

Gugu Mkhulisi

Professor Joan Hepburn

Masks, Circles: Healing The Pain

This play is, undoubtedly, one of the best pieces of work that I have ever laid my eyes on. This is not only because of the plot and how the theme of sisterhood is shown between various races but because of how it was written. Moving between the masked and unmasked characters represents the masks that we wear to make it seem as though we are living these happy lives when in fact, we have baggage that we carry with us. The unmasked characters show a soft side that is almost childlike, so pure and innocent yet carries so many burdens. The characters all have different things that meant a lot to them as children that they lost in one way or another and this to me, also symbolises how they lost their childhood and true selves due to rape. They lost their hopes and settled for what life had given them instead of hoping for more. The fact that they get these back at the end of the play is the restoration of the characters' dreams and hopes as well as their lives to themselves.

Ever so often, when we meet people, we first look at our differences. The play shows 5 women, of different backgrounds and races or heritages who are not bound together by the colour of their skin but rather –and unfortunately- their unfortunate circumstances. The women in this play find themselves in a place that draws them in, so them being here is quite unfortunate. They overlook the fact that they do not even know how they got there but rather look at the fact that their stories of being survivors of rape is what binds them together. They are all drawn into this space where they feel at home and unjudged, a safe space and this space seems to help them form relationships among themselves as well as share their stories. I am personally not one who is entirely for safe spaces because I feel as though safe spaces are not safe for everyone. There is never a moment where everyone

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feels extremely safe or at ease, especially when there is a group of people from different backgrounds but the play showed me that there is actually a possibility of being in such a space and the space works for everyone almost equally without one person or a group of people being dominant in the setting that they are in. However, in order for people to reach such a space, then they have to reach a common ground then move from there which is a human flaw because way too often, we jump at our differences.

Last summer, I did an interview with the, "Pink Brandy Programme" and one of the questions that they asked me was what my life goals were. One of the goals that I mentioned was that I would like to see a safe space for the women of Swaziland. A place where women of similar experiences can go and just share their survivor stories and other experiences and heal, in the process. The challenge that would come with this was to encourage women to overlook their differences and realise that fact that we are similar in ways that we cannot even comprehend and are bound by similar experiences yet we all walk around in our little bubbles and ignore the people around us, who possess the power to help us cope and heal. This wish of mine was encouraged by a statistic that I saw when doing research for a project that as is, 2 in 3 girls are sexually assaulted before they reach the age of 20, in Swaziland. Looking at this statistic taught me two things;

1. I am not the only one
2. There are other girls out there who are still hurting and living with the burden of the secret that they have not told, who live around me. Since we live in a country where the senators are currently looking to remove incest and marital rape from the country's

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Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Bill, nobody will help us get out of this but each other.

As a result, a friend of mine and I, created an annual event where women of different ages get together and share their stories and mingle with the hope to create relations such as the ones created by the characters in this play. So if anything, this play inspired me to keep this event going as well as think of other ways to create a safe space for women who cannot make it to the event.

The repetition of peace and tranquillity to describe the setting in which these women are in represents not an actual place but a state in which one has to be in order to move forward. We often do not realise the power of acceptance and coming to terms with what happened and then being at peace about it. So the fact that the characters meet at this place portrays the fact that they have reached the point where they accept their circumstances and then they are now ready to move forward together too. Which is an important element in the story, it shows the power of being surrounded by people who are genuinely supportive of you and how in the end they encourage Nancy to go back to school as a beam of hope for all of them shows just how sisterhood goes beyond age and race.