

DECLARATION

I declare that this report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts in Dramatic Art to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other University.

Kabi Thulo _____

.....15thday ofDecember.....2009

ABSTRACT

This study gives expression to my journey of mediating my Sangoma, artist (performer and theatre maker) and scholarly roles. It is a personal journey that paints the picture of my multi-faceted identity, particularly within the context of pursuing my Masters studies. This study is not trapped within the confines of giving expression to my identity, but also engages with specific research questions that have guided the course of the research that is detailed in this Research Report.

Three essential areas of enquiry demarcate the parameters that define this study's locale. These are: how ritual and theatre can be synergized; can a ritual-based theatre performance facilitate *communitas* amongst an audience and what the potential shamanic characteristics of a contemporary performer are? These enquires were grappled with through a creative project entitled *They Were Silent*, which is a collaborative (research) project done by myself, Jessica Lejowa and Lerato Sekele. This creative project points to the practice as research paradigm and methodology employed by this study. It was through practice as research that this study managed to facilitate interplay between theory and practice. The theories that ground this study are Victor Turner, Richard Schechner and Malidoma Patrice Somè's ritual theories. Jerzy Grotowski's notion of *Total Act* and Richard Schechner's theatre performance practice theory that views a theatre performer as a shaman also constitute this study's theoretical base.

This study's research findings are derived from the devising, performance and post-performance phases of its creative project. These findings give voice to the merger of ritual and theatre as being dependent on the context, intentions and other factors related to a ritual-based theatre performance. Essentially, this study posits that ritual and theatre can merge when the ritual and theatre performance contexts co-exist. This Report illustrates the challenges related to the potential of a ritual-based theatre performance to facilitate *communitas* amongst a theatre audience as a means of

addressing societal fragmentation. *They Were Silent* succeeded in creating *communitas* to some extent. However, this study's shortcoming related to the facilitation of *communitas* through a ritual-based theatre performance is that its finding cannot be regarded as absolute and general.

Regarding the potential shamanic characteristics of a contemporary performer, this study generally agrees with the theory that speaks of this subject and makes the point that a contemporary performer's mode of performance, performance context and intentions can define a contemporary performer's shamanic characteristics and role. This study also makes a pertinent point that a contemporary performer's shamanic characteristics are not necessarily dependant on a performer being a practicing shaman as I am.

This study provides a possible conceptual approach of how theatre and ritual can merge, illustrates the complexities of *communitas* and proposes a perspective into how a contemporary theatre performer could be shamanic.

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DEDICATION

To my ancestral spirits (Bataung ba ha Ramokhele; Bakwena ba ga Sechele, Amazizi aka Sweleba, Amahlubi aka Zanela, Amandebele aka Ndabula, Bangwaketsi, Bafokeng, Bo Tholo Mmina Tshipe, Ntatemoholo Khanyapa le madlozi a boMndau); my family; people who are experiencing various life challenges as a result of not answering their ancestral calling; and my unborn child. *They Were Silent* was meant for you all.

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