

Sexual Abuse and Gender Conflict: The Experience of a Play Creation Process at The University Of Botswana

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The primary aim of this paper is to recreate the stages that were taken in the creation of a collaborative play entitled *Murdering the Soul* at the University of Botswana. I also hope to show how the process casts light on gender conflict in Botswana and the way that conflict was addressed in the play creation process. The description may indicate ways in which similar conflicts could be addressed through collaborative creative work.

Murdering the Soul was created in 1998-99 by UBE423 the name given to a group associated with a fourth year "Theory and Practice of Drama" course within the English Department at the University of Botswana. I am the tutor for the course, and this article takes the form of a diary, which attempts from a quite personal viewpoint, to reconstruct the whole workshop process.

Most of the students undertaking E423 have no or little experience with practical drama, but many hope to become patrons of drama clubs in Botswana's Secondary Schools. This "emergency" situation has to be seen within the context of Botswana's breath-takingly rapid expansion of secondary education as part of the 7th and 8th National Development Plans. I have tried to base the pedagogy of E423 on harnessing a tradition of collective creativity, which underpins Botswana's cultural praxis, in order to immerse the students in as wide a variety of theoretical and practical drama skills as possible. In this paper, I concentrate on the practical aspects of the course.

The pedagogic core of the course is a workshopped play, which the students create every year with my help; this is used as a heuristic tool for developing skills in playwriting, acting, directing, design, stage-management and drama theory. As the annual play is almost always (at the students' request) on a topical and often controversial issue, the process usually also requires considerable research into the social, economic, psychological or cultural factors, which contribute to the targeted problem. A brief paragraph about the social background of *Murdering the Soul* would be helpful.

Botswana has a reputation for peace and tranquillity in its social and political development, particularly by contrast with other African countries. In many ways the reputation is well deserved. This is not to say, however, that there are no conflicts or abuses. There are many abuses associated with class conflict, land appropriation, ethnic divisions and generation tensions. One of the biggest sources of conflict is gender. A patriarchal indigenous system of social relations has been distorted and exacerbated by a history of labour migration, rapid

urbanization and the break down of extended family networks and support systems. This has created a climate in which women and young girls are not only discriminated against socially, but in which they often also become victims of male aggression. Domestic violence and rape have become major social problems.

The remainder of this article describes how UBE423 tried to analyze and project this problem in theatrical form.

Week 1

Introduction to the course plus trust and group building exercises.

Week 2

The students produce a list of about twenty topics in which they are interested. Through a process of debate, elimination and amalgamation, this is reduced to a list of about six. The trust, group-building and acting exercises continue.

Week 3

In addition to building on the Week 2 skills, we create several improvised sketches based on the chosen topics. Among the most interesting of these is an improvisation of a man bullying and then sexually abusing his stepdaughter. Another sketch is based on the recent civil and military disturbances in Lesotho (a topical issue since Botswana Defence Force troops took part in the South African-led intervention force).

Week 4

The choice of topics is whittled down to two: sexual abuse of children and militarism in Botswana. My own preference is for the latter. The group, however, settles on sexual abuse of children as the chosen topic. There is a preponderance of women in the group, and many of them feel strongly that gender conflicts in modern Botswana society create a climate, which encourages sexual abuse of children, especially girls. Most of the men in the group are also happy with this choice of topic. Since UBE423 has tended to specialise in plays which focus on women's problems, there is a sense that by the very act of opting to do the course the men have expressed at least a basic sympathy towards women's issues. In any case all of us, male and female, are aware that the play-making process will force us to deal with the ways existing social mores affect attitudes toward sexuality in Botswana.

One of the improvisation groups creates a moving sketch about a girl who has been turned dumb as a result of being sexually abused. A ngaka (spirit medium/traditional doctor) gives her a gourd of medicine, which, with her mother's encouragement, she is to give to the rapist. There is some well-orchestrated suspense leading to the girl giving the gourd to her own father. Other improvisations,

however, have a crudely simplistic quality, relying excessively on unfocussed and uncontextualised dialogue.

Week 5

Now that we have chosen the topic we begin researching the issues, not in a very formal academic sense, but eclectically, in a way appropriate to our artistic goals. Some students visit Ditshwanelo an active and well-organised national NGO supporting human rights in Botswana. Individual members of Ditshwanelo give useful information and show the students a fat file of newspaper and magazine cuttings on child abuse. This gives us some useful stories for possible plot motifs.

I also talk to Gloria Jacques, the acting head of the Social Work Department at the University. She gives me a background in some of the psychological and sociological factors which give rise to the problem of sexual abuse of children in Botswana. She gives me a brief bibliography on the subject, and most usefully of all introduces me to Ms. Malecha Monthe, a social worker at Childline, with whom I have a long interview. Malecha tells me about the major problems facing Childline and takes me through a few typical case histories, explaining the social conditions which lie behind them. She is particularly keen for our play to focus on troubles Childline has with untrained and sometimes hostile members of the Police Force. In addition, using Gloria's list, we borrow books from the library about child-abuse in Africa, some theoretical, from a psychiatric or sociological viewpoint, others more practical, with case histories.

Week 6

In a plenary session the students express great interest in the research topics. The major problems, which we distill from the various research agencies are:

- 1) The high incidence of serial marriages/ relationships, leading to a large number of "step" relationships in Botswana society. According to Childline the commonest form of sexual abuse comes from step-uncles, followed by step-fathers and then step-grandfathers.
- 2) The male-dominant gender climate in Botswana's schools. This is exacerbated by neo-traditional attitudes of respect which young girls are expected to have towards male authority figures.
- 3) A far less common, but not insignificant problem is that of pedophilia and child prostitution, arising from a nexus of causes, including an emerging but very covert sex tourism industry, and the desire of some men to avoid AIDS by

seeking virgin partners.

I divide the group into three to start working on story-lines (mostly culled from the *Ditshwanelo* files) about the major issues. No attempt is made at this stage to coordinate the story-lines of the groups. Although the emphasis is on creating plots, which can effectively concretise the issues, the work of acquiring acting and directing skills continues. Almost all the sketches are in Setswana.

Week 7

We show each other the various sketches and critique them from the point of view of skills as well as content. The sketch of the first group depicts a man ill-treating his step-daughter by overworking and beating her. This leads to sexual abuse. A second group show a young math teacher bringing a young female pupil to his house to do work; this leads to him raping her. In a related sketch, a concerned female teacher reports the rape to the headmaster, who, for the sake of maintaining his school's reputation, covers the case up.

By one of those serendipitous quirks, which I find happens often in workshopped play creation, the topic of sexual abuse of children coincides with two personal testimonies given to me by adults about sexual abuse they suffered as children. They come to me as friends seeking someone sympathetic to talk to over issues that were troubling them. In the accounts that follow, I have used fictitious names.

One is a young Motswana man, Kagiso, who has recently been suspended from a Catholic seminary. One reason he has sought me out is that he has discovered that I also attended a seminary, from which, though for a different reason, I was effectively dismissed. Kagiso feels he has been stigmatized by the Irish priest responsible for discipline, because a few years earlier Kagiso repulsed the priest's sexual advances. This experience has not only traumatised Kagiso psychologically, but has stimulated severe doubts about his faith. I cannot help thinking how homosexual abuse of male children does not feature at all in the UBE423 sketches.

The other story is closer to our sketches. The testimony comes from a young Motswana woman, Gladys, who was raped as a child by her step-father. I have told Gladys about the theme of the play on which I am working and this triggers a desire in her to recoup the memories of her own rape, memories of which have come back to haunt her recently.

I have no intention at this stage of using the experiences of either Gladys or Kagiso directly, but their revelations certainly help motivate me.

Week 8

Mid-Semester break. I use the week to read extensively around the sociology and psychology of child-abuse and rape. Some of the more enthusiastic

students do likewise.

Week 9

We do a warm up dance of nightmare figures dancing around the bed of a sleeping girl, haunting her with aggressive sexual fantasies. She wakes up screaming and they disappear. We are all impressed by the theatricality of this dialogue-free scene, but are not sure how we could use it.

We continue with the sketches. The third group shows a sketch about a European tourist providing a very poor family with money in order to “buy” a young girl for a weekend. In an extension of the sketch the girl runs away from the hotel to Gaborone, where she becomes a street child. She is befriended by a group of prostitutes who induce her into a life of child prostitution.

We spend a fair amount of time discussing issues, which lie behind all three sets of sketches, especially the rise of patriarchal attitudes in modern Botswana institutions such as the family and schools. Even the males in the group are sensitive to the ways modern Botswana men often manipulate perceptions about “traditional values” in order to exploit women and girls. This creates a climate in which sexual abuse of young girls appears almost part of the natural order.

We critique the sketches and make some suggested changes. The large group elects a script committee, consisting of Ogone, Jomo, Jane and myself, to begin writing up the sketches. Everyone realises that the separate scenes need to be merged somehow to make a unified story-line.

Week 10

The script committee meets, and we agree that although the sketches have wonderful dramatic potential, there is little to link them. We are anxious that we only have a few weeks left to complete the script before the end of the first semester. We start allocating script-writing tasks from the scenes which we feel are fairly well established (mostly in Setswana). We speculate about the possibility of using the nightmare scene as part of a frame linking the scenes.

In the practical session, we do the nightmare scene again. We then get Modiri and Charity, as doctor and nurse respectively to improvise a dialogue scene with Betty playing the young girl immediately after she awakes. The group is impressed and feels that the Doctor could be a major figure in the play as some kind of narrator. We redo some of the earlier improvised sketches for the sake of the script committee to establish the dialogue. We also make a decision about which scenes should be in Setswana, which in English, and which using a mixture of languages.

The script committee has another emergency meeting, and speculates about the possibility of using discussions between the doctor and nurse as a frame for the play. We feel that it would be better to have a psychiatrist and social worker

as the protagonists of the frame, especially as Malecha gave us some information about the process of referring cases to the psychiatric wing of the hospital. We decide that the psychiatrist should be dealing with the cases of three young girls: one the victim of abuse by her teacher, one by her step-father and one by the pedophile tourist. Ogone, Jomo and Jane suggest I should work on some specimen dialogue between the psychiatrist and social worker while they are working on the dialogue for the existing sketches.

It is becoming clear that the relationship between Dr. Chileshe and the children will be important, and, at the committee's suggestion, I ring Malecha to obtain more information about the referral process from Childline to the psychiatrist.

I have a very busy weekend trying to fix the characters of the social worker and the psychiatrist. In the improvisation, Modiri portrayed the psychiatrist as a fumbling, rather insecure character. It may have been that Modiri himself felt insecure in the role. But his portrayal gives me the idea of having the psychiatrist as a very young, recently qualified man. The name which Charity gave to him in the improvisation, Dr. Chileshe, is Zambian, and this gives him, as *mkwerekwere* (an insulting name for any African from North of the Limpopo) an added insecurity.

The problem with the social worker is that she has not appeared at all in any of the improvisations, we have only talked about her in the script committee. I realize, however, that if we are looking for a contrast with Dr. Chileshe, then she needs to be mature, sensible and very experienced in Botswana culture, but not very exposed to the intricacies of psychiatric analysis. This would allow us to use a double "ignorant character" technique for exposition purposes. Almost inevitably, the social worker, whom I initially call Kedibonye ("I have seen" in Setswana) emerges with sensible, compassionate and tenacious qualities very similar to the real Malecha of Childline.

In order to build the conflict between the two characters, I play around with making Dr. Chileshe insecure because of his lack of experience. He overcompensates by relying excessively on the psychiatric jargon he learned at medical school. Two of the books we have borrowed on the psychology of child abuse are useful sources for this jargon.

In addition to writing two specimen link scenes involving Kedibonye and Dr. Chileshe, I also type out (albeit with many errors in the Setswana sections) the substantive scenes given to me by Ogone, Jomo and Jane.

Week 11

The script committee meets to read the two sets of scenes and to make changes. I rapidly make the changes and photocopy the scenes for the large group. There is general agreement that the improvised scenes have come out well, but there is dissatisfaction with the linking scenes. Jomo raises a misgiving he has raised earlier at the script committee, that most of the previous UBE423 plays

have used a frame structure. Few in the large group are worried about a repetition of the frame format, and I try to explain why that format is very common with work-shopped plays (e.g. *Woza Albert!* and *Asinamali!*). Long complex scenes are difficult to sustain in improvisation; a series of short relatively simple scenes is much easier for the actors to handle. Thus, the total play structure tends to be episodic – a series of short scenes linked together like beads on a string. The frame acts as a narrative thread to keep the beads together. In a Botswana context the narrative frame is also appropriate owing to the strength of indigenous traditions of dramatized narrative.

The problem, I suggest, is not with the frame format itself, but that the two linking scenes, which I have written for Kedibonye and Dr. Chileshe are rather boring. There is a viable character contrast, and some elements of a conflict, but there is no element of suspense. In short, the frame needs a story-line of its own. This weakness is linked to another – the total lack of an ending to the play. None of us have any idea how the play can build to some sort of climax and denouement, and we have only three weeks left in the semester before our Christmas holiday deadline. I ask the whole group to think of possible ideas for an ending.

In the next few days, I frantically try to think of possible plot lines involving Dr. Chileshe and Kedibonye, but all the ideas fizzle out. I'm beginning to feel utterly desperate when, one evening, I hear on BBC's "Focus on Africa" programme, a very moving interview with a child soldier from Sierra Leone. Immediately after the interview, I realize how the plot for the frame could be developed. If Dr. Chileshe were involved in a war situation as a child his lack of openness with Kedibonye and his reluctance to get close to the three girls could be related to earlier (now suppressed) experiences of physical and sexual abuse. The climax of the frame story could then be the revelation of his experiences to Kedibonye and the conquest of his inhibitions.

The following day we have a script committee meeting. None of the other members have developed any ideas for the ending. I run my idea with them, and they like it. We discuss the impact it would have on the character of Dr. Chileshe, and agree that we need to change his nationality from Zambian to one which would provide a plausible background for a former child soldier. We decide on Uganda, and with the help of a Ugandan colleague, change his name to Dr. Lubega. We also look again at the stories of the three girls. Ogone feels that it might be awkward to have three different narratives. We examine the three separate plots and realise that if we make the girl who is raped by her teacher the same girl who has the pedophile/child prostitute experience we could reduce the number of narratives to two.

We also think more carefully about the psychiatric aspect of the play. We decide that the girl with the screaming nightmare at the beginning of the play should be almost catatonic, struck dumb by her terrible experiences. This relates

to the early improvisation we did about a dumb girl regaining her speech. We decide to call the girl Matshwenyego (Tshwenyi for short) and she is the girl raped by her step-father. We call the other girl Nchadi, and her character is quite different. She has a hard, worldly-wise attitude (picked from her street experiences as a child prostitute), a tough mask hiding the inner trauma. Much of the suspense of the play is to lie in the way Kedibonye and Dr. Lubega help the two thirteen year old children (through a reenactment of their stories) to free themselves from their post-traumatic prisons. Somehow, we have to devise a suitable ending which links these two stories with Dr. Lubega's revelations.

When the large group meets for the practical session, there is much enthusiasm for the script committee's ideas and we have a busy time workshopping them. One group creates two scenes involving the police (using ideas from *Malecha*). In the first scene, Tshwenyi's mother reports her daughter's rape, receiving a very unsympathetic response from the two male police officers. In the second, Kedibonye blasts the police for their negligence and male prejudices.

Another group works on a scene in which a teacher at Nchadi's school, guilty about her failure to get the headmaster to take action over the rape, follows Nchadi to Gaborone. With the help of a sympathetic teacher she "rescues" Nchadi from the gang of prostitutes, and takes her to Childline. Yet another group works on an extended mime scene (with drum accompaniment) showing Dr. Lubega as a child witnessing the rape and murder of his mother in the 1982 Luwero Triangle upheavals. We are able to use some of our earlier work on the Lesotho insurrection for parts of this scene. The mime shows the young Lubega running away to survive in the bush, and his recruitment into Museveni's N.P.A. as a child soldier, where he is forced to participate in a brutal killing.

By the end of this physically and emotionally exhausting session, we are very satisfied with the progress, especially in the development of Dr. Lubega's character. However, there is still terrible anxiety about the lack of an ending. Charity suggests that the conclusion should involve the girls finally adjusting to and surviving their trauma, but she hasn't any specific plot development to which we can link that reconciliation.

Another concern, raised by a male student, Gregory, is that the play seems almost obsessively concerned with men's brutality. All the men in the play, black, white, young old, educated or uneducated seem to be either rapists, abusers or weak hypocrites who cover up for their abusive "brothers." Even the women in the group agree with Gregory that the play is at present unbalanced, and might, by appearing too preachy, alienate the audience. The group asks the script committee to work on making Dr. Lubega an even more sympathetic character than at present, and (despite the shortage of male actors) to make one of the sympathetic teachers who helps Nchadi, male.

The script committee meets again, and we allocate scenes to be written up,

with myself working on the linking scenes for Dr. Lubega and Kedibonye—including the very difficult flashback mime scene. For the latter, I arm myself with a book about Uganda's recent history and a psychology book with case histories of people traumatised by war, including some about child soldiers in African conflicts. We also deal with the problem of how Tshwenyi, struck dumb after the rape, is able to tell Kedibonye about it. I ring Malecha again, and she explains how at Childline they often use dolls for the purpose of prompting children who cannot or who are reluctant to talk. I immediately realize the dramatic potential of this solution.

During these frantically busy days of research and writing Gladys comes to see me. I tell her about the progress of the play, in which she feels she has invested much of her own emotional capital. She says her discussion with me and her thoughts about the play have made her think more about the sexual abuse which she suffered and the impact it had on her later life. She says she wants to tell me about another experience which she had previously suppressed. The story is from a later period of her life, when she was eighteen. Her step-uncle, with whom she was staying, tried to seduce her. She was so terrified and angry, after the earlier rape by her step-father, that she grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed her aggressor. It was only a light wound and her step-uncle did not report the incident to the police. The attack left another terrible scar on Gladys's psyche; she feels she cannot have a successful relationship with men since then and fears that she will never have a child because of fear that s/he could be sexually abused. Tears roll down her face while she tells the story, and I am uncomfortably aware of the deep waters in which I am trying to swim.

I'm worried that I might be triggering off emotions in Gladys that could exacerbate rather than heal her wounds. I also feel guilty that I might be using Gladys as mere raw material for the play, recycling her trauma for the audience's voyeuristic pleasure. Gladys is an intelligent well-educated woman, and is fully able to understand my qualms, particularly as she, a young black woman, is confiding in a middle-aged white male. Gladys, however, assures me that she has never had the confidence to talk about these events before, that reliving the memory is doing her a lot of good, and she really wants me to put as much of her experiences as possible into the play. She feels it would give some value and utility to parts of her life, which up to now she has always felt to be totally negative.

Another rather uncomfortable speculation, which occurs to me is that the relationship which Dr. Lubega has with Nchadi and Tshwenyi might be rather similar to the one I have with Kagiso and Gladys, and perhaps also the actors. That is my interest in but also inhibitions about the subject may be linked to personal concerns about my own emotions. I try to dismiss these fears by rationalizing that *all* creativity depends to some extent upon a predatory relationship between creators and subject matter.

The encouragement I receive from Gladys gives me the confidence to seek

out Kagiso, as I follow a hunch that these two testimonies might hold the key for unlocking the elusive conclusion to the play. To my surprise, Kagiso too is very happy to talk to me, and was in any case, on the point of contacting me to update me on his progress. He says that since the last talk he has felt very strongly the need to expose the sexual abuse he received at the seminary, partly to draw attention to the hypocrisy of those Catholic Church leaders who hushed the incident up, but partly also to put the incident behind him. He's thinking of allowing himself to be interviewed by one of the popular newspapers and wants my opinion. I ask him if he's thought about the impact on his family. He assures me that his anonymity will be strictly maintained. I tell him that in those circumstances the newspaper article might be a good way of dealing with his trauma, and perhaps saving other seminarians a similar fate.

I tell him about my idea of using his experiences in the flashback scene about the young Dr. Lubega. As with Gladys, I explain my inhibitions about exploiting his trauma for public consumption. As with Gladys (and for similar reasons), he tells me not to worry about the idea of exploitation; as long as his own anonymity is guaranteed, he is very happy with the idea of weaving his experiences into the play. I ask him to go over the story again and, with his permission, I take notes. Kagiso, like Gladys, is looking forward to seeing the finished play.

When I get home, I go straight into the Dr. Lubega narrative of his Ugandan experiences, basing myself on the case histories I've read in the book chapter on children and war. First I do the scene of the young Lubega witnessing his mother's rape and murder, followed by his initiation into the NPA. This scene is relatively easy since we have improvised a dance mime on this topic and the images are vivid in my mind. The scene is to appear after Nchadi's story—just over half way through the play, at the point when Kedibonye gets Dr. Lubega to agree that he's personally involved with the cases of Tshwenyi and Nchadi, because of the traumas he's trying to cover up from his own childhood. I also have the idea of using Kagiso's story as part of the young Lubega's experiences, but am not quite clear how it can fit into the play. I also write two very brief scenes in which Kedibonye uses dolls to tease out Tshwenyi's story of the rape.

Week 12

When the script committee meets there's unanimous enthusiasm both for the new scenes and for the emerging shape of the play. We make some changes to the new scenes (including the translation of the two doll scenes into Setswana), I type them out and have them photocopied. We are all still uncomfortably aware that we don't have a climax or conclusion.

In the practical session, we do a dramatized reading through the new scenes, including the mime. The whole group is satisfied. Towards the end of the session, Bonanza Garebatho, a former UBE423 student, who has strong skills in

choreography, works with us on the opening of the play—the nightmare dance depicting Tshwenyi’s traumatic fantasies. He uses a song “Thiba ka mo” which is about shielding oneself from someone who is trying to stab you. Bonanza creates a dance where nightmare figures mime stabbing movements while the restless, sleeping Tshwenyi tries to ward off their blows. When she awakes screaming the nightmare figures disappear.

The group approves the dance. I feel electrified by it. The image of Tshwenyi warding off the phallic knife-blows echoes very strongly the images from Gladys’s story of her obsession with knives after her rape, and how she turned that anger against her step-uncle. After the practical session, I have time to reflect on these images. One reason for my excitement is that it makes concrete an idea which I realize the play has been groping toward, namely the link between sexual abuse of children and aggression. Sexual abuse is like an undeclared war waged by men against women and girls. The cycle of violence this triggers off has catastrophic effects. In the books I have been reading on the psychology of child abuse, there is considerable analysis of the phenomenon of “intergenerational abuse transmission,” whereby victims reproduce the aggression they experienced by becoming aggressive themselves. A possible ending for the play reveals itself. It would link the stabbing image from Gladys’s story and “Thiba ka mo” with the very early sketch we did about the dumb girl who recovers her speech.

Towards the end of the play, Tshwenyi sleeps in the psychiatric unit of the hospital, as at the beginning of the play. She has another nightmare vision of she and Nchadi holding knives above the kneeling men who abused them—Tshwenyi’s father and the police officer and Nchadi’s rapist teacher and the pedophile tourist. She and Nchadi slit the throats of their abusers. Tshwenyi wakes up, and, still confused, stabs the only man in the room, Dr. Lubega. It is a mere flesh wound. Tshwenyi collapses. While Dr. Lubega is being treated Kedibonye covers up the incident with the nurse, and cajoles Tshwenyi out of her state of near unconsciousness. When Dr. Lubega returns, bandaged up, he tells Tshwenyi that he is not angry with her. He tells her, Nchadi and Kedibonye about the sexual abuse he endured as a child at a Catholic orphanage (Kagiso’s story). Kedibonye translates to Tshwenyi. The story provides evidence Kedibonye needs to convince the girls (especially Tshwenyi) that not all men are evil and they too can be victims of sexual abuse. If Dr. Lubega could overcome his terrible experience to become a successful and productive member of society, they could do the same. Tshwenyi is so moved by the story, by Kedibonye’s persuasion and by Dr. Lubega’s forgiveness that she regains her speech. She hugs Dr. Lubega and the play ends.

I quickly write up the ending, using Kagiso’s words almost verbatim for Dr. Lubega’s flashback. We have a script committee meeting in which we go over my proposed ending. Apart from some minor changes (mostly cutting down on Dr. Lubega’s psycho-babble), the committee endorses the ending enthusiastically.

I type up the changes and get this and a cast list photocopied.

Week 13

We take the changes to the whole group, and again there is unanimous, and very relieved, acceptance of the ending. Gregory is particularly pleased because it provides a more balanced view of men than our earlier versions of the play. We discuss various possible titles and the group decides, against my own preferences, on the title, *Murdering the Soul*, an allusion to a choral line by Tshwenyi and Nchadi in Tshwenyi's second nightmare scene.

Toward the end of the session we discuss the casting of the play. Although there are enough roles for everyone (26) in the group to have a part, some will have much bigger roles than others. I give the group two options, democratic casting by the whole group or autocratic casting by myself. The advantage of democratic casting is that it is itself a useful learning experience, the disadvantage is that it can sometimes lead to feelings of jealousy or rejection if mutual trust has not been sufficiently well established within the group. We decide on democratic casting. I explain the principles of casting, hand out the cast list and we discuss the requirements of each character. We agree to do the casting itself later in the week. I have a lot of work doing the final version of the play so that the actors can learn lines over the Christmas holiday.

The casting session goes well. Ogone, who is probably the most experienced actor in the group gets the role of Kedibonye, a key part requiring both narrative and dramatic skills. Jane and Betty, two of the shortest, but very talented actors in the group get the roles of Nchadi and Tshwenyi respectively. The most difficult choice is for Dr. Lubega. The most experienced male actor in the group is Jomo, but the choice finally falls on Modiri, who is much taller, with a gravitas that probably makes him more suitable for the character. The casting for the minor parts (including some doubling up) is also very sensible.

I manage to finish typing the play, pasting together all the separate scenes and ensuring continuity.

Week 14

There is a rather unpleasant aftermath to the casting exercise. Some of the group are not happy with Jane being cast as Nchadi. Jane is a young "coloured" woman, and some feel that it would be more appropriate for her to have Tshwenyi's role, in that Tshwenyi's father is only her step-father, so it would be plausible for her real father to have been an absconding white man. Jane is upset about this, feeling that she is the victim of racist prejudice. I explain to the group about stylization and realism, relating it to the theories of Stanislavsky and Brecht, which we have been studying in the theoretical component of the course. I point out that our play is stylized rather than realistic, so we do not have to have totally realistic

casting. For example, Ogone is a young woman playing the part of a middle aged woman. I give examples of the Zimbabwean group Zambuko/Izibuko who have non-gender and non-racial casting, with whites playing the roles of blacks (or vice versa) and men playing the parts of women. We stick to the original casting and I'm able to persuade Jane not to get too discouraged by the incident.

The play is printed and distributed and the actors urged to learn their lines over the Christmas vacation. I also send the script to Childline for their comments. Malecha makes some minor complaints about choice of words (e.g. the use of the term "victim" when the currently correct term is "survivor"). I don't ask the actors to change the lines, since the colloquially "incorrect" language seems appropriate in the context of the discussions.

2nd Semester — Rehearsals and Performance

This article focuses on the creation of *Murdering the Soul*, so I do not want to dwell on the rehearsal process. There are two achievements, however, which do throw light on the resolution of gender conflicts.

One relates to Modiri's struggle to come to grips with the very complex character of Dr. Lubega. In the early rehearsals, Modiri is painfully inhibited, and finds it very difficult to open up, just as the character he is playing has similar inhibitions about revealing his past to Kedibonye. Modiri is very aware that his difficulty in expressing emotion in the area of sexuality is linked to culturally acquired taboos, and society's perceptions about male "decorum." He also realises that the struggle to overcome those inhibitions is linked to a wider process taking place in Botswana. Especially after the crisis of the AIDS epidemic, men and women are having to learn to be much more open in the discussion of sexuality, a loosening up, which women seem to find easier than men.

In the psycho-dynamics of the rehearsal process, Ogone is able to give considerable help to Modiri in his "loosening up," just as Kedibonye gives to Dr. Lubega. The most difficult scene for Modiri is the one in which Lubega finally cracks and reveals to Kedibonye that he himself was an abused child. I ask him to visualise a baby bird cracking through an egg-shell. Kedibonye is like a mother helping him break the shell, but not wanting to hurt the embryo inside; the bird itself has to peck its way out of the shell. In one of our run-throughs of the scene, Modiri suddenly loses his inhibitions and "cracks through the shell." When we finish there is an awed silence, and then the three of us hug each other with excitement.

Another incident involves Bordack who plays the minor part of Sejabana, the man who rapes his step-daughter. The scene involves Tshwenyi's mother, after finding out about the rape of her daughter, using quite explicit language in her denunciation of her husband. The particular words which cause the problems are: "wena kafa o njela ngwana". Although the script has already been approved,

once the scene is rehearsed, several people in the group (mostly men), feel that the language is too explicit. The vast majority of the women, however, feel that the language is entirely appropriate given the level of provocation. In a debate which reveals (and teaches) much about gendered attitudes to Setswana conventional discourse in the discussion of sexuality, the majority convince the objectors that the line must be kept.

Bordack himself projects Sejabana as a rather flat character in the early rehearsals, a crude, macho villain. I ask him to speculate what might have made Sejabana into such a brute. Bordack begins to realize that there are links between Sejabana's frustration about his economic status and the aggression, which he directs towards Tshwenyi; Bordack is thus able to make both Sejabana's motivation, and the message of the play, more complex.

By the time we have our first performance, in the student hall at the University of Botswana there has been considerable publicity about the play, in newspaper articles, posters and information related to the Maitisong Festival, for which the play has been selected. Some of the issues in the play have also attracted recent attention, partly owing to a series of widely reported seminars held by the women's rights group, Emang Basadi, on the topic of rape, and partly because Kagiso's anonymous story has been published in *The Midweek Sun*.

At the first performance (free of charge), there is an enormous audience, which I estimate to be in the region of 1400. I have several anxieties about the impact the play's sensitive themes might have on the boisterous crowd. The most open statement of the play's theme comes in a scene between Dr. Lubega and Kedibonye just before Tshwenyi's second nightmare. Kedibonye explains that in Botswana the police often collude with rapists in a male attitude whereby "women and girls are there to gratify men" and no real distinction is made between "consensual and forced sex." Dr. Lubega compares the situation to warfare:

For those of us who have known the horror of war this is all incomprehensible. Botswana must be the only country in Africa which has enjoyed genuine peace for decades. How can the men start declaring war on the women and girls?

I am worried that these lines, which Modiri directs to the auditorium, especially coming from a character who is a *mkwerekwere*, might alienate some of the men in the audience. At the performance there is some whistling and inter-gender "jossing", but no open hostility.

Among the audience, on the front row as invited guests, are Kagiso, Gladys, as well as Malecha and Ms Pelononi Leshwiti (another social worker) from Childline. Their presence also makes me feel anxious, in case they may feel we have distorted the truth. My fears are unfounded. After the performance both

Kagiso and Gladys come to hug me, to congratulate the actors and to say how much they enjoyed the play, and how personally rewarding they have found it. Gladys is especially eloquent in her explanation that seeing the play (particularly the reconciliatory ending) has helped her come to terms with her own memories and anxieties. Some days later, Pelononi writes a letter congratulating us, expressing satisfaction with the good publicity for Childline and pointing to only minor quibbles with the text of the play.

Conclusion

After this very long account, I wish simply to make the briefest of speculations about the nature and extent of reconciliation and conflict resolution which the play generated. Without any objective methods for analyzing the audience response, it is difficult to gauge the success of the play as a general tool for conflict resolution. For Kagiso and Gladys, I have no reason to disbelieve their strong assertions that their involvement in the play was very therapeutic. The actors too in post-performance evaluations, have indicated that the process of making the play was extremely revealing, not only about the facts of child sexual abuse in Botswana, but also of the cultural, social and economic conditions which give rise to it. It has helped many of them clarify and adjust their attitudes to these topics. Significantly, one of the students most skeptical of the topic, Gregory, became enthusiastic, and used a similar topic in a play he wrote himself for a portfolio within the course.

For myself, the experience has been sometimes shattering, often inspiring, and always extremely revealing.

Finally, I am aware that this paper has hinted at, but not attempted to answer, a question about how far the kind of research which went into the play can go in exploring people's real pain. The pain is a fact; drama is fiction. The fiction depends upon the pain, but cannot in all morality replicate it. I'm aware that my paper leaves wide open questions about the extent to which and the circumstance in which it is legitimate for art to exploit people's lives and suffering for aesthetic or didactic purposes. The negotiation of that ethical minefield, however, would require more sophisticated philosophical instruments than my semi-autobiographical paper has been able to provide.

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