not the participants were able to allow themselves to access their primal impulse in permitting their bodies to speak unhindered, which may be affected by overthinking and restrained to head knowledge.

Take, for instance, one of the participants who had chosen her counterpart’s artefact from which to embody the culture; she presented a dynamised image and, when she was finished, she said, “Done!” and made her way to sit down. I acknowledged her offering but reminded her that the image must come to a halt so that we who are witnessing can appreciate it and also for her to freeze in the image to show us through her body how she perceived the culture of one of her fellow colleagues.

I had prefaced this with an invitation to everyone to follow their impulses and to trust their bodies—permitting them to speak. The participant stood there for a moment

with an awkward smile on her face, biting her nails before offering an image. It was at that point that I knew, from witnessing her before deciding on an image, that she was nervous and presented something because she was asked to and not because she was attuned with her body in order to allow it to speak.

I acknowledge that in this context I represented and was, in practice, an authoritative figure who likely caused this discomfort due to my role alone. What immediately comes to mind is when you are asked a question in class and get it “wrong”, and then how the body reacts to that—especially when you are asked to answer again. Naturally, the mind races to find the “right” answer, but that does not equate to thinking critically, and the nervous ticks are shown through the body to confirm this, and more times than not, the “right” answer is not given.

I make this analogy to acknowledge the teacher–student dynamic whereby I, as facilitator, must have been like a teacher to the participant who was the student. While the first day of the workshop comprised games and exercises to at least soften that dynamic and allow for speaking with the body to occur, the moment I asked the participant to re-do the image, the teacher–student dynamic was instantly reinforced and the participant’s engagement reverted to how a typical student in the classroom would have reacted.

Furthermore, the evident socialisation as brought about by the banking system of education and potentially their upbringing required that more time be spent in the process to truly tackle habitual restraints. This would be done through the playing of more games and engaging in exercises that aid in breaking muscular alienation (Boal, 2008).

Susan Aposhyan makes a distinction between dissociation and presence that helps me understand further what may have occurred to the participant. She defines dissociation as:

“A state of disconnection between one’s body, one’s feelings, and the present reality.”

And about presence she writes:

“When all our sensations, thoughts, and feelings are integrated, we are present in our bodies.”

She gives the example that you feel something in every cell of your body. My conclusion from this is that the participant experienced both dissociation and presence at different parts of the same moment because, when she went into her head about what to do and how to do it, she was present in her thoughts and alive to the sensations that were coursing through her body due to the nerves. However, while she was not able to decide what to do and looked around nervously as if seeking the answer from us in the room, she was dissociated from her body and, for as long as the uncomfortable seconds were, she froze and had no knowledge in that

instant that her body could speak, despite the fact that the day before and the morning leading up to this exercise, her body was learning to and speaking in images.

The novelty of learning this new form of non-verbal communication likely had not taken root in her, which is understandable because habits take much longer than two days to establish. According to the 21/90 rule:

“Forming a new habit takes 21 days of consistent action, and then an additional 90 days to make it a permanent part of your daily routine.”



Figure 8: An Image of an artefact between two participants. Photograph: fellow participant

During the next part of the exercise, in which Image Theatre and artefacts were fused, each participant, after witnessing their colleague's expression surmising what they thought their artefacts represented as far as their culture was concerned, was invited to show us an image that revealed their culture through what was evoked by the artefact.

Just by naming what is visible in the image (see Figure 8 above), we see individuals of which one is seated and the other is standing. There are smiles and a passing on of a container. Before sharing what the participant meant by this image, it is important to note that this part of the exercise was to be done individually, but the participants, without speaking, found their way to each other to end up in this image.

Something that Boal (2002:185) calls a *social vision*, which he states as:

“Shown how this particular theme influences or affects this particular community.”

The theme in this instance being the cultures of the marginalised. A reminder here is that the participants in the room were all from different marginalised ethnic groups, some of whom, on the first day, admitted to having prejudicial thoughts toward the next person's ethnicity.

Considering this, it was interesting to witness how, during an individual task, the marginalised banded together without as much as a word or preparation, to contribute to each other's images, thus creating a social vision that Boal attests:

“The image no longer shows multiple points of view, but rather a single, global, all-embracing vision.”

More examples of the aforesaid will follow in the next chapter, but first, these are the words from the participant who brought in the artefact (container of baked bread):

“Every time we visited (my grandmother) at the village from when I was between two and four, you would eat so much even when there isn't (much) food in the fridge. You even wondered what the old woman meant when she said that there wasn't any food. And when you leave, you always left with a big plastic bag full of baked bread or scones for your journey back home but also with excess for those you were returning home to... it was a policy that no one left empty-handed. You feed to show love with the little that you have.”

Referring to Figure 8 again, we can deduce that the person seated on the floor is the granddaughter and the one standing is the grandmother, and the detail that alludes to her being the grandmother is how the lid is in her hand, which suggests that she is the one that opened it and thus is the one doing the offering.

Having brought in the idea of a social vision into account due to the organic way in which this image occurred, my interpretation of this image is that it symbolises people sharing parts of themselves and their cultures across ethnic boundaries in the face of laws and behaviours that pit ethnic groups against each other.

Fascinatingly, those who are marginalised find a bond through shared domination, but as earlier expressed, there exists prejudice amongst the marginalised and so when things came together the way they did during the image and artefact sharing, it is affirming that this practice without words can facilitate an organic amalgamation akin to Ubuntu through the body. Ubuntu (or Botho) being an African philosophy that emphasises humanity and the interconnectedness of people, underscoring a responsibility that each person has towards another person:

“I am because we are.”



Figure 9: Participant embodying an artefact that belongs to another. Photograph: Pesalema Bogwasi

During a different showing of an image of an artefact, a young lady is seen frozen in a posture that communicates that she was in the process of milking a cow (see Figure 9 above). Before the owner of the artefact—which was a small cup of *madila* (see Figure 10)—revealed the meaning behind the chosen article, a rich reflection ensued.

In speaking back to the image, it was revealed that in the represented culture, as experienced by the individual, during the process of fermenting the milk, a bucket is used instead of a sack made from animal skin. One of the participants, upon hearing this, remarked that they were not informed about it being possible to be done with a different medium to *kgetsi* (sack).

However, the similarity that those in the group who knew about this process agreed upon was the physics and mechanics pertaining to the fermented milk being less dense and thus rising within the vessel, and the more dense solution being the water separated from the milk, sinking and then being drained from the bottom, leaving the *madila* behind.

Another nugget of gold shared by a different participant was that, culturally speaking, nothing is wasted. Initially, the fresh milk from the cow would be used for tea and for drinking, but whatever remained would then be used for the fermentation process of making *madila*, and in that way, every drop is accounted for.

This reflection served as evidence that so much information can be distilled from a single image attached to an artefact to give it context and a specific cultural

resonance, that through it five different people from different ethnic groups were able to collectively learn, remember and confirm a practice that was shared across their respective ethnic groups.



Figure 10: A cup of sour milk, commonly referred to as madila in Setswana.
Photograph: Pesalema Bogwasi.

The reasons for each participant first embodying the artefact belonging to their colleagues was so that they attempted to make their thoughts and ideas about the next person's culture visible through their bodies. In the context of the preconceptions about each other's ethnic groups that were shared on the first day, this served as an opportunity for biases and/or opinions to be refuted or confirmed.

Admittedly, there was a risk of the participants antagonising each other; however, we went forward with this framing because of the evidence of camaraderie, consent and collective vulnerability illustrated following the first day, which concluded with a reflection. Moreover, the participant whose artefact was being embodied by another would follow up with their image of what that artefact represents in or about their culture.

Taken together, the participants were communicating with one another by one showing what they thought or surmised about the other's culture, and the artefact's owner responding with the truth about their culture as they knew it. The combination of Image Theatre, artefact engagement and reflections following these exchanges unearthed similarities across the various represented cultures in the room. It also stood as a point of education through knowledge about one another's culture, and it sparked a re-remembering of the hidden or latent facets of culture.

CHAPTER 7: IN THE WORDS OF THE MARGINALIZED AND WHAT IT MEANS

It has been expressed throughout this research that the group of people that were pivotal to this research represented some of the marginalized ethnic groups found in Botswana, whose languages have been disenfranchised for nearly 60 years. It is therefore imperative that the voices of the constitutionally silenced be heard.

In this chapter I share the words of the participants verbatim, including some words and/or phrases that were said in Setswana, translated for ease of the reader's comprehension. Throughout this section and to respect the participant's anonymity, I refer to each as 'Participant' with a number at the end to differentiate them. At various sections and where applicable I give context and analysis. The following segment is from a video file I labelled 'Artefact 7' in which a participant was sharing what they witnessed being shared about their artefact through images (tableaux) before breaking down what the artefact represented to her and the story that emerged from witnessing but also embodying what the artefact triggered for herself.

7.1 In the words of Participant 1

[TETO MOKAILA] And now, what was your interpretation of what you just saw, before we get to you revealing what this artifact means to you in the cultural sense?

[PARTICIPANT 1] What she said, and then an additional thing is the joy, right, the kids were crying before, and then you make them bread, and then they eat. And you can eat and be full, but it's just, you're just full, but there was also joy, that's what I noticed. And then, what connects it to my culture is my grandma, every time, we would visit her, there's a point in, like from two years, when I was two to four, where I lived at the village with my little sibling and my grandma. And since then, until now, at my big age, you eat so much, like even when there isn't food, like the, maybe, the fridge isn't full or whatnot, you know what, you're still going to eat so much, like what does this old lady mean when she says there is no food? She gets mad when you don't eat, while there is food, and when you leave, you always get a huge plastic of bread, scones, something, she's going to bake something for you, for the journey, and then also something for the people that you are going to find back at home. We are many, my siblings, we are six, so we never all visited at once. They would split us between the different families with the different holidays. She'll bring back something for the other parts of the family. And then, I noticed my grandfather's sister passed away a few months ago, and from the stories I heard during her funeral, also I got this sense, because people were sharing, she baked, so she baked for the whole community, she sold what she baked to sustain her children. She was a single mom. But then also, even after you're grown, you don't live in the village, and when you move away to Francistown for work, if one person of, because my dad's age group, him and his cousins and whatnot, I think there were about 10 who all graduated into

adulthood at the same time and left to go look for work, and most of them ended up in Francistown for work in the army. If one of them comes, there will maybe be a smaller packet for himself, but then there will be a bucket for everyone else, and you're going to split it between everyone else that you're going to meet there, you give so and so some and whatnot. A person doesn't just leave empty handed. So yeah, that thing about when you feed to show love, with the little that you have.

7.2 An analysis of participant 1's experience

For a visual, please refer to Figure 8 and note that the subsequent paragraph in the previous chapter, beneath the picture, the initial analysis ensued. Continuing with the analysis but with a focus on the themes that arise, I reiterate that *Ubuntu/Botho* struck me due to its unforeseen manifestation by way of the agency that the participants took in constructing collaborative images despite the rule of the image having to be done individually.

I am reminded that the struggle for liberation that Freire refers to within this context also shows up as questioning the boundaries set by another (in this instance, me as facilitator) to control how things should be done. What if the oppressed—the marginalised—decided, as they did in this instance, to do things their way because they deem it necessary to convey a social image that amplifies the voices (albeit non-verbally) of the one who is sharing?

This moment exemplified *Botho* in that, selflessly, one participant wanted to join their fellow to offer support so that the comrade whose image it was to begin with could perhaps speak through a social image in a more potent way that one body might have struggled to convey. Freire (2000:33) writes:

“They are no longer willing to be mere objects, responding to changes occurring around them; they are more likely to decide to take upon themselves the struggle to change the structures of society, which until now have served to oppress them.”

Taking these words into account and as an analogy to the workshop, I—as facilitator—could be seen as the oppressor who, through the giving of rules, took on the role of a governor, and the participants, being the oppressed, had a moment in which one saw the other as their equal, wanting to assist their fellow human. It meant breaking the rules set by me in order to ensure that their colleague was seen and supported so that their voice could be heard.

I have experienced this several times when teaching Image Theatre. A student who would be visibly struggling to hold their individual image would be aided by their colleagues in a subtle manner to uphold it. Again, these would be individual images as per instruction, but I noticed how other students would slightly adjust their images to support another after trying to inconspicuously move closer to them to do so. They would tell me in reflection that it did not feel right to see their colleague struggling, and so they chose to help.

Likewise, in the research workshop, one of the participants said something along the lines of:

“Ne ke batla go mo thusa” (translated: “I just wanted to help them”).

The separate yet interconnected instances shared here highlight the humanising quality of *Botho* (Ubuntu) despite the presence of an opposing authority.

Kobe (2022), quoting Archbishop Desmond Tutu, writes:

“A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.”

Botho is also clearly defined in the participant’s sharing of her experience through her image when she talks about her grandmother. From what was expressed, her grandmother not only thought about feeding the grandchild who came to visit her but her concern was also for the rest of the family who were not present, because she would bake enough for her grandchild to also take back home to share with the rest of the family.

I am reminded of Biko’s analogy between Western and African cultures concerning Ubuntu. He asserts that the former is individualistic and the latter communal, giving an example of how typically people of Western persuasion are protective of their properties to the extent that, when answering a knock at their door, they would ask what the person who has visited wants—even if it were a neighbour. This highlights that, in order for one to visit another, it must be because they want or need something and, to an extent, are treated as trespassers, also underscoring that beyond occasionally seeing their neighbours entering or leaving their home, they have no contact with them.

In contemporary Western culture, there is an insistence that one makes an appointment or calls beforehand so that their host expects them and knows what the nature of their visit is prior. On the contrary, Biko attested that Africans would visit each other without any form of forewarning and without a pre-composed agenda, but simply to go and check on a friend or relative. He also mentions that people in a community knew not only the people living next door to them but nearly everyone across the village or farmland, due to the fact that there was a culture of walking long distances to meet with each other simply to check on each other and to ask for the proverbial brown sugar.

“Our culture has always been a human-centred society whose sacred tradition is that of sharing; therefore we must reject, as we have been doing, the individualistic cold approach to life that is the cornerstone of the Anglo-Boer culture” (Kobe, 2022).

Grounding this in the Botswana context, I remember that my maternal grandfather, who lived in the capital city, Gaborone, would call his friends and organise a suitable time in which to see them. Being a stickler for time, he would ensure that he arrived just moments prior to the appointed time. However, whenever he was in his home village of Matenge nearly 500 kilometres away, he would simply ask that someone take him to go and see so-and-so on a whim just so he could see how they were doing.

Also, he would at any moment during the day or evening walk from his house to a neighbouring homestead to see someone, and if that person was not there, there would not be any regret or expressed sentiment that they should have first called or made an appointment to avoid disappointment. In fact, the person might hear from the ones that received my grandfather that he was there and would immediately walk over to see him.

I share all of this to point out a personally and nationally observed reality, while rooted in the story from the image above, that a Western culture has been adopted by Botswana, especially in the cities and towns. While *Botho* is inherent, it is largely practised in our home villages as preserved by those whose grandparents and elderly relatives are still alive.

It is astonishing to note the difference in behaviour between when someone is in their home village and the opposite when living in the city, where, in truth, our inherent *Botho* has been foreshadowed by the adoption of colonial ideologies. This is not to conclude that we no longer have *Botho*, but to merely point out that it has been diluted and practising it requires intentionality.

What Image Theatre offered was a tapping into memory and the opportunity for the ingrained stories of the marginalised to emerge, which came as a reminder of our humanity and the value we hold as human beings. There was no “othering” of anyone in the moments of this exploration. Witnessing the social image of the young ladies sharing bread between them (see Figure 8) and hearing the story about the participant’s grandmother, for a moment transported everyone in the room to a space and time when *Botho* was exercised without thought, but as a way of being.

Also worth noting is that all present were reminded of our intrinsic *Botho*, which affirms the metaxis of Image Theatre at work. Metaxis is defined as being in:

“A position between two opposites from a middle point, but also involves an assimilation of both at the same time” (Mora, 2023).

In this context, we were physically in a room, but also in the participant’s village through the image, thus being able to experience the memory and simultaneously reflect upon it in the here and now.

I stress the value of Image Theatre in bringing a memory to life while the artefact specifically contextualises it. Because of metaxis, the participants’ consciousness is

made alive to *Botho* as something to be intentional about in the real world. Due to engaging in the image-making practice and the emergence of this philosophy (*Botho*), because of it, the version of themselves that is doing this imprints it upon their memories, which has the potential to manifest in their everyday lives beyond the research workshop.

Linds (1998:74) argues:

“The protagonists must practise in the second world (the aesthetic), in order to modify the first (the social).”

Linking this quote to the research environment, the participants are the protagonists, the second world is the liminal space they are in when making images, and the first/social world represents the real world that they live in. Linds (1998:75) goes further to share Boal's words in writing:

“...if the artist is able to create an autonomous world of images of his own reality, and to enact his liberation in the reality of these images, they will then extrapolate into his own life all that he has accomplished in fiction.”

7.3 A Communal reflection centering Participant 2

The following account is taken from a video I labelled 'Artefacts 9', in which participants were sharing their reflections about the image of the participant in a milking stance as they embodied the artefact (See Figure 10) of a fellow participant as well as the artefact owner's social image (See Figure 11 on the next page). Furthermore an analysis of the aforementioned will ensue.



Figure 11: A social image of participants embodying the experience connected to the artefact being held. Photograph: fellow participant.

[PARTICIPANT 3] There's a point where she was doing this and then this, I was just wondering what's going on in there.

[TETO MOKAILA] Tell us, what did you think?

[PARTICIPANT 3] I was just wondering. If this is the part where she takes whatever the milk is poured into and hung on the tree, leaving it there for the process of fermentation to start or what's happening? It was also very quick and quite brief. The demonstration was quite quick.

[TETO MOKAILA] It was very quick, yeah. That's fine. But I've heard both of you, so we've heard what they both had to say. Now (Participant 2), what did you see happening there?

[PARTICIPANT 2] Like them, I saw, not a man, a person, milking - doing the whole process. But the thing that you asked him, I thought, isn't it you pour fresh milk in a container and then it will ferment. But when it makes the solid parts, it also makes the watery bits. So I'm thinking the hanging it thing was... Because others, they use the sacks. But at our home village we use a bucket. We just, make a hole in it somehow, we make a little tap. Because isn't it the liquid density will go up. So at the bottom (of the bucket) it will come out. That's what I saw. Also, I saw she was impatient during the whole thing. Impatient. During the whole thing. In kinda in her head, it took a long time from the milk to the madila. But then later on, she was eating.

[PARTICIPANT 3] The thing is we have somewhat a similar culture with regard to this part. But as far as maybe, the part where a small hole is made (at the bottom of the bucket) for the water to drip; I wasn't as informed about that one. And it's quite interesting. Obviously, we know that madila as it is rises to the top and the water stays at the bottom. And this process is quite interesting, because the bottle or the bucket would be this big, and when the bucket is this big, the portion of the madila, is just this (small) portion. The rest of it is water. So you remain with very little madila. In this process you have to always drain out the water. If you are in a hot place like at our villages, it means that it's an everyday process: You refill, tomorrow you pour out that water, you then refill with fresh milk that comes from a cow.

[PARTICIPANT 1] Can I say something that I think, I was trying to portray also, that they missed.

[TETO MOKAILA] Yes, actually, yes.

[PARTICIPANT 1] After milking, I made tea first, and then after.

[PARTICIPANT 3] Oh, that was tea? That was you making tea? I thought you were drinking. I thought you were drinking the milk.

[PARTICIPANT 1] Because I don't drink milk in my tea. I didn't think that you would make that interpretation.

[PARTICIPANT 4] Me too, I thought she was drinking milk.

[PARTICIPANT 1] No. But it's still the same thing. That we don't waste. When you're done with this, it continues, and it can make another product. Just because it's bad for tea now, or milk, drinking, it doesn't mean the lifetime of the milk is finished.

[PARTICIPANT 2] So, what it means to me now?

[TETO MOKAILA] So, what it means to you.

[PARTICIPANT 2] Okay, it has nothing to do with the milking. Really, actually. This bit, this bit, whenever I go home, it's actually this and biltong. When my dad goes on visiting, I was raised by my father. It's just me and him since I was four. Very close, very, very close. So, whenever I visit home, he knows I'm coming. He would go to the cattle post. He'd take out that biltong that he had kept, bring that for me and then pre-cook it and then pound it. I didn't bring that now, I'm saying. But with this batch, when I went home, the day before, I came from Satau, there was no madila at home. And then his cows, you know how cows at the cattle post are, it was not okay. And there was nothing. He actually had to call his friend, so that they would go together to the cattle post to go get me madila. I wasn't going to get the whole bucket, but he brought the whole bucket. So, there's that. And also, growing up at primary (school) when my grandmother was still alive and okay, my dad would bring madila and I would go around the village selling with a cup - I used to hate that. I hated that. But now, we had enough. When I go home, I want there to be madila in the fridge so that people would come and buy. Because actually that money is for my airtime and sweets. So, it's just been, and something that, because my father was, my father went to Namibia when he finished doing his standard seven because there weren't any schools in Botswana so then his uncle took him to go and – he repeated standard seven to go and start Form 1 essentially because of the whole language and everything. So, when, when was that? Back in 2002, he retired early because my grandfather passed away. And my grandmother was - she lived alone at Satau. So my father was like, I can't let my old mother stay alone. So, he moved from Namibia to come to Botswana with no plan. He was a principal, the youngest at that time. So, he left that job in the government. I like to laugh at him saying, "by now you would have been a minister, come on." But yeah, he left that job to come to Satau to stay with his mother with no plan. They had about 10 cows. So, he survived. Coming with me as baggage - if he came alone, I'd get it. But he came with me at four, no plan. And your retirement hasn't kicked in yet because, well, you are young. So, he came and then, multiplied those cows in a way. Started taking care of them. We survived with madila – I used to hate madila. Because it was like a poverty food, if I

may call it. Every day, if there wasn't staple food, *madila* is there, you know. So, it was like a staple food. And then, now, I love it. Something that reminds me of home. We survived by selling *madila*, because the cow we couldn't kill them yet because they were 10. We start chowing them, there won't be anything. But now, we are proud owners of many cows. Yeah. We are not selling *madila* to survive anymore, like I mentioned. It's for airtime and sweets. It's no longer, "you need this", right now they are selling the cows themselves. Yeah. If you need money. Yeah.

[PARTICIPANT 1] That's a movie and a half. Yeah. I would watch that.

[PARTICIPANT 3] Yeah. It's an interesting story.

[PARTICIPANT 2] So, he doesn't have anything to do. And funny enough, my father apparently doesn't know how to milk a cow. I don't know if they are teasing him, or really, because I really, if I think about it, I've never seen him milk a cow. And my uncles like to say, oh, your father doesn't know. So, maybe it's true.

7.4 An analysis of the communal reflection about Participant 2's artefact

One of the things that occurred during this reflection was that there was cross-cultural commonality and thus resonance. Specifically, when zeroing in on Participant 2's revealing moment that, in the process of making *madila* that she has been exposed to, a bucket is used instead of a sack. What most in the group were knowledgeable about is that a sack known as *lekuka* is normally used for the fermentation process.

I take this moment to recount my stance about the preservation of culture being about upholding the "old way" in the modern day. However, what this moment brought up is that cultural practices can still be preserved even if the mediums used are different. If the process leads to the desired product, then is not the essence of the culture in the practice? And if, in our present day, we have different vessels in which to uphold these cultural practices, is it then not acceptable for us to use what we have at our disposal?

This affirms what Hall (quoted in Laurencin & Roy, 2014) said about not focusing on people's roots, but rather their routes, in underscoring the fact that identity and culture are not stagnant or confined to a specific place. As times change and as human beings grow and even migrate across borders or from the village to the city, there is an inexorable internal and external motion taking place that does not divorce us from ourselves or our cultures either. Adaptability and evolution go hand in hand here, and I stress again that culture is still preserved, except through the tools of the day.

There is an element of humanisation that is evident in Participant 2's recollection that not only resonated with her peers, but how the sharing of her experience, as triggered by an artefact and the image of the culture, revealed commonalities amongst the group, highlighting community as an innate shared culture.

We have two different stories in which being of service to the community was a means of survival and directly contributed to the families from whom the sellers belonged. In one, it was the participant's grandmother who baked and sold so that she could support her family, but her skills also fed her family. In another, we have a little girl who sold *madila* to contribute to the family but who later in life sells *madila* for pocket money.

I want to note that in each testimony, the two people selling are three generations apart, and while selling for sustenance is not unique, what I want to place focus upon is how it builds and maintains community. While the art and business of selling is ancient and has evolved in leaps and bounds, I cannot help but distinguish between the capitalistic commercial approach and the community-based reality of the ways it is practised in the shared testimonies.

I am reminded of my late maternal grandmother who used to be associated with a non-government organisation called Botswana Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). She was an avid baker, but when, because of her old age, she could not bake anymore, she would sometimes send me or my other cousins to go to YWCA with money to collect a batch of scones or rock buns that she would then ask to be delivered to someone else, as a contribution of support.

The first time I collected scones at YWCA, having told the people there who sent me, they lit up and from that interaction I learnt that my grandmother had imparted so much to the organisation and that she taught many young and old women there how to bake. The women I had encountered that time were three generations junior to my grandmother.

This is all to say that the thread of *Botho* and community are what bind us despite the different ethnic groups we are from, and that in intentionally acknowledging and practising Ubuntu/Botho we exercise a form of constant humanisation and thus preserve a shared cultural ethos.

7.5 A reflection on participant 3's artefact

The following account is from a video I labelled *Artefacts 15*, whereby a participant shared their experience and cultural reference around the artefact that they brought into the space. Again, cultural commonalities arose as well as how objects and tools available to us today hold historical and yet contemporary significance.



Figure 12: A participant holding up their artefact during reflection. Photograph: Pesalema Bogwasi

[PARTICIAN 3] Initially, I had wanted to bring, you see those oil containers? Yes, I have that at home. And inside we had washed out the madila that was previously within, but it still smells like madila. The idea was not necessarily for me to talk about madila per se, but the idea was for me to talk about how, in our culture, anything which is a container of this nature, in a bottle form, is very important to keep, is very important to have. Because madila, water for our uncles when they are going to look for cows, they pour waters in these containers so that they hydrate as they go on horseback looking for the lost cows. Madila, we would always say when we are about to leave the village, you'd have it poured into a container. Last year, no, 2022, December, when I was at the cattle post, I was so interested in leaving with 20 litres of madila, when leaving the cattle post. So, I had won at managing to do the 20 litres. But then, my aunt came with visitors, and you know what we do, when they come with visitors. It's now being shared with the visitors who came. But, say, I was able to go, to leave the cattle post with 7 litres or so of madila. Growing up we were raised at the cattle post – that's where we grew up. Then, later on, when our mothers were working, we end up moving to where they have been transferred. My mother worked as a nurse. So, we'd leave here and transfer to there and there and so on and so forth. But the main point here is that when we would go to the cattle post or at our home village, or if it's her going back to our home village, we are sure that

someone coming back to wherever now we are staying will be coming with madila. She talked about madila, she talked about Coke. And in her demonstration, when she was laughing and showing the demonstration of laughing, I was actually thinking 'khadi' (traditional beer). Right? Yes. That's just how these things (containers) are so important to us. They represent more than just one thing. The people who use these two litre containers for example would go and use it as something we would call 'sekale' (weighing scale). Yes, a person would come with their weighting scale of the khadi. A long time ago it would cost two Pula (Botswana currency) for a bottle the size of this one, for khadi.

[PARTICIPANT 2] Wow!

[PARTICIPANT 4] It used to be cheap.

[PARTICIPANT 3] Yes it was cheap but prices only started to rise in the latter days. When I would take off from my home village and return to wherever I was living at the time. My uncles would make sure that we would leave having packed something for the road. Which meant, madila for each one of us children before we would travel.

[PARTICIPANT 2] Hm! Everyone had a two litres?

[PARTICIPANT 3] Yes. Remember baKgalagadi are farmers like that. They are very big on farming and rearing of cattle, livestock and so on. That's our lifestyle and that's something that formulates who we are, and you can never talk of moKgalagadi and not attach them to livestock rearing. And I heard her mention that now they are in a position to sell these cattle and take care of themselves. You know, it's quite crazy that when we go to our villages, you'll find an old man wearing tattered clothes, living in a rundown house, driving a car he long bought in 1999 as his first vehicle. Only for you to later on discover that this man, monetary wise is a millionaire because that which he has in the kraal, if he sells it and puts it in an account, he leaves what's in the account and continues with what is their normal lifestyle. They eat only what's enough even if there's an abundance of meat, they live within their means. That's why they live in the houses they live in, that's why they drive the cars that they do, to them they do not fancy anything about lifestyle. I remember a story that we were told about one of our relatives. They are very rich, with cows. They have three cattle posts. Have you ever seen yourself going to the cattle post and when the cattle are being guided out of the kraal the dust that is kicked up and how white the air becomes with dust, you can't even see the cows; that's how rich these people are. We hear at one point that he was called by the bank to come and have a discussion with the people at the bank. When he arrives there they say to him, "sir your money is so much in the bank and is just sitting. D.I.S. (Directorate of Intelligence and Security) is almost about to investigate the extent at which money is entering your account and the truth behind where the money is from. Can you at least take part of it and see what to do? Build, buy houses, buy cars, at least to reduce the large amount of money. But these are people that if you see them like I

had said, nothing about them, represents or resemble what could be in their bank account. When we were told to bring an artefact, I was just thinking about how life used to be so simple. How life and how meaningful life was before, because people valued the important things. Being family, being your happiness, being your mental health, things like that. I got to think about that container that I saw at home, it reminded me of my uncles and my grandmother, people who played an important role in ensuring that we become a better people. Sacrificing their own happiness. Sacrificing themselves and what could come out of them. Just so the next generation become a better people. It would be said, “go and get educated so that tomorrow you can take care of us.” Go and get educated so that you are at schools and afterwards you will be able to bury us when we die. So, I was actually sad when I noticed when I was already going somewhere far that, oh no, I left that thing. Because reading through the messages that were speaking about the artefact, I got to realize, do you know there are things that really speak so much of who we are as people. Things that get to be a reminder of where we are coming from. And possibly where we could go as people, but maybe we are not so attached to these things and the realities around these things. And as I mentioned earlier, this really is a process so amazing for us. Because now we are starting, at least on my end, I’m starting to get in touch with who I am really...



Figure 13: A social image of a participant pouring. Photograph: Pesalema Bogwasi

7.6 An analysis on the significance of a container in culture

Continuing the story on container artefacts, I note that not only were we previously introduced to the use of a relatively modern container through which cultural practice is sustained, but through the latter reflection we are introduced to how a relatively modern container in the shape of a plastic two-litre bottle can have various uses yet still carry cultural importance.

I take this opportunity to highlight that each of these participants brought these artefacts separately and without prior discussion with one another, as I sent them private messages about this. Moreover, they were all meeting each other for the first time during this workshop and had not accessed each other prior.

Likewise, this serves as a metaphor and correlates to how, without speaking to each other or planning it during this segment of the workshop, the participants gravitated toward each other to form social visions in the images that were originally to be expressed individually (see Figure 13). Once again, the community without saying anything spoke volumes through their choices and virtue of collective embodiment.

The participant in their testimony above speaks about how, as a matter of principle, anyone that would return to their home village would not leave without at least a container of *madila* to take back to their home. This connects directly with the other participant's reflections about never leaving their respective villages empty-handed.

The aforementioned further emphasises a shared understanding and way of living that cuts across ethnic group divides and again underscores the innate nature of *Botho* among them. This point is reiterated to stress how discrimination across all ethnic groups nationally, as well as inter-marginalised, is partially based on differences, and this begs the question: what would it be like if, instead of the differences, people focused on their shared ideals and cultural similarities?

Yes, it would be ideal to celebrate and accept one another regardless of our differences; however, through the images attached to artefacts exercise, I witnessed different yet fundamentally similar embodiments of *Botho*, even though there were some missed details and misinterpretations of images as expressed in some of the reflections. There was an organic leaning upon one another and celebrating each other despite differences, while also embracing commonalities. There is a lesson to be heeded here.

Revisiting the importance of containers in the cultures that were in the room, the multiple uses communicated across the reflections reaffirmed and metaphorically demonstrated the evolution and adaptability of culture along with the wisdom and perseverance of the people that practise the culture.

The metaphor being that whether covered in animal skin or hollowed fruit (think calabash), when times change and the latter become less used, culture still carries on and in newer casings—even through the utilisation of plastic containers.

Now to segue to the containers, or rather, the living, breathing and expressive vessels that we are never without: our bodies. While the artefacts sparked culturally relevant memories, it is through the bodies of the participants that context was given and one of the ways in which the container was used was shown.

I take this opportunity to remind the reader that the verbal reflections took place after the demonstrations of the social vision images. Before the artefact owner shared the above transcribed story, some of the guesses from the witnessing participants about the image (Figure 13 refers) were that it was a group of men drinking Coke, but another, while agreeing and simultaneously countering, said that it was likely that they were drinking traditional beer (*khadi*).

The one who guessed that Coke was being drunk most probably looked at the branding on the container and concluded, whereas the other participant drew from the framing of the image, which was that it is shown in a cultural context, and thus the liquid being poured must be *khadi*.

This was, of course, confirmed when the participant shared that one of the uses of the container was historically for weighing *khadi* but also for packaging and drinking it. Furthermore, that same container was used for storing *madila* for purposes of taking it to share with family, but also to contain water when men (the participant's uncles) would carry water in it in pursuit of lost cows.

While all this other information could not be deduced by the chosen social vision image, the combination of the artefact and bodies frozen in the image gave rise to the greater cultural context as afterward expressed.

CHAPTER 8: THE ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN PROMOTING AGENCY AND PRESERVING CULTURE

“Photographs act as a visual language, transcending barriers of literacy, language, and geography. They communicate stories of the past, emotions tied to cultural identities, and the significance of preserving traditions in a rapidly changing world” (Bhattacharya, 2024).

Initially, when I decided to include photography as a medium, it was purely to document the process and preserve the moments for later reflection. While that sentiment still holds after the fact, the understanding that culture would be illustrated through the body and in unique ways that would likely never be repeated served to highlight the need for this expression to be preserved as well.

Thus, this chapter will reveal how photography was used and why it was crucial that it become a part of the process beyond documentation, including how it impacted the participants at a particular point during the workshop when they engaged directly with the camera.

Up until now, various photographs have appeared in this research report and, while they may have served as an occasional break from the visual monotony of text, their purpose in this research is more valuable and multi-pronged. For starters, without the photographs to refer to after the workshop by the participants and me, it would have been very difficult and perhaps even impossible to recall details surrounding the images that people assumed in order to reflect upon and analyse their meanings.

Indeed, future witnesses of this work would also be missing precise visual references from which to make sense of what is written and thus robbed of the opportunity to appreciate the story in its entirety—colour, texture and all.

Furthermore, while Image Theatre is somewhat staged in that someone illustrates a tableau, the final image captured photographically is of the personification of the opinions, thoughts and ideas of that particular individual. The photograph of the image is literally a picture of the person’s internal world within a given context, which distinguishes it from merely being a picture of posing.

Argelander and Moore (1974:51) wrote:

“Many important historical productions can never be studied analytically... because there is no photographic record.”

I purposefully bring up this dated quote because, in Botswana today, while events are quite well documented, there remain some unique and highly impactful workshops and trainings that go undocumented or contain imagery of people posing during or after the event, more than there being a visual story from which people get a sense of what was going on at the presented event or workshop.

In this age of Instagram, TikTok and Artificial Intelligence, where trends, proximity to public figures and computer-generated images have become the order of the day, storytelling and documentation through photography has become somewhat endangered. Herein lies the irony of embracing technological evolution at the expense of opposing the preservation of an old and trusted way of documentation.

Archaeological photographer Daniel Lindskog writes:

“Not only do we need to know what we have in our records, but we need to be able to show it. The simple 2D image is still the most affordable way to do this. It’s been around for ages and will outlive all of us, no matter what technical inventions it may have to compete with” (Lindskog quoted in Widerberg, 2025).



Figure 14: A participant taking a photo of their fellow participants. Photograph: Teto Mokaila

The metaphor that I extract from the above quote challenges preservation in an evolutionary sense, as expressed in the previous chapters about contemporary

containers being used to reserve cultural practices. Instead, it insists that an aged practice be used as is and accordingly preserved.

I glean from this that, in some cases, the idiom *“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”* applies, but at the same time, advanced ways of photography can still exist alongside the “old way” or be used in different circumstances.

In the framework of this workshop, I leaned more on traditional photography for its raw and unfiltered approach, which left no room for embellishing, but rather, the capturing of true expression as it occurred. While I am not against the democratisation of photography in which everyone who owns a smartphone carries the potential of being a photographer or at least a documenter within their respective environments, nonetheless, through this research I advocate for awareness towards intentional preservation through the aliveness that the subject of documentation will never be exactly the same as it is in that moment.

This remains true for staged photographs, as in photo shoots, for instance. If you look into the details, you will likely tell that no matter how precisely one tries to emulate the moment before, slight differences will be detected. No two images are alike—and I mean this photographically and in the case of Image Theatre.

8.1 Agency and witnessing through photography

Maintaining inspiration from Augusto Boal’s philosophy that *“all people are theatre and we all have the capacity to act”* (Boal, 2002:xx), it was deemed necessary that this value not only refer to the Image Theatre process but to the photography as well.

How this was achieved was by inviting the participants—neither of whom had photography experience—to pick up the camera and capture each other demonstrating images about their respective cultures. This came about as a way to affirm their initiative and agency in creating the social vision images and offering them an opportunity to broaden their own experience of the workshop in its entirety, through experiencing one another through a medium that, up until that point, they were the witnessed.

Landscape photographer Ellen Borggreve wrote:

“If you make the photograph about the witness instead of the witnessed, you can create unique and authentic work” (Borggreve, 2022).

Interestingly, the witness-and-be-witnessed dynamic existed throughout the duration of the workshop, but the inclusion of a camera through which to witness each other nuanced the dynamic in ways that I will express through the words of one of the participants who, in relation to photographing their peers, said:

“When you are behind the camera you get to realise all the gestures and all the emotions wrapped around an individual.”

This statement suggested that while two days of witnessing had occurred, it was the observing through the lens of the camera (on the final day) that an added layer of focus on the details of the images of their peers came about.

As a photographer, I can attest to a hyper-focus that befalls one looking through a lens. It is as though the world around you ceases to exist or becomes still, and what is in your frame of vision becomes the entire world for a moment, hence having a deeper appreciation for detail.

Also worth mentioning, and in commenting on how the participant's photographs constitute what Borggreve calls "authentic work", I note that the participants who took the photographs did so by imprinting themselves into the final image that was taken. This is due to the fact that, in their agency, whether aware of composition or not, they showed us their unique perspective. So when we look at each photograph that each participant took, we do so knowing that this was one person's exact view and whether they decided to step closer or move further back, it represents how they saw the world as well as their idea of how best to portray it—an image of the image they were witnessing, as it were.



Figure 15: The photographer guiding a participant on the basics of camera use.
Photograph: Teto Mokaila

8.2 Preservation of culture through the lens

About their experience of how culture might be preserved through photography, another participant said:

“Photography is more like our sight; it makes us aware of what there is in culture ... It is because of photography that we have history.”

I observe this sentiment to be premised on the fact that, for as long as what is documented is preserved, then what the documentation is about—in this case, culture—is preserved. If you keep the photograph alive, then at the very least you keep the memory of culture alive as well.

This accords future observers a glimpse into a frozen moment representing a particular culture. It does not end there in the context of Image Theatre because the

viewer of this photograph, in an instance where no caption or written explanation accompanies the picture, would be left with the task of making sense of what the picture is conveying. Hence, the inclusion of artefacts in the images for added context.

This by no means gives the viewer the “answer”, but adds detail that might help them interpret contextually. The idea is not to get it right, but to engage critically in making meaning of what is being witnessed.

What then does this say about the accuracy of a photograph being data that conveys a particular culture? In order for culture to be preserved, in what ways can it be when opened up to subjectivity? The reason for these questions is that when dealing with Image Theatre, multiple points of view surface due to every witness’s unique perspective, and additionally, unseen or unnoticed details coming from the person doing the image may be revealed by those witnessing, thus adding another layer of meaning to the image.

The conundrum that this poses when we talk about the preservation of culture having photographed the image representing it is that, within this framework, what is being communicated is that we can interpret culture. Maybe it is possible; however, further study is required to explore and bring language to this contradiction and how to either solve its mystery or let it be as two parts that exist in tandem.

What I have seen to be possible through this research is that the photographs of the images that represent culture can, through reflection, conjure memories of the witnesses’ own culture. The argument I then make is that the body carries latent aspects of culture that, through the witnessing of a photograph depicting culture or a practice of it, can bring to the fore one’s own memory about their culture, thus suggesting that the body is the preserver of learned culture.

CHAPTER 9 (CONCLUSION): MAKING MEANING OF THE BODY, IMAGES, ARTEFACTS AND PHOTOGRAPHY

At the inception of this research, I set out to explore how the practice of Image Theatre could inspire a group of people belonging to diverse marginalised ethnic groups to substitute verbalisation for expression through the body, while using photography as a tool to document the embodied cultural preservation based on the individual and the collective's demonstrations.

Throughout the process, it was also intended that new knowledge through communal interactions within this frame would materialise. The discoveries made were, first of all, of a unanimous revelation in which the participants, along with me as facilitator, became aware of the similarities across each represented ethnic group's culture in the room.

Through the witnessing of the images, the reflections thereof begot a stronger sense of community and connectedness in our midst. A re-realisation of *Botho* as the binding indiscriminate shared philosophy was established. A key ingredient in catalysing this unearthing was the use of artefacts in these images to bring texture and, in some cases, smell, to trigger memories around culture.

The artefacts also assisted with the contextualisation of the photographs of the images, which were subjects of reflection post-workshop in the name of making meaning through multiple interpretations.

As far as liberation is concerned, the participants took on agency to act without invitation once they became comfortable with the bodily language of images. This resulted in the creation of images of social visions in support of each other, which proved to reinforce the details and overall richness of what the images were portraying. In affirming this spontaneous act of collaboration, I quote Freire (2000:66):

"No one liberates himself by his own efforts alone..."

Preserving culture through the use of photography in the instance of this research brought up more questions than answers. Referencing a personal understanding about culture being a living and evolving entity when having come from the school of thought that culture is historic and stagnant, I realised that this internal conflict remains underexplored post-research workshop.

The questions I am left with are:

- How do we preserve culture through a photograph if it is evolutionary?

- In preserving culture through a photograph that represents an image demonstrating a cultural practice, how relevant would that interpretation be in the future?
- For those who believe that culture is rigid, how can we reconcile that with the evidence that it (culture) is evolutionary, especially during an interpretive reflection of a photograph depicting it?

I conclude that further investigation is required to satisfy the conundrum of the two poles.

The act of decolonisation in and through Image Theatre situationally abandons the spoken word and, in particular, the dominating languages of Setswana and English, to instead use the body to communicate. This reveals that there needs to be a longer process to realise the meaning of decolonisation.

That is to say that, if you are colonised in your mind through habits adopted unconditionally, then what are the chances that when you shift from using words to using the body to communicate, your bodily expression will not be confined to the bounds of the knowledge you have retained that are a product of colonial teachings?

I found a partial answer to this in acknowledging that decolonisation did begin to take shape by way of the participants speaking a new language through their bodies. This act of changing the discourse and unearthing the hidden learned behaviours through the reflective tools of Image Theatre, artefacts and photography has the potential for genuine liberatory change as advocated by Boal (2002).

The practice of challenging the body brought about a realisation of possibilities beyond what they knew, which translated to a mental shift that stemmed from what happened to, with and in the body. This empirical fieldwork was an affirming reminder that practice as research can and does inform theory. It is the embodiment of theory.

Through this research, the bodies that engaged in Image Theatre began to inform the mind of new ways of expression and, as a result, an open reflection and interpretation around the issues of culture, language and preservation were evoked.

This is a story of a few people representing marginalised ethnic groups in Botswana and how they discovered that their silenced voices were concealed in their bodies that carried the memories of their respective and shared cultures. Their bodies spoke volumes.



Figure 16: The workshop participants with the facilitator/researcher. Photography: Pesalema Bogwasi

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



WITS SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
DRAMA FOR LIFE
Arts for Social Transformation and Healing

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET

Warm greetings,

My name is Teto Mokaila. I am a Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Warren Nebe. I am conducting research focusing on using an embodied method as a means of non-verbal communication to co-knowledge build and preserve culture amongst marginalized people.

I humbly invite you to take part in this research by way of agreeing to participate in an Image Theatre workshop, whereby you would be asked to express thoughts and ideas through the use of the body. It is a physical endeavour and will require that you challenge your body to contort and move in ways that you might not be used to doing on a daily basis. With this in mind, and as a part of the process, the workshops will commence with games and exercises that help in making the body more expressive. I propose that the workshops take place during November for the duration of 4 hours per session, over 2 days from 23 to 24 November 2024. I.e. Saturday session 1 will be from 09h00 to 13h00 and session 2 will be from 14h00 to 17h00. On Sunday the final session will be from 14h00 to 18h00. There might be an additional day following the workshop which we will entail embodied meditation for the sake of detaching from the work and the psychological triggers that may emerge. I will be accompanied by three of my colleagues who are trained applied drama and theatre practitioners, as well as a psychologist, in their capacities to co-facilitate and ensure mental wellness respectively. Furthermore, we will be accompanied by a photographer.

With your permission, we would like to photograph you during the image making process as a form of data collection and also invite you to take pictures of fellow participants as a part of the process. There will be video taken during specific times in the workshop, for the sake of data collection and post workshop analysis. If you do not consent, I humbly ask that you allow for one of my colleagues to step into your place momentarily for the photograph to be taken in your stead, and then you would retain your position afterwards during the part(s) of the process that require it.

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Private Bag X3, WITS, Johannesburg, 2050



During the research activity, in my capacity as facilitator, I will ask for your name. However, in sharing the results of my research study, I will not include your name. Also, with your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name will not be used.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part.

You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

This research will be written up as a research report. Should you require a summary of the research report, I will be happy to share it with you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below.

Yours sincerely,

Teto Mokaila

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THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO CONSIDER THIS STUDY.

IF YOU WANT TO TAKE PART IN IT, PLEASE SIGN ATTACHED CONSENT FORM.

THIS INFORMATION SHEET IS FOR YOU TO KEEP.

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APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND
JOHANNESBURG



WITS SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
DRAMA FOR LIFE
Arts for Social Transformation and Healing

Participant Consent Form

For “Employing Image Theatre as a Practice for Co-Knowledge Building and Cultural Preservation amongst Marginalized Tribespersons in Botswana”

Your participation is for research purposes which will form a key part of my data collection process and be instrumental in my final report for my Masters in Applied Drama and Theatre research.

I, _____
(participant's full name), do hereby consent to engaging in the Image Theatre workshop by way of participating in the facilitated games and exercises, and offer my opinions in the guided reflections.

I agree that my picture(s) are the property of the researcher, but use of the aforementioned would be for research purposes only.

☐

← Please tick here if you CONSENT

I do not consent to my picture being taken, but will allow for one of the researcher's colleagues to replace me at the moment of the picture in order for my embodied tableau to be represented.

☐

← Please tick here if you DO NOT CONSENT

I understand that this consent is perpetual, that I may not revoke it, and that it is binding.

IYUNIVESHITI YASEWITWATERSRAND | YUNIVESITHI YA WITHWATERRAND

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Volunteer Name:

Date of Birth: ____ / ____ / ____

Volunteer Signature:

YUNIVESHITI YASEWITWATERSRAND | YUNIVESITHI YA WITHWATERRAND

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APPENDIX C: PSYCHOLOGIST/THERAPIST CONSENT FORM



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DRAMA FOR LIFE
Arts for Social Transformation and Healing

Participant Consent Form

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I agree that my picture(s) are the property of the researcher, but use of the aforementioned would be for research purposes only.

☐

← Please tick here if you **CONSENT**

I do not consent to my picture being taken, but will allow for one of the researcher's colleagues to replace me at the moment of the picture in order for my embodied tableau to be represented.

☐

← Please tick here if you **DO NOT CONSENT**

I understand that this consent is perpetual, that I may not revoke it, and that it is binding.

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Volunteer Name:

Date of Birth: ____ / ____ / ____

Volunteer Signature:

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APPENDIX D: SESSION PLAN

Image Theatre Research Session Plan

Day 1

(22.11.24)

Facilitator	Activity	Description	Motivation	Duration (mins)	Resources
Teto	Meditative Warm-up (Stretching)	A head to toe warm-up that focuses on breath and engaging the different body parts. It will be done in tandem with deep breathing and listening.	Warm up the body and bring awareness to the different parts, the space, and the self in the space while regulating the energy in the room through breath. This also brings awareness to the importance of breath.	10	N/A

Teto	Introduction and embodying names	Each participant to offer their name and a stretch or manoeuvre that must be echoed and attempted by all other participants, until everyone has had a chance. <i>Which languages are in the space? What interested you about this research workshop?</i>	Warming up the body and initially challenging its "muscular alienation". In the process inviting play into the space and getting to know each other.	15	N/A
Teto	Contract	Laying down ground rules and research aims and inviting participants to voice expectations. <i>What potential challenges or dangers should the participants be aware of in undergoing this process?</i>	Establishing what we will be doing within the framing of what the research aims to achieve, with a consideration of everyone's safety and rules of participation. Furthermore, this exercise invites the participants to take up agency and speak.	15	Paper and pen

Teto	Milling & seething w/ image of the day	Walking around the space and respond to prompts inviting specific tableaux. <i>Show me an image of your culture. Show me your journey from home to here etc...</i>	space. To bring awareness of to the space, how to manoeuvre within its limits, while also being aware of other bodies and how to negotiate space.	15	N/A
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			Additionally, introducing the spontaneity of following the bodily impulse without much pre- thought.		
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Teto	Check-in	A brief reflection on the just-ended exercise. <i>How are you feeling? What came up?</i> <i>Did you learn anything new about your body?</i>	Gauge where the participants are emotionally and what they are grasping at this point. This will inform if I carry on or need to stay longer in one of the exercises to steep them in the idea of "knowing the body"	5	N/A
Teto	Who am I? /Where am I?	Without words, I will whisper to individuals an occupation/profession and a location, which they would then embody.	"Making the body expressive" The participants will be challenged to leave all possible expression exclusively to the body, thus aligning their thoughts to what the body can do in the absence of	15	N/A

			their voices. They'll be talking with their bodies.		
Teto	Columbian hypnosis	In pairs participants will take turns to lead each other using the palms of their hands	Introducing power dynamics and control. A metaphoric exploration of the marginalized tribe's positionality in relation to the state backed Setswana speaking tribes	15	

Teto	Opening dialogue through the body (https://artmuseumteaching.com/2012/02/09/image-theatre-opening-a-dialogue-through-our-bodies/)	Forming a circle with the participants. Two would be invited to enter the circle and play out a very short scenario (as prompted by the facilitator) and then then freeze in an image. The rest of the group would then witness and analyse the image (levels, facial expressions etc) and give feedback on what they are seeing. After which those in the middle would change their positions based on feedback they receive from their peers. Ideally everyone should have a chance to be in the middle. <i>Have you ever been in a position where you were discriminated against for not being primarily Setswana or English speaking?</i> <i>Show us what challenges you or</i>	Allows for stories to emerge from the body and for the participants to begin witnessing with critical eyes what dynamics of power may be at play, and thus, begin to think about why it is so. Furthermore, participants would be challenged	60	N/A
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		<i>people you know have faced for not being natively Setswana speaking.</i>	to exercise their agency to make changes based on what they have witnessed and thought. NB: It's easier to advise or change something when you are not in it, but the contrary is more difficult.		
	Comfort break	Breathe, eat, walk around	-	10	N/A

Teto	Sign/gesture deconstruction	Toggling through different gestures based on what emerged in the previous exercise (but also including generic ones), the participants would be asked what the signs/gesture mean or represent, and challenged to discover what else they could mean, especially with the deliberate shift of context as induced by the facilitator. Moreover the participants would be urged to sculpt their co-participants should they want to challenge the meaning of the offered gestures. <i>Which gestures stood out to you in the previous exercise?</i> <i>How would you have expressed that</i>	Bringing awareness of ingrained meanings and inviting a deconstruction of these meanings, thus rediscovering connotation in the room at that exact point. Also, agency	60	N/A
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		<i>differently if you had to use a different gesture?</i> <i>Show us!</i>	would arise by virtue of the participants challenging through sculpting (spect-acting).		
	LUNCH	EAT, CHAT, REGROUP	-	-	N/A

Day 2
(23.11.24)

Facilitator	Activity	Description	Motivation	Duration (mins)	Resources
Teto	Re-remembering through artefacts (Listening Hour & Photography)	Stories from each participant about the articles they have brought into the space and how they connect them to their cultures. Tellers would then choose which participant they want to photograph them in an image that represents their culture at the end of their story. <i>Whitney mentioned on the group that "Gaborone has no culture". What does that mean about your respective cultures in terms of practice and visibility, especially considering that there is rich cultural diversity here?</i>	Challenging the participants to follow their impulses in embodying stories that emerge about their respective cultures. Furthermore, the image representing the story is immortalized through the photograph	60	N/A

			for future reflection and analysis.		
Teto	Story of Images	Incorporating their respective artefacts, in 2 groups of 3 or 4, the participants would tell a non-verbal story of how they can collaborate as a diverse group to stand up against language and cultural disparity. The witnessing group would comment at each phase (real, ideal and transitional) up to the final social image. After one group is done, the next one tells their story while the others witness.	A "rehearsal for the revolution" as Boal puts it. Hidden meanings emerging from witnesses to extend the potential meanings of the images.	60	
-	Comfort break	Breathe, eat, walk around	-	15	N/A
Teto	Photography reflection			45	Laptop & phones (reflection was done online due to time constraint)
Psalm and Teto	Immediate Reflections	Brief video interview of each participant sharing what they leave the workshop with as relates to Image Theatre and marginalised tongues.		25	Camera, tripod and 2 chairs

APPENDIX E: VIDEO FILES (SCREENSHOT)

