

Rewriting, Redefining, Reclaiming Identity

Reflection Transcriptions

2022

Table of Contents

W1:.....	3
Identity talk:.....	3
W2:.....	4
Complete Image	4
Image Theatre.....	4
W2 Final Reflections	5
W3:.....	5
Reflections on identity:.....	5
Final Reflections from W3:.....	6
W4 Forum Theatre	7
Keywords on violence and identity:	7
What did you learn from ‘stop and think’?	7
Reflections:	7
W7:.....	8
Healthcare continued:	8
W6 & 7 Reflection:	10
W8:.....	10
Keypoints on living conditions:	10
Final reflection:	11

W1:

Identity talk:

A: You go into a place like that and there's nothing you can do about anything; your hands are tied. It's not a case of rebelling because you committed a crime. It's got to do with the helplessness; being in a situation where you can see a miscarriage of justice and you can see the wrong things happening but it's totally beyond your control to do anything about it. And if you do do something about it, you're going to come up against. I mean if you decide you're going to protest now or say something or whatever, you don't know what you're going to get.

A: The IPV. These are the people that prisoners go to. They're supposed to be impartial. They get sent by the department or whatever. And they're supposed to be able to speak to any inmate privately without a member or anyone and you'd give them your questions, your requests, your complaints; stuff like that. They're supposed to go through the system, the department of corrections and report whatever you said. But if there's something that you reporting that goes against the grain of what is happening in the system inside the prison. Then there's a problem. The other thing is they have a policy that twice a day you line up. In the morning you get up and you line up again before you get locked up. In your lines, the member in charge shouts 'complaints or requests'. So, any complaints you have, or any requests you have, you bring it up there. If the cell leader can't help, then they bring it up there. Unless it's really serious, your complaints and requests aren't really taken care of. It's just because the law said they have to ask, they do ask.

C: They just ask and do nothing.

A: Because they're obligated to ask. And the ruder you were, the better you were treated. The people who used to swear. All the members will befriend with them. That is abuse of power.

D: For the first year, I didn't go out for exercise. They had to phone my mommy to speak to me. Because for that entire year, I did not want to go out. My food, I would just pick at it. Until my case officer came and said I have to eat because I'm going to be here for a while and I'm gonna get very sick. They put me in a single cell. When we got from Pollsmoor to Drakenstein I wasn't gonna be transferred from Pollsmoor. I was there for 5 days. Because I was maximum classified, they had to send me to Drakenstein. The doctor didn't want to send me because, in a night, I lost 2 kilos. He said, 'this is a possible TB case'.

Nawaal: Was there anything in particular that put you into that emotional and physical state other than the fear of being in prison?

D: I was surprised because this was my first time. I just found myself in a whole different world. Lost. I mean, I got sentenced, I go down to a *gat* (hole).

C: Having to go through that humiliating strip search. I mean, you're naked, you have all your clothing bundled up in your hand, then you go along this queue. They tell you, 'Squat! Squat! Jy squat!' *Yoh* that part was humiliating. It doesn't feel right. I don't know if you ever get used to that. The many times I had to go through that. It's humiliating every time. Because then you go into prison as a prisoner.

D: For me, the first time I experienced that was when I was sentenced and I went to Pollsmoor. The new ones stand on the left side and the guys that were there stand on the right side. I was the only new one that day. The member explained to me before he made me do it. He explained to me, this is what's going to happen now. He didn't make me do it there, he took me into a

room, and I did it there. I told him it's fine. I know it's protocol and I have to do this. When I got to Drakenstein, I knew that this was going to happen.

W2:

Complete Image

'What did you see?'

D: Firstly, in our image I saw oppression. The strip search oppressed us. Human dignity was being stripped away.

C: With me and A, the first image looked 'welcoming' because they were shaking hands.

C: B was being oppressed, violence, he was being beaten.

B: The first thing that came to mind was *skop*, '*skiet*' *en* *moer* (violent action). Those are the kind of words I remember from the inside. If you're not a number, *dan word jy gemoer* (then you get beaten). I was *moered* (beaten) first because I was from the same area as some of the guys. You had to try to defend yourself but even though you wanted to, you were still powerless. You couldn't do it because you weren't a number. The second thing was that you were stripped from your dignity, and your privacy. The way that A was standing, *waar's my* privacy (where's my privacy). I'm used to having my own private space but here you've got no privacy.

A: I'm with B. I just saw fear. You know you're defenceless. And even if you want to, you can't do anything. You're not just fighting the person who's doing it but you're fighting a system. If you're inside there you've got to consider in those few seconds what happens if you retaliate. There are so many things to consider as in, how does it affect you in that cell? How does it affect you outside of the cell? How does it affect you with the wardens because are you going to be charged? Are you going to be able to sleep tonight? All of that. And if you don't fight back, then you like a *frans* (not a number), what are people going to do to you because then you're weak. So, you're fighting a complete system. With the strip search, I get that with human dignity. And then he was spot on actually, that privacy and you trying to hold yourself back, but you can't really because everything you do is just open.

Image Theatre

Human rights violations present in Image of the Word

A: Your dignity, your human dignity

D: Your right to privacy.

A: There's not much of a right. But it's your right to safety and security. You're supposed to have the right to adequate living conditions.

B: And what about freedom of speech? You don't have a say about anything. You must know your place. If you say something, you have to think before you speak.

A: You have to think before you speak. Because I mean those rights come with responsibility and when you commit a crime certain of those rights you lose. And you've got to understand that, so you've got to adhere to the system that's being enforced.

W2 Final Reflections

‘What are your reflections or any thoughts on today, on identity, on how you used to feel when it came to your identity?’

B: I think sometimes you just felt lonely. Even though you realise afterwards that you are in prison, there are moments when you felt alone. Yes, you’ve got buddies, you’ve made contacts with some people to get some things and whatever. You still feel that loneliness when you sit in a quiet space. You think you can still do what you want to do, then the realisation kicks in: *kyk ‘hiesa’, ek is terug in reality* (look here, I am back in reality). *Ek is in die tronk in. Ek kan nie doen wat ek wil doen* (I am in prison. I can’t do what I want).

D: I can relate to that but mainly the part that you are speaking about. For a full year and a few months, I didn’t go out for exercise. At all. In the end, they had to phone my parents to tell them that ‘I’m not coming out to get sunlight.’, ‘I need exercise’, ‘I’m just in my cell.’. I think there’s that sense of ‘I’m alone in this’ or ‘I’ve got nowhere to go’. This is my lot. This is what I’m facing and how am I gonna deal with this right now? After the judge said to me, bam, 15 years, it felt like ‘there goes my world; ‘I’m spending 15 years behind bars and I’m not gonna see the outside world.’. So, you get that sense of loneliness.

B: I think I never really had a happy moment in prison. Until they brought ginger biscuits to prison.

W3:

Reflections on identity:

Recap on the group poem:

So, there was this girl who always sat on her bed,

Jy kom sit hier soos iemand wat vooregte het.

Die issie jou ma se huis nie.

Are you insane or are you lame?

Is it a shame to make the same mistakes again and again? Wake and please refrain.

Trying to write just a letter.

Damn, I should have known better.

To attempt to do it in here,

But my response is coated with fear.

‘What’s the difference between your sense of self now and your sense of self then, considering how all of those violations impacted who you are? What did you notice between the past and the present?’

D: For the past, I said ‘fearful’, ‘non-existent’, ‘alienated’ and ‘very foreign’. Presently, I am more courageous now. I’m seen. I feel like I’ve got the sense of belonging back to something and somewhere. I just feel good and like I can do anything.

B: Again and again, attempt responses. *Voorregte* (privileges). That was in the past. But then I see some of the stuff still reflecting in the present. What I used to do again and again and again, I’m still doing again and again and again. That would be both good and bad. Sometimes I will

tell myself, “(Dis) my laaste drink” (this is my last drink). For example, *Môre doen ek dit net* again (tomorrow I do it again). It’s a bad thing. In the past where it came to wanting to attempt to do something, there was that fear also of ‘Am I good enough?’, ‘Am I able to do this?’. Today I’m doing whatever I apply my mind to. I just do it. There’s no more second thoughts. Obviously, there’s second thoughts when it comes to doing bad but when it’s doing the right thing, I don’t just say I’m actually going to do it; I actually do it. Then, I highlighted this one, responses. I was very quick to respond to things, I never listened. I just wanted to be the right one. But today I can speak vibrantly in response because I speak the facts. It’s no longer like in the past where I have to ‘*Ja man, die tronk is so en so en so*’ (yes man, prison is like this and like that). Now that I’ve experienced it, I can actually say ‘this is how the experience was’. Even in my personal life, this is how things are going for me. It might be different to someone else, but that’s just how it is. Today I am actually skilled with certain things which will actually prevent me from having the ‘privileges’ that would be of a disadvantage to me. That’s where the ‘coatedness’ comes in, where I used to wear a mask to cover my face. Put up an appearance but today I appear as other than I wanted people me to see me.

C: I’ve got a fear of expressing. ‘Solitary-ness’. Loneliness. Violated. Over and over. You would be violated; you wouldn’t be given the chance to speak up and then you’d be afraid to speak up also. Whereas now, I feel freer to say what is on my mind; what I feel is right or should be rightfully mine. Also, to express myself also. Feeling solitary also, at that time. You felt alone even though you were in a room with approximately seventy other people. That’s on the maximum side. I was one of them. I felt alone and I was on drugs also. That also made me feel alone and rejected or not accepted in some people’s lives or how I should have been there; what was expected of me from my family. Now you did wrong. Now you’re not allowed certain things. Like, you are an outcast also. Whereas now, I use that experience to teach others about my experience. That brings oneness and togetherness. All of that was just violence that time. It wasn’t seen, wasn’t heard. I feel now it’s been adhered to or seen. That time we go through the same stuff over and over. It’s very difficult for me to put myself in that time. I don’t know why. It’s not that I regret where I came from. It’s hard for me man. I find it difficult. But also, I don’t want to forget it.

Final Reflections from W3:

‘What did you notice? How did you find the process? Is there anything you’ve taken away?’

D: As a final reflection, all our experiences were different. And yet the same as we all have been violated where safety and security is concerned. Yes, it might have been in different ways, but it all boils down to, ‘we’ve gone through the same experience but just in different ways.’

C: Maybe to encourage you guys and myself to express ourselves more maybe. Say what you feel, what’s on your mind and in your heart. We shouldn’t be afraid to embrace our emotions. When we’re happy we should be happy. When we’re sad, we should feel sad. We shouldn’t try to suppress our feelings. We should be true to our feelings within ourselves. I also agree with D that we do feel the same way regarding our safety and security in prison, but we did also experience it individually in our own way.

B: In the past and now in the present, some of our habits may persist. I feel, personally, that I have grown from it. I think I can recognise in some of them as well, not the person who they used to be. That to me is an advantage. It’s also a testimony to not only the community but also to the next generation. Reflecting on what we’ve been through and how we can encourage others to try and refrain from going down the same road that we’ve been through. I’ve also learnt

that we are able to depend on ourselves nowadays, coming from the setting back then and using our experience to motivate ourselves. Being strong enough to actually keep us away from what we were doing and therefore being the way that we are today.

W4 Forum Theatre

Keywords on violence and identity:

B: Inside, I wasn't accountable for much other than needing to behave myself. I'm accountable more at home with family responsibility with actions.

C: Safety. You are safe inside, in a sense. You're safe from a lot of things that could have happened outside.

Nawaal: Could the situation be reversed to say that you could also be safer outside.

C: Yes.

A: Relationships. Precariousness. The relationships you form in prison and the impact it can have in your life if you are not involved in that relationship. How your own relationships can impact other people also in prison and the precariousness thereof.

What did you learn from 'stop and think'?

B: You're colonised in your mind.

C: It's not easy going from the character, from what they were thinking, to yourself.

B: It became easier, knowing the plot, then putting yourself in the positions of the character or their feelings. What would you have done? What would you have been thinking after stuff like that?

A: One thing that also became blatantly obvious. Even though B was saying whatever, because you had done something wrong in the eyes of that person and the eyes of the wardens, it makes you defensive. You can't react like you normally would. You've got to behave in a certain way. Even if you're outside and you have a job, you still have the freedom to tell your boss off and take the repercussions. You have that choice. In prison, you're completely cut off. Those people, your parole, and how the rest of your visit plays out depends on how you act in certain aspects. You say what you feel or know they want to hear. There's very much a restriction of speech and a restriction of actions. There's a 3rd restriction in your mind. You've got to change how you think in certain ways, so you don't let it slip out.

Reflections:

'What came up for you during the writing and Forum Theatre process?'

A: You're thinking of what you're saying and how to respond within whatever context it is but you're also anticipating questions that may be asked. My mind is already like, 'how would I answer?' If you're on the forum side of it, it's as B and C said earlier, looking at the person, hearing the person and thinking about what they could possibly be thinking whilst sitting there.

A: It's very, very reflective because it's a case of watching the person and having a way of putting myself in a person's shoes. You sort of go into the mind and just say, "How would I be feeling? I always imagine myself sitting there. I'm extremely sceptical and don't believe most things until they're proven to me.

D: It's like saying something in character and actually trying to figure out what that character is thinking at that time. That, for me, was also something else. It's more reflective, as in, which side you're sitting on and what goes through your head.

D: From up here you don't know what C is thinking whilst looking at you. When you're down there, you don't know what the person up here is thinking.

C: When we played the character, it was difficult, doing the stop and thinking. As, to put myself in the shoes of the character at that moment, it was a bit tricky. As we did it more, it became a bit easier.

'What issues are present in the Forum Theatre story'.

A: I think mental abuse. The fear of the unknown and the fear of your precarious situation. Not knowing what to expect and being an adult in a closed community. You're almost like a child. You can't say what you want to, and you're dictated to. Your actions and reactions are not what they always should be. As I said, you're always on the defensive. You get people like Kate that don't like you for whatever reason. It's a form of mental abuse. You always have to watch what you say, when you say it and to who you say it to. You can never be yourself completely unless you find a very close group of people that you trust implicitly. You can't move. You can't leave. The length of your bed is your space until the prison decides that they want to move you. You've got to try and make that space as comfortable as possible for yourself. You try and get on with everybody because you don't know what other people are capable of. I was never myself. I couldn't be. Fear also. You fear the responses of people. Also, what you put yourself through trying to fit in or be comfortable in the space. How things are done and how things are sorted as to what the social forces decide, determine how you must live and where you must live. The conditions that you live under aren't suited to your needs as a person. It doesn't necessarily meet the standards for your human rights. It's ongoing so it's structuralized. You don't have any way to change. That's where the mental abuse comes in because of the fear in that situation. Then physical abuse in the sense of, if you say too much, they put you on a speed draft. Because you're long-term, they can send you to Pollsmoor, Sun-city, George or wherever they feel like it. There are all different types of mental abuse.

W7:

Healthcare continued:

Key points on issues of healthcare. Key points from the games pushing against each other, imitating others, and radio needle.

B: Not just radio stations but essentially the whole mass media. They tend to paint things in a different light. They tend to put out the positive thing. That's why I put in there that you can bring in specialists to talk about this, that and the other but once you're inside and you have experience, it brings out a totally different story. They will always have a cover-up story. When they bring in a specialist, the specialist would always make it easy by saying, "This he has had for quite some time, he never developed it in prison". But sometimes you develop things like that while inside out of fear and stress and those kinds of things. They always tend to sweep it under the mat. There was a time that they knocked me with a lock over my head. They said it was because I was looking for trouble. I was waiting for a parcel and the lock just

came on my head. I had to get several stitches. There were no members to see. The guys that work inside the prison, they are also scared of some sort of gang or someone inside that might be able to threaten the family, so they'd rather sweep it under the carpet.

D: It's true what B says about sweeping it under the carpet. I was gang raped in prison. When I went to tell the member, this is what happened, he sat me down and he was like 'So, I can't take this to the head of prison because I will lose my job.' At the time, I used to help them a lot with the admin. He asked me to do the inventory and check the bed and stuff like that. That's when it happened. I was alone in the room and these 4 guys came in and they raped me. I went to him, and he said, 'I can't tell the head of prison. What I'm gonna tell the head of prison is that they were playing with you, and you didn't like it.' That's what happened. However, the head of prison, knowing me, saw that I was lying when I spun that story. Two days later, the actual truth came out and they got punished for it. One of the guys actually had a release date to go home and he lost his date. There's a lot of stuff that happens, especially where healthcare is concerned, they just shoved it under the carpet. When it came out that I was gang raped, then they were on their toes because I said I'm going to tell my parents and you guys nothing about what happened. Then they got security to take me hospital for treatment. Then they made a case and all of that. But I wasn't seen to. I was told to spin a story otherwise 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 is gonna happen to you and you're going to lose this and that. When you come with the truth then they threaten you because you've got so many privileges, and this is gonna be taken away from you. I tend to agree and that's why I slipped into the role of the head of prison. That's why I said all of those things. In front of people, these 300 and something offenders, it's my responsibility and if I slip up, how am I gonna look? What are these kids and what are these inmates' parents gonna say about me as the head of prison? Then I'm not doing my job properly. I can't do that, so I need to create a cover-up story because of that. DCS is afraid of the media. They are afraid of being exposed in the media. That is why they have a spokesperson, and the spokesperson just sugar-coats everything.

B: When it comes to *die medical bakke* (the medical containers). When you come into the prison and you are either awaiting trial or on a running case, then let's say you've got 15 days to appear. Then they use you, especially when you're a *Frans*, to say that you're medical. Then you get things that the other inmates don't get. They would use you to tell them, 'Listen here, say that you're a medical patient here'. Then you would receive that and in return, 'I'll give you my bread or my what. Then I'll take the medical *bak* (container) to make things easier for the other inmates inside'. When it gets to the member that this has been happening, then the guys, the top-notch, would actually have a word with the members to the guy they made a deal with. He didn't ask him for it. This guy would agree and say that 'I wanted more bread or something'. His health is being neglected, even if he's not really a medical patient, there's some of them that really need to be attended to. They would swop it and they would be on more of a downside where their health is concerned. At the end of the day, that guy ends up in a hospital and he has to wait also to get seen to. So, he's affected negatively in the long run. Say this guy has TB and he's gonna die in 30 days. After 30 days, this guy would still give away his medical *bak* (container) because of the threats that happened inside. But the members sweep it under the carpet.

C: I can't see the reason why there are so little doctors practising inside the prison. Doctors should also be staying on the premises at the prisons. They get the housing subsidy on the prison premises to be there to be available when they need to be. It is supposed to be in the budget of the prison. Then you get all these other things that the prison caters for. They have all these expensive instruments and equipment. Where's the medical supplies that should be there?

B: Who do you tell your problems to? We've got one social worker. She was the only social worker for both the male and the female in medium B. If I've got a problem, like I wanted to see my son. None of the members could help me until I wrote a *verslag* (report) to the head of prison. She assisted me with my first phone call. That way I could connect with my son. She told me to remind her every week that I could come in for a phone call even if I don't have a call card or I'm not allowed to use the phone or anything. That's what stresses me. The longing to build a relationship with your family on the outside. That also makes you sick on the inside. It plays mentally with you. That actually drives some people insane. There was this guy, he's like a frequent flyer. This one guy opened the door for us one morning. I heard him whole night on the phone in the room. They just took the padlock and the chain, and he just went *bos* (wild) on the members. They wanted to have a national braai day but at the same time, we couldn't be allowed to make a phone call. He was having problems with his kid at home that was sick. One morning he took his lock and his chain, and he was going at them. I could see then that it was playing emotionally and psychologically. When they came to a conclusion as to why he did then the head of centre said, we need to allow them more time. Even with the visits, you get like half an hour but then they cut it to 10 or 15 minutes because of the population of the prison.

'Is there access to psychiatrists and psychologists?'

B: We do but only when they see that you're going 'crazy'. So, you have to be 'crazy' in order for them to refer you. Even if you want to see one, with a personal problem you don't want to talk to the next person about, you have to go 'crazy' in order to see one.

W6 & 7 Reflection:

'What did you learn about yourself, about who you are?'

B: You still have this little piece inside of you that still cares. Especially when you're incarcerated. You can still see who needs more attention than you and you know your own strength. At the end of the day that still comes into play where you still see to the next person other than yourself.

B: They will tell you, okay right on Christmas day we'll give you a lucky packet. Come Christmas day you won't even see the outside light. Then you would go out and say but on Christmas day we did this, this, and that to the media. And the media will report that, and the families will say aww that's so good of them. But then when we are released, we say but they did shit, they did nothing. I don't know. That's why I also said the fear of oppression. Especially when the number gangs target the higher ranks of DCS. You've got family, you've got this, you've got that. You make sure that we've got the right to this, especially us, we don't give a shit about the rest. If we don't have the right to this, we'll put the word on the outside. And even your men are working for us. The only way that the system can be changed is if there are DCS members with the core beliefs that go according to the white paper.

W8:

Key points on living conditions:

'How did the poor living conditions affect your sense of identity?'

D: What I wrote was what other people experienced. The place was dirty. There was a lot of overcrowding. There are cockroaches because of the food. There are big rats. The toilets smelt like urine. It wasn't cleaned.

- B: There's a lot of rats. On my side, there was no detergent for cleaning, so we had to use the green soap. To do our own shit. We had broken toilet facilities, so we had to push our hands down and create our own flow, even down the basin. There were no toiletries. Not enough per inmate. 4 or 5 people per toilet roll and one facecloth that you have to tear in four so that you can all have a piece to wash off. Lice. You were living with them. Then there's the broken windows of course. Then the food poisoning and the worms and even the expired dry ingredients. Then the walls peel and are very mouldy. That caused a whole lot of asthma attacks and TB patients to go.
- C: Lack of toiletries. There's not enough toiletries per inmate. If there are any toiletries at certain times, they just forget about it. Filthy blankets. At the time I was at the prison, the washing facilities were closed for 10 years. When it eventually opened up, I was one of the guys that said we're going to wash the blankets of the sections. We went into every room take the dirty blankets, wash it and fold the blankets. There's broken toilet bowls. Like broken, you can't use it, or it's blocked to the point when you can't use it. The plumbers don't come out. Then there's the over crowdedness. There's too many in a cell. A cell that was made to house like 30 or 40 inmates, they put like 90 guys in there.
- C: Yeah, for me it was like; '*Yarre, hoekom het jy jouself lat vang?*' (Why did you get caught). I couldn't have done this to myself.

Final reflection:

Final reflections on human dignity, human rights, sense of self, wellbeing

- B: We've got a platform to speak about it now whereas we never had a platform to utter one word. To me at the end of the day, being in the position where you've got the experience of being incarcerated boils down to one thing; that you have been treated with unfairness, even though people claim that you are now the property of the state. When you are done with your parole, who are you then property of? Who have you been property of before you were incarcerated? Where does your identity lie et cetera? Why does it have to change when you are incarcerated? Yes, you have to do certain things in order to fend for yourself and to survive. At the end of the day, how can I say something, do something, have my own identity to survive in prison without being threatened or being a victim of anything of a sort? The platform that we have, and we are more on a privileged level to speak, laugh, write about it. There's always a light that goes on to say this, that and the other happened and this is what I can bring to the table.
- C: You are property of DCS. If you are property of DCS for the remainder of your sentence or court date, then why do they not treat you like you're supposed to be treated? Why not uphold your rights that they so openly violate every day? They do with you what they feel like they want to do. As long as they get their pay check from month to month, they don't care about you.
- B: There's something in the bill of rights that says every human being has the right to this and that. At the same time, some of the rights can be taken away, but only on a court mandate. How can DCS just take it away if there's no court mandate?