ADAPTATION AND PERFORMANCE OF GREEK DRAMA IN POST-APARTEID SOUTH AFRICA

by

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Abstract

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In my dissertation I examine how adaptations of Greek tragedy in South Africa after the fall of apartheid (1994) address the transitional stage of the country and mediate in the formation and apprehension of post-apartheid national identities and the formation of a new *communitas*. Drawing particularly from Raymond Williams and Jean-Pierre Vernant, I approach tragedy as a paradigmatic model for analyzing the dialectical relationship between cultural text and social context. The examination of this paradigm in the context of post-apartheid South Africa is grounded in postcolonial theory defined as an ongoing project of addressing the politics of identity representation in conjunction with the underlying conditions of cultural and material inequalities in a neo-colonial context.

I am focusing on three plays that provide distinct perspectives on the problem of national identity in the post-apartheid era and distinct artistic approaches to the process of adaptation. My examination of each play consists of two, interrelated parts: in the first part, I conduct a structural analysis of the text and an examination of the ways it relates to and reworks the major themes and concepts of the Greek tragedy it adapts. In the second part, I examine the connections between the country’s dominant discourses on national identities and the plays’ representations of these.
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1. Introduction

My journey into the research of contemporary South African adaptations of Greek tragedy began by way of contemporary Greece, first as a result of a frustration over the current state of the performance of tragedy in the country-- a frustration shared by audiences, critics and practitioners alike over what they see as an oscillation of tragedy between conventionality and aesthetic experimentation for its own sake-- and secondly from what I personally see as a poverty, in the country, of intellectual and academic discourse on tragedy. Increasing aesthetic experimentation along postmodernist lines and models, imported primarily from central Europe is complemented, on the intellectual level, by an anxiety over the fate of “our” texts, and “our” language in the hands of local or foreign, “traditional” or experimental directors. This anxiety is premised on a popular discourse (disseminated primarily through education and the mass media) that views tragedy as one of the cornerstones of national cultural identity and pride and simultaneously a bearer of universal aesthetic and ideological values that should be universally “respected” and preserved. The result of such perceptions that rarely, if ever, enter into a critical debate, is that in recent years, the performances of tragedy that fill the open-air theatres around Greece every summer increasingly become the battlefield where “Greekness”, cultural and national identity as well as self-respect are measured, defended or threatened. What seems to evade the attention in such heated reactions is the lack of a systematic intellectual analysis of the links between tragedy as part of the larger domain
of cultural production and contemporary Greek identity, a discussion that has taken place in the postcolonial world but does not seem to have significantly affected Greek intellectual discourse. The result of this vacuum is, in my view, an aloofness by practitioners and critics, over the political relevance of the form and content of tragedy in a country which at present is wrought by economic, political and social problems. Departing from this blatant absence of the discussion of politics in Greek performances and criticism of tragedy, and confident that one can find out about oneself by looking from a distance and through the lens of someone else’s reality, I turned to South Africa, a country with an exceptionally vibrant political and theatrical history in order to explore what started as a very simple question: what is the political relevance of tragedy today?

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With that point of departure, I want to discuss how adaptations of Greek drama in South Africa post apartheid and after the first democratic elections in 1994 address the transitional stage of the country and mediate in the formation and apprehension of post-apartheid national identities. Drawing significantly from Williams and Vernant among others, I approach tragedy as a paradigmatic model for analyzing the dialectical relationship between cultural text and social context.

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1 This raises a major issue which is beyond the scope of my thesis, namely, what is the position of Greece in relation to the West, and to Western cultural praxis and discourse. I believe that part of the reason that such debates have not reached the country is postcolonial discourse’s monolithic geographical division between the West and the postcolony that does not differentiate between certain Western areas’ ambivalent status and history. For a relevant discussion see Lazarus (2002).

2 I use the term “cultural text” as defined by Balme (1999) as any carrier of integral meaning (ceremonies, works of art, genres etc) because of the flexibility of the concept to include not only linguistic cultural manifestations. I find such a term appropriate for tragedy because it allows us to view it not strictly as text but in its broader cultural dimensions that include dance, music, ritual, politics.
The examination of this paradigm in the context of post-apartheid South Africa requires an acknowledgment and definition of the country’s postcolonial status. Although the post-1994 period has been defined in critical discourse as postcolonial, the colonial history of South Africa including apartheid and its ongoing repercussions as well as the neo-liberal policies adopted after democratization must all be taken into account as they complicate the use of the term for dramatic and cultural criticism. Although the shift from a materialist cultural discourse that emphasized the structural relations between class, race and culture to a postcolonial discourse concerned more with issues of identity representation seems to be common in the post-colonial world, the very particular colonial history of South Africa and the special characteristics of apartheid make the application of postcolonial criticism more complicated than elsewhere. The presence of “the colonizer [who] will not be got rid of, precisely because he does not see himself as such” (Carusi 1990: 96) and "the proliferating binaries of apartheid [which] will long outlive any merely political winning of freedom" (Pechey 1996:153) create in the country what Loren Kruger (1999) terms an “asynchronicity” in the way the nation perceives itself- a result of the multiplicity of ethnic groups and the different stages of development and modernity due to colonialism and apartheid. Voicing the same concerns as critics in the rest of Africa who caution against postcolonialism’s Eurocentricism Kruger writes:

3 In his overview of the history of South African Theatre Hauptfleisch (1997) defines the post 1994 period as postcolonial. Kruger (1999), Carusi (1990) and most recently Warnes (unpublished manuscript) all agree that while colonization in South Africa which is of the settler type and apartheid which has been defined as “colonialism of a special type” make the historical limits of colonialism harder to define. Yet they all conclude that postcolonial discourse is still useful and relevant for the analysis of South African culture.
the combination of modernizing and archaizing impulses in (...) South African theatrical nationhood (...) resists attempts to assimilate the drama of South Africa to the influential formulation of postcolonial culture as "all the culture affected by colonization from imperialism to the present day" (Ashcroft et al) [...] The problem with this generalized idea of the postcolonial condition (...) is that it "suspends" history including the history of cultural imperialism and the past and present of uneven development, in the name of a generalized "resistance". The attribution of anticolonial force to textual complexity under the aegis of a postcolonial "resistance" also attempts to validate as "postcolonial" those formal techniques that have more to do with metropolitan modernism and postmodernism, thus potentially reinforcing rather than deconstructing the hegemony of metropolitan cultural and critical norms, while neglecting other forms, from "tribal sketches" to "historical pageants" which despite association with colonial and neocolonial institutions, such as mission schools, have been used by Africans to assert their own modernity and sovereignty" (1999: 9).

Kruger does not reject postcolonialism as a critical tool but uses it provisionally:

If the term "postcolonial" is to help us in plotting the drama of South Africa, it has to illuminate these asymmetrical and asynchronic enactments of South African modernity and maturity (...) and thus to acknowledge as Homi Bhabha puts it the "disjunctive" character of the "enunciative present of modernity" (1991: 195). The
ambiguous temporality of the impersonations and enunciations at play here does not therefore mean that we should abandon the term "postcolonial" but rather that we should pay due attention to each of the stages to which they might appear" (ibid. 11).

My analysis therefore will be conducted from the perspective of postcolonial discourse which, in acknowledging the limitations of the use of the term in the case of South Africa and in an increasingly neo-colonial world, is conceived “as a process of postcolonializing (...) a project [that] has to be alert to imbalances and injustices wherever these may be found in East and West, North and South (...) a project to correct imbalances in the world, and not merely to do with specific "postcolonial constituencies..." (Quayson 2000: 9-11). Such a definition overcomes some of the most crucial limitations of postcolonial theory. Firstly, it allows for the inclusion of many instantiations of the postcolonial that can encompass the post-apartheid and the neocolonial. More crucially, it shows a materialist sensitivity that does not focus solely on identity politics and the problems of cultural representation thus evading the problem.

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4 Miyoshi (1993) for example argues that not only postcolonialism has not been achieved but that we are confronted with neo-colonialism on a global scale.

5 Postcolonialism as a theory and practice of cultural analysis has raised criticism on various levels: that it generalizes and pays little attention to specific locations, histories and institutions; that its disassociation with the Third World renders postcolonial identities not structural but discursive; that it effaces pre-colonial histories and takes focus away from a sharp critic of imperialism; that it advocates the emergence of a postcolonial split-subjectivity which in fact is disempowering; and that with its focus on culture and identity politics it risks to aestheticize colonialism (see Loomba and Orkin (1998, Introduction) for an overview of these viewpoints. Also Shohat (1992), McClintock (1996), San Juan (2002)). In addition, African critics have argued that post-colonial criticism overemphasizes the binary opposition between metropolis and colony, assessing the colonizers' cultural production not in its own terms but as voicing resistance to the "master" who thus remains at the centre of critical attention (see for example Osofisan 1999).
of "aestheticizing colonialism" that postcolonial theory has been critiqued for, yet calls for a consideration of economic inequalities in assessing cultural representations.  

South Africa’s “asynchronicity”, the characteristics of which I will discuss later, in combination with the fact that the demise of apartheid and the transition to democracy are relatively recent and their repercussions still felt and debated, make South Africa an ideal context from which to explore the possibilities of combining postcolonial discourse with a materialist sensibility in the exploration of Greek drama as a model for identifying the links between cultural text and social context.

In this section I want to give an overview of the dominant critical approaches to Greek tragedy in South Africa in order to argue for the need to redefine the transhistorical and transcultural character of tragedy and re-examine the “grounds of comparison” upon which we discuss Greek tragedy in a postcolonial context. Focusing particularly on postcolonial dramatic criticism, I want to suggest that although it has pointed to the equivalences upon which a discussion of Greek drama in Africa can be facilitated, it has not adequately explored other areas of commensurability.

6 Quayson clearly aligns himself with Marxist criticism "as a broad discourse of continuing significance to understanding the condition of the world today. Marxism provides a particular constellation of concepts to account for facts in the sociocultural configurations of the postcolonial world order...” (2000:13). For a discussion on the possibilities and points of contact between postcolonial theory and Marxism see also Bartolovich and Lazarus (2002).

7 I am drawing my use of the concepts of “equivalence”, “comparison” and “commensurability” from Melas’ (2007) analysis of identifying grounds of comparison in a postcolonial context. Discussing the notion of comparison from the point of view of what she terms a “postcolonial formalism”, Melas proposes the notion of “incommensurability” as a concept that may help reconfigure comparison “not as a method but as a space, where it signifies inclusiveness and a non-hierarchical transversality” (2007: 41). Her concept of incommensurability is situated at the space between comparison and equivalence and allows us
Any discussion of tragic criticism in South Africa must take into account the fact that Greek Drama enters South Africa by means of the colonial culture and education imported into the country from the mid-19th century onwards. Therefore its presence must be examined within the broader context of Western drama in South Africa and its function as a tool of cultural dominance that affirms European supremacy and reflects an elite education yet is also an instrument of cultural resistance expressing dissatisfaction with oppression and exploitation. As I will be showing, the utilization of Western dramatic and performance forms by English, Afrikaner and Black South Africans for reinventing, affirming or questioning cultural identity has problematized the very usage of the terms “Western” and “African” insofar as they do not adequately account for the diversity of European and Black African populations in the country and the multiple affiliations among them along class and racial lines manifested in the various forms of cultural production. While acknowledging this complexity I will be using “Western” and “African” as working definitions to describe dramatic and performance modes imported by the colonies through the country’s settler populations and Black African performance modes respectively.

to bring “previously separated objects into comparison, even when [there is] no given basis of equivalence” (ibid. 31) in a non-hierarchical, non “measuring” fashion. The concept then “produces a generative dislocation without silencing discourse or marking the limit of knowledge. This minimal incommensurability instead opens up the possibility of an intelligible relation at the limits of comparison” (ibid.). Melas’ approach is historically and conceptually situated between the postcolonial promise of the recentralization of dispersed and fragmented possibilities which “neither reduces those fragments to equivalent forms nor induces a paralyzing incommensurability” (ibid. 42) and, on the other hand, the commodification of late capitalism where “there are no limits to commensurability (…) insofar as it can hypothetically bring all objects into relation on the basis of equivalence” (ibid.).
In this context an assessment of Greek drama in South Africa consequently must take into account Kruger’s cautionary remarks when she discusses the dominance of the Western canon in South Africa and the attempts towards decentralizing it:

Distinctions between the centre and the periphery, between imported and indigenous production, between affirmative and critical culture, are (...) not as straightforward as some commentators may wish to claim. Any argument for the overall neo-colonial character of theatre (...) needs to take into account not only the nationality or ethnicity of the playwright but also the workings of the institution of theatre (1999: 51).

As is the case in the rest of Africa, Western theatrical forms and plays of the Western canon were imported to South Africa first by travelling groups from the metropolitan centres of Europe (particularly London) and later by local companies to enforce the relations with the colonial metropolis and solidify the colonizers’ ethnic identity and-- particularly in the case of the Afrikaners-- language. These imported theatre forms included “the whole range of melodrama, farce, music hall, vaudeville, musicals, cabarets, pantomime and dance, as well as the full canon of “serious fare” as well as “[t]he “classic” tradition, represented by Shakespeare, Moliere, Schiller, Ibsen, Chekhov, Shaw, O’Neill, Anouilh, Williams, Miller, Osborne (...)” (Hauptfleisch 1987: 181).

This directly imported drama soon led to the production of local South African drama “based on a paradigm derived from the Western concepts of theatre and theatrical
endeavour, making use of the infrastructure and conventions introduced to the country by the British and the Dutch” (ibid.). This type of drama was adopted by Afrikaner, British and African writers alike, the latter transposing the Western models either into local African languages or writing in English. Whether imported or local this type of drama was highly influential from the mid-19th century until the last decades of the 20th and has “constituted the central and dominant form within the South African theatre system, exercising a hegemonic control over both the “canon” (what is to be published, what is to be studied) and the “paradigm” (what form the new, indigenous plays should be written in)” (ibid.).

In terms of the themes and styles adopted, the Western or Western-modeled works, whether by European or Black artists, can be broadly divided into two categories: works directly replicating Western aesthetic and thematic emphases and interested in aesthetic experimentation rather than political engagement; and works that employed the western forms and themes, often inventively mixing styles, in order to address the realities of life in South Africa. Among the second type of work, the most popular Western theatre techniques adopted were those of the politicized theatre of Brecht and Piscator, Grotowski’s “poor theatre” and, particularly after apartheid and the emergence

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8 Referring to the neo-colonial theatre dominating South Africa in the early 1900s Kruger writes that even locally produced plays “may have departed from metropolitan norms in incorporating local topics and dialect, but [their] generic mix of drawing-room comedy, social satire, and broad farce was exactly the combination that was popular in metropolitan and provincial theatres in Britain and North America at the time” (1999: 51).
of a very active community theatre, Boal’s socially engaged theatre style. 10

The ideological underpinning of the first category of educational, entertaining or apolitical Western theatre is not hard to discern insofar as these works, implicitly or explicitly, sustained and disseminated the cultural creation of a privileged elite and functioned as tools to “embody, transmit, and provide the demonstrative rationale to support [the state’s] national policies” (Peterson 1994: 38). 11 While British theatre was concerned particularly with an entertaining type of shows, a trend also followed by many Black African artists, Afrikaner theatre was more interested in consolidating its language and identity and promoting Afrikaner nationalism. 12 Black writers of the African elite followed on this theatre tradition seeking to combine African themes with the Western aesthetic. 13

In the second, alternative and more overtly politicized category we find plays whose themes engage with economic oppression and exploitation, township life, pass

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10 For a discussion of Brecht’s influence on South African as well as more generally postcolonial theatre see Kruger (1999, 2004)
11 “The pedagogic appeal of performance for missionaries and liberal whites was that it seemed amenable to the transmission of Christian and ‘civilised’ ideals and values. […] The stock themes of Theatre-in-Education in mission schools were those of repentance, character training, habits of industry, diligence, thrift and obedience” (Peterson 1994: 36).
12 South African critics (see for example Kruger (1999), Peterson (1994), Orkin (1991), Mda (1996)) have referred to the “ahistorical narratives” of a number of entertaining shows, often with racially mixed casts, presenting a romanticized view of either tribal or township life which emerged in the 1960s and 70s (for example, IpiTombi (1975), King Africa (1987)).
13 Characteristic of such theatre is the work of Herbert Dhlomo and the Bantu Dramatic society in the 1930s whose preference for European plays and styles seemed “to suggest a thorough assimilation of the ideas and values inculcated at mission schools and expounded by liberal whites (Peterson 1994: 37). Peterson however notices a shift to the articulation of more militant political ideas and a nationalist agenda by those artists, as a response to the increasing segregationist and racist policies.
laws and racial discrimination (for example *Hungry Earth, Too late, Woza Albert!*). These themes of oppression however overshadowed issues such as gender and working and lower classes issues that figure much less prominently in apartheid theatre (Goodman 1999, Peterson 1994). After 1994 this phenomenon has started to shift with new themes emerging such as gender inequality, domestic abuse, Aids, xenophobia, reconciliation (including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission), and identity issues, to name some of the most prominent.

The ideological force of Western classical drama has been analyzed in relation not only to its form and content, which set the standards for the evaluation of dramatic creation in South Africa, but also in its institutional dimensions. Classical drama, particularly Shakespeare as the cornerstone of British language and education, has served the agenda of separate and (un)equal development mainly for two reasons. Firstly because it has been associated with missionary education and universities which made it available only to White students and audiences as well as a small Black elite, and also with European-modelled venues in the city centres that acted as reminders of colonial and State power (as opposed to the total lack of theatre venues in the townships) (Peterson 1994: 38-9). Secondly because it has been associated with a widely disseminated

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14 An assessment of such plays needs some caution insofar as politics in some of these plays are nothing more than a surface reality serving as the background for the plays’ emphasis on “religion, familial and cultural virtues and communal strengths as the best ways to challenge apartheid” (Peterson 1994: 47). Gibson Kente’s plays for example have often been criticized for such overshadowing of the urgent political issues (see also Mda 1996).

15 Orkin (1991) and Peterson (1994) point to how the classics and particularly Shakespeare were used as instruments to literally belittle the Africans’ intellectual capacities based on their inability to cope with the archaic English language which was entirely foreign to them.
(primarily through schooling) interpretative approach that sought to foreground the plays’ “universal truths” and “market them as universal and trans-historical “civilizing forces”” (Peterson 1994: 38). Furthermore, the classical, entertaining or aesthetically experimental theatre has been privileged not only by the country’s infrastructure in the major cities but also by funding policies and the predominance of English and Afrikaans (Mda 1996, 2002) even among Black African theatre practitioners, contributing to the marginalization of African languages and the isolation of non-urban, non-English speaking communities from this type of theatre.

The staging of Greek drama, which appears systematically in South Africa in the beginning of the 20th century, follows the same type of division between a consciously apolitical or nationalistic approach and a more militant appropriation—the latter predominantly by African or racially mixed groups. For the English, the staging of Greek drama was confined primarily to educational institutions while for the Afrikaner it was closely related to the need to affirm Afrikaans as a language capable of expressing and transmitting what is considered the world’s highest literature -- including Shakespeare and the Greeks (Van Zyl Smit 2003). From Smit’s overview of Greek tragedy in South Africa, we can infer a prominence of *Oedipus Rex* among both the English and Afrikaner, as well as a popularity of the *Trojan Women, Agamemnon*, and later (in the 1960s) *Antigone*. Among black groups, performances of Greek tragedy are recorded systematically in the 1960s and 1970s, staged by primarily amateur companies,

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16 See also Orkin (1991), chapter 9 (“The Shakespeare Connection”).
sometimes with connections to universities and often led by liberal white artists (Smit 2003), as in the case of Fugard and the Serpent Players. The performances are mainly in English and again we observe a prevalence of *Oedipus* and, particularly, *Antigone*, while after apartheid there is a shift which privileges the staging of *Medea*, the *Bacchae* and the *Oresteia* as they tackle issues of multiculturalism, otherness, revenge and the law that emerge in the South African society.

Because of the association of Greek tragedy with the colonial culture, the criticism of its performances and adaptations in South Africa has been dominated, similarly to the rest of Africa and the postcolonial world, by discourses that focus on the practice and politics of intercultural exchange. Postcolonial dramatic theory has stressed the partly historical and partly programmatic character of intercultural exchange and has examined the ways the postcolonial works “emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tensions with the imperial power and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (Ashcroft et. al. 1989: 2).

In explaining the transferability of Greek works to an African context and the special appeal that Greek tragedy had among Africans over other forms of colonial drama, postcolonial critics stress a number of cultural commonalities between the two areas: the centrality of myth and ritual and a polytheistic religion, the dominance of oral versus literary forms of performance, including music and dance, and the importance of
communal experience and an organization of public life that fosters it are common cultural elements that have made Greek tragedy a genre very appealing for adaptation among African dramatists. Criticism has also stressed the relevance of the themes of Greek tragedy to postcolonial contexts: the archetypal conflicts between genders, and that between individual and the state or other family members have provided excellent material to African dramatists to address the conflicts and repercussions of colonialism and the anticolonial struggle. By virtue of their status as “diasporic texts”-- texts “colonized”, appropriated, disseminated and then abandoned by the western canon (Hardwick 2004) -- the Greek texts allow artists in postcolonial contexts to voice resistance to European domination “from within”. By reappropriating a cultural text related to the western canon yet (unlike, for example, Shakespeare) spatially, historically and linguistically distinct from it, artists in the postcolony stage what Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) have termed a “cultural counter-discourse” that questions and dismantles the authority of European culture.

Unlike advocates of interculturalism who often tend to ignore the power relations underlying any cultural exchange, postcolonial critics have been more influential in pointing to the imbalances behind cultural differences and in foregrounding the agency of the colonized in the process of reappropriating and reinventing cultural practices for the

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purposes of national and cultural reaffirmation. Yet such readings do not seem to adequately address the complex ways by which Western culture has functioned equally as a tool of resistance and of compliance equally by European and African artists. Furthermore, as African critics have repeatedly stressed (for example Osofisan (1999)) these readings remain bound to a reactionary approach whereby the works’ articulation of politics and aesthetics is validated only insofar as it “answers back” to a European “oppressor”.

Although these concerns have been already stressed by critics of South African theatre (see for example Kruger’s (1999) remark in the first section of this chapter, also Orkin (1991), Kavanagh (1985)), I want to stress what I see to be a third limitation of the dominant postcolonial readings, namely that they oversimplify the understanding of tragedy’s transhistorical and transcultural character thus limiting the possibilities for more complex approaches to tragedy’s socio-political relevance in contemporary contexts.

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18 Theorists, critics and practitioners of intercultural theatre have been criticized for celebrating difference and intercultural exchange without acknowledging the relationships of cultural domination which lies behind such exchanges and which results in an appropriation and exoticization of non-western cultural forms by the West. At the level of adaptation this practice has often meant an easy assimilation of the «other» text into the adapter’s culture, an easy rendering familiar of the unfamiliar. For a theoretical approach to the problem see Melas (2007, also footnote number 6). For criticism of the pitfalls of intercultural theatre practice see C. Weber (1989), C. Barker (1996) (in Pavis), B. Jeyifo (1996). For intercultural adaptation and translation see Hutcheon (2006), Maier (1995). For the risks of easy assimilation in the case of intercultural adaptations of Greek Tragedy see Hardwick (2004, 2005). Following Hardwick, it seems to me that Wetmore’s approach in his influential book *Athenian Sun in an African Sky* does not avoid the pitfalls of easy assimilation when he views the classics as a “fluid bed” that can be transformed to fit any context.

19 Revermann (2008) introduces a different perspective in this discussion when he examines the reconfiguration of Greek tragedy’s dystopia as utopia in 20th-century stagings. He writes that “Greek tragedy, as re-instantiated within twentieth-century conceptual and performative frames, has become a means for articulating the desire and need for change and social transformation, functioning as positive, beneficial and constructive artistic and political force” (2008: 105). He gives several reasons for this phenomenon, namely the otherness and cultural distance of Greek drama (an argument resonating
Despite its political sensibility, it seems to me that the current criticism does not adequately engage with a re-examination of tragedy outside of the confines of a Western epistemological system of tragic theory to which tragedy has been incorporated and whose primary characteristic is a radical split between the individual and the collective, the metaphysical and the political (Williams 2006). In formulating then the main theoretical premise of my thesis, I want to return to the tragic “structure of feeling” founded on the dialectic between the individual and collective, as the main ground of commensurability for a discussion of Greek tragedy in South Africa.20

Thus in my analysis, although I acknowledge the cultural similarities and the significance of the themes of Greek Tragedy for postcolonial societies, I will be examining the works at hand, on the grounds of what I see to be a deeper similarity at present between Greek tragedy and South Africa. My argument is that the two are comparable at the level of “structure of feeling”, as instantiations of a profoundly transitional moment experienced at once as political and metaphysical, at once

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20 In Williams’ definition, “structure of feeling” is a formation of responses, interests, and perceptions “into a new way of seeing ourselves and our world” (1952: 11), a formation “as firm and definite as ‘structure’ suggests yet (…) based in the deepest and often least tangible elements of our experience” (ibid. 10). See also Williams (2006: 40) and Williams (1977). The ‘structure of feeling’ shifts and shapes differently in different eras leading to distinct forms of experiencing the world. Williams bases his historical overview of tragedy and the tragic experience based on the radical shifts of the structure of feeling across time, the most radical of which he defines to be the one of the radical split between the metaphysical and the social that occurred with the advent of Christianity (Williams 2006).
individually and collectively as the quest for what Turner has termed "communitas": a stage where past hierarchical structures collapse, through a ‘rite of passage’, into a collective which is an “unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated (...) communion of equal individuals” (1969: 96). The concept of communitas involves an understanding of social experience simultaneously at the individual and collective levels: it shapes out of a constant dialectic between a highly structured, hierarchical formation and an unstructured collective and is “the product of peculiarly human faculties which include rationality, volition and memory, and which develop with experience of life in society” (ibid. 128). These produce the periodic renewal of social structures. As I will discuss below, following Williams’ linking of tragedy to the notions of order and disorder, tragedy functions as the rite of passage that renews and reaffirms the social contract among the members of the democratic polis.

South Africa is in that transitional state where the renewal of social bonds remains elusive and thus the establishment of communitas remains precarious, in the making but not yet accomplished. Greek tragedy on the other hand, always rehearses this process of communitas through the enactment of a rupture of order and the establishment of a new one.

My approach is premised on the existence of a dialectical relationship between text and context, which views the work of art as mediating between social formations,

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21 Revermann makes a similar argument on the affirmative nature of tragedy when he writes that tragedy serves as a means of reflection on the democratic polis aiming to preserve and elevate Athens in the eyes of its audience. Tragedy, Revermann argues, aims towards renewal and affirmation rather than “advocat[ing] and effect[ing] radical socio-political transformation” in praxis (2008: 107).
between a dominant ideology and the ways social groups relate to it. The dominant ideology here should be understood not as “a simple reflection of a ruling class’s ideas” (Eagleton 1976:7) but as encompassing “conflicting, even contradictory views of the world” (ibid.). The work of art has a double relationship with the dominant ideology being on the one hand the product of material and ideological conditions of its time as well as being simultaneously autonomous, with the potential to transcend ideology and render it transparent and comprehensible. Thus, the artwork is seen as capable of mediating the subjects’ identity formation in relation to the dominant ideology. Pecheux (1982) has identified three types of such subject formation: Identification where the subject freely consents to the dominant ideology, counter-identification, where the subject rejects the dominant ideology reversing it, and dis-identification, where the subjects recognize dominant ideologies as inescapable but transformable. To this process, the work of art can contribute, by producing a “double vision”- holding up the dominant discourse for examination and at the same time defamiliarizing it (Quayson 2000).

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I want to begin by looking at how tragedy performs this function of the “double vision” in reflecting and defamiliarizing the discourses of Athenian democracy. Following particularly Williams and Vernant, I want to foreground the relationship between tragedy as a cultural form, and the emergence of a democratic ideology and system as well as the ways tragedy mediates identity formation simultaneously on the
individual and the collective level in relation to this new democratic consciousness. Subsequently, I will draw comparisons with the present transitional moment in South Africa.

Raymond Williams argues for a structural relation between tragedy and disorder which, according to him, explains the transcultural and transhistorical relevance of tragedy. He writes:

[Importantly, tragedy seems to occur neither in periods of real stability, nor in periods of open and decisive conflict. Its most common historical setting is the period preceding the substantial breakdown and transformation of an important culture. Its condition is the real tension between old and new (...). In different cultures, disorder and order both vary, for they are parts of varying general interpretations of life. We should see this variation not so much as an obstacle to discovering a single tragic cause or tragic emotion, as an indication of the major cultural importance of tragedy as a form of art. (2006: 77-8).

Classical Greek tragedy occurs as a cultural phenomenon at a time of multiple transitions- cultural, historical and political- where we observe the simultaneous presence of residual and emergent forms of expression and consciousness. Culturally, it is the transition from a religious to a political interpretation of the world (Vernant 1981) and the transition from an oral to a written culture (Wetmore 2002) where the oral tradition of the myths and the epic narratives of mythic heroes are being mediated by the craft and input
of the playwrights who transform and revise the mythical stories. It is also a time of political transition for the Athenian city-state, from oligarchy to democracy (Anderson 2005) and from a tribal to a civic organization of the collective (Longo 1990), where the development of civic laws results in the individual developing a consciousness as a citizen. This is set against the historical background of the Persian wars and a transition, at the ethnic level, from isolated city-state consciousness to the emergence of a Panhellenic identity that developed as a response to the Persian threat (Hall 1991). This gave Athens a leading role among city-states culminating, towards the middle of the 5th century, to the formation of an Athenian empire. In this context, the democratic ideology underpinning Greek tragedy must be understood as peculiarly Athenian, a reflection of “the new Athenian vision of the polis […] not a vague model of the generalized Greek city-state, but quite specifically democracy, and rhetoric in praise of democracy [as] an Athenian invention” (Hall 1991: 16).

The social structure of classical Athens therefore should be understood not as one of complete, finalized perceptions and identities but as one of conflict and transformation where identities are shaping in relation to an emerging democratic ideology and a process of self-definition simultaneously at a city-state and at a national level. In the following part of this section I want to look at the ways tragedy mediates identity formation creating multiple levels of identification at the individual and the collective level, both as an institution and, more importantly, in terms of its artistic form.
At the institutional level, tragedy is organized and presented as part of the city-wide festival of the Great Dionysia. The setting of the festival, which is both religious and civic constitutes a process of confirming and questioning the participative nature of Athenian democracy (Cartledge 1997), and of defining citizenship and the roles of the citizens whose participation was required at all levels- as choregoi, audiences, performers, chorus members. In its every facet the performance of tragedy in the context of the major dramatic festival of the Great Dionysia in Athens demonstrates the ways the event served not only as a religious ritual and a highly intellectual recreation but more importantly its mediation of the relations between different groups of citizens and ultimately the performance of the city to itself. The organization of the theatre festival that required wealthy citizens to sponsor the choruses as well as assist poorer citizens in attending, the participation of Athenian male citizens as performers and chorus members, the competitive character of the festival before the entire city, and the very high levels of audience attendance, made the dramatic festival an institution where the city actively exercised its democratic policies and involved the entire citizenry thus creating and periodically re-creating a self-aware, well informed community (Cartledge 1997: 22).

22 For a detailed discussion of the synthesis of the audience and the ways they participated in the festival both in the theatrical productions and as audiences see Goldhill (1997). See also Hall (1997) for a discussion of the differences between the actual stratification among Athenians as citizens and as audience and how the civic body is represented in the tragic texts. Examining representations of Athenian-ess versus otherness (i.e. barbarians), gender and class, Hall concludes that tragedy represents a polyphonic democracy which exceeds in inclusiveness the actual Athenian democracy: “Greek tragedy does its thinking in a form which is vastly more politically advanced than the society which produced Greek tragedy. (…) Tragedy’s multivocal form and socially heterogeneous casts suggest an implicit egalitarian vision whose implementation in the actual society which produced it was absolutely inconceivable” (1997: 125).
At the level of artistic form, it is the reworking of the myth by individual playwrights, from the point of view of the polis that embodies tragedy’s fundamental “structure of feeling” of an experience that is individual and collective as well as metaphysical and political. Myths are culturally authoritative narratives that “embody and explore fundamental social institutions and the beliefs and values associated with them” (Anderson 2005: 124) thus acting as a feature of ideological compactness (Longo 1990), providing the audience with a deeply rooted "network of beliefs connected to institutions, practices and feelings" in which the community's "deepest inquiries and modes of understanding" (Williams 2006: 39) are embedded. At the same time, the mythical stories which represent “moments of extreme crisis, violent conflict, and emotional distress, moments in which traditional values are threatened and social bonds break down” (Anderson 2005: 124) lend themselves to a creative revisioning from the point of view of the polis and the role of being a citizen. This revisioning can be traced back to multiple levels starting with the role of the playwright which mediates between the epic tradition and practices and the contemporary city and its public festival, the use of civic concepts in the tragedies and most crucially, the dialectical relationship between chorus and hero. The role of the playwright in this process is crucial: his mediation between epic tradition and tragic performance should be understood not merely, as Wetmore (2002) argues, as symptom and indication of the transition from orality to literacy, but, more importantly, as a part of the nexus of sociocultural relations (Longo 1990) involved in the creation and
production of tragedy. Longo (1990) stresses the author’s role in mediating the relationship between the polis and its citizens and the formation of civic consciousness in the framework of complex institutional and social conditions, and his argument is crucial for our understanding of the agency of the artist and the function of the role of art to mediate identity formation.

The revision of myth from the point of view of the polis is mostly manifested in the ways the tragedies invoke, often anachronistically, institutions, practices and concepts of Athenian democracy: the relationship between state and citizen and their mutual obligations, the emergence of a legal consciousness and a law system replacing customary forms of justice and the relation between individuality and collectivity, residual forms of heroism and the democratic ideal. Cartledge (1997), Goldhill (1997a) and Vernant (1981) among others have stressed the dialectical relationship between drama and legal procedures as indicative of a sociocultural transition from religious and customary organization to the conceptualization and formalization of civic law. Focusing on the use of legal terminology for example, Vernant argues that it is used in an often inconsistent and vague manner suggesting a legal consciousness in the process of emerging out of a deeply religious background:

[W]e find terms used imprecisely, shifts of meaning, incoherences and contradictions which betray internal clashes and tensions at the very heart of a system of legal thought....The legal terminology is also used to convey the
conflicts that exist between legal values and a more ancient religious tradition, the beginnings of a system of moral thought already distinct from the law although the boundaries between their respective domains are not yet clearly drawn (1981: 14).

Through a detailed examination of specific plays Goldhill (1997a) suggests that the complex usage of legal language and rhetoric in tragedy indicates not only a cultural stage where there is still "no idea of absolute law" (Vernant 1981: 14) but more importantly a self-conscious interrogation and debate on the city's own systems of thought and discourse:

[S]taging the agon, dramatizing the corruption and failures of communication, displaying the conflicts of meaning within the public language of the city, provoke the audience of tragedy towards a recognition of language's powers and dangers, fissures and obligations. Democracy prided itself on putting matters *es meson*, 'into the public domain to be contested'. Tragedy puts language itself *es meson*, on display and at risk in the glare of democratic scrutiny (1997a: 149-50).

But the fundamental tragic relationship where tragedy’s “double vision” in reenacting and interrogating the principles and practices of democracy against a mythical and religious background is mostly manifested, is that between the hero and the chorus (Vernant (1981), Williams (2006)). In their dialectical relationship, an embodiment of “both the history and the presence, the myth and the response to the myth” (Williams
2006: 40), and the limits of individuality within the collective are explored in the context of a culture where individual achievement is still highly appreciated but where also individuality is subjugated to the democratic collective (Goldhill 1997b). Hence, by means of language, performance and characterization, the tragic playwrights direct the audience to a double identification with the hero and the chorus, the action and the response to the action.

The hero invites for identification insofar as s/he is faced with the deep ontological dilemma of action: every hero of Greek tragedy assumes an action which is autonomous and yet not autonomous- product of personal deliberation and premeditation and at the same time predetermined by the gods:

From a tragic perspective...there are two aspects to action. It involves on the one hand reflection, weighing up the pros and cons, foreseeing as accurately as possible the means and ends; on the other, placing one's stake on what is unknown and incomprehensible, risking oneself on a terrain which remains impenetrable, entering into a game with supernatural forces, not knowing whether, as they join with one, they will bring success or doom (Vernant 1981: 20).

It is in heroic action-- the most important feature of drama according to Aristotle, that tragedy explores the limits of human responsibility and agency.\textsuperscript{23} To be himself, the tragic

\textsuperscript{23}In his \textit{Poetics}, Aristotle places action at the centre of the tragic plot as its most important element, giving it primacy over "ethos" - character: "tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions of life. Well-being and ill-being reside in action, and the goal of life is an activity not a quality; people possess certain qualities in accordance with their character, but they achieve well being or its opposite on the basis of how they fare. So the imitation of character is not the purpose of what the agents do; character is included along with and on account of the actions. So the events, i.e. the plot, are what tragedy is there for and that is the most
hero must act, for it is only after action has been fully accomplished that its full meaning, purpose and implications become known to the agent: "It is only when the drama is over that actions take on their true significance and agents, through what they have in reality accomplished without realising it, discover their true identity" (Vernant 1981: 20).

But heroic action also directly impacts also on the collective level as tragedy explores what happens through the hero to the social and religious order. If on the individual level the accomplishment of action leads to self-knowledge, on the collective level it leads to the restoration of moral, religious and social order:

Order in tragedy is the result of the action even where it entirely corresponds, in an abstract way, with a pre-existing conventional belief. It is not so much that the order is illustrated as that it is recreated. [...] in tragedy the creation of order is directly related to the fact of disorder, through which the action moves. Whatever the character of the order that is finally affirmed, it has been literally created in this particular action. (Williams 2006: 75-6).

The audience’s reflection on the restoration of order is mediated by the tragic chorus. The role of the chorus in the tragedy is multifaceted: they act as "built-in witnesses" (Easterling 1997: 163) whose "job is to help the audience become involved in the process of responding, which may be a matter of dealing with profoundly

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24 We must distinguish between the notion of what happens through the hero and what happens to the hero. The latter, as Williams (2006) argues is a later interpretation of tragedy in the West that is preoccupied with the individual hero and his character rather with action and its double impact on the collective and the individual simultaneously.
contradictory issues and impulses" (ibid. 164). Whether as onlookers (i.e. Antigone) or as more personally involved in the action (i.e. Trojan Women, Libation Bearers), the chorus members express collective responses and feelings, they suggest possible reactions to the heroes' fates or emotions or offer insights speaking from a position of "authoritarian wisdom" drawn from "shared traditions of thought and feeling" (ibid. 165) often expressed in a proverbial fashion. Yet the tragic chorus is constructed in a manner very different to the heroes’ nobility and “monolithic ethos” (Vernant 1981). Their authority and insight is often counterbalanced by their occasional inability to penetrate the opaqueness and ambiguity of the heroes' speech in a manner that the audience is able to (Easterling 1997) and they are often presented as "fluctuating with fluctuating circumstances: [the chorus] does not have to be as consistent as a single individual and it speaks of itself in the plural just as freely as in the singular" (ibid. 164). The diversity of responses (i.e. wisdom/lack of insight) and the plurality and potential of fluctuation within its body result in the chorus acting simultaneously as an identifying and an alienating device inviting different degrees of empathy among the audience and facilitating their double identification on the individual and the collective level.

A central aspect in defining the function of the chorus not only in Athenian tragedy but, more crucially, in the context of South Africa is examining the degree to which the chorus can be understood as representing the collective of citizens and, subsequently, the authority of their point of view within the tragedy.
Against Vernant’s (1981) and Longo’s (1994) interpretation of the tragic chorus as a direct reflection, in tragic form, of the polyphonic and pluralistic structure of the polis, with its inner conflicts and stratification (as opposed to the homogeneity of the rural dithyrambic chorus (Longo 1994)), Gould (1996) has stressed what he terms the chorus’ social marginality which, in his view, puts the chorus into a position of otherness in relation to the Athenian audience. Therefore Gould refutes an interpretation of the chorus as authoritative representatives of the citizen body.

Although he acknowledges that the chorus respond to the tragic action as a collective body, Gould points to the need to understand the chorus’ view and reaction as one among the many viewpoints expressed in tragedy, not more or less insightful than the audience’s, and shaped by the chorus’ status. Their age, gender, and even locality insofar as local rootedness is, in his argument, essential in the shaping of social identity. This last point is crucial in the context of South Africa where, as I will be showing in the next section, issues of marginality and locality are essential in the shaping of post-apartheid identities. The South African adaptations I will be discussing are not exceptions to Gould’s observation that part of the problem contemporary performances of Greek tragedy have with the staging of the chorus lies in our modern inability to see the close connection between locality and social identity. Such connection in the context of South Africa is of a very urgent and overtly political nature that determines the shaping of the collective body. In this case “locality” translates, as I will be discussing shortly, to the
community, class, cultural or religious affiliations that influence the shaping of South African identities. Engaging, therefore, with the problem of the identity of the chorus and how it shapes their intervention is of great dramatic potential and of significance in how the plays at question address the present South African moment.

While useful in pointing to the shaping of the chorus’s identity, Gould’s argument becomes problematic, as Goldhill (1996) has pointed out, insofar as he overemphasizes the chorus’ “otherness” which leads him to question their potential to articulate views that may have an authority among the Athenian audience. Arguing that an emphasis on “otherness” is central in tragedy and its “negotiation of ‘the other’ to find meaning for the self” (1996: 253) Goldhill views the chorus’s power lying in their role in mobilizing debate inside the tragedy and between the audience and the performance: “That the chorus can speak with the full weight of a collective authority is crucial to tragedy’s explorations of authority, knowledge, tradition within the dynamics of democracy’s ethics of group and individual obligations” (ibid. 253). Furthermore, in the same manner that legal language sets up concepts of law up for debate, the chorus, expressing one out of multiple viewpoints, sets up for debate the very concept of debating and articulating a viewpoint: “The chorus requires the audience to engage in a constant renegotiation of where the authoritative voice lies. It sets in play an authoritative collective voice, but surrounds it with other dissenting voices. (…). The chorus thus is a key dramatic device for setting commentary, reflection, and an authoritative voice in play as part of tragic
conflict” (ibid. 255).

What I have tried to do in this section is to examine specific components of tragedy (hero, chorus, action, conflict) whose significance forcefully emerges in the analysis of the South African adaptations I will be discussing. With this examination I want to provide an overview of the various ways tragedy as a form and an institution mediates the relationships between the polis and its citizens, between the democratic ideology and the ways citizens relate to it. By reenacting a crisis that is experienced simultaneously within the individual and the collective body, tragedy embodies the rite of passage by which identities are constantly questioned and reaffirmed, always renewing the creation of communitas.

The way that the Athenian democratic ideology served as the political and ideological horizon through which tragedy was produced, written and experienced, finds its analogy, as Jameson has analyzed in his discussion of the political allegory, in the way political reality in postcolonial societies serves as a constant horizon for reading postcolonial texts. During apartheid, a reading of performances as political allegories, where the individual and the political converge,25 was facilitated by the urgency and

25 Jameson defines political allegory as a form where “the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society” (1986: 69). In Jameson’s argument the interface between the personal and the political is characteristic of third World literatures and distinguishes them from Western post-capitalist literary production where there is a radical split between the two (ibid.). Indeed Greek tragedy (although Jameson does not refer to it) is, for Marxist critics, an exemplary pre-capitalist Western cultural form where the individual and the political are in constant dialectic.
immediacy of the political situation: the absurdity of the regime which made itself constantly felt equally on the private and the public sphere led to a politicization of the private and thus created the framework by which even private stories would be read as political. 26 Theatre then became a space of “subjunctive action” where publicly forbidden acts could symbolically or literally materialize on stage (Kruger 1999). In this context the staging of Greek tragedy-- itself founded precisely on the dialectic between the individual and the collective -- would acquire a utopian dimension, envisioning a new social order and inciting to collective action (Revermann 2008). 27 By contrast, European theatre in South Africa, with its exclusively entertaining shows or, in the case of the classics, its foregrounding of universal truths and individual virtues, had in the context of the dominant nationalist discourse, a strong ideological role as a “reversed” political allegory - one of conscious depoliticization and privatization of the public sphere that would maintain a rupture between the individual and the collective. 28

Yet, as Jameson has shown, the significance of such allegorical texts and readings shifts as the political horizon itself shifts and acquires new meanings (1986: 73). The obvious structural relations between cultural text and social transformation and the

26 In this approach I depart slightly from Jameson: Jameson views the allegorical character of Third world literature as a product of the economic and colonial relationships of the third world to the First world. His view is problematic as long as it generalizes notions of Third and First world or the West and sustains the binaries between the two (see Ahmad (1986)). For the purposes of my analysis, although I acknowledge the split in the individual-collective interface that Jameson discusses between Western and Black African cultural creation, I attribute the allegorical function of South African apartheid works as emanating from the conflation of the public and private spheres as the apartheid regime made itself constantly present in everyday life.

27 See footnote number 19.

28 Jameson discusses allegory’s potential to enforce the split between the individual and the collective (1986: 79). I engage again with this idea in more detail in my analysis of Molora.
shaping of identities that prevailed during the anti-apartheid struggle\textsuperscript{29} is, at present, replaced by what many believe to be a crisis and lack of purpose in artistic creation largely due to the apparent political stability that followed the establishment of democracy.\textsuperscript{30} In the absence of the unifying anti-apartheid narrative, South Africa, like all postcolonial, post-independence societies, seems to be confronted with an impasse where

\textsuperscript{29}In a manner very similar to the discussion on the relationship between Greek tragedy and the polis, Kruger (1999), Hauptfleisch (1997), Steadman (1998), Orkin (1991), Kavanagh (1985), Coplan (1985) have analyzed the ways cultural creation during colonization and apartheid has reflected the shaping of social identities. Kruger writes that apartheid theatre works combined elements from Grotowski, vaudeville acts, Brecht, variety acts, exuberant impersonation, a syncretism which corresponded to the people’s lives that had to balance the matter-of-fact negotiation of absurd but painful conflicts cause by apartheid law with the energetic mockery of that absurdity. Coplan (1985) too has argued that the development of syncretic theatre works during apartheid was the result of how performance mediated the process of urbanization and identity formation among different classes and how it helped reorder and give significance to the experiences of apartheid. With reference to action Coplan (1985) argues that such performance could mobilize action by bringing the collective recognition of the potential for control over material resources turning it into actual social power.

Kavanagh (1985) has shown how the discourse of racial difference was used during apartheid to to create a ‘false consciousness’ that would impede the formation of class consciousness and thus conceal the economic exploitation at the heart of a system whose aim was the imposition of the capitalist order in the country. Despite this unifying racial discourse, the dominated group should not be perceived as classeless: colonialism and apartheid created very distinct groups- a middle class black elite and a proletariat which in turn, due to the apartheid laws, was divided into multiple subgroups (rural/urban, unemployed/employed etc.). At the same time, while ‘race’ was used to divide blacks from Europeans, the discourse of nationality was used to divide the european groups amongst themselves and differentiate between English and Afrikaans culture and politics.

On the level of cultural creation these relations and formations translated in the formation of a nationalist and largely isolated Afrikaans culture; in British culture acquiring a hegemonic status and having elicited consent from the black middle-class; a rural black culture attached to traditional and tribal elements; and an urban proletariat black culture, highly syncretic and drawing elements from africa, europe and african-america (Kruger 1999).

Hauptfleisch (1997) discusses the emergence of a “crossover” highly syncretic and collaborative form of theatre in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century as a result, on the local level, of the political necessity to relate political messages to a variety of social groups and a reflection of the country’s multi-ethnic and multi-libguistic environment and, on the international level, of globalization and the emergence of the post-modernist discourse.

With reference to Black theatre pre- and post-apartheid, Steadman (1998) discusses the links between race, class and power in the formation of essentialist and structural notions of “blackness” in South African culture and theatre. He argues for the need of post-apartheid South African theatre to capitalize on an emerging black aesthetic rooted in a diasporic identity which is politically and culturally strategic acknowledging simultaneously black struggle against oppression and hybridity and cultural exchange.
the direction of political praxis is no longer visible (Jameson 1986). Furthermore, contrary to the Athenian context where myth and the civic ideal provided a unifying ideology for the social conflicts and transformations, what emerges in South Africa after apartheid is a contradiction between official discourse and reality. A unifying narrative of diversity and reconciliation is undermined by a fragmentation in the formation of civic identities and perceptions of “the nation”. This creates a controversial political horizon which complicates the attempt at a politicized reading of the texts in question: the analysis must take into account the shifting meanings of reality and discourses as well as the perspectives adopted by the artists and works at question.

What I intend to show in this section, then, is that despite its apparent political stability, South Africa is characterized by a crisis in the narratives that would provide ideological compactness -- in other words by an absence of common, collective perceptions of the country’s transition and the characteristics of this transition. The present moment is not only still confronting the legacy and binaries inherited by apartheid, but, more importantly, it is differently perceived by different groups of the population according to conditions and mindsets still rooted in these apartheid binaries. I will focus specifically on how the dominant narratives of reconciliation and multiculturalism that have emerged after apartheid with the aim to promote social cohesion have to a large extent failed, until now, to provide a unifying national ideology,

\[30\] For a discussion of the present day state of theatre in relation to what seems to be a lack of purpose see Hauptfleisch (1997), Mda (2002), Van Graan (2006).

\[31\] I will return to this idea in my conclusion where I engage with Jameson’s discussion of the problem of “narrative closure”.
primarily because they are undermined by deeply rooted economic disparities sustained by the country’s neoliberal policies. The purpose of this analysis, serves to prepare the ground for an examination of how the plays in question mediate and synthesize the multiple interpretations of the present and which of the dominant narratives they adopt.

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The 1994 elections led South Africa into a period of a double transition, on the domestic and the international level, requiring a process of definition of the country’s democracy and its role in relation to the rest of Africa and the world. On the domestic level the establishment and consolidation of democracy involved confronting “social and political violence, inequality and poverty, pervasive racism and risks of separatist movements by minority groups” (Bekker and Leilde 2003: 121); at the international level it meant dealing with the “re-entry into the global economy […], globalization and the gradual loss of state sovereignty as well as the rise of the politics of identity […]]” (ibid.). In order to overcome the binaries of the past, the rhetoric and policies promoting multiculturalism and reconciliation were officially adopted by the country’s new constitution, in an attempt to forge a unified national identity based on respect for racial, religious, ethnic and cultural diversity. At the economic level, this new liberal constitution was complemented by the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies which were successful in raising South Africa into a leading position among African countries.

32 Bekker and Leilde (2003) note that although “multiculturalism” is not adopted officially as a term, policies akin to multiculturalism are, allowing us to use the term for analysis.
These policies, although they included certain measures for addressing the economic discrepancies of the past (Black Economic Empowerment, Affirmative Action) did not radically address the problem of resource redistribution in the country (Lesufi 2005). The failure to effectively address the material gaps among the country’s groups -- a failure that has led some analysts to term the democratization of South Africa an “elite transition” (Bond 2000) - has resulted in a fragmentation of identities and an ideological void in which the discourses of multiculturalism and reconciliation have failed to act as “features of ideological compactness” (Longo 1994: 18) among the country’s groups.

While multiculturalism and respect for diversity is one of the cornerstones of South African democracy, there seems to be a discrepancy between the official discourse that promotes a type of “critical multiculturalism” and the social practice where the so-called “difference multiculturalism” seemingly prevails.

Critical multicultural policies avoid essentializing either identity or difference as the central premises of multiculturalism. Instead they focus on the process of how inclusion and exclusion, identity and difference are created through relationships of domination or equality, the distribution of resources and the access to opportunities:

From the perspective of critical multiculturalism, representations of race, class, and gender are understood as the result of larger social struggles over signs and meanings and in this way emphasizes not simply textual play or metaphorical

33 For various analyses on the economic development of South Africa and the effects of globalization see Zegeye et. al (2005).
displacement as a form of resistance (as in the case of left-liberal multiculturalism) but stress the central task of transforming the social, cultural and institutional relations in which meanings are generated” (McLaren 1994: 53).

The result is a social process of *incorporation* which involves the dual transformations that take place in the dominant values and in those of the insurgent group as the latter insists on more complete incorporation into the body politic and the former grudgingly gives way (...). The body politic becomes a medium for transformative incorporation, a political arena of contestation, rather than a base from which exclusions can be more or less silently extended, managed and manipulated...Incorporation undermines the grounds of integration and marginalization for it empowers those once marginalized in relation to the dominant and forceful of the body politic (Goldberg 1994: 9).

This model of multiculturalism avoids the pitfalls of “difference” (or “liberal” or “corporate”) multiculturalisms, namely focusing exclusively on the politics of identity and essentializing culture as an overarching discourse of organizing social relationships at the expense of the discussion of politics and power. This latter type of multiculturalism seeks to assimilate difference and eliminate dissent by accommodating but not in fact integrating minorities, for the sake of a more effective administration of the state. As Goldberg writes:

These are the multiculturalisms …that take themselves to be committed to the
broad tenets of philosophical liberalism which are unconcerned... with the redistribution of power and resources.....Multiculturalism and cultural diversity are assumed as mantric administrative instruments that serve to contain and restrain resistance and transformation as they displace any appeal to economic difference by paying lip service to the celebration of cultural distinction (1994: 7-8).

In South Africa the new constitution has adopted a number of official policies to ensure that cultural identities and differences are respected and fostered. Bekker and Leilde write that

Beyond the classically liberal rights of the individual (...) new constituents of civil society are identified- cultural, religious, and linguistic communities, the institution of traditional leadership and customary law. In addition (...) the notion of the right for self-determination specifically for communities sharing a common cultural and language heritage is recognised. (...). It is noteworthy that in terms of constitutional theory at least the South African case appears to recognise cultural pluralism more comprehensively than in countries where multiculturalism is official policy (...) (2003: 123).

However, as the writers show, the portion of the population that identifies and benefits from this official discourse of multiculturalism is primarily the middle-class, urban and
commercial agricultural population that embraces “a cultural ethos that is ‘international anglophone’” (ibid. 123). Conversely, a part of South Africans that comprise almost 40% of the population and are categorized as the country’s ‘underclass’ (with very high levels of poverty and unemployment) do not identify with this discourse as they do not identify themselves on the basis of cultural affiliations. These groups identify strictly with their local surroundings and “these local identities are defined in both race (African and Coloured) and class terms rather than in cultural terms” (ibid. 127). The lack of audacious measures on the economic front and the persistent social and economic problems seem to have failed to produce a critical multicultural environment and have instead resulted in what Goldberg describes as a dualistic model characterized by “pluralistic allowances at the margins [and] its univocal core insistencies at the centre” (1994:6) with the poorer part of the population remaining discursively and institutionally, excluded from the official policies on cultural diversity. In his analysis of the shaping of identities in the new South Africa Alexander observes that, as a result of the country’s double transition and the effects of globalization and economic policies, there is a “strong association between poorer, working-class people and local identity [in] contrast with the views of the affluent for whom political meaning is derived from national issues and economic concerns are also stated at the national level’” (2006: 50). Mayer, in her

34The study by Tihanyi and Du Toit (2005) has similarly showed that the educational system has failed to promote racial diversity and that in cases where a multicultural approach is adopted, it usually serves to gloss over the issue of race rather than confront and surmount it.

35 Alexander writes: “A post apartheid national identity has begun to take shape but it is weak and heterogeneous, and likely to fragment in the face of significant economic or political crises. If this happens, contestation based on three identities is likely to come to the fore. First there is an Africanist identity that
ethnographic approach where she studied responses and experiences from individuals to
the dominant discourses of multiculturalism, reconciliation and the idea of the “rainbow
nation”, concludes that in South Africa “[r]egarding the value discourses, the assumption
is that critical multiculturalism is being envisioned and constructed. With respect to
everyday conflicts, presumably the form of critical multiculturalism is ideal and desired
but difference multiculturalism stands in the foreground of the perception and
construction of reality” (Mayer 2005: 77).

The second major national narrative that aimed to unify the formerly racially divided
country is that of national reconciliation- a discourse that dominated South African social
and political life post-1994. According to Tihanyi and Du Toit reconciliation is defined as

a metaphor that initiates, guides and sustains processes of social, political
and economic change in order to overcome divisions that originate in the
past yet continue to reproduce various forms of economic and social
inequality and discrimination. Reconciliation is a historically and
contextually sensitive process; it inevitably entails learning to live
together, but the context, content and intensity of this learning process
remain open for discovery and debate (2005: 27).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the official body assigned with the

the new ruling elite is likely to draw upon to maintain its base of support among the black African masses. Secondly, there are various ethnic identities that opponents of this elite can mobilize. […] these are more likely to be based on the new ethnicities of religion and language than the old ones based on apartheid ascription. Thirdly, notwithstanding social and political divisions, a new working class identity is also emerging (2006: 54).
task to collect, mediate and make publicly available (in the form of broadcasts and of its
final publication of its proceedings) testimonies of human rights violations that occurred
between 1960 and 1994. It was established as a result of negotiations between the
formerly rival parties (ANC and NP) who rejected the option of trials as dangerous for
the reconciliation process. The rationale behind its establishment was that truth, in the
form of full disclosure of past events, would enable a common acknowledgment of the
past among all South Africans and thus would facilitate the transition to the new
democratic nation. Thus, the function of the TRC was primarily ritualistic (to provide a
space for testimony and collective healing), partly archival (to collect and give to the
public the material on the past), and partly juridical (in that it had the capacity to grant
amenity to perpetrators based on full disclosure of their actions and their political
motivations). As Bundy points out, in all its capacities, the TRC was primarily
“commit[ed] …to nation building rather than… to an explanatory social science” (2001:
15): its goal was to create a collective memory for the new nation, one that all parties
could subscribe to in order to become members of the new South Africa.

The fact that the TRC served a nationalist rather than an analytical agenda proved
to be problematic. As Franchi (2003) has argued, the outcome was that the TRC failed to
provide South Africans with a commonly accepted historical account and an overarching
interpretation of the past: the revelation of the facts did not prevent formerly opposed

36 I discuss the function of the TRC in more detail and provide a more extensive bibliography in the chapter on Molora.
groups or individuals from retaining their own interpretations of the past, their actions and motives. Differences were glossed over rather than transcended, in the name of the nationalist project of reconciliation. The result was an ideological void filled with the “fantasmatic dream” of a nation reconciled with itself: while the idea of reconciling was a prerequisite for the nation to come together and to exist, underneath that idea the perceptions of the past remained fragmented and often contradictory, and the TRC did not provide that space of consensus required for the creation of a new communitas. In addition, the TRC failed to address as a central component of the collective memory and interpretation of history the structural role of apartheid in creating material inequalities and the need to redress those as essential for the formation of a new national identity. Thus an essential feature of national identity, the mutual agreement between groups and individuals of how wealth will be distributed (Kymlicka 2001), was left unaddressed.

What emerges from this overview of the two cornerstones of the new “rainbow nation”, multiculturalism and reconciliation, is that although at the level of official discourse and the national imaginary the nation is unified in diversity, in practice the persistent material disparities result in the fragmentation of national identities and a dualistic model where the nation seems to consist of two nations of “increasingly deracialized insiders and persistently black outsiders” (Marais 1998: 239). In my analysis I will be looking at how the plays rework the Greek myths in order to affirm or question the official discourse, and whether they illuminate the complex ways that South African
identities are constructed in relation to it.

The plays

There is a very significant number of tragic adaptations in South Africa after 1994 predominantly in English and Afrikaans produced either professionally or in university settings. Although the present work is focused on professionally produced, English-speaking plays for reasons that I am explaining below, the existing body of tragic adaptations in South Africa unquestionably merits critical attention and further scholarly investigation. On the other hand the number of adaptations or stagings of classical comedy is significantly smaller (Boklied, an adaptation of Aristophanes’ Birds by Marthinus Basson in the only professionally produced comedy I came across in my research) not therefore yet constituting a body of work that would allow the researcher to systematically identify the tendencies (artistic and ideological) and draw conclusions.

Besides their Medea that I will be discussing in detail, Magnet Theatre company have created In the City of Paradise, an adaptation of Aeschylus’ Oresteia interrogating the theme of revenge in what we may infer is a post-apartheid context. Set in a suffocating dysfunctional domestic space with a black Clytemnestra and a white Electra and Orestes, the play reconfigures the killing of the mother as accident (Orestes’ gun accidentally fires and kills her) thus exploring the limits of responsibility and agency in a context where free will seems shortcircuited by the complete absence of any possibility of divine intervention or any notion of cosmic order.
Acclaimed Afrikaner director Marthinus Basson has directed two major adaptations both in Afrikaans: *Mamma Medea* based on the play by Tom Lanoye explores the Jason-Medea conflict in the context of contemporary issues of gender relations and domestic abuse in a visually and aesthetically compelling performance; and *Aars!* an adaptation of the *Oresteia*. Unfortunately with the exception of photographic stills of *Mamma Medea* no recorded material of either performance is available to allow for a more detailed account of these two works although they both attracted large critical attention both in the English and the Afrikaans speaking press.

Brett Bailey, a subversive English speaking theatre artist has directed *MedEIA*, another adaptation of Euripides’ play, in a site-specific performance focused around the themes of xenophobia and otherness. Oscar von Woensel’s play on which Bailey based his performance is a highly poetic and abstract version of the story, constructed as one continuous monologue of Medea which incorporates all the other characters’ lines allowing the director great freedom as to character and line breakdown. Bailey used two actors for Medea -- a young white Medea and an older black Medea--; he set the performance at the outskirts of a shanty town with the audience following the action in various settings in the open air, and used highly ritualistic modes of costuming and performance –a style that he has often been critiqued for as being appropriative of traditional African performance modes—to explore themes of exclusion and marginalization.
Together with these professionally produced plays, two university productions, both at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, are worth mentioning in this brief overview of the existing postapartheid adaptations. The first is Tamar Meskin and Murvin McMurtry’s *Spoils of War*—an adaptation of the *Trojan Women* using a number of excerpts from other tragic texts. Here the plays’ characters are conflated in four archetypical personae— the Soldier, the Poet, the Woman and the Seer—in a manner that allows the play to foreground the themes of war, injustice and dispossession pointing to tragedy’s universal relevance while evading the trap of rendering the tragic form or the themes it engages with in easily familiar terms. The second play is Murvin McMurtry’s adaptation of Sophocle’s *Electra*. This version’s extremely interesting proposition is that all the choral parts are replaced by actual testimonies from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In this manner the play not only proposes a very interesting view on the problem of how to represent testimony but also it very successfully rethinks on the role of the chorus and the collective. The delivery of the testimonies by the chorus recentralizes the collective in the tragedy in a manner that few contemporary performances of tragedy are successful in doing. Furthermore it collectivizes testimony pointing to its communal experience and function thus avoiding to monumentalize testimony as part of a nationalistic master-narrative of reconciliation (a problem that I will return to in my discussion of *Molora*).

Among this exciting and diverse body of adaptations I chose to focus on three specific plays: Magnet Theatre’s *Medea*, Yael Farber’s *Molora* and Sabata Sesiu’s *Giants*
for practical as well as methodological reasons. While acknowledging that the plays under examination engage with a multiplicity of themes and cannot be reduced to one single meaning, I suggest that each chosen play for discussion represents a different aspect of the dominant national narratives: *Medea*, by Magnet Theatre, particularly engages with the narratives of colonization, cultural clash and multiculturalism; *Molora*, by Yael Farber, is concerned with reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa and of all three plays discussed here is the one that is most overtly allegorical; *Giants*, by Sabata Sesiu, engages with problems of governance, residual and emergent forms of power in an implicitly post- and neo-colonial context thus examining broader questions of South Africa’s postcoloniality in a Panafricanist context. The choice of these three plays therefore aims to cover a large part of the dominant South African discourses from 1994 to the present.

At the same time the three plays represent three different perspectives on dramaturgy and creative process, all of them bearing significant links with the traditions and the trends of South African theatre. While immediately after apartheid a large part of South African theatre seems to be faced with a sense of loss of identity and purpose, and despite the fact that many practitioners turned to commercial or "theatre for theatre's sake", there is a growing body of alternative theatre that borrows equally from African traditions, the apartheid-era syncretic forms that used dance, song, mime and text, as well as struggle themes to engage with an interrogation with the present state of South Africa
either by discussing reconciliation, by depicting a conflictual world, and by interrogating more or less explicitly the possibility of a sense of community (Kruger 1999).

While part of that broad category of theatre, the three plays examined here represent distinct approaches to drama and performance creation. *Medea* is a collective, non text-based approach which employs the process of physical theatre and in which the text does not exist independently of its performance; *Molora* is a combination of the work of an individual playwright together with collective input and bears characteristics of intercultural theatre creation combining as it does distinct elements of western theatre and African performance; and finally, *Giants* is the least deconstructive of the three texts, moving along the lines of and raising issues about the characteristics of African tragedy in the Soyinkan tradition of a metaphysical tragedy expressive of an African worldview. Additionally, in the case of *Medea* and *Molora* the playwrights/creators of the pieces are also the directors of their performances, whereas in the case of *Giants* the playwright is not implicated in the performance of the piece. The different dramatic and performance styles as well as creative processes that the three plays embody call for different analytical approaches and frameworks. In the criticism of the first two plays, the text is inseparable of the performance as the two complement each other and illuminate the creators’ intentions. The case of *Giants* differs as the playtext stands independently of its subsequent productions allowing for an analysis that focuses exclusively on the script.

In terms of a theoretical approach, while I view all plays through the broader

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37 I will analyze this point in more detail in the chapter on *Giants*
scope of postcolonial drama which engages with the narratives and repercussions of colonialism (and, in the case of South Africa, apartheid) in content and form (with the engagement with Western texts and the fusion of Western and non-Western modes of performance), my analysis will raise issues pertaining to the dominant aesthetic characteristics in each play.\textsuperscript{38} Thus while in the case of Medea and Molora we have strong elements of a postmodernist aesthetic, Giants explores the more traditional forms of African tragedy. The first two plays experiment with the form and deconstruct the linearity of the original texts, are highly and openly intertextual, and often point to the process of creation and their own theatricality. They combine in performance heterogeneous elements that often remain deliberately not unified into a common aesthetic. Conversely, Giants retains the play’s linearity and very carefully constructs a stylistic homophony.

Such radical difference in aesthetic expression should not be seen as incidental and unrelated to the racial affiliations of the playwrights: Fleishman, the director of Medea, is a white Anglophone male who collaborates in the creation of his theatre works with Jennie Reznec, also white Anglophone. Yael Farber, creator of Molora, is a white Anglophone female, and Sabata Sesiu the playwright of Giants is an African male. Lewis Nkosi points to the links between race and the adoption of the postmodernist aesthetic among South African writers when he writes of the

\textsuperscript{38} For a detailed discussion of the characteristics of postcolonial drama, its strategies, methods and aesthetic see Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) and Balme (1999).
…split between black and white writing, between on the one side an urgent need to document and to bear witness and on the other the capacity to go on furlough, to loiter, and to experiment (…) Though often treated as natural, sometimes a positive sign of our cultural diversity and richness, and as such a reason for celebration rather than regret, the difference between black and white writing can also be read as a sign of social disparity and technological discrepancy (1998: 75).

Nkosi gives a number of reasons for this discrepancy, including colonization, lack of university education and contact with Europe and the rest of Africa for the majority of black writers which led to a rather introvert writing. He also points to what he describes as a reactionary and paternalistic attitude which suggested that “postmodernist theory and practice have little to offer oppositional black writers still deeply preoccupied with nationalist agendas and questions of agency” (ibid. 75-6). Yet he concludes that black writers may insist on the modernist aesthetic because they are not yet finished with the political agenda of modernism in the same way as Europe may have.

This remark leads to a crucial question: can the postmodernist aesthetic with its focus on the proliferation of meanings and perspectives ethically engage with the “asynchronicity” of post-colonial South Africa and the persistent binaries and inequalities inherited from apartheid? Carusi writes that postmodernism’s “undecidability, multiple and endless possibilities of meaning (…) have no place in the context of real political urgency, where there is a need not for endless self-reflexivity, but for definite decisions to
be made” (1990: 101) and although she writes pre-1994, the problems and fragmentation in South African society seem to make political action no less urgent even after 1994. 

Perhaps South African dramatic writing is not yet finished with the modernist agenda and a traditional approach, although it may be less aesthetically challenging, may also be more ethical in the given context. My analysis, although not attempting to give definitive answers to this problem, is broadly informed by this interrogation of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics.

Related to these questions is also the problem of visibility and critical attention. A general observation that comes out of my research is that the number of adaptations of Greek drama by Black African theatre practitioners in South Africa is shockingly small. According to my research *Giants* is the only professionally produced Greek adaptation by a Black African playwright to appear after 1994. It is true of all three plays that none seems to have been able to overcome the problem of audience demographics that critics of South African theatre repeatedly stress. Thus all, according to the available information, have played to predominantly white, middle-class audiences nationally (*Medea, Giants*) and internationally (*Molora*). This general observation aside, *Giants* is the one play that, in comparison to the other plays examined here, has received the least

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39 On this see also Van Graan (2006).

40 Quoting Benjamin, Gugelberger has discussed the contradictions between aesthetic and ideology writing that “the more refined and successful in aesthetic terms a work of art becomes, the more it lacks moral and social integrity” (1985: 3). This has been a central preoccupation among African dramatists and critics who are concerned with the tension between aesthetic success- ideological failure and conversely ideological relevance and aesthetic failure. For a detailed discussion from a Marxist perspective of the tension between aesthetics and ideology in African literature see Gugelberger (1985).
critical attention and has had the least number of performances, revivals or national and international tours. Consequently, material for this play has been scarce and harder to collect. This may be attributed to the fact that critical attention tends to focus on aesthetic innovation and experimentation (Nkosi 1998) and tends to privilege works that satisfy the requirements of postcolonial dramatic criticism that insists on the works’ “counter-discursiveness” (Garuba 2001) and replicate the black/white racial binaries, a choice that as I will show in my analysis is evident in Medea and Molora but not in Giants.

With these observations in mind, my choice of the three plays aims to cover diverse aspects of the South African postcolonial reality, but also to be as inclusive as possible in terms of race and gender and to contribute to a correction of imbalances within critical attention towards white and black adaptations of Greek Drama. This decision was also the result of pragmatic factors, namely the constraints of time, space and material availability and accessibility. In any case, the volume and diversity of the entire material that I had the opportunity to collect and research reveals not only the vibrancy and relevance of the genre in South Africa but also the vast potential of the field for further scholarly investigation.
2. Magnet Theatre’s Medea (an adaptation of Euripides’ Medea)


The creation, in 1994, of Medea by Magnet Theatre and Jazzart Dance Theatre coincides with the country’s first democratic election and the subsequent feelings of a “universal spirit of release and goodwill” (Johnson and Schlemmer 1996: 353) and a “public euphoria which was certainly unique in South Africa” (ibid.). The hopes for the improvement of the living conditions of the oppressed and disenfranchised are complemented on the cultural front by a renegotiation and reconfiguration of cultural identities and subjectivities. Previously silenced cultures reemerge and reclaim their space as part of the new nation and the racial binaries are being renegotiated on the basis of a common humanity needed to surpass the racist dividing lines for the sake of national

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41 Magnet Theatre was first created in 1987 by Mark Fleishman and Jennie Reznek with the following mandate: develop a unique physical performance style through the continued creation of small scale productions; collaborate with other practitioners on larger scale productions which would encompass a broader sociopolitical vision; develop a profile for the company as an ongoing organization with a specific artistic vision; to develop the language of physical theatre in South Africa as a means to overcoming vast language diversities. (magnettheatre.co.za/aboutus.)

Medea was the first collaboration between Magnet and Jazzart. Since they have worked together on a number of works: The sun, the moon and the knife (1995), Soe Loep Ons...Nou Nog! (1996), Vlam 2 (1999), Cold waters/Thirsty Souls (2001), Rain in a Dead Man’s Footprints (2003), Cargo (2007). Since its first inception in 1994 Medea toured in 1994 and 1995 in South Africa.

Jazzart dance theatre was founded in 1975 by Sonje Mayo under the name Jazzart Dance Studio, and was renamed in 1986 when present director Alfred Hinkel took over. The company is the oldest modern dance group in South Africa and it has worked towards the development of a particular style and movement vocabulary based on the fusion of Western and African styles. During the apartheid years the company worked as a racially mixed group for the anti apartheid struggle. Today, still a racially mixed group, they continue and expand their educational and developmental activities. (www.jazzart.co.za/fullhistory.htm)
unity. More importantly, subjectivities such as women, minors and homosexuals that had been long disregarded by the racial discourse and the needs of the antiapartheid struggle emerge in the public discourse and demand to be acknowledged and to have their rights addressed.

The post-election cultural landscape then must be understood as one whereby identities are perceived as fluid rather than fixed, hybrid constructs that “challenge the fixity of identities under apartheid and undermine the cultural hierarchy and imposed ethnicities” (Wasserman and Jacobs 2003: 15) thus allowing for “cultural borders [to be] transgressed” (ibid.). This climate of euphoria and the potentiality emanating from the fluidity of identity-construction is countered, as discussed in the introductory chapter, by the ever-present legacy of apartheid and the oppositions it created which lead at times to a reaffirmation of identity by the previously oppressed on essentialist terms “in a process of postcolonial identity reconstruction” (ibid.). It is also countered by the deep inequalities on the social and economic level with the result that still in the immediate post-election period “material powers mitigate against a boundless reshaping of the cultural landscape” (ibid.)

In the field of theatre creation, while certain formal characteristics of the struggle-period theatre remain present and influential, the dismantling of apartheid brought with it the demise of the protest voice (Fleischman 2001) and allowed for other subjectivities and individual stories to enter the theatrical landscape previously dominated solely by the
master narratives of colonialism and apartheid.  

In this context, the choice of the myth of Medea by Magnet and Jazzart seems very timely and appropriate, as it raises two issues that were very prominent in 1994 South Africa: the issues of gender and cultural identity, “otherness” and belonging. In the two chapters that follow I will examine the myth of Medea with a particular emphasis on her construction as a heroine in the most influential versions of the myth, in comparison with the rendering of her persona in the Magnet theatre version. The overall argument that will emerge from these chapters is that although there is a fundamental dialectic in the perception of “self” and “other” in both cultural and gender terms in the classical treatment and figure of Medea, as well as in South African society during and post apartheid, in the way Magnet theatre constructs Medea as a gender and cultural “other” it fails to dismantle the binary interpretation of self/other, male/female and overcome the

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42 Larlham (1991) writes that during the interim period, right before the 1994 elections, South African theatre is:

- a theatre that addresses issues of immediate relevance to South African society with a de-emphasis on producing western works
- an eclectic, intercultural theatre that integrates performance conventions and acting styles from diverse cultures
- playmaking, rather than working from pre-existing scripts, often with a director-playwright who organizes and records improvisations. The actor is regarded as a role-maker rather than an interpreter of roles
- actors’ theatre with an abundance of song, dance and music; a de-emphasizing of technical theatre or lavish productions
- a theatre that records the cultural history of the people, that assists in re-education after a long period of enforced censorship and disinformation.

Fleischman (2001) makes the point that Larlham’s comments are based on his observations only in the area of Kwa-Zulu Natal yet they are presented as pertaining to the theatrical activity in the entire country. Indeed he argues that this, far from being an abstract generalization may be pointing to a new and productive tendency towards decentralization in theatre practice in South Africa and the ways it is theorized and discussed.
exclusion of the “other”. This happens despite its structure which is deconstructive and which claims to offer a multiplicity of viewpoints at the expense of a single authorian point of view. In this chapter, I will focus on the representation of Medea as a female with an eye to the points of convergence between gender and cultural identity.

The figure of Medea in classical versions of the story.

The story of Medea is divided into five ‘episodes’ according to the different places that she finds herself and the incidents that occur: the Colchian episode- where Medea helps Jason get the Golden Fleece; the Iolcan episode- where she helps Jason avenge King Pelias; the Corinthian episode- where she is married to Jason then betrayed by him and banned by king Creon; the Athenian episode, where she lives with king Aegeus, tries to kill his son Theseus and flees; and the Median episode, where she settles in the land of the Persians (Graf 1997).

Although the Euripidean version of Medea’s myth is now considered canonical, there are a number of significant treatments of the myth or references to it prior to and after Euripides. In the archaic period, Graf singles out the Odyssey for its references to Medea’s myth that point to the significance of the Argonautic expedition for the Greek oral tradition while Mastronarde includes in the archaic versions of the myth Hesiod’s Theogony which presents Medea as a goddess, and “two lost epics, Eumelus’ Corinthiaca and the anonymous Naupactia” (2002: 45). Common among these versions of the myth

43 Graf calls ‘vertical tradition’ the existence of different versions of the same mythic episode and ‘horizontal tradition’ the existence of different versions that construct a “running biography of the mythic figure” (1997: 21)
are the role of Aphrodite in making Medea fall in love with Jason, and the presentation of Medea as powerful in the use of medicines and drugs (Graf 1997).

In the fifth century B.C., apart from Euripides who engages with the myth, Pindar in his fourth Pythian ode describes the episode in Colchis (Mastronarde 2002). In the Hellenistic period Apollonius of Rhodes creates the epic narrative of the *Argonautica* that covers the entire Argonautic expedition- books 3 and 4 narrate the story of Medea in Colchis and Corinth. A contemporary of Apollonius, Dionysius Scytobrachion composes his own prose version of the Argonautica in which he excludes divine intervention and (possibly) introduces the theme of the sacrifice of foreigners by the Colchians- a theme that is also found in a later (6th-century AD) version by the Latin poet Dracontius (Graf 1997). A common characteristic among the Hellenistic versions is that all writers (with the exception of Apollonius who does not emphasize this element as much) foreground the depiction of the Colchians as foreigners, putting them “side by side with the Egyptians, the Taurians, and the Cyclopes of other stories” (Graf 1997: 27).

All these renderings of the myth give not only different versions of the events but also emphasize different aspects of Medea’s mythical persona portraying her as a witch, a barbarian, a goddess, or a love-striken, betrayed female, to varying degrees. What is of interest for the present analysis is the emphasis of all these versions on Medea as a cultural and geographical *foreigner*:

The basic theme of Medea’s persona remains constant: she is a foreigner, who
lives outside of the known world or comes to a city from outside; each time she enters a city where she dwells, she comes from a distant place, and when she leaves that city, she again goes to a distant place. This sense of Medea’s ‘foreigness’ is expressed and articulated differently by each author who portrays her, but it is always there. (Graf 1997: 38)

Against this common background of Medea as a foreigner, one who does not “belong” anywhere she goes, the various versions give different emphasis to Medea’s importance as a heroic female character and subsequently to the quality of her actions. I will be examining these aspects—representation of ‘otherness’ in relation to female heroism and action—in the three versions—of Euripides, Apollonius and Seneca—from which the Magnet theatre performance draws its material and then proceed to examine the Magnet version.

The Euripidean version focuses on the Corinthian period of Medea’s story and the events from the moment Medea finds out about Jason’s betrayal and her banishment by Creon, until her final revenge and escape to Athens. The preceding parts of the myth, in Colchis and Iolcus, with which the audience was familiar, and therefore able to complement the story (Mastronarde 2002), are only referred to insofar as they serve to highlight what led to the present situation and provide the heroes with arguments and justifications of their present attitudes and actions.

In Euripides the notions of Greek ‘self’ and barbarian ‘other’ emerge in the way
the characters interpret Medea and her actions in a way that allows him to put the notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in a constant dialectic. For Medea, her cultural and geographical ‘otherness’ is stressed as the indication of an extreme degree of isolation and exclusion from any notion of ‘home’ which makes her a victim:

…I, a desolate woman without a city, shamefully injured by my husband

Who carried me as plunder from a foreign land, have no haven from this disaster

No mother, no brother, no relative at all (256-259).44

In the way the others understand Medea, her foreignness is a source of extreme and dangerous power. To everyone around her, she is unruly, irrational and ultimately capable of atrocious acts because she is not Greek, she does not partake in the Greek system of values:

Jason: I have noticed many times before, not only now, how harsh passions

Lead to impossible deeds. After all, if you had borne the decisions of people who are stronger than you with a good grace, it would have been possible for you to stay in this land and in this house. (446-450).

In the end of the play Jason exclaims that “There is no Greek woman who would ever have brought herself to do this” (1340).

Her otherness furthermore empowers Medea with capacities that are inexplicable to the Greeks and thus a source of fear:

Medea: …I shall ask you for what reason you are sending me from your land,

44 Translation by James Morwood.
Creon.

Creon: I am afraid of you [...] There are many things I can point to which contribute to this. You are a clever woman, skilled in many evil wiles. (281-286)

Euripides then directly links foreignness to power and the potential for action. Mastronarde for example writes how the play's imagery of sea and travel associated with her foreignness develops so as to depict Medea "as moving from helplessness and passivity to control of the vessel of her life" (2002: 35). Interestingly, Euripides does not emphasize Medea’s external characteristics that would easily classify her as cultural ‘other’- in fact he underplays those elements that would portray Medea as a witch: she is not seen performing magic (unlike Seneca, as I will discuss later), there are only very few references to her ability to use magical potions, and even in her stage appearance there is evidence that she was dressed as all the other characters.

What Euripides achieves by underplaying the external characteristics of otherness is that the threat of the ‘other’ and the ‘unfamiliar’ must be understood as embedded in action and as situated within the ‘self’, as “the disturbing possibility of otherness lurking within self- the possibility that the normal carry within themselves the potential for

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46 There are varying opinions regarding Medea's appearance. Mastronarde (2002: 41) argues that she was most likely dressed in a manner indicative of her elite status but not of her non-Greek-ness. Sourvinou-Inwood (1997) suggests that throughout the play she was dressed like a Greek and only in the final scene when she is raised in the sun's chariot she wears an oriental dress- a view which seems supported by the vase paintings around Medea. Although Mastronarde seems to doubt the accuracy of these paintings to provide information on performance, Revermann (2005) suggests that there are strong links between the two that allow us to draw conclusions about performance despite the fact that the painter may have taken liberties in the representation of specific tragic scenes.
abnormal behavior, that the boundaries expected to keep our world safe are not impermeable” (Johnston 1997: 8). What makes Medea particularly dangerous is that she can threaten the order from within: Jason understands that he was breeding the evil into his house- yet Jason would not have been Jason without Medea and her evil deeds from which he benefited in the past as she makes sure to remind him. Medea is needed as much as she is feared and her power lies in her awareness of that fact. Medea is therefore constructed as ‘other’ through action- hers and the others’- and the interpretation of those actions.47

There is a second aspect to Medea’s significance as an agent and that is the socially transgressive power of her actions that raises her to a heroic level, making her an equal, if not superior, opponent to her male counterparts.

The central conflict between Medea and Jason is that he betrays not only their marriage but also their partnership in heroic actions (the acquisition of the fleece and their escape) that was sealed with vows (Mastronarde 2002).48 The actions that have led up to this conflict and the interpretation of the conflict itself by both parties reveal the contrast between Medea and Jason in terms both of their gender roles and of their heroic status.

The discussion of Jason’s betrayal is characteristic in illustrating how Medea is

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47 Boedekker (1997) has analyzed how Medea becomes “Medea” though imagery, through how she describes herself and how others describe and interpret her.

48 Mastronarde writes that “Medea makes her tragic decisions because she gives precedence to her heroic status” (2002: 9) as opposed to Jason who “tends to reduce [her] complaint to sexual jealousy” (ibid. 8) thus ignoring this heroic status.
and perceives herself as a heroic partner and seeks to restore her heroic fame and reputation while Jason is presented as an ordinary man calculating the gain from his actions (Mastronarde 1997), unable to attribute Medea’s actions to anything else but feminine passion: 49

Medea: I am at a loss to understand whether you think that the gods you swore by then no longer rule, or that men now live by new standards of what is right- For well you know that you have not kept your oaths to me (493-496)

[…]

I have earned the hatred of those dear to me at my home, and have made enemies of those whom I should not have harmed by doing you a favour. In recompense for all this, in the eyes of many women of Greece you have made me happy indeed. What a wonderful husband, what a trustworthy one, I, wretched woman, have in you (506-512).

To which Jason responds:

Since you lay too great a stress on gratitude, I consider that it was Aphrodite alone of gods and men who made safe my voyaging. You are a clever woman but it would be invidious to spell out how Love forced you with his inescapable arrows to save me. (…) You helped me and I am pleased with the result. However by saving me you took more than you gave…. (526-533).

49 Knox discusses in detail how Medea is constructed in the play as a hero, comparable to Ajax, Odysseus or Achilles, “whose inflexible purpose, once formed, nothing can shake- a purpose which is the mainspring of the action” (1979: 297).
You women have sunk so low that, when your sex life is going well, you think that you have everything, but then, if something goes wrong with regard to your bed, you consider the best and happiest circumstances utterly repugnant (569-573).

As Blondell (1999) has analyzed, Medea at present, but also through the unraveling of her past story and deeds, appears to assume for herself roles external to her and traditionally male: she decides to give herself to Jason, become his partner and marry him thus becoming her own ‘master’; she decides to take revenge for Jason’s betrayal thus attributing justice for his break of oaths and thus becoming her own judge; and finally she kills her children and escapes thus becoming simultaneously her own punisher and god-savior- Euripides, according to Blondell, deliberately underplays the role of the gods because it is Medea who in the end becomes herself god-like. It is the sum of these actions that make Medea who she is.

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50 It is debatable whether the infanticide was an innovation of Euripides or it existed in previous versions of the myth. In her analysis of young Carcinus’ version of the myth from the 2nd-century CE, West (2007) gives an overview of various versions where Medea does not kill or unwillingly kills her children. In several of these versions the killing is related to religious purposes (as sacrifice) and not necessarily to a betrayal by Jason. On this subject as well as on other possible innovations introduced to the myth by Euripides see also Mastronarde (2002) and Knox (1979).

51 Mastronarde agrees with this when he writes that "Medea leaves the intervention or operation of the gods to be inferred by those members of the audience who wish to detect it" (2002: 32)

52 See also Knox (1979): “Medea is presented to us not only as a hero but also, at the end of the play, by her language, action and situation, as a theos or at least something more than human. She does not start that way, but that is how she ends” (304).
Taking so many [...] modes of action to herself, she gradually assumes the methods of the natural, supernatural and human powers that seemed to prevail over her, until at the end of the tragedy there remains only the composite, immense figure that has now become “Medea”…(Boedekker 1997: 147).

Medea is then Jason’s ‘other’ not only because she belongs to the heroic mythical world and he to the everyday (Mastronarde 2002) but also because, with her actions, she disturbs all stereotypes of the female role by being closer to the heroic male prototype than Jason is. What is more interesting is that she is very conscious of the female stereotypes to which she is expected to adhere and she consciously uses them against those very men who impose them. So for example in her second scene with Jason she is in fact able to manipulate these stereotypes in order to convince him to accept her fatal presents to his bride.

This subversion of gender stereotypes points to the dialectic in Euripides of the representation of gender roles: there is what would be consider a female aspect in Jason’s unheroic attitude and a male heroic part in Medea. In addition there is an oscillation within Medea in relation to the perception of her gender as she identifies at times with mythical heroes and at times with the ordinary women. Indeed, Medea’s depiction as an ordinary woman should not be underestimated. Although as a heroine she is set far apart from the other women of the chorus, as a woman she identifies with them and hence she
is able to elicit their support in revenging Jason:  

Of everything that is alive and has a mind, we women are the most wretched creatures (230-231)

In stressing her feminine aspect, Euripides places particular emphasis in Medea’s motherhood. Medea is depicted as a sensitive mother, both in her encounters with Jason and in her monologue before the killing of the children. Her act of infanticide therefore becomes all the more important and all the more subversive precisely because it is rooted in her conscious womanhood and motherhood. With this action Medea disrupts the familial and social order and is raised beyond the human and the bestial, to the divine.

Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica* is an epic narrative of the 3rd century B.C. that covers the entire story of the Argonautic expedition and the story of Medea not only in Corinth but also in Colchis, Iolcus and later Athens. It is the 3rd and 4th books of the epic that narrate the events of Medea’s story. The narrative is constructed along the lines of a story type familiar in Hellenistic literature [that]…centers on a triangle comprising a father,

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54 There will be a more detailed reference later on the various ways that Medea identifies and disidentifies with the chorus and Jason. On that, see Sourvinou-Inwood (1997).

55 In his analysis of Medea as a hero, unstoppable in her resolve, Knox writes: “There is one person who can and does pose a real obstacle to Medea’s plans, who can effectively confront her with argument- Medea herself. In the monologue she delivers (…) she pleads with herself, changes her mind, and changes again and then again to return finally and firmly to her intention to kill them. (…) In this great scene the grim heroic resolve triumphs not over an outside adversary or adviser but over the deepest maternal feelings of the hero herself. (1979: 299-300)

56 For an analysis of the characteristics of Apollonius’ epic in relation to the Homeric epics see Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004). The writers argue that Apollonius epic is unique among Hellenistic epic poetry in its engagement with the mythical subject of the Argonautic expedition.
who unusually is the king of a city, his daughter, and a foreign enemy. The enemy
attacks the city but cannot conquer it because the father protects it, sometimes by
supernatural means. The daughter, however, who has fallen in love with the
foreigner, betrays her father, in hopes that her treachery will be rewarded by the
fulfillment of her love” (Graf 1997: 24).

Such type of narrative focuses on the heroine’s emotional and psychological states and
with the use of devices such as the interior monologue the author invites the audience to
view the events through her point of view.57 While Apollonius follows in this tradition his
use of the epic narrative in the Medea story deviates, according to Graf, from the strict
pattern described above, with respect to the construction of his male and female heroes:
Jason is not depicted as a warrior who comes to conquer Colchis but as simply wanting to
get the Fleece and willing to bargain for it. In the case of Medea Apollonius has to
balance between the typical maiden of this story type and the powerful mythical figure of

57 For the use of the interior monologue and Apollonius’ innovations to the epic narrative form see Fussilo
and Hunter (2001). In their analysis of the ways Apollonius uses and reworks the epic tradition, Fantuzzi
and Hunter point to “Apollonius’ apparent distance from his characters [which] is one manifestation of a
self-conscious generic placement (…) Apollonius’ stance towards characters ‘born long ago’ (…) is not a
matter of a radical break with the past (…) but rather a re-arrangement of emphasis giving new meaning to
particular elements within a pre-existing repertoire. Whereas, however, this generic placement emphasizes
distance between ‘then’ and ‘now’, the powerful aetiological drive of the Argonautica works to break down
the distance and to problematize the nature of epic time” (2004: 92). The “new prominence of the narrator”
(ibid. 119) that Apollonius introduces allows him to manipulate characters’ stories and narratives (i.e.
expand on narrations of their past, or their inner conditions, or conversely have them choose silence) in a
way that suggests that “aetiology, which binds the present to the past, has taken the place of epic stories
which rather accentuate the divide between the two” (ibid.). A last point to be made in regards to the
Apollonian style relating to how the reader is invited to view the characters is the “lowering of the tonal
level” (ibid. 101) inherited by the homeric epic which brings the events and heroes’ passions into the realm
of ordinary experience: “The sympathy between ourselves and the characters of epic is now explicitly
marked by the shared patterns which govern both their lives and ours” (ibid. 102)
Medea (Graf 1997). The result is a redefinition of the role of the hero in the epic narrative, as Clauss has shown, and such redefinition impacts, in turn, on how Medea’s ‘otherness’ is to be perceived and interpreted.

Clauss’ (1997) analysis holds that the Apollonian epic has Jason as its central male hero while it gives Medea the role of the “helper-maiden” in a pattern analogous to the relationship between Odysseus and Nausica in the Odyssey. It is in the ways that both deviate from the norm of their typical roles that a redefinition is forged. Jason, Clauss argues, is not shown to possess typical heroic qualities -- Hercules’ bravery and strength, Achilles’ courage and warrior quality or Odysseus’ cleverness. In Jason’s view of ideal leadership “the best of the Argonauts must settle conflicts and arrange treaties or agreements with foreigners” (Clauss 1997: 151) and indeed Jason’s quality that will help him achieve his goals is “his ability to make deals with foreigners, to make a bargain for another’s strength and cunning” (ibid. 155). As a result of this characteristic “his mode of action will not only set him apart from other heroes of the ancient epic but will also require a higher level of assistance on Medea’s part” (ibid. 150). According to Clauss Medea’s contribution to Jason’s success leads us to reconsider Jason’s heroism and the notion of heroism in general: Jason is not an independent hero. Instead, his real challenge is to conquer Medea through love- once he has achieved that everything else will happen for him through her aid.

Just as Jason is in a sense the inversion of the heroic archetype, so Medea is the
inversion of the typical maiden- a model of which is, according to Clauss, Nausica. Through detailed descriptions of her psychological state we see her falling in love, then battling with her conscience and her duty towards her father, battling with her own sense of shame and considering the damage to her reputation and the condemnation of the public opinion if she decides to give in to her love for the stranger:

Away with modesty, farewell to my good name! Saved from all harm by me, let him go wherever he pleases, and let me die. On the very day of his success I could hang myself from a rafter or take a deadly poison. Yet even so my death won’t save me from their wicked tongues. My fate will be the talk of every city in the world; and here the Colchian women would bandy my name about and drag it in mud- the girl who fancied a foreigner enough to die for him, disgraced her parents and her home, went off her head for love. What infamy will not be mine? (...) Better to die here in my room this very night, passing from life unnoticed, unreproached, than to carry through this horrible, this despicable scheme (130). 58

Unlike the typical maiden Medea gives in to her passions transgressing all moral boundaries and uses her powers to help Jason until the end and Jason promises to marry her in exchange. We have in fact, Clauss argues, a reversal of the epic roles: instead of the powerful hero assisted by the maiden, we have a powerful maiden assisting a helpless hero, an alliance of disastrous consequences: “As Jason discovers, the cost of achieving mythical heroism in a post mythic world is an irrevocable deal with a Hecatean power”

58 Translated by E. V. Rieu
Unlike Euripides’ version in Apollonius it is emphasized that Medea’s passion for Jason is provoked by the goddesses -- Aphrodite, Hera and Artemis whom we see planning how to help Jason in the beginning of book 3 -- and it is their intervention and plan to rescue the hero that makes it impossible for Medea to resist her love for Jason. Thus in Apollonius the centrality of Medea’s agency as we saw it in Euripides is diminished. In his narrative, what matters more is not how Medea becomes Medea through her actions but the “grim ramifications of [her] love (…). In the world of the Argonautica, Eros is a more destructive force than either strength or cunning, and its destructiveness can work on behalf of or even against the object of desire” (Clauss 1997: 176).

Like Euripides, Apollonius in his descriptions of Medea and the Colchian world does not overplay the elements of cultural foreignness. In fact, because his approach is that of making a psychological portrait of Medea, he does not underline difference in order to allow for psychological empathy and identification on the part of the audience (Graf 1997). It is instead through this reversal of the typical epic roles that Medea’s foreignness is implied: because in the Apollonian epic Medea dares to do what no typical maiden of the Homeric epic tradition would, she is an ‘other’, radically different from the model of the virtuous and restrained Hellenic woman (Clauss 1997: 177).

Seneca’s tragedy is the play that has least influenced the production of Magnet
theatre’s *Medea-* yet it is worth examining as it introduces elements that are not to be found either in Euripides or in Apollonius. It too focuses on the Corinthian chapter of Medea’s story but approaches the myth from an entirely different perspective than either Euripides or Apollonius. In terms of structure, Seneca opens the play with a monologue of Medea where we are informed that she is already aware of Jason’s betrayal and of Creon’s decision to exile her and she is already preparing herself for revenge. Seneca eliminates the episode with Aegeus and has only one scene where Medea confronts Jason (instead of two in Euripides). Instead he introduces a whole scene where we see Medea putting her magic in practice in order to kill Creon and his daughter -- the messenger’s report of their deaths that follows is also significantly shorter than in Euripides. In the end of the play, Medea kills first one of her sons on stage as a sacrifice to the ghost of her brother which appears to her and the second one she kills a little later, in the presence of Jason.

Seneca’s approach focuses on the depiction of Medea’s extreme emotional conditions: first pain, then anger, ultimately leading to crime. Medea is shown as entirely possessed by these feelings psychologically, mentally and physically. The extremity of her emotions serves two purposes: first, in accordance to the stoic philosophy to which Seneca subscribed, it serves as an *exemplum-* an illustration of the destructiveness of a human vice- in this case irrational love and anger.\(^{59}\) More importantly, it serves to

\(^{59}\) On the relation of Seneca’s work to the stoic philosophy and the use of Medea as *exemplum* see Motto (1988), Costa (1974), Nussbaum (1997)
construct Medea as the sum of her irrational emotions, setting her apart not only from anyone around her but gradually, and as she proceeds towards the accomplishment of her crime, apart from the human world (Cornud 1997).

Unlike Euripides where Medea becomes herself through action, in Seneca, as Boyle (1997) has argued, there is a fixed image of the mythical Medea and the heroine’s actions serve to confirm this image and to establish it before an audience’s eyes. Both the quality of heroism and the quality of action then are different in Seneca and Euripides. While in Euripides Medea insists on having her heroic pride restored, in Seneca she is driven by an irrational manic force to “be Medea again”. As a result, in the way this Medea acts there is nothing of the calculation and “surgical precision” (Boedekker 1997: 147) with which Euripides’ Medea acts. While in Euripides it is important to see the process of planning and action that raises Medea to her heroic status, in Seneca what becomes central is the demonstration before an audience of those acts that constitute the mythic persona of “Medea”.

Seneca begins by drawing Medea’s isolation and exclusion pushing it to the extreme: his Medea has neither the sympathy of the chorus who is clearly hostile to her and in support of Jason, nor the assistance of Aegeus in whose land she could find refuge. In her speeches Medea repeatedly underlines her physical and emotional isolation from her surroundings and her status as a refugee and a homeless, landless traveler:

We’re on the run Jason, we’re on the run.
Not that moving home is new. Rather, the reason we are moving home is new.

I am used to being on the run solely for you. (443-447) (...)

You send me back? Where to?

You order an exile into exile, and don’t provide her anywhere to go (457-460).60

In the course of the play, however, Medea’s otherness and the fear derived from it is not identified as cultural difference but is located in her otherworldly mythical persona. It is characteristic in that sense that the play does not emphasize Jason’s belonging versus her non-belonging. In fact Jason sides with Medea as he too identifies himself as a refugee—the difference being that he has managed to secure for himself a ‘home’ that will save him from the curse of having to constantly move from land to land. Medea is ‘other’ because she does not belong to the world of humans and indeed there are many descriptions of her by herself or the others that compare her to animals or natural elements; she is a mythic creature with the power to upset the order of the cosmos.

The relation between Medea and the cosmological and social order is repeatedly stressed in the play. First, Creon’s decision to ban Medea is based on the war that Pelias’ son threatens to lead against Corinth because it gives refuge to the woman who killed his father. Medea’s presence therefore is a direct threat to the city’s security, an element that we do not find in Euripides. But at a larger, cosmological level, the chorus relates Medea to the travel of the Argo (Motto 1988, Costa 1974, Boyle 1997), a travel that was perceived to shift and expand the geographical boundaries of the then known world.

60 Translation by Frederick Ahl.
creating anxieties and fears about the world order deeply felt in the Roman world of Seneca’s time. Medea’s actions completely disrupt any sense of order and bring utter chaos: she not only kills the king and his daughter but sets the whole city on fire and kills her offsprings: “I want the world to die with me” she tells the Nurse. She is the embodiment of chaos but at the same time she demonstrates to her audience- the Corinthians, Jason, us- the impossibility “to create a world without her” (Boyle 1997: 131). Through its destructive power her otherness is affirmed.

Seneca’s descriptions of Medea’s emotional state, the extremity of her deeds which acquire a supernatural character and the extensive descriptions of her as a sorceress invoking deities and performing magic create a persona that is outside of this world, that belongs entirely to the world of the myth. Seneca’s Medea is very self-conscious as a dramatic character: “I shall become Medea” she proclaims and throughout the play she reminds herself and her audience of her mythical identity and her potential. 61 When, in the opening of the play, she is contemplating revenge and recalls her past deeds she says:

I am wasting time. I did all this in virgin innocence.

Some fuller pain should rise within me now I’ve given birth.

People expect it (50-53).

A later to Creon: “I admit Creon to guilt; for I create danger.”

Her deeds aim at self-consciously affirming this mythical identity: at the end of

61 Boyle (1997) analyzes the self-conscious theatricality of Seneca’s Medea.
the play Medea has returned, in a full circle, to the state she was before Jason arrived in Colchis:

Now I have you back again: my power,
My brother, and my father. Now Colchis has regained its stolen fleece of gold
My kingdom has come back to me again;
Now my rape, my motherhood, are gone and my virginity returns (982-8).

The play, as Boyle argues, is very conscious of its own theatricality and of its Euripidean predecessor. Characteristic in this sense is the killing of Medea’s second son: Medea needs Jason as an audience otherwise her action will have no meaning. There is then a difference in the perception of the relationship between past and present in the two plays: in Euripides time moves linearly forward. The past is causally subordinated to the present and serves to justify and explain present actions which in turn lead to a new status quo -- Medea’s elevation to a heroic and godlike status. In Seneca however the relation between past and present is a cyclical one: her actions bring her back in time and serve to ‘freeze’ her in the mythic time as an archetypal mythic figure.

The delineation of the other characters is indicative of Seneca’s concern with Medea’s irrational passion rather than heroism: neither Creon nor Jason are presented as repulsive and unfair as in Euripides. Creon has reasons to ban Medea and he at times is presented as kind- for example when he offers to raise Medea’s sons as his own. Jason is presented as a fearful, tired man, by no means an equal partner to Medea. Not only is he
not heroic but he even lacks the capacity to calculate, bargain and make deals that the Jason of Euripides and Apollonius had. Such un-heroic, humane depiction of Jason only makes Medea’s fury seem more irrational and her actions more inhuman.

What I have tried to show so far is that in all three plays that provide the source of material for the Magnet Medea, cultural and gender “otherness” are closely associated with action. Whether or not otherness is emphasized by performative means (the representation of magic on stage or an exotic appearance), otherness is not to be found in behavioral or performative patterns but it is connected with the accomplishment of a series of actions. Furthermore, even when the Medea myth is brought closer to the audience's everyday experience (either through the emphasis on her psychological state (Apollonius) or her affinity with the state of everyday women (Euripides) this depiction is always coloured by allusions to her heroic/mythical status (and actions that affirm it) thus creating a distancing effect.

Magnet Theatre: Medea

Magnet theatre’s Medea draws from all three works, primarily Apollonius and Euripides and to a lesser extent from Seneca. The performance uses the Corinthian episode as found in Euripides, but also gives extensive performance time to the episodes in Colchis and Iolcus as found in Apollonius and uses images and text excerpts from Seneca. Because the approach to the creation of the adaptation is performance- rather than text-based and because my access to the work was possible solely through watching
a video recorded performance, my analysis will approach text and performance as one, as inextricably connected to one another.

Fleishman, the play’s primary director, follows a method of working that draws from the modes, forms and processes of oral traditions. His belief is that oral traditions, rooted as they are in popular culture, can facilitate the creation of “a dialogic theatre of struggle and transformation as a collective mode of expression” (Francis 2006: 102) and contest the dominant cultures largely associated with the authority of the written text. Thus, the process of developing a work involves putting emphasis on improvisation rather than on a scripted text and on the performers’ physical expression as well as drawing material from myths as much as from reality (i.e. personal memories, stories, behaviors). The result is a hybrid performance style where a multiplicity of means -- body, words, mime, song and music-- are all equally involved in the meaning making process.

Such was the process followed for the development of Magnet and Jazzart’s Medea. The structure of the play is episodic: through a combined use of narratives and sequences of physical movement that are organized in complex ways -- opposing, reflecting, complementing or repeating one another -- the play creates images that are

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62 For a detailed analysis of how Fleishman uses the techniques of oral traditions in his work and particularly Medea, see Francis (2006).

63 Images are defined by Scheub as “felt actions or sets of actions evoked in the imagination of the members of the audience by verbal and non verbal elements arranged by the artist, requiring a common experience by both the artist and the audience” (1998: 23).
patterned non-linearly and disrupt the surface linear progression of the story. The shifts between times and spaces happen by very simple means with changes in lighting, which is used in a cinematic manner shifting from spotlight to general light thus creating spaces and ‘close-ups’, and with the change in the actors’ costumes and physicality. The use of the body is very important: the transitions to the different moments in the past are initiated first by an abstract movement that alludes to the event to be narrated but only in a vague manner while the event represented in the movement may run parallel to it or be entirely interrupted or abandoned. In the first case it will then be transformed and dissolved to the following scene creating a connection between the two events.

The play is framed as storytelling, a device which structurally brings it closer to the epic narrative form than the tragic form, closer to Apollonius than to Euripides or Seneca. The choice of the storytelling device on the one hand relates the play to African oral performance modes, postcolonial strategies and a Brechtian aesthetic, all of which will be discussed in the next chapter. On the other hand the device serves to render the myth familiar by simplifying and emphasizing the fundamental characters and "functions" (to use Propp's definition of a character's action) of the folktale: an evil king, a male hero, a female-helper, the acquisition of a trophy, persecution and marriage.

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64 Patterning is defined as “an ordered temporal movement of images” (Scheub 1998: 95): images, verbal and non-verbal elements are structured in complex ways- opposing, reflecting or complementing one another- in a manner that disrupts the linear narrative: “temporal movements occur in non-temporal image sets, the latter commenting on the former” (ibid. 96). Patterning functions in engaging the audience emotionally and psychologically so that the story’s message is relayed not in a direct, didactic manner but indirectly, through the audience’s emotional manipulation by the storyteller.
Through this simple rendering, the Medea myth as related by the characters in the play acquires a universality on the basis that it replicates, on the surface level, "the ideal success story" (Dundes 1968: xv) of the typical folktale. What is even more useful for the purposes of the present analysis is that the choice of the storytelling, the epic narrative format, has two interrelated results: the first is that action is not the centre and focal point of the drama, instead the ‘focalization’ on the heroine and the very act of storytelling become more important than Medea’s action. The second is that the play exploits the possibilities that the Apollonian narrative offers to explore the heroine's inner world, a technique which serves the play’s purpose to construct Medea as an ordinary woman, rendering her persona familiar to the audience.

The play begins with Medea seated on the stage saying “listen to my story children” and narrating the beginning of the Argonautic expedition. It then shifts to the ‘present’- the Corinthian episode- from there moves to the past, to Jason’s arrival in Colchis, then back to Corinth and so on, in a constant temporal movement through the various episodes in Medea’s story. The significance of the storytelling technique and the multiple, overlapping narratives will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. For now I wish to stress that the storytelling frame emphasizes the primacy of the telling of the events over the making of the events. As the story narrates events and characters into life, it is not the characters but the story that makes things happen. This has an impact on

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66 Aristotle in Poetics has analyzed the primacy of action as the distinguishing characteristic between tragedy and epic.
how we are to perceive Medea’s character: her role as an agent becomes secondary to her role as a sounding board of the events. The focus of the play then is more on what has *happened to her* rather than what *she does* or what she is capable of doing. I will examine the play arguing that the deliberate depiction of Medea as un-heroic, emphasizing her as an ordinary woman and the fact that her agency is downplayed by the very structure of the performance as she is depicted as one who reacts or is acted upon rather than an actor, raises problems about the way she is constructed as ‘other’- foreign and female, in the South African context. Although by means of structure the play claims to wish to dismantle the authorian point of view in its construction of Medea it replicates the dominant point of view which subordinates the ‘other’ to the ‘norm’.

The first significant moment of action in the performance is when Medea decides to betray her father for the sake of the stranger. In Euripides this is a transgressive act that defies the norms of the male’s control over the female that the Euripidean audience was very familiar with. Apollonius too emphasizes this moment by giving us an extensive description of Medea’s inner turmoil and hesitation when she is about to decide whether to betray her father or not. In this *Medea* we see through gestures and expressions that Medea has fallen in love with the stranger. She then visits him in the night and, in a scene charged with sexual passion, she reveals to him that she can help him kill the bulls. To suggest the division between her lover and her father the performance positions the father on stage but outside the scene, he is standing away from the stage light, with his back to
the couple and when Medea makes her final decision she goes and takes the fleece cape
that he is wearing and gives it to Jason. The scene is not concerned with building the
tension of the decision nor in foregrounding the implications for Medea’s sense of honor
and reputation which are factors that both Euripides and Apollonius take into account. To
her offer to help Jason’s first response is: “If you help me I will make your name great all
over Greece” to which she does not react. Then he says “if you help me I will make you
my wife” and she gives him the magic potion with which to kill the bulls. Interestingly
the scene here adopts the version of the events that we saw Euripides’ Jason arguing for:
that Medea’s decision was a result of passion only. The play focuses on the need of
Medea to be assured as a woman but remains silent about the deliberation and effort
involved in her act of saving Jason. Furthermore the play underplays the importance and
difficulty of the decision for Medea making her conquest by Jason a very easy one. In this
way both Jason’s character as a deal-maker (as we saw him in Apollonius) that is
necessary in establishing a relationship of equals between the two partners and the
seriousness of their alliance which explains the seriousness of his betrayal later on are
diminished.

In the myth Medea performs a series of actions essential in saving Jason and the
Argonauts and allowing them to flee: the killing of the bulls and the snake-guardian of
the fleece and the killings of her brother Absyrtus who chases them and of King Pelias
who demands the fleece. In both Seneca and Euripides it is Medea herself who performs
the task of killing the bulls and the snake:

I saved you (...) when you were sent to master the fire-breathing bulls with the yoke and to sow the field of death. I killed the dragon which, ever unsleeping, guarded the all-golden fleece (...) and held up for you the beacon of safety. (475-482).

And in Seneca:

Think of Aeetes’ herd, their fire, in a field whose harvest was Steel-clad fighting men. Think of a foe which sprouted without warning from the earth. I bade them slaughter one another. (Seneca, 467-70)

In Euripides the description of these acts by Medea conveys the image of a hero of Herculean dimensions and of utter catastrophe for her victims and insists on the fact that Medea saved Jason’s life more than once- three times in the monologue she repeats “I saved you” and “I saved your life”. In Seneca Medea takes the responsibility for all the atrocities that Creon blames her for arguing that her actions by saving the Argonauts saved the Greeks:

But let us see what happens to the Past if I am good

Your pure Hellenic land will to ruin,

Why? All its leaders, don’t you see, will die! (240-2)

Magnet’s version follows Apollonius in that it is Jason who performs the killing of the bulls. In a highly physicalized scene where he is centre-stage, spot-lit, his upper
body is naked and amidst Rambo-like screams of effort and tension he struggles with the bulls that are enacted by the chorus members. The killing of Pelias is very briefly referred to by Apollonius and in the play it is not enacted but narrated by a ‘messenger’, therefore we do not see Medea’s involvement in this action at all.

In the scene of the killing of Absyrtus the play again follows Apollonius but there are some interesting differentiations. In Apollonius Medea finds out that Jason wishes to ‘trade’ her in order to escape Absyrtus’ pursue. Her reaction is fierce and forceful, untypical of a simple “helper-maiden”. She becomes “appalled” and confronts Jason: “Have you forgotten all you said to me when you were forced to seek my help? (…). You should be ready to stand by me, come what may, instead of leaving me alone while you consult the kings (…)” (158-9). And she concludes with a threat: “You have broken a most solemn oath (…). You will learn better soon” (159). Apollonius continues: “She boiled with rage. She longed to set the ship on fire, to break it up and hurl herself into the flames. But Jason calmed her. She had frightened him” (159-160). He promises her that he will think of a plan and her reply is “Plan now!”.

In Magnet’s version we see the three characters simultaneously (the scene is framed as Medea’s memory when she speaks to her therapist) debating and bargaining as to whether Medea will return to her home and under what conditions. When asked by the therapist to speak about her brother’s death Medea replies: “You must understand, I met the man of my dreams” and continues describing once again Jason as the man of her
dreams. She explains the killing saying “we were trapped. They caught up with us-
Absyrtus and his men. Jason didn’t stand a chance, he gets confused, he panics”. When
the story shifts from Medea’s memory narrative to the depiction of the events, Jason
insists that he must become king and Medea repeatedly asks “what have you done” to
find out that Jason in fact traded her in order to escape and keep the fleece. There is no
confrontation between them whatsoever, instead, upon discovery, Medea turns to her
brother, lies to him saying that she was kidnapped and raped by the Greeks and asks him
to take her back with him and tries to manipulate him using what could be seen as a
stereotypical feminine ‘playfulness’- saying for example “you should listen to me, I am
older than you”- as well as ‘playing the victim’ attitude. Seeing that she is unsuccessful
she decides to trap him and, together with Jason, kills him. The scene ends with her
casually saying to her therapist “in the end, one has to make a choice”, hers being the
husband over the brother. Medea is then not only entirely dependent on the two men but
is also presented as unable to confront either of them. So internalized is her dependence
that even to her therapist she justifies Jason’s betrayal thus showing no consciousness
whatsoever of her role as his helper nor of his responsibility towards her. Furthermore, in
the killing of her brother, the play emphasizes her desire to keep her man over the
importance of the action in saving lives and honouring the agreement between the two
partners that are emphasized in Euripides and Seneca.

In the Corinthian episode of Medea’s story the play follows Euripides in terms of
the storyline. Here Medea is faced with her betrayal by Jason and her banishment by Creon. The Euripidean play unfolds as a very careful and detailed planning on the part of Medea that will enable her to take her revenge and flee: Medea plans, manipulates everyone at every moment, says what she must and does what she must at the right moment to secure the success of her plan. What in Euripides is manipulation of the others in this Medea is a call, sometimes desperate, for pity and help. Characteristic in that sense is Medea’s meeting with Aegeus. In Euripides Medea uses Aegeus to secure herself refuge after her crime. In this version Aegeus is a lawyer who announces to Medea, while we see her packing to move out of the house, that she is considered an alien in all of Greece by law, has no right to property and must leave Corinth. Out of pity (unlike the Euripidean Aegeus who actually will gain something from her) he offers to help her suggesting that she should visit a friend of his in Athens who will give her sanctuary. Once again, it is not Medea who drives the action but it is Aegeus who does something for her. The meeting with him is not the overcoming of an obstacle, as in Euripides, but the exact opposite- it causes even more desperation and helplessness.

In addition to underplaying Medea’s agency and the tensions, motives and implications around her actions, the play further emphasizes her womanhood over her heroic identity through the depiction of moments archetypically or stereotypically ‘feminine’: her mannerisms when she falls in love or when she is trying to manipulate a man; her intimate moments of falling in love, making love, giving birth; her moments of
vanity when she fixes her dress and her hair. Similarly moments when she is directly manipulated and acted upon take significant stage time: she is raped by the chorus of the Greeks, she is asked by Jason to abandon her Colchian ways and dressings in order to become a Grecian woman- which she does.

The play consciously reverses back the models of heroism and power, in restoring Jason as the powerful male hero and making Medea a passive anti-hero. The representation of Medea as an ordinary woman that in the course of the play becomes alienated, violated, impoverished, has direct references to the oppression against the ‘other’, particularly women, under, and still after, apartheid. Yet this view although correct, it is also partial as it seems to disregard the agency and role of South African women both actively, as fighters in the public arena, and implicitly, in safekeeping, promoting and forging cultural identities and allegiances during apartheid, and their multiple strategies of entering the public life and affirming their citizenship status after apartheid. Furthermore, in the representation of Medea’s ‘otherness’ and cultural

67 The South African society is admittedly one of great gender inequalities. Women, particularly African women, are the nation's greater 'subclass', subject to high rates of unemployment, poverty and violence. The current position of women in South Africa should be understood a result of historic shifts and changes whereby the patriarchal structures and norms of colonization and apartheid incorporated pre-colonial customary patriarchal structures in order to maintain male control over women and exercise this control in the service of each political and social system’s idea of ‘nation’, ‘society’ and ‘community’. Manipulation and control over females should not be seen exclusively along the lines of the dominant racial divide as it has been carried out in much more complex ways and in multiple levels. For an analysis see Britton (2006) and Maitse (2000).

68 Deborah Gaitskell and Elaine Unterhalter (1989) have analyzed the construction of the notion of ‘motherhood’ among African and Afrikaner parts of the population in different phases of colonization and apartheid and how it has been employed in constructing the idea of the nation. Their analysis is revealing of the complex ways race and gender created multiple alliances in the process of constructing cultural and national identities in South Africa during and after apartheid.

69 With reference to the state of women in post-apartheid South Africa, McEwan writes that exclusion,
identity it seems that the play ends up confirming the cultural barriers that it seemingly
sets out to criticize.

Since this Medea is deprived of what in the previous versions we have seen as
constituting ‘Medea’, the potential for action, the heroic stature, the relation to the
mythical world, we need to see what it is that makes this Medea what she is. What I will
argue is that because Medea’s “otherness” is not linked to her action or her potential for
action, it is stressed solely as cultural otherness expressed not in terms of agency but in
terms of behavior and external characteristics. In this respect the play is much closer to
Seneca than to Euripides or Apollonius: as in Seneca Medea “becomes” ‘Medea’ through
a return to a fixed mythological identity, in the Magnet version too Medea becomes
‘Medea’ through a return to a particular, fixed, cultural identity while her gender
subordination remains, in the play, unchallenged. First we need to see how this cultural

poverty and violence create a sense of “failure to fully realize gender equity in substantive and participatory
citizenship […]”. As with other post-independent states, the struggle for women lies in the (im)possibilities of
translating de jure equality into de facto equality, and of translating state level commitment to gender
equality into tangible outcomes at local and individual levels” (2005: 972). An important aspect of this
struggle is redefining the woman’s role in the private and the public sphere and opening spaces for actual
participation and what this entails, McEwan argues, is the need for a redefinition of citizenship and of
belonging that would accommodate, aside from the western definitions of political and social participation,
local concepts and understandings of the meaning and practice of citizenship. In attempting such a
redefinition McEwan argues that in the post apartheid South African context, citizenship should be
examined from a gendered perspective with an “emphasis to citizen practices [which] extends participation
to autonomous forms of action through which citizens create their own opportunities and terms of
engagement” (ibid. 985). She suggests that although there is indeed an exclusion of women from the formal
public sphere- as the latter is perceived in western terms- in fact there are ““actual spaces” where
citizenship is expressed” (ibid. 987) beyond the strict divisions of the state and civil society and where
women are active and articulate their rights as citizens: “households and communities are as much part of
the realm of citizenship as more formal political spaces and women see their participation in these spaces as
a realization of their citizenship status” (ibid.). The acknowledgment and examination of these social
practices should be taken into account in order to offer some insights as to how citizenship is perceived and
practiced in different contexts and therefore how policy could adjust to actual practice (ibid.).
identity is established.

The play is structured around a juxtaposition between the Greek world and the Colchian world the former represented as “modern” and the latter as “primitive”. Although the movement between the two worlds is fluid and the transitions are (deliberately) not always clearly defined, the two worlds are never seen to intersect as the one (Greek) belongs to the present time of the Corinthian episode whereas the other (Colchian) belongs to the past and is narrated into life through storytelling or memory. I will analyze the representation of the two worlds in more detail in the next chapter. For now I want to focus on Medea and her transition from the Colchian to the Greek and back to the Colchian world again.

Medea’s trajectory is depicted as a process of loss and retrieval of cultural identity represented theatrically by the change of costume and physical expressivity. A key moment in that transition is when, after being raped by the chorus of Greeks, banished and abandoned, she encounters the nurse in a moment that recalls Seneca: the nurse tells her that she is not herself anymore and Medea, taking off her Grecian wig and revealing her shaved, leopard-spotted head, replies “I will become Medea”. The return to her Colchian appearance coincides with the first moment that we actually see her ready for action, to kill Creusa and her children.

Unlike Euripides where the killings of Creusa and the children come as the culmination of a plan of action that runs throughout the play, in this case they come as a
manifestation of the retrieval of her cultural identity: action is a derivative and an affirmation of “Colchianess” as the essential characteristic of Medea -- just as in Seneca, Medea’s action returns her full circle back to who she once was. This is confirmed by the way the killing of the children is carried out: in Euripides the decision to kill the children is weighed over and over again. In her famous monologue Medea is torn between her motherly feelings and her lost pride. It is with great difficulty that her heroic self suppresses her female, motherly self. The infanticide there is a very significant action for two reasons: first because it is invested with meaning -- what it will mean for Medea to kill her children -- and secondly because through this action Medea becomes a mythic heroine, a punisher and a god. In Seneca too the infanticide is invested with meaning, namely, how much the killing will cost to Jason.

In Magnet’s Medea however the killing is not invested with prior meaning because it has not been prepared nor debated in any way. Its meaning is only derived by its association with cultural identity: by undressing her children to reveal their loincloths Medea reappropriates the cultural identity of her offspring as she has done for herself. Interestingly Medea does not come back on stage carrying the dead children and therefore their killing can be only an assumption based on our prior knowledge of the myth -- but it may as well not have happened this way. What matters is not so much her action but the revelation of cultural identity as Medea symbolically reappropriates her children, makes them part of who she is, Colchian. The consummation of the tragedy
therefore, to return to Vernant and Williams, is not the act of the killing but the act of putting back the Colchian clothes, symbols of the Colchian identity. After the infanticide, Medea reappears dressed in a regal tribal red dress and climbs up on a window on the top of the backstage wall and remains silent until the end of the play. She is neither victorious, she has not become a hero, a punisher or a goddess; she has simply become Colchian again.

The risk of such an approach is that cultural identity becomes a fixed condition. Like Seneca’s Medea who adheres to her fixed mythological identity, so this Medea adheres to an idea of “Colchianess” which becomes essentialized. The semiotic significance of clothing as a means of theatrical representation of cultural identities is not irrelevant: can the problem of cultural identity and the process of becoming or unbecoming oneself in one’s own or foreign culture, really be dealt in a manner as simple as putting on and off a piece of cloth? The choice of such a theatrical device oversimplifies the structural complexity of how cultural identity is constituted. 70

As we have seen, neither Euripides or Apollonius chose to foreground the external characteristics of Medea’s foreignness, in fact they tried to underplay them. Instead the examination of the ‘barbarian-ess’ constitutes for them an exploration and a questioning of ‘Greekness’: ‘Greekness’ is the sum of a set of moral codes and values to which Medea’s different set of values, or lack thereof, constitutes a threat. The clash between

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70 In needs to be mentioned that such a device seems to be a standard feature of Magnet Theatre creations. Objects serve a symbolic purpose functioning as the play’s “gestus”. See for example the persistent use of shoes in Cargo and in Every year Every day I am walking.
the two problematizes ‘Greekness’ as much as it exposes ‘barbarianess’: Jason’s value system that led him to betray his oaths is no less faulty than Medea’s that leads her to infanticide. Related as they are to moral values, ‘barbarianess’ is examined within ‘Greekness’ and vice versa.

By contrast, the representation of a fixed image of cultural otherness results, as Banning points out, to the inability to overcome the binary opposition between what is perceived as ‘norm’ and what as ‘other’ -- an opposition whose construction is the privilege of those who belong to the ‘norm’ in the first place. In that sense the play undermines its own engagement with the multiplicity of points of view and narratives: this engagement remains a stylistic device, an exhibition of the potential for a multiplicity of points of view at the discursive level while on the structural level a clear dichotomy remains and the point of view remains that of the normative culture.

‘Greekness’ is also associated as we have seen with a model of maleness and heroism which particularly Euripides and Apollonius question through the forceful presence of Medea’s female heroism which outdoes Jason in action. Medea is depicted as much as an ordinary woman, jealous, wronged, with motherly feelings, as possessing characteristics of a typically male hero. Femaleness is examined as it is constructed through Medea’s relationships with Jason, with the chorus, with her children. In Magnet’s Medea however, femaleness is conflated with cultural otherness (Banning 1999): Medea the female Colchian is examined solely in juxtaposition to Jason, the male Greek, as his
other. Such a binary opposition is problematic insofar as it risks oversimplifying the complex ways that gender is constructed in the context of South Africa during and post-apartheid. In this context, as discussed already in the second part of this chapter, who constitutes an ‘other’ to whom and to what degree is not always a straightforward matter.

An interpretation of Medea's persona lends itself to an exploration of the different allegiances through which female identity is constructed in conjunction to the issue of inclusion and exclusion from a community. As we have seen, in Euripides, Medea identifies with the chorus of Corinthian women who, on the basis of their shared womanhood, align themselves with her. In their case they identify with Medea rather than with their fellow Greeks thus prioritizing their gender over their cultural identity. On the other hand Medea disidentifies from them not only because she is a foreigner and they are Corinthian but also because of her heroic status which raises her above the ordinary woman. Although she is different from Jason as a woman, her heroic status which is more masculine than feminine makes her an equal partner to him- while he, lacking that status and the ensuing magnitude of action, is presented as more effeminate. The two of them are allied since they are both foreign in the Corinthian land- yet he is “less” foreign than she is since he is a Greek. Thus Euripides’ Medea while culturally is excluded from the society of Greeks, does not belong and is deprived of rights, she has alliances as a female.

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71 See Sourvinou-Inwood (1997) on the levels of identification and disidentification among Medea, the chorus and Jason according to gender and ethnicity.
72 Hence she is able to commit the infanticide, a decision that the women of the chorus, as ordinary women, oppose and find incomprehensible.
Seneca downplays the gender relations and focuses rather on Medea’s complete isolation and ‘unhomeliness’. Medea does not have the chorus on her side- they are supporting Jason and his new bride on the basis of their cultural allegiance. Instead it is Jason that seems relatively sympathetic towards her. Interestingly Seneca presents him too as out of place, in search of somewhere to belong and momentarily their displacement unites them against their gender differences. Their gender conflict becomes important insofar as it foregrounds Medea’s ability to annihilate Jason through her absolute control over procreation:

If, even now, there is, unknown to me,
Some fetus spawned by you inside my womb,
I’ll use this sword and tear it out with steel (1011-13)

In both plays, the centrality of the act of the infanticide serves to identify womanhood with motherhood. Motherhood however is not related to cultural identity: Medea does not want to have her children raised in Corinth with their father only on the grounds that they will be raised by another woman, not because they will be alienated from her own culture. Their killing serves as a punishment to Jason and herself, raises her above ordinary womanhood into a heroic/mythological status and serves as a confirmation of the power that the female has over the male- the power to control his continuity.

Instead of these multiple allegiances that construct ‘Jason’ ‘maleness’ and
‘Greekness’ as much as they construct ‘Medea’, ‘femaleness’ and ‘foreignness’, in Magnet’s Medea we have a clear-cut binary opposition: Colchian/female- Greek/ male. Medea is constructed exclusively as Jason’s cultural and gendered ‘other’- he is the stable point of reference to her process of gradual alienation and ‘othering’. Thus the multiple ways in which South African subjectivities are constructed as ‘other’ or as ‘same’ in relation to the other gender and cultural groups are not revealed. The result is that the political importance and the potential for intervention that the construction of these subjectivities had in practice in the play is replaced by a retraction from action to an idealized cultural identity perceived in essentialist terms. Medea is not only passive but often complacent in the process of her own alienation and appropriation both as a woman and as a Colchian: not only does she quickly agrees to dress up and act as a Greek but even when she is banned and abandoned her response is: “But I am one of you now (…). This [Greece] is my place too now”. In a direct reference to the South African reality we see Medea raped by the Greeks, we see her exiled and all her belongings taken away from her, a direct reference to the lot of South African women who were considered by law “as perpetual minors who could not own property nor enter into any contract” (Maitse, 201) -- in short deprived of all her gender and citizenship rights. Her ‘unhomeliness’ is extreme: she is even deprived of the chorus’ sympathy that Euripides’ Medea enjoyed. Yet this Medea is not depicted as an agent with an extremely subversive potential. We have never seen her as constituting a threat to the status quo. Yet in reality,
the control, often violent, and the extreme exclusion of the South African female from all spheres of public life is a direct result of the acknowledgment of her crucial role in maintaining or subverting the status quo, starting with her role as a mother. Having downplayed Medea’s subversive power as a woman the play although it tries to raise gender issues it ends up engaging with the themes of inclusion and exclusion only in terms of cultural identity. As Banning writes “this Medea demonstrates the difficulties of effecting cultural intervention without at the same time engaging in gender interventions” (1999: 45).

At the end of the play Medea reappears in a red tribal dress and climbs up on a window at the top of the backstage wall where she remains perched as a bird and completely silent, watching the action on stage, until the end of the play. The chorus and Jason emerge infuriated at Creusa’s death seeking to kill Medea. At the moment when they see her, but can’t reach her, Jason finds the children’s (European) clothes. Crying “Medea what have you done” and then only her name, he kneels in pain while at the same time he is crowned king under the sound of Western religious music. At this point the play reveals its political character: we are presented with the establishment of a new order. While in Euripides and Seneca it is Medea who creates the new order, here it is Jason and the chorus who crown him king. From this new order Medea is present-absent, a silent spectator who has chosen not to be part of this order. The play envisions the new order as "hollow" in terms of citizenship and belonging.73 It concludes by posing the

73 With reference to women’s citizen status in post-apartheid South Africa (see also footnote 23) McEwan
question: what is this kingdom worth that is based on so much blood and that excludes the ‘other’? But, in the context of post-election South Africa it fails to acknowledge, thereby declaring as equally hollow, a citizenship hard-won by the previously excluded and their spaces, possibilities and modes of action from within the status quo.

(2005) is critical towards the so called ‘hollowness’ that western critics see in the concept and definitions of citizenship deriving from the inevitable exclusions that it creates between those who have it and those who don’t. McEwan concludes that “A feminist conceptualization of citizenship as ethically-grounded action in all spheres of life, not simply as public participation, perhaps has broader relevance in allowing us to think beyond notions of ‘impasse’ or ‘hollowness’ that inflect much of contemporary western theory (which rarely, if ever, takes account of understandings or experiences of citizenship in post-colonial or post-liberation contexts, where it is hard won, valued and continually reshaped in ways that are perhaps more meaningful and innovative that in the west) (2005: 987).
2.2 Shaping and representations of cultural identity in Magnet Theatre’s Medea.

Magnet theatre’s Medea approaches the Medea myth as an “extremely personal story” (Reznek in Friedman 1996: 30) setting it against the grand-narratives of colonialism and apartheid (Fleischman 2001) and attempting “to come to terms with the issues of multi-culturalism and multilingualism” (Friedman 1996: 30).

All reviewers related the play with the sociopolitical situation of 1994 South Africa seeing it as accurately portraying “the way living in South Africa now feels: its sheer complexity of emotion” (Greig 1996: 21) and as proposing an innovative theatrical language befitting this feeling. The themes of a clash of cultures, the process of self-alienation and transformation and the theatrical means by which these are staged resonated with a country in the process of re-defining itself on the basis of the need for coexistence among its various people. In discussing the value of the performance in the context of the transitional state of South Africa, Miki Flockemann argues that:

…my reading of the repositionings of identity as performed in culturally syncretic works such as Fleishman/Jazzart’s Medea, is informed by the notion that “Instead of situating literature and other arts as both marginal to, and reifying of, cultural

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74In Adrienne Sichel's review for example, we read that, "Central to the tragic love story of the betrayed, child slaying Medea and the treacherous power-hungry Jason is the issue of cultural identity. Who is the savage and who is the barbarian? What is civilization? Should one culture and language be valued above another? Socio-political power at what price? These are the questions this production poses in a head-on collision with theatrical forms and conventions" (1996: 3). Greig writes that "The work creates a theatrical language capable of dealing with the new order" (1996: 22) although in response to those praising the play's aesthetic as innovative he argues that "The claims made for this aesthetic are generally extravagant and ignorant- it is only new to those who choose to ignore history" (ibid.).
practices, aesthetic forms might be taken as central to the epistemological and ethical possibilities of culture’s emergence” (Stewart, 1993:14). It is at moments of transition which put pressure on existing political, social, cultural and gendered identities, that cross-cultural exchanges should be foregrounded in our readings of cultural production (1996: 86).

The play is structured around the juxtaposition of two cultures - the Colchian and the Greek, and Medea's process of alienation and loss of Colchian identity. In Fleishman’s words the play is about “two cultures that are incomprehensible to one another, about a woman who takes on the dressings of her lover’s world and who, in the process, loses her history and sense of self” (in Friedman 1996: 30). In this context of cultural clash and alienation the Medea myth is used as an allegory for the exploitation of the indigenous peoples and their resources by the Europeans (signified by Jason's quest for and acquisition of the fleece which, we are told, empowers whoever has it, his repeated statements that he must be king no matter what the price, his planting of a flag as soon as he lands on the land of Colchis) and the appropriation and exclusion of its indigenous people, in this case the ‘Colchians’, signified by Medea's journey to Greece, her betrayal and abandonment by Jason.

The approach of interweaving the personal narrative with the grand narrative is typical of postmodernist writing where “the ‘grand narrative’ is given over to the ‘little narrative’ and the telling of the story is displaced by the telling of a story that looks
towards its own displacement” (Kaye 1994: 18-19). Yet, the play’s more or less implicit engagement with South Africa’s past and present, with relations between dominant and dominated and with issues of identity, appropriation and alienation, allow for a post-colonial reading of the play. From that perspective, I will first examine how the Colchian and the Greek communities are constructed in order to show that the play sustains the colonial dichotomies between ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’. I will then focus on the character of Medea in order to see how the play deals with the problem of agency and subjectivity of the post-colonial, post-apartheid subject. Underlying my reading is a concern with the ways the play relates to the dominant ideology and practice of multiculturalism as it emerged in South Africa after 1994 and as it was discussed in the introductory chapter. I am arguing that although the play engages with the issues of cultural clash and cultural identities, it treats them as sites of cultural distance and not, given the history of South Africa, as sites of agency or resistance to assimilation. In so doing it ends up perpetuating a Eurocentric "orientalization" of the indigenous.\(^\text{75}\) The play undermines its own attempts to engage with the issues of multiculturalism in South Africa because, as I will show, it sustains by means of physical and linguistic representation the "collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans" (Said 1979: 7). Furthermore, if Flockemann is correct on the importance

\(^{75}\) I am here distinguishing between “difference” and “distance”: while “difference” is part of the postcolonial agenda which seeks to stress and contextualize “similarities of experience while at the same time registering the formidable differences that mark each former colony” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 3), “distance” points rather to the unwillingness to find similarities and, in aesthetic terms, the exoticization of the “other”. On “difference” see also Tiffin and Lawson (1994).
that cultural products have in the shaping of cultural consciousness at transitional moments then, by the same token, the replication of such binaries and the avoidance to engage with the material and racial aspects of multiculturalism and cultural domination in a play that engages with the problem of cultural identity, contributes to the postponing of directly facing and mending those issues by the new social order.  

The play thus becomes complicit, part of the broader network of institutions that support the Eurocentric "orientalizing" discourse.  

Already in the previous chapter, I referred briefly to Magnet theatre’s method of working with the modes of performance and the aesthetics of African oral traditions. These involve the creation of images as the fundamental structural elements of the story instead of text, storytelling, presentational over representational style, non-linear patterns of development, loose characterization, improvisation and physical embodiment of multiple characters, use of dance, song and mime together with text. These modes of creating performance, Fleishman argues, allow for multiple meanings to emerge from all participating in the creation instead of the singleness of the author/director-generated meaning in text-based theatre.  

In its use of these modes of performance the play seems to be an attempt to recreate a form of African “festival theatre”, a type that, drawing its

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76 Among the play's reviewers I believe Robert Greig is the only one to point to that. He writes: "Medea mirrors our world. Whether it actually illuminates how we live, move and have our being, is another matter" (1996: 21)

77 Said writes about the "European material civilization and culture" (1979: 2) which creates and supports the Orientalist discourse "culturally and ideologically (...) by institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines (...)" (ibid.).

function and aesthetic from social and religious rituals, prioritizes spectacle over drama (Conteh-Morgan 1994) and "incorporat[es] diverse forms such as singing, chanting, drama, drumming, masking, miming, costuming, puppetry, with episodes of theatrical enactments ranging from the sacred and secretive to the secular and public" (Olaniyan 2007: 355). It also has the characteristics of "performance" as defined by Schechner: oscillating between efficacy and entertainment, originat[ing] in impulses to make things happen and to entertain; to get results and to fool around; to collect meanings and to pass the time; to be transformed into another and to celebrate being oneself; to disappear and to show off; to bring into a special place a transcendent Other who exists then -and- now and later -and- now; to be in a trance and to be conscious (...)” (1997: 142).

This multivocal, sensuous and celebratory character of festival theatre becomes in the play the object of thematic and aesthetic inquiry: the play associates the world of the Colchians with this rich type of performance and juxtaposes it to the world of the Greeks which is depicted as a lot more restrained and closer to the ‘familiar’ modes of text-based Western drama. Conteh-Morgan (1994) has shown how this is a false binary to begin

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79 Conteh-Morgan (1994) gives an overview of the forms of ritual (social, religious, performance) that have shaped the modern forms of African (Francophone) drama. He argues that although the three forms overlap, there is however a clear distinction between ritual and drama: in the former "elements of spectacle exist on their own terms" (1994: 15) while in the latter they are subordinate to the story. Having its roots in ritual, African drama tends to give more emphasis on spectacle as opposed to Western European text-based theatre. Yet, he argues that "to say that modern [African] drama is more theatrical and less dramatic than its mainstream Western counterpart is to describe a dynamic cluster of tendencies for either tradition, and not a static category of essences. It is especially not to make a value judgment" (ibid.)
He has argued that both aspects of theatre, spectacle and drama, ritual and efficacy, have been prevalent in both Western and African drama across time, through historical evolution and conscious experimentation with theatrical forms. In addition, he has pointed to the risks inherent in such an approach of essentializing cultural identities. I will discuss in detail how Magnet's *Medea* translates the ‘us and them’ into performance terms, beginning with an aspect that holds a central position in the play, namely, the performers' corporeality.

The production is, as already mentioned, a collaboration between a theatre (Magnet) and a dance company (Jazzart). The latter has a long history of creating movement vocabularies drawing from the particularities of the dancers’ bodies and the elements of the various South African cultures while the former draws its methods not only from the oral African traditions but also from the theatre tradition of Jacques Lecoq which emphasizes the actor’s physical expressivity and the preparation of a body that is capable of transforming and embodying a wide range of physical and emotional states ranging from the grotesque to the sublime. The bodies then in *Medea* must be understood as an important medium of signification, equally important to the text. As such they should be examined in the ways they signify through their presence, the

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80 Conteh-Morgan refers to the work of a number of Western theatre practitioners (Grotowski, Schechner, Blau, Brook) who have advocated the return to a 'total theatre' that will incorporate elements of spectacle, music and ritual. Referring to their work and its impact he speaks of a "reevaluation of theatre (...) which now promotes the hitherto 'primitive', undifferentiated festival and other performance practices of non-literate peoples to the rank of vital and 'civilised' forms, while those of 'civilised' peoples are devalued as 'primitive' (1994: 16).

81 For the importance of the body in the philosophy of Magnet theatre see Fleishman (1990, 1996).
metamorphoses they undergo, their movement and their ‘framing’ through costume (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, Balme 1999).

I would like to start by looking at the ways the performers’ bodies signify in the context of the representation of the Greek and Colchian cultures. All the performers of Medea’s racially mixed cast form the play’s two choruses, the Greeks and the Colchians, while the actors who play the principal roles occasionally mix with the choruses in choreographed scenes. In the analysis that follows I will argue that the play falls into the trap of representing the Colchians in a typically Eurocentric and exoticizing way, albeit admittedly aesthetically accomplished, “in which images of the indigene have been circumscribed to a semiotic field that is limited to seven signifiers: orality, mysticism, violence, nature, sexuality, historicity, and an imitation of indigenous ‘forms’ of communication” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 207). The Colchians are represented as different and as geographically, temporally and culturally distant, occupying a mythological, a-historical time and space.

Overall, the representation of the Colchians is invested by what Banning characterizes as “enhanced theatricality”: tribal dresses, dancing and singing, vivid speech and gesticulation, polyglottism, constitute a typical representation of a “native” community. The performers are half naked, dressed in pieces of loincloth. They dance and move almost always as a closely knitted group with very large gestures, with pelvic movements and closer to the ground and with excessive energy. The ways their bodies
interact with one another suggest sexuality, a close connection with nature and a childishness as their dances and play are often interrupted by laughter. Their dancing together with their ululations is often violent and their intentions often incomprehensible: dance, gestures and actions are used as a substitute to verbal communication, as a means to express emotional states, relations or to complement narrative. The news of the Argonauts' approach to Colchis is first conveyed by a performer who physically enacts a frantic horse-ride embodying both the rider and the horse before he starts announcing the news of the strangers' arrival. When Jason arrives at Colchis, the people receive him with ululations and dance around him in a violent-provocative manner that suggests "a ritual sexual invitation to Jason by the women, a ritual sexual challenge by the men" (Banning 1999: 44). When Medea welcomes the stranger she does so by offering him a pot of water. Later, when Jason and Aeetes bargain about the fleece, the exchange is initiated by Medea who in a ritual manner holds up some pebbles which she then leaves on a piece of cloth. The "discussion" between the two men has the form of pebble-throwing, verbalized by either Jason or Medea who translates Aeetes' gestures to Jason. They act and react as a crowd, amorphous, and politically primitive as suggested by the scene where Aeetes with an abrupt gesture quiets down their noise and ululations and they instantly obey by lowering their heads and curling down. Some of the characters, particularly Aeetes and Medea, use repeatedly strong gestures as a means of communication or to indicate an emotional state, gestures that although carry emotional resonance (suggesting for
instance, anger, or frustration) they cannot be decodified according to a modern audience’s experience. The dominant characteristic in their depiction then is that "rationality is undermined by excess" (Said 1979: 57) and by a strong ritual character insofar as it is “ordinary behavior transformed by means of condensation, exaggeration, repetition, and rhythm into specialized sequences of behavior serving specific functions usually having to do with mating, hierarchy, or territoriality” (Schechner 1993: 228).

As Banning argues, it is the “semiotic richness” (1999: 44) with which the representation of the Colchians is invested that relegates them to the status of “other” to the Greek, Western norm: the Greeks are represented as typical of contemporary western civilization, as ‘modern’: they are restrained physically and vocally, they engage in familiar activities (i.e. partying, divorce settlement), and they make use of technology (cellphones, helicopter). They are dressed in trenchcoats that cover them up to their calves and boots. Their movements are small and restrained, their bodies stiff and straight with upward moving patterns and each dancer is more isolated in relation to the group. Overall, the Greeks seem to be physically confined by the restricting ‘civilizing’ norms of Western culture.

In the depiction of the Colchians we have the exploration of the grotesque body, a body in its natural state, non-idealized and non-beautified as theorized by Bakhtin. In the Bakhtinian analysis of the aesthetic of ‘grotesque realism’ the “essential principle […] is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a
transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (1968: 19-20). Central then in this aesthetic is the body and particularly its lower strata, “the life of the belly and the reproductive organs” (ibid. 21). Unlike the modern, bourgeois body which is individualized and ‘complete’, cut off, that is, from the material world around it, the grotesque body has “a cosmic and at the same time an all people’s character” (ibid. 26) as it acknowledges at all times its connection to the earth, the material world around it and the other bodies. It is an incomplete body signifying simultaneously degradation and regeneration. In the depiction of this body the emphasis is placed on the parts where it connects to the outside world, “on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth” (ibid.).

Fleishman in articulating his theatre’s aesthetic has acknowledged the Bakhtinian influence and has argued for the use of the grotesque body as part of the return to folk oral cultures (Francis 2006). In Medea the use of the grotesque body can be found in the dance patterns of the Colchian chorus, in the gestures of Aeetes and Medea with their extended arms and fingers, open mouths with extended tongues and protruding eyes, the scenes of flirting, child birth and love-making where the actors, as animals, smell, touch and bite one another in a scene where sex is almost cannibalistic. Following Bakhtin,
Fleishman emphasizes the subversive potential of this body that is always in a process of transformation, “an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming” (Bakhtin 1968: 24).

In Bakhtin’s analysis there is a crucial dialectic between the grotesque and the ‘civilized’ bodies: the social function of the grotesque aesthetic, rooted as it is in the carnival tradition of folk cultures, is to parody the idealized, spiritual, individualistic aspects of life by materializing them, making them flesh, bringing them down to earth in a way that is life affirming and assertive of the vitality of the collective body. Similarly, in postcolonial theatre, the use of the grotesque body, because of its antithesis to and parody of the ‘classic’ aesthetic, is a means for the colonized to reaffirm its subjectivity as it aims at “decentering imperial tropes to foreground a corporeal performativity that promotes unruliness” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 224). In this context the “juxtapositions of classical and grotesque bodies usually function to expose and ridicule the colonizing culture’s representational motifs” (ibid.). The grotesque therefore is combined dialectically with the serious and it operates from within it: “the ever-growing, inexhaustible, ever-laughing principle which uncrowns and renews is combines with its opposite: the petty, inert “material principle” of class society” (Bakhtin 1968: 24).

In Medea, although the grotesque is used in that direction, to create a contrast between the Colchians and the westernized Greeks, this contrast fails to go beyond the dichotomy of civilized/uncivilized and in fact it maintains it. One reason for such failure
is that the semiotic codes used for the depiction of each world, movement vocabulary, sounds, costume, are distinct and complete in themselves (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996) and never penetrate one another. The grotesque element then, does not operate in dialectical opposition with the social order and thus its subversive potential is annihilated. Instead it becomes self-referential theatricality that reinforces the depiction of the Colchians as exotic. A second problem is that in the performance the juxtaposition is not between the folk and grotesque against the high and idealized but between primitivism and modernity. In Bakhtin’s analysis, the folk humour mocks materiality but is not historically antecedent to it. In Medea, the Greeks are not the idealists that are countered by the folk, carnivalesque culture but the modern, technologically advanced people countered by the primitive community. The result is that the depiction of the Colchians becomes mythologized and historicized. Finally, the carnival tradition and the grotesque aesthetic as part of it, are consciously summoned by the people in a celebratory and festive spirit, as means to critique the social order. In the play however they constitute part of a people’s identity and thus become fixed and essentialized categories instead of deliberate choices.

The use of dance in the play is indicative of the different ways the Greeks and the Colchians are depicted. Gilbert and Tompkins draw attention to the “ideological encoding” of dance and argue that “while dance can act as immediate metaphor for certain cultures, dance- along with other kinds of movement- can be figured as more
deeply significant for and in itself” (1996: 239). It is this point that needs to be examined in relation to the function of dance in Medea. Interestingly, in the depiction of the Colchians, dance becomes a metaphor for the ‘other’ while, in the depiction of the Greeks, it has a significance in and for itself.

Dance is also used in the Colchian part of the story to construct those incidents that, because of their mythological character, cannot easily be interpreted realistically: for the killing of the bulls Jason is centre-stage as he prepares himself for the fight while the performers in a minimalistically choreographed scene jump against him embodying the bulls. For the killing of Absyrtus, the stage is split in two: Jason and Medea are fleeing (the two actors mime running on the spot while a group of Colchians on the other side do the same) followed by Absyrtus who emerges from the group with slow, controled dance moves, as he prepares to take revenge, moves that continue during his dialogue with Medea, until the end of the scene. The travel of the Argo is also embodied by the performers, this time dressed as Greeks, who create with their bodies the shape of the ship, enact the rowing and the sounds of the sea.

Apart from the travel of the Argo, dance is limited to very few scenes when used among the Greeks. More importantly, it is used literally and not as a metaphor for communication. Early in the play we have a scene where the Greeks rape Medea, it is a scene where movements that simulate sex are choreographed in a fast pace under flashing light and loud metal music that add to the brutality of the scene. Dance and play are also
used in the scene of the celebrations for Medea's wedding. Minimal dance with similar kind of heavy metal music is used when Jason is partying before his wedding.

While it is true that in theatrical terms, the mythological aspects of the story offer a lot more opportunities for the creation of a physical theatre of images, yet the exclusive association of the Colchians with this mythical world is problematic. It results in a metaphorical use of dance among the Colchians which we do not find among the Greeks and in the isolation of the natives in a timeless past: they seem to occupy a mythical time and space, secluded from the contemporary world and the present time. The use of movement as a substitute for verbal communication and the quality of the dance which is often characterized by a childish playfulness in the way the bodies relate to one another, often accompanied by laughs, create the image of a primitive, innocent, intellectually undeveloped people. The centrality of the physical expressivity in the case of the Colchians serves to speak for their culture, representing them as a highly physical 'dancing' people. The Greeks on the other hand are not depicted so much as a non-physical culture, but on other terms, as hostile, violent, modernized. Therefore the Greek subjectivity is constructed in more complex terms than the Colchian subjectivity which does not escape the simplistic and stereotypical construction of bodily terms. The result for such representation is similar to how Said (1979) describes theatrical representations of Orientalism in Europe: "[a] line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful

Craig points to that when he writes that the performance's approach, "celebrates the dark gods of anger and passion, rather than intellect, and is suspicious of verbal meaning. It seems to imply too that being African means being dead from the neck up, a sophisticated version of the natural rhythm approach" (1996:21)
and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant” (57).

Multilingualism is used in a similar manner in the play. The use of language in postcolonial contexts is always linked to questions of power (Balme 1999) and the use of indigenous languages in particular serves in itself as an act of defiance against the imposed imperial language “and an attempt to retrieve cultural autonomy” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 169). It also serves to depict the actual community of people against the dominant culture’s insistence on purity that resulted in a depiction of society as homogeneous and monolingual. In multilingual contexts people belonging to particular linguistic groups tend to understand the languages spoken on stage "through literal, metaphorical, and political frames of reference which are specific to their own culture and experience" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 169-170). Thus the use of indigenous languages on stage can strategically exclude and include parts of the audience, ultimately “dispers[ing] any particular discourse’s claim to singular authority” (ibid 173).

Amkpa writes that “[c]olonialism and European languages were not simply imposed on people, but also reorganized social relations, reinvented ethnicities and sparked off various cultural practices that identified and disidentified with its hegemonies” (2000: 119-120). Language therefore is instrumental in creating identity and a sense of belonging in a community and the choice of language on the part of the colonized is a strategic, conscious act to define him/herself against the fabricated identities and communities that the imposition of language by the colonizer creates. In
South Africa, more than anywhere else in the colonized world, indigenous languages served as a means of racial, ethnic and cultural isolation and subordination. The imposition of Bantu languages became an instrument of apartheid to exclude the black population from access to the urban world and foster ‘tribalism’. The result was often a reactionary rejection of both Afrikaans and tribal languages and culture, in favor of English language and culture that acquired a hegemonic status.

In the play the Colchians are depicted as multilingual: Zulu, Tamil, Cape Afrikaans, English are used in the Colchian community while the Greeks are speaking exclusively Standard English. What such a division suggests is that all non-English languages are categorized as 'other' and 'Colchian', in an undifferentiated, generalized group. The specificity of each language is lost, together with the ideological tensions among these languages. They therefore lose their status as languages by becoming a generic category of 'non-English' while their significance as means of constructing identity and community is ignored. At the same time the play fails to question the hegemony of English. The English language thus is affirmed as a universalized norm, a 'neutral' language and the ideological weight behind it remains entirely unquestioned.

Early in the play there is a scene that clearly illustrates how the play treats the

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83 All reviewers and critics of the play related the use of multiple languages to the emerging issues of multiculturalism in South Africa. Greig writes that Medea "is a play where language is devalued partly because the play is about people without a common language or values" (1996: 22). For Sichel the depiction of "seething interculturalism, charged with racial intolerance and violence (...) is reinforced by the languages, predominantly English, Tamil, Cape Afrikaans and Zulu which are fused with (...) ritualistic vocabulary" (1996: 3) Reznek too argues that "by articulating different languages the production attempts to come to terms with the issues of multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism" (Friedman 1996: 30)
relations between cultures and power by means of language. It is the scene where Jason asks for the fleece from Aeetes, a scene of negotiations where Medea acts as an interpreter. The scene begins with Medea putting some pebbles on a piece of cloth- then the two men start moving them around- each one in turn makes his “moves” bargaining about the fleece while Medea interprets.

In that scene Aeetes does not speak, he only moves the pebbles on the floor, an action which Medea then translates into words for Jason. Jason then performs the same action of moving the pebbles while simultaneously speaking in English- which Medea does not translate for Aeetes. Although we know that Aeetes speaks, we have seen him before speaking in Tamil, in this case he does not, he only uses gestures. Medea's intervention and translation into English is necessary for the audience to understand what is being exchanged. Jason however is in possession of both the English language and the ‘game’ of the throwing of the pebbles and can translate and make himself understood without the need of Medea. Contrary to the practice of postcolonial theatre which, as Balme (1999) has argued, tends to explicitly present rather than cover the linguistic difficulties in order to underlie the power relations linked to language, the play makes things very easy for Jason: the difficulty of communication, of partaking into the different culture's codes is a problem that only Aeetes has: to make himself understood he needs a translator while Jason does not need such mediation. Yet in postcolonial conditions of such negotiations the colonizer is in equal need of access to the colonized people's codes
and means of communication and therein lies his weakness: he cannot enforce his will except with some assistance of the colonized. This not only foregrounds his dependence but also points to the translator’s power that springs from his/her "capacity to 'unsay the world' and to 'speak it otherwise'" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996:176). Since Jason does not need Medea as he can translate himself, both his powerlessness and her potential power are underplayed, in fact reversed. Instead of exploring the agency and power of the Colchians in this scene the play remains at the level of playing with the semiotic codes and the ways they overlay one another once again self-indulgently pointing to its own theatricality. Furthermore, although in previous scenes and particularly through the characters of Aeetes and the Nurse who speak Tamil and Cape Afrikaans respectively, the play has tried to present the possibility of multilingualism with languages other than English standing independently on stage, in this scene it undermines this attempt falling into the need to translate the foreign language for the sake of the English speaking characters and the audience, thus classifying the indigenous culture as foreign.

This scene is characteristic of how the show constructs Medea as situated between languages and cultures, a position that is stressed throughout the play. Both linguistically and physically Medea is depicted as transforming to and identifying with either culture by means of her use of language and physical presence and expressivity. Below I will focus on how her character is constructed in relation to the two cultural groups in order to argue that her depiction as in-between cultures in conjunction with the underplaying of
her agency discussed in the previous chapter, result in her marginalization and exclusion from the new social order that the play engages with.

In a play that uses a multiracial cast, Medea, like Jason, is played by a white actress. The issue of race in the South African context where the country is in the process of reconstructing itself as non-racial is a very sensitive one. In postcolonial contexts, physical representation of identity needs to be negotiated between the two extremes of a universalized body and an essentialized body (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996): postcolonial theatre avoids the first by foregrounding the body’s “markers of difference”- gender and race- and the second by “conceptuali[zing] all markers of identity/difference as partial, provisional, and likely to change depending upon the signifying system in which they operate at any particular time” (ibid. 201). There are two predominant strategies in postcolonial theatre in regards to race: to either “emphasise racial difference [in order to] recuperate marginalized subjects or, alternatively, to dismantle all racial categories by showing their constructedness” (ibid.). Balme (1999) terms these practices as “effacement” or conversely “resemanticization” of the body’s race and he shows how they are strategically used as a reaction to the European theatre’s restriction of indigenous performance to the realm of folklore through the depiction of the indigenous body as ‘natural’ and ‘savage’.

Given that racial tensions in South Africa in 1994 were much more prevalent than they are now, the choice of a white actress for Medea in a multiracial cast can not be
bypassed as “colour-blind” casting but should be interpreted as a strategic choice. My argument is that the play tries not to dismantle but to efface racial categories and discusses difference on cultural and not on racial terms.

Medea signifies as Jason’s cultural ‘other’ through her costume and her physical, but not verbal, language. Because Medea and Jason are of the same race, the play emphasizes these external characteristics (physicality and costume) as markers of difference between tribal and western culture. As a Colchian she is dressed in tribal clothes, her hair is shaven, her gestures and expressions are large, often animalistic and grotesque and she performs ritual actions. As a Greek she is dressed in a mini-dress and high-heels, wears a straight-hair wig, and performs small gestures as fixing her dress or her make up looking in a pocket mirror. There is a characteristic scene in the play when Medea's transformation from Colchian to Greek is performed: as they flee to Greece (the actors again simulate the act of running), Jason asks her to change her clothes and manners- which she immediately does:

…go change your clothes (...). In Greece you should be like a Grecian woman. (He takes off the fleece and wears a t-shirt. She wears a straight her wig which he looks at and approves of). Do not (....) speak to the moon (....death). They hate it here. I hate it too. (She wears high heels). You’re not in Colchis anymore, you’re in Greece now. It is not monsters that live here but men”. (They stop running, he has a last look on her, hugs her and they all stay still as in a family photo).
The play here uses a device familiar to post-colonial and specifically South African theatre: the superimposition on the performer’s body (that constitutes one sign system) of external elements, costume, gestures (that constitute another sign system), from another culture. The purpose of this device has been to point to the constructedness and "shifting signification" of race, parodize both the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ or suggest the process of acculturation of the colonized, through the juxtaposition of the two signifying systems that are used to complement or contrast one another and are set in dialogue with one another. Using the same device, the play wishes to comment on the process of ‘westernization’, perceived in negative terms, as opposed to ‘tribalism’ but by underplaying race it does not problematize ‘whiteness’ in its structural relation to the ‘West’ and its connotations. Cultural politics become dissociated from racial politics and the latter are deliberately ignored as non existent. This constitutes a gross disregard of the structural relations between culture and race in South Africa, of the ways that culture has been employed as a means to sustain or subvert identification in terms of race but also of the racialization of culture, the access to or restriction from cultural forms based on race. The result is an essentialization of culture and a critique of western ‘modernity’ against a nostalgia for an ‘innocent past’ that is characteristically Eurocentric in its ignorance of the fact that negotiating between modernity and indigeneity has been an integral part of the process of self-apprehension for the colonized who, as part of racial politics, had been ‘condemned’ to tribalism.
The play’s approach further disregards the construction of one’s identity as a process of conscious realization of the connections between racial and cultural politics. Although Jason’s white body is a signifying part of his European-ness, Medea’s white body is seen as neutral in its signification as part of her otherness. In this sense white becomes a non-colour, and the white body becomes thus universalized, a neutral, ideology-less body upon which various markers of difference can be inscribed, while the black body remains particularized and racialized: the actress’ white body allows her, in theatrical terms, to be easily transformable from Colchian to Greek, to ‘pass’ for either, implying that a black acting body would carry in the Greek world its race which would not be effaced.

Medea then is not depicted as structurally ‘other’ but as transformable: her identity changes literally as easily as changing clothes. Since race as a marker of difference is effaced, identity is only negotiated in terms of the external signifiers of cultural difference. Her very own body then, is not, for Medea, a site of constructing identity and self-awareness as ‘other’. Strangely, it is Jason who demonstrates a clear awareness of Medea’s otherness and its implications as the scene described earlier shows or as he tells her towards the end of the play:

What were you before I came, woman? You are in Greece now, instead of some barbarian land. You have the blessings of law and justice here. You have won fame and fortune. If you were still living in the end of the earth no one would
have heard the name Medea

He also tells her “I want to be king. You want to be my wife. I cannot be king while I’m still married to you”. Medea’s response to his statements about power is “No, you want a younger wife, a Grecian wife. Your foreign one is passing into old age”. His attitude exemplifies how the colonial gaze ‘frames’ the colonized as inferior (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996) and plainly shows how cultural identity and power are related for him. Medea however demonstrates no consciousness of this relationship nor does she interrogate the meaning of ‘Grecian’ and ‘foreign’. For her the problem is focused solely on Jason’s sexual desire. Her passivity and lack of consciousness leave Jason’s views unchallenged.

In a similar manner, she is positioned linguistically in an in-between space in a manner that negates language’s significance as a means of identification and belonging. Although she is a Colchian unlike the rest of her people she only speaks English, although she can understand the other languages as well as the physical and gestural vocabulary which she occasionally adopts. The fact that she only articulates herself in Jason’s language isolates her from her community: language is not a means for her to identify herself as Colchian and have a sense of belonging. It is characteristic that when, at the end of the play, she returns to her Colchian identity by changing her Western clothes with a tribal dress, she demonstrates so through her costume and her physical but not linguistic vocabulary. Like race, the English language is seen as a neutral, ideology-
less language. The combination of her English, with her understanding of all languages and her physical vocabularies, make Medea highly transformable, easy to identify with either culture while it diminishes her sense of identity as belonging to a linguistic group.

In the process of colonization, Parry argues, in order to serve the purposes of the colonized, the native subject was not constructed as entirely the binary opposite of the colonized but as "a programmed, nearly "selfed other" of the European" (1987: 27).

"Hence" Amkpa argues

the sites for contesting social reality and identities (...) became physical and psychological and much more complicated through the process of self-aware representation than they would have done if they remained identifiable in cultural assumption and representation as the 'other' of the colonizing cultures. (2000: 118).

Medea is constructed as the “selfed other” of Jason but she lacks the capacity for “self-aware representation”. African dramatists, as Amkpa suggests, have sought to explore the conscious ways that subjects negotiate, construct and choose identity in the 'third space' between cosmopolitanism and locality, western and indigenous, modern and traditional. Medea, although it situates the heroine in that “third space”, it does not handle her in-betweeness as a possible space for the construction of a new subjectivity and intervention but leaves her to oscillate between "mimicry and […] subject-less-ness" (Amkpa 2000: 119).
Medea's subject-less-ness is enforced by the very structure of the performance which is founded on the deconstruction of the narrative. If the postcolonial agenda was to recuperate the subjectivity and agency of the colonized and revisit history and the past from their point of view, Medea disrupts this agenda and claims to do the opposite: decentralize and problematize subjectivity and question whether history and the past can ever be objectively revisited and recuperated. In this version of the Medea myth Medea is displaced, absent from her own story. As a subject, she is not the agent nor the ‘centre of consciousness’ but the product of the very acts of narration and performance, constantly transforming, constructed as the sum of stories, accounts, memories and events that happen to her, are told about her or she tells about herself.

Storytelling is the performance's “structural and (...) epistemological framework” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 127) as evidenced by two key moments of storytelling that frame the events of the play: the first in the beginning of the play by Medea and the second in the middle, by Jason. In addition, the play employs the technique of multiple, overlapping narratives set against a single, multipurpose set (a sandy beach with a rolling garage door at the back) within fragmented and disrupted temporal frames. The audience gets to see different characters’ points of view on the same event, for example in the scene between Medea, Jason and Absyrtus where Medea’s return to Colchis is negotiated, or to see the effects of the past to the present as in Medea’s joyous wedding scene which
is repeatedly interrupted by the tragic description of her brother’s burial by their father. Thus the play “overlays narratives that are often geographically and temporally distant [and] records the inscriptions of past and present simultaneously rather than sequentially” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 147).

Such devices, apart from their centrality in African oral cultures and their subsequent postcolonial strategic usage which I will discuss in more detail below, found their full potential in Brecht's theatre as defamiliarizing devices aimed at constructing an analytical narrative framework and enhancing audience awareness and reflection. It is Brecht's practice of illuminating the personal story against a social background through the use of "parable"—historically removed storytelling that allowed for critical distance—that found resonance with African dramatists and theatre creators who incorporated African performance modes in contemporary theatre during the anti-apartheid struggle (Kruger 1999). Yet, as Brecht himself was only too aware, the use of such devices does not in itself constitute social critique: "a theatre which employed the techniques of 'epic' without its objectives would be an idealist and aestheticised version of his own intentions" (Brooker 2007: 190). In the case of Magnet Theatre's Medea I suggest that these devices fail to be more than a pleasurable aesthetic play for two reasons: firstly, because the characters have been rendered, as discussed the previous chapter, all too familiar, divested as they are of their heroic mythological status; in this context of familiarity the only defamiliarizing element is the enhanced theatricality of ritual in the
representation of the Colchians with the implications discussed above. Secondly, because
the framing of the play as storytelling and the disruption of the narratives are devoid of
any social context and as a result they only become self-referential theatricality.

Medea opens the play with her story of the Argonaut’s travels: “listen to my story
children. There once was a wicked king called Pelias…..” She goes on to recite the story
of Jason’s father and how he unfairly lost his crown to Pelias, how Jason returned to
reclaim the crown of his father and how Pelias, in order to return the crown, asked him to
go to Colchis and get him the golden fleece. She describes Jason:

He was tall and handsome….his hair was golden and he smelled of the sea. He
was strong as a lion”. Her story concludes with Jason’s acceptance of the
challenge and his embarking on the Argo to Colchis: “He was resolved to do
anything necessary to bring back the golden fleece. Anything at all to become
king.

This story is countered halfway through the play by Jason’s version which interrupts the
flow of the play and gives an entirely different perspective on the facts:

Listen to my story children. There once was a wicked king called Aetees. He ruled
the Colchians far away. The source of Aetees’ power was a ram’s fleece made of
gold (…) Aetees has a daughter. She knew the magic of the gods. She was
beautiful (…) one day a stranger came to Colchis from across the sea and he
demanded that Aetees hand over the golden fleece. But the king was drunk and he
became enraged… and he was about to kill the stranger when…something changed his mind.

He continues with the challenge given to him by Aeetes:

The stranger accepted, he was strong he had the gods on his side. Next day he woke up, went to the fields, killed the bulls…..But the king was so savage, so deceitful, so dishonest, that he refused to give up the fleece and ordered instead that the stranger be killed. But the stranger was strong and he had the gods on his side. He took the fleece and escaped with it across the sea.

Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) argue that storytelling is important in postcolonial theatre “as a strategy for revisioning history” (126) and point to the centrality and authority of the figure of the storyteller in the communities. The storyteller is “one of the most significant manipulators of historical narrative in colonized societies” (ibid.) who “lends cultural weight to the histories presented and foregrounds the ways in which such narratives are (re)constructed” (ibid. 129). Essential in the process of storytelling is the interaction with the audience that the teller can manipulate and guide, interact with them and elicit response and feedback that feeds into the story. Used on stage, storytelling can be “a metatheatrical device which draws attention to the relationships between the narrative and its performative enunciation [that] creates two levels of audience: the onstage audience’s responses invariably affect those of the paying viewers, whose communal reaction reinforces any sociopolitical response” (ibid.).
Although the play is thus framed, it undermines the use and role of both the storyteller and the responding audience. The two storytelling scenes are addressed to the children who although on stage they do not really take active part in the scene. Thus the act of the storytelling does not really encourage any response but is rather exhausted in its own telling. More importantly however, the telling of the story is split between two characters who are opposed and have opposing interests in the story. As a result of having her story countered by Jason’s version of the story, Medea’s role and authority as the teller of her own story is undermined. Therefore, instead of using the device of storytelling to give agency and authority to Medea, the play uses it to foreground the importance of the *telling* itself and the multiple points of view it generates. What is problematic in this approach is that by equating the validity of both Jason and Medea’s versions and by foregrounding the equal right of both to tell the story, the play strips Medea of her right to have her story acknowledged. This becomes even more interesting if we consider that “many pre-contact storytellers were women, and thus their authority as historians was doubly discounted by invading Europeans. That many women playwrights have returned to the storytelling tradition (…) attests to its importance as a form of cultural historiography and as a potential mode of empowerment for (post-)colonial subjects” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 131).

The function of the multiple overlapping narratives similarly “is not a matter of articulating political meanings but of making visible the politics of who speaks and who
is spoken for” (Kaye 1994: 140). As a result of the displacement of the subject as the centre of consciousness, “the writing of history [becomes] subject to the struggle between narratives” (ibid. 20) and the past is not anymore “considered to be out there as a thing which is somehow ‘available’ but must be read as an effect of the very narratives that would seek to describe it” (ibid.). In this way the play “affirms personal and historical “knowledge as perspective”” (Hutcheon 162).

Foregrounding the importance of the telling from multiple points of view further serves to point to the play’s own constructedness. The performance is self-conscious in that it reminds the audience of its artificiality as a presentation of events but also of the artificiality of making history. This strategy seeks to illuminate “the consequences of the narrative act. The effect of such a resistance is not to be found in a particular import or articulation of a point of view, but occurs as a destabilizing of that which is assumed, of that which would appear to the audience as something which is already ‘known’” (Kaye 1994: 142). The problem is whether in a context as politicized as the South African, such a typically postmodern ‘destabilization’ can illuminate and interrogate the actual power relations operating in the society. At the level of theatre practice, paradoxically, the ultimate responsibility and authority remains with the director/creator who is the initial and the only real storyteller invested with the power to narrate the characters to life and decide on the means of representation for both the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. And to slightly paraphrase Said (1979), in the case of Medea is the (dominant) ‘self’ that articulates the
(marginalized) ‘other’ and "this articulation is the prerogative not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries" (57). In this sense, the play undermines its own goal to dismantle the hierarchies of western theatre where the only generator of meaning is the writer/director. The constructedness of the play and the proliferation of narratives and viewpoints makes the structure all the more transparent revealing the artificial absence of the director, an absence which, because it is artificial, it makes a strong statement. What then becomes problematic is whether in a society as politicized as post-apartheid South Africa, a creator can afford to show himself to be deliberately absent. This absence becomes ideologically as forceful as, if not more than, the authorial singleness of meaning it supposedly subverts.
3. Yael Farber: *Molora* (an adaptation of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*)

3.1. Revenge and forgiveness in *Oresteia* and *Molora*

*Molora* is an adaptation of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, set in the immediate post-apartheid South African context. It was first written in 2003 and has been performed twice in South Africa (at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival (2003) and the Market Theatre in Johannesburg (2007)) and more extensively for international audiences in Europe and North America, in most cases to critical praise. According to the play's writer and director Yael Farber, one of South Africa's most acclaimed young directors,

the premise of [the *Oresteia*] was striking to me as a powerful canvas on which to explore the history of dispossession, violence and human rights violations in the country I grew up in. I had long been interested in creating a work that explores the journey back from the dark heart of unspeakable trauma and pain- and the choices facing those shattered by the past" (Farber 2008: 7-8).

The play is concerned with the themes of revenge, forgiveness and reconciliation as they emerged in the South African public discourse during and after the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as well as internationally, with the perception of South Africa's peaceful transition into democracy as a "miracle".

The TRC was the central institution in the process of national reconciliation, and although its work concluded in 1998 with the publication of its massive report on human
rights violations during apartheid, the play's engagement still in 2003 and onwards with the themes raised by and through the TRC adapted in the context of the Oresteia remains pertinent. Despite the official "closure" that the TRC offered in dealing with the past, problems of national reconciliation are still very pressing and debatable, especially since economic factors have prevented the translation of the reconciliatory discourse into reparations and equality at the economic level. In addition, the play's implicit and explicit references to the TRC as process through the enactment of testimonies, relate to Farber's preoccupation with and work on testimonial theatre and her belief in "speaking as a form of healing" (Nield 2008:9).

The function and theatrical representation of testimony will be discussed more fully in the next chapter where, I argue, testimony is appropriated as part of the play's articulation of a nationalist discourse founded on the concept of the white man's alienation from the indigenous community. In this chapter I am interested in examining in detail the theme of revenge as it emerged in tragedy, in South African public life and as it is being reexamined in Molora. My argument is that while in both tragedy and in the South African context revenge and its alternatives emerge as acts of self-definition and communal rites of passage towards the establishment of communitas and are linked to themes of law and justice, in Molora revenge is a priori rejected along Judeo-Christian

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84 Prior to Molora Farber has created a trilogy of testimonial plays: A woman in waiting (1999), Amajuba (2000), and He Left Quietly (2003)
85 Nield quotes Farber as arguing that "Speaking and being heard is a modest but profound beginning [...] The shattered history of South Africa will take generations to heal but I believe theatre has a significant role in this process" (2008: 9).
interpretations that propose forgiveness as the alternative to wrongdoing. This choice has results on the dramatic and the ideological level: on the first, it renders the play undramatic and un-tragic as it discredits the central driving action, revenge. On the ideological level, the choice to focus on the discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation that prevailed, at least initially, during the TRC, constitutes only a partial representation of the process and disregards not only the controversies that emerged around the discourse of forgiveness but also the pressing themes of law, justice and reparations that forcefully emerged as responses to the TRC. By discrediting the central action of revenge Molora transforms tragedy into a parable of forgiveness and in doing so it mythologizes a political process such as the TRC.

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Although subtitled "an adaptation of the ancient Oresteia trilogy", Molora is a synthesis of text excerpts from Agamemnon, the Libation Bearers, Sophocles' (and to a much lesser degree Euripides') Electra, Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, TRC testimonies and the Bible. Although there are no specific references in the play to a particular historical time period or sociopolitical setting, it is clear that the play is set to

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86 See Introduction.

87 Although there are scarce references to the Eumenides (for example a reference to the Furies in page 80 of the play), Molora does not draw significantly from the last part of the trilogy neither in terms of text nor, more importantly, in terms of the plot: as I will be showing in detail, there is not a progression of the plot from Orestes' committing matricide to the establishment of a court of law and his trial in Molora as there is in Eumenides. Furthermore, the setting of the TRC which may allude to the Eumenides' lawcourt is not employed in the play as such, partly because, as I will analyze, of the TRC's non- or quasi-judicial nature, partly because in the play it features only as a dramaturgical frame but without adding to the resolution of the drama as the lawcourt does in the Eumenides.
explore revenge as a possible scenario after the fall of apartheid.\textsuperscript{88} The plot begins with Klytemnestra's final monologue in \textit{Agamemnon} where she fiercely admits her murder of her husband, which is set as the play's initial testifying scene.\textsuperscript{89} Although the play pays special attention to the depiction of Klytemnestra's and Elektra's antagonistic relationship as dramatized by Sophocles, the main events and unfolding of the plot are directly borrowed from the \textit{Libation Bearers}: Orestes arrives from exile as an avenger and the siblings plot and prepare for the killing of Ayesthus and Klytemnestra. While Ayesthus is successfully murdered as in the original tragedies, Klytemnestra's killing is stopped thanks to the intervention of the chorus of Xhosa women, consisting, in the performance, of members of the Ngoqo cultural group of split-tone singers, who decide that the cycle of violence must stop. \textit{Molora} does not engage with the process of the establishment of court and law procedures as it is dealt with in the \textit{Eumenides} but ends with the chorus, Elektra and Orestes letting Klytemnestra live.

The play's representation of the themes of revenge and forgiveness requires an analysis simultaneously along two planes: the tragedies, which are its original source of material, and the South African discourses on forgiveness and reconciliation which are the play's constant referent and source of meaning. The latter cannot simply constitute the background of interpretation but must directly inform the analysis of the play because,

\textsuperscript{88} Farber wants the play to resonate with other situations of conflict around the world and in different eras- from Hiroshima to 9/11- the play's title in fact which means “ash” in Sesotho was partly inspired by the “fine white powdery substance” (2008:8) over New York after the 9/11 attacks. In my analysis I will focus in the play’s relation to post-apartheid South Africa.

\textsuperscript{89} When I refer to \textit{Molora} I use Farber’s spelling of the names: Klytemnnestra, Elektra, Orestes, Ayesthus. When I refer to the \textit{Oresteia} and \textit{Electra} I use the translator’s spelling- Clytemnnestra, Electra, Orestes.
more explicitly than any other play in this study, *Molora* is conceived and structured as an allegory and this directly impacts on the understanding of its dramaturgical structure. I have already referred, in my introductory chapter, to the relationship between tragedy and political allegory. Although this is applicable for *Molora* as for all other plays discussed in this work, at this point I want to pay particular attention to the fundamental structural characteristics of an allegory and their relation to the allegory's external referent, in this case forgiveness and reconciliation in South Africa.

In order to understand *Molora* in terms of dramaturgical structure we need to take into account the “profound discontinuity and “multiple polysemia” of the “allegorical spirit” (Jameson 1986: 73). The structure of an allegory is determined by the allegory’s external referent and serves to illustrate it: "The structure, shape and interconnections [of the allegory] are determined by something outside itself -- its meaning or referent (...). The allegorist does not begin with an image which suggests a meaning, but he begins with an idea or meaning and looks for an image to represent it" (Via 1967: 5-6). As a result, internal logic becomes secondary to the illustration of the idea: "[T]he elements of the story (...) behave not according to their own logic or nature but according to the logic of what they represent” (ibid. 6). Therefore, Via concludes, "an allegory is likely to contain improbabilities too great to be assimilated into the story; it will appear nonsensical if read on its own terms and will have to be translated into what it represents in order to have sense made of it" (ibid.). This leads to the second important
characteristic, namely, that the allegorical form sets out to reaffirm rather than interrogate the event it refers to: an allegory presumes by its audience a previous knowledge of the external referent and therefore "it communicates to a person what he already knows, though (...) in a symbolic and altered fashion (ibid. 7). (I will return to this last point in my discussion of how Molora represents the TRC based on partial perceptions that sustain the idea of South Africa's miraculous transition but obscure the controversies and political implications of the process).

My premise then is that Molora is an allegorical representation of the "ubuntu theology" promoted by Archbishop Tutu, Chairman of the TRC, according to which victim and perpetrator must meet and encounter each other in order to discover and restore each other's humanity:

Tutu's theological model seeks to restore the oppressor's humanity by releasing and enabling the oppressed to see their oppressors as peers under God. In this can be a mutual understanding, as Jesus teaches, through friendship (John 15:15). For Tutu ubuntu expresses this mutuality. The relationship of oppressor and oppressed and the resulting definition of humanity through racial classification are broken through ubuntu, an alternative way of being in a hostile world (Battle 1997: 5). Tutu viewed the ways that ubuntu theology could facilitate the country's transition to democracy as a spiritual and not a political program: “Ubuntu would humanize the oppressors in the eyes of blacks and (...) a sense of common humanity would form”
(ibid. 47). In that sense “ubuntu (…) provides an alternative to vengeance because it provides an invaluable perspective in which white and black people may see themselves as other than racial rivals (ibid. 44).

A number of choices as well as what I consider dramaturgical inconsistencies and structural imbalances in the play must be understood in this context of allegorical representation in order to facilitate an analysis and understanding of the play. Molora progresses in a linear way from the exposition of conflict (the confrontation between Klytemnestra and Elektra), to climax (Orestes arrives and is ready to avenge), to denouement (Klytemnestra is forgiven and reunited with the children and the community). However, the play is not driven by the central action of revenge, its preparation culminating in its accomplishment, as in Libation Bearers and the Euripidean and Sophoclean Electras. As a matter of fact, nearly the first half of the play is devoid of action, devoted entirely to establishing (through the characters' speeches and the re-enactment of their testimonies) Klytemnestra as the repentant perpetrator, Elektra as the revengeful victim and the conflict between the two. It is only in the second half of the play, with Orestes' arrival, that the action begins. Hence the planning, preparation and undertaking of revenge that in the tragedies are explored throughout the entire play, in Molora they are condensed in that second half.

Despite the overarching linearity of the plot the structure of the play is episodic: it is structured in 19 scenes in each one of which there is a central action summarized in the
titles of the scenes, for example "interrogation"; "dreams"; "grief". Dramaturgically speaking, it is these 19 units with their sub-actions and thematic preoccupations that, pieced together, give the play its overall meaning as an allegory of reconciliation. This already moves the play away from the tragic structure (insofar as it is a reversal of Aristotle's point that in tragic structure the whole is more significant than its parts). It is in accordance, however, with the allegorical structure where the illustration of the external referent is more crucial than the internal logic of the play.

In this structure, the characters are not developed consistently in relation to the central plot and action of revenge but rather according to the "plots" and thematic preoccupations of each scene: for example, Klytemnestra is fierce and defensive of her atrocities in the scene titled "murder" where she confesses the murder of her husband, wrought with guilt in the scene "dreams" where she speaks of her nightmares; Elektra expresses her hatred in the scene of "grief", her need for motherly love in the scene where she meets her mother over her father’s grave. Such contradictions of a psychological nature, which are abundant in Molora, are foreign to what Vernant (1981) has described as the tragic characters' "monolithic ethos" (see below with reference to Clytemnestra’s and Electra’s confrontation in Sophocles). In naturalistic theatre where such psychological fluctuations are more common, they are the products of conflicting roles and contrasting expectations (for example Miss Julie's giving herself to Jean and instantly switching to a dominating attitude as a result of her conflicting roles as a female
and as a member of a higher class). In *Molora* however there are no such conflicting roles -- on the contrary, as I will show, the play eliminates all contradictions emanating from conflicting duties and allegiances. Such psychological inconsistencies can only be explained on the basis of the play's allegorical function which conflates the libidinal and the political (Jameson 1986).\(^{90}\)

This conflation, which in the play serves to illustrate the categories of "repentant perpetrator" and "revengeful victim" according to the ubuntu theology, must be read in conjunction to what is a second crucial aspect to the allegorical form, namely the shifting significances of the relationship between symbol and referent of which the allegorist as much as the reader must be alert (Jameson 1986).\(^{91}\) In my analysis of *Molora*, I will show that the play fails to trace these shifts that were central in the South African discourse on reconciliation. The result is a reversal of the typical allegorical relationship between the libidinal and the political: as Jameson has shown in a different context, *Molora* ends up reading “the political analogy as metaphorical decoration for the individual drama, and as a mere figural intensification of this last. Here, far from dramatizing the identity of the political and the individual or psychic, the allegorical structure tends essentially to separate these levels in some absolute way.” (ibid. 79)

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90 For Jameson’s argument and definition of the allegory see Introduction, footnote 24.
91 Jameson writes that “Our traditional conception of allegory (...) is that of an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one table of equivalences: this is, so to speak, a one-dimensional view of this signifying process, which might only be set in motion and complexified were we willing to entertain the more alarming notion that such equivalences are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text” (1986:73)
In order to understand the significance of revenge in the *Oresteia* we first have to set out a few parameters. We must understand that for an Athenian audience, contrary to the later Judeo-Christian ethos by which revenge was socially destructive, revenge was culturally justifiable: according to Greek culture both benefits and injuries should be repaid.\footnote{In ancient Greek culture vengeance was not only a legitimate but in fact a required form of restoring justice between the wronged and the wrong-doer, viewed as “not a problem but a solution” (Burnett 1998: xvi). Such perception of vengeance was based on the idea that “repayment (…) was an outward expression of the regularity (dike) that supported both society and the cosmos” (ibid. xvi): a repayment towards an injustice, just like a repayment towards a benefaction, is the objectification in action of anger or gratitude. By countering a past action with a new one— not the same but equal— “vengeance, were it perfectly to succeed, would make a past offence as it had never been” (ibid. 5). Culturally, vengeance was considered an obligation towards kins and the community, a necessary act to restore the balance between the members of a community, and also an active form of self-definition for the victim of injustice who thus restored the psychic balance between himself and the wrongdoer (Burnett 1998). It was only later, with Socrates, Plato and the Stoics, Burnett argues, that vengeance started to be seen as the outward expression of a psychic pathos, of the feelings of anger, and as such to be condemned.}\ But even outside of such cultural matrix, revenge has always been a very appealing material for drama insofar as it relates to issues of restoring justice, personal nobility and self definition: revenge, both in actual and particularly in dramatic contexts, takes place when justice is not at place or is malfunctioning. The avenger then becomes an appealing dramatic character as s/he takes it upon him/herself to restore justice (Keyishian 1995). In tragedy, revenge is a particularly powerful dramatic action as it, more than any other type of action, tests the limits of human responsibility and agency.

In the *Oresteia* and *Electra*, revenge, as is directed from Clytemnestra to Agamemnon and from Orestes and Electra to Clytemnestra, has always a double
character: it is internally and externally motivated and it has personal and social implications. The heroes act from personal interests as well as from divine guidance or possession and their acts result in a change of status for themselves but also for the collective at large that is implicated in the action.

The *Oresteia* in particular is exemplary in exploring this dialectic between the personal and the social, the internal and the external as they converge in the act of revenge. In analyzing the trilogy’s spatiotemporal organization, Revermann has shown how the *Oresteia* creates a “composite reality” consisting of

the juxtaposition of various notions of space and time: civic, ritual, personal, communal and synchronizing, linear, cyclical (...) the elements of which both the fifth-century playwright and his audience are culturally conditioned to keep conceptually apart while at the same time accepting them as meaningfully coexisting in their individual and communal construction of social, religious and political order (2008: 250).

In the context of this “composite reality”, the dramatization of revenge in *Libation Bearers* is a collective “rite of passage”, a liminal moment of transition where “[w]e are presented (...) with a “moment in and out of time” and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties” (Turner 1969: 96).
Matricide is a symbolic action of transition from a female, natural law-governed community to a patriarchal, man-made law, civic society (Burnett 1998). The *Libation Bearers*, examine vengeance as one possible alternative in the transition of “mankind’s passage from enslavement to Nature, into a civic structure that held natural forces in fruitful bondage […] a move away from an initial, wild and woman-wrought justice […] toward a final institutionalized system of punishments administered by a court of men” (ibid. 105). In Orestes’ action, and his subsequent torture by the Furies, revenge is a hypothesis tried out and through trial rejected as “not a workable model for the achievement of secular justice” (ibid.). In the hero’s wanderings from exile to Argos to Athens

the move of the *Oresteia* (...) is one not just of progression but of progress: from chaos to order, from the vendetta-ridden dysfunctionality of the royal oikos to the institutionalized modes of conflict resolution in the polis, from the darkness of the watchman scene to the light of the torches in the final procession (Revermann 2008: 247).

In the next play, the *Eumenides*, the trilogy establishes a civic system of justice that administers human relations while it incorporates and respects customary law. The emerging status quo is not exactly one of reconciliation, Vernant (1981) argues, but one of tension: the divine world is in turmoil as much as the human affairs are. The old deities

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93 In his analysis Revermann examines the significance of the juxtaposition between spaces in the trilogy (Argos, Delphi and Athens) that serves to elevate Athens in the *Eumenides* to “a place of unquestionable authority, legal and civic but also religious” (2008: 247).
are accommodated in the new order— they must be— but their fear is lurking. Their terrifying potential is appeased but remains ever present. It is only through the accomplishment of revenge that the new order can be established in a manner that both the old and the new will coexist, in a manner that the old order will keep checking on the ways the new one operates. The enactment of revenge in the tragedy is a rite of passage for the audience as much as it is for the heroes: it allows the audience of citizens a fictive participation in the proscribed (Burnett 1998) that enables them to willingly and rationally enter the new social structure. Thus, the play

while exposing and enacting conflict, emphasizes social and ideological cohesion and the possibility of conflict resolution and redemption, both individual and collective, albeit not as something mechanical or intrinsic but in need of continuous effort that manifests itself in ritual remembrance and civic collaboration (Revermann 2008: 252).

At the individual level, the *Oresteia* dramatizes the process of recognition for the avengers of their role as such, their duty and desire to act and the results of their actions. It is that moment of recognition of an externally imposed action that needs to be invested with personal meaning that makes avengers tragic heroes of a particular complexity:

Most tragic protagonists are responsible (…) for how they suffer. Recognition of their role in the making of what afflicts them is a large part of what makes their catastrophes tragic. A revenger’s position is different. His predicament is imposed
on him and to know this is part of his plight. Injured by another or urged towards vengeance (...) he is forced to adopt a role. His qualities colour the drama of which he is part; tragedy can mourn the waste which follows from the narrowing down of his personality to the bare demands of action (Kerrigan 1996: 12).

Burnett (1998) has analyzed the transition for Orestes and Electra from being "foreigners" to an action that is externally imposed to becoming fully conscious of it. For both siblings to revenge their dead father is a duty implied by their cultural context as well as by the fact that their father, a great hero of war, has been shamefully treated upon his return and thus his dignity must be restored. In addition, each one has a different point of departure, different degrees of investment to the action which, as Burnett makes the point, converge in order to lead to action.

Orestes is incited to revenge by Apollo's oracle which leaves him no choice: "Apollo… spoke to me and said “If you do this, you shall be clear of evil blame; neglect it…." I will not say what punishment he promised” (Libation Bearers, 1031-4).94 While he begins as an instrument of the god with no personal agency, upon arrival to his father's house he is confronted with his sister's misery and his mother's unpopular rule. Gradually in the course of the play, as Burnett has analyzed, he develops a full consciousness of the reasons why he must avenge: in addition to god’s order, he must act out of duty to his family, duty to his people and his own rights as the heir to Agamemnon's throne:

For there are many desires converging in one,

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94 Translation by David Grene and Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty
The gods’ commands, my great grief for my father-
And I am pinched by loss of my property-
The thought that those most famous of mankind,
The citizens who devastated Troy in spirit of glory,
Shall become subjects of two women. (Libation Bearers 300-4)

In Sophocles (after whom Farber models her Elektra), Electra's drive for revenge is partly motivated by her own mistreatment in the hands of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and partly by her duty to her father. While for both children respect and duty towards their father supersedes all other family relations, the Sophoclean Electra, as Burnett illustrates, fully identifies as her father's daughter: she has spent her life “alienated from community and family, and her external identity has been erased by a set of counterdefinitions laid down by her father’s murderers (…)” (1998: 121) and “knows herself only as her father’s daughter” (ibid). The personal investment to revenge then as a form of self-definition is far greater than Orestes'. When she hears that Orestes is dead she realizes that the only way to reclaim her identity and dignity is by taking action in her own. Burnett (1998) identifies this moment of recognition as Electra's moment of becoming a conscious avenger passing from a state of passive lamenting and waiting for Orestes to a conscious state of being ready to take action. In her passionate and uncompromised decision to avenge her father by killing Aegisthus Sophocles creates “an abstraction- the Impulse of Revenge in its pure state, untainted by contact with its goal
an isolated creature in the act of taking a principled and wholly elective decision (ibid. 123-4). In this, Electra’s impulsive wish for revenge has to be complemented by Orestes’ calculated, premeditated and god-driven plan for matricide. The two combined synthesize a complete action, calculated and passionate, divine and personal, against both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (Burnett 1998).

A crucial aspect in the process of revenge in Sophocles’ Electra and the Oresteia is the relationship between mother and children which in turn points to broader relationships between notions of justice and law. For Orestes and Electra the dilemma inherent in tragic action is stretched to the limit: their act of duty and self-definition can be accomplished only through the murder of their own mother. As both Burnett (1998) and Vernant (1981) have observed, in the moment when Clytemnestra shows her bare breast to her son in order to save her life, and he for the first time hesitates, the tragic dilemma is condensed in all its power:

Clytemnestra: Stop, my child. Have some reverence for this breast

Which often, sleeping, you milked to your good (…)

Orestes: O Pylades, what shall I do?

I cannot kill my mother. (Libation Bearers, 897-901)

For both Orestes and Electra the decision to avenge carries with it the symbolic significance of outgrowing the mother: it is a rite of passage to adulthood. Analyzing the Libation Bearers from this perspective Burnett (1998) has shown how Aeschylus
constructs motherhood so as to emphasize the ritual significance of the killing for Orestes and make matricide acceptable for an audience. Her depiction in the trilogy is a gradual process from ethos to daemon: her reasoning, complemented by her calculated strategy for killing Agamemnon in the first part of the trilogy culminates in a passionate rejoicing of the moment of killing that borders on the irrational:

So, as he lay there, he gasped out his spirit,

Choking, poured out a sharp stream of his blood and struck me with the dark bloody shower.

I rejoiced as much as the new-sown earth

Rejoices in the glad rain of Zeus (…) (Agamemnon 1390-1394).

In the Libation Bearers Aeschylus systematically deconstructs Clytemnsetra’s persona: she lacks motherly feelings towards her children having sacrificed them to her passion for her lover:

Electra: For as it is, both of us are exiles,

Sold by our mother, who has traded us for her man (Libation Bearers 131-2).

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95 For the tragic hero’s inner division between ethos and daemon see Vernant (1981).
96 Translation by David Grene and Wendy Doniger O’ Flaherty.
97 As Burnett (1998) points out this lack is accentuated through the juxtaposition of Clytammestra with the Nurse who is presented as Orestes' real mother in the way she cares about him.
98 In their depiction as disinherited and exiled, Orestes and Electra are constructed as ‘liminal personae’ “not here nor there (…) betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial (…)”. Liminal entities (…) may be represented as possessing nothing (….) [A]s liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia….It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (Turner 1969: 95) It is such conditions of marginality or inferiority, Turner argues, which in a structured society are contained as dangerous or ‘polluted’, that “incite men to action as well as to thought” (ibid. 129). The outcome which is a new communitas (see Introduction) is thus “the product of peculiarly human faculties which include rationality, volition, and memory, and which develop with
and she is described as a daemon or a mythical monster:99

Orestes: How does she seem to you? Was she a viper, or a sea serpent,

Whose very touch brings corruption though the hand was not bitten? (ibid. 994-6)

The task of the children is to undo the mother in order to become better than her
in piety and justice (Burnett 1998) and the complication arises from their recognition that
they are hers-

Electra: I have a spirit like a ravening wolf’s;

I got it from my savage-minded mother (Libation Bearers, 421-2)

but must be different from her:

Oh my father hear me.

Grant that I may be more chaste than my mother,

And have a hand more reverend than hers. (Libation Bearers, 139-141)

The recognition of the price one pays for this outgrowing of the mother comes
only with the accomplishment of the action. It is only after he has killed her that Orestes,
who up to that moment could define himself only as the avenger, can see the meaning of
his action as her son:

Yes, I have pain

For the deed, for the suffering, for our whole race.

I have the pollution, the undesirable

99 Burnett (1998) argues that the structure of this middle part of the trilogy resembles a folktale where the
young man (Orestes) is sent on a mission to kill the beast (Clytemnestra)
Fruits of my victory (1017-20)

In Aeschylus the daemonic representation of Clytemnestra prevails not only in the way she is seen by others but also in the way she interprets her own actions. She too has her own reasons to revenge Agamemnon. He killed her child, he brought home a concubine but also he must pay for his father Atreus’ past crimes against Aegisthus’ father and for his own hubris of stepping on the carpets. Clytemnestra then, although she does not receive a direct command from the gods like Orestes, she is simultaneously a free agent and the impersonation of a daemon (Grene 1989), the instrument of divine punishment:

You cry aloud on this as my work
But do not call me Agamemnon’s wife.
No, it is the old bitter Evil Genius
Of Atreus, giver of the cruel feast,
That has likened himself to the wife of this dead man and has paid him off…

(Libation Bearers 1498-1503)

If in Aeschylus the division within the tragic character between ethos and daemon and the ritual significance of renenge are emphasized, in Sophocles, the measured and rational argumentation of Clytemnestra in her confrontation with Electra serves to illustrate a different aspect of the tragic character -- what Vernant has described as the impenetrability and single-mindedness of the tragic hero when it comes to notions of
justice: “For each protagonist, locked into his own particular world, the vocabulary that is used remains for the most part opaque. For him it has one, and only one, meaning. This one-sidedness comes into violent collision with another” (1981: 18).

In the major *agon* between Clytemnestra and Electra both women reason for and against Clytemnestra's rightfulness in killing Agamemnon. The play does not really resolve the conflict nor discredits Clytemnestra's argument and the most forceful response from Electra upon which the conflict ends is that her mother should beware of the form of justice she chose as it may befall upon her. What is most important to retain from the scene, which we will find again in *Molora*, is that the play sets the very concepts of law and justice under interrogation and analysis through the reasoning of two characters each of whom is fully attached to their own interpretations of these concepts. It is this persistence on one's notion of justice that makes the confrontation a tragic one.

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In post-apartheid South Africa revenge and its alternatives featured prominently in the discussion of South Africa’s transition to democracy as political and judiciary terms. In this context "revenge" meant the legal persecution of the leaders and perpetrators of apartheid. In analyzing the negotiations that preceded the establishment of the TRC Christie writes that "[w]hat would happen to those that ran the system in a post-apartheid political system was a crucial question in these debates" (2000: 68). There were three possible scenarios for the country's transition: to forget and take no action; to establish
Nuremberg-type trials; and to institute a commission that would promote national reconciliation. The second option, legal prosecution of the supporters and perpetrators of apartheid, was interpreted as "revenge" and it was never really contemplated because it went contrary to the negotiating process which suggested temporary power-sharing between the National Party (NP) and the African National Congress (ANC) and which wanted to secure that the previous regime would be allowed "to make a more dignified exit from the political stage" (ibid. 76). Political amnesty was the alternative that was put forth as a condition by the NP in order to agree to the transfer of power.\textsuperscript{100} The TRC was then established as an alternative to trials "with the mission to effect national reconciliation on the basis of respect for the historical record, for human rights, for individual and collective trauma" (de Kok 1998: 58). In addition, the Commission was given the judicial power to grant amnesty to perpetrators on the condition that they fully disclosed their past actions and their political motives, a power that not only made it unique among Truth Commissions around the world (Hayner 2001) but also raised a great deal of controversy with regard to its purpose and function.\textsuperscript{101} Amnesty then was

\textsuperscript{100}Krog reports how amnesty was imposed to the new government as a prerequisite for the transition. She quotes Tutu saying: "We did not decide on amnesty. The political parties decided on amnesty. Amnesty made our election possible. The amnesty clause was inserted in the early hours of the morning after and exhausted night of negotiating. The last thing, the last sentence, the last clause, was added: amnesty shall be granted through the process of reconciliation. And it was only when that was put in, that the boere signed the negotiations, opening the door to our election" (2000: 30-1).

\textsuperscript{101}The function and the contribution of the TRC to the restoration of justice is highly debatable while it is generally admitted that its foundation was the result of very difficult and complex political negotiations. There is not a straightforward answer as to whether or not it was a trade-off for the attribution of justice. Hayner argues that “nonjudicial truth bodies do not and should not be seen to replace judicial action against perpetrators, and neither victims nor societies at large have understood them to do so in those countries where truth commissions have been in place” (2001: 87). In assessing both aspects of the debate she argues that in many cases, South Africa included, the way amnesty was handled by truth commissions has “led to a
proposed as the alternative to “revenge”.

By virtue of its double character as a ritual space of witnessing and an official space of jurisdiction, the TRC can be understood by analogy to the tragedy as embodying in one single form what in the *Oresteia* happens in two successive stories (*Libation Bearers, Eumenides*): it was itself the rite of passage and the law, the enactment of disorder and its containment within an official process, the liminal space of transition and an institution of the new dispensation. This dual character of the Commission did not call for the participation into the proscribed (as in the case of *Oresteia*’s Athenian audience). Instead it called for the participation into the prescribed and socially expected: as a truth-gathering process it would serve to establish the historical facts of persons, actions and political motives for atrocities committed; as a “shared public ritual of acknowledgment” (Quayson 2007: 83) it would serve to have the victims’ sufferings revealed and witnessed, “bring[ing] the disappeared stories back into symbolic currency, *but within the
framework of the settlement” (de Kok 1998: 58, my emphasis). The participants were to relive the past in a new context where the witnessing of the past was considered to have cathartic and healing results but also where the outcome was known to them in advance: the perpetrators, were the conditions met, would be granted amnesty. In other words, unlike the *Oresteia*, in the TRC structure is not the outcome of the ritual process but rather it is inherent in the process. What this means is that the TRC was based on the premise that the subversive potential of the “liminally inferior”, the victims, which might take the form of revenge in a literal or symbolic form, had to been contained so as not to turn against the very institutions of the new order. For the victims direct action was replaced with the symbolic act of witnessing (which I will be discussing in the next chapter) while the establishment of a new order through the granting of amnesty was predetermined on a political level.

While the concepts of revenge and amnesty in the South African context were clearly political responses to the transition and acts of institutionalized justice, they were early on in the process invested with the theological discourse of forgiveness. In the rhetoric promoted by the Commission’s President Archbishop Tutu forgiveness was conceived in its Christian sense, as “[t]he possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility -- of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing” (Arendt 1958: 237). In that sense forgiveness is the

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102 On this contradictory process of containing the symbolic action within a structured official framework see also Quayson (2003) Chapter 4, p. 95.
103 See footnote number 99 about liminal personae in the context of a rite of passage.
opposite to revenge which “acts in the form of re-acting against an original trespassing whereby far from putting an end to the consequences of the first misdeed, everybody remains bound to the process” (ibid. 240). Bringing perpetrators face to face with their victims and having them disclose their actions and their motivations was thought to facilitate reconciliation in a process where “what was done is forgiven for the sake of who did it” (ibid. 241).

The concept of forgiveness however presents two problems related to its representation both in drama and in the context of the TRC. In relation to tragedy the judeaochristian concept of forgiveness that defers action from man to god is foreign to the tragic genre that is founded on the centrality of action. Even if Christianity may engage with similar problems as tragedy (human fate, the relationship between the human and divine spheres) tragedy explores the limits of human responsibility and agency in an action that changes the world order. By contrast, in Christianity such intervention to the world order is rejected as interfering with God’s plans for humanity.

In relation to the South African reality, the concept of forgiveness in its pure Christian sense was soon discovered to be inapplicable in the context of the TRC: forgiving was understood to be a personal process that the victims refused to have it institutionalized through an official body as the TRC. In her assessment of the TRC, Hayner observes that “in some of [the Commission’s] first hearings Archbishop Desmond Tutu would sometimes ask victims if they were ready to forgive and reconcile after telling their story” (2001: 156). Reports however showed that “some of the victims still find the idea of reconciliation and especially forgiveness, insulting (…) Victims are not ready to engage in a reconciliation process unless they know more about what happened. They often say they are willing to forgive, but they need to know who to forgive and what they are forgiving them for” (ibid. 157). With the revelation of such
between forgiveness on a personal level and amnesty as a form of “official forgiveness” and in most cases they saw their capacity to forgive as conditioned by the State’s ability to offer them reparations and improve their way of life. The discourse of forgiveness was then toned down and the process affirmed that “each time that it aims to re-establish a normality (social, national, political, psychological) by a work of mourning, by some therapy or ecology of memory, then the ‘forgiveness’ is not pure- nor is its concept. Forgiveness is not, it should not be, normal, normative, normalizing” (Derrida 2001: 32).

In the cases where there is a call for national unity, be it in the form of reconciliation, granting amnesty or unearthing memory, there is always political calculation at stake “and it is necessary always to integrate this calculation in our analyses. (…) It is always the same concern: to see to it that the nation survives its discords, that the traumatisms give way to the work of mourning, and that the Nation-state not be overcome by paralysis” (ibid. 40-41).

In its dramatization of the South African process to reconciliation, Molora, drawing partly from the myth and partly from the South African reality, interprets revenge as a combination of personal and social motivations. The conceptualization and complexities in the victims’ responses it became clear that the commission’s “initial claims of achieving full reconciliation had been unrealistic. Archbishop Tutu began to argue that a more reasonable goal for the commission was to “promote” reconciliation, rather than to achieve it” (ibid. 156).

105 “In an interview after refusing to forgive Dirk Coetzee for killing and “braaing” her son, Mrs Kondile says: “It is easy for Mandela and Tutu to forgive…they live vindicated lives. In my life nothing, not a single thing has changed since my son was burned by barbarians….nothing. Therefore I cannot forgive” (Krog 2000: 142). Hayner too makes the point that according to surveys conducted by TRC staff, it was people whose “experiences and interest in giving testimony were connected to material deprivation” that went to the commission, and “most victims were saying to the Commission “reconciliation must be materially linked. Give me something that enables me to go on’” (Grobelaar qt in Hayner 2001: 81).
dramaturgical treatment of revenge serve however not to illustrate its meaning in the South African context but to render it unjustifiable and discredit it in favour of the theological discourse of forgiveness without engaging with the complexities and political calculations that surrounded the concept and process of “forgiveness” in South Africa.

In Farber's play, the reasons that incite the heroes to revenge seem to be, like in the *Oresteia*, both personal motivations and social imperatives. Yet the dialectical relationship between the personal and the social responsibility and the process of acquiring the consciousness to combine the two in a fully chosen action is lacking from the heroes and this lack leads to the play’s deconstructing and discrediting of the significance of revenge.

The play associates revenge with larger political issues and it is at this point that the dramaturgical but also ideological confusion occurs. Two important points are raised in the course of the play that collectivize the impulse for revenge and place it within a pre-existing theological interpretation. First, revenge is required by Elektra as a response to wrongdoing based on racial discrimination. We see Klytemnestra physically torturing her daughter reciting a passage from the Bible which has been used to provide theological explanations for the exploitation of Blacks from the Whites:

*Klytemnestra turns from Elektra and lights a cigarette and exhales a cloud of smoke.*
And Ham saw the nakedness of his father, and told his brethren without.
And Shem and Japheth went backward, and their faces were backward
So that they saw not their father’s nakedness. And when he awoke from
his wine, and knew what his younger child had done unto him
He said...Reaching out for Elektra’s hand. Cursed be your children. She pushes
the burning tip of the cigarette into Elektra’s palm. Elektra screams. The servants
of servants shall they be unto their brethren. The seed of your line shall be the
carriers of water and the hewers of wood. Straddling Elektra, she pushes the
burning tip into the side of her daughter’s neck. Screaming, Elektra tries to crawl
away. For the Lord thy God is a jealous God. And your dark descendents shall
live in slavery...All the days of their lives. (Farber 2008: 32-33)
In a later scene, when Orestes is sent from the tribeswomen to avenge, his revenge
is linked to the community’s claims to the ancestral land- again a discourse heavily
loaded with theological, cultural and political connotations.¹⁰⁶
Now you are a man, go and take care of your sister
Go and do manly things (...)
Go take your inheritance and your rightful position
Your ancestors want you to return to your father’s house and take your position
there (Farber 2008: 49-50)

¹⁰⁶ Boesak (1995, Chapter 1) analyzes how cultural perceptions on the possession of the land were utilized
by the colonizers with the assistance of the missionaries to support the black people’s expulsion from their
land, and subsequently how the struggle to regain the land became part of a broader cultural and theological
discourse that supported the blacks’ fighting back to reclaim their rights.
As part of this discourse Agamemnon is not the war hero and father whose honour must
be avenged. Rather he has a symbolic function- he is the ancestor, part of a long lineage
with rights on this land who demands that these rights be reclaimed- "Agamemnon's line
will not die" as Elektra says to her mother (Farber 2008: 41).

These two scenes elevate revenge to a duty towards an entire people who have
been wronged and disenfranchised. Yet there is no dramaturgical justification as to the
roots of this collective feeling of revengefulness nor as to what invests the two siblings
with the responsibility to act as representatives of a group. In the play the collective of
black people, the chorus of Xhosa women, are never seen as being implicated or
reflecting upon the action of revenge and the notions of justice related to it.107 There is a
stark contrast between this chorus and the chorus of the Libation Bearers who directly
incite Electra to action and are very active in voicing the siblings’ duty to their father,
reminding them that it is the law and justice that require them to act:

Chorus: then remember- “on those guilty for the murder…”

Electra: What shall I say? I don’t know. Tell me.

Chorus: Pray that on them there come a god or a man…

Electra: As judge or as avenger? Which shall I say?

Chorus: Say simply, “who will kill to answer killing”

Electra: Can I with piety ask the gods for that?

107 See Boesak (1995) for the different forms of restoring justice that emerged as part of a theological ethics
of revenge in the process of the Black people’s struggle for liberation.
Chorus: Yes, giving evil for evil to an enemy (*Libation Bearers*, 117-123).

The Aeschylean chorus not only dictates to Electra what she should do but also assumes responsibility for the piety of their actions. Even when Orestes’ nightmare begins after the murder, the chorus still supports his action:

But what you did was right! Do not unite your lips to evil utterance; do not blame yourself (*Libation Bearers*, 1045-6).

*Molora’s* Orestes and Elektra, unlike their Greek counterparts who are the rightful heirs to Agamemnon's power, claim rights to the land only by virtue of their race. At the same time however the play undermines the two agents’ power to act on behalf of a collective fusing the action with personal motivations and limitations that turn the collective feeling of revenge as a means of restoring justice for a people to a personal feeling of vindictiveness impersonated by Elektra and an unconscious, almost mechanical act impersonated by Orestes.

Elektra stands in as a symbol for the abuse of the black people in the way she is tortured by Klytemnestra and in the way she describes herself ("And now, all these years I am a slave in the Halls of my father's House"). The way she switches from the first person singular to plural in her speech is characteristic in how she fluctuates in the play from being a person to being the representative of a racial collective:

*I have hated you so long....
And now you want to look into my heart?*
You who did this to my father will pay.

For if the dead lie in dust and

nothingness

while the guilty pay not blood for blood-

then we are nothing but history without a future. (Farber 2008: 24-25, my emphasis)

Yet when it comes to the explanation of her motivations for revenge and her intention to act revenge is and remains a strictly personal matter. Despite the play’s collectivizing of revengefulness and setting Elektra as the symbol of black suffering, nowhere in the play does she demonstrate either a link with the community nor a consciousness of the political scope of wrongdoing and revenge or her role as a representative of a collective. Her anger is directed exclusively to her mother: Klytemnestra killed her father and is sleeping with a man who mistreats her. But Klytemnestra’s actions are perceived as betrayal of the motherly love she owed her children and not as acts of trespassing Elektra’s concept of justice: this Elektra does not want to restore justice but the breached relationship with her mother.

Elektra grasps [Klytemnestra’s] legs, kneeling before her

Elektra: I only want to know you. Who you were before the hurting

Who we could have been (Farber 2008: 43).

This is complemented by the absence of Agamemnon as a strong point of identification
for Elektra: this Elektra does not define herself as her father’s daughter, therefore to avenge his death is not a process of self-definition. *Molora* crucially lacks the tragic tension between opposite responsibilities, duty towards the father and bond with the mother, that make the avengers’ decision a tragic one. It is not only because the play lacks the cultural background of the tragedy, the responsibility towards kins and the cultural expectation to repay their injuries, that the duty of the children towards the dead Agamemnon in *Molora* is very much attenuated. It is mainly because the play uses the figure of Agamemnon and his murder only as pretexts to start off the action, building no links between him and his children. In the *Oresteia* he was a war hero who deserved better treatment than what he found. In *Molora* for the larger part of the play we do not know who he is and how his children relate to him. His murder does not become a part of a discourse on justice and punishment until late in the play and then only to provide justification for Klytemnestra's actions. This, combined with the lack of an awareness of any collective responsibility, make Elektra's passion to avenge mere vindictiveness against her mother.

At a certain point in the play, when she and Orestes are ready to take revenge, Elektra quotes from the famous monologue of Shylock in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*:

> If you prick us do we not bleed?

> If you tickle us- do we not laugh?
If you poison us- do we not die?  
And if you wrong us...  
Shall we not revenge? (Farber 2008: 72).

The invocation of Jewishness, which once again attempts to collectivize revengefulness, is justified on the basis of a similar history of dispossession between the Jewish and the Black people and an essentialization of race as a discourse used to justify such dispossession. It is also justifiable on the basis of what Adelman (2008) has described as "the danger from within": in the cases of both the black and the Jewish in order to justify their dispossession their difference had to be emphasized despite their sameness as human beings. Hence in both cases the dispossessed need to re-emphasize their humanity of which they have been denied primarily by means of distorted Christian discourses (see Adelman (2008) and Boesak (1995)). It is characteristic that Tutu articulated his political concepts for the need for an approach between black and white beyond racial divides in very similar terms: "White people laugh, they love, they cuddle babies, they weep, they eat, they sleep, they are human. But if they are human, why oh why can't they see that we laugh too, we love too, we weep too, we cuddle babies too, we eat, we sleep- why can't they see that it is impossible for things to go on like this?" (qt. in Battle 1997: 38-9).

Interestingly Molora does not choose Tutu's positive affirmation of common humanity but the Shakespearean Jew's rhetoric whose primary characteristic is vindictiveness, villainy and a desire to pay malice with malice, an attitude which, as

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108 On this see Adelman (2008).
Keyishian (1995) shows in his psychological approach to revenge in Shakespeare's heroes, is characteristic of persons who react out of deeply rooted anger and feelings of victimization. Her vindictiveness is very prominent when Elektra insists on revenging despite her mother's expression of remorse, an attitude which even by ancient Greek standards was regarded as base. Unlike the Sophoclean Electra for whom memory of the father means honouring his reputation as a war hero and safeguarding her own identity, for this Elektra memory is associated with a pathological clinging to anger: to remember for her, means to remember her anger, a motif that runs from the beginning until the end of the play:

I have hated you so long.

And now you want to look into my heart?

You who did this to my father will pay (Farber 2008: 24)

... Don't ask me to forget my hatred.

There can be no forgiveness.

Slay her like the bitch she is. (ibid. 83)

This interpretation distorts the notion of memory as it emerged during the TRC as the memory, acknowledgment and respect for the historical record, a collective memory of facts which was considered essential so that no similar atrocities would occur in the

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109 See also Burnett (1998) and Greenblatt (1980) on the Jew’s depiction as antisocial.

110 See Burnett (1998: 2) for an analysis of the Aristotelian definition of revenge.
future. Elektra's revengefulness becomes an entirely personal feeling isolated from any notion of collective responsibility and justice.

Contrary to Elektra, Orestes is the one who has a direct link with the community and is guided by them in seeking revenge as we see in the scene of his initiation. Yet although assuming action on behalf of a collective he remains, throughout the play, a passive instrument of the community demonstrating no consciousness whatsoever of the reasons why he should act. Upon arrival to his father's house his process is the opposite of his Aeschylean counterpart: the conditions he finds there not only do not raise in him the willingness and determination to act but make him even more passive and consciously opposed to action:

I cannot shed more blood (…)

There is still time sister.

Walk away.

Rewrite this ancient end (Farber 2008: 83)

Such change of heart is motivated by the chorus of women who have a shift that is dramaturgically improbable but explainable on the basis of Molora's allegorical structure: although they were the ones who sent him to revenge, now they are the ones who stop him.

Thus what we see in Molora is a complete reversal of the relationship between the ancient Orestes' and Electra's motivations and combination of impulses: in Farber's play
the two siblings complement each other only in their limitations that make revenge entirely unjustifiable: one avenger (Orestes) has absolutely no personal investment in the action while the other (Elektra) has only personal investment which is so overwhelming that makes her socially destructive. Revenge is thus discredited: if it is accomplished it will have no personal no social purpose either.

To further render revenge unjustifiable and illustrate the "ubuntu theology" of the need between rivals to reapproach one another, Molora, again reversing Aeschylus, overemphasizes Klytemnestra's feelings of motherly affection which are not only exclaimed by her but also acknowledged by her children in different occasions throughout the play:

Elektra: You loved me once- I think…

You loved my brother- and you loved me… (Farber 2008: 42)

The multiple ways that Aeschylus and Sophocles used to diffuse the relationships and decentre Clytemnestra (identification with the nurse, with the father and with the two siblings amongst themselves) here have been eliminated so that all relations converge into one, the mother-child relationship.\footnote{The two siblings' identification with one another is foregrounded both in Aeschylus, in Electra's repeated attempts to match her identity with her brother's, and in Sophocles, particularly in Electra's dirge over her brother's ashes.} Such a simplification facilitates the play's interpretation of revenge through a Judeo-Christian lens rather than a tragic one: Molora disregards the ritual significance of revenge as a process of self-definition and outgrowing the mother and instead views it as an act by which the avenger becomes an
imitation of the wrongdoer. The children are defined strictly and exclusively in relation to their mother: if they act they will become not better than her but exactly like her.

Klytemnestra: You stupid girl, you witless child-
You know not what you do.
Already the darkness in your eyes.

You become me. You choose the curse (Farber 2008: 80, my emphasis).

In *Molora* then, the way to outgrow the mother is not by acting but by not acting.

To prepare the grounds for forgiveness and reconciliation *Molora*, again reversing the tragedy, emphasizes Klytemnestra's feelings of guilt and provides her with a number of justifications for her actions that construct her too as a victim of circumstances: Agamemnon mistreated her and killed her child, she is under Ayesthus’ bad influence (as Elektra suggests) and when she killed Agamemnon there was a state of war (the play does not give any more references as to what it means with that) forcing her to safeguard her own survival (“we were a country at war. It mattered only that we survived” (Farber 2008: 27)).

Similarly to Elektra, the depiction of Klytemnestra is a dramaturgical fluctuation between personalization and collectivization of guilt. Her use of the Biblical passage cited earlier, as well as her switching from the first person singular to the first person plural when she speaks, position her as a symbol of white guilt for the injustices done to the black people. To represent remorse *Molora* not only has Klytemnestra’s feelings of
guilt repeatedly confessed by herself and acknowledged by Elektra but also employs the advantages of theatrical representation: as a way to have her guilt affirmed, we see enacted on stage Klytemnestra’s nightmare of giving birth to a snake:

_She climbs slowly onto the Testifying table which has now become her bed. She is tormented twisting in her slumber_ (Farber 2008: 34).

With the aid of the chorus women and under the descriptions of Elektra we see Klytemnestra giving birth to a snake:

_One of the midwives pulls a writhing, blood-covered snake from between Klytemnestra’s legs. They place it on her breast. (...) Klytemnestra screams and starts awake._ (Farber ibid. 35).

The dream is not so much emphasized as a premonition for the avenger to come, which is the explanation given for the Aeschylean Clytemnestra’s dream, but is rather introduced in the beginning of the scene by Klytemnestra herself as a manifestation of guilt:

What is guilt?
What is memory?
What is pain?
Things that wake me in the night…
By day I stand by what I have done
But at night I dream-
And dreams don’t lie (Farber 2008: 34).
Yet the collectivization of guilt should not and cannot mean a collectivization of repentance. The scene in fact raises very sharply a problem that emerged during the TRC: can repentance and forgiveness be collectivized and publicly displayed, acknowledged and affirmed? Or are they strictly personal feelings that can only be manifested through intimacy at the interpersonal level? Arendt (1958) has argued for the possibility to forgive both on the personal and on the collective level: on the personal level, it is love that allows us to see who the other person is and on that basis forgive. On the public sphere it is respect for the other, respect conceived as

a kind of “friendship” without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem (Arendt 1958: 243).

Arendt however does not address how this respect can be manifested through actions and behaviors that can verify forgiveness and reconciliation. Anthony Holiday in his critique towards the TRC discusses the impossibility to publicly test the veracity of public expressions of forgiveness and remorse which leads to the conclusion that forgiveness and remorse are in fact unrepresentable. Holiday writes that

the genuineness of either [forgiveness and remorse] is [not] testable by the same sorts of public procedures as are applied when we need to tell true from false descriptions. In the latter case we have only to examine the evidence and to
compare it with what was said in the description. And this evidence must, if it is to count as evidence, be publicly inspectable. In the cases provided however by such locutions that, like expressions of forgiveness or remorse, have a sincerity constraint attached to them, we cannot apply the same type of test as that used for descriptions. That sort of test is inapplicable not because the condition of sincerity is in principle inaccessible to verification by others (…) but because degrees of intimacy enter into the expression and scrutiny of remorse and forgiveness (…).

In order to assure myself that someone is genuinely remorseful, I must be able to interpret what they say with that clairvoyant sensitivity to the nuances of their speech and the behaviour that accompanies it such as is characteristic of those intimate interactions that typically hold between close friends, but also between psychiatrists and their patients, priests and penitents in face-to-face confidential encounters. By definition such encounters are not public examinations of evidence (…) since the meaning of intimacy implies the exclusion of that anonymous majority we call “The Public”. This is why such public bodies as courts of law pronounce on guilt or innocence but do not dispense forgiveness. It is also perhaps why the TRC was empowered to dispense amnesty without requiring a show of remorse from those it indemnified (1998: 52-3).  

Although Molora has placed itself as we’ve already seen within discourses of

\textsuperscript{112} Reading Krog’s \textit{Country of my skull} (2000) and Slovo’s \textit{Red Dust} (2000) is revealing of the tensions between the public display of remorse by the perpetrators and their “real” face as had been experienced by their victims who often refused to accept such display as genuine. See for example Slovo (2000) chapters 20 and 28.
collective dispossession and guilt based on racial discrimination and subsequently has 
collectivized the pursuit of revenge in the name of ancestral rights to the land, now the 
attempts to mutual understanding occur only on the interpersonal level. Forgiveness and 
remorse can only be verified through the intimacy of dialogue: Klytemnestra, although 
she justifies herself, feels guilty and repentant and unlike the Aeschylean heroine she 
acknowledges that she was wrong in her actions as she openly confesses:

I am not so exceedingly glad at the deeds
I have done (Farber 2008: 27).

Elektra is able to acknowledge her mother's guilt:

I hear your fear at night through the walls.
I see you coming to pay penance each
year at your victim's grave. You think no
one knows you.
But I see your heart.
I know it hurts (Farber 2008: 42).

The scene of the two women's confrontation does not deal, as in Sophocles, with the 
exploration of two valid but conflicting notions of justice but is devoted entirely to 
illustrating an attempt at mutual understanding, explanations and an analysis of guilt.

Due to its private nature then forgiveness cannot dramatically justify the passage 
to the new order of things with which the play ends just as, in the South African context it
was not adequate to sustain and justify the rhetoric of national reconciliation. The play, endorsing a view that wants the Black people possessing unique qualities to forgive, closes with a scene where forgiveness is collectivized and revenge is rejected before its enactment: 113 the chorus of Xhosa women intervene and stop Elektra at the moment when she is ready to kill her mother: “The women of the Chorus move swiftly as one. They grab Elektra and overpower her. (...) They restrain her and pull her to the ground where they cradle her like a child” (Farber 2008: 85).

The play closes without engaging with Eumenides and the problem of the institutionalization and attribution of justice which is central in the Oresteia as much as it is in South Africa. In her closing lines Klytemnestra expresses her gratitude on behalf, once again, of an imagined collective:

And we who made the sons and daughters of this land…

Servants in the halls of their forefathers…

We know.

We are still only here by grace alone (Farber 2008: 87).

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113 In her analysis, Krog views this perception as emanating primarily from Tutu’s ubuntu theology. She writes that “Tutu believes that black people have access almost to a superior humanity, which enables them to do things that surpass cold logic. When a woman at the Truth Commission says that she forgives the killers of her son, Tutu tells her: “You make me proud Mama, to be a black person like you.” What the world lacks, black people have”. (2000: 145)

In reality, it seems that Tutu in his ubuntu theology attempted to construct a more complex idea of the relationship between community and individual. Although he acknowledged the spiritual and organic character of the African community whereby the person acquires “meaning and intelligibility only in the context of his or her environment” (Battle 1997: 37) he did see the risks of western extreme individualism on the one hand and of an overpowering community suppressing the individual on the other. Therefore, he sought to combine Western and African elements to formulate his views on “how community forms individuals as peers” (ibid. 38)
On the one hand, the collectivization of forgiveness and the play’s failure to engage with the question of justice, result in elevating forgiveness to a national end in itself. On the other hand, Klytemnestra’s expression of gratitude in fact embodies, maybe unconsciously, what is a typical white liberal attitude:

In th[e] interstice [between power and indifferent or supportive agency] the English-speaking South African has conducted the business of his life. Now he was indignant and guilty; now he was thriving. This no man’s land ensured a fundamental lack of character. With a foreign passport in the back pocket of the trousers, now they belong, now they don’t (Ndebele 1998: 26).

The spatial organization of the play’s last scene is telling of how the expression of “liberal guilt” serves to conceal the sustenance of the binaries between dominant and dominated and of the ways that the dangerous power of the ‘liminally inferior’ must be contained: after her children “extend their hands to help her to stand” (Farber 2008: 85) Klytemnestra “walks slowly away” (ibid.) and takes her position to give her final testimony. At the centre of the stage “the women of the chorus explode into song, circling brother and sister (...) Elektra and Orestes embrace, weeping” (ibid.). Not only is Klytemnestra set apart from the group, but also she maintains the privilege to speak the last lines of the play and once again she is at the centre of the story giving her own interpretation of the situation. While she is conveniently released from guilt without undergoing, as the Aeschylean Orestes is, any form of punishment or justice other than
her own nightmares, forgiveness becomes an internal affair of the black community: Orestes and Elektra do not speak but weep while their own people are watching over them. Their displacement as subjects of their story, the suppression of their agency both in their ability to act and to speak are ‘sanctified’ by the transcendental community of elders. The play’s collective does not demand justice or truth from the White but forgiveness from the Black. As a result the play resituates both the TRC and the *Oresteia* in a new interpretive context where the public acts of justice and (as I will show in more detail in the following chapter) truth-telling become secondary to the private act of forgiveness and the latter becomes memorialized as a national end in itself.
3.2. **Molora and the narratives of nationhood and reconciliation.**

Insofar as *Molora* discredits revenge and promotes the ideas of forgiveness and reconciliation it becomes part of the South African tradition of ‘reconciliation theatre’ that appeared in South Africa in the early nineties. In reconciliation plays “the reality of a polarized society is defied to present human beings from all racial groups communicating, sharing and understanding” (Angove 1992: 44). Such plays draw equally on real life stories and events, biographical accounts and testimonies as well as fictional scripts, to explore the tensions in the country’s transition to democracy. The focus of these plays is usually on the interpersonal relations among South Africans and the individual experience in the new political context.\(^{114}\) This type of theatre “is not a theatre devoid of fear, insecurity and introspection [but it] transcends present reality to display to its audience a potential South Africa” (ibid.). A number of intellectuals and critics have been critical of the theatre of reconciliation as they see it as attempting a silencing on history (Mda 1996) focusing on themes of forgiveness and reconciliation at a personal level but disregarding the problems of justice and reparations at an institutional level. Reconciliation plays "do not appear to address the crucial issue that justice had to be the basis for any discussion of guilt and atonement” (ibid. 215):

> There is never an explanation why we need reconciliation. Instead of explaining

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\(^{114}\) Examples of such plays are Fugard’s *Playland* (1992), “inspired by a picture of white soldiers dumping bodies of SWAPO guerrilla fighters into a mass grave” (Mda 1996: 214), his *My Life* (1992), Foot-Newton’s *Reach* (2007) and others.
how we got here, the accent is on South Africa being a polarized society. Silence on our history makes it impossible to answer the question: on whose terms must forgiveness be granted?" (qt. in Mda 1996: 215).

These critics conclude that “as long as the question of justice has not been addressed by the political structures, a true Theatre of Reconciliation will not emerge in South Africa” (ibid. 216). They argue instead that a theatre that directly engages with the emerging social issues of the country (i.e. Aids, xenophobia) has a far greater potential to contribute to reconciliation than plays directly addressing reconciliation as a theme.

I have already discussed the play’s allegorical representation of the country’s transition from apartheid to democracy: the national divide, understood, as we will see, predominantly in racial terms, is embodied in the relationships between Klytemnestra and her children, Orestes and Elektra. I have also referred to the play’s division into 19 scenes structured in a non linear, non Aristotelian fashion. Unity of action, time or place are abandoned as the play switches between spaces (the house, the TRC hearing hall, and the mountains) and as time shifts between re-enactments of the past (the killing of Aegisthus, the torturing of Elektra, the sending away of Orestes as a baby) and testimonies in the present. On the aesthetic level too, Molora draws from a variety of traditions: realistic, psychological acting is combined with exclamatory outward acting that directly addresses the audience as in many “testimony” scenes; struggle themes like, for example, the depiction of Elektra’s tortures, are combined with African song and ritual; and raw,
graphic violence is combined with the use of stage symbolism. This aesthetic collage is directly linked to the play’s ideology. In South African theatre there has been a long tradition of juxtaposing seemingly foreign theatrical elements into new, syncretic works, a practice that developed as a direct result of the need to negotiate on the one hand the realities of a complex and often absurd and incoherent everyday life (Kruger 1999) and on the other hand the formation of hybrid identities that the everyday reality led to (Coplan 1985). Contrary to such hybridization which was partly organic and partly programmatic, *Molora*, as I will try to illustrate, employs elements of cultural and political history and performance in order to construct an image of “South African-ness” pointing to an imagined national identity and reaffirming dominant perceptions on reconciliation. The play capitalizes on the one hand on the theological discourse that dominated, at least in its initial stages, the TRC and on the other hand on the world-wide popularity of the TRC as an institution that provided not only truth but also large doses of drama and spectacle to South African and international audiences. It fails, however, to address less dominant interpretations of South Africa’s transition that pose questions on issues of justice, reparations and the still yawning gap between beneficiaries and victims of apartheid.

To explain what I mean by an “imagined national identity” and how the play reproduces it I will draw on the argument that Andrew Lattas (1990) has eloquently developed in relation to representations of aboriginal cultures in Australia. Lattas argues
that in their search for a national and cultural identity, nations who have faced major ethnic divisions (such as settler colonies), use dominant discourses (art, art criticism, political discourse etc) in order to “create and perpetuate a sense of alienation” (1990: 51) as the basis of collective identity: the dominant portion of the population is to understand themselves as alienated from the land and as fundamentally different from the indigenous, dominated people. Lattas holds that “this conceptual space of alienation mediates national selfhood. It produces nationalism by continuously calling on people to reflect on their collective sense of self” (ibid.). The national identity that is being produced is based precisely on the affirmation that there is no national identity and it is in that space of “lack” that the nation manages to construct and manipulate subjectivity:

[O]ur ascribed lack of national identity is used continuously to authorize discourses which are concerned with giving us a sense of national self. The posited space of alienation inside the self is the creation of an opening, a gap, within which a number of discourses concerned with the management and production of identity find their locus, their proliferation of mechanisms of control, of discourses for reconciling the nation with itself, rendering it whole and unified with itself (ibid. 55).

In this context what is created is what Lattas calls “the personhood of the nation”: the material and political circumstances that constitute the nation and the power relations within it are replaced by psychological and metaphysical interpretations normally
attributed to individuals: “all the christian and psychoanalytic techniques which have been developed for the problematization of individual identity have come to be projected on the wider spatio-temporal domain of the nation” (ibid. 55). Political discourse, Lattas continues, is reduced to “a means for realizing the mythical personhood of the nation through discourses which question and fix the psychological traits, unity and character of the nation. The personhood of the nation is not a given but something that has to be produced" (ibid.).\footnote{Mark Libin (2003) makes a similar point although from a different perspective. Libin proposes an examination of trauma through a postcolonial perspective: “Although trauma studies and postcolonial studies have rarely intersected, there is (...) a growing understanding of postcolonial theory as a discourse haunted by the trauma of colonialism, a discourse permeated with traces of European guilt and indigenous victimization” (2003: 121). While Lattas examines how in the postcolonial context guilt and victimhood are manipulated to serve a nationalist agenda, Libin examines how working through narratives of collective trauma “conditioned by otherness” (ibid.) can facilitate in producing “authentic listeners” among the dominant group, able to “respond to these narratives in a respectful and productive manner” (ibid.)} In what follows I will look at how the play, by means of dramaturgy and performance, deconstructs, privatizes and Christianizes its political context and replicates this model of alienation in order to construct and sustain the “mythical personhood of the nation”.

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In Molora the oikos, the family of the Atreides, stands in as a metaphor for the nation: a white Klytemnestra backed by and, as we hear, manipulated by an invisible Ayesthus, is confronted by a black Elektra and, later in the play, by a black Orestes. Aside from the obvious rendering of the opposition in racial terms, to which I will return later, an important note to be made in relation to the Oresteia is that the characters do not have political roles, they are not, in other words, the heads and rulers of the polis as their
Aeschylean counterparts are. In this manner the play eliminates the interface between *oikos* and *polis* which is essential in tragedy as it creates the dialectic between the personal and the political, and focuses only on the personal and inter-familial (the role of the chorus in this context will be examined in detail later).

This familial and racialized division is not given any historical specificity. Instead, the beginning and reasons for the enmity between mother and children remain deliberately and consistently blurred in the play: initially it is Klytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon (for reasons that we only hear of much later in the play) that causes Elektra's hatred; but later Klytemnestra also refers to a "curse", dating from long ago, that has been at the root of the family's division with its repeated acts of violence; and it is also Ayesthus who is held responsible, by Elektra, for the family's deterioration. What is important in this ahistorical setting where there is no clear relation between cause and effect is that the play chooses to represent history in very simple, elemental terms: an initial bond breaks, a period of enmity ensues and in the end the bond is restored. The play presumes a primordial unity, a time when the family was "whole": early in the play, just before she goes to murder her husband, we witness a loving relationship between Klytemnestra and her daughter as she tenderly bathes her child, a moment which Elektra occasionally recalls: "You loved me once... I think..." (Farber 2008: 42). The killing of Agamemnon abruptly interrupts the tender mother-child bathing scene and from that point on a period of enmity and hatred begins between Klytemnestra and her children.
until they are reunited at the end of the play. As the murder in the play comes entirely unmotivated and unprepared, it is marked in time only as the opposite of love: one moment the family is united, the next they break apart. Later, Klytemnestra explains her motivations: it was partly Agamemnon's cruel treatment of Iphigeneia and partly a curse which has befallen the family and which throughout the play will gradually become the dominant explanation for the cycle of violence. History then is interpreted not as a process of events brought about by conscious agents but strictly in emotional and metaphysical terms: it is a transition from love to hate and back to love, and also a transition from a curse to the lifting of that curse.

The interpretation of history in terms of a love/hate relationship and the subsequent feelings of loss and alienation are reinstated by means of spatial organization. The play unfolds in three different physical spaces: the private space of the house, dominated by a stagnant and violent relationship between Elektra and Klytemnestra, and the invisible yet overpowering presence of Ayesthus; the public space of the hearings dominated again by Klytemnestra and Elektra and this time with the presence of a silent Chorus in the background who, as far as the hearings are concerned remains uninvolved; and the

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116 Unlike Clytemnestra’s murder of Agamemnon in the Oresteia, which comes premeditated, planned and with a number of reasons justifying it.
117 It is important here to compare with the significance of Agamemnon’s downfall in Aeschylus: the moment of Agamemnon’s destruction coincides with the moment of his glory when he sets foot on the royal carpet. That is the moment of the consummation of the drama, as Vernant (1981) has shown, when human and mythic time collide and become one.
118 Here we must note the difference with the Oresteia: there, the cycle of violence is a result of a combination of divine will (retribution for acts of hubris and kin-killings) and individual responsibility (duty to gods, duty to family and the dead, personal conditions).
communal space, dominated by the chorus of rural community women where Orestes is raised and from which he departs to return as an avenger. The first two spaces are represented primarily by means of sets and props: two big wooden tables, microphones, the actresses' simple, domestic costumes. The third is created by means of presence and performance: the chorus' song and dance, theirs and Orestes' tribal dresses, the reenactment of rituals. What is common in all three spaces is that they all serve to reinstate the feeling of alienation that Lattas (1990) discusses: in the house it is between mother and daughter. In the hearings it is the alienation between victim and perpetrator. And in the communal space it is the alienation between individual and community, urban and rural space. In what follows I want to show on the one hand, how the play handles the victim-perpetrator relationship and how it constructs the domestic and public spheres as interchangeable thus domesticating the political; and on the other hand how it sets the communal space apart, maintaining a division between the communal and the political which results in attributing metaphysical qualities and thus monumentalizing the community.

**Domesticating the political**

The first part of the play is constructed around a fundamental binary relationship between Elektra and Klytemnestra. In the beginning of the play the two women are introduced to us as the victim and the perpetrator respectively: they have come to testify before the audience and the chorus of Xhosa women. The stage directions clearly indicate
how the setting should be a direct reference to the TRC hearings:

*The ideal venue is a bare hall or room- much like the drab simple venues in which most of the testimonies were heard during the course of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission: two large old tables- each with a chair- face one another on opposite ends of the playing space* (Farber 2008: 19).

The two women are placed opposite and confronting one another on the two wooden tables, behind microphones, a place to which they come back to every time the play switches from re-enactment to testimony thus reinstating in terms of stage configuration the dynamics of opposition. In the opening scene titled “testimony” Klytemnestra admits her crime (the killing of Agamemon) and claims it to be a work of Justice. When her turn comes Elektra confesses how, having been repressed all those years she is finally free to speak up. She then reveals her intention to avenge: “For if the dead lie in dust and nothingness, while the guilty pay not with blood for blood- Then we are nothing but history without a future” (Farber 2008: 25).

The play establishes the relationship between victim and perpetrator in strict and unproblematically binary terms: love/hate, black/white, guilty/victim. These categories which as I will show are reinstated at all levels of performance from casting to text, defy the complexities of relations in South Africa as revealed during the TRC hearings and they serve to establish Klytemnestra as foreign and alienated. The casting (Klytemnestra is white, Elektra, Orestes and the chorus are black) sets Klytemnestra apart from the rest
of her "family" and is a direct allusion to the racial politics operating at the heart of the division in South Africa. Although the racial division is the most obvious one to be made with reference to apartheid, in fact it evades the more complex problem of how the system created relations of power based not only on racial but more importantly on economic, class and even geographical terms, manipulating people regardless of race and thus creating a deeply embedded mistrust among the entire population. The TRC revealed that identifying victims and perpetrators was not easy: aside from atrocities committed by white against black, there was also white against white, black against white and black against black. Although the general truth of the oppression of the black and coloured majority by the white minority is by no means to be questioned, it is worth noting that the TRC revealed something much more important: the degree to which apartheid completely tore apart the social nexus and any notion of community. Such a revelation was and still is of utmost importance to the country’s process of reconfiguring and rebuilding community and explains many of the difficulties in the nation-building process even after the racial discourse has been lifted. Although the family in tragedy lends itself to exploring such tensions which emanate from different roles, allegiances and responsibilities (Electra- daughter and avenger; Orestes's responsibilities towards both parents; Klytemnestra, betrayed wife and murderess), here the racial categorization is too strong and functions as a means of exclusion oversimplifying the relations in the family.

The complexity of the political context becomes, in Molora, secondary to creating
a psychological portrait focusing on what Libin (2003) has described as the anxiety of the guilty faced with the ‘other’ who claims victimhood. Dialogue, acting style and stage symbolism are used to blur the lines between the personal and the political in a manner that obscures the way apartheid structured power relations. At the level of text the play is dominated by the victim’s reaffirmations of victimhood and the perpetrator’s reaffirmations of guilt both of which reoccur as a leitmotif in every testimony:

Elektra: Years passed between us, mother and daughter.

But I was not permitted to sit at the table.

You fed me like a dog (…)

Every day you tried to break my strength.

Everyday you tried to destroy my spirit (Farber 2008: 47)

(…)

Klytemnestra: there was so much fear in those years.

Every night the shadow of my son would fall over my bed

The inevitable vengeance he would one day bring.

For those we harm as children-

Grow up to be men (ibid. 48).

There are many scenes of emotional detail and complexity in the tradition of realistic, psychological theatre that serve to ‘translate’ the victim-perpetrator relationship as one of a double-bind, love-hate relationship between Klytemnestra and her children:
they want to love each other- as mother and children should- but they cannot. A scene
telling of this psychological approach is the one between Klytemnestra, Orestes and
Elektra at the dinner table, a scene which is filled with Freudian undertones, tensions and
unexpressed feelings:

**Klytemnestra takes a small pair of shoes tucked into the breast of her dress. These shoes once belonged to the baby Orestes. (…). Klytemnestra begins to cry. Orestes is visibly moved.**

Klyt: Girl- it was ever your nature to love your father.

But sons have a deeper affection for their mothers…

And mothers for their sons.

As a babe- I couldn’t wean him from the breast.

He was just a boy when I lost him.

Orestes…

I never saw you a man… (Farber 2008: 70-1).

In this same scene Klytemnestra’s psychological deterioration as she is
overwhelmed by guilt, is depicted through a number of psychological details: her
emotional instability, switching from sentimentality to violent outbursts or apathy, her
incessant smoking and drinking, her violent, uncontrolled manners.

The psychological approach to guilt and responsibility is very evident in the use
of stage symbolism, reminiscent of the theatre of Strindberg and Ibsen and their use of
stage props as symbols of an absent authority with a significant effect on the rest of the characters. Ayesthus in the play remains invisible but it is suggested by all the characters that he is the ultimate source of all evil, responsible even for Klytemnestra’s violent behaviour towards her children. His overpowering presence that inflicts terror on everyone in the house is symbolized first by a pair of enormous boots and then by an enormous hanging uniform. Yet it is never clear who he is, what is his source of authority and in what ways he affects the other characters in the house. He is so elusive that he could signify anything, from an abusive husband to an entire system. The use of the worker’s uniform to symbolize him is in that sense revealing: the uniform is a very poignant symbol of the oppressed which here is used to symbolize the oppressor, thus frustrating any attempt to identify who Ayesthus is and what he represents. His function in the drama is to conveniently absorb all responsibility, social, political, ethical, which, placed as it is on this abstract entity that lies outside the play, evades scrutiny and definition.

The way the play depicts Ayesthus is in fact characteristic of how it consistently avoids defining the political reality as such, and insists in fusing it with the emotional frustrations of domestic relations. Terms of vital political significance in South Africa during the reconciliatory process (truth, law, justice, ethical choice) emerge in the characters’ dialogue but their meanings remain elusive as each character uses them in different contexts, with different connotations or even interchangeably. The result is that
what were political issues here become private matters: justice becomes the reaction to the private feeling of being wronged, a sort of moral indignation to the wrongdoing unrelated to the world order. Equally, truth is recontextualized and from a public event, as in the TRC, becomes a private, interpersonal matter:

    Electra: Mama, if I speak gently can I say my truth?

    Klytemnestra: Indeed you have my leave. And if you always addressed me in such a gentle tone, you would be heard without pain.

    Elektra: I want only to know you. Who you were before the hurting. Who we could have been… (Farber 2008: 42-43)

The most striking aspect of the play's depoliticization and personification of its context is the representation of the process of "testimony" on which I want to focus. The inherent performativity of testimony and the theatrical representation of testimony and archival material in general has been the object of inquiry by theorists of documentary theatre as well as artists. So Carol Martin, for example, writes of the challenge

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119 In his director’s note for *Ubu and The Truth Commission*, W. Kentridge (1998) endorses the theatricality of the TRC and addresses the question: “In the face of the strength of the theatre of the Commission (...) how can any of us working in the theatre compete with it?” and he answers “Of course we can’t and don’t try to. The origin of our work is very different and even if in the end it links directly to the Commission, this is secondary rather than primary. Our theatre is a reflection on the debate rather than the debate itself. It tries to make sense of the memory rather than be the memory” (1998: ix). Kentridge elaborates on two cases when this problem was dealt with, his own work with puppets in *Ubu* and *The story I am about to tell*, a play where real witnesses performed themselves. The choice of the puppets to represent the witnesses came “as an answer to the ethical question: what is our responsibility to the people whose stories we are using as raw fodder for the play? There seemed to be an awkwardness getting an actor to play the witnesses- the audience being caught halfway between having to believe in the actor for the sake of the story, and also not believe in the actor for the sake of the actual witness who existed out there but was not the actor. Using a puppet made this contradiction palpable” (ibid. xi). In the second example, *The story I am about to tell*, although the ‘actors’ are also the testifiers, there is still a gap between their testimony in the Commission and the performance of the testimony for theatre. Kentridge argues that the device works precisely because these are not actors: “It is their very awkwardness that makes their performances work.
presented by what she calls “the continuum between documentation and simulation” (2006: 11): how to give “theatrical viability” to the representation of the document through the incorporation of all those elements that are constitutive of presence—body, voice, delivery etc— and are lying outside the official record.120

In Molora, on the visual level, the fluidity of the boundaries between the space of the house and the space of the hearings makes these two spaces inter-penetrate: the tables shift position, the two women take their seats behind microphones and the "house" has transformed to the "hearing hall" in a manner that makes the public space an extension of the private and the political conflict an extension of the mother-daughter confrontation. I am interested here to see how the testimonies are used in the play. As I will argue, testimony is stripped of its content, function and performative character to remain only an empty frame that serves to add an element of "South African-ness" to the performance.

The space of witnessing

Essential in the act of testimony is a meeting: the meeting between the speaker, the person who testifies, and the listener, the person who witnesses. It is also a meeting between the past and the present: experiences that were suppressed and unacknowledged

One is constantly thrown back, through their awkwardness, into realising these are the actual people who underwent the terrible things they are describing” (ibid. xii).

at the moment when they were lived, are reclaimed, relived in order to be witnessed and acknowledged.\textsuperscript{121} Laub (1996) has written that for survivors of collective trauma this process of retelling and witnessing the past is essential for the victims to heal and move on.

The process of testimony requires the presence of what Libin (2003) terms an ‘authentic listener’ to the victims’ reclaimed experience. In the relationship of bearing witness that occurs between the victim and the ‘authentic listener’ Laub sees a “joint responsibility [which] is the source of the reemerging truth” (1996: 69). The process of witnessing, however, is founded on the impossibility to fully recuperate the past:

On the one hand the process of the testimony does in fact hold out the promise of the truth as the return of a sane, normal and connected world. On the other hand, because of its very commitment to the truth, the testimony enforces at least a partial breach, failure and relinquishment of this promise. (…) There is no healing reunion with those who are, and continue to be, missing, no recapture or restoration of what has been lost (...). The testimony in its commitment to truth is a passage through or an exploration of, difference, rather than an exploration of identity (Laub 1996: 73).

\textsuperscript{121}Laub writes: “The utter inhumanity of such systems lies in that they annihilate the victim to such an extent that they make it impossible for them to bear witness to their own suffering: “[the Nazi system] convinced its victims, the potential witnesses from the inside, that what was affirmed about their ‘otherness’ and their inhumanity was correct and that their experiences were no longer communicable even to themselves, and therefore, perhaps, never took place. This loss of the capacity to be witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one’s history is abolished, one’s identity ceases to exist as well.” (1996: 67).
In the case of South Africa this idea of the “broken promise” is even more pertinent as the process of witnessing is put to the service of the reconciliation among the groups of a nation that have neither a common experience nor a common collective memory.

Analyzing the function of testimony in the TRC from a psychoanalytic perspective, Quayson observes that:

The key problem in the way of historical recall is precisely that the affectivity of the traumatic nexus has already haemorrhaged into the structuring of historical processes themselves. Given the fact that this haemorrhaging has become integral to the coming-into-being of the post-apartheid body-politic, it is then extremely difficult to return an integrated political subject back into history (2003: 95)

While this must be taken into account when one is analyzing the function of testimony in South Africa, it remains true that the process of witnessing is crucial for the individual and collective healing: “it is this very commitment to truth, in a dialogic context and with an authentic listener, which (...) makes the resumption of life, in spite of the failed promise, at all possible” (Laub 1996: 73).

The TRC was, among other things already discussed in the introductory chapter, an attempt to recapture and redefine the past through memory and the restoration of witnessing. For all involved, testifiers and witnesses, it consisted of reliving the past, an experience which victims often regretted as it brought back painful memories and

\[122\] As several critics have observed, the TRC aims in fact not at a re-conciliation, since there was nothing in common to be reconciled- but at “conciliation” for the first time (Krog 2000).
traumatized them for a second time as they had to revisit events they had tried hard to forget (Krog 2000, Hayner, 2001). This collision between the past and the present manifested itself in what was the TRC’s highly performative aspect: the physical and emotional expressions in the manner of delivery. Sighs, hesitations, cries, shouts, pauses, all these para-linguistic elements that remained out of the official record gave the testimonies their truthfulness and were the ‘embodiment’ of memory. In stressing the innate theatricality of the commission, Cole writes that for many, these public hearings- with their embodied expressions, their weeping, their silences, their demonstrations of “wet bag” torture techniques, their confrontations between former torturers and those they tortured, the wails, and the moments that transcend language- most defined the commission (2007: 175, my emphasis).

While the narratives of the atrocities served to convey the facts, the emotional reactions, those moments that were beyond words, conveyed the experience of the past in all its pain:

When early on the hearings, witness Nomade Calata broke into a loud wail during her testimony, this disconcerting cry became an emblematic moment in public memory. (…) The importance of this sound- a wail that transcendent language

123 In fact, revealing and naming the guilty was seen by many participants and analysts alike as impeding instead of facilitating the reconciliation process. For some, to get to know who their torturer was not only stirred memories and hatred but also turned people against a person instead of foregrounding the responsibility of a system and of all individuals in sustaining that system whether by active support or by mere indifference (see Hayner 2001).
and, in doing so, captured something elemental about the experience of gross violations of human rights- indicates the degree to which embodied expression was central to the TRC process (ibid. 178).

The reproduction of the TRC in the media but also in literature and theatre, posed the problem of how the experience of witnessing in its factual and emotional dimensions can be recreated without betraying the authenticity and the individuality of the testifiers’ experience. It also raised a valid concern that the disembodiment of the testimonies and their inclusion in fixed, official or unofficial records, ran the risk of subsuming the multivocality of experience into a single, unified narrative at the service of a nationalist agenda (Hutchinson 2005, Robins 1998).\(^\text{124}\)

*Molora* evades the fundamental problem of how to theatrically represent testimony by stripping the testimonies of both their factual and emotional dimensions and by entirely overriding the function of testimony as a site of witnessing. The two women deliver self-conscious accounts of their feelings about the past- their object is not the past, not history in the form of facts, but the self, its emotional reactions, its feelings of hatred, vindictiveness or guilt:

Elektra: The years pass –

And the grass grows over the grave of a loved one. They told me I was caught

In grief.

\(^{124}\) Quayson makes a similar point in his analysis of testimony which aims to show that “no easy solution to the traumas of apartheid is possible and that in fact this restless disorder of memory [manifested in testimony] is to be taken as constitutive of a new political imaginary” (2003: 78).
People said I must move on.

But how? How could I forget?

How can we move on until the debt is paid? (Farber 2008: 36).

The speech as well as the manner of delivery is self-reflective, composed and articulate, uninterrupted by the process of remembering, reminiscent of a soliloquy or a speech rather than a testimony.\textsuperscript{125} The “testimonies” in the play are in fact conceived outside of the dialogic space where, according to Bakhtin (1981) every form of discourse occurs\textsuperscript{126} and which in the South African context was consciously created in order to restore suppressed experience as part of the collective national memory.\textsuperscript{127} Although presented in pairs they are isolated from one another in a manner that excludes the processes of active listening, understanding and responding, processes which are essential in any form of dialogic encounter and introduce new aspects, points of view and emotional expressions to the discourse, “sometimes crassly accommodating, sometimes provocatively polemical” (Bakhtin 1981: 282). As a result of this lack of conflict the understanding of the speeches among the characters and for the audience remains “purely

\textsuperscript{125} My comment on the delivery is based on personal viewing of the performance (Market Theatre, 2007)

\textsuperscript{126} Bakhtin writes that “In the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active: it assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the response, with a motivated agreement or disagreement. To some extent primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the gound for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other” (1981: 282)

\textsuperscript{127} According to Quayson “[t]he sheer mass of testimonies and the mediatized nature of the TRC’s work ensured that the hearings produced a peculiar form of public addressivity and interlocution in which the traumas suffered by individuals were automatically a subject of identification, reflection, and debate by the nation as a whole” (2003: 92).
passive, purely receptive, contributes nothing new to the word under consideration, only mirroring it, seeking, at its most ambitious, merely the full reproduction of that which is already given in the word” (ibid. 281). The dialectical character of the act of witnessing which requires an active speaker and an active listener disappears.

Furthermore, these testimonies are dis-embodied, devoid of authentic emotional implication precisely because what is central in the act of witnessing, the collision between past and present, does not occur. It is precisely this mode of delivery of what end up being “pristine, uncorrupted narratives” (Posel qt. in Cole 2007: 180) that remain uninterrupted by the truth and power of emotional response that divests the “testimonies” of any truthfulness. The result is the invocation of generalized sentiments of sadness and self-pity that aim to provoke the empathy of the audience and the past is to be perceived only in terms of these emotions that are isolated from authentic experience. Here happens what R. Williams has described although in a different context: the action of the drama (the interrogation of the past through its collision with the present) is replaced by an interest on the heroes’ ideas and feelings about it. The result is that the responsibility of experience is transferred to the audience who becomes “a passive consumer of feelings” (2006: 49).

What is even more interesting is that the act of witnessing is either altogether absent or reversed. It is altogether absent as far as the "audience" (who, the stage directions suggest, is the chorus of Xhosa women and the actual audience of the
performance) is concerned: the chorus of women who sit at the back of the stage as "witnesses" to the testifying process do not interfere with the action at all and have no reactions whatsoever. Ironically the TRC has been repeatedly compared to tragedy, with the audience of witnesses as the chorus-reacting, commenting, shouting, sympathizing, condemning or consoling the testifiers. In this case the lack of participation on the part of the chorus robs them of their function of witnessing inherent in their role both as auditors and as a tragic chorus. Equally, the audience of the performance cannot act as witnesses although the stage directions suggest they should ("contact with the audience must be immediate and dynamic, with the audience complicit- experiencing the story as witnesses or participants in the room" Farber 2008: 19): by virtue of their status as a paying audience they cannot be expected to act as "authentic listeners" and partake in the "joint responsibility" of witnessing. They have come to watch a theatre performance to which the testimony is only incidental therefore they do not come predisposed to get actively involved in the act of witnessing.

While witnessing is absent with reference to the audience and the chorus it is reversed with reference to the one-on-one relationship between victim and perpetrator: oddly, it is not the victim but the perpetrator who is being witnessed and acknowledged. The TRC consisted of two separate processes with separate functions and purposes and separate space and time: there were the victims' hearings, who came to have their stories

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128 See for example Krog (2000) and George Bizos’ comments in the documentary *A long night’s journey into day* (2000).
related and to ask for reparations, and the perpetrators' hearings who came to reveal their actions in order to be given amnesty. While the first was largely a ritualistic, symbolic and cathartic process, the latter was a quasi-judicial process. In the play no such distinction is made: Klytemnestra's (the perpetrator's) testimonies are juxtaposed to Elektra's (the victim's testimonies) and the two are almost always presented in pairs. What happens in these encounters is that Elektra's speeches in addition to always reinstating her hatred and desire for revenge they also acknowledge Klytemnestra's guilt. The result is that it is the perpetrator and her emotions that become the object of interest and analysis while the victim serves to reflect and draw more attention to these emotions.

While *Molora* disembodies the testimonies, stripping them of all para-linguistic expressions, it “re-embodies” actual testimonies that dealt with the description of physical torture by re-enacting them on stage.\(^\text{129}\) I will focus on the most striking of these re-enactments, the demonstration of the wet-bag torture. In order to show the extremity of her exploitation by Klytemnestra, Elektra in her testimony asks from her mother to demonstrate how she tortured her in order to get information as to her brother's whereabouts. The play consciously and explicitly replicates an event that occurred in the TRC hearings and "will remain one of the most loaded and disturbing images in the life

\(^{129}\) The importance of the para-linguistic elements in the embodiment of the testimony is also related to the primacy, in the act of testimony, of orality as a mode of ordering experience over the written word. A fundamental difference between oral and written systems of communication is that in the former, utterances are understood as being able to embody and not merely represent the world (in Tiffin et. al. (1989)). Carol Martin (2006) has argued that artists engaging with testimony have to negotiate the tension between the two. *Molora* in fact subjects the oral mode to the linearity of the written word, thus performing a second “colonization” of the victims' experience.
of the Truth commission" (Krog 2000: 92) that of the amnesty hearing of J. Benzien, a high-rank officer of apartheid and torturer, and his direct confrontation with his victim, Tony Yengeni, later member of the ANC Cabinet. The actual event as it occurred in the TRC hearing is revealing of "the double-edged relationship between the torturer and the tortured" (Krog 2000: 93). Krog reports:

The first indication of the complexity of the relationship between an infamous torturer and his victim is the voice of Tony Yengeni. As a member of Parliament, Yengeni's voice has become known for its tone of confidence- sometimes with arrogance. When he faces Benzien [the torturer], this is gone. (…) He sounds strangely different- his voice somehow choked. Instead of seizing the moment to get back at Benzien, Yengeni wants to know the man (…) At Yengeni's insistence, Benzien demonstrates the wet bag method. "I want to see it with my own eyes" (ibid.).

The demonstration ends unexpectedly with the revelation of Yengeni’s submission to the torture and betrayal:

Back at the table, Benzien quietly turns on him and with one accurate blow shatters Yengeni's political profile right across the country. "Do you remember Mr. Yengeni, that within thirty minutes you betrayed Jennifer Schreiner? Do you remember pointing out Bongani Jonas to us on the highway?" And Yengeni sits there- as if begging the man to say it all, as if betrayal or cowardice can only
make sense to him in the presence of this man" (ibid. 94).

The incident is indicative of the deeply rooted and extremely complex power relations among South Africans as Benzien proved that he could "within the first few minutes (...) manipulate most of his victims back into the roles of their previous relationship- where he has the power and they the fragility" (ibid. 95). The revelation caused a stir in the public opinion, particularly among ANC supporters who did not know how to feel about Yengeni: “the torture of Yengeni continues, with some of us regarding him as a traitor to the cause, a sell-out, a cheat and in some stupid twist of faith and fate, his torturer becomes the hero, the revealer, the brave man who informed us about it all" (ibid.). The incident also revealed that the complications of real life as revealed in accounts like this defied generalizations and idealizations.130

In *Molora* the same event ends in an entirely different way. We have already seen Elektra being tortured in previous scenes where the stage directions describe her as having “endure[d] the interrogation with a courage reminiscent of a political resistance fighter” (Farber 2008: 32). Now, after the demonstration, Elektra sobbing with rage addresses Klytemnestra:

Elektra: One day you will face your God. And ask for forgiveness for the things you did in those years (Farber 2008: 48)

As in the case of the "testimonies" here the re-enactment of the torture once again renders

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130 In *Red Dust* Gillian Slovo describes a similar occurrence between the victim, Alex Mpondo and his torturer, Dirk Hendricks. There too the perpetrator’s testimony about the wet bag torture ends in a reversal of roles as the victim’s betrayal is revealed. (Slovo 2000, chapter 28)
problematic the act of witnessing in the play and runs the risk of objectifying the suffering as spectacle for audience consumption. Libin in his analysis of the same incident has shown how the demonstration of the torture served the Commission’s primary purpose for the victim: to create a witness in the face of the Other in “a search for significance, a desire to establish a relationship that will free the victim from trauma” (2003: 129):

Yevgeni’s request for re-enactment seems predicated upon a desire to scrutinize Benzein’s face as the policeman transforms from amnesty claimant to torturer. Yevgeni resituates himself within the appalling scene and consequently unmask himself: he can now observe Benzein, and Benzein, in turn, is confronted with the previously hidden face of his victim. Thus both Benzein and Yevgeni encounter the unconcealed and unflinching face of his Other” (ibid. 128).

In Molora, as the victim willingly positions herself in the place of the tortured, she becomes the object of torture for a second time but also of the object of the audience’s gaze. As in the case of the testimonies, the absence of any real conflict, the absence of this moment of facing the other that has a disturbing and healing power, transfers the responsibility of witnessing to the audience. This raises the problem that Libin (2003) has accurately posed: in cases where testimony is conditioned by otherness, who can be an authentic listener? Can a member of the dominant group have a respectful and productive response to the other’s trauma? The problem becomes even more

131 Libin follows a different spelling of the names than Krog.
sensitive in the case of the re-enactment of tortures where the line between voyeurism and authentic response is very thin no matter who the audience is. On the one hand it is questionable whether a paying audience, comprised in the case of Molora of predominantly white, middle class members and, even more, of the international community of theatre-goers, in the context of a mainstream theatre or an international festival, can become, in the two hours that the show lasts, authentic listeners. On the other hand, otherness conditions how the audience sees. Basing their analysis on R. Young’s assertion that “it is impossible for a western audience to ‘read’ the ‘raced’ body, without using the classification system that is deeply imbedded in western discourse” (2004: 113), Holledge and Tompkins have argued that even in performance, it is a common activity of all dominant groups to engage, “by means of recognition and labelling (...) in the policing and patrolling of the boundaries that separate the self and its other” (2000: 119). The spectacle therefore of a black body being tortured by a white oppressor will only reaffirm the stereotypes about black victimhood, perpetually “locking” the black body into the role of the sufferer.

In fact, Molora’s depiction of the torture and subsequent change to the "scenario" of the actual event makes this a typical case of a TRC story being partially replicated and adjusted to fit the purposes of the discourse that appropriates it. In this case the purpose is to idealize the victim and invest it with Christ-like qualities and a redemptive power:

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132 Y. Hutchinson (2005) discusses the frustration caused to victims who testified their stories only to see them partially reproduced by the media and, having been altered, superimposed upon them.
having endured tortures equal to those of Christ, the victims "become a sacrifice which redeems humanity" (Lattas 1990: 59). While for the Judeao-Christian concept of justice suffering is a means for the sinner to re-enter the communion of people before God, in this particular concept the sinner is punished with guilt: “ [the victims’] blood is the means of establishing a consciousness of sin" (Lattas 1990: 59) within the dominant population. Lattas concludes that "this redemptive mission can only operate through a patronising gesture which constructs the other as full of a significance which we lack" (ibid. 61).

**Primordiality and the mythical space of the nation**

The deconstruction of the political context in favour of psychological and emotional interpretations constructs the public space as merely an extension of the private space and the perpetrator/victim, mother/daughter relationships become reflections of one another domesticating the political relationship. The space of the rural community on the other hand has its own codes and characteristics and is created with a distinct performance vocabulary. The stage symbolism, realism and psychological acting that dominated the representation of the domestic space and the space of the hearings are in this case replaced by traditional Xhosa songs, dance and music and ritual re-enactments in indigenous languages. Against the suffocating space of the house characterized by violence, oppression, isolation and moral decay, the play constructs an open rural space characterized by freedom, protection, collectiveness and wisdom.
Elektra hands the baby Orestes to the “women of [their] tribe” who assume the role of mother and raise him until he becomes a man. He grows up “in the mountains” and we see him for the first time on the day of his initiation ritual: he is “wrapped, and with his face shrouded, in the striking white and red initiate’s blanket, holding a stick over his shoulder” (Farber 2008: 49). The women, seated around him in a circle offer him “the traditional words of wisdom” (ibid) in Xhosa with which they send him back to his fatherland:

Now that you are a man- go and take care
Of your sister.
Go and do manly things (ibid.)

(…)

Orestes stands and drops his blanket to reveal his powerful, muscular physique
(…) He takes up his new blanket and begins the slow, graceful “Dance of the Bull”. The women of the Chorus ululate. (…) Orestes walks the perimeter of the performance platform. He has begun the journey of return to his ancestral home
(ibid. 50)

Unlike Elektra, who is powerless and isolated, and unlike Klytemnestra, who is a victim of circumstances and of Aegisthus, the community has complete freedom of decision and, although they do not act directly but mainly through Orestes, they have the authority to enforce their will upon all. Their decisions radically change the power
dynamics between the characters: it is they who demand the killing of Ayesthus, it is they who warn Orestes to stop the cycle of violence, it is they who stop Elektra from killing her mother in the end.

Such division between the domestic space constructed as urban by means of language, costume and behaviour and associated with oppression and the rural space which is associated with freedom, is not without ideological implications. The conflict between urban and rural space and culture has been central in the formation of postcolonial identities. Holledge and Tompkins argue that personal subjectivity in post-colonial contexts is shaped in an interim space between ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’: “postcolonial identities are largely determined by a spatial conflict between an imagined ancestral homeland to which they wish to return physically or mentally, and the contemporary culture in which they now reside” (2000: 98).

From this conflict, a “third”, “in-between” space emerges that allows the post-colonial subjects to elaborate “strategies of selfhood -- singular or communal -- that initiate new signs of identity” (Bhabha 2004: 1). The subject emerges as hybrid, between fixed identifications and defying concepts of homogeneity, historical and cultural “purity” and “authenticity”. The reconfiguration of identity calls for “redefinitions of concepts of homogeneous national cultures, transmission of historical traditions, “organic” ethnic communities” (ibid. 3). Instead, “social differences are not experienced through an already authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of
community envisaged as a project” (ibid.).

For South Africa in particular the tension between rural and urban space was of great significance for the shaping of identities but also for the formation of collective consciousness and action. Far from a romantic view of the “African roots” the rural space was associated with tribalism, isolation and backwardness as well as a more rigid form of oppression by the Afrikaner minority. Urbanization on the other hand was associated with modernity and the construction of new hybrid identities and new cultural forms of resistance and South Africans actually fought for their urban status as a way towards emancipation (Coplan 1985). Coplan has shown how South African culture and identity has been significantly shaped by this tension between the rural and the urban and the process of adaptability to the urban environment leading to highly syncretic forms of cultural expression.

Contrary to this syncretic experience Molora creates a stark contrast between a communal space of spirituality and a domestic space of moral decay. The community is depicted as possessing a primordial wisdom and clairvoyance which invests it with almost metaphysical powers. Their ritualistic behaviour is pervasive: upon Orestes’ arrival in the house, Elektra abandons her Christian arguments about forgiveness and revenge and joins her brother in performing an extensive ritual of calling the spirits of the ancestors. Fear and threat now become tangible in the house in the form of elusive sounds.

\[133\] Kavanagh (1985) has elaborated on the differences between urban British hegemony and rural Afrikaner rule which operated in a more direct and oppressive manner.
and movements which the two women try to ritualistically invoke or exorcize. As she prepares for revenge, towards the end of the play,

_Elektra moves to the uniform of Ayesthus. She removes it from its hook, throws it to the ground and spits on it. Klytemnestra starts awake. Elektra disappears behind the table. (…). Elektra hangs a large dead snake behind Klytemnestra and slips back beneath the table. Klytemnestra turns to see the snake and screams._

_The Chorus Woman intensifies the rhythmic movement of her feet. IGUBU (the Traditional Drum) assumes the quickening of the rhythm, like a heartbeat that is racing. Klytemnestra lights Mphepho (herb that is burnt when communicating with the Ancestors). She smothers the dead animal in the smoke-in an attempt to neutralise the curse that has been put on her House._ (Farber 2008: 74)

While the chorus’ role as citizens is non-existent, as their silent, largely decorative presence in the hearing hall indicates, as members of the community they are omnipresent and intervene at crucial points in the story in a manner that makes their presence mystical and nearly god-like: After Orestes has killed Ayesthus

_One of the women of the chorus who raised him appears to him. He is unsure if she is real or a vision. He drops to his knees stunned._

_Ma Nosomething: My child! Why do you kill? (…) What you have done is terrible. Never kill again._

_Orestes reaches for her but she is gone._ (Farber 2008: 76)
According to Lattas, the insistence on ascribing primordiality and spirituality to the indigenous people serves to invest them with a symbolic importance: “[T]hey are expected to provide a common sacred space capable of overcoming the potential ethnic (...) divisions [and] to reclaim the identity of the nation. This is a process of reconstituting national origins, of creating a new mythic space for the nation to live in” (1990: 60). Following Lattas' analysis, Holledge and Tompkins observe the "spatial irony" created by the idealization of the rural space: while the inner existential void "is believed to lie beneath the 'tinsel town' of the urban culture (...) the emptiness of terra nullius that justified colonial annexation is reconfigured as a spiritual fullness" (2000: 74). The idealization of the primordial becomes possible precisely by its marginalization, its supposed abstinence from the rationality and materiality of life. It is connected with nature rather than culture and thus is perceived as expressing eternal truths and values. Lattas concludes that

this ideology positions itself as non-racist because it values the primitive while denouncing the spiritual poverty of western society. However, the effect of this ideology is simply to imprison [the indigenous] within a binary opposition where they become the system of meaning which white society has lost (1990: 61).

In this context communal and individual identities in Molora are not "envisioned as a project" but constructed in essentialist and exclusionary terms as unproblematically identical with themselves (Young 1995): they are shaped exclusively in relation to the
mythical ancestral community as either belonging to it, or being alienated from it: Orestes is entirely defined by it to the extent that, unlike the Orestes of Aeschylus, he has no freedom of agency at all. He is raised by the tribal women, sent by them to avenge, his mind changed by them and in the very end stopped by them before the action. Elektra, caught as she is between two spaces, is shaped by the memory of an ancestral fatherland which is mediated by that community, as the unleashing of her ritual and mystical behaviour after Orestes’ arrival signifies. Conversely Klytemnestra's identity is constructed as alienated by the community, her children included. She is the one who through her acts of violence has set herself apart and now longs to be reunited. Klytemnestra is in every sense a foreigner, a racial, cultural and ethical outsider.

The emphasis on Klytemnestra's foreignness not only serves to invest the community with a metaphysical significance, as described by Lattas (1990), but also results in shifting the focus once again (as shown earlier with the use of testimony) to the perpetrator with the victims acting as a magnifying glass for her guilt. I already discussed in the previous chapter that Orestes' foreignness in Libation Bearers is crucial in constructing the process of him growing into a fully conscious agent and developing his own reasons for wanting revenge. As he is the tragedy's primary agent the play gradually constructs and emphasizes all those aspects that lead to and justify action. In Molora it is the exact opposite: Orestes does not simply belong to the community but he is an instrument of that community with no individual will whatsoever. In a reversal of the
tragic focus it is Klytemnestra who "returns", not physically, but spiritually, much like the
lost sheep of the Christian parable, it is she who grows into a conscious repentant, ready
to be incorporated in a community unproblematically imagined as harmonious,
homogeneous and unified.

Such construction of the characters' identities along the lines of
identification/alienation with an imagined, idealized community, is not without
repercussions at the level of stage representation which ends up to what Holledge and
Tompkins (2000) term a "taxonomic approach" towards identities and cultures,
characteristic of certain strands of intercultural theatre practice. The play uses a
multiplicity of cultural and historical signifiers but empties them of content and function:
the testifying setting and the reenactment of TRC incidents fail to replicate or at least
point to the significance of the act of witnessing; the tribal chorus, who we are repeatedly
told in the play's publication and criticism are "real" Xhosa singers, not actors, are
excluded from action and interaction in the play; the reenactment of rituals is devoid of
their function as stages of transition, thus we see Orestes' initiation but as far as his
agency is concerned he does not grow into a conscious agent. All these devices then are
planted into the play as markers of authenticity and "South African-ness" especially
directed to Western, non South African audiences, rather than explored in their cultural
and historical context and significance. In addition, the aesthetic "homophony" between
the characters’ identities and their on stage representation, which “reduces the body of the
performer and the performing body” to a single cultural paradigm (Holledge and Tompkins 2000: 119) results in what the writers describe as a “fear of conflict” (ibid. 114) between two cultural categories: indigenous cultural elements are placed alongside western performance styles within the larger political context only to imply the otherness of the indigenous.  

Thus, although set in the context of a transitory society in which identities were, and still are, being reconfigured at multiple levels (cultural, religious, economic, geographical) identities are presented, in the play, undialectically and unproblematically "pure". In this manner the ‘other’, the unfamiliar, is easily rendered familiar by means of stereotypical representations and is assimilated into the nationalist discourse. Simultaneously, the basis of this discourse remains rooted in alienation: the ‘other’ is acknowledged and celebrated as ‘different’ yet remains confined within the boundaries of its own culture, while the material and ideological basis of difference remain unaddressed.

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134 “The skills of the performers, their command of aesthetic conventions and their physical idiolects all merge and are read as symptomatic of a generalised racial or cultural category” (Holledge and Tompkins 2000: 119)
4. Sabata Sesiu: **Giants** (an adaptation of Sophocles’ *Antigone*)

4.1. Negotiating political agency in *Antigone* and *Giants*

*Giants*, an adaptation of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, was written in 2000 by South African playwright, actor and director Sabata Sesiu. The play won the 2nd Nooupourt Farm Reward for Playwrights competition in Cape Town and was subsequently performed in 2001 at the Artscape Theatre under the direction of Warrick Grier. Of all three adaptations discussed here, *Giants* is the one that least deconstructs the tragic form. Setting the play in a rural African context Sabata does not use the Sophoclean text as such but maintains the linearity of the plot, its progression from conflict to resolution and the magnitude of the characters’ status and focuses on the original tragedy’s main conflict: that between the king (Makhanda) as representative of civic power, and the young woman (Nontombi) who takes it upon herself to honour, at the expense of her life, the ancestral traditions that dictate her brother’s burial.

More emphatically than *Medea* or *Molora Giants* engages with the problems of African postcoloniality as they emerged throughout the continent after liberation and as they are now faced by South Africa in particular: the tension between tradition and

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135 Information on Sabata Sesiu and his work is scarce. In addition to being an active theatre practitioner with a long involvement in community and educational theatre he is also Theatre professor at the University of Cape Town.

136 Reviews of the performance are extremely limited and there is very scarce information on audience reception. It seems however that the play was not satisfactorily attended (see for example http://www.oulitnet.co.za/senet/senet.asp?id=4265). Unlike *Medea* and *Molora* where the playwrights also directed the plays’ performances, in the case of the *Giants* playwright and director are different. Therefore in my analysis I will only engage with Sabata’s text and not with the subsequent director’s interpretation.
modernity, customary and civic law are examined under the overarching question on the nature and form of leadership in post- and neo-colonial Africa. Despite the play’s Panafricanist and universalist claims\(^{137}\) - it is set “regardless of period” (Sabata 2000) in a setting that could be “anywhere in Africa. It does not matter whether it is the north, south, west, east or central Africa… Anywhere in the world” (ibid.) and although it refuses to explicitly engage with colonialism or apartheid, we cannot ignore the fact that the play is written post-apartheid and that it explores issues of power and law, which make it directly relevant to the contradictions of the process of nation building that South Africa, following all post-independence African societies, must face.\(^{138}\) Furthermore, its rural setting implies that part of the contradictions in the process of nation building lie in the tension between customary and civic law, subjecthood and citizenship as sites of contrasting political traditions and practices that the nation building process must inevitably address if democracy is to be achieved (Mamdani 1996).\(^{139}\) The play’s

\(^{137}\) In a press release Sabata is quoted as saying Giants as a play “is meant to be (...) a legend that surpasses race, gender and national stereotypes. It is not Greek, nor African, but human.”

\(^{138}\) All the quotations from the Giants come from an unpublished manuscript of the play, which has no page numbers.

\(^{139}\) Mamdani (1996) observes that in post-independence African societies there is a gap between urban centres where civic laws apply and rural communities that after independence are still largely under the influence of customary law. The result is that the population of the former identify and are treated as citizens while the latter as subjects. Mamdani argues that it is the challenge of post-independence societies, to achieve a harmonization between the two: “In the African continent, where a key institutional legacy of the colonial period is the bifurcated state, a successful democratic reform needs to straddle both spheres. A successful political reform of the bifurcated state needs to be simultaneously rural and urban, local and central” (1996: 217). With particular reference to post-apartheid South Africa he writes: “Deracialization meant that the social boundary between modern and customary justice was modified: the former was in theory open to all, not just to nonnatives; the latter governed the lives of all those natives for whom modern law was beyond reach. Although independence deracialized the state, it did not democratize it. Although it
panafricanist perspective serves in fact to broaden the scope of the present analysis beyond South African borders, as it situates South Africa within post-colonial Africa -- a position that due to the country’s history and present economic growth has been very often contested. In this sense the discussion of issues of leadership, agency and identity in the African postcolony that will prevail in these two chapters must be understood as echoing the present condition of South African postcoloniality.

The choice of the tragic form, a topic to which I will return in the next chapter, further emphasizes the play’s postcolonial agenda: in his reworking of the Antigone myth Sabata follows in the long tradition of African tragedy as theorized and practiced by dramatists like Soyinka, Osofisan and others and which emerged in response to the debates about African identity and culture after liberation. In this context, as I will show in the next chapter, Sabata explores the possibilities of the materialist and metaphysical discourses on African tragedy in order to raise issues of governance, identity formation and agency as well as cultural expressivity in a post-independence, post- and neo-colonial setting.

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140 Alexander (2006) for example analyzes how Mbeki’s “pro-continent” ideology of “African Renaissance” which promoted liberal economic policies across the continent securing a leadership role for South Africa, enhanced national unity “among both whites and blacks within the business and political elites” (2006: 42) but also “may have contributed to a popular discourse that treats ‘Africa’ as excluding South Africa” (ibid.) On the other hand he views an “Africanist” aspect in this ideology which “argues for building on specifically African traditions, history and culture (…). In this form African Renaissance is linked with a move to define national identity as something associated with black Africanness which (…) could give a boost to Africans who, in general, remain more socially marginal” (ibid.). On the same subject of the relations between South Africa and the rest of the continent also see Deder (2005 particularly p. 13-15).
In this chapter I want to argue that, in restaging the main conflict of *Antigone*, the play departs from dominant Western and postcolonial interpretations of the tragedy that render the Creon-Antigone confrontation in strictly binary terms and like the Sophoclean tragedy attempts a more dialectical reading focusing on an examination of the limits of power and law-making authority and viewing the imperatives of non-civic institutions, such as family and religion, as essential in limiting and checking on the autonomy of civic power. *Giants* then is not straightforwardly concerned with condemning a tyrannical rule and celebrating opposition but with the process of the ongoing dialogue between two areas of human experience, the civic and the traditional, that have cultural, ethical and political implications, a dialogue that is not finished with the end of colonialism.

In what follows I want to examine the relationship of *Giants* to *Antigone* through the prism of the Sophoclean tragedy’s transmission in a postcolonial context. In doing so my intention will be to argue against the binary interpretation of the play that has prevailed in Western and postcolonial criticism in order to prepare the ground for the analysis of the more nuanced types of resistance represented in *Giants* and already present in *Antigone*. My overall argument in this and the following chapter is to show how in the *Giants* such nuanced representations, which are predominantly though not exclusively related with gender, begin as modes by which the postcolonial subjects negotiate agency and resistance to power to end up as metaphors at the service of highlighting an anxiety with the crisis of masculinity and patriarchal authority in an
African postcolonial setting. The examination of this process will take into account the ways the play is positioned within the African discourse on tragedy as it attempts to synthesize elements from both the materialist and the metaphysical strands of African tragic theory.

**Transmission of the text and Antigone as a model of resistance.**

*Antigone* is one of the most widely adapted Greek tragedies in contemporary theatre, from Japan to the US and from Germany to South Africa. The reasons for this popularity have been the focus of numerous analyses but can be summarized in G. Steiner’s argument that the play “dramatize[s] clashes of private conscience and public welfare of a nature and seriousness inseparable from the historical, social condition of man” (1984: 5). Both in the West and the postcolonial world the play has been adapted to address the theme of opposition to an oppressive state: Brecht and Anouilh’s *Antigones* are set in the context of Nazi occupation in Germany and France; Fugard’s *The Island* in apartheid South Africa; Osofisan’s *Tegonni* and Brathwaite’s *Odale’s choice* adapt the play in the context of the colonial occupation in Nigeria and Ghana; and Grizelda Gambaro’s *Antigona Furiosa* in the context of the Argentinean “Dirty War”.

Criticism of the play’s adaptations in the West seems to be dominated by the constancy (…) of the Creon- Antigone confrontation and dialectic in their political, moral, legal, sociological ramifications. Named or implicit, the two figures and the mortal argument between them initiate, exemplify, and polarize
primary elements in the discourse on man and society as it has been conducted in the West (Steiner 1984: 108).

Criticism of postcolonial African adaptations tends to interpret the works as presenting a model of heroic resistance to colonialism with Antigone representing the colonized, “talking back” to the oppressive state\textsuperscript{141} thus situating the plays in the corpus of counter-discursive literature.\textsuperscript{142} K. Wetmore Jr. for instance seems to be endorsing this view in his analysis of African adaptations of the play when he writes that the popularity of the play in postcolonial contexts can be attributed to the fact that “Antigone demonstrates the disenfranchised speaking out against the powerful whose interest is the preservation of power, not necessarily doing what is right or just” (2002: 170-1).

Although this perspective is certainly central to the interpretation of the play and its adaptations, the theme of resistance to power should not be unproblematically endorsed nor should Antigone be easily perceived as a heroic symbol of resistance.\textsuperscript{143} As both Sourvinou-Inwood (1989) and Helene Foley (1995, 2001) have argued, albeit from

\textsuperscript{141} Critics like Goff and Simpson (2007) or Holledge and Tompkins (2000) attempt more nuanced readings offering cultural and gender-sensitive approaches. In their overview of the adaptations of Sophocles’ Theban plays Goff and Simpson argue for a paradigmatic shift from reworkings of Oedipus to those of Antigone that suggests among other things, a shift in methods and theories of cultural transmission. Their argument is too complex to be summarized here. See Introduction from \textit{Crossroads in the Black Aegean} (2007).

\textsuperscript{142} It is on this basis that Harry Garuba (2001) examines the reasons why \textit{The Island}, among all other African adaptations of the play has received the most extensive criticism and visibility: because, in his view, it satisfies this Eurocentric view of the relations between colonized-colonizer in binary terms. For a response to Garuba’s argument see Wumi Raji (2005).

\textsuperscript{143} As Winnington- Ingram writes “among the antitheses of the play a simple contrast between villainy on the one hand, sweetness and light on the other, finds no place” (1980: 128). See also Griffith (1999). Indeed scholars of Classics are divided in their interpretation of Antigone as a citizen between those who view her as ignoring the city and those who view her as the ‘ideal citizen’.
different perspectives, although Antigone’s act is endowed with heroism and moral superiority it can not be unproblematically taken as a timeless, universal example of resistance to oppression. Sourvinou-Inwood (1989) for example argues that such an interpretation is based on cultural assumptions that have been superimposed on the text and are largely based on an assessment of the play with a prior knowledge of its ending (Creon’s destruction). Placing the text in its cultural environment she argues that the Athenian audience of the time would side with Creon and consider Antigone a “bad woman”, acting beyond the boundaries of her social role as a woman but functioning as an instrument of the gods to punish Creon for his hubris, an interpretation that does not seem to hold much validity (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 117).144 Foley, although she refutes Sourvinou-Inwood’s main argument, agrees that Antigone’s “heroic action cannot serve in any simple sense as a timeless, gender-free model for civil disobedience” (1995: 182). Similarly Goff, in her analysis of Osofisan’s Tegonni discusses the same issue from a postcolonial perspective and argues that the fact that the figure of Creon has taken many interpretations not only as a white colonizer but also as a home-grown African tyrant (…) makes it difficult to recuperate [Antigone] simply as a figure for African resistance: since she is part and parcel of the cultural equipment that the colonizers drew on to explain the success of their inroads into other cultures, she presumably only comes to Africa by way of colonial Europe. The discourse of resistance that

144 For a response to Sourvinou-Inwood’s argument see Foley (1995).
Antigone typically generates must here be related to, perhaps even descended from, the power structures of colonialism that undermine resistance (2007: 41).

The long, unanswered debate as to who of the two is the drama’s tragic hero, Antigone or Creon, points to the fact that emphasizing binary interpretations of the play that favour Antigone as the heroic representative of eternal ancestral laws against political injustice is limiting the possibilities of the text. Instead, as Griffith (1999) has argued, what seems to be Sophocles’ concern is not each of the heroes in themselves but their conflict and its nature. From that perspective the clash between traditional and civic laws embodied through Creon and Antigone must be read, similarly to the case of the Oresteia, with a double perspective: on the individual level it is shaped by the heroes’ roles as “statesman” and as “virgin daughter” and the ways they negotiate their agency from within the exigencies of these roles (Foley 2001). On the social level it is a rite of passage by which democracy tests itself and examines its limitations and dangers. As Zeitlin (1990) has argued Thebes is a surrogate for the democratic city that undergoes its own rite of passage from which the principles of Athenian democracy are salvaged and

145 According to Knox (1964: 67-68) although at first it seems that Creon is the play’s tragic hero, he in fact lacks the Sophoclean heroic temper. Creon’s final concession and defeat, Knox suggests, reveals instead the magnitude of Antigone’s heroic temper and establish her as the true tragic hero of the play. However what interests me here is the characters’ conflict, rather than establishing who of the two is the tragic hero.
146 Knox points to the difference between Aeschylus and Sophocles in their experience, concept and representation of the Athenian democracy. With reference to the Oresteia he writes that “In the democratic institutions of his city, so hardly won and so valiantly defended, Aeschylus saw the prototype of reconciliation of opposites among men and among gods (…). But Sophocles (…) lived in a different age. The political power and material wealth of Athens reached a level which Aeschylus, confident though he was of Athens’ future greatness, could hardly foreseen; but the future became darker through the years. Athenian imperial policy enforced membership in what had started as a league of free cities for the liberation of Greece but was now an empire which even Pericles compared to a tyrannis” (1964: 60).
Martha Nussbaum’s (1986) approach which analyzes the conflict from the perspective of ethics and practical reasoning is fundamental for an understanding of the dialectics of the play both at the social and individual level. Nussbaum dissects the characters’ ethical positioning in order to argue that each character’s absolutism in endorsing their principles, the city for Creon, the family for Antigone, results in a clash of values that is destructive for both. Had the characters been able to negotiate and be flexible catastrophe would have been avoided. Her approach is valuable for the present analysis in that it helps to disengage the figure of Creon from the tradition that easily interprets him as a tyrant and contributes to a richer understanding of his character.

Creon must negotiate between his duty as a statesman who has just taken rule over the city after political turmoil and his duty to bury Polyneikes as the last surviving member of Oedipus’ family. To begin with, his civic principles and the way he expresses them do not resonate as totalitarian and, as far as we are able to tell, the Athenian audience found them reasonable (Winnington –Ingram 1980, Griffith 1999, Sourvinou-Inwood 1989) -- for example we know for a fact that later politicians quoted Creon’s views on the relationship between city, leader and citizens.148 Neither his decision to leave the body without a burial should strike from the beginning as undemocratic for denying

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147 In stressing the close connection between Sophoclean tragedy and Athenian democracy Knox has argued that it is “Athens itself, its heroic energy, its refusal to retreat, to compromise” (1964: 60) that is at the heart of the playwright’s concept of the tragic heroes- heroic, isolated and uncompromised in their decisions.

148 Foley refers for example to “Demosthenes’ approving quotation of parts of Creon’s speech [which] confirms that it conformed with contemporary ideology” (1995: 134).
burial to the city’s traitor was a common practice,\textsuperscript{149} although Creon’s extremity in pronouncing it (“He must be left unburied, his corpse/carrion for the birds and dogs to tear,/an obscenity for citizens to behold!” (229-231)) which reaches the point of relish (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 121) constitutes a transgression of the boundaries between the human and the bestial (Segal 1981) that adds to his downfall.\textsuperscript{150} What is more crucial in understanding Creon’s character is not the decision as such but rather his inability to acknowledge any conflictual duties between city and family. Creon’s entire ethical system and interpretation of moral values is organized in relation to the city and the city’s benefit alone (Nussbaum 1986). Love, friendship, justice, even sexual pleasure Nussbaum argues, are defined only in relation to the city. Thus in politicizing Polyneikes’ burial (Segal 1981: 185) Creon avoids the tension between duty to the city and duty to the family: “city-family conflicts cannot arise if the city is the family, if our only family is the city” (Nussbaum 1986: 57).

His inability to acknowledge conflict extends not only in the way he has constructed a tension-free world for himself but also in the way he perceives other people’s duties, allegiances and affiliations. Foley (2001) and Griffith (1999) have pointed to Creon’s love for generalizations and “universalist” remarks about human types and actions as indicative of Creon’s desire to oversimplify his worldview (“Money! Nothing worse/ in our lives, so current, rampant, so corrupting!” (335-336) “Anarchy-/\textsuperscript{150}Translation by Robert Fagles (1982).

\textsuperscript{149}“Contemporary Attic punishments of traitors involved casting the body outside the city’s borders, throwing them below into pits and gorges, or casting them into the sea” (Foley 1995: 134).

\textsuperscript{150}Translation by Robert Fagles (1982).
show me a greater crime in all the earth! (752-753)). As a result of his desire for an existence free of tension Creon only knows a binary relation to the city: one is either for it or against it. It is this feature of his that makes him, as the play evolves, into a totalitarian type of leader.

The rest of the characters try to teach Creon that he must be flexible, he must learn to yield and that negotiation does not mean loss and disagreement does not mean rejection -- *Antigone*, is “a play about teaching and learning, about changing one’s vision of the world” (Nussbaum 1986: 52).

Haemon: Now don’t, please,

Be quite so single-minded, self-involved

Or assume the world is wrong and you are right (788-790).

But Creon remains blind to even the most powerful signs around him, like for example the storm that covers the body with dust and that even the chorus, who is sympathetic to Creon, acknowledges as a possible warning from the gods.

It is this lack of flexibility, a refusal to yield that is typical of the Sophoclean hero (Knox 1964) that is Creon’s “error of judgment” and brings his downfall: Creon learns the importance of yielding but only too late. The end of the statesman who becomes “apolis” (Winington-Ingram 1980) (“Take me away, quickly, out of sight. / I don’t even exist- I am no one. Nothing.” (1445-1446)) is a lesson for the exercise of democracy that

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151 On the significance of teaching and learning and the confrontation between a hero unwilling to hear and the people around him who try to teach him see also Knox (1964).
the Athenian audience was often reminded of in theatre and in political discourse: that traditional and civic institutions must constantly check on each other so that none grows beyond legitimacy.\textsuperscript{152} Athenian democracy is reminded, as Creon is by Haemon, that the city’s benefit is not an end in itself but a tool for the happiness of the citizens (Nussbaum 1986) otherwise the ruler, as Haemon points to his father, will end up ruling in the desert.

After arguing that there is an inherent dynamic in the character of Creon, who progresses from being a legitimate leader, to authoritarianism, to learning, corresponding to the dynamic character of democracy, I want to turn my focus on the character of Antigone in order to suggest that she too must be seen as a dynamic character and not an unchanging symbol of resistance in the way she articulates agency from within the confines of her role as a woman.\textsuperscript{153}

Antigone too has difficulty in acknowledging conflict between city and family and organizes her worldview in absolutist terms where duty to the family is superior to any other duty -- “if one listened only to Antigone, one would not know that a war had taken place or that anything called ‘city’ was ever in danger” (Nussbaum 1986: 64). Similarly to Creon she distinguishes between friends and enemies according to whether or not they serve the family’s benefit:

\begin{quote}
Ismene: You’re wrong from the start,
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{footnotes}
\item[152] In her analysis of the city-family conflict in Antigone, Foley (1995) makes this point when she writes that “Attic law and ideology seem to insist that adequate leadership rests on having familial ties” (139) and provides examples of public speeches where the adequacy of politicians to rule the city was judged on the basis of whether they had children and how well they raised them (1995: 139).
\item[153] There is a very clear analogy between the character of Creon and the Athenian democracy which, as Knox (1964) reminds us, had grown from a democracy to a “tyrant city” towards its allies.
\end{footnotes}
\end{footnotesize}
You’re off on a hopeless quest

Antigone: If you say so, you will make me hate you,

And the hatred of the dead, by all rights,

Will haunt you night and day (107-111).

That Sophocles does not intend to present Antigone’s action as a heroic model of resistance is indicated not only by the chorus’ lack of sympathy for her and the overall isolation of her action (Griffith 1999, Knox 1964, Winnington-Ingram 1980, Sourvinou-Inwood 1989) but also by her final punishment: despite her honouring of the gods, her civic disobedience is not to be rewarded and the gods will not save her. In the familial values that Antigone represents Sophocles sees the counterbalancing of Creon’s civic principles but in her punishment he warns against the potential overpowering of the few aristocratic families that may threaten the principles of democracy: 154

While the play certainly asserts the inviolable claims of kinship and points up the oppressive potential of civic authority in the wrong hands, it does so in such a way as to remind us of the inherent dangers posed to the stability of the polis by its leading dynastic families. If ‘family’ is the solution, it is also the problem (Griffith 1999: 49).

154 This is why Knox interprets Antigone’s devotion to the family as a political and not only religious act: “This loyalty of hers [to the family] is in fact a political loyalty not only because the particular circumstances force her to choose between family and polis but also because historically the strong, indissoluble tie of blood relationship had in earlier times […] been the dominating factor in the citizen’s social and political environment. It was much older than the polis and in democratic Athens still showed on every side signs of its continued power as a rival and even a potential danger to the newer civil institutions and forms of organization” (1964: 76).
The heroic representation of Antigone, a remnant of the Romanticism (Steiner 1984) that has prevailed over the play’s modern interpretations, is founded on what is with no question a “moral superiority” of her character:

Antigone’s actual choice is preferable to Creon’s. The dishonour to civic values involved in giving pious burial to an enemy’s corpse is far less radical than the violation of religion involved in Creon’s act. (…) Furthermore, Antigone’s pursuit of virtues is her own. It involves nobody else and commits her to abusing no other person. (…) Finally Antigone remains ready to risk and to sacrifice her ends in a way that is not possible for Creon…There is a complexity in Antigone’s virtue that permits genuine sacrifice within the defense of piety. (Nussbaum 1986: 66).

Nussbaum concludes that Antigone demonstrates a “vulnerability in virtue [which] contributes to making her the more humanly rational and the richer of the two protagonists: both active and receptive, neither exploiter nor simply victim” (1986: 67).

In understanding such complexity in Antigone’s character we must examine her action, following Foley (2001), in the context of her gender role and the ways she transgresses the social expectations emanating from this role. As a young virgin Antigone would be expected to marry and have children and continue the family line (Foley 2001, Griffith 1999, Sourvinou-Inwood 1989). Her duty towards her dead brother, on the other hand, is culturally obscure: there is no question that the funeral was an obligation of the
males, and in this case the only remaining male relative is Creon, yet it is unclear who must undertake this responsibility when there are no blood male relatives left. It is from this position, of the only blood relative left to Polyneikes, that Antigone decides to act.

In defending her action Antigone does not argue for an unquestionable challenge to power but is able to particularize, as Foley (2001) has argued, in the process of defining specific conditions under which she must act autonomously as a woman. Against Creon’s tendency to generalize Antigone appears to us as able to define her action as the product of specific circumstances that require of her to abandon her traditional female role and assume a transgressive, public role. Foley has observed how in all of her scenes Antigone “adopts a range of styles, each suited to different private or public context and to her interlocutor, to convey a consistent position that repeatedly insists on giving equal right to concerns of justice and familial responsibility” (2001: 182). This attitude she maintains even when she confronts Creon, in a monologue that has been contested as to its authenticity because it seems to compromise her heroism but is very characteristic for the purposes of this analysis in illustrating that her action is the product of a very conscious choice under very specific circumstances:155

Never, I tell you,

If I had been the mother of children

Or if my husband died, exposed and rotting-

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155 Knox observes that at this point Antigone “makes her last long speech not in lyrical song but in spoken iambics, the medium of reflection, discussion, analysis. She tries to reason out her own motives, to clarify for herself, now that the consequences are irrevocable, the motive and nature for her action. The reasoning is certainly ‘autonomous’ and ‘self-conceived’ but it contains not the slightest hint of surrender” (1964: 67)
I’d never have taken this ordeal upon myself,  
Never defied our people’s will. What law,  
You ask, do I satisfy with what I say?  
A husband dead, there might have been another.  
A child by another too, if I had lost the first.  
But mother and father both lost in the halls of Death,  
No brother could ever spring to light again (995-1004).

In arguing for the conditions that led her to break the law, Antigone attempts for the first time to negotiate between her duties as a citizen and her duties as a female relative in the same way that, in the same scene, she appears to negotiate between her duty as a devoted sister to the dead and her role as a woman: as she is taken to her tomb Antigone for the first time realizes and laments for the loss of a normal life as a woman which she consciously sacrificed for her familial duty:

Look at me (….)

Looking into the last light of day  
The last I’ll ever see..  
The god of death who puts us all to bed  
Takes me down to the banks of Acheron alive-  
Denied my part in the wedding-songs,  
No wedding-song in the dusk has crowned my marriage-
I go to wed the lord of the dark waters (900-907).

In concluding her remarks on how Antigone must balance between these roles Foley writes that

If Antigone has difficulty communicating with her audiences persuasively both inside and outside the play, it may be because there is no ready traditional vocabulary or recognized procedure for a female moral agent in classical Athens, or it may be because Antigone’s situation requires her to abandon a set of traditional female obligations (to marry and to obey her guardian) to pursue another (183).

This final observation on the character of Antigone will be crucial for understanding the role of women in *Giants* in how they negotiate their agency in the context of Makhanda’s patriarchal rule, a point to which I will return in the next chapter. In the pages that follow I want to focus on how Antigone’s negotiation and contextualization of her action is reinterpreted in *Giants* in the form of a diffusion of the Antigone character among all the play’s characters. In doing so the play attempts to render the tragedy in materialist terms as a struggle among social forces.

*Giants.*

Sabata structures his play around the same conflict and with the same succession of events as in *Antigone*: King Makhanda forbids the burial of Sizwe who has come to fight against him. When she finds out Nontombi decides to bury her brother in order to
respect the ancestral laws. Together with her sister Wanjiru who supported but did not take part in the burial Nontombi is captured and tortured in order to denounce the act. Makhanda’s wife Nozizwe and his son Asante intervene to save Nontombi’s life but unsuccessfully: Makhanda sentences her to death. At the end of the play and after the intervention of Shango, the sangoma, clairvoyant and chorus leader, Makhanda realizes his mistake but only too late: he goes to Nontombi’s prison cell to find her dead, his son commits suicide in front of him and he receives the news of his wife’s suicide.

There are two important interventions to the Sophoclean tragedy: firstly, Sabata presents Makhanda as an authoritarian African leader whose rule is from the beginning of the play illegitimate; secondly he makes all his characters more directly complicit in Nontombi’s action diffusing resistance among all of them. These interventions must be explained under the light, on the one hand, of postcolonial issues of leadership and agency and, on the other hand, the characteristics of materialist tragedy which emerged in the African cultural discourse to address those political issues from a culturalist perspective.156

The play attempts a panafricanist and universalist critique of imperialism (Stratton 1995) by introducing Makhanda as “the imperialist, the conservative, the rightist, the fascist, the terror” (Sabata 2000), words that instantly make him an emblem of contemporary unjust rule worldwide. Makhanda and Creon have many similar characteristics: both conflate their authority as males with that of the political leader (a

156 For a detailed discussion of the discourses on metaphysical and materialist tragedy see next chapter.
point to which I will return in the next chapter) and interpret the woman’s action as doubly transgressive not only to their civic but also to their gender roles; Makhanda too conflates (albeit in a different way than Creon as I will show) the *oikos* with the *polis* viewing the city as an extension to the household and therefore his property to rule in any way he sees fit; even in his language Makhanda, like Creon, has a preference for the use of proverbs and generalized, simple, “universal” truths—characteristic of many contemporary totalitarian leaders (Griffith 1999).

The first crucial difference between *Giants* and *Antigone* is that the former’s concern is not to show how the ruler risks becoming authoritarian, as in the case of Creon, but how he already is authoritarian and needs to change. There is then a shift in the focus of tragedy from teaching and learning to listening and changing which, I argue, changes the quality of the tragic characters: following in the tradition of materialist tragedy where “protagonist and antagonist forces are not agents who carry an ineluctable ‘tragic flaw’ which destroys them [but] individuals who carry the concrete goals and aspirations of social groups, forces or classes” (Jeyifo 1985: 26), Makhanda as the central tragic should be understood as an historical subject in the midst of social changes which he is unable to perceive.

I want to begin by establishing that in the persona of Makhanda the play illustrates a very problematic and inefficient type of leadership that of the “Big Man rule” (Hyden 2006), a product of colonial appropriation of precolonial forms of leadership
(Mamdani 1996) very common in the African postcolony. The central characteristic of the Big Man rule is the crisis in legitimacy as a result of the ways the colonial system stripped traditional forms of leadership of their modes of securing accountability (Mamdani 1996). The result was the emergence of the rule of what came to be local tyrants whose governance lacks both “a contract between the rulers and the ruled” (Quayson 2003: 47) characteristic of civic societies, as well as “the specific nature of reciprocal obligations immanent in the indigenous sphere” (ibid. 48).

The absence of a social contract is replaced by relationships of clientelism and the invocation of “a sense of organic relation between the leader and led” (ibid. 47). The relations of dependency are sustained by the infusion of terror among the population, nurtured by “a proliferation of binarisms, such as those of good versus evil, us versus them, dissent against the state versus support for the state, with the governed being invited to take sides” (ibid. 50). This strategy of “present[ing] stark choices to the citizenry as a means of enforcing allegiance” (ibid) is often imposed through violence which in fact eliminates the possibility of choice.

The result is the collapsing of separation between the private and the public spheres. For the leader this translates to an instrumentalist view of the state which he perceives as his possession: “the country is the ruler’s estate and the state apparatus is ultimately to use at his own discretion” (Hyden 2006: 99). Not only the ruler is not bound by law but in fact he is “able to change its authority and power to suit [his] own personal
needs or preferences (...). Political leaders in Africa have had a very instrumental view of constitutions and formal institutions, treating them seriously only when it has suited them” (ibid. 98).

For the led, the result is “the rupturing of the private by the incoherence of the undemocratic state. (...) The African postcolonial state makes itself existentially “unforgettable”, invading all spheres of social existence to the degree of rendering itself a constant horizon for the interpretation of sociocultural phenomena” (Quayson 2003: 48). Self determination and praxis in the private sphere is not possible but in the light of the social images that the state has produced for its citizens, an element which will be very important in my discussion of how women in the play negotiate agency.157 Overall then the postcolonial state under the Big Man is, to recall Creon’s imagery, a ship led in such a way that what matters is remaining afloat rather than going anywhere (Hyden 2006).158

It is under this light that we must understand how Makhanda addresses his people and announces his decision to leave the body of Sizwe, one of the two brothers who came to fight against him, without a burial. The decision, we later hear from his wife, has been taken in an authoritarian and illegitimate manner, as Makhanda has imposed his will upon the other members of the state:

157 This is characteristic of totalitarian regimes. Diane Taylor (1998) for instance discusses how during the Argentinean “dirty war” the state constructed the identity of the “good mother” which was put directly to the service of the state apparatus. Yet this same construct can be manipulated to turn against the state as she shows in the case of the Madres of Plaza de Mayo and as is demonstrated in the case of the female agents in Giants.

158 Nussbaum (1986) shows that Creon’s concept of seamanship is also problematic: his inability to allow conflict and dissent in the name of security results in understanding the city not as a tool for the well being of the citizens but as an end in itself, a governance over inert subjects.
You went to the other heads of state and told them you had a new law

(...)

But you never asked for their advice.

You just told them that you have a new law.

You made up the law and you kept everyone else out of your way (...)

The elders and your countrymen were left with no choice but to obey (...)

Because YOU are the king, the father of the nation and the state!

THEY HAD TO DO WHAT YOU WANTED (Sabata 2000).

Yet when he appears in front of the crowd Makhanda elicits consent by presenting himself as simultaneously the father and the servant of the nation that is organically linked to him in a manner that conflates his three qualities of leader, father and male:

You are my horns... For, a bull without horns cannot keep the kraal very strong...

Like a tongue to saliva, I am bound to you for ever (...) As a father, as a king, I have been called upon to react, to take a stand, to make a decision. Because, a leader that fears to act openly in front if his people, is like a man without balls (Sabata 2000).

The ululating crowd is there not to decide but merely to approve (Mamdani 1996) when he proclaims his verdict for the two dead brothers.

Makhanda: I HAVE SPOKEN

All/Crowd: the king has spoken!
Makhanda has spoken!
The king has spoken!
Makhanda has spoken! (ibid.).

In the pronouncement of his decision Makhanda maintains in their death the binary opposition that divided the two brothers in life, the one at the service of the state, the other one against it. Makhanda goes much further than to simply pronounce that he forbids burial for Sizwe: Sechaba will be buried in royalty, a national day will be named after him, his statue will be sculpted and put in public display; instead, Sizwe's body will be left to rot and not only whoever tries to bury him but even whoever looks at him will be punished with death with no trial. The extremity of his verdict, which reminds of Creon’s relish in shaming Polyneikes, is only a precursor to the extreme physical violence he will use to divide the two sisters and force Wanjiru to denounce Nontombi and her act. The reason his strategy fails is because, as I will discuss in more detail later, the two women are able to acknowledge the state imposed binary and resist it.

Because Makhanda conflates his roles as father, male and king, he interprets Nontombi’s act of disobedience as a personal insult. In his response towards her not only does he remind her of how she is thrice subjected to him, as a citizen to an overpowering state (“the state is like an elephant and you are like an ant” (Sabata 2000)) ; as a woman to the man (“there will never be two bulls in one kraal. One of them must be a cow” (ibid.)) and as youth to the elders (“You are just a calf. A little, little, little calf’ (ibid.))
but he also reduces their conflict to “a battle of wills and wits” (ibid.) where the issue is not to find a political solution but to have a winner. Creon’s refusal to yield to obligations other than the civic translates in the case of Makhanda to a refusal to acknowledge constraint and negotiate in a manner very characteristic of totalitarian rulers:

Personal rule is a system of relations linking rulers not with the citizens but with patrons, clients, supporters, and rivals, who constitute the system. To the extent that personal rulers are constrained, it is the result not of rules or roles but of the power of these other actors to whom they are linked. Games that these political actors play tend to be zero-sum events, in which there is little, if any, room for compromise. In fact a compromise is viewed as a loss, never a win, as is typically the case in institutionalized democracies (Hyden 2006: 98-9).

In defending his political decisions and actions, including Nontombi’s extreme punishment as she is being beaten and raped daily by his men, Makhanda manipulates concepts of power and tradition and employs the state apparatus in order to evade responsibility and accountability. When Nontombi reminds him of the importance of the ancestral custom of burial his response is not only to argue that as an elder he knows tradition better but also to impose his own interpretation of tradition which means respect to his patriarchal authority:

Now I am the one getting a traditional lecture from you! Did your parents teach you to face and challenge a king’s system of governance like this? Did your
parents teach you to exchange words with the king, your father. Did they teach you to answer back when elders speak to you? Did they teach you to talk back when a man speaks? (Sabata 2000).

Similarly when he is reminded that his son will hold him accountable for the suffering of his future wife Makhanda conveniently disassociates the role of the state to the torture from himself. For Creon the conflation between oikos and polis results in that the city is his only family thus eliminating conflict between the two. For Makhanda city and family are extensions of one another, their limits conveniently blurred as he constantly switches between the roles of father and leader conflating or separating them at will in order to avoid accountability:

Makhanda: I am happy that I am free of her (...). My hands are clean. I am happy that the leaders of the nation have taken the responsibility of “looking after her” (...). I do not want to know what is being done to her. I was my hands of her. (...) Nozizwe: What will we say our son when he comes back from the initiation school? What will we have to tell him after all this?

Makhanda: That is for the men to decide.

Nozizwe: What will we tell him as his parents? Your men are not his parents!

(Sabata 2000).

The illegitimacy of Makhanda’s rule that the play highlights changes the nature of Nontombi’s action and the subsequent reactions to it: faced with such a blatantly unjust
power the characters in the play do not have, like the characters in *Antigone*, to negotiate conflictual duties between city and family, civic and customary law. Rather, in their case, customary law is summoned as an altogether alternative form of authority, one that, rooted as it is in the beliefs and practices of generations, is more democratic and legitimate than Makhanda’s rule. In the confrontation between Makhanda and the other characters Sabata emphasizes not the mythical but the sociopolitical background of the action, the methods the tyrant uses to elicit consent, the diverse modes of resistance, the complicated ethical choices implicit in the contestation of his power by the other characters. In so doing he demonstrates the shifts in power relations and the formation of consciousness among his heroes as a response to specific historical circumstances that require action.\textsuperscript{159}

The choice that eventually all characters after Nontombi must face is starkly presented as a choice of a moral nature: whether to comply with injustice or voice their resistance to it. As the chorus puts it

\begin{quote}
[T]here comes a time in life,

to be confronted with the painful truth

to take risks
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{159} According to Marxist tragic theorists like Osofisan or Jeyifo, the ritualistic world of African myth no longer suffices for an understanding of the contemporary world. Instead, the myth needs to be reinvented to address a contemporary consciousness: “The ancient modes of life must dissolve and yield place to an empiric mastery of life and the means of production” (Osofisan 1982: 75). For a discussion of the differences between the metaphysical tragedy’s emphasis on myth as advocated by Soyinka and the criticism of Marxist theorists, see Olaniyan (1995, chapter 3).
And then there comes a time
we have to sacrifice
we have to think of betrayal
we have to think of commitment
we have to forget the principles
that we always thought we owned (Sabata 2000).

Faced with this moral imperative all the play’s characters gradually take sides in support of Nontombi’s action of burying her brother. Unlike Antigone, who acts very much in isolation, here voices and acts of resistance are diffused among all the characters of the play -- even characters who in Sophocles have limited roles, like Ismene (Wanjiru) and Euridice (Nozizwe).

The first agent of resistance is, interestingly, the dead Sizwe. The symbolic function of his body and the significance of his burial must be understood first in the African cultural context where burying and honouring the dead is a duty and a benefit both for the living and the dead. Neglect or denial of burial is considered a punishment for both the dead and the living that will be haunted by the unburied ancestor (Wetmore 2002: 176). Sizwe’s burial must also be considered in the political context of South

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160 In discussing the cultural significance of burial in classical Greece and Africa Wetmore (2002) shows that in both cultures burial rites and the connection between the living and the dead is very important. In Greece the deceased are cut off from the world of the living and for them “a new set of rules” and a “new set of gods” (Wetmore 2002: 174) is in place. The ancestors are crucial for the sense of bond and continuity within family and community and must be remembered and honoured. Yet because they are cut off from the world of the dead, Wetmore concludes that “the benefit of funerals and of tributes to the dead, according to
Africa: as with most totalitarian regimes funerals in South Africa were occasions of collective expression of rage against despotism. They were events at once highly performative and political: “[E]ach death, each funeral procession with its weeping and angry mourners, has been elevated to a symbol of life under oppression, and has been utilized as an occasion to mobilize support for the ongoing struggle” (Hauptfleisch 1987: 181). In the context of oppression the funeral acquires a new “sociocultural function” (ibid.) which often determines its form and content. The funeral then becomes a public performance with a meaning “far greater than only burying a deceased relative or friend, it becomes a matter of orchestrating an outcry against oppression” (ibid.). In that sense, denying burial and forcing the dead body to literal and symbolic disappearance were methods used to suppress collective expression and erase the dead from history. Even today the retrieval of the disappeared bodies is a highly charged process where the relatives reconnect with their dead, restore them to collective memory and offer them a resting ground where they can be visited and remembered.

This context is echoed in Sabata’s politicization of Sizwe’s death. The play openly sides with the dead when it describes him as the freedom fighter that came to fight against Makhanda’s tyrannical laws. Sizwe fought against his own brother not for their own claims to power, as Polyneikes and Eteocles, but for the sake of Makhanda. Their conflict then is, as in the case of the two sisters, an opposition imposed by the tyrannical the Greeks, was to the living” (ibid.). In African cultures rites vary but the common belief is that there is a continuity between the living and the dead with the latter being in communication with the gods and capable of greatly influencing the life of the living.
state rather than being their own choice. In *Giants* then, although the dead body is the site of conflict between Nontombi and Makhanda as in *Antigone*, it acquires additional meanings. Because Sizwe in life was a direct threat to Makhanda’s rule his dead body acquires a symbolic significance: to acknowledge him in death would mean to acknowledge his opposition. Punishing him in death serves as a symbolic act of punishment for anyone who opposes him and acts as a reminder of the allegiances that the people are forced to make for or against the state. Sizwe is not an individual case but part of a continuum, one among many who fought against Makhanda and punishment is essential in suppressing those who will decide to follow him. To bury him would mean to restore his status as citizen: as a dissident Sizwe was an exile in life and so he must remain in death.

The dead body is further invested with agency as it constitutes a threat even after death: Sizwe’s body, like Polyneikes’, resists decomposition. While in *Antigone* this was a sign from the gods that Creon fails to see, here it suggests the continuity between the living and the dead and the ever-presence of what Sizwe stood for:

Shango: This is a miracle.

Someone passing from a distance would bet on a calf

That the body was asleep

NOT DEAD

Dancers: Beware Makhanda, Beware!
The body is not dead
The body is asleep

Beware Makhanda beware! (Sabata 2000).

In his decision to punish the dead Makhanda will be caught in a peculiar paradox as Goff (2007) has shown in a slightly different context: while with his forbidding of the burial he will try to stage his victory over rebellion with this same decision he regenerates rebellion against his rule. It is the three women in the play, Nontombi, Nozizwe and Wanjiru as well as his son Asante, that will undertake the role to challenge Makhanda’s way of leadership and try to fuse his governance with ethical qualities.

In the confrontation between Makhanda and Nontombi the authority of ancestral laws is placed against the arbitrariness of the Big Man’s decision-making authority. We know that Makhanda has always been a tyrannical ruler but with this decision against Sizwe he tests his subjects’ tolerance as he transgresses not only human but also ancestral laws. Seen in the context of the illegitimacy of Makhanda’s rule Nontombi’s defense of the ancestral laws does not take the form of a conflictual duty between city and family as it is for Antigone. Rather, it is the proposition of an altogether alternative form of understanding leadership: the ancestral laws become an expression of a democratic ideal and a means of legitimation of power.

Nontombi decides to act and bury her brother precisely when she realizes that the purpose of Makhanda’s decree is to produce and sustain political division between those
who support him and those who support her brother: “No, Makhanda cannot say this. Baba Makhanda must not divide our family so. It is wrong” (Sabata 2000). Her decision to bury her brother is founded on her respect for ancestral traditions but more importantly it is an attempt to dismantle the binaries imposed by Makhanda and even point, although implicitly, to the state’s role in separating her two brothers

Nont: They were brothers, drank the same milk. (…) They were inseparable until you became king of this land. You separated them

Mak: No. I did not. Your brother went to exile out of his own accord.

Nont: It was because of your laws (Sabata 2000).

She insists in foregrounding the two men’s brotherhood and their equal rights to citizenship:

To me his having [been] exiled means nothing because he was fighting to live in this country. He was still a son of the soil. HE DIED IN THE FRONTIERS OF THIS COUNTRY (Sabata 2000).

Her position then is not so much like Antigone’s to prioritize familial over civic philia but to strategically emphasize brotherhood as a political stance, an alternative to the state’s creation of divisions.

In her argument Nontombi capitalizes on Makhanda’s instrumentalist use of tradition and claims to an organic link to the community and she strategically overemphasizes the importance of the burial in order to confront him with his own
defiance of the indigenous laws:

Nontombi: You and I know that the heads would be used as a communication channel with the ancestral spirits. We both know that each child that is born in this country is named after the skull in the sacred caves….YOU are named after the skull in the head. Your spiritual welfare is safeguarded by the skulls in the sacred caves (Sabata 2000).

The value of the traditional laws takes an additional importance: they are viewed as laws that express the common sentiment, they are embraced by the majority and they rule people’s everyday lives:

There are people like me out there, who are governed by laws such as this one and are prepared to defend them until the end. I would rather respect them than you (ibid.).

Whereas Antigone makes a distinction between respect for the Gods or Creon, Nontombi’s distinction is between the people and Makhanda. Nontombi undoubtedly expresses the will of the majority and in her rhetoric these laws are a model of governance much more efficient and democratic than Makhanda’s. Nontombi’s expression of democratic principles is dramaturgically supported by all the characters’ expression of allegiance with her as opposed to Makhanda’s extreme isolation.

The violent treatment of Nontombi in the hands of Makhanda’s men is what

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161 Conversely it is debatable, according to the critics, whether Antigone expresses the common sentiment, as she and later Haemon claim, or not, given the lack of support by the play’s chorus. See Winnington-Ingram (1980: 138). Also see Sourvinou-Inwood (1989).
triggers the reaction of Makhanda’s wife Nozizwe. Giving her a much more significant part in the action than her Sophoclean counterpart Eurydice, Sabata constructs with Nozizwe’s persona a second model of female resistance to the tyrannical rule.

The first time Nozizwe articulates a voice of her own is when she expresses her worries over Nontombi’s mistreatment. Her argument is initially not of a political but of an emotional nature: she objects not to the core of her husband’s decision or the reasons for it but to his disproportionate revenge and the extreme violence that Nontombi, as a young woman, is made to suffer. Hers is a politics of compassion where human empathy can coexist with the duties of statesmanship. Although she generally does not oppose her husband's politics she objects to this particular case because the victim is a young woman and their son's future bride. Her suggestion is that he should back up, forget the law and let Nontombi go in the name of humanity, think as a human and a father and not as a leader:

Forgive her. Forget the law. (...) Think of a young girl who has no parents and has lost two brothers she really loved. Forget the law and think of the pain she is going through. There is no right and wrong in life my husband, unless we search for the truth veiled behind the monumental pillars of "right or wrong". There is one universal truth and each man must find his way to this truth, independent of conventional codes of conduct! My husband, she is a child... a human being (Sabata 2000).
Nontombi earlier tried to show Makhanda that there are ethical constraints to his governance emanating from tradition. Nozizwe now tells him that it is time to humanize his statesmanship. Like Creon he must be reminded that human feelings and sensitivity to family bonds and emotions are not foreign to governance- instead they are a prerequisite for democracy. To Nozizwe’s attempt to infuse rule with compassion Makhanda responds as the statesman who views all social relations in legal terms: "Human feelings can only be defined by law. Morality comes from law, life is made up of a set of rules- behavior is rule, birth is law, death is law" (Sabata 2000). The cold, legalistic terminology suits him in order to avoid the responsibility posed to him by his wife, to act humanely.

Despite his wife’s pleas Makhanda, unwilling to “lose” and compromise, continues Nontombi’s torture and in the end passes the sentence to have her killed. It is at this point that Nozizwe for the first time takes a stance on the issue of Nontombi’s action to bury her brother: Makhanda should have given her a trial and not treat her as a traitor because what she did was right and in accordance with the ancestral laws. Nozizwe points to the illegitimacy and unaccountability of Makhanda’s decision:

She was no traitor my husband. She performed what IS traditionally right.

(…)

She suffered the consequences that are not of her own doing

Because YOU had changed the law (Sabata: 2000).

More lucidly than anyone in the play Nozizwe identifies Makhanda’s mistake: he took
upon himself all powers - he became legislator, judge and jury - ignoring all other authorities, judging, condemning and punishing Nontombi on the basis of his own arbitrary law.

Nontombi's sister, Wanjiru, is the third female model of opposition that Sabata creates in the play. Unlike the other characters who in their actions try to show Makhanda how he should govern better, Wanjiru is the only one who, in the end, fully rejects him and his rule. Because her rejection is very strongly associated in the play with her womanhood, I will discuss her role more fully in the next chapter. Here I only want to delineate the progression of her character in relation to Nontombi's action. The Ismene-Antigone confrontation in *Antigone* serves to juxtapose, according to Nussbaum (1986), a flexible reasoning and a more humane type of love (in Ismene's desire to die rather than live without her sister) as opposed to Antigone's frozen, almost inhuman love for the dead rather than the living. In *Giants* Wanjiru's relationship with Nontombi serves rather to highlight the binaries and allegiances violently imposed by the state.

At first Wanjiru is similar to Ismene: afraid of Makhanda and unwilling to join her sister in the act of burial. She explains her fear as a result both of the infamous tortures to which Makhanda subjects anyone who dares to oppose him but also of her status as a woman- physically and socially:

We are two weak women. We are physically weaker than all these men are and we as women we are even barred from politics and decision-making. We have no
power to challenge baba-Makhanda (Sabata 2000).

While for Nontombi Makhanda's decree is so unfair that to disobey it is the only option she sees, for Wanjiro Makhanda's violence is so cruel that although she knows what is ethically right, she sees no other option but to obey him. To Wanjiro’s abstinence Nontombi responds differently than Antigone reacts to Ismene: she does not reject her nor categorize her among the enemies as she understands the conflict and the possibility for more than one reaction to the situation. The two sisters are presently faced with a dilemma that we can infer is similar to the choice their brothers had to make in the past, forced to take sides for or against the state. Both are able to acknowledge the division not as a moral imperative but only as necessity imposed upon them and so remain allied.

But Makhanda's men pose yet another, more cruel dilemma which tests their bond to the extreme. They capture Wanjiro, severely torture, rape and humiliate her in order to force her to denounce her sister and her action. They threaten her with death and bring her in front of the imprisoned Nontombi. Wanjiro describes her tortures to her sister who remains silent throughout: she has been kicked to miscarriage, repeatedly raped, had her breasts burnt and nipples cut off. She now has to choose between more torture until she dies or making a public statement against her sister and living ashamed and crippled for the rest of her life.

Sabata is not interested at this point in what Wanjiro’s final choice will be. He rather focuses on the dilemma itself, its cruelty and unfairness, which turns sister against
sister, which in the past turned brother against brother: "I am ordered to discredit the right and condone the wrong to save my skin from being roasted...And now I have to decide" (Sabata: 2000). Nontombi's silence is shattering. We can imagine two young, mutilated bodies, perhaps hardly able to speak. Makhanda’s display of power in the way it tests their bond in fact succeeds to create stronger opposition: in remaining allied, their bond transforms from natural sisterhood to a choice, a structural sisterhood that later manifests itself in what becomes Wanjiru’s active defiance of his power. 

As in the case of Nozizwe and Wanjiru, in the case of Asante too Nontombi’s act and imminent death mobilizes opposition to the state power. When Asante appears to Makhanda he has just returned from his initiation school, he has then officially entered manhood, and has already been informed that his future wife is detained for having broken the law. Asante is similar to Haemon in that he appeals to the public sentiment which sides with Nontombi and tries to show his father that compromise is not always a loss but a gain when it reflects the public opinion. When Asante takes Nontombi’s position, he does so in the name of the public opinion: he sides with her because the people say she was right. As a future king then he demonstrates an example of democratic leadership:

Asante: If she had done anything shameful I would not side with her

Mak: She has brought the law into disrepute.

162 On the issue of the sisterly bond, Steiner argues for *Antigone* that the brother-sister relationship becomes supreme, “it is a relation between man and woman which resolves the paradox of estrangement inherent in all sexuality (...) Thus sisterliness is ontologically privileged beyond any other human stance” (1984: 17). In the *Giants* sisterliness is more than an ontological bond, it becomes political.
She has brought the law into contempt and that is shameful!

Asante: But the people say she has not! (Sabata: 2000).

Nontombi challenged Makhanda’s rule with tradition and Nozizwe with the principles of humanity, Asante now challenges Makhanda directly with the principles of democracy forcefully defending the public will against his father’s authoritarian decision-making.

Surrounded by those characters, Makhanda is, like Creon, like the target against whom all characters shoot their arrows (Antigone 1144-1145). Yet his quality as a tragic character is different from Creon’s. Makhanda has not made an error of judgment, in fact he has been conscious all along of his actions and until the very end he maintains that he did what he had to do. While Creon has been misinterpreting signs that showed him his error, Makhanda acknowledges such signs or the others’ warnings but decides to follow his own path:

Noz: My husband, she is a child…a human being

MAk: I know

Noz: Then release her

Mak: What would I say to my cabinet? That I hid my tail between my legs in terror? WHAT MUST I SAY TO THEM?

Despite acknowledging his mistake, even despite moments of guilt expressed in the form of nightmares that he confesses to Nozizwe, Makhanda chooses to remain attached to a
system of cultural and political mechanisms that secures him his status and authority. Makhanda however, is not like the Sophoclean hero whose stubborn persistence to his decisions is his way of revealing and affirming who he is (Knox 1964); nor does he possess the nobility of the Soyinkean tragic hero of metaphysical tragedy who is an amalgam “of communal responsibility, tragic dare, and Promethean will, plunged into the primeval gulf” (Olaniyan 1995: 57). Makhanda’s error is not, like Creon’s, a stubborn attachment to a conflict-free ethical world but rather his attachment to the wrong type of authority. If Makhanda misinterprets something that is the people’s tolerance and the power of the cultural and political system that has always supported him to perpetuate itself, both of which he takes for granted. As opposed to the Sophoclean hero who “will not listen but he hears enough to know that he is under attack” (Knox 1964: 19) Makhanda misinterprets the historical moment as he clings to power and fails to see that the times call for a change. He remains deaf to the other characters’ attempts to show him that it is time that he listens to the voice of the people and change his mode of leadership:

Shango: Listen Makhanda

Listen to the cries in the village!

They are the cries of souls slain during the course of time. (…)

Run Makhanda run

Run and silence the screaming voices

Run and turn back the clock!!! (Sabata 2000).
At the end of the play Makhanda is punished by the destruction of his family and the plunging of the city into chaos as Sabata warns of the inevitable chaos that awaits if things in the African postcolony do not change. But Nontombi too, as well as everyone else who opposed him, suffers violence and death. In the case of the Giants however this is not a punishment but rather a sacrifice which elevates the characters, particularly the females, to a symbolic status. The play’s articulation of gender politics in the context of its oscillation between materialist and metaphysical African tragedy will be the subject of the next chapter.
4.2. Giants and the representation of gender in the context of African tragedy

In the previous chapter I examined how Giants reinterprets the conflict between Creon and Antigone from the perspective of postcolonial leadership as a conflict of social forces that require transformation. In this chapter I want to more systematically situate the play within the context of the discourse on African tragedy and examine how it combines elements of materialist and metaphysical tragedy. With particular reference to the representation of gender I will argue that, as the play progresses, the materialist perspective is entirely superseded by the metaphysical at the expense of a radical critique of patriarchal rule.

I have already mentioned that unlike Medea and Molora that engaged with the grand narratives of apartheid, colonialism and reconciliation through a postmodernist deconstruction of the tragic form, Giants adapts the story of Antigone while maintaining most of the structural characteristics of classical tragedy, an approach which places the text in the long tradition of African tragedy and tragic theory. As this tradition developed in relation to the question of the reconstruction of African cultural identities during the anti- and early post-colonial years, Giants, by becoming a part of it, seeks to raise similar issues, this time in the context simultaneously of post-apartheid South Africa and an increasingly globalized and neo-colonized Africa. In that sense the play uses the tragic

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form in order to voice dissatisfaction with the post-colonial indigenous modes of
leadership and pose the question of the ideal type of leadership for contemporary Africa.

*Giants’* engagement with the form of African tragedy reemerges today to remind that
since postcolonialism is not yet a fait accompli for a large part of the world, the questions
of national and cultural identity and their aesthetic expression remain as pressing as they
always were.\(^{164}\)

The play, I argue, is constantly balancing between the two prevailing schools of
thought on African tragedy, that of the metaphysical writers such as Soyinka and that of
the materialist writers such as Osofisan.\(^{165}\) While both sides examine the form of tragedy
in relation to African cultural identity pre- and post-colonization, the metaphysical critics
advocate as the aesthetic and ideological basis of African tragedy a comprehensive
worldview based on African myth and ritual while the materialist critics suggest the need
for a modernization of myth and ritual for the purpose of social mobilization. Despite the
debates between the advocates of either school it seems that the two theories are not
necessarily or always mutually exclusive: so, for example Soyinka (1975) has argued for
a relationship between tradition, ritual and revolution and for the “materiality of
metaphysics”, that produces a constant dialectic between the world of ritual and that of

\(^{164}\) See my Introduction with reference to Nkosi (1998) on the preference for modernist as opposed to
postmodernist forms among black South African writers.

\(^{165}\) For an overview of the two strands of criticism see Conradie (2000).
Indeed, great works of African tragedy seem to be unanimously acknowledged for their potential to incorporate the revolutionary ideal within a comprehensive depiction of the African world. This is aesthetically expressed not by a rejection of the traditional aesthetic forms and rituals but by a dialectic relationship “between the forces of tradition and the modernistic consciousness” (Osofisan 1982: 78). This, as I will show, is the dialectic that *Giants* attempts to articulate: the play combines Soyinka’s ideas on the self-contained ritual space with the Marxist critics’ ideas on the tragic hero and juxtaposes a debate on issues of tradition and modernity as articulated by the heroes with a comprehensive African worldview expressed through the depiction of a self-contained, cohesive community and its cultural forms. I showed in the previous chapter how, at the level of content, Sabata juxtaposes Makhanda’s mode of leadership with the other heroes’ moral imperatives of humanism, democracy and respect to the ancestral laws and how the tragic conflict is produced as a result of this confrontation. In this part I want to begin by showing how, at the level of form, the playwright is placing his heroes who articulate a modern consciousness against a ritual, self-contained space created in the Soyinkean tradition and primarily by the Sangoma and the chorus.

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166 For a detailed discussion on the debate between Soyinka and his Marxist critics see Olaniyan (1995, chapter 3).

167 Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* is discussed among critics as a characteristic example of such a play. Olaniyan (1995) shows how Jeyifo who has been a critic of Soyinka’s metaphysics has gradually shifted his views and argued for the ways this play uses myth to address contemporary issues of liberation in Africa.
Central to Soyinka’s tragic theory is the view that African tragedy is the artistic manifestation of a culture characterized by “a cohesive understanding of irreducible truths (…) defined within man’s knowledge of fundamental, unchanging relationships between himself and society and within the larger context of the observable universe” (1976: 38). A key element for the expression of this culture is the notion of the ritual space which must be understood “not merely as a physical area for simulated events, but as a manageable contraction of the cosmic envelope within which man (…) fearfully exists” (ibid. 41). An essential aspect of Soyinka’s theory is that the tragic world is a hermetic, self-contained world where archetypal forces of being are set in conflict. This enclosed tragic world is expressed with a variety of cultural forms and media, “a stylistic and sensual assault both on intimates of that culture and on outsiders equally” (ibid. 56).

In *Giants* Sabata follows in the tradition of evoking “a hermetic world, autonomous, demonstrably cohesive, neutral to exterior mores and values” (Soyinka 1976: 55) which he constructs by means of setting, performance and most importantly the extensive use of patterns and modes of performance drawn from African oral traditions. The set represents a typical African rural space: Makhanda’s palace is “a grass hut with a few tree stumps covered with animal skins (…) a few horns, skulls, beads, cloth etc…” (Sabata 2000); the sangoma’s cave is dark and scary, filled with bones and skulls; these are complemented by “a back-stage backdrop with a country side drawing, complete with a blue sky, birds, huts, mountains, rivers etc., to give a ripe scenic effect of a
beautiful country” (ibid.). Following Soyinka who emphasizes music “as an indispensable vehicle of the ritual transition” (Olaniyan 1995: 52) seeing “a mutually propelling relationship between poetry and music in tragic art” (ibid.), the stage directions insist on the centrality of dance and particularly music for the performance of the play. The playwright describes his work as “a musical narrative and dramatic poem” and has composed his own music which, the stage directions suggest, should be used whenever possible.  

The use of oral performance forms is present throughout the play. The story is rooted in oral tradition as it draws material partly from Sophocles’ play and partly from the Sotho legend of Hodhova, a woman who is said to have changed African burial practices. The play uses praise poetry delivered in Sotho in order to introduce Makhanda to the audience and his community and the leader himself uses a highly poetic and descriptive speech, abundant in proverbs and metaphors characteristic of African oral traditions. But it is particularly with reference to the Sangoma-chorus leader and the chorus that the use of oral performance modes is most apparent.

168 www.adminnews.uct.ac.za/docs/496e9386938a44e0616e8dff6ba1aaad.doc
169 For a discussion on the importance of the use of oral forms in modern African writing see particularly Irele (2007). Irele argues that “In the quest for a grounded authenticity of expression and vision, the best among our modern African writers have had to undertake a resourcing of their material and their modes of expression in the traditional culture. Because the traditional culture has been able to maintain itself as a contemporary reality and thus to offer itself as a living resource, the modern literature strives to establish and strengthen its connection with a legacy that, though associated with the past, remains available as a constant reference to the African imagination. The oral tradition has thus come to be implicated in the process of transformation of the function of literature and in the preoccupation with the formal means of giving voice to the African assertion” (2007: 78).
170 Unfortunately, no other information on this legend seems to be available.
171 See for example Adeeko (1989).
The Sangoma is also referred to in the play as “the poet”, his appearance on stage is always accompanied by music and dance and his speech is highly poetic. In the interaction between the Sangoma and the chorus of dancers Sabata recreates a communal ritual of praise poetry with the Sangoma acting as the poet and the chorus responding and intervening as members of the community:

Shango: Did I tell you

Nontombi had two brothers

And a sister

Sizwe, Sechaba and Wanjiru

Dancers: No

No

No (...)

Shango: I never told you that

One of the brothers was an exile

Dancers: Sizwe was an exile

Sizwe was an exile

Sizwe was an exile (Sabata: 2000).

The scene of the report of the two brothers’ killing is a characteristic example of how the play combines dance, poetry, repetition and call and response:

Soyinka (1976: 38-39) discusses the function and pattern of the interaction between the poet-leader and the community of audience-participants.
Two dancers execute a battle scene. The other dancers freeze as they look at them.

Shango: And then

Dancers: During the battle

Shango: and then

Dancers: Sighs, screams, Pain, Agony, Death (ibid.)

Because the Sangoma and the chorus never directly interact with the heroes and are not in any way affected by or intervene in the action (the Sangoma does so only in the end, which I will examine later) they function less as a Greek tragic chorus and more as a performance within the performance (the enactment of traditional praise-poetry performance) and at the same time as a Brechtian alienating device which interrupts the action providing historical and social background and inviting the audience to reflect on the action.173

Stylistically this juxtaposition is expressed in a manner not dissimilar to the way Vernant (1980) has described the dialectics within and between the chorus and the hero of Greek tragedy. Vernant has argued that in tragedy the elevated language used by the chorus creates links between the tragedy and its roots in the dithyrambic song while the more modern language used by the heroes connects tragedy to the audience’s contemporary experience. But he has identified a second type of dialectical connections, that between the chorus’ language and their association, as a collective of citizens, with

173 The similarities between Brechtian theatre and traditional African performance modes that formed the basis for syncretic theatre forms has been pointed out by Kruger (1999).
the contemporary democratic community and the heroes, as descendants of a heroic 
mythic world and their language that brings them closer to contemporary citizens.174

In *Giants* there is a similar technique as the play uses a highly poetic and metric 
language in the choral parts, often with the accompaniment of music and dance and a 
more prosaic, pragmatic, often pejorative speech in the episodes between the heroes:

Nontombi: I was brought up to love [my brother]. Not to hate him or anyone for 
that matter. To me his having exiled means nothing because he was fighting to 
live in this country (…)

Makhanda: Now shut up. It is my turn to speak. (Sabata: 2000).

At the same time Sabata has the chorus express contemporary ethical dilemmas in a 
heightened poetic manner and undercuts the political conflict at the heart of the heroes’ 
debates with oral forms of expression (poeticized language, use of metaphors and 
proverbs) or dance re-enactments that take over the action as in the cases of the two 
young women’s rape. While in Greek tragedy, as I have discussed in the Introductory 
chapter, this method was used to create multiple levels of identification for the audience, 
simultaneously as individuals and as citizens, in *Giants* it serves a different although no

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174 Vernant writes that "at one moment the same tragic character appears projected into a far distant 
mythical past, the hero of another age, imbued with a daunting religious power and embodying all the 
excesses of the ancient king of legend. The next, he seems to speak, think, live in the very same age as the 
city like a "bourgeois citizen" of Athens amid his fellows" (1981: 10). Equally, while the chorus is "to 
express through its fears, hopes, questions and judgments, the feelings of the spectators who make up the 
civic community" (ibid.) their use of lyric song and archaic dialect acts as a distancing effect for the 
audience. For a commentary on the chorus’ language as an effect that distances the chorus from the 
less political purpose: to sustain the dialectical relationship between the materialist and metaphysical perspective as two equally valid, complementary forms of understanding and expressing the African experience.

Despite its metaphysical, comprehensive aesthetics and its Panafricanist vision manifested in repeated associations of Africa with motherhood, birth and belonging, the play avoids, at least initially, falling into the trap of an essentialization of African cultural identity. Recalling works like *Things Fall Apart* or *Death and the King’s Horseman* the play presents a non-idealized, conflict-ridden community suggesting that the errors committed that lead to its demise are internal and not results of external factors -- although, as discussed in the previous chapter, the implications of colonialism are echoed in the way Makhanda’s “Big Man” type of leadership is constructed.  

It is, however, when it comes to the representation of the gender conflict at the heart of the play that Sabata’s depiction of the community disregards internal stratification and his attempt to combine the materialist and metaphysical perspectives fails. As he emphasizes all characters’ common origin from “Africa’s soil”, Sabata pays “little attention to other intracultural differences, such as gender (…). Yet we cannot claim that gender difference is irrelevant to a conception of an anti-imperialist cultural identity” (Olaniyan 1995: 61). Although Sabata’s female characters are initially

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175 Both Achebe and Soyinka have argued that in these works the colonial factor is not the reason why the precolonial society falls apart - it is rather one element that precipitates the demise of an already conflict-ridden community. In his analysis of *Death and the King’s Horseman*, Olaniyan confronts this “culturalist denial” of the colonial factor and argues that “despite the overinvestment in the representation of cultural differences, the theme of political domination intrudes repeatedly, covering the gamut of the African encounter with Europe, from slavery to colonialism” (1995: 59).
constructed in a manner that shows them acquiring political consciousness, the play, as I will show, demonstrates a lack of consciousness with regards to the power structures underlying gender roles.

**Tradition, modernity and gender.**

The association of the heroes with the forces of traditional, conservative patriarchy on the one hand and tradition in its pure form on the other, places at the centre of the tragedy the clash between concepts of tradition and modernity that were central in the formation of postcolonial African identities. This clash has been described in broad terms as one between the advocates of a nostalgic return to an idealized African pre-colonial identity and those who view tradition as an impediment to the continent’s modernization. However, it should be understood in more complex terms as deeply rooted in the nationalist project of the construction of an African post-colonial identity: as the newly formed African nations had to balance between asserting their African identity against the European colonialists on the one hand and asserting their national identity as independent modern nation-states within the African continent on the other (Irele 1981), questions of language, cultural expression, gender and governance were being reexamined from within the tradition-modernity debate. The use of colonial or indigenous languages in literary expression and the reaffirmation of the value of oral performance forms, the role of women in the new political and social systems and conversely the role
of patriarchy and the crisis in masculinity brought forth by the demise of old patriarchal structures, became pressing issues in the cultural and political realm.

In *Giants* the conflict between tradition and modernity is focused around the problem of governance which is linked to the crisis in masculinity as suggested by the play’s rendering of the conflict in gendered terms. In the African postcolonial experience, and South Africa is by no means an exception, the political crisis that demands new ways of leadership and brings to the political struggle groups previously excluded (women and minors) is inextricably linked with the need to redefine the role and position of the traditional patriarch. In the play such need is experienced as frustration by Makhanda in the way he interprets the challenge to his authority as a challenge to his masculinity. This adds an additional layer to understanding Makhanda as a tragic hero: he is not only the leader who is unable to cope with historical change but is also a man whose role as a male is being redefined and he is unable to accept this process of redefinition. In the context of the play the crisis of masculinity is tragic because it creates a cultural and political conflict: it suggests a loss of status and power which is seen as historically inevitable yet it occurs within the context of a society where issues of virility, femininity, sexuality and procreation are considered essential for the community’s continuity and well being.

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176 For a discussion on the crisis in masculinity and emerging modern concepts of masculinity in Africa generally and South Africa specifically see Lindsay and Miescher (2003), Ouzgane and Morrell (2005), Becker (2006), Clowes (2008), Robins (2008).

177 I draw this idea from the discussion of J. P. Clark’s *Song of a Goat* where the tragic stature of the hero has been debated (Conradie 2000). Against critics who have suggested that sexual impotence is not a theme fit for tragedy, the play’s defenders argue that, in the context of a tradition that places importance in the
When it comes to Nontombi’s character however, although she fulfills a tragic purpose in the conflict of social forces in the way she defends tradition as a legitimate form of leadership, she is not equally examined as a tragic heroine in relation to her status as a female in the same way that Makhanda is. In his approach Sabata focuses on the crisis of the male linking “male sexual potency with male political potency” (Stratton 1994: 51) in a manner that, as Stratton shows, has been used traditionally in African male nationalist writing to foreground male authorship and subjectivity. As I will argue below, despite the play’s attempts at incorporating the materialist discourse on tragedy what prevails is the metaphysical approach which places the text in a tradition of such masculinist African writing. This approach relegates females to the status of symbol and tends to use them as tropes for the support and expression of masculinist ideas and concerns with their own cause or participation in politics remaining marginalized (Stratton 1994). In adopting such perspective the Giants is eventually unsuccessful in radically challenging the patriarchal authority it sets out to question as it disengages the critique on leadership from a critique on gender inequalities.

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We can identify a number of ways that the female has been employed as a trope for African male nationalist writing. Innes and Rooney (1997) observe a shift in the use of the trope from pre to post- independence writing. In precolonial nationalist writing, they argue, male writers always represent the nation and the contest for power over the roles of males, females, family and continuity, the inability to live up to such roles is indeed a tragic theme.
nation/continent in gendered terms, in “a kind of complex Oedipal struggle in which the contestants are always males of different generations, and the contested land, or a character who symbolizes the land is female” (1997: 195). There is an intergenerational conflict between males to determine who will take authority over the land. In this quest the female is identified with the land that has to be conquered and owned. The identification of the female in such writings with tradition in its pure, untainted form is part of the concern on how feminine values will be incorporated in the masculine quest for power and control.

Post-independence writing, on the other hand, is more concerned with defining the characteristics of the ideal (male) governance: “[T]he concern with harmonizing masculine and feminine principles is replaced by a concern with finding and defining the right kind of male leader” (Innes and Rooney 1997: 197). In this task, the woman-as-land metaphor is replaced by multiple female characters embodying the people who must be won over by the leader: women “are there to be wooed and seduced and claimed by the hero and prospective leader, and their role is to enhance both the masculinity and the political authority of the leader, not to participate in or actively pursue the leadership or themselves become involved in politics” (ibid. 198).

Stratton (1994) approaches the same question from a different perspective: she identifies two tendencies in the representation of women, one that is static, identifying the woman with the land and with eternal unchanging values and traditions (the “pot culture”
trope) and one where the woman embodies the state of the nation in its historical process (the “sweep of history” trope). Stratton argues that both practices equally objectify the female: it is always the male who is identified as subject/citizen and the female always identified as object/nation. In both approaches, Innes and Ronneys’ and Stratton’s, what is common is a historical progression of nationalist writing from a single, static representation of the female to one that is multifaceted and changing -- although in both cases the writers agree that the female continues to be objectified and function as a metaphor.

Both these approaches are present in *Giants* but in a reversed order: the play progresses from depicting multiple female characters consciously responding to a historical moment towards unifying them all into a single female character, Nontombi, who takes a fully metaphorical role as the embodiment of the land at the end of the play. In what follows I will trace this progression beginning by looking at how the female characters in the play negotiate their status between citizenship and subjecthood to Makhanda's patriarchal authority and voice their citizenship rights. This should be read in light of Foley’s discussion, analyzed in the previous chapter, of Antigone’s negotiation of autonomous agency from within the social expectations emanating from her role as “virgin daughter”.

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178 Stratton (1994) develops this argument in response to some feminist critics who have argued that the “sweep of history” trope allows women agency as they are presented responding and adjusting to changing circumstances.
In the colonized world women's issues were subsumed to a larger nationalist agenda in the name of national independence. This agenda created binaries which identified modernity/public space/materiality with the alienating colonial forces and tradition/private space/spirituality with the preservation of the ‘authentic’ national identity and women as its safeguards (Chaterjee 1989). Such binarism, while favoring male citizenship, it placed women in a contradictory position between traditionalism and modernity: although constitutionally they were acknowledged as citizens, in the private sphere women were still treated as subjects, subordinated to the rules of patriarchy. As Quayson writes:

[...]he elite men contesting Western hegemony were in fact clamouring to be citizens in their own right. It was when it came to women and the domestic sphere that the matter became less clear. The loss of clarity could be said to be directly related to the fact that women were located within [a] series of polarities [...] (materiality/spirituality, outside/inside, modernity/tradition) that were implicitly hierarchical and that were ultimately geared to subserving elite male interests (2000: 118).

The result of such tension was that often women, even to this day, find themselves

179 In his analysis Hyden locates the contradiction in the contrast between relations of production and reproduction. “Patriarchy” he writes “typically refers to the deference due to males, but in the African context reflects more specifically the relations of reproduction and production that mandate that men have the right to control the property and loves of women and juniors. [...] With relations of social reproduction being dominant- and certainly not yet subordinated to those of capitalist relations of production- the position of women is more influenced by premodern rather than modern institutions” (2006: 164-66).

The result then is that “The Big Man phenomenon (...) permeates both politics and the society from top to bottom” (ibid.)
in what Quayson (2000) describes as a "contradictory modernity" whereby their rights to autonomy as secured by their citizenship status clash with the expectations from them in the domestic sphere. Quayson concludes that "this state of affairs (...) enforces a renunciation of normal life and institutes a lack in the formation of the modern African woman" (2000: 129).

In this context customary law, far from being a liberating force, has been an instrument for the preservation of the patriarchal rule and a hindrance to women's liberation. Similar to forms of leadership and their colonial appropriation discussed in the previous chapter, customary law in pre- and post-independence society was “adapted” to serve the needs of patriarchy:

> [J]udges in colonial days did little to challenge the existing patriarchal tradition and with social change brought about by capitalism and urbanization, the conditions of women often deteriorated. As colonial officials tried to understand and codify specific customary laws, they relied on senior men who were believed to have the relevant information. They did not question the fact that these elders interpreted the situation from their vantage point. The result was that many intrafamilial rights and duties that had existed in precolonial days were overlooked. Judges after independence have done little, if anything, to challenge this legacy (Hyden 2006: 172).

As a result customary law prohibits the formalization of certain areas of social life under
civic laws and "continues to dictate most social life. This means that there are always ways around the formal legal system, especially on civil matters such as the relations between husband and wife in a marriage" (Hyden 2006: 171).  

Culture and tradition therefore became a tool used by male elders to subjugate women that continues to this day. Hyden discusses in particular the case of South Africa where the constitution, although very liberal and democratic, avoids defining and limiting the authority of customary law. As a result "the new constitution in South Africa has provided a platform for the continuation of a bifurcated legal system that can be used to discriminate against women" (2006: 174).

In the rural communities the response of women to such contradiction varies but generally, as Becker (2006) has observed with particular reference to post-independence Southern Africa, traditional positions of authority are being reconfigured in the context of the post-colonial discourses on gender equality. Becker has showed that, despite local and regional differences, “rural women and men produce local, gendered modernities” (2006: 48) in the process of renegotiating tradition in order to ensure access for women to “traditionally” male positions of authority. She does however point that such

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180 On the same issue see also Quayson (2000: 103-132).
182 Becker makes the point that despite governmental policies on gender equality and affirmative action for women, the women’s reconfiguration of their social and political role has emerged as a product of systematic education, participation in the work force and “through a new local discourse on gender that has emerged largely independently of the state, although it is certainly informed by the postcolonial state’s gender equality discourse” (2006: 36).
183 Becker’s (2006) research focuses in four different rural communities across Namibia.
184 Similarly to Mamdani (1996), Becker (2006) points to the role of colonialism and Christianity in excluding women from the public sphere and enforcing patriarchal rule.
transformations are often met by female reluctance or fear and male resistance which “appears to be compounded at times with the threat of domestic violence” (ibid. 36).  

Interestingly, Quayson in his analysis observes that "the transitional crisis" (between traditionalism and modernity) makes itself fully felt among women after the husband has died: “It is almost as if on the death of the husband, the women are thought to be powerless and have to be made to submit to the dictates of tradition” (2000: 129). In *Giants* however what happens is quite the opposite: the death of the brother denotes for the characters the moment of transition when rights of citizenship start to be claimed. Tradition in this case is not used as a suppressive but as a liberating power and as a means through which the women in the play claim their voice. The conflict here is then between two different definitions of tradition, one that claims to derive from ancestral roots and laws and one that has been modified, as discussed in the previous chapter with reference to the “Big Man” phenomenon, to serve the traditional rights of patriarchy.

It is in the light of these contradictions and negotiations that the women in the play take a stance. In the process of contesting Makhanda's law and his law-making authority the three women choose different paths, strategically manipulate what is expected of their social roles, renounce normalcy, form bonds and alliances which lead to a 'sisterhood' which is not only natural, as between Nontombi and Wanjiru, but also structural, a sisterhood by choice.

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185 Interestingly, according to Becker’s analysis it is mostly males of the younger generation who object to women’s acquiring positions of authority. This seems to be the result of a frustration caused by the post-apartheid discourses on equality on the one hand and the crisis in the global market that the youth face on the other (Becker 2006).
Nontombi manipulates her roles as a young woman and as Asante’s prospective wife in order to point to the arbitrariness of Makhanda’s law. She is able to cleverly manipulate the expectations emanating from social roles as she reminds Makhanda that, as a young woman, she owes respect to tradition and the ancestors as much as she does to him. Equally she is able to confront him with his duty to his son to whom he will be accountable for torturing his future wife. In a manner very much reminiscent of Antigone’s ability to particularize, discussed in the previous chapter, Nontombi specifies her reasons for resisting Makhanda but from within the confines of respect for his authority, a clever move of negotiation that in fact allows her more space to have her voice heard:

You are a king… Makhanda
You shall always be king.
I will always respect you as a man, as a father
As a human being
As my country’s ruler and my king.
But I will never respect YOUR law against my brother. (Sabata 2000).

At the same time Nontombi, unlike Antigone, refuses to renounce the normalcy of her life as a woman. Even in the midst of her torture with her body severely abused, even despite the ‘shame’ as Makhanda puts it, of having lost her virginity to his men’s rape, she insists that she will marry Asante. In her refusal to deny her womanhood, Nontombi
articulates a subjectivity that needs not compromise the normality of life to defend her cause, a subjectivity where the roles of woman, wife and citizen do not have to be mutually exclusive.

Nozizwe, Makhanda’s wife, is constructed in the play as a subservient wife, confined in the home, her role being primarily to listen and support her husband. She is the only one that Makhanda trusts and confides his fears to and she is supportive during his explosions of anger or fear and guilt. Restricted as she is in the domestic sphere Nozizwe’s only tool of action is the manipulation of Makhanda’s discourse. She is the one character that is most complex, psychologically, in the play and that is demonstrated in her use of speech. She is the only one in whose words we must always read a subtext, in which the intention or meaning is often the opposite of what the words say: she agrees in order to disagree, she concedes in order to resist. Throughout the play she has a very subtle way of making herself heard, manipulating speech and turning Makhanda’s arguments against him. Her strategy is most obvious in her last confrontation with Makhanda where she will more openly challenge her husband but always in the confines of her role as a wife, a scene revealing of the tensions between her domestic role and her political views.

In the beginning of the scene Nozizwe follows a strategy similar to Nontombi’s playing on the expectations from her role as a subservient wife, telling Makhanda exactly what he wants to hear. Makhanda is going through a moment of self-doubt and guilt and
tries to affirm his righteousness and ease his conscience. Nozizwe methodically builds on his own arguments. Her goal is not to discredit his leadership altogether but to make him acknowledge his error over this specific case: the treatment of the young woman and the arbitrariness of his law.

As the discussion unfolds Nozizwe for the first time takes sides on the issue of Nontombi’s action to bury her brother: Makhanda should have given her a trial and not treat her as a traitor because what she did was right and in accordance with the ancestral laws. More lucidly than anyone in the play Nozizwe identifies Makhanda’s mistake: he took all powers upon himself, he became legislator, judge and jury ignoring all other authorities, judging, condemning and punishing Nontombi on the basis of his own arbitrary law.

Yet her efforts are fruitless and her discursive strategy proves in the end inadequate to convince Makhanda. Faced with his unwillingness to understand she finally concedes. Then her technique of manipulating speech becomes the affirmation of her own silencing as she gives up in the battle of words and implicitly asserts her own impotence in radically resisting him and overcoming the restrictions of her role as a wife. The end of the scene is a very powerful and dramatic culmination of her succumbing to subjugation and silence:

Makhanda: I DO NOT THINK I HAVE DESTROYED A LIFE

Noz: You did not my husband
Mak: I was right and I stand by my convictions (…)

Noz: You were right, my husband.

MAk: I should have given her a trial

Noz: You should have given her a trial

Mak: the law stated that there should be no trial

Noz: And the law had to be obeyed

Mak: I GAVE HER A CHANCE TO SPEAK TO ME

I gave her time to reason (…)

Noz: And now it’s over.

SHE HAS FALLEN

Mak: I was never wrong

Noz: Need you say more my husband? (Sabata 2000).

Unable to overcome the contradiction between the silence imposed on her as a wife and her own political beliefs, Nozizwe will be led to self-annihilation by committing suicide.

While Nontombi and Nozizwe try to negotiate their citizenship status manipulating the social expectations of their gender roles, Wanjiru is interestingly the only one who refuses to negotiate. While in the beginning of the play she refuses to cooperate with Nontombi out of fear for Makhanda’s tortures, as the play progresses not only does she refuse to denounce her sister but she openly and fully rejects Makhanda and his authority:
She said I am not a god
She said I am only human

(...)

She spat on my face (...)
She cursed my law and my words (...)(Sabata 2000).

In that sense while the first two women (and Asante as we will see next) are closer to an effective, flexible ethical reasoning as described by Nussbaum (1986) and embodied in Sophocles by Ismene, Haemon and Teiresias, Wanjiru adopts a more radical ethical stance.\(^{186}\) Her final and overt articulation of her beliefs means the rejection of her status as a woman as she submits to Makhanda’s torture and rape:

Makhanda: She chose to condemn herself, she chose to degrade herself.
She chose to regard herself as lifeless…
She chose to ignore the values that made her a woman (Sabata 2000).

In her uncompromised position, womanhood is sacrificed to rejecting Makhanda’s patriarchal rule. In her conscious choice to stand by her beliefs at the expense of her status as a woman Wanjiru resembles Antigone more than Nontombi does.

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The articulation of a political consciousness by the play’s women, as in the case of Wanjiru observing that “we as women are even barred from politics and decision

\(^{186}\) See my analysis of Nussbaum’s argument in the previous chapter.
making” (Sabata 2000), is counterbalanced by their association with the pure and eternal values of tradition and the expression of “eternal truths”:

Nozizwe: There is no right and wrong in life my husband, unless we search for the truth veiled behind the monumental pillars of “right or wrong”. There is one Universal truth and each man must find his way to this truth, independent of conventional codes of conduct (…). (ibid.).

Their political standpoint most of the time exhausts itself in observing but not questioning or challenging their situation as in the example above, yet they are still endowed with a degree of agency insofar as they are positioned at the crossroads of important ethical choices during which they articulate their voice and gradually enter into the political arena and challenge Makhanda’s power.

It is however with regards to their status as women and particularly the depiction of female sexuality and their lack of consciousness with regards to the sexual exploitation they suffer that the play most overtly undermines its representation of the females, treating them exclusively as symbols of the nation’s degradation and regeneration. As Quayson observes with reference to the representation of female heroism in an African postcolonial context

whereas for men, the movement between private and public is smooth and largely unremarked, for women, the movement into the public sphere is often registered as posing danger. This manifests itself structurally as an anomalousness attached
to female heroic agency. This anomalousness is frequently seen in the articulation and control of female sexuality and reproductive capacities. In these two areas women, when heroic, are imagined as negating or at least setting aside their socially defined sexual and domestic roles. Even as the robust redefinition of their socially assigned roles is celebrated, there is also a small tinge of nervousness about what exactly this might mean for society at large (2003: 41).

The women in the play are predominantly defined as virgins and mothers while the interpretation of their embodied sexuality in terms of sexual abuse holds a disturbingly central position in the play. In the case of Nontombi a constant juxtaposition is created between her desire to marry and have children and the violent defilement of her virginity which is considered the gravest insult that Makhanda’s men commit against her. Yet the rape she suffers is not acknowledged in the play as a violation to her person and dignity but as an obstacle to her prospective marriage to Asante and her potential child-bearing:

Nozizwe: How will we tell [Asante] that his future wife is eaten by pain daily, wrought with tears of agony and cracked like a rock- will he know that her secret cave is penetrated by sticks of pain? That her virginity that he so much treasured is now no longer…Broken and defiled by your men? (Sabata 2000).

In her own account of her rape and her determination to marry and have a family despite it Nontombi does articulate a voice that seeks to overcome the role of the virgin
proscribed for her and claim her right to a normal life. Yet even as she acknowledges the violation she suffers as a manifestation of patriarchal power, this recognition is related to the significance of the rape for Asante, the prospective husband, rather than its significance as a tool of subjugation for Nontombi herself:

Nontombi: You have not told him
That my buttocks are red from your daily rape
Makhanda: You have become dirty
My son will never marry dirt
Nontombi: it is your dirt Makhanda
Makhanda: He will never marry you
Nontombi: I will marry your son Makhanda (ibid.).

In the way Nontombi’s sexuality is depicted, she takes on the status of a symbol for the pure, untainted land that must remain pure in order to be conquered and to produce the next generation of Africans while her physical violation “tells of the new ruling elite’s imitation of their colonial predecessors in defiling Africa’s cultural heritage” (Stratton 1994: 44).

The way sexuality and rape are used in the case of Wanjiru is different and serves to symbolize not the defilement of the virgin land (after all Wanjiru is not a virgin but a married woman and prospective mother) but as a way of expression of male anxiety in the face of the crisis of masculinity. Wanjiru is the character most blatantly objectified in
the play in relation to the representation of her sexuality and I have already discussed in
the previous chapter how her womanhood has been violently attacked as a means to
enforce an opposition between the two sisters. Her objectification becomes clear by the
way her story is related to us: we last see her on stage after she has been tortured and
when she is called to make the decision to support or denounce her sister and save her
life. Wanjiru is the one who most uncompromisingly and openly rejects Makhanda’s rule
and voices her defiance directly and for this she is most cruelly punished. Yet both her
defiance and her punishment we do not see nor do we hear from her: they are reported
and described in detail by Makhanda himself. In that crucial scene of female agency and
rejection of patriarchy the play invites us to see things not from Wanjiru’s but from
Makhanda’s point of view and Sabata goes as far as to provide a defense for Makhanda
and his reaction to Wanjiru’s rejection namely their common African origin:

She said I am nothing!

She forgot.

She forgot that I was also born in this country

She forgot my umbilical chord was buried in this soil

She forgot I was held by the same mothers that blessed her (…)

(…)

I raped her

I ejaculated inside her womb the anger, the pain
The frustration of what YOU and HER caused in my life (Sabata 2000). Sabata here seems to caution against the articulation of a female subjectivity that goes too far in contesting patriarchal power. It is characteristic that Wanjeru is the only one who suffers the most violent assault and death and yet for the rest of the play she is hardly ever mentioned again. Even her own sister fails to side with her: surprisingly, Nontombi’s reaction after she hears of her sister’s rape is to still voice her respect of Makhanda’s authority. In this context Wanjeru’s rape takes a purely figurative, metaphoric quality as the voicing of male frustration while the way this is experienced by the female is of no interest. In that sense Wanjeru’s brutal treatment by the “Big Man” in person, serves to voice “men’s degradation under some non-preferred socio-political system” (Stratton 1994: 53) while the reality of female sexual exploitation within a patriarchal system remains unaddressed.

In the case of the sexual exploitation of both Nontombi and Wanjeru the women “metaphorically [are] of the highest importance, practically [they are] nothing” (Stratton 1994: 52). In the context of South Africa and the country’s “rape pandemic” which has led to the politicization of sexuality and an increasing tension between sexual neo-conservatism on the one hand and the institutionalization of sexual rights on the other (Robbins 2008) such representation is alarming: on the one hand it reinforces a masculinist “sexual culture” still deeply embedded among South Africa’s population; on the other hand, in contextualizing rape within a discourse of African culture and tradition
it enforces stereotypes of gender relations and African masculinity and sexuality without taking into account the complex ways African masculinities have been constructed in relation to class, age and social status (Clowes 2008).\footnote{This interpretation is influenced by Robbins’ (2008) analysis of the Zuma rape trial, following the striking similarities between the character of Makhanda and that of J. Zuma in the way masculinity and political power are conflated in how they (on stage or in court) speak and perceive of rape.}

In the debate about power between Makhanda and his son Asante the play stages an intergenerational conflict over power common in African male nationalist writing (Innes and Rooney 1997) and attempts to represent an alternative, modern type of masculinity that will fuse Makhanda’s power with more progressive and democratic principles. Yet this too proves inadequate in contesting patriarchal power not only because Sabata does not go as far as to question leadership as a male privilege but also because Asante’s articulation of political consciousness is in the end, much like the women’s, subsumed to the play’s metaphysics.

Interestingly, although Asante’s function is similar to the females’ insofar as his role is to contribute to the bettering of the patriarch’s leadership, he is not relegated to symbolic status in the same way as the women of the play are. He can advise his father as his equal and, although he does not directly claim the power for himself, he speaks from the secure position of the uncontested successor of Makhanda’s, his place in power being predetermined and therefore not having to fight for it. More importantly, it is in the way he is acknowledged by his father as an interlocutor that Asante’s status as an agent is
affirmed: Makhanda asks from his son to *understand* him and shows an interest in his son’s predisposition and reactions:

You have come here,

I hope,

Not in the spirit of anger against me,

But with understanding,

With appreciation for the fact that I love you.

I respect you,

My son (Sabata 2000).

This attitude is in direct opposition to Makhanda’s encounters with the women where he dominates without having to listen and always succeeds in silencing him in the name of his patriarchal authority. The Bakhtinean concept of dialogism, already discussed with reference to *Molora*, is again here relevant: the acknowledgment of the interlocutor, in the case of Asante, creates conditions for reflection and negotiation while the monologic attitude in his conversations with the women denotes their effacement as agents.

Asante’s embodiment of a modern masculinity is mostly manifested in the way he relates to Nontombi: he wants to marry out of love, a choice which is already subversive in its defiance of patriarchal traditions.\textsuperscript{188} What is even more is that Asante insists on

\textsuperscript{188} Traditionally the family should choose the bride for the young male. See Clowes (2008) on how young men negotiated between familial expectations and their own desires, during and post-apartheid. Clowes points to the emergence of such alternative masculinities as a result of urbanization and labour as young men entered the workforce and became less dependent on the male elders.
marrying Nontombi even despite knowing that she has been raped and is no longer a virgin. This determination on the one hand suggests the articulation of a modern consciousness on the part of both youths, one that defies traditional prescriptions and roles in marriage. On the other hand however in his claiming of Nontombi Asante remains completely indifferent to the act of rape as a form of violation and manifestation of patriarchal power. Thus their relationship acquires a symbolic status: the claiming of the defiled virgin by the young male constitutes what Stratton has described as the male revisioning of the nationalist project after independence: the female becomes “an embodiment of the nation both as it has been degraded, tainted, corrupted- prostituted-down through the ages, and as it is re-envisioned by man- a kind of virgin land” (1994: 46).

Even Asante’s alternative masculinity is subsumed, as the Giants moves towards its closure, to what becomes a triumph of the metaphysical approach. Sabata sets the final scene of the play with only the three males present -- the young male, Asante, the patriarchal political power, Makhanda, and the cultural authority, the Sangoma. Yet even despite this triadic, albeit exclusively male, structure, the multivocality that the play begun with converges into a unison as the Sangoma and his interpretation of the events dominate the final scene. As he has always held the role of the commentator in the action and by virtue of his association with the culturally authoritative role of the praise poet and community’s representative, his viewpoint in the end becomes the play’s ‘official’
viewpoint. This is one of a strictly metaphysical interpretation of the events: Nontombi’s destruction is one that brings natural and moral chaos awaking the rage of the dead and the unborn; the assault on her is a direct assault on the land:

Shango: Makhanda
You have turned our once beautiful land
Into cinders of burnt wood
You have painted the nation’s heart
With shame and torn dejected souls
The smell of death has become pollution everywhere.
Last night you destroyed a little girl
A little girl that was once a virgin (Sabata 2000).

All other forces that played a part in contesting Makhanda’s power have gradually disappeared from the scene: none of the women is present and the relative multiplicity and multivocality of female perspectives converges into one, Nontombi, who is only spoken about as a symbol and no longer as an agent of a politically significant action. Asante’s discourse is depoliticized and fully assimilated to that of the Sangoma and even the dead Sizwe and his burial that early in the play had a strong political connotation (see previous chapter) are now referred to only in passing, as a way to enforce the link between Nontombi and ancestral tradition:

Asante: She was right Makhanda
No flesh and bones of the Abantu is to be buried in foreign soil. (…) 

No corpse of the Abantu is born to be the scavengers delight

You forgot Makhanda

You forgot the body has a soul

You forgot she embodied the spirit of the gods

You forgot she came, like you,

From the Africa that was before we were born

You forgot her body is fathered by the earth

Mothered by the land where all the spirits dwell (ibid.).

Makhanda, although he tries desperately to defend his actions, is finally defeated by the Sangoma, the only authority who has power over him. He is defeated however not on rational or political terms but on strictly metaphysical ones:

You have destroyed many lives

Now I see yours slowly ending

I see punishment everywhere in you

I see a plague and I see leprosy

I see you rot while alive-

Get away from here Makhanda

By the Gods you are beginning to stink! (ibid.).
It is worth here comparing this final relationship between Makhanda and Shango with the relationship between Teiresias and Creon in Sophocles in order to foreground the undialectical approach of *Giants* to the role of cultural authority as another form of patriarchal authority. In *Antigone* Teiresias comes to warn Creon to free Antigone and bury the body. Although as a seer and prophet he holds a respected position among leaders and community his authority does not overpower that of Creon and in fact he is harshly criticized and questioned by the king as a representative of institutionalized religion (“You and the whole breed of seers are mad for money!” (*Antigone* 1171)), in a manner that allows Sophocles to offer not just another indication of Creon’s blindness but also a sociopolitical and not a transcendental perspective on religious authority. If Teiresias’ warning has an impact on Creon it is firstly because he foresees disaster for his family and secondly, and very importantly, because the chorus intervenes and advises Creon to listen to him: “But good advice, / Creon, take it now, you must” (*Antigone* 1222-1223). There is then in *Antigone*, a dialectical confrontation between the religious and the secular authorities mediated by the community.\(^{189}\)

Not unsimilarly to ancient Greece religious authorities such as sangomas in South Africa had no less a sociopolitical role and were often criticized for supporting instead of contesting the injustices of patriarchal power. I have already discussed how elders used

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\(^{189}\) With regards to the significance of the intervention of the chorus in finally changing Creon’s mind, Griffith’s point is very relevant as he observes that “By the end of the play, the audience may derive some reassurance from the political developments that they have witnessed, whereby Kreon’s authoritarianism, and the excessive pusillanimity and blindness of his advisers, have been replaced by a collaborative relationship between ruler and “citizens” conducive to a more harmonious civic future (...)” (1999: 56).
their cultural authority to perpetuate the subjugation of minors and women and in this context, sangomas in many cases have not been an exception in remaining strongly attached to the patriarchal privileges of their position of authority. Clowes (2008) for example discusses how in mid-20th century South Africa the authority of the sangomas and the customs that supported them where heavily questioned and criticized in the context of the country’s urbanization and I have already referred to Becker (2006) and her analysis of how traditional authority is at present reconfigured along gender discourses.

In *Giants* however, the final representation of a victorious, overpowering Sangoma outside of the dialectics and complexities of such discourses suggests an ideological shift of the play towards an essentialization and idealization of cultural identity and tradition as the expression of eternal truths and a comprehensive worldview free of the conflicts and implications and necessary negotiations inherent in the struggle for power. It is, to borrow Jeyifo’s criticism on Soyinka, the turn to a “timeless ahistoricism (…) in which imagined beings and relationships have absolute and autonomous existence. Hence it is easy victory, illusory, undialectical: thought, in a bewitched, becalmed, vaporous zone of absolute self-subsistence, frees itself from its moorings in the sea of real-life processes” (qtd. in Olanyian 1995: 64). This final victory of the Sangoma constitutes a failure in contesting the patriarchal tradition as Nontombi’s struggle and the women as agents fall into silence, their actions appropriated and relegated to symbolic status.
What does the shift from multivocality to the cultural authority’s single voice suggest? Could it signal a regression to a new traditionalism as a reaction to the political vacuum created in a neocolonial context and by unsuccessful local leadership? Here we may draw some comparisons between Giants and Magnet theatre’s Medea: both plays end with the male leader, alone, his family destroyed, still a king but in aporia about who he is ruling over and why and in both cases with their female opponents having fallen in silence. This aporia seems in both plays to be replacing catharsis, a point to which I will return in my concluding remarks. To the political vacuum Medea offers no alternative, although it juxtaposes the possibility of a celebratory multiculturalism, and Giants seems to be proposing as an alternative an African metaphysics. In both cases the playwrights seem unable to offer political alternatives -- an approach that more than anything else points to the reality of a society where despite liberation and a seemingly stable political regime, issues of power and citizenship are still far from closed.

I am using the word aporia because it encompasses the meanings of impasse, perplexity, puzzlement and denotes, in my view, a state which is simultaneously intellectual and existential.
5. Conclusion.

The goal of my thesis was to examine how adaptations of Greek Tragedy in postapartheid South Africa address the country’s political and social transformation, how they engage with- reflecting or challenging- dominant discourses and how they mediate in the shaping of postapartheid social identities. In this examination tragedy serves as a paradigmatic model for analyzing the dialectical relationship between cultural text and social context.

The starting point for my reflections which led to this thesis was, as I state in my Introduction, a personal disillusionment with the current state of tragic performance and discourse in Greece which I find to be Eurocentric and apolitical in its disregard for questions of culture and identity in a society in deep crisis as is the Greek one. I chose to situate my examination of the connections between tragedy, politics and culture in South Africa on the one hand because of its long tradition of politicized, syncretic theatre, and on the other hand because of its recent history of decolonization and democratization which allows the researcher to directly witness the emergence of new identities and new power structures. In other words, and as it emerges from my analysis of the discourses and policies that presently shape the New South Africa, the country revealed itself to me as the context that Williams describes as that where tragedy is born: not in a state of open conflict, not in a state of stability but in a state of deep transformation.
In establishing my perspective I had to address a number of theoretical and methodological questions. Firstly, my intention to link the tragic form with questions of cultural and social transformation meant that I would not strictly conduct a literary, performance or historical analysis—although all these parameters informed my work. It rather required of me to approach drama and performance as integral aspects of ideology and culture—simultaneously reflecting it and shaped by it. This approach in turn was founded on an understanding of the work of art as mediating the way individuals shape their identity in response to overarching ideologies. Hence my focus was not primarily on the problems of literary adaptation—who adapts, what is adapted, in what medium, what is changed, retained, rejected from the source material and so on—although these definitely formed my analysis. More than that however my purpose was to identify how the South African social context invites for a reconfiguration and reconceptualization of fundamental tragic structures and concepts—for example agency, action and social order, the role of and relationship between hero and chorus. Some points of interest that emerged then in the plays I examined were: who is the hero and what is his/her agency in a context where new identities emerge? (An issue that emerged particularly in my discussion of Medea and Molora). How can we think of the chorus as a collective—how are new collectives formed and identified? (An issue discussed particularly in Molora). What is the significance of action particularly when it threatens to disrupt a newly found social order? (An issue analyzed with reference to all three plays). My comparative
analysis then had to move simultaneously on two planes: not only how the contemporary adaptations relate to the Greek texts but also how the reconfiguration of the tragic structures relates to the new social context. Hence my two-part structure in the analysis of the plays— with the first conducting a structuralist and dramaturgical analysis of the relation between the Greek and South African texts with a focus on the reconfiguration of specific themes; and the second focusing on the adapted play itself and making connections between text, performance and discourses that have shaped the formation and understanding of identities presently in South Africa.

The transitional sociopolitical context of South Africa posed a theoretical challenge with respect to how I relate my thesis to the current postcolonial criticism. The complexity of the current South African social and political reality which struggles between democracy, the residues of apartheid and neocolonialism, made it clear that a discussion of culture and identity politics as conducted by postcolonial discourse must be complemented by a materialist perspective that would account for the ways identity and culture are shaped as responses to the shifting economic and social reality. Hence after a research focused particularly on finding points of difference or connection between postcolonial criticism and materialist criticism, I aligned myself with a concept of postcolonialism as process, a process that does not end with independence or the fall of apartheid but requires continuous vigilance in addressing power imbalances no longer solely in a post- but in an increasingly globalized neocolonial context. Hence in my
Introduction I engaged with the writings of Alexander, Zegeye, Meier, Bond, Mamdani, Becker and others on how identities and collectives are perceived and shaped in response to economic measures following the country’s entry into the global economy and the adoption of neo-liberal policies; on the dominant discourses of multiculturalism and reconciliation and their connection with the problem of resource redistribution; on issues of gender equality, citizenship and subjecthood in response to the shifting power relations. This perspective, of a materialist-sensitive postcolonialism, constitutes one of the fundamental theoretical but also ethical foundations of my work and combined with the premise that I discussed initially- the work of art as mediating in the process of identity formation- it opens up the field for research in more areas of theatre practice- for example representations of immigrant identities in a context of increasing migrations globally or the performance of testimony in contexts conditioned by otherness.

In addition to identifying the particular approach to postcolonial theory that would make it possible for me to account for South Africa’s particular socioeconomic reality, I also had to more specifically situate myself in relation to the current postcolonial criticism of Greek drama in Africa. This raised simultaneously a second issue- namely where do I, in my work, locate the transhistoricity and transferability of Greek tragedy that makes it pertinent material for adaptation in South Africa.

The existing criticism of the adaptability of Greek tragedy in the postcolonial world has emphasized thematic relevance as well as cultural similarities in order to
explain the appeal of Greek tragedy to postcolonial artists. The themes of resistance to
power and individual/state conflict, interfamilial clashes, otherness and belonging but
also the ritual and communal practices, religious beliefs and the cultural centrality of
mythology have all been presented as factors to explain this transferability. Although
these are not the only reasons argued for by present scholarship they have definitely
prevailed in postcolonial criticism.

Although valid, the existing approaches seemed to me to be limited not only for
the reasons that they have already been critiqued for (i.e. eurocentricism or insistence to
counter-discursiveness) but more crucially for my purposes, because they have not
adequately dissociated Greek tragedy from the European tradition of tragic theory.
Although critics have pointed to the difference of the Greek works from the colonial
culture which brought them to Africa they have identified this difference as primarily
linguistic and spatiotemporal. But I was more interested in emphasizing Greek tragedy as
product of a specific culture and society that allows- in fact requires- an experience and
understanding of the world simultaneously on the individual and collective level as two
distinct but interlocked spheres of experience. The specific conditions that make such
experience possible are the radical political development of Athens into a democracy on
the one hand, and a pre-christian, pre-capitalist culture on the other where the radical split
between individuality and collectivity, politics and metaphysics has not yet occured.
That reading enabled me to locate the commensurability between Greek tragedy and its South African adaptations at present beyond cultural and thematic equivalences. Adopting Williams’ concept of the structure of feeling in order to describe this very particular mode of experiencing and understanding tragedy which radically differentiates it from the European tradition that came after it, I was able to identify Greek tragedy as a model that can account for the experience of profoundly transitional moments in search for a communitas. This model presents itself as at once culturally specific -- as the product of a culture that created a particular structure of feeling -- and transcultural/transhistorical insofar as the dialectic between its structure and its social context constantly rehearses the formation of communitas allowing for culturally and historically variant interpretations based on the historical and social transformations of the structure of feeling. This model of interpretation then was particularly useful and productive in the case of South African adaptations where the social context is one of shifting identities, reconfigurations of citizenship and belonging and highly contradictory interpretations and experiences of a communitas which is still elusive.

This approach can enrich, I hope, current criticism of postcolonial adaptations of Greek tragedy because it can broaden the scope of analysis as it proposes new grounds for the transferability of Greek texts into new social contexts. It also enables postcolonial criticism to account not only for works that directly engage with the binaries of colonialism (and in the case of South Africa apartheid) or in contexts of open conflict–an
approach that has favoured certain plays and adaptations over others (i.e. Medea, Antigone) but can also cover works that use tragedy to reflect on issues of governance, self definition, democracy, inside the postcolony and without referring back to these colonial binaries.

The research that I conducted with archives, theatres and universities in South Africa led to several observations on the general position of the Greek classics in South Africa from 1994 until now. I want to first provide an overview of these observations before focusing on specific conclusions that may be drawn from the discussion of the plays in the present work.

1. According to my research it seems that the performance and adaptation of Greek tragedy in South Africa at present is an activity still very much confined to White middle class artists and audiences. This can be explained as a result of two factors: first, the association of the form with colonial culture as well as university and missionary education which made it available only to whites as well as a Black elite. Related to this is the second factor, namely that the present reality of the Black majority that still faces enormous material hardships in their daily lives privileges other theatrical forms and thematic preoccupations. Thus there is, for example, a really active and growing community theatre engaging with themes like AIDS, domestic abuse, economic hardships and corruption.
This observation however does not, and should not, mean that the classics cannot have an active part in creating highly aesthetic works, socially engaged and actively involving the underprivileged communities. Several contemporary examples from South Africa demonstrate that this is possible and can lead to extremely interesting and innovative works.\textsuperscript{191}

2. Related to the first point is the observation that the majority of performances and adaptations of Greek drama whether at the professional or the University level, are in English\textsuperscript{192} and Afrikaans.\textsuperscript{193} During my research I only came across one adaptation of Oedipus King in Xhosa created and performed in the University of the Witwatersrand and on which it was impossible to find any additional material.\textsuperscript{194} This only confirms the fact that the Greek classics are still predominantly confined to the domain of European, middle-class cultures.

3. My third remark points to the very significant number of University productions of Greek classics that in my view merits greater attention. While professional productions seem to have greater access to infrastructure, audiences and criticism, University productions are often more innovative, experimental and ideologically challenging. In my own research, although limitations of time and space forced me to eventually focus

\textsuperscript{191} I am referring here particularly to a work that I had the opportunity to view during the 2007 National Arts Festival, \textit{A Moliere in Soweto}, an adaptation of Moliere’s \textit{Forced Marriage} set in contemporary Soweto, performed by the Kliptown Youth community theatre. The aesthetic accomplishment and social relevance of the work are in my view exemplary of the direction that classics in South Africa may take.


\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Aars!}, \textit{Mamma Medea}, \textit{Boklied} by Marthinus Basson

\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Ugcaleka Ubuyile}, directed by Shkura Yani, 1998
exclusively on professionally produced plays, I have come across very thought-provoking works that may raise very challenging discussions regarding, for instance, the process and aesthetic of adaptation and the use of the chorus. Compared to the professionally produced works these plays, interestingly enough, often voice a much bolder and more articulate engagement with aspects of political and social life in South Africa and globally.

4. My fourth point refers to the shift in themes, an observation which has already been made in different contexts: as opposed to the dominance of the Antigone myth during apartheid, after 1994, and although there are still performances and adaptations of the play, there is a proliferation of stagings of Medea and the Oresteia as the country moves from the theme of state confrontation to exploring gender clash (Marthinus Basson’s Mamma Medea) multiculturalism and xenophobia (Brett Bailey’s MedEIA, Magnet Theatre’s Medea), revenge and reconciliation in the new South Africa (Farber’s Molora, Magnet Theatre’s In the City of Paradise, both based on the Oresteia).

With these general remarks in mind, I want to turn to an examination of specific aspects of the plays I discussed looking at how they re-envision tragedy and how they contribute

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195 I am referring specifically to Spoils of War, by Tamar Meskin and Murvin McMurtry; Electra by Murvin McMurtry (2000); and The Suppliants by Tammi Hamerschlag (2003, University of the Witwatersrand), a play based on testimonies and letters by African women and children refugees in South Africa.

196 See Introduction from Goff and Simpson (2007)

197 With reference to the Antigone myth there was, in addition to Giants, a performance of Antigone at the Baxter Theatre in 2004 directed by British director Sean Matthias with John Kani as Creon.
to our rethinking about tragedy both aesthetically and ideologically. My overall conclusion is that the plays I am discussing do not radically challenge the dominant ideologies of today’s South Africa. They either mirror the complexities of identity formation and belonging in South Africa today but do not point beyond them to the possibility for new conceptualizations of citizenship and action. Or, in some cases they end up affirming and indeed embracing dominant discourses that in practice have been experienced as contradictory and problematic. This general hesitation or unwillingness to transcend the prevailing ideology is directly reflected in the plays’ use of the tragic form where as I argue, tragic concepts like the role of the chorus in pointing to the process of reflection and debate, the significance of action in radically changing the social order or the conscious agency and deliberation of the hero, are contained. On the other hand, the questions and issues these plays raise, the new forms with which they infuse or approach tragedy demonstrate a relationship with tragedy that is very alive and very dynamic. The plays attest to the fact that there is in South Africa an ongoing process of thinking about tragedy and most importantly an ongoing process of thinking through tragedy about the collective experience of transformation- at once contradictory and dynamic. Below I will point to specific issues that the plays raise in their reworking of tragedy on the aesthetic and the ideological level.

On the aesthetic level, the affinity between African and Greek performance traditions that foregrounds the ritualistic aspects of tragedy and allows for a reintegration
of dance, song and, occasionally, masks into the performance of tragedy, has been repeatedly stressed by postcolonial criticism. The three plays discussed here build on these similarities and propose, with different degrees of success, the fusion between elements of African performance and the Greek texts. In my view, the most aesthetically accomplished such attempt is that proposed by Magnet theatre in Medea where dance, song and ritual are, aesthetically speaking, best integrated into the performance. The play most successfully overcomes a certain awkwardness that many modern performances face in the transition from episodes to choral parts and from spoken text to music and dance. This may be attributed to a creative approach that prioritizes the collective over the individual heroes and the development of the piece through physical improvisation from the point of view of the collective out of which the heroes both emerge and return. I find this to be a very productive method not only for the staging but also for the teaching of Greek drama and one with the potential to reveal new ways for the staging of the chorus and the relationship between chorus and heroes.

Similarly, Farber’s idea to not use professional actors as the chorus of Molora but a female rural group of Xhosa split-tone singers is again one that may lead to interesting results with regards to the interpretation of the chorus, although in her case, as I showed, the idea was not adequately explored. The approach however is definitely useful in
pointing to the possibility of a chorus more diverse and trained in non-literary forms of
expression such as music, dance and song.\textsuperscript{198}

Beyond the cultural similarities that constitute a basis for fusing African
performance modes with tragedy these plays radically contribute to the interpretation of
Greek tragedy through their exploration of the connections between tragedy and
testimony. The interface between the two is touched on in \textit{Molora} but can also be found
in other adaptations that I did not have the opportunity to include here.\textsuperscript{199} The use of
testimony in tragedy opens up a very stimulating discussion in two ways: first, in
examining the ways tragedy can function as the aesthetic framework for staging
testimony, and secondly, in looking at the ways the setting and “performance” of
testimony (with all its emotional, social, and judicial implications as an act of witnessing)
may serve as an interpretative frame for approaching and staging tragedy. I believe that
the investigation of these issues has the potential to open up a very fruitful and creative
field of interpreting, approaching and teaching the performance of Greek tragedy.

On the ideological level we can generally observe that the change of the political
system has brought a radical shift in the significance and interpretation of concepts such
as action and the collective which were much clearer during the anti-apartheid struggle
when theatre was the space of a collective reaction to segregationist policies (Kruger

\textsuperscript{198} Farber’s attempt brings to my mind a contemporary Greek staging of the \textit{Bacchae} (by director
Sotiris Hatzakis, 2005). There the chorus consisted of professional dancers and actors while the chorus
leader was a professional singer. The combination was very successful as it gave equal attention to the
physical expressivity of the chorus as well as their participation in the action through the spoken text- the
element that is missing from \textit{Molora} (where the women hardly speak) thus marginalizing the chorus.

\textsuperscript{199} See Introduction on Murvin McMurtry’s \textit{Electra}. 
1997). Such a shift, that has led many artists to feel a loss of purpose, finds its aesthetic expression in a revisioning of central tragic concepts. Below I will look at the three that I consider most crucial and are common in all of the plays examined, namely the role of the chorus, the significance of action and catharsis in relation to the exploration of the emergence of communitas.

The adaptations of Greek tragedy examined here do not evade what seems to be a common problem in modern stagings of tragedy: determining the identity and dramatic function of the chorus. Generally, this problem has to do partly with the fact that modern concepts of community do not understand the way social identities are structured based on locality, ancestry, ethnic identity (Gould 1996) and partly with the change in “structure of feeling” where the interface between the collective and the individual is not as strongly felt. Despite South Africa’s history of a collective theatre that reflected in form, organization and content the collective mobilization in society the present adaptations do not seem to overcome the severance between the individual and the collective symptomatic of a Western cultural tradition (Williams 2006, Jameson 1986). This is mostly manifested in the way they fail to actively implicate the chorus and define its identity and function. In Medea, Molora and Giants the choruses do not represent the complex ways by which the South African collective is synthesized even when they directly and explicitly refer to the South African reality (as in the case of Molora). All

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200 Hence, as Williams (2006) observes, in the Western concept of tragedy the chorus gradually shrinks until it totally disappears and the focus of tragedy shifts exclusively on the individual.
plays seem to want to imply either a homogeneous, transcendental, tribal collective
(\textit{Molora, Giants}) or one conceived in binary terms as western versus indigenous \textit{(Medea)}.
More importantly these choruses do not demonstrate any consciousness \textit{as collectives} in
the way the Greek tragic chorus does: they remain detached from the action, observing
rather than providing insights and arguments and they are not in any way affected by the
tragic characters and action. As a result of their non-representative synthesis and their
distance from the action and the other characters these choruses do not provide any level
of identification for the audience who can only identify individually, with the heroes, but
not with the collective. More importantly, they fail in what is one of the most crucial
functions of the chorus, namely to bring attention to the process of debating itself as
inherent in public democratic life (Goldhill 1996). As a result the chorus in the plays
examined here has a primarily decorative function: they are the source of singing,
dancing, at times creating an “exotic” contrast between Western and tribal civilizations
\textit{(Medea, Molora)}. In all three plays the association of the chorus with African
performance idioms but their exclusion from the process of rationalizing and reflecting
on the tragic action is ideologically charged insofar as it results in the plays exoticizing or
romanticizing “African-ness” and, in the case of \textit{Medea} and \textit{Molora}, sustaining the
West-‘other’ binaries.
-In all three plays tragic action is contained: in \textit{Medea} the infanticide is only implied
towards the end of the play, in \textit{Molora} revenge is stopped and in \textit{Giants} the burial
becomes secondary to Nontombi’s redemptive suffering. Such a revisioning of the tragic
action results in its displacement as the central feature of drama: action is conceived as
either the illustration of an identity rather than the means by which identity is constructed
(\textit{Medea}) or as socially destructive (\textit{Molora}) or as symbolic (\textit{Giants}). In all circumstances
it is conceived as incidental rather than the drama’s driving force. What this means is that
the rite of passage towards a new order that tragic action embodies is never actually
carried out, it is never accomplished or experienced. The new order then that the plays
conclude with, is not created by the heroes as the outcome of their actions but rather is
conceived, as Williams (2006) has described, as a greater scheme of things operating
beyond and despite human experience and to which human agency is subsumed.

-The previous remark leads to the last and perhaps most crucial observation on the
question of “narrative closure” and the type of order and communitas these plays
envision. All plays end in a state of ambivalence, a state of \textit{aporia}, in the sense of doubt
or impasse in the face of a new order that seems precarious and elusive: in \textit{Medea} a
personally defeated Jason is crowned king while Medea is watching from afar; in \textit{Giants}
Makhanda holds the dead bodies of Nontombi and his son and looks out to the audience
in frustration; even \textit{Molora}, the most optimistic of all, ends with what seems to be a
wishful thinking, an enactment of reconciliation at the personal and symbolic level rather
than a new state of things. This new order is elusive not only because it has not been
created through action but also because it is never consciously acknowledged by the
heroes and the chorus, as is always the case in tragedy, but is left to the audience to infer. Such ambivalence in the plays’ “narrative closure” in fact reflects the ambivalence in the envisioning of a new communitas. It is, to follow Jameson, the formal or literary manifestation of the political problem of the African post-independence society where “no forms of praxis or change seem conceivable (...) no political solutions seem present or visible on the historical horizon” (Jameson 1986: 75-76).

In this context, if a utopianist re-envisioning of tragedy’s dystopia (Revermann 2008) was possible during the anti-apartheid (or, in different contexts, in anti-colonial or anti-war) stagings where tragedy served to voice the need for social mobilization and when the utopia was possible to define, in this case it is hard to speak of utopianism as it is this sense of aporia that prevails in the plays’ closure. This is the case not only of Medea and Giants but equally, I believe, for Molora. Despite the apparent utopianism of its conclusion the lack of political or social solution and the rendering of a political process into psychological terms render the play’s closure all the less convincing.

Or, we may speak of a different form of utopianism not conceived in terms of praxis and direct intervention to the social order but in terms of the theatrical praxis as such and the re-envisioning of the tragic form as a mode of thinking through reality (Revermann 2008: 107) and the existing social order. The contemporary South African adaptations of tragedy, those examined here as well as those that I could not include, despite their ideological shortcomings are valuable in pointing to tragedy’s relevance as
an intellectual tool to reflect on society not only in times of political urgency and open confrontation but equally in times of democracy and (real or apparent) stability. Tragedy can radically challenge oppression, as it has throughout the 20th century, but today, in the face of economic and environmental crises, poverty, and inequalities on a local and global scale, it may equally radically challenge our perceptions of democracy, equality and progress and the discourses that sustain them. Pointing to the fact that tragedy can serve as a mode of thinking about our world, our everyday life and our role as citizens, is, I believe, these adaptations’ most valuable contribution.
Appendix 1. MEDEA

[The description is based on a video viewing of the performance. The division into scenes is arbitrary].

The play is set on a sandy beach with a garage door at the back of the stage, a neutral space that will be used as the setting for all the scenes of the play. As the audience takes their seats two boys are already on stage building sand castles. In the semi-darkness of the stage the Nurse comes in, digs in the sand and hides the golden fleece.

Prologue: The play proper begins with Medea in a simple mini dress and bobby hairstyle reciting the mythical story of Jason and the Argonauts as a bedtime story to her children.

Scene 1: The chorus of Greeks enters dressed in trenchcoats and boots. They move around Medea who is standing in the centre nervously fixing her hair and dress, in subtly threatening dance moves. Over the garage door Creon appears in a white suit to announce Medea that she is banned from his country causing her frustration. She pleads for 24 hours in order to prepare herself for the trip. Creon grants her the favor in exchange for the children- she will have to let them stay behind, with their father and the new bride.

Scene 2: The chorus enters from the garage door. A dance sequence of violent moves simulating sex and abuse ensues. Medea is raped and violated by the chorus.

Scene 3: The Nurse, speaking Afrikaans and English, comes on stage to console the desperate Medea and give her strength to stand back on her feet. It is only when she sees her reflection in a pot of water that the Medea realizes what has happened to her. Saying
“this is not Medea” she removes her bobby wig and we see her shaved, leopard spotted head.

**Scene 4:** While the Nurse is slowly washing Medea’s head and puts back her tribal headpiece, the chorus who are standing on the sides of the stage slowly remove their trenchcoats. They now transform to the people of Colchis, dressed in pieces of loincloth. On of the chorus members simulates (by enacting both the rider and the horse) a frantic horse-ride.

**Scene 5:** Aetes arrives on stage and the chorus receive him with ululations. The horse-rider in a messenger-like monologue announces to Aetes that “the strangers are arriving” and describes the arrival of the Argo. The play’s time has shifted in the past, in the Argonauts’ arrival. When his monologue is over the sound of a helicopter is heard and Jason descends in a parachute from above, lands and plants a flag centre stage. An encounter with the chorus follows, a physical encounter, a mix of fear and curiosity.

**Scene 6:** The chorus dance around Jason. It is a ‘tribal’ dance, celebratory and sensuous, partly welcoming, partly exploratory and partly intimidating and provoking Jason as ‘the foreigner’, like a ‘rite of passage’ before he is allowed to enter into their community. The dance pauses when Medea offers Jason water and she drinks from the same cup. We see the first signs of Medea falling in love with Jason.

**Scene 7:** Aetes, with the help of Medea who acts as interpreter, tries to find out what brings Jason to their country. The interaction is not in words but in a kind of a ritual that
resembles the throwing of bones which Medea “reads” and translates. When finally Jason reveals that he is there to get the Golden Fleece outrage erupts among the chorus, Aetes and Medea. Jason is being attacked. Aetes sets Jason the task to kill the bulls and Jason accepts the challenge. In the night, when he is alone, Medea visits him and hesitantly suggests that she can help him. When he promises that he will make her his wife she firmly decides to assist him.

**Scene 8:** Jason and the chorus enact the killing of the bulls. Jason triumphs and Medea takes the fleece cape of her father and hands him to Jason. The two lovers flee and the journey is again enacted physically on stage. Simultaneously to their fleeing in a different space (the stage is divided by spotlights) a ritual dance of Absyrthus (Medea’s brother) takes place.

**Scene 9:** With the ticking of a clock in the dark we are again transferred in the present, 18 hours before Medea has to depart. Medea puts on her wig and high heels, she is in Greece now. In a process of a therapy session Medea’s memories are enacted: after her flee she is abandoned by both Jason who trades her in order to escape Absyrthus’ persecution and her brother who sees her as a traitor. She sets a trap for her brother in order to kill him and stay with Jason.

**Scene 10:** Jason and Medea kill Absyrthus. A celebratory dance follows (the chorus is again dressed as Greeks) and the couple get married. The celebration is interrupted by a
messenger’s speech (a member of the Colchian chorus) that tells Medea how her father found and buried his son’s dead body.

**Scene 11:** Jason gives his version of the story as a bedtime story to his children. His version presents Aetes as a dishonest savage and does not refer at all to Medea’s assistance.

**Scene 12:** We are transferred to Jason and Medea’s travel back to Greece in the Argo. The chorus recreates the ship and the travel with their bodies while Jason and Medea engage in a passionate almost cannibalistic enactment of love making at the end of which she gives birth to their two boys.

**Scene 13:** They arrive to the city of Peleas and meet an old blind prophet who shames Jason for having married a ‘savage’, foresees that she will bring him trouble and conveys the people’s contempt and hostility for the foreign ‘barbarian’. The events of the killing of Pelias and his daughters are recited as a prophecy by the old man.

**Scene 14:** They flee to Greece. Jason forces Medea to change her appearance and manners in order to fit in the new culture.

**Scene 15:** We are in the present again, 10 hours before Medea’s departure. Medea discusses on the phone with Ageus, a divorce lawyer. In a pragmatic and legalistic manner he informs her that she is an alien with no rights and must leave the country and advises her to go to Athens.

**Scene 16:** Jason is partying before his wedding with Creon’s daughter.
Scene 17: Jason and Medea confront each other. Their past and deeds are negotiated with Jason evading responsibility. After the fight he leaves and Creon appears to demand from Medea to hand him the fleece as only she knows where it is. She agrees to do so and asks him to allow her to offer a present to his daughter. In exchange, Creon allows her to see her children for the last time.

Scene 18: Medea and the Nurse unearth the fleece from the beach. In the midst of song by the chorus of Colchians Medea wears the fleece with careful, ritualistic moves. In a frenzied dance she is transformed into a Colchian again and digs for the dress that she will be offering to Creusa.

Scene 19: In a messenger speech, again switching between English and Afrikaans, the Nurse describes how Creusa wore the dress and how she died.

Scene 20: Medea undresses her two boys from their shirt and shorts to reveal the loincloth they are wearing underneath. She takes them inside. Their killing is only hinted to by the nurse’s song and her digging into the sand and “burying” herself. Medea reappears dressed in a regal, traditional red dress. She climbs up the wall at the back of the stage and perches on a window on the wall looking down.

Scene 21: From the garage door, the Greek chorus and Jason emerge infuriated and wanting to avenge Creusa’s death. When the Nurse erupts in a hysterical laughter mocking Jason, he kills her but immediately finds his sons’ clothes and understands what
has happened. Jason is crowned king under the sounds of classical orchestral music while holding his sons’ clothes and screaming Medea’s name.
Appendix 2. MOLORA

The play is set on a bare stage, with two wooden tables and a rectangular area covered with sand in the middle of the stage at first covered with a large piece of black plastic. The performance opens with the women of the chorus (Xhosa split-tone singers, members of the Ngoqo cultural group) seated among the audience. One after the other they rise and take their place on chairs at the back wall of the stage. The last one of them takes off the plastic and uncovers the sandy area.

Scene 1: Clytemnestra, a white middle-aged woman, and Elektra, a young black woman, enter the stage and take their seats behind the tables, facing each other. They begin to testify: Clytemnestra confesses the murder of her husband Agamemnon. Elektra, free to speak up for the first time, tells of a list of evils that she suffered from her mother and that we will see enacted on stage.

Scenes 2-4 are a flashback to the days of Agamemnon’s murder. We see Klytemnestra bathing her daughter, then walking away, taking an ax which she forcefully hits it on the table thus suggesting her husband’s murder. Elektra cries asking for her father but Klytemnestra tries to silence her. Later in the night, Elektra sends away her baby brother, handing him to one of the chorus women to protect him from their mother. In scene 4 Klytemnestra tortures Elektra burning her with cigarette butts to get information about Orestes but Elektra does not speak.

Scenes 5-7 are a flash-forward to the time before Orestes’ arrival. Klytemnestra confesses
her guilt which causes her to have nightmares each night. We watch her nightmare of giving birth to a snake, a scene that is graphically represented on stage with Klytemnestra lying on the table in pain and the chorus women helping her deliver what turns out to be a snake covered in blood. Having overheard her mother’s nightmares same as every night, Elektra visits her father’s grave (the sandy area centre-stage) and lies there soothed by the chorus’ song. Klytemnestra arrives and the two women confront each other on Agamemnon’s murder, notions of justice, truth and the law. Klytemnestra tries to justify her act while Elektra first tries to understand her mother and seeks her love and later promises to revenge her father’s death with the aid of her brother.

**Scene 8:** The two women take their positions back to the testifying table as we have returned to present time. Elektra asks Klytemnestra to demonstrate for the commission and the witnesses how she performed the wet-bag method on her in order to find out where she sent Orestes. The torture is re-enacted on stage. Elektra survives without revealing information and warns Klytemnestra that one day she will have to face justice for what she has done.

**Scene 9:** Orestes comes of age and is initiated in a ceremony by the women of the chorus. Bare-chested and carrying traditional weapons he performs a ritual dance of initiation under the chorus’ song. At the end of the dance, the women send him off to reclaim the land of his father.

**Scenes 10-12:** Orestes arrives at his mother’s house as a stranger to announce to
Klytemnestra her son’s death and bring back home his ashes. Klytemnestra receives him with joy while Elektra weeps for the loss of her brother. At the end of her dirge and while Klytemnestra is inside the house (and Ayesthus, from what we are told, is away) Orestes reveals to Elektra his true identity. Reunited the two siblings perform a ritual around their father’s grave asking for his support and vowing to avenge his death and restore justice.

Scenes 13-15: Klytemnestra dines with Orestes at the table while Elektra works in the house like a servant. Klytemnestra is drunk, she reenacts Agamemon’s murder for her guest and she becomes emotional when she remembers her son and realizes that she will never see him again. Elektra hangs an enormous worker’s uniform to dry- it belongs to Ayesthus. Klytemnestra passes out and Orestes leaves to the fields to find and murder Ayesthus. Klytemnestra wakes up by some strange noises. As she comes in the room, Elektra frightens her hanging a large snake behind her.

Scenes 16-17: The killing of Ayesthus is performed on stage with Orestes being suspended from the stage ceiling and running in circles with his feet in the air, around the perimeter of the stage, his trajectory culminating in cutting the hanging uniform with falls on the floor. He returns carrying Ayesthus’ heart in his hands. One of the chorus women appears to him after the murder telling him that he shouldn’t have shed blood.

Scenes 18-21: Elektra takes Ayesthus’ heart from her brother and triumphantly shows it to Klytemnestra who now knows that the young man is here to kill her together with her daughter. Klytemnestra takes the ax to fight for her life but Orestes’ resolve has already
weakened. A fight follows between brother and sister as he wants to stop the circle of violence and let their mother live, while she is determined to kill her and take revenge. As Elektra grabs the ax from him and is ready to take it down on her mother, the chorus intervenes and stops her. She kneels down weeping. Klytemnestra delivers the play’s closing lines expressing gratitude for having had her life spared.
Appendix 3. GIANTS

The play takes place in three areas- a traditional chief’s hut decorated with animal skins, the sangoma’s cave, Nontombi’s prison cell, bare with blood stains on the walls. Behind there is a backdrop showing a beautiful landscape.

Scene 1. The Sangoma, leader of the chorus, sings an ominous song suggesting an impending danger or disaster.

Scene 2: Nontombi, the young woman, and Asante, her fiancé and Makhanda’s son, come on stage and with dance moves that allude to mating, they express their love for each other and their impatience to marry and have children.

Scene 3: In a long call-and-response sequence the Sangoma and the chorus tell of Nontombi’s family and the deadly combat between her two brothers, Sizwe and Sechaba. They call the former a freedom fighter who fought to free his people from Makhanda’s tyranny. Two dancers, accompanied by drumming enact the fight.

Scene 4: Makhanda, followed by a praise poet who sings in SeSotho appears before his people and announces his verdict: Sechaba who fought on his side will be buried in honour while Sizwe who opposed him will be left unburied to rot and no one is allowed to even look at the body. The crowd occasionally responds with ululations.

Scene 5: Wanjiru brings to her sister Nontombi the news of Makhanda’s verdict about their brothers. Nontombi’s first reaction is to comply but she instantly changes her mind and decides to act according to the ancestral laws and bury her brother Sizwe. Wanjiru,
too afraid to join in the action, tries in vain to discourage her although she sees the rightfulness of her choice. The two sisters remain allied despite their different decisions.

**Scene 6:** In a poetic interlude the chorus sings of the preparation of a burial for a loved one and warn Makhanda that Sizwe’s body is still alive and one day will rise again.

**Scene 7:** Makhanda converses with his wife Nozizwe and tells her of nightmares that do not let him sleep at night. He refers to his extreme policies of torturing and killing those who disobey him as possible sources of guilt although he claims them necessary for the country’s peace and stability. Nozizwe obediently joins him in this view in order to ease his consciousness. They discuss about their son Asante who will soon return from his initiation school as a grown man. Nozizwe informs Makhanda that their son chose Nontombi to be his wife. At that moment, a messenger arrives announcing that Nontombi was caught burying Sizwe’s body. The news leaves Makhanda in deep frustration.

**Scene 8:** Makhanda confronts Nontombi, tries to have her explain her action and apologize in order to set her free for the sake of his son. Nontombi refuses to denounce her act and reminds Makhanda of the importance of the ancestral laws of burial for the community’s continuity and well-being. An argument over tradition and authority ensues where Makhanda tries to silence Nontombi on the basis of his age and status. As he fails to do so, he resolves to have her tortured in order to force her to publicly apologize.

**Scene 9:** Makhanda and Nozizwe argue over Nontombi’s treatment. While Makhanda tries to evade responsibility claiming that the elders of the community are in charge of
her, Nozizwe reminds him that she is just a young girl and asks him to demonstrate pity and compassion and release her. Her please however are in vain as Makhanda refuses to yield fearing that he will lose his status and credibility among the elders.

**Scene 10:** Wanjiru, carried by Makhanda’s men, visits Nontombi in her prison cell. She has clear signs of torture on her body. We hear that she has been tortured and raped in order to denounce her sister and side with Makhanda. She is facing the dilemma to condemn her sister or die in the hands of Makhanda’s men. The dancers of the chorus enact with their bodies scenes of rape and torture.

**Scene 11:** The chorus sings of moral responsibility, of humans at the crossroads of a decision between life and death when faced with injustice and the need to make sacrifices in the fight against it.

**Scene 12:** Makhanda once again confronts Nontombi in her prison cell where she is being tortured and raped by his men. He announces to her with every detail how her sister was raped, tortured and left to die after she refused to obey him and showed disrespect for his power. Nontombi for the last time declares her respect to him as a man and a king but remains firm in her decision that she was right burying her brother and obeying the ancestral laws. To Makhanda’s arguments that she has been raped therefore is unpure for his son, Nontombi insists that she will marry the man she loves. After listening to her, Makhanda decides to pronounce her sentence to death.
Scene 13: Nozizwe tries for the last time to warn Makhanda that killing Nontombi would be against ancestral and human justice. He points to him the arbitrariness of his decision which he made despite all democratic procedures. Unable to confront her, Makhanda repeatedly exclaims that he did nothing wrong and he acted as a statesman should. Failing to convince him otherwise, Nozizwe complies and remains silent.

Scene 14: Asante appears before his father to respectfully ask him to release Nontombi. While Makhanda tries to convince him to forget about her, he insists that he is in love with her and wants to marry her. Makhanda tries in vain to draw Asante on his side and failing to do so he declares that he will proceed with his decision to have Nontombi punished with death. In rage, Asante warns his father that killing Nontombi will mean losing his own son.

Scene 15: The sangoma sings an ominous song predicting danger and disaster, very similar to the one in the opening of the play. Makhanda appears before the Sangoma who, also supported by Asante, accuses him that with his decision to punish, torture and kill Nontombi he caused the disaster of the community, the destruction of the land and the rage of the dead and the unborn. Makhanda makes a last attempt to justify his actions but he finally repents before the Sangoma’s prediction of more destruction. The Sangoma asks him to run and release Nontombi’s soul and ask for forgiveness. Makhanda, followed by Asante, runs to Nontombi’s prison to find her lying dead. In a fit of rage and despair Asante turns his sword against his father but in the last minute he kills himself. As
Makhanda realizes what he has done, a messenger arrives bringing him the news of Nozizwe’s suicide. The play closes with a lost and frustrated Makhanda looking out to the audience as the lights come down.
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