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Working with Mophato: Interrogating and Shifting Representations of Black Women in Botswana through Performance

A Research Report by Creative Research and Written Report in partial fulfilment of a MADA by Coursework and Research Report

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Supervisor: Jane Crewe

Date: 10 August 2012

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

ABSTRACT

> The voices of women have not been absent or silent, in fact, the struggle to be heard has been constant, but 'seemingly absent' because the receiver was not actively present, or possibly, the listener chose not to 'hear' (Singer, 2008: 1).

My experience in theatre and performance has led me to conclude that representations of black women often fail to give voice, or allow them to give voice, to their experiences of life in their individual societies. Instead, they are often represented as a homogenous black female, an exoticised, sexualised and/or impoverished entity that is often spoken for or about, but who never speaks for herself.

This paper is a reflection on the process I underwent with Mophato Dance Theatre to use performance to interrogate and shift representations of black women. In so doing, I chose to use Physical Theatre as an approach to theatremaking as it draws on different performance modes, providing an inclusive approach that uses physical, vocal and written texts to explore ways of re-presenting black women.

I have taken as my starting point the idea that binary oppositions create a framework for the marginalisation of certain groups in favour of others. The process focused on collapsing the distinctions between audience and spectator as well as performance space and viewing space, treating these as symptomatic of a society that emphasizes separation for the sake of simplicity in categorizing subjects. This has included an exploration around the reorganisation of the theatrical performance space to challenge the existence of these binaries. In this way I hope to call attention to the use of binaries in setting up unfavourable and simplistic categorisations of people which, I believe, have resulted in the objectification and marginalisation of women in general and black women in particular.

Thus, I have endeavoured to reconfigure performance space and create conversations to challenge existing binaries in the theatre in order to re-present black women. This has been in an effort to develop a theatremaking approach for myself that will allow me to interrogate and shift representations of subjugated identities.

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DECLARATION

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Course Code: DRAA 7003

Supervisor: Jane Crewe

Due Date: 10 August 2012

Title: Working with Mophato: Interrogating and shifting representations of Black Women in Botswana through Performance

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