

The Impact of Interactional Theater on Women in Sex Work

Based on research conducted in cooperation with Theater For A Change in Malawi, Africa.

Silje Berg Rødal

Candidate number 331

Master in drama and theatre communications

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Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences



Figure 1: Photo taken by Silje Berg Rødal during the Lilongwe performance

PREFACE

“There are two primary choices in life: to accept conditions as they are, or accept the responsibility for changing them” (Waitley, 2009).

This has been a long, tiring, dreading, rewarding, fun and inspiring journey. I have gone from being at my lowest low alone and scared during the darkest nights in Lilongwe, to being at my highest high during the performance at the beachside in Salima. It has been a rollercoaster, nothing like what I expected. But for once it was a rollercoaster that I liked being on. I have learned so much about myself throughout this progress as well as I have learned so much about the possibilities within theatre. There are no limits to what you can do if only you believe in it.

The ladies I was so lucky to work with showed me what creating change meant, and how far they were willing to go to create a new and better life for themselves and for others in the same situation as them.

They have been my inspiration throughout this whole progress and I am forever grateful that I got a chance to meet them and be a part of their lives, even if it was only for a couple of months. Thank you for making me part of your group.

I would also like to thank my mom and my dad for being my biggest supporters, always cheering me on from the sidelines. I would not have gotten through this if it wasn't for your many phone calls telling me I would be ok. Thank you.

I also need to thank Theatre For a Change for giving me this opportunity, it has been an honor seeing and taking part in a little bit of the work you do. I will never forget it. Zikomo Kwambili.

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INTRODUCTION

Using theater as a tool for creating change and bringing empowerment is a field that I have been interested in for a long time. During my second year at California State University of Long Beach I was introduced to an organization named InterACT. They were practicing forum theatre around the USA and at various military camps around the world. Their performances were split in two with first the performances of small scenes where the audience could take part and change the action followed with second, a discussion about the scenes and what had unfolded on stage. They performed scenes about rape culture and alcohol in one of my communication classes, and I was hooked from the very first scene. I was delighted that theater could be used in such a simple, but effective way, with no props, no make-up, and no back story, the actors dove right into the scene and my classmates engaged by jumping up on stage and taking part. It was amazing and different than anything I had seen before. Of course I realized later that the field had been around for a long time with Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire leading the way, but I had only been introduced to theatre as performance and stage work.

After watching the performance I got in touch with the leader of the organization and asked to join in on their meetings to see how it all worked. He also told me about other organizations doing similar work, and others using theatre for change in very different ways. This sparked an interest in me, and I looked everywhere for more information and for more examples of what I came to call applied theatre. After a while I came across various groups in Africa. I knew right away that this was something I wanted to look into and work with in the future. Reading a lot of

Jennifer S. Hartley's work also inspired me to look at opportunities everywhere and not just in organizations or projects that already existed. This was also interesting as it demanded a lot more from me both personally and professionally.

When I was planning and trying to figure out what I would do for my thesis I realized that creating something completely new, without any experience or knowledge about the country or applied theatre would be too big of a challenge, and eventually lead to a negative experience for me. So I decided to contact organizations I knew about, but still creating opportunities for myself by asking if I could do a study on applied theatre instead of filling a position they might already have been looking for.

This led me to Theatre For a Change and the opportunity of a lifetime.

THEATRE FOR A CHANGE

Theater For a Change is a nongovernmental organization that works with different projects using a variety of theatrical methods to create change around the world. They have pioneered a unique method to promote behavior change and policy change, using aspects of participatory learning. In the project that I am looking at this learning is made through interactive theater with female sex workers in Malawi. Theatre For a Change in Malawi works with a lot of different groups and topics, but a common thread is that the goal is for the participants to learn how to create change themselves. Giving the participants tools they can use in their life in the future, not just during the project period (Theatre For a Change , 2016).

The reason theatre has such a big role in their work is its ability to take us out of ourselves and to put our most personal stories, emotions and behaviors on display. Using theatre as a way to try out actions and seeing reactions that might come out in real life situations. During the training week an interactional theater piece is devised using participants' personal narrative that reflect the risks and difficulties they face in their own lives. After observing and acknowledging the truth of the dramas, individuals are invited on stage to tag into the action and change the narrative as they see fit. This is commonly known as the touch tag method. Empowered by the freedom to play and try new things everyone is encouraged to find their own solutions to the issues shown on stage (Theatre For a Change , 2016)

Theatre For a Change's method of behavior change is well-founded in research and practice, using Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre techniques, the educational theory of Paulo Freire and Robert Chambers' insights into Participatory Learning and Action. The method was first used in Ghana in 2003 as a tool to stop the increase of HIV/AIDS. It has later been used in Malawi, Burkina Faso and Senegal, dealing with a lot of various issues relating to sexual and reproductive health and gender. After twelve years of using the method with various people from various parts of the society, there has been a lot of evidence to prove that the method leads to achieving sustainable, positive change for the participants (Theatre For a Change, 2016).

Participation is a key element in the work that Theatre For a Change does and all of the projects are dependent on people wanting to take part, showing energy and enthusiasm. This idea can be explained easily using a car metaphor.

Theater = Vehicle

Participation, energy, enthusiasm = Gas

Change, Empowerment = Destination.

All parts work together creating a successful project that hopefully will lead to three things.

1. Individual impact

2. Group impact

3. Community impact.

Therefore it is important to remember that the level of participation determines the effectiveness of the behavior change. As participants are the experts, their contribution is required in order to identify and explore behaviors within the group. This is important for my research as it is all based on voluntary attendance.

TITHANDIZANE

This is the project that I got to work with and do research on. The Sex Workers' Project 'Tithandizane' – empowering female sex workers to improve their health and advocate for their rights. The project empowers female sex workers in Lilongwe, Kasungu and Salima, to identify behaviors that put their health at risk and develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills to reduce this risk. Participants take part in peer facilitated behavior change workshops. They also change the attitudes of their community, clients and power holders using interactive theatre (Theatre For a Change , 2016).

RESEARCH QUESTION

There is two research questions that I have been working with throughout this process. Both based on the Tithandizane project and its effectiveness. One being directed at the women in sex work and their part in the project, the other taking in the consideration of the community members. For the second one it is important to remember that there were five different communities, and therefore five different audiences.

1. What impact does performing their own experiences and stories using interactional theater have on the women in sex work?
2. What impact does watching these experiences and stories performed have on the audiences in the communities?

IMPACT

To understand the research questions and this project it is important to have a clear definition of the term impact. Our language is complicated, and without clear guidance and agreement on what we are saying there is a big chance for confusion and miscommunication. I took a lot of time trying to figure out the exact difference between effect and impact, and deciding what word I would use for my research questions. However Theatre For a Change have been using the word impact in the project for a long time, and I think it is important for me to stay true to the language they use. Impact to me is also a stronger change, whereas being effected by something can mean a change in mood or feeling, an impact creates a bigger change within a person or a group.

MALAWI

To understand this research a basic knowledge of Malawi is necessary, particularly when it comes to the field of sex work and the status of women in the country. In this sub-chapter I will introduce some of the important facts and numbers, so the data and the analysis will make sense in the context it is set in.

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world, and with a population of 16,3 million people there is constant need for jobs and economic growth. This leads to the population having to take on whichever jobs they can get. One of these jobs are as a sex worker. Being a sex worker in Malawi is tough, not well paid and extremely risky. There are precautions and safety regulations that should be followed, but unfortunately these things are not always known to the women in the field. One of the biggest issues is HIV and not staying safe.

Malawi's HIV prevalence is one of the highest in the world with 10.3% of the population living with HIV 1. In 2013 an estimated 1,000,000 Malawians were living with HIV and 48,000 people died from HIV-related illness (National Statistical Office, 2011). HIV disproportionately affects women in comparison to men in Malawi. The 2010 Malawi demographic and health survey found that HIV prevalence among women was 12,9%. It has also been found that HIV prevalence among sex workers is as high as 70% (National Statistical Office, 2011). Sex workers in Malawi also face high levels of discrimination and stigma when seeking HIV services, further increasing their vulnerability to HIV. A growth in confidence and understanding about their rights can help make it easier for these women to seek help, and to take control.

METHOD

In this chapter the reader will get an insight into the various methods used to collect and analyze data for this research study. First by looking at what view I came in to this study with, and then getting into the actual methods of the research. In the end I will bring up some ethical reflections that I felt was necessary to get through this research study.

MY ROLE AND MY PERSPECTIVE

I will be observing the training and the performances as well as talking with the participants and taking part in some of the activities. I will then look at the data and interpret it to answer the research questions asked in the beginning of this thesis. My view is based in the science of hermeneutics theory. To understand something, we always need to interpret it and give it our own meaning based on what we see and experience. In traditional hermeneutics 1500 - 1800 the hermeneutical circle responds to a relationship between the part of the text and the whole text (Gadamer, 2008). But in modern time the theory has been updated, looking at people, conversations, places and other factors as well. This updated theory is what I will be working through. All factors matter and being able to go down to Malawi and spend a couple of months in the culture will give me a better understanding on how the women are impacted.

A lot of scientists have given hermeneutics different meaning, but the definition of Gadamar is the one that I use. He explored the use of hermeneutics in all disciplines of lives, showing how the hermeneutical theory was important and necessary for all human understanding. I am an outsider, looking at the sex workers and the interactional theater from my view (Gadamer, 2008).

I want the reader to be aware that my experience in the field and in the country is limited, so this thesis is solely based on the two months in Africa and extensive reading both before and after the trip.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

My research will be qualitative with a focus on observation, conversation and an interpretation of the data collected. The goal is to understand the data and how the work done by Theatre For a Change impact the female sex workers and the communities they perform in. This understanding will come from the material I collect. In 2009 Alvesson and Sköldbberg wrote in their book Reflexive Methodology that;

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”

(Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p.17).

This definition is wide and includes a lot of various things, but I also think it is helpful in understanding the use of qualitative research and it worked as the main guide for my research.

METHODS

In the next few subchapters I will explain the methods and tools that I have used to collect and interpret the data.

FIELDWORK

Fieldwork will be important in my thesis, as I want to see how the Malawian female sex workers are effected by their performances. Reading about the method and the work done beforehand by Theatre For a Change gives a good ground base for the research, but to complete the research, observation and being present throughout the work is key. Talking to the women and the people in the local community will show the impact of the work and the positive or negative results. Katrine Fangen writes about the relevance of “place dimension” in the implementation of field work , and that this is important in relation to informants and " the cultural context in which they interact within, and the structural limits their position in society imposes them" (Prisoner, 2010, p. 78). The work that is performed is influenced by the area the project is in, the culture that it takes place in and the social status of the area and the people. By being in the field I can see these site-specific events that affect and influence not just the performances, but also the women.

CONVERSATIONS

Conversations and interviews with the practitioners, the leaders and the audience will make out part of the research material. The leaders can describe why they do what they do and how the process have been before me arriving. They can put into words thoughts I might fail to word myself. I am doing research on their work and so them as people are just as interesting for the

research as the women is. I will also have conversations with the participants. This is to see if they feel like there have been an impact, and if they feel like they have changed at all. Having conversations at different times will also point out differences in behaviors that the women themselves might not notice. These conversations will be open and without firmly prepared questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The participants will have the opportunity to share their own feelings and discoveries. I will also conduct small conversations with a randomly selected sample of the audience after every performance. For these conversations I will have prepared questions to make it easier for both the participants and the translator. The answers and discoveries from these conversations will be helpful for answering the second research question.

OBSERVATION NOTES

To be sure I remember every impression and all the methods and practices being used I will use observation and observation notes. Using observation notes will give me the chance to write down anything without using a filter, making sure nothing that might seem unimportant is wasted. Not knowing how things can change in the process it is important to have as much material as possible. The observation notes will also be used as a diary, which includes taking down key words as the observation is taking place, and writing reflections and thoughts at the end of the session/day. This will keep the focus on the observation, making sure that as little as possible is missed. It is also important to note that this master will be written by me, and thus will be influenced by my way of thinking. I have a responsibility to be as separated from my thoughts as possible, but I want the reader to be aware that these observations are mine and therefore automatically effected by who I am as a person. As Aase and Fossåskaret writes, "It is

not so that the data is hiding behind the scenes, waiting to be collected by the skilled field worker who has succeeded in getting there. Behind this understanding is the idea that data is always created through an interpretive process” (Aase & Fossåskaret, 2007, p.36).

I'm the interpreter and hence my brain and my thoughts will be part of the research automatically.

PHOTOGRAPHY

It is often said that “a picture says more than a thousand words”, a phrase I took to heart when I was very young. Photography can create an impression and tell a story in a completely different way than just text does. If you have ever read an article about a small child who has not received food for a month you probably found yourself being shocked and sad, but most likely quickly moving on and forgetting about the problem in a short amount of time, while if you see an image of a starving child, it will be stored in the brain, and the sight of the little child might return throughout the day. It makes the situation more real and we realize that what we read is true. In a study of Walker Evans and his use of photography as a research method Nordeman writes:

“So, the camera is Capable of two capacities at the same time, it can objectify reality and subjectify it. In this dual function lies the value of overusing photography as a research method. The (if you will) photographer's ass is always covered. You may not agree with his/her (Subjective) evaluation, but thanks to the objective nature of photographs you can't deny its truthfulness; in this sense, the photos serve as pieces of evidence. Evidence, of course, is what everyone is looking for” (Nordeman, 2007).

The pictures will work as evidence for the things I write, but also as a tool for creating depth and a sense of reality to the work.

VIDEO

I will use video as a way of saving and storing data. “Perhaps the greatest strength of choosing video as a method for social research is its flexible and almost limitless potential for gathering, analyzing” (Harris, 2016, p.24). Using video I will be able to re-watch the rehearsals and the performances as I am writing my thesis and also pick out moments that is important for the study.

ETHICAL REFLECTIONS

When doing research on a topic with sensitive stories and real life experiences there is a lot of extra work that needs to be put into the planning and the execution of the research. The culture is completely different from the one I am used to, and therefore the field of sex work is also looked at completely different. Throughout my research I had to respect this and take it into consideration when deciding what research methods to use. This was done by extensive reading into the country, the people, the culture and the work. I made sure I got an understanding of where I was traveling and what I could expect. I had to be as prepared and ready as I could be when traveling to work with something completely foreign to me. I have no right to judge, make assumptions or force a certain view on the women, especially not knowing the story behind their actions.

The description of applied theatre and a researcher from a foreign place by Thompson has been extremely important for me during this research. "We are only ever visitors within the disciplines into which we apply our theatre...We are not experts in these areas nor should we seek to be. One of applied theater's strengths is in its status as the outsider, the visitor and the guest" (Thompson, 2003, p.20). I travelled to Africa, a continent that I have never been to before. To Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world. Culture shock, a feeling of being overwhelmed, loneliness and a sense of not belonging were all part of the struggles I went through during my two month journey. It was hard to understand and accept at times that it was ok to not be an expert on their culture and lives, as long as I stayed open and listened to what they had to say.

There is also much to be said about organizations helping in third world country, and why it's being done and for who? At certain times before the fieldwork, the question: Do they want our help? came up a lot. But this was quickly answered when I met the women in the program. They were all excited and happy to get this opportunity, and as everything is voluntary, the women were very strong on their wish to be there and take part. An important factor to this is also that the goal is not to make the female sex workers quit their job, the goal is merely to make them understand their rights. And how to execute them.

THEORY

In this chapter I will explain and investigate the various theories and definitions used throughout the project focusing on three major categories; Applied theater; Freire and Augusto Boal; African theatre.

APPLIED THEATRE

I have always been fascinated and interested in the field of applied theatre, even before I actually knew the definition of the term. Using theatre as a tool of communication and a tool of empowerment is a field that is new to me and I think it will be a very important field in the future. With the world getting smaller and smaller, and people having to immigrate to new cultures without knowing the language or the social context, theatre can be a great solution to make sure integration is done in the best way possible. So getting to work with applied theatre was both exciting and rewarding. I have read a lot about the field, and one thing that is evident is that there is no set in stone definition that you have to stick with. Various researchers have written their own definitions and explained the field and the term in their own words. I have become familiar with Phillip Taylors way of thinking and I think that he is one of the people that explain the concept in the simplest way. "The theater is applied because it is taken out from the conventional mainstream theater house into various settings in communities where many members have no real experience in theater" (Taylor, 2006 , p.1).

This is a very basic definition that explains why something can be called applied theater, and for most people that would be enough of an explanation. For me as a researcher however it has also been important to bring in more to the context. I needed to look into people that brought in

change to applied theater, "Aim to help people who are unable to or afraid to express themselves to discover their voice" (Hartley, 2012, p.1) and researchers who have taken applied theater to a new level through their studies, creating theater pieces that were deliberately intended to lead the audiences to become more self-aware and self-reflexive. Many of these new ideas came together in the work of Peter Brook whose theater-making was designed to join spectators, actors and performance in a communal celebration of experience (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009).

Peter Brook explains the exact kind of theater that Theatre For a Change works with. Interactional theatre. Interactional theatre lets the audience become a part of the ensemble and opens up and the possibility for conversation between different groups of people.

One of my biggest inspirations throughout this journey have been Jennifer Hartley. She has worked with applied theater for many years and she explains perfectly how a research study like this really isn't a finished product with all the answers. The project keeps going on after I have finished my data collection and so impacts from the project might appear or disappear after my work is done.

"I often talk about how an applied theater project is like going to see a movie and walking out fifteen minutes before the end. You may almost know the outcome, you might be able to guess what it might be, but you don't see it the whole way through – the story is unfinished. Applied theater work never actually ends, it is complete for the facilitator at a certain stage, but the work continues through the influence on the individual or community in various ways. A successful applied theater project will leave participants with the skills to integrate aspects of the work in a way that speaks to them as they proceed" (Hartley, 2012, p. 82).

This explanation is also a big reason for why I wanted to work with Theatre For a Change. They never do work with a group and then just leave them as soon as they feel like their work is done.

They teach the participants lessons that they hopefully will bring with them into the future, and give them opportunities to stay with the projects forever if they want. Jennifer also explains how effects can be small or big, but still just as important and worthy. “The fact that they stated their similarities was a huge step forward, just like the women sharing their stories in our workshops” (Hartley, 2012, p.59) and in a different project, “In their isolation and silence many of these men had come to feel they were alone in their suffering. Finding common ground is key” (Hartley, 2012, p.22).

I have also found it helpful to look at theory that explains how the participants help themselves by being forced to look at their lives and community through theater. Joy F. Morrison explains the concept by looking into both the audience and the participants in the play. Not only can theater be a medium for information flow; it can also be, according to Epskamp: a microscope through which the local population can examine and analyze its own community (Morrison, 1991). The theater is successful because people recognize themselves and their own lives on stage. This was also a big part of why Henrik Ibsen in his time became famous with his realistic plays, *The Wild Duck* and *The Dollhouse* that showed how life was like for a normal middle class family at the time. People recognized characters, stories and actions from their own lives and it left them thinking about the play for a long time after it was done.

“Members of the audience identify with the action because they see their own problems, frustrations, and emotions reflected in it. These performances create a sense of community among the spectators and between spectators and performers thus the content of the play produced in rural areas should reflect the realities of African village life” (Morrison, 1991).

Talking about one of the most important elements of applied theatre, the connection between the audience and the performers. To create this connection and give life to the spectator the language and the way the play is presented is important.

“Botswanas minister of education, the honorable K.P.Marake, reminded a team of popular theater practioners that “to develop democratically, the government and the people must be able to speak to one another and must use a language that everyone understands. The task of popular theater was to provide this language and to communicate ideas and messages from the center to the remotest villages in the land” (Desai, 1990).

Devising the theatre pieces together through discussion and conversations helps create a language that everyone can understand. It also lets people think about how they feel and why their opinions are the way they are. When talking to people about this project I found that a lot of people wanted me to make sure the women performed a certain issues, or make sure the audience felt a certain way about sex workers. I think a many of them thought I was travelling to Africa to create good and share the right views. But that is not what I was doing at all. I was traveling to learn and explore how well theatre works as a communication tool for sex workers in Malawi. It was not my job to tell anyone what is right or wrong.

“Life is not simple, with clear lines between good and bad, black and white. In reality issues are rarely clear-cut. People often insist I must take on a right or wrong stance in my work. They say I must make judgements about what is best or right for people and promote it. But that is not what the work is about. I do not tell people to behave, I explore their behavior with them. Exploration and discussion” (Hartley, 2012, p.18).

The field of applied theatre can bring you anywhere in the world, and I think being open and understanding what your role is as a researcher is the most important thing you can do.

PAULO FREIRE AND AUGUSTO BOAL

Theater of the oppressed showed how theater could be used in a political way, bringing the voices of the oppressed out to the community. It tried to create a forum in which everyone was welcome to express their opinions and their feelings toward society, the culture and the way things were. Theater became a tool for conversation and made it easier to feel heard in the society. It went by the believes that If you want change you have to create it yourself (Boal, 2000).

Theater of the oppressed vs. Theater versus oppression. Theater versus oppression is working against oppression and finding ways to deal with it. Not just working toward a goal of enlightenment, but a goal of empowerment and change. A more radical way of working and thinking. Theatre For a Change works towards the theater versus oppression kind of method. Trying to make change and making the women speak up and create a better day for themselves (Freire, 2014). Paulo Freire felt that all human beings, no matter how ignorant or submerged in the “culture of silence” are capable of looking critically at their world in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with the proper tools for such an encounter they can gradually perceive his (their) personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of of his (their) own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it. (Freire, 2014)

“A Freirean nation – The pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed or practiced by the oppressors. It would be a contradiction in the terms of the oppressors not to only defend, but actually implement a liberating education” (Freire, 2014, p.39).

Joy F. Morrison also writes about Boal's way of working that those theater projects that have remained outside- or theater for the people plays- initiated and organized essentially by outsiders putting across narrowly circumscribed messages and analysis with a minimum of villager participation in the process. The performances have drawn large audiences and raised community problems in an energetic and entertaining way. But it would be a misrepresentation to say they stimulated a process of critical thinking or created sufficient momentum for an organized and collective response to the problems (Morrison, 1991). In the end it was purely entertaining and fun for the moment. Instead of leaving a trail of change and reflection as Theatre For a Change hope to do with this project.

AFRICAN THEATER

Traveling to Africa for the first time, I also found it valuable to read about theater and its use in the African culture. "Theatrical activity has existed in Africa from precolonial times. Precolonial theater had its roots in religious ceremonies and rituals and later included drama which was enacted for purposes of socialization" (Desai, 1990, p.68). There has always been theater, just not in the way the we like to think of the formal staged theatre.

"The role of performance is central to all African cultures, and for generations Africans have been communicating with each other in this way. African performances differ from that in the west because it is part of the whole fabric of African life and culture, existing as part of the larger communication environment which includes dance, drama, storytelling, music, games, and visual arts," (Morrison, 1991, p.9).

This was important for me as I realized the women I was working with probably would be familiar with performing in one way or another. Their traditional dances go many decades back, and there is pride in taking part in the rituals around the villages.

“Ruth Stone describes the atmosphere at such performances when she explains that Africans often think of performance in a transactional sense. Like two people pulling at either end of a tug-of-war rope, rather than two people simply standing alone, one part merely exists without the other. The interaction in these performances reflects the sense of community and sharing amongst villagers and hence there is more potential for good communication between actors and audience” (Thompson, 2006, p 108).

For many it was a social event, where you got to spend time and enjoy yourself after long workdays outside. Being able to play, dance and have fun was a privilege and an enjoyment that was sacred amongst the African villages. It was also way to show others how their lives were and what was needed in the political sense.

“As a medium for communicating new ideas to villagers in Africa, forum theater is successful because it is an oral medium that makes use of the prepared means of communication in Africa, because it is interactive, and therefore participatory, and because it involves a democratic exchange of information.” (Morrison, 1991, p.28).

It was part and parallel of the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community. It was an activity among other activities, often drawing its energy from the other activities. It was also entertainment in the sense of the involved enjoyment.

With the change on social culture and the growth of colonialism theater changed to incorporate the changing social structure and the new way of living bringing applied theater to Africa through community based theater (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009).

DATA

In this chapter I will give an overview of the data that I have collected. This is not all the data, as that is too extensive, but rather an excerpt from my observation notes together with some of the photographs that I have taken. This chapter is written in a very diary like style, mostly because I was inspired by Jennifer Hartley who writes her work in a very simple but effective way that describes every day of her various projects. The chapter will focus on the observation notes from Lilongwe, because the training was more extensive and I got to be a part of it for longer. But I will also show an excerpt from the observation notes made in Salima and Kasungu.

The data is all based on two months in Malawi, where I got to follow three groups of sex workers from various areas around the country. The groups all consisted of ten women that have been involved with theater for a change for a three month period, learning about their rights and where to seek help if needed. Data was collected through observation, photography, recordings and interviews with the participants. The interviews and the recordings were all in the local language, but was translated and transcribed to me in English by a Malawian translator.

LILONGWE

The data in this subchapter is based on the auditions, the week long training and the performance done with the Lilongwe group.

AUDITIONS

For the Lilongwe group I was able to attend the auditions the women had to go through if they wanted to participate in the interactional theater part of the project. We had auditions for 16

women from two areas within Lilongwe. They took place at two different locations, and one consisted of ten women while the other consisted of six women. It was voluntary to come and there was no obligation to stay the whole time or even to accept a part if you got one. I was there as an observer and did not participate in any way or form. Meeting the women for the first time was exciting and also nerve-wracking, as I was not sure what they would feel about me or about the reason I was there. The facilitator introduced me and my project and let them know that it was their choice to take part or not. They were all very welcoming and seemed to want to help with the research, which was good news to me.

The auditions were very simple and informal, as to not scare the women from theater and the pressure of being on stage. None of them had any experience with formal theater, so it was important to ease into it. The women were divided into pairs and given five minutes to improvise a scene showing the oppression that sex workers go through. They were not judged by their talent or how well they performed their characters, but on their energy, their willingness to try and their body language. It was more about who wanted to take part, and who would enjoy being on stage for the performance. The intention of the performance is not to hurt anyone, so consideration had to be made to make sure no one would be. Because of that the facilitator told me he would only pick girls that he knew would be able to perform based on their status and respect in the community.

It was great to see the auditions, and the energy that the women brought. Most of them were eager and excited to try theater, which showed when they performed their scenes. Even though

I did not understand the language, it was evident from the body language and action that a lot of the scenes were about the same things, showing that there are certain issues that are more prevalent in the sex work field. One issue that came up a lot was the mistreatment from costumers. This mistreatment came in the form of not paying, being violent and forcing the women to do something they did not want to do. The women did a good job at showing their emotions and feelings towards the issues, at the same time as using humor as a tool to distance themselves from the reality of what they were performing. There was various levels of comfortability and interest into the acting, so when picking who was going to take part in the play, the biggest component was that the girl wanted to take part. Because of vulnerability and the strength it takes to do a project like this, forcing someone or picking someone who did not seem secure was not an option. In total ten girls from two different areas were chosen to participate.

TRAINING

DAY 1

The training started on a Monday four days after the auditions had taken place. All ten girls showed up on time and ready to get to work. Everyone seemed eager, energetic and excited to get started, which they also showed through their initiation of a warm up dance. As soon as they started singing and dancing it was easy to tell that they had done that before. One of the ladies told me that in their villages it was common to have rituals filled with dance and music, and that everyone was expected to participant from the moment they could walk. So even though they had not done theater before, it was evident that performance and rhythm was in their blood.

We asked the ladies to anonymously write down their expectations for the week and what they hoped to get out of the project. Some of the answers were:

- To learn various methods to stay strong as sex workers
- Learn my rights
- Build confidence and self-awareness
- Learn more about theater
- Get out of the sex work business
- Learn what to do and who to go to for help.

Out of their answers it was evident that they knew what the project was about, but also that their focus was on themselves. They wanted to learn something and change instead of making the audience learn and change. They did not seem aware of the influence that they could have on the community if they used their knowledge and power right.

The rest of the day went by to talking and doing name games to get to know each other and understand we were all coming from. I had been nervous that me, being the only white person not speaking Chichewa, would create a nervous or impacted feel among the ladies, but luckily I was wrong. They all welcomed me with open arms and let me listen and take part throughout the whole day. And even though I don't speak the language that most of the conversations were held in I felt included through body language, face and touch. Having the facilitator also translate throughout the day helped with the actual data and explained some of the actions I did not understand.



Figure 2: Photograph taken by Silje Berg Rødal during the training in Lilongwe

DAY 2

Today the TFAC facilitator had a meeting in the morning, and so we started the day without him. Interesting to see what the women would do when they were put in charge and if they were still as interested and as willing to do the work. Two of the older women took charge and started a dance-song warm up that they all seemed to know from before. And once again I was amazed at the way they all just became one through the dance, and how they all personally shined. No one seemed scared to take the spot light, and no one was only half doing it. Everyone cheered for everyone, and if a stranger walked in, I think he would think they had known each other for much longer than they have.

To keep the energy up we did a running exercise, once again orchestrated by the women. When the blood was running and the brains were ready to get to work they got together in one group

circle and started writing and discussing the play itself. What should happen? Who is in it, what do we want to show the audience? Everyone took part and everyone was given the chance to give their suggestions and comment on what the others said. But after a while I noticed that the oldest had taken charge and wrote down the things she wanted to write down, instead of writing down everything which she was supposed to. When asking her to make sure she got everything she said that it was all written, but in less words to not use as much paper. When the facilitator arrived, he questioned the play and the writing of it as the actions and scenes had changed drastically since the day before. Words as she told me to and we never said that was used about the plans were quickly changed back to what the majority wanted. This was the only time that I felt like they took advantage of me not understanding the language and me being an outsider. After that it never happened again.

By the end of the day the story was finished and the ladies were ready to start rehearsing. The story was based on their own experiences and it was interesting to see how involved and passionately the ladies felt about the play

DAY 3

Today was the half way mark of the week and an interesting point in the workshop. Theater for a change focuses and works toward the ladies being able to create performances themselves, but also for them to be able to teach what they have learned to other people. They want the ladies to be independent and for the projects they do to keep going even when the organization don't have the time or the funds to focus specifically on it. The project is not meant to be a once

in a lifetime experience that takes place and then is never talked about or explored again, so to make sure the ladies are inspired and motivated to keep the work going it is important that they know the reasoning behind what they are doing and how it all works. This day took care of that goal.

For the first hour, we focused on theater and what it meant to the ladies. There was a lot of different replies and different questions regarding the term theater, and it was interesting to see the realizations in the ladies faces as they understood that theater in a way could be anything, and that most of them had experience in it from their childhood games. One of the ladies talked about a memory that she had from when she was a child.

“I remember when I was younger, just a child, and I was playing around with my three sisters after school. We had a small field where we got our crops from and it was a very nice area to play around on when our parents were working. We always pretended that we were farmers trying to sell our stuff on the market. It was a lot of fun, because we would go to the market with our mom on Saturdays so when we played we just pretended to be people we had met or seen during the last market trip. My oldest sister always wanted to be the farmer, and I remember I thought it was so weird, because it was so much more fun playing the people buying stuff. The farmer was always the same, but the people I played always changed. It was fun, and I guess now from what you are telling me it was a form of theater. I guess I am an actress, I just did not know it.”

It was great to see her tell the story and getting into the memory of her and her sisters playing around. And as she was telling it the other ladies was laughing and remembering their own experiences with playing around doing theater. Afterwards one of the ladies asked if there had to be a certain quality for it to be called theater, if there were certain rules you should follow for it to be theater. It was an important question with no double lined answer. As we discussed the question we agreed that to us theater could be anything you would like it to be, be it from a child playing to a professional musical on Broadway. At certain times quality matters, but other times it is the message and what the play represent that is the most important. You always want the story to be told as honest and pure as possible, but that doesn't mean it have to be a perfect performance from a theater critics eye.

We also went through a couple of terms that would help with the performance and make it easier for them to know how to act and put their emotions into the play.

Protagonist – The main character

Antagonist – The fighting source

Climax – The main event of the story. There needs to be a buildup that leads to a climax.

Conflict – Opposites, and the thing you want to change

Body language – Face, gesture, space, emotion, movement

As we went through the terms we showed examples and did different exercises to show the terms in action and make it easier to understand the meaning of them. The first exercise was hot seating, where you sit in a chair as your character and answer all questions asked about your

character. The questions can be about everything, from what their favorite food is, to where they are from, to how they know the other characters. It is an interesting activity that forces you to dig deep into your character, and because you do not have a lot of time to think, you have to become your character and think the way they would. The activity was a little bit scary in the beginning, and none of the ladies wanted to be first. They also seemed to be nervous about doing something wrong, but we quickly removed that fear, when the facilitator made a mistake when showing an example of how it was done. It was fun to see the ladies getting into the acting and taking their character seriously.

The term climax and buildup was hard for the group to grasp, and even though we knew that they did know the term in life, they did not seem to draw the line from word and theory to the actual action. This was highlighted when we asked for examples, and no one could give us any. I decided to make it really simple and relate it to something that they would recognize or easily understand. I pretended to be a commentator at a sporting event, specifically a football game, and gave commentary for two minutes. Starting with a low and relaxed voice as if the ball was in the middle of the field and the teams weren't doing anything spectacular. I then slowly, but surely heightened my voice, talked faster and showed more energy as the ball went closer to the goal. And when the ball ended up in the goal I ended up in a climax, with an explosion of strength, excitement and energy. I did this in Norwegian as that's the language I am the most comfortable speaking fast in, but they understood the reasoning for the exercise and what I was trying to communicate. Using the speed, tone and the volume of the voice to change what you are saying. To teach how to use your body and your expressions we did an exercise that demanded you to go

through different emotions (sad, angry, happy) as well as pretending to find a box and trying to communicate to the audience what it was without using words.

This day was long, but rewarding in that the run through in the end was really good, and the ladies felt confident in performing the next day.

PERFORMANCE

The day started with bad news about two of the girls not being able to perform with us because of sickness and personal reasons. At first I thought this would make the women panic, but instead it made them come together and solving the issue by suggesting changes and stepping up to take on extra roles. By 10 am we were on our way to the location of the performance. When arriving at the village it was hard to imagine a performance taking place. It was an empty area close to a couple of stores and a small market, but there was barely any people around. The facilitator explained that there was nothing to worry about and that we would get an audience as soon as the performance started. The ladies were still calm, but full of energy when we arrived.

After a ten minute warm up and set up we started the performance by playing the drums and doing their traditional dances. It was evident that the community had heard the songs before and that they knew the dances. Not even a minute after we started a group of 50 people were gathered around in a circle. This number quickly grew 90 and then 120 and then 150 (see figure 3 & 4). Most of the audience members stayed the whole time and watched with delight as the women did their work.



Figure 3: Photography taken by Silje Berg Rødal during the Lilongwe performance



Figure 4: Photography taken by Silje Berg Rødal during the Lilongwe performance

It was at times hard to see and hear for the people in the back of the circle, but the women tried their best to speak clear and loud. There was also a speaker playing music a little bit further down the street, so that did not make the situation better. The dancing and the girls shaking was definitely an energy boost, and the audience was excited from the very first scene.

First the women performed the play the whole way through with an interested and loud audience. At one point there is a violent scene where the man is hitting the sex worker and instead of feeling bad the audience laughed, which I found odd. But I was later told that it was because acting is often looked at as a game, and therefore the audience do not take the violence seriously. It does not mean that they think it is funny, as later explained by an audience member.

Without not being loud enough and taking a little long when coming back on stage the show went really well and the women shined. One girl in particular grabbed my attention the whole way through. She really found herself on stage. She also talked about feeling this change and her confidence growing in the discussion after the performance. As soon as the play was over the audience was given the opportunity to go back and do a touch tag. A lot of people were eager to participate, especially men. It seemed like the focus was mainly on one scene with the policing community members. Everyone had ideas on how to change that scene. I think maybe it would have been good to go through the scenes one by one, and doing a touch tag in all of them. This would bring attention to more issues than one. Still good however that the touch tag worked and that the women handled it perfectly, stepping into their characters and playing against the audience member without any hesitation (see figure 5).



Figure 5: Photography taken by Silje Berg Rødal during the Lilongwe performance

Right before we were leaving an audience member told me she liked the performance and would have love to participate more. After the performance we all went back to the rehearsal space to talk about the experience. It was clear that everyone was pleased with the work and proud of themselves. We had a small forum about the process and information about the future was given. I asked a couple of questions and got a lot of feedback during the forum.

DATA

- Sound recordings
- Pictures from training and from performance
- Observation notes

SALIMA

In this subchapter I will show some of the observation notes made during one day of training and two performances.



Figure 6: Picture taken by Silje Berg Rødal before Salima performance

TRAINING

I got to follow a group of 9 girls during their last day of training in Salima. They were supposed to be 10, but one was gone for personal reasons. They had already performed their story before, and so this was their second time on stage. It was easy to tell that they were more comfortable during the training, and also seemed more prepared for what was going to happen during performance day. The play was similar to the one in Lilongwe, or at least it seemed similar before

I got the dialogue which was different. The facilitator told me that the issues and the actions often are the same, but that the way things are dealt with are different. They seemed almost too confident in their acting skills, speaking too fast, on top of each other and making the gestures too small. I think they forgot that even though they had done the performance before, this was a new audience that had never seen it before. They have to play it as strong as they did the first time. However they did take direction well, and the performance got a lot better throughout the day.

We talked about the location of the performances, and I was told the original plan was to perform it in their own village. But after some consideration and thinking the women had decided they were not strong enough to do that yet. They were scared of the stigma and the consequences it would have for them if they performed in their own community. They instead decided on two other locations that they thought would be fun and energetic. It was interesting to watch this group since they had been performing before. They were all still around voluntarily wanting to perform again, which showed in their passion and energy. They all wanted to be there and do the work.

PERFORMANCE 1

The first performance took place in an open, bigger area on the beach (see figure 7). The whole audience got to sit down and watch, and there was no pushing or disturbances during the performance, just people paying attention. The location also made the performance more controllable and therefore lead it to be a better performance than it would have been somewhere else. The audience was 70% adult males, 20% adult women and 10% kids. The performance went well and the women used the space creatively and effectively keeping the circle big and open. When the touch tag started a lot of people were eager to get up and suggest changes. First the men were the dominant ones, but as the discussion went on and changes were suggested the women stood up and shared their opinions as well. During the touch tag, three of



Figure 7: Photography taken by Silje Berg Rødal during the Salima performance

the scenes were changed, which was good. When the facilitator makes the choice to not go through the whole play scene by scene, you are left with a risk that all the focus will be on one scene, and therefore the changes possible in the other scenes are not talked about or discovered. This leads to less of an impact from the performance. But during this touch-tag three out of six scenes were changed, which is good when two of the others were the beginning and the end which both just set the mood and explained what was coming, and what had happened. The suggestions were well received, and everyone was willing to get up and try the chance to see if it worked. The women also did very well at keeping the attention and showing interest in what the audience was saying.

After the performance, I had a focus group with 9 people from the audience to get a deeper understanding for what they got from performances and if they felt it was effective. Speaking to them I got to ask more direct questions, but also listen to people that maybe weren't as active or outspoken in front of the other audience members.

When the focus group was done and the dancing among the public had ended we left feeling happy and energized for the next performance. The audiences waved and smiled and gave good hint that life shouldn't be this hard for the women working in prostitution. If they are so well received here, why can't they also be accepted other places?

PERFORMANCE 2

After a small break, we headed straight over to the spot for our next performance. The energy was still high and the women were eager to start. Because the ladies were the ones who chose the performance location we had to talk to the community leader first to get the location approved. Back home this would have been done beforehand, but I was told that it was better to do it right before the performance in Malawi, because it made it harder for the leader to say no. After a small conversation about the topic and what we were trying to do he took us to the middle of a market and told us we could perform there. It seemed like it would be a good location at first with a big open round area, but a lot of the market stalls had speakers that were being used as radios. Luckily we had our microphones, and figured the ladies would be able to speak loud enough and demand the attention of the audience.



Figure 8: Photography taken by Silje Berg Rødal during Salima performance

The ladies started their singing and dancing and quickly drew an audience to their circle. They kept the energy up for a little while, but then for various reasons it went down throughout the dancing and throughout the performance. The space kept getting tighter and smaller as the audience kept pushing themselves towards the center of the stage (see figure 8). The microphones made it harder for the ladies to move around and forced them to stand still instead of forcing the audience outwards again. There was also the issue of the ladies not being trained in the use of microphones. Some of them held the microphone too far away from their mouths while others just moved it too much. That made the sound coming from the market speakers more evident and I think the audience lost a lot of the things that were said.

The second performance took place at about 12 a clock which also attracted a different audience then what we had seen at the other performances. It was 60% children, 30% men and 10% women. Based on this the interaction and the participation during the touch tag went down and made the ladies seem less interested. By the end of it they were all on the bus ready to leave, before we had done the goodbye dance.

At the same time as we were performing the other facilitator was doing performances in other locations with another group. I had a conversation with him afterwards without saying how our experience had been just to see how he had felt his performances had gone. He said that the first performance had gone well, and that the response and participation had been high. The audience had been mostly men, and they had discussed loudly amongst each other about their opinions and what the play had showed. The second performance took place in their own community. Which meant that a lot of the audience were members of their families and people that knew who they were. This lead to an interesting touch-tag were a lot people wanted to take part, but ended up making it seem like everything was the sex workers fault. They can do whatever they want as long as it is not hurtful, but at one point the facilitator did say he felt the ladies were being more judged because of the performance then understood which is the goal. The ladies however left the performances feeling confident and proud that they had gone through with it. The facilitator told me he felt like they walked with their heads held higher when leaving the location than what they did when they arrived.

Data:

3 sound recordings from my group.

Focus group discussion with the audience after the performance

Pictures from rehearsal and performances

Observation notes made during training and during the performances

KASUNGU

For my last observation, we headed to Kasungu to spend some time with the group there, and look at the way they had worked with the play and the performative tools that they had learned on an earlier occasion. This is also just an excerpt from observation notes taken during one day of training and one performance.

TRAINING

In Kasungu I got to work with a group of 10 women who all had performed together once before. After watching the training I could tell that the women were having fun and trying to get deeper into their characters. This was very good and well received by the facilitator. It shows that they don't believe the work is done just because they have already performed once. When they did a run through however it became clear that the story had to change. I am not sure if they had changed it or if they had performed it this way before, but the story and the message it was sending out was a little bit on the edge of being okay and not okay. It was very harsh on the sex workers themselves and did not leave any room for empathy or for sympathy from the audience. This shows how important it is for the women to have guidance and help from people not in the community or at least people that can look at the performance with a fresh new view.

They change the storyline quickly and once again I felt that maybe the facilitator was helping a little too much, making the play similar to the other ones in Lilongwe and Salima. But I was told he did not make any decisions, but rather suggesting simpler ways for them to get their stories across.

The ladies were all eager and fully invested in the training, and talking to them it seemed like a lot of them had grown very fond of the theatrical world.

PERFORMANCE

The Kasungu performance was a very interesting one, because it was pretty much perfect. The audience was engaged and enthusiastic, the women were powerful and giving it their all and last, but not least the location was perfect. There was enough room to move around, the audience could easily see and hear what was going on, and there was enough room for everyone to just be comfortable (see figure 9). The audience stayed the whole time and interacted with the women in a very friendly but direct way. Making it easy to try out different actions and start a discussion about the topic. Everyone was invested. Both male, female, young and old. After the performance I got to speak to a small group from the audience and they had a lot to say about the project and their interest in similar opportunities.



Figure 9: Photography taken by Silje Berg Rødal during the Kasungu performance

DATA

4 Sound recordings from my group

Photography taken during training and the performance

Observation notes from training and performance

DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will look into the impact that were shown throughout the project focusing on the women, but also taking in the audience and the impact that I was able to see on them during and after the performances. This is all taken from observation notes, interviews and discussions. The quotes have been translated from Malawian to English by a Malawian translator, and some of the sentences will lack formal structure because I wanted to keep the language as real to the actual conversations as possible.

Afterwards I will also discuss implications and suggestions for future studies.

WOMEN IN SEX WORK

SUPPORT SYSTEM

One of the benefits that appeared throughout the project, was a benefit that neither me or the facilitator had thought much about before we started. If you ask people that have been part of a theater production, more than likely they will talk about their theater family, and how the production meant so much because of the people they worked with. In my bedroom I have three posters from three various shows that I did during High School in New York. All three of them are covered in messages and autographs from the cast and crew of the various shows. To me they were all family, and the bond that we created during the various productions still bring a smile to my face today. It is also a safety to know that I can always contact them and we will have a common experience to talk about. When you create art you need to feel safe and comfortable, and you need to trust the people you are being vulnerable around. Being on stage or showing your costumes is not an easy thing to do, but it is a lot easier if you know you are together through

the most intense moments. “We helped each other when we needed to do extra work and we also took care of each other when the play was not good” (Lilongwe Training).

The group-effect also came in to play when seeing the impact on the individual woman. Watching the others perform a different solution that what you had thought off and seeing it work opened up a big learning effect on the whole group. They got aware and accepting of each other as smart individuals with great suggestions. The group is effected by the others and end up changing through watching other people’s work. “I never felt like a good actress, but I do think learning and seeing what the others have done have given me a lot.” (Kasungu performance).

CONFIDENCE

One key effect from the performances and the rehearsals was how much the women’s confidence level grew. Looking back at my observation notes, the change is documented clearly through the change of involvement, amount of talking and on the acting during the performances. Even though they were all nervous and worried about the performances, they felt like they were ready to show their work. And it was obvious that they were ready for it. And in the end they explained that they weren’t nervous to go out amongst people and be themselves anymore, they also felt safer and ready to stand up for themselves in tough situations. Just knowing where to find help and how to get of a scary situation helped their confidence immensely. One of the girls in Lilongwe explained their learning process and confidence growth during our discussion at the end of the week.

“In my side I feel we have done well. During the training we were so shy that we couldn’t believe in ourselves that we can perform outside in the open air where people can watch

us. But we have been able to achieve our goals due to our commitments and willingness. We are now able to do things that we couldn't do before" (Lilongwe performance).

"For me it has helped me because now I won't be shy standing in front of people. This was my first time standing in front of people and I believe next time I will improve more than today. I will do more great than this" (Salima performance).

A similar statement was made in Lilongwe when one of the girls wanted to thank the other girls for the work they had all done. "For me, I feel like we have done great. For most of us to perform drama out in the open was a completely new experience. I did not expect us to succeed or to fill people's expectations. Some of the girls had to leave during the week or ended up not being able to perform, which meant the rest of us had a lot more work, trying to fill their parts as well as our own. But through it all we managed to achieve what we wanted to deliver"(Lilongwe performance).

A key element during the training weeks were also the power the women had in the creating and execution of the play. They were allowed to create their own work based on their own stories and experiences. It was their play, no one else's. Sometimes it can be easy for an outside eye to decide what issues are evident and what needs to be fixed in a community, but in reality, there is no way you can know what is most important without living in the community and experiencing life there every day. These women know better than anyone what problems sex workers face, and which problems needed to be brought to the surface in the play. At first it was apparent that some of the girls were more confident and ready to take on a leader role, deciding how the scenes should be and who should play which character. No one really questioned it and let leader make decisions. But then just a day later the others decided to take the word and speak up about their

own experiences and the issues they wanted to bring up on the stage. Being able to making their own decisions and creating their own story was something that felt new to some of the girls. And they were excited to feeling like they were in control of something.

“I think I have never made decisions only for myself. When I started working in sex work I was very young. I did not know why it was or wrong, or what it really meant. My family needed money, and my little boy wanted food and clothes. I never got to really decide if it was something I wanted to do or continue with. I had to. Here I can decide for myself and let everyone know what I am thinking” (Kasungu training)

“Men always tell me what to do. When I work I can’t say anything, because they pay for it. I have to do everything he says. I always want to speak up, but when I do they get angry. Earlier when I talked about wanting to show how it’s like to be on the street no one got angry or said no. That was nice” (Lilongwe training).

It is hard to imagine what it is like to finally feel that power, but looking into the eyes of one of the girls I could feel the light that had been lit inside of her.

AWARENESS

The women opened up about their experiences and they learned from each other what was going on in the other communities. Some issues were bigger in some communities (police brutality and customer violence) while other problems where big everywhere (no payment and sexually transmitted diseases). The women were amazed at how different it was just a village away.

After performing they also managed to put into words what their next task would be, and they were all aware it was not going to be easy.

“What I wanted to say is that we have managed to perform well and we have done a good play, but what remains is the implementation of the said things into real action. In play/acting we should make sure we find good and interesting activities. We should not only be actors, but be able to do what we say. We should make sure we talk about issues

that affects the community we are in, not just talk about things to entertain. I also think we need to work more and get even better as actors” (Kasungu, performance).

RESPECT

There was a huge difference in how the women talked about themselves from the first day of training till the last performance. In the beginning they talked in a manner that suggested what they said did not matter and that how people treated them where okay since they had chosen to be sex workers. In Lilongwe we brought in a police officer on one of the last days of training, and the way the women spoke up and explained their issues, and what they needed help with was amazing. Earlier in the week some of them wouldn't even have looked the police officer in the eyes, yet alone speak to him with a raised voice. They demanded respect the same respect from him that they demanded from themselves.

KNOWLEDGE

Going into the project we started with conversations about theater in general, interactional theater, and what the ladies wanted to get from the project. It became clear that the level of knowledge about the different topics varied hugely from person to person. Most of them were aware of what theater was, especially relating it to games they participated in as kids. “When I was little, I used to play family with my brothers. We pretended that we were mom, dad and sons. Even though I found it boring I always had to be the mom because I was the only girl” (Kasungu training). Based on their experience as children they enjoyed learning more about theatre and the way play can be used in all different fields around the world. During the training in Lilongwe the girls got to try a variety of different theater games, learning how to improv, mime

and work with what you have. A lot of them thought this was fun, and asked to learn more. Their interest in theatre grew every day.

They also learned more about their own rights and what to do in the situations that they show in the play. During discussions we also brought up other situations, so that the women could help each other through them. "I did not know that sex workers even had rights which have to be respected. I will now be confident and be able to know how to speak up and get respect. It has also helped me in my creative thinking" (Lilongwe, performance).

But most importantly they learned where to go for help. "After this training I know what rights I have and I know where to go if I need to report something. The police have to be there for me and there is a lot of NGOs that will help me through any crisis that I go through" (Salima, training).

THEIR OWN GOALS

I also think it is interesting to go back to the list that women in Lilongwe made during the first day of training and see if the project was successful based on what was accomplished according to it. On the list they mentioned what they hoped to get out of the project and what their goals were.

- To learn various methods to stay strong as sex workers
- Learn my rights
- Build confidence and self-awareness
- Learn more about theater
- Get out of the sex work business

- Learn what to do and who to go to for help.

I think all of the goals were reached in one way or another, except for maybe the fifth one. Getting the women out of sex work is never the main intention for Theater For a Change, but maybe some of the tools and the newly discovered personal qualities can help the woman that wanted to get out of the business.

AUDIENCE

Measuring or/and recording the effect on the audience was harder, and it is important to remember that for a better understanding a more specific study pertaining particularly to the audience would have to be conducted. I also think a longer term study would be beneficial as it would give a better picture of the actual long term effect. But After the performances I did have small forums with a random sample from the audience where I got to ask a few questions about the play and the community. I think the answers were well thought through and showed a delight and interest in the performance.

AWARENESS

The main goal was for the audience to get an awareness of what happens in their community. We can't expect that everyone knows that there are issues going on or that the sex workers even have rights. This is something we wanted to change, which was clearly brought forward through the actions and narratives of the performances. When asked what they learned the audience had a lot of feedback. "The play was good and most of the things that were outlined are the things

that we see in our day to day life. So we need to take it serious because the play was teaching us something” (Audience Salima).

Some of them also related the play to the Malawian law and felt like it was important for the authority to watch and learn as well.

“What I have learnt is that it is not good to take a 15 year old girl to the bar and get drunk. The laws of Malawi do not permit a 15 year old to be found at the bar. The most shameful thing is the attitude of the bar owners, accepting young children to be found and working at the bars. They are supposed to be chasing away such children and not tolerate them.” (Audience Salima).

“As for me I have learned to take the issue to the NGO (nongovernmental organization) that works with the issue. We should also report what we see to the police. We have to fight back. Together with the police we can fight the malpractice of abusing young women for sex.” (Audience Kasungu)

The fact that the audience members understand that there is a problem, and that they admit that they need to change and take action is a positive example of how these performances impact the people watching.

“The play is teaching us to look at our culture as Malawians. Looking at where we are coming from as Malawians. The play is teaching us a lot about what is happening and what others are doing wrong. The play demonstrates different situations and actions that happen in real life. From watching this and getting to take part we learn how to be as people” (Lilongwe Audience).

Being able to accept that your culture and community is not perfect is the first step to creating change. If you admit that there is something wrong you can start looking at it and figuring out what exactly you have to do to make a difference.

KNOWLEDGE

As mentioned earlier the knowledge about sex, sex work and human rights, varied a lot amongst the local communities. This became clear during the forums we had after every performance. The biggest difference in level of knowledge was seen between the performance in Kasungu and the first performance in Salima. In Salima the head of the community spoke up on his opinion and lead the rest of the audience into a discussion about right and wrong. He seemed confident and knowledgeable, which made the discussion professional and serious. He did not want to take part in the interactional theater part as an actor, but he did ask others to walk up and show what they would do in the different situations. This lead to engagement and enthusiasm amongst the others. They brought up a lot of good observations and lessons because he let them know it was okay. “The play has helped us understand how HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases are transmitted. I did not know that you should wear condom all the time. But now I have learned that those sexually active should always wear one” (Salima audience).

“This play gives sex workers a voice, and explain that they too are human beings with rights. But I also think it teaches us to take care of everyone, whether they are a sex worker, mad man, or any kind of person, they deserve respect of their rights. We are not allowed to violate them”
(Lilongwe Audience).

The ladies also had their own reasoning for taking part in the project and even though most of them were to change something about themselves, they were also aware and knowledgeable about the effect it would have on the audience. “We are teaching sex workers out there about their rights and we are also teaching the audience to interfere and stop people from abusing sex workers. Everyone need to know about our rights and what is happening” (Lilongwe training).

And of course the feedback was not one sided and all positive about the play. There was also constructive criticism as well as people just not agreeing with the play or the plays purpose at all. This is something that the people in community and the sex workers gained awareness of, which leads to a safer daily life in the village.

“I understand the problem and her concern, but the main issue is prostitution. Most NGOs say no woman is a prostitute, that we all undress and have sex. But a woman, if she knows she is HIV positive she will try to seduce men to infect them. She deliberately starts dressing provocatively to attract men in the neighborhood. Her aim is to infect others” (Lilongwe Audience).

“You need to explore more of the story. All of the sudden the girl was a sex worker. Where was her family? What happened before. Maybe they could have helped her. It was too fast. So I don’t feel like I really got the whole story” (Salima Audience).

There is no way that everyone is going to like what you do or agree with what you are saying, but making people question themselves should be looked at as a success in its own. “This drama is very helpful, because it opens our eyes to things we see every day. I did not know the sex workers did not always want sex. I don’t know if that is right, but it was interesting to see” (Kasungu, audience). Accepting the different ways of thinking is something you have to do when working on projects like this. Creating change takes a long time and you have to be ready to take it one step at a time.

DISCUSSION

I also found that one of the most important effects the performances had was the initiation of discussion and open conversation. At every performance there would be one or two dominant audience members that grabbed the word as soon as they had the chance, letting everyone know their opinion. Most of the time this was either adult men with authority amongst the community

or young boys just reaching the age of adulthood. This was also a result of the fact that the majority of the audience members were male at every performance. But by having a male step up and talk first it creates a willingness and a want amongst the other men to reply or voice their opinion on a matter.

Discussion and conversation forces people to think about a topic, and to look into why they believe what they believe. It is also educational and interesting to hear what other people think about something, and why they think that way. Even if their beliefs don't change, they have been forced to question it, which is a beginning when it comes to changing things in the future. Talking to the girls in the bus when leaving the performance they all commented on the participation of the audience and that they were relieved and happy that it seemed like they cared about the topic. "I did not know if the people would actually come up on stage and act out their suggestions, but there was no reason to worry as people were eager to come up from the beginning. They shared their opinions" (Salima performance).

It is also important to remember that the project did not finish when I was done with my research. The project is still going on, but with less interference and help from theater for a change. The ladies were asked to keep their group going by electing a leader or a person that would be responsible for letting everyone know about rehearsals or meetings. They were also told that theater for a change would help with transportation, costumes, props, guidance and whatever they might need. And they were reminded that the whole project is voluntary. The women do

the performance because they want to, not because they have to. So if any of them felt like they were finished and did not want to perform again that is a decision they are free to make.

The goal is also for the women to be able to perform and act as the facilitator as well. During the process they watched as the theater for a change facilitator did his work and they came with suggestions that he could try out. "I have learned that as a facilitator I need to be humble so that I can be able to relate and understand everything the audience is saying. Above all I want to give guidance and let the audience speak their mind in a controlled manner. A good facilitator is one who has good leadership skills and are able to relate and be open to everyone."

It will be good for the ladies to control the whole performance by themselves, but I think it was important to not bring in one of them in the role of facilitator for the first performances. We did not know how the audience at the various communities were going to react or if they were even going to participate at all so to expose the ladies to that kind of unknown territory and expect them to handle it if the reaction was harassment or disdain would have been wrong. The ladies also seemed happy to have a "professional" actor on their team, and looked to him for help and guidance throughout the week.

FUTURE WORK AND STUDY

It would be beneficial for the organization to look deeper into this project and establish more concrete goals as to what they want to achieve with the project. The overall goal of bringing understanding and knowledge to the community, and knowledge and awareness to the women is good, but is too big of a goal when you are looking at the specifics of the project, something

you do when studying something scientifically. Writing down and clarifying certain goals would make it a lot easier for research purposes, when figuring out if the work is successful or not. Right now it is clear that the project have an impact, but how long that impact lasts is questionable. It would be interesting to follow the women from the very beginning, from the very moment they are connected to Theater for a Change, throughout the project and then some time after, maybe even up to a year. I only got to be a part of the middle of the project and therefore can only speak out about what I learned from that period. I think it would be beneficial and quite interesting to follow the women for a longer time, asking them the same questions on multiple occasions and noting how they change throughout time. For projects like this, time is key. Hopefully more research will be done, and there will not be a short time frame like I did for this one.

There also needs to be an agreement on whether the project is for the women in sex work only, or if the project also have a goal about effecting the audience in a certain way as well. It is evident that it does have an effect on the people watching, but at the moment it is hard to tell if this is an intended effect or if it is just a bonus to the work that is being done with the women. I also think a separate study could be done with the audience, but it would take a deeper connection and emerging into the communities. This would be spending time with the communities, seeing how people treat sex workers, what is life like, what opinions do people have? And then looking if anything changes after the performances have taken place. Maybe it would be a good idea to follow a few people and doing in-depth studies on them. I think that would lead to a greater revelation in how well this project works for the audience benefit.

I also got to read the project plan that specified the training down to what games should be

played, what discussion questions should be used and how to deal with various situations. It was detailed, organized and clearly explained how the various parts would lead to the next one and what the women would get out of the various games. All of the games have a purpose, even if it is just to get the women engaged, and it is important to know these purposes. At certain points it felt like the focus was too much on having fun and doing games that really did not have any intention for the project at all. Of course it is important to let everything go and get let your mind have fun, but it felt like it took up too much time especially during the last days of training. I also questioned the involvement of the facilitator and if there was times when the girls were guided in a certain direction on what issues to talk about. It was hard for me to tell, as I could not understand the language, and therefore did not catch everything that was said during the discussions. But looking at the three different groups there was a lot of similarities in the plays, so many that I wondered if it was coincidental because a lot of the sex workers go through the same problems, or if there was certain issues that the facilitator wanted to focus on.

Another interesting factor to look at is the performance itself. The locations were picked by the women for half of the performances I watched, while it was decided by the facilitator and the women for the others. We had to go to the village and ask for permission on the spot, which lead to a yes every time, but also lead to doing the performance wherever we could find room. Most of the time this was in the middle of the markets. This brought a lot of audience members, but created chaotic episodes where the dialogue was too low, the crowd was too close to the women causing the stage to become too small, and having audiences that consisted of a lot of children. I do not know if there is a great solution to this issue, but looking into it and trying to figure out

a better way to pick the locations and do the performances would bring the project up to an even higher level. One of the audience members at Salima suggested that the performances were announced beforehand so they could make sure that as many people as possible showed up. This could be an option to at least try out if possible.

It is also important to remember that there were certain implications to this study. Time wise I wish I could have taken part from the beginning of the project, getting to spend an equal amount of time with all the groups and seeing them from the beginning to the very end. I also struggled with the language and being without a personal translator to do the interviews with. Had there been more time I think both these issues would have been solved, but I think it is important to mention them as it shows in the research that the situation was not ideal.

CONCLUSION

There was a huge impact on both the women and the audiences of the interactional theater performances. A change in behavior, thought set and a willingness to discuss your beliefs was shown in the various groups, and it was clear that the women and the audiences felt like they got something out of the performances. I wish I could have spent more time with the ladies, and I am hoping to add on to this study by connecting with the ladies again in the future seeing if they felt like it had a long lasting impact, or if the impact went away after a while. I want to finish the discussion and the thesis with a quote from one of the audience members at the Salima performance.

“To me, I just have to thank Theatre For a Change for the things that we didn’t expect. We have been able to know something that we didn’t know before. But I hope that you continue doing this so that we keep on learning. Your program is really beneficial to both the older generation and the younger generation. What you demonstrated here is what happens so it has really helped us. Please continue” (Salima performance).

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Research on the impact of interactive theatre performance on the participants of the Nzotheka project at Theater For A Change

Researcher: Silje Berg Rødal

You are being asked to participate in research for a master thesis at Oslo University of Applied Sciences. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form explains the risks, the benefits and how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and any questions you might have about the study have been answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. A copy of this form will be given to you if you want it.

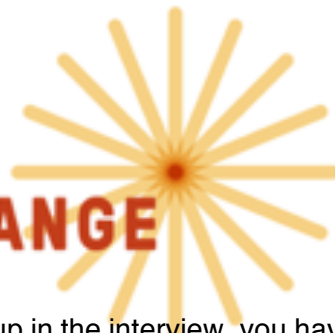
Description of study

This study is being done because I, in corporation with theater for a change would like to look at the impact interactional theater can have on development and empowerment on the individual. I am particularly interested in the question:

What impact does performing their stories as interactional theater have on the women who perform?

If you agree to participate, you will talk to an interviewer about your experiences with performing your story and taking part in the process of the project. The interview will be audio recorded. The interviews will take part before the performance have taken place, once more right after the performance is done, and if possible two weeks later.

The interview will take about an hour, depending on how much of your experience you choose to share. If you agree to participate, you also agree to me observing and taking notes on the work you do throughout the project. Throughout the project, group conversations will be used as data, and used in the research.



Risks and discomfort

If you ever feel uncomfortable with a topic brought up in the interview, you have the right to refuse to answer any question, and are free to leave the interview and research at any time.

Benefits

Knowing how well the program and the process work will help set the guidelines for future work.

Using theater in this way could be beneficial for people struggling with various things all over the world. The things I learn will be published in the master thesis, it will be given to the organization Theater for a change, and to professionals who are interested in the topic. The result can help improve programs that work with applied theater for development and empowerment all over the world and also make it a good experience for the participants taking part in the various projects.

Confidentiality

Information about you will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms will be created and used. Recordings of the interviews will be kept on a computer protected by a password. Only information approved by you will be included in the written transcripts.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study please contact Silje Berg Rødal, graduate student, Oslo and Akershus university of applied sciences, s.301531@hioa.stud.no bergsil@hotmail.com.

Or Jennifer Benton at Theatre for a Change on +265 1 759 124 / 125 / 121

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary



• you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature _____ Date

Printed Name

As part of the research process we will also be documenting the work through photographs. The photographs will be used to show the experience of the Interactive Performances, including the performance and training.

By signing the consent below you are giving permission for TfaC and the researcher to use the photographs and film to help the work of Theatre for a Change and its partners, in connection with sharing and promoting the research and Interactive Performance

I consent for Theatre for a Change to record and use the following (delete as appropriate):

photographs of me
film footage of me
the name of the project that I am connected with
the area in which I live

Signature _____ Date

Printed Name

Please note that you do not have to give media consent to take part in the research

Appendix 2: The three stories

STORY FROM LILONGWE

Scene 1

A neighbor and a relative is talking about the main character, the girl. The relative however do not know that the girl works as a sex worker, before the neighbor complains about living next to someone who works in such a disgraceful business. When the girl walks in, she is received in a very negative way. She is judged by her relative and the neighbor. Neither one of them understands why she had to go into that business.

Point of scene: To show that sex workers often are judged by all members of the community, both strangers and family.

Scene 2

We are at the market, were two ladies are sitting on the ground gambling with cards.

One of them is the manager of the main bar in the village. They are having fun just hanging out when the girl arrives. She tries to ask the bar manager if she could get one of the rooms in the bar and be hired as a sex worker there. It is a lot safer than being on the streets, and it seems to be more accepted amongst the community members. The bar manager however does not accept her, as she has been on the streets for too long, and probably have a disease,

Point of scene: To show that sex workers also get judged by other people in the sex worker business. It also shows that there are different forms of sex work, and it questions the fact that sex work is more accepted when it is done in a bar.

Scene 3

After getting the nod from the bar manager, the girl decides to go to the bar to have a drink and hang out. At the bar the music is playing and the alcohol is flowing. The girl ends up dancing with two men after they force her on the dance floor. They buy her some drinks and after a little while she ends up leaving with one of the men.

Point of the scene: To show that it's not always the girls initiating contact, but that very often the men are the ones to pressure themselves on the ladies.

Scene 4

The girl and the man comes back on stage getting dressed. It is understood that they have just had sex in the alley. They are arguing as the man is refusing to pay for the job she has done. The girl gets angry as he had promised to pay right after and he was even supposed to pay more since she had let him have sex with her without a condom. The man however tells her that she doesn't deserve any money and tries to make her go away. The girl grabs the man to try and keep him from walking away. This makes the man even angrier and he ends up hitting her and pushing her to the ground. The scene ends with the lady on the ground crying for help.

Point of scene: To show how scary and unfair the business can be. And that the ladies are often mistreated by their clients.

Scene 5

This scene take place a couple of days later, and starts with the girl sitting on the street crying about being in pain and not having anyone to talk to. Two of her friends, who also work as sex

workers, comes walking by. They ask her what is wrong, but when she tells them they just laugh and blame her for letting him have sex with her without paying. They also tell her that she probably has a disease and that it is her own fault for not using protection. They walk away without helping her.

Point of scene:

Scene 6

The sex worker is back on the street at night trying to get some clients. She is together with another girl and they are both talking about what they want to do in the future. Neither one of them wants to be a sex worker, and they tell each other their different reasons for working in the business. The other girl the story of how her family needs money to feed her younger siblings. Her father used to be a successful farmer, but because of the drought his crops suffered badly one year, leading him to talk to friends about how to earn money. She says one of her uncles gave him the suggestion to let her spend time with other men in exchange for money. Because of the bad situation he was in her father did not feel he had any other choice, so he leads her into the sex worker business. She says that even though it was her father's idea in the beginning, her family no longer speaks to her because of the work she has. Right as she finishes her story two policing members of the community jumps out at them and forces them down on the ground. They threaten to take them to the police if they don't give them all the money they have. The other sex worker gives away her money, but the main character does not have any money on her so she can't give anything. This makes one of the men angry and he tells her that she

needs to pay him in another way. She has no other option to comply even though she is still in pain.

Point of scene: Making sure the audience know that sex workers most of the time do not want to work in the business, but that they don't have another choice. It also shows how dangerous the work can be, and that they are exploited and used by other members of the community. It also shows once again that the ladies often do not have a choice but to do what they are told.

Scene 7

The girl comes back on stage and tells a short review about everything that has happened to her. She prays to god that something good will come soon, because she doesn't know if she can keep on living like this.

Point of Scene: This is just a scene to remind the audience what they have scene, but also that it's never too late to step in and offer a helping hand.

At the end of the seventh scene the facilitator step in to explain once again what the audience can do, and let them start the discussion and the interractional part of the performance.

STORY FROM SALIMA

Scene 1

Two friends are discussing financial problems, trying to figure out how they are going to move on with life. One of the girls is really poor and says she is willing to do anything just to get money for food at least. The friend suggest that she will get her a job at the restaurant in the village.

Scene 2

The friend brings the girl to the restaurant, but as they get there the girl realizes it is not a restaurant, instead it's bar. She does not want to go in and gets angry at her friend for taking her there. But because she really needs the money and her friend says it is the only way out, she goes in. She falls under from peer pressure from her friend. They talk to the bar owner and he is very fond of her, so he lets her have a job, but not before he tests her out himself first.

Scene 3

The girl have been working at the bar for a while, but does not like it. She talks to her friends about it and tells them that it is wrong for a girl under 18 to work in the bar. She should not be there. Her friends just laugh, telling her she knew what she was getting herself into. She should take care of herself and she will be fine.

Scene 4

The girl is infected with a sexually transmitted disease, but can't stop the work. She talks about her life back home and how she does not have any parents or anybody else to look after her. It was her own fault that she accepted the job at the bar, but she wish someone would have told her how to protect herself when having sex. Her friends could have told her, or the bar manager should have informed her about safety when he hired her, but instead no one said anything, Letting her get sick.

At the end of the fourth scene the facilitator walks on stage and explains the touch tag one more time before letting the audience start their involvement.

STORY FROM KASUNGU

Scene 1

Two ladies are putting on make-up and talking about everyday things. They are dressing up to go outside and show how good looking they are. A friend visits and tell them she needs help getting money, or a job. They tell her she needs to go talk to the bar manager and ask him for help. They show her the way.

Scene 2

At the bar she ask the manager for a job. He accepts and she dances during her first night trying to get a man. A drunk man takes her away and we are to assume that they are having sex.

Scene 3

The girl is in need of more money for her family at home and the bar is not going well, so she decides to head for the streets with a friend. They are walking around when they get caught by two police officers. The police asks for money, but since she doesn't have any he forces her to have sex with him.

Scene 4

The girl is crying in pain and trying to understand why the police officer did what he did. She tries to get help from the people in the village, but everyone ignores her cause they think she has just been with a normal client. If he was violent it was her own fault.

After the fourth scene the facilitator walked out on stage and introduced the touch tag to the audience.