

Innovative Methods for Applied Drama and Theatre Practice in African Contexts:

Drama for Life

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Edited by

Hazel Barnes, Carol Beck Carter
and Warren Nebe

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In memory of

Henrike Grohs

Cultural Warrior. Cultural Educator. Cultural Diplomat.

Henrike Grohs studied ethnology and was Head of the Goethe-Institut in Abidjan from 2013—2016. She co-founded the project Next—Intercultural Projects at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. Between 2002 and 2009, she worked as Project Manager in the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra’s Education programme. In 2009, she was appointed Advisor on Culture and Development at the Goethe-Institut in South Africa. Henrike Grohs, together with Katharina von Ruckteschell, the Director of Goethe-Institut South Africa, and Peter Conze, the Director of GIZ South Africa, worked closely with great care and equality with the Drama for Life team during this time. Henrike Grohs passed away in a terrorist attack in Côte d’Ivoire in March 2016 along with seventeen other people. She was 51 at the time.

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The contributors to this book whose writings and interviews focus on and examine important aspects of the academic, research and public programme, enabling the contributions of Drama for Life to become accessible to a broader readership.

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The administrators and managers who ensure the smooth running of the academic programme, the research hub and public interventions, the conferences and festivals, the Playback Theatre School and the Theatre Company. The effectiveness of Drama for Life is enhanced by their commitment.

The delegates to the conferences and festivals, the child, youth and adult audience participants of theatre projects and the communities and schools within research and internship initiatives, have all made valuable contributions to understanding of the field. Their lively support has ensured that Drama for Life is grounded in a spirit of profound connection and service.

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The University of the Witwatersrand for its foundational and ongoing support of Drama for Life, the Department of Applied Arts, Arts Therapies and Arts Research, has made a lasting contribution toward a pedagogy of transformation and healing.

The Wits School of Arts, The Wits Theatre and our partner departments have contributed richly toward our growth in Arts Research.

The enlightened funders and public partners who have made the work of Drama for Life possible, have made a valuable and enduring contribution to education, the arts and society.

The Federal Republic of Germany, through the entities of the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and Goethe-Institut, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), without whom Drama for Life would not have come into being.

Hazel Barnes, Carol Beck Carter and Warren Nebe.

FOREWORD

BY DRAMA FOR LIFE ALUMNI

“Ya bohla! o ithuta ka mehla” is a Sesotho expression that can loosely be translated to mean a wise one learns all the time. My mother tells a tale of defiance. I am the character. Five years old. I am accused of “stealing” steamed bread, a special preserve for the guests. “No, I did not!” I say, facing my grandmother. Apparently, my response stunned everyone.

Fast forward 2008, I am a Drama for Life scholar, studying with creatives from Southern Africa. Within a few weeks, my courage to speak back to power is validated. What a jOURney! We get to know each other, challenge one another as well as the literature being presented to us. We quickly realise the necessity for this robust engagement because Marimba Ani (1996) reminds us that many of us received colonial miseducation. Consequently, “it is necessary to begin, therefore, with a painful weaning from the very epistemological assumptions that strangle us. The weaning takes patience and commitment, but the liberation of our minds is well worth the struggle” (1996, 1-2).

The process was not easy but well worth it. I remember Drama for Life envisioning workshops and I knew then that the programme would transform the continent. Indeed, ground-breaking programmes and scholarship can be seen through the work of alumni such as Thokozani Ndaba, whose Ntethelelo Foundation is using Applied Theatre techniques to influence change and improve the lives of the marginalised communities. More than anything, Drama for Life gave us the tools to navigate the world and to work with political rigour as well as empathetic listening. These attributes are needed now, more than ever when Covid-19 is presenting unprecedented circumstances forcing everyone in the world to rethink their ways of being and knowing.

More recently, I was moved by the act of unprecedented protest and defiance in the South African cultural history by Sibongile Mngoma and other creatives who staged a sit-in at the National Arts Council in Newtown, Johannesburg, demanding answers with regard to the disbursement of the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme meant for the creation of employment and the support of artistic endeavours for those in the creative

and cultural industry. There again, I saw the ever topical and responsive Drama for Life offering debriefing to artists and creatives at the National Arts Council. I hope you, dear reader, will feel the pulse of activism, consciousness raising, education and healing through the experiences of these scholars, with whom we have been teachers and learners. After all, “ya bohlale o ithuta kamehla”. While Drama for Life has amplified this principle for me, I would argue that it has done so for many scholars now implementing the ideals of art as a tool for socio-cultural and technological justice all over the world.

Selloane Mokuku Masters in Dramatic Arts (MADA), Drama for Life,
Wits University
Lecturer; Rhodes University,
Assitej SA Chairperson and Assitej International Executive Committee
Member.

Author of self-published books; “I Simply Cunt” and “QANQANA
SENQA”
Playwright; “Dipalo”, co-written with Ginni Manning (Winner of the 2019
Assitej Playwriting Competition)
Drama for Life alumna 2008-2009

Thoughts on witnessing Drama for Life

Being invited to contribute a forward to this book is both an honor and a challenge: Should I share a story? A thought? A blessing? Imagine a vision? I decided to think and feel back to one of my most marking experiences at Drama for Life and to let my thoughts wander from there.

I never wanted to tell the story, to tell you what it feels like.
I am here to tell you what it feels like.
(Peter Hayes in “I Am Here”)

These words of Peter Hayes in his autobiographical play “I Am Here” form one of my clearest memories of theatre experiences at Drama for Life. I witnessed his performance during the Drama for Life Sex Actually Festival 2010. Back then I was about to finish a one-year volunteering program at Drama for Life. Being 20 years old and having grown up in rural South West Germany, I absorbed the atmosphere of Johannesburg, the Wits theatre community and all Drama for Life had to offer me. It was a time in which I collected so many important and meaningful experiences in this community. But still I connect this one specific performance with something unique—a

feeling that literally sits in my body and shaped my path from there on: It is the experience of sharing complex personal stories, of interweaving them with the social and political and of witnessing them.

Witnessing others. Witnessing ourselves.

When Peter Hayes took the audience on his pilgrimage, on his path of discovering his HIV infection, of reacting to it, of sharing it, he allowed me to enter a deeply personal space—intimate, vulnerable, strong, and empowering. He made me feel anger, pain, joy, desperation, sadness, naughtiness. He made me question my thoughts, my feelings, my perspectives. He shared a story with the audience that allowed us to really witness—to witness him, to witness his journey, to witness ourselves reacting.

Witnessing as attitude.

Today this experience still sits with me. And the idea of witnessing as a “politics of recognitions” (Oliver, p. 475) became an embodied attitude towards theatre. Witnessing is a choice, an attitude, an action. Theatre is witnessing. And: This specific performance was just one of so many moments of witnessing and being witnessed that I experienced in the broader context and community of Drama for Life.

In the eleven years since the described moment, I committed to the field of Applied Theatre. I became a researcher, lecturer and facilitator. Now I see that it all began at Drama for Life—with experiences of witnessing theatre, not watching theatre.

Reading is witnessing.

So, I am asking you to not only read but to witness this book, all these chapters that complete a chapter of Drama for Life’s journey. Let us all be active witnesses to Drama for Life as “witnessing—in both senses as addressing and responding, testifying and listening—is a commitment to embracing the responsibility of constituting communities” (Oliver, p. 485).

Eliana Schüler, Lecturer, Researcher, PhD candidate (Europa-Universität
Flensburg),
Facilitator in the collective X Perspektiven (www.x-perspektiven.com);
Drama for Life Weltwärts Intern 2009-2010; Volunteer Sex Actually
Festival;
Assistant 2011 and Co-cordinator 2012

To be the first in any endeavour is a difficult and complex thing. As part of the first cohort of South African trained Drama Therapists, my memories of my time studying with Drama for Life are about as complex as you can imagine. One thing that I am sure of however, is that the greatest gift my time at Drama for Life gave me were my fellow students. Daily I was confronted with the realities of my privilege as a white, middle class, neurotypical, cis-gender woman in South Africa. The realities of the systems that the majority of South Africans face were not hidden from us, but rather shown as a challenge to find connections, forge new ways of being, and continually question what we mean by “safe spaces” and “healing” (and perhaps even more importantly, why **we** were the ones who thought we could bring healing). My training at DFL was by no means easy, but neither is the work that I do now, and perhaps the journey was one of learning to trust myself as an imperfect practitioner, meeting imperfect clients, and travelling together. I do not know a more humbling and profound lesson for a young therapist. We do not have the answers, or the power to change the systems that we find ourselves in, but we do have the power to create, to play, to story, and in this way to bring relief and connection.

As Drama for Life continues to work in all of the diverse spaces of South Africa (and beyond), I have no doubt that their greatest strength remains what it always has been: the collection of students and practitioners it gathers into community. I hope that readers experience some of that diversity within the pages of this volume, and that the nuggets of hard-won knowledge can inspire further research, practice, and creativity. It is difficult for practitioners to balance the needs of the communities we serve, with the amount of energy and time required to write about the work that we do. It is my sincere hope that Drama for Life continues to provide space for young academics and practitioners to write, to publish, and to have their voices heard. In this way we reach out across continents, and fight against the isolation that plagues and fatigues us as we work in the field. As you read, I hope that you remember what a mentor once said to me: all of us can do more than any of us. Take heart, keep learning, you are vital in this world.

Monique Alexandra Hill BSocSci (UKZN),
BA(Hons) Applied Theatre, MA Drama Therapy (Wits)
HPCSA Registered Drama Therapist, Certified Cyber Therapist,
BADth International Sub-Committee Convener
Drama for Life Alumna 2013-2015

Drama for Life, has for me become synonymous with self-discovery, self-care, healing, social transformation, justice and the practice of art as a critical life skill and tool. The epic story of Drama for Life has to be experienced to be believed and I am saying this from experience. When I went to Drama for Life in 2008, I thought I was going for skills in Applied Drama, little did I know, I would come face to face with myself. I can still remember it as if it was yesterday, it was a Drama Therapy class. Everything looked ordinary until this one process that was going to be one of the many processes that would lead to my complete transformation. There was initial resistance to this process because it was bringing to the fore issues I have managed to avoid confronting for years. I found myself face to face with my demons. The only thing that was different this time and gave me hope and power to fight and not flee, was the presence of an amazing and gifted lecturer called Kirsten Meyer. That was the beginning of the end of those demons. Throughout, I was busy slaying demons and mastering skills to help others do the same. Then it dawned on me why the programme was called Drama for Life. This story will not be complete if I do not mention how the program shaped my current professional life and career. One of my courses was Performing Arts Management and it was my attachment at Soul City that changed my professional life completely. I had a light bulb moment realizing how drama can modify attitudes. Long story short is, my attachment influenced me to enrol for a Master of Public Health with a specialization in Social and Behaviour Change Communication and I am now an international SBCC consultant.

These 21 chapters give you the reader a rare opportunity to learn from the best brains in the industry. Reflective by design, the book is loaded with tried and tested models and approaches in Applied Drama, Arts Therapies and Social Transformation insights presented in most creative and captivating manner. Reading this book is like touring several countries and continents from the comfort of your seat. Each page allows you to experience different cultures, personalities and experiences from different generations and walks of life, all bound by the belief in the power of theatre as a tool for social engagement, transformation and healing. It is a must read for anyone who is yearning for evidence-based approaches in the Arts Therapies, Applied Drama, creative social entrepreneurship, social and behavioural transformation. It is an invaluable resource for artists, activists, communication for development practitioners, Theatre for Development and the marginalized and minority groups. I am talking from experience and

inviting you to enter the amazing world of Drama for Life and experience it for yourself in black and white. Enjoy.

Samson Setumo

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 Master of Public Health in Social and Behaviour Change Communication,
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Chief Executive of the Firebrand Group based in Botswana
 Drama for Life Alumnus 2008

Drama for Life—Bridges of the South

Transatlantic journeys, over the past five hundred years, have been characterised by pain, love and a search for new experiences of the world. Crossings between East and West, along the sun's line, have connected continents that observe the same solar inclination and share the same constellations. Along with viewpoints from the South, and coastlines on the same ocean, Brazil and South Africa share histories of slavery and colonialism and post-colonial explorations of multiculturalism.

As a Brazilian woman born in a vast and plural nation, to encounter these transcontinental cosmological, epistemological and ontological resonances in the studies offered by Drama for Life has been critical for my self-development and my work. These will probably continue throughout my life.

My educational experience during the Masters in Applied Theatre from 2014 to 2015 involved cosmopolitan encounters with colleagues from throughout Africa. It included practical work and immersion in rural and urban communities and heated debates about social structures and biopolitics. Dialogue was sustained even amid contradictions. All of these dynamics have continued to shape my life's ethos.

The embodied Arts and dialogues in the Drama for Life pedagogy connected people, culture, communities, desires and projects, and allowed personal and collective engagements. Drama for Life pedagogies framed these engagements through metaphors, and, as Bakhtin says, "ethical acts" of interpersonal creation and feeling.

The Drama for Life facilitators used games, drama, dance and role play that were malleable to diverse contexts and worked with collective questions. These helped foment processes of conscientisation, empowerment and the dismantling of the oppressive and hegemonic structures that imbue education, social experience and critical thinking. Through these processes, I accessed different layers of knowledge relating to community praxis, issues of identity, human rights, justice and emancipation.

Many of the scholars who write in this book were my teachers and mentors; they taught me a lot about humanity intertwined with politics, about arts stitched together with mutual care, about otherness as an intimate and personal process, about listening and speaking. At the heart of these learnings, it seems to me that peace may be found within the boiling of the melting pot. This does not require the absence of disagreement, conflict or difference, but, in the words of Lusmarina Campos, “it is having the profound desire to find pathways of approximation, especially in situations where distances are magnified and opinions harden. It means having the ability to hear in words and in the silences between the words what the other is saying. And to hear, sometimes, it is necessary to be silent.”

May this book be a lantern of the soul for those practitioners who reach for it.

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State University (UDESC), Brazil
MA in Applied Theatre in Education Therapy and Activism, Drama for
Life, Wits University, South Africa
BA in Performing Arts, UDESC, Brazil
Director of Mirassol Postgraduate Institute
Director of South African Documentary Film Festival (BR)
Drama for Life Alumna 2014 -2015

Death and life are in the power of the tongue; And they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

(Proverbs 18 verse 21)

To consistently choose engagement, to acclaim dialogue, to brave the deep and polarizing divides evident in our land, indeed in the political landscape the world over; this is not only an act of courage and faith in humanity. It is to choose life in a time when death is an ever-present companion and threat. It is befitting then that here, theatre, praxis, community—all is for life.

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MA Dramatic Arts, University of the Witwatersrand
PhD, University of KwaZulu-Natal
Drama for Life Alumna 2007 -2008

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PART ONE

DRAMA FOR LIFE: CONTEXTUALISATION AND HISTORY

This part of the book provides a contextualisation of Drama for Life that frames the content and work in subsequent chapters and sections. Within Part One, we are guided through the transformational contexts, changes, challenges and opportunities that tell the story of Drama for Life and lead to a redefining and reimagining of the work, impact and role of Drama for Life. This reimagining takes place within the backdrop of Covid19 and a change of leadership.

Chapter One is underpinned by stories of contexts, people and praxis that relate to the history, existence, ethos and current form of Drama for Life. Warren Nebe guides us through the phases of transformation, change and healing that epitomises Drama for Life and the multitude of challenges, opportunities and successes that have made the journey of Drama for Life traumatic at times and exhilarating at other times.

In Chapter Two, using a postcolonial lens, Munyaradzi Chatikobo addresses the paradoxes and challenges of Global North funding in the establishment and growth of a Global South organisation (Drama for Life). He argues that while western funding has had an enormously positive effect there are also negative effects which have “retarded natural growth of the creative sector in South Africa”. He discusses several issues including asymmetrical power relations, self-determination, side-lining and “permanent volunteerism”.

Chapter 3 is in the form of an interview with Munyaradzi Chatikobo (part of the initial student cohort and staff member at Drama for Life) and Warren Nebe (founder and, until recently head and director of Drama for Life). The semi-structured interview was facilitated via Zoom by Carol Beck Carter and focuses on contextualising, redefining and reimagining the work at, and vision for, Drama for Life.

Each part of the book, including **Part One**, concludes with a photo essay focussing on a Drama for Life Project. The Part One photo essay, “Through Positive Eyes” is based on a project that put “cameras in the hands of the people most deeply affected by HIV to create personal photo essays”. The photographs are by Gideon Mendel and Text by Warren Nebe.

CHAPTER ONE

DRAMA FOR LIFE: BUILDING CONTEXTS FOR TRANSFORMATION

WARREN NEBE

Story was at the heart of our drama. Safeguarding life was at the heart of our response to the HIV and AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus) pandemic. Telling the story for life became our purpose. Therein lie the seeds of what birthed Drama for Life. This introductory chapter about Drama for Life attempts to map some important stories, and the contexts and praxis that gave rise to transformative learning, embedded in a dream, a dream ultimately deferred.

Drama for Life was initially a programme housed in the former Division of Dramatic Arts, Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand from 2008 to 2010. The programme, having grown exponentially, separated from the division at the end of 2010 and formally became a postgraduate division of Applied Drama and Theatre and Drama Therapy in 2012. Today, Drama for Life is an intersectional and interdisciplinary department of Applied Arts, Arts Therapies and Arts Research that incorporates a host of postgraduate diplomas and degrees, inclusive of the only accredited Drama Therapy and, soon to be, Dance Therapy degrees in Africa. Moreover, it is home to the most comprehensive Applied Drama and Theatre undergraduate and postgraduate study trajectory in Africa. The department, however, is not designed as a regular academic entity alone. Instead, Drama for Life also comprises a comprehensive resource centre and student office that provides administrative, welfare and Drama Therapy support for its students and community. Intrinsic to its construction and operation is a Creative Research Hub, home to an accredited Short Course Programme, the Drama for Life Playback Theatre School, Drama for Life Mvuso Project, a professional Drama for Life Theatre Company, and an annual international conference and festival that serves the public.

Telling the story about Drama for Life's construction is not straightforward. Its composition is the story of many young and old community members,

students, artists, academics, teachers, cultural leaders, development experts and cultural diplomats worldwide. Its purpose, it could be argued, is to excavate, revive and affirm stories for medicine. Story is rooted in this critical description of Drama for Life because story binds us, defines us, and instils a sense of belonging. It gives the teller a voice, the listener space to receive, reflect, reframe, and, ultimately, to respond to the story. This call and response are crucial for a potent medicine, a remedy that aims to restore our humanity in the 21st century. As Lewis Mehl-Madrona notes, “In what has become an increasingly impersonal world, both medicine and society at large, are beginning to realise and rediscover the importance of relationship and stories in healing” (2010, 1). It is in the cyclical act of telling, and giving of story, and in the act of listening, and the receiving of story, that we make medicine, and it is through this act of storytelling that we build contexts for transformation in education. Consequently, story, context and praxis are inseparable because “we would not survive without story, for story defines our meaning and purpose, our identity, our goals and values - everything that makes life worth living” (2010, 1).

Vision: An African Humanity

Upon Nelson Mandela’s release from 27 years of imprisonment, he took it upon himself to visit many countries that had housed freedom fighters and exiles, countries that had played a role in fighting for the end of Apartheid. I was living in Gaborone when he conveyed his gratitude to Botswana’s people on 5 June 1990. Everybody seemed to stop what they were doing. Schools and businesses and small shops closed. Transport systems were inadequate to transport all the people. Young and old walked the bare streets, crossed the dusty fields and pathways in the bright warm light of day, making their way to the stadium. Fifteen thousand people witnessed Mandela’s legendary entrance; an entrance staged to express his heartfelt thanks. The moment’s significance did not go unnoticed by the Batswana or the people of other countless African countries that had safeguarded South African citizens and friends and borne the Apartheid regime’s aggression. Botswana, being a young neighbouring country, had suffered numerous acts of violence. The looming demise of Apartheid with its promise of a liberated South Africa, free of its shameful, debilitating legacy and the dream of an Africa that was united, equal and proudly liberated, rippled through the people that day. Mandela’s actions were more than a reflection of the strategic statesman that he was, his actions arose from his own lived experience, and an innate understanding of what it meant to be African.

Travelling through Africa in 1962, before his arrest and imprisonment, he spoke eloquently about his own Damascus moment, recognising something in himself that he had only heretofore understood intellectually. Mandela wrote, “I felt I would be visiting my own genesis, unearthing the roots of what made me an African.” Upon arrival in Mbeya, Tanzania, he noted,

“I then truly realised that I was in a country ruled by Africans. For the first time in my life, I was a free man... I felt the burden of oppression lifting off my shoulders... I was being judged for the first time not by the colour of my skin but by the measure of my mind and character”. (Mandela, 1994, 334 - 45)

Mandela’s words resonate with me. I, too, found my liberation outside of South Africa on African soil. I, too, felt the burden of oppression—a different kind of oppression, but a pressure nevertheless—lift off my shoulders, and I, too, experienced what it meant to be judged by my character and mind, not by the colour of my skin. To surrender to Africa is to meet one’s own humanity and the humanity of others. Apartheid South Africa had othered Africa, just as it had othered the majority of her own people. It had separated South Africa from the rest of the continent. It had chosen to go to war with its neighbours. Moreover, in so doing, it had become the symbol of the very worst kinds of oppression, an aggressive, toxic legacy that colonialism had bequeathed to Africa.

Mandela’s dream of a united, emboldened Africa, compassionate and respectful in its relationships, accessible in its expression of herself, and artistically and culturally grounded in integrity, foregrounded Drama for Life’s making. That dream, in turn, was engraved by the footsteps of those Mandela respected: Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta, amongst many others. Moreover, it is no coincidence that Thabo Mbeki’s rallying call for an African Renaissance, an extension of Mandela’s vision, found voice in Drama for Life’s dream quest.

The formation of the African Union in 2002, the promised rebirth of Pan-African arts and culture, mainly through performing art festivals and conferences, and the looming policy formulations that would invite investor growth in Africa, for Africa, were all prevalent foundational stones for Drama for Life as she was dreaming herself into being. Asked to see ourselves in each other, to see ourselves through our relationship to one another, and to the earth and all sentient beings, Mbeki’s “I am an African” speech was inclusive, and wholehearted in its embrace of humanity. It echoed across the continent, finding resonance in Drama for Life’s pedagogy rooted in “ubuntu” (Mbeki, 1996; Nebe, 2016).

As a new entity born in the African Renaissance era, Drama for Life's vision was to locate itself in Africa as an African initiative, committed to Africa's leadership and to bridging North and South, West and East Africa, by creating a space for connection. Its vision was a bold attempt to bring together the vast imaginative and creative expertise of mature African scholars, first and foremost, into a safe, affirming and enhancing home of learning based at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. We sought as Applied Artists to unearth the roots of what made us African, to see ourselves in each other, to learn from each other's vast pools of knowledge and lived experience, and to research ways to address the threat of the HIV and AIDs pandemic in Africa as Applied Artists. The first cohort of students came with extensive field experience, representing Africa's finest arts organisations, theatre groups and Applied Theatre interventions. The dialogue was rich in complexity, the learning shared and equal in value and respectful of each person's cultural, artistic and educational knowledge. It was a challenging academic feat that held enormous promise. It became a "living pedagogy". Learning was determined by those who were present in the education space. It was mutual, collaborative, and shared and negotiated by all participants. We worked actively to deconstruct decades of colonial education by shattering the notion of the teacher as the authority, deconstructing patriarchy, redefining the relationship between teacher and student, re-imagining women and men, paying heed to oral histories, subjugated knowledge, common lived experience, cultural and unique signatures of expression and the divergent, sometimes uncomfortable spaces between us. The stories shared served as an ethnographic documentation of a living pedagogy because it was a hybrid of the present, relational cultures.

Our ordinary, oppressive and liberatory, divergent and painfully traumatic histories on the continent served as our foundation for the house we were building. After all, how could we not reflect on how colonialism, be it at the hands of the French, German, Portuguese, English or Dutch, amongst others, had shaped our countries' histories, cultural narratives, education and arts practice? Inevitably we had to contemplate the Cold War's role at the hands of the American and Russian Governments in the wars and conflicts that crisscrossed the African continent. It was impossible to ignore our own stories after witnessing our loved one's die from AIDS-related illnesses when we knew that the rich countries of the West had the patents, the know-how, and the money to provide life-saving medication. It is a story all too familiar still today in the age of Covid-19.

Being Human in the face of HIV and AIDS

What propelled us toward one another as Africans and what gave birth to Drama for Life as an African arts-based entity was the devastating impact of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa. By the time Drama for Life had launched itself in early 2008, an estimated 1.8 million people had perished of AIDS-related illnesses in South Africa. With more than two-thirds of all people living with HIV globally, Eastern and Southern Africa remains the world's hardest-hit region today, a reality exacerbated by the detrimental impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (The Global HIV AND AIDS Epidemic | KFF (2021).

It did not escape us that we had chosen to locate Drama for Life in South Africa, a country led by an HIV and AIDS denialist (Gevisser, 2009). Thabo Mbeki's Government played an influential role in discounting the relationship between HIV and AIDS through its negation of the science, its insistence on nutrition as a singular remedy, and its refusal to create access to life-saving pharmaceutical drugs. Mbeki's Government lost the legal case against it by the civil society organisation Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). The Constitutional Court ruling on 5 July 2002 declared that access to HIV and AIDS prevention services was a human right for all HIV-positive pregnant women (Honermann and Heywood, 2012). The implications of the court ruling rippled across the public health system and all related sectors to everyone's benefit, particularly those who were living with HIV. The whole region breathed a sigh of relief.

The damage, however, to public health was immeasurable, long-term. A culture of denialism personified by Mbeki's words and actions, supported by his Ministry of Health and others, had created enough misinformation, obfuscation and confusion to exacerbate an already leading cause of death: stigmatisation. Across the continent, stigma had come to play an aggravating role in intimate relationships, stopping people from taking precautionary measures, getting tested and, or openly seeking medical treatment when required. Silence and secrecy were a killer. Countless anecdotal and evidence-based related stories of how people died from AIDS-related illnesses because they had delayed taking personal action, even though they faced severe ill-health, permeated conversations and staff and students' empirical work.

As a postgraduate research space, Drama for Life's mission was to investigate how Applied Drama and Theatre as an educational methodology could effectively address stigma. The social context mapped our work: in dealing with stigma, we began to address culture, gender, sex and sexualities. We grappled with access to education and health in the context

of class, race and economics. We reflected on our own experiences in the field, what had worked and what had not worked, and began to understand the complexities of HIV and AIDS, health and education, in theory, policy and action. Furthermore, we acknowledged that if anything was going to change, we needed to create a pedagogical culture that would position critical reflection as a central tenet on who we were in relation to this work, our roles, behaviours, and choices as Applied Drama and Theatre Facilitators in engaging with complex psychological and social matter. Not only did we engage with one another from across the continent to unearth what it meant to be African, we began to unearth what it meant to be human in the face of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. We began to unearth what it would take to be responsible, conscious, and ethical professional Facilitators of Applied Drama and Theatre with children, youth and adults in schools, universities, businesses, and communities in our countries of origin. Through this active engagement, Drama for Life made several critical pedagogical choices that would shape its existence. It was the context, after all, that mattered.

A Challenge of Context: South Africa's Shadow

Drama for Life's launch was a touch and go affair. Its capacity as a significant project within the University space was made possible by substantial, generous funding from the German Government through the German International Corporation (GIZ—formerly GTZ) and Goethe-Institut. This partnership represented seemingly vastly different interests: GIZ represented the development and science world, and Goethe-Institut represented the arts and culture world. This new partnership, almost unheard of anywhere else in the world, was symbolic of Drama for Life's intersectional and interdisciplinary vision. The funding partnership enabled Drama for Life to award scholarships, comparable to Fulbright or Mandela-Rhodes scholarships, to deserving candidates primarily from the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Having named and endorsed the project, "Drama for Life", democratically at a specially convened SADC Conference in 2006, a political wrangle back at SADC Headquarters amongst competing SADC departments threatened to scupper the project. This event was symptomatic of a disease in Africa's development field, a field fractured by ongoing political in-fighting, cultural dissonance between Africa and the West, and excessive misuse of grant money allocated for development.

The GTZ SADC Director turned to me to move swiftly on implementation. On receipt of the contract, my line manager refused to sign. The rebuttal was emblematic of what I/we would have to navigate in the University