

# **A Brief Moment in the Great Postcolonial Story: Crime, Violence and Grief in Contemporary South African Theatre.**

David Peimer  
*Edge Hill University, UK*

## **Abstract**

Much has been written about Protest Theatre during the apartheid era; and much has been written about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission after the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa. Much has also been written about the profound importance of postcolonial theory in relation to South African, and other African, theatre practices and traditions. This article aims to contribute to the growing knowledge of in-depth and nuanced insights gained from this legacy in the context of current, post-apartheid theatre. This article specifically argues that, in post-apartheid theatre, when the characters and/or audience, collectively experience grief, the traumatic legacy of the binary arrangement of identities (of 'primitive/civilized, superior/inferior, master/servant') constructed by and for power during the pre-revolution era, breaks down and the crimes of colonization and apartheid are perceived by the audience. This is seen as a necessary part of the process in the ongoing countering of the received master narrative inculcated by the colonial and apartheid periods. Agreeing with Ash Amin, the paper argues that through such theatre the periphery is liberated and, on those terms, engages with the centre, or historical, hegemonic narrative.

From that perspective, history and the present can be grasped and new post-apartheid identities seen as multi-dimensional, non-stereotyped, and in 'constant production' are revealed. Applying this notion, one observes that multiple stories emerge to articulate this countering process. But, core to this process, is the subjective and collective experience of grief leading to the binaries collapsing and the crime of the colonial and apartheid project being seen at the core of the traumatic history which informs the contemporary, multi-layered South African experience. The article explores five contemporary South African plays: *Bush Tale*, *Relativity*; *Township Stories*, *Hallelujah!*, *Reach*, *Armed Response*. Notions of postcolonial and identity theory are incorporated in the article as they help illuminate the plays. In addition, insights gained from the Kleinian School of Object Relations psychoanalytic theory help inform notions of how the

processes of grief and trauma deepen our understanding of the plays, and the contemporary South African narrative.

## **Introduction: The Legacy of Colonial Binary of Self and Other.**

This article argues that, in post-apartheid theatre, when the characters and/or audience, collectively experience grief, the legacy of the binary arrangement of identities constructed by and for power during the pre-revolution era South Africa, breaks down and the great crimes of colonization and apartheid are perceived by the audience. From that perspective, history and the present can be grasped and new, post-apartheid identities seen as multi-dimensional, non-stereotyped, and constantly evolving. In short, the binaries of 'primitive/civilized, superior/inferior,<sup>1</sup> master/servant' are noted as having been ideologically arranged to install, justify, and sustain the previous structure of power. It is these binaries that collapse through the characters and audience experience of grief in most post-apartheid theatre, but especially in the plays chosen. The paper will explore five contemporary South African plays. The plays are: *Bush Tale*, *Relativity*; *Township Stories*, *Hallelujah!*, *Reach*, *Armed Response*.

Identity construction and its deconstruction are central to postcolonial discourse precisely because of the insistent interventions of the colonized re-imagining history and cultural memory, and the resultant fading supremacy of the colonial legacy of ideologically arranged identity binaries and hierarchies. In theatre, this deconstruction does not merely refer to dislocation of theatrical character; rather, it implies a dialectics of constant evolution because of the ceaseless intervention of history. In this context, there never was a "Garden of Eden" period in identity formation, and, rather, a dialectics of struggle between construction and deconstruction is more the norm in narratives of historical and cultural forces. In this post revolution phase, I contend that crime, violence, grief and the criminal subject, as represented in these plays, articulate important, changing societal perceptions of these notions. It is vital to note that this happens when the supremacy of the legacy of the colonial ideologically arranged binaries is destabilized. I further propose that this occurs when the audience experiences collective grief, even if for a few moments of theatrical time. The article also proposes that, through exploring these plays, this process leads to a profound sense that, ultimately, the great crime of colonization is seen as the rough terrain

from which the South African story emerges. Arising from this, a future can be intuited, the past re-imagined, the present grasped.

## **Context**

Much has been written about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (the TRC) as a sociological and political phenomenon. Much has been written about the TRC in relation to representations of memory and performance theory. This article does not focus on these debates, as it is more interested in how the TRC might illuminate certain aspects of the plays explored here. Thus the first focus is on the processes of grief. The following insights regarding the TRC are useful in relation to this. Jane Taylor notes that 'some of the perpetrators seemed to have capacity for remorse...some seemed shocked and fearful... some showed no remorse or grief...a profound denial...'.<sup>2</sup> In relation to the victims, she notes that 'In the play, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, we faced the question of how to articulate the traumatised speaking of their trauma...their testimony...authoring their words...in performance...we saw the themes of anger...and grief...from the survivors or their families'<sup>3</sup> In essence, it can be proposed that the perpetrators either remained in denial or went through a process of denial, shock, remorse, grief and acceptance.<sup>4</sup> The survivors or their families went through a process of shock, anger and grief, and, through great pain, some acceptance<sup>1</sup>. Importantly, these processes are similar to significant moments and character trajectories in the plays, as will be observed later in the article.

Here, Kleinian psychoanalytic notions of the processes of grief are useful. Klein notes the processes outlined and this leads her to explore the inner psychoanalytic paradigm involved. In essence, Kleinian's<sup>5</sup> Object Relations<sup>6</sup> theory speaks of our internalizing, or projecting onto others, inner and outer good or bad objects – object being the word for a parent, partner, a child, society, a boss, or any other person or group of persons. In our unconscious we internalize such objects and split these into good and bad objects. It is often through the process of grieving that we are able to re-evaluate our internalized split objects. For example, the dead parent can no longer be seen primarily as bad or good, as we painfully, even if partially, re-integrate good and bad objects in times of grief. Through the processes of grief described, we either remain in denial (the splitting of internalized good and bad objects remains) or engage with the process that enables us, at least partly, to integrate the good and bad objects.

“The rebuilding of this inner world characterizes the successful work of grief...a recovery is a putting back together of the previously split internalized objects or persons...the result of grieving is that the personality is enriched by gaining a better ability to appreciate the Other object...and deepen the individual’s relation to putting back together his previously split inner good and bad objects ”.<sup>7</sup>

In Object-Relations Theory, our Self is always in relation to an Other, and not just in a relationship between our ego, id and superego. This is the psychoanalytic underpinning of the self/other binary and can be related to the postcolonial thinking of Fanon and Said, and Hegelian<sup>8</sup> philosophy. As Fanon posits: “Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose himself on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, it is this other who remains the focus of his actions. His human worth and reality depend on this other and on his recognition by the other. It is in this other that the meaning of his life is condensed.”<sup>9</sup>

Applying Fanon’s notion to Kleinian processes of grief and the self/other dichotomy, helps give us a theoretical sense of the TRC process and this assists in illuminating the role that the binary and grief play in the theatre texts explored. In essence, lift the binary induced by colonial and apartheid categorizations, and we observe a human with complexities, multiple identities and multiple narratives. We do not see a Self ideologically framed by hegemony as an inferior (or superior) Other. In this way, the binary is collapsed, or, in Kleinian thought, the psychic process of splitting is negated by integrating the Objects. Further, I argue that the dramaturgical device which begins this process in the plays is when the characters and audience observe that the crime of colonization or apartheid created the ideologically framed binary in the first place. Theatrically, this happens when the characters undergo experiences that force or enable them to engage with this process. That is how the binary collapses, and how these writers counter or dialogue with the inherited master narrative, and the real crime<sup>10</sup> observed by the characters and audience.

Noting the work of Fanon, Said, Homi Bhabha, Hall, Spivak and others, I would propose that the notion of Ash Amin is helpful in linking current postcolonial thinking with Kleinian psychological discourse in relation to the plays explored, and the collapse of the binary. As she notes: “Postcolonial thinking liberated the periphery from the centre... from the binaries...revealing...the colonising project, the intersections and distances of hegemony and resistance... and the narration of counter-histories”.<sup>11</sup>

When the periphery is liberated, the binaries are exposed as an ideological arrangement, and, as outlined, I would argue, that in the plays, we observe this happening when the great crime of colonisation/apartheid is observed. After this realisation, in Kleinian terms, the self/other splitting is able to achieve some integration of good and bad objects, or, at least, a mutual recognition. In this way, a dialogue between subaltern and coloniser, or apartheid believer, can begin. The end of apartheid and the TRC experience led to playwrights' exploring new ways of conveying subjective and societal understandings of the Self/Other dynamic, collective and individual trauma, freedom and a sense of belonging. But, removing the claws of totalitarianism also revealed feelings of abandonment, revenge, anger and grief. Further, since the late 90-s, disillusionment with certain ideals of the revolution, the fact that 1 in 9 has Aids, lack of healthcare, education, housing, jobs, corruption, extreme poverty and violent crime have also informed the South African experience.

What all the plays have in common is the notion that it is the audience and characters' experience of grief that ultimately removes the binary from identity construction. And it is this dramaturgical structure that enables all to see they have been part of a social construct that has the process of criminalization of all at its heart. This realization results in a profound shift in the perception of the phenomenon of colonization itself, as history and colonization come to be seen as the great crime.

As Hall notes: "[t]he traumatic character of 'the colonial experience'...the ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization. Not only, in Said's "'Orientalist'" sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes...they had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as "'Other'".<sup>12</sup> This profound understanding of the self/other dynamic can be observed in some of the plays explored.

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## **The Legacy of the Colonial Binary and Contemporary South African Theatre**

The play, *Bush Tale*, by Martin Koboekae (2006), has a subtle, gentle humorous style. It depicts the mistrust prevalent when two people from extremely different cultural backgrounds meet by chance in a deeply rural part of South Africa. A white woman with a conservative background encounters a witty black man with a politicized history. She is trying to get away from her white husband who is on holiday at a nudist colony. The black man is on his way to the mill where he works, and pushes a rickety wheelbarrow laden with bags of corn. The rural,

desolate space of their meeting becomes a poetic image and backdrop. The sensitive, subtle sense of the deconstruction of binary identities is observed as the characters', with much trepidation and distrust, begin to interact with each other. One can observe the influence of the Truth Commission and the Kleinian split of good and bad objects being experienced by the characters. We also observe the subaltern resisting the hegemonic narrative of the white woman as, the black man, the peripheral character slowly moves to counter the centre or master narrative. He does this aware that he will not let her have the power to make him experience himself as Hall's Other.

The characters confront their individual cultural memory of white privilege and black rage (beneath the humour) as they attempt to discover the meaning of Otherness. This is done through a focus on emerging revelations of "truth." and how it might "humanize" Otherness. The characters inhabit the legacy of centuries of colonization (not just apartheid) and it is a slow, painful process (even if framed in subtle wit) - to relinquish their inherited binary perception of themselves and the white/black ideological structure. As this happens, the characters and audience slowly grasp that identity is a dynamic process, a dialectic of deconstructing inherited beliefs and constructing new values. This is also the essence of Object Relations Theory - we construct ourselves in relation to others (objects) and our values and beliefs can only change if societal categories are lifted and we engage as human beings.

In the play, this process is achieved through the collective experience of trauma/grief; collective for both characters and audience. What is surprising is that this experience of trauma is skillfully done through a gentle, chance encounter of two characters. Ironically, this sensitivity of style gives the trauma and identity deconstructing processes a heightened impact. Moreover, in the end, both the characters and audience, through the process of collective grief, sense the criminalization of their entire society and memory (with its attendant binaries) is being replaced by an emerging new perception of Self and Other in the post-apartheid era. In this way, the play is a delicate and thoughtful moment in time during which these characters try, with great trepidation, wariness, humor and curiosity to engage with prejudice, stereotype, and cultural memory. The characters find a few quiet, stolen moments that enable them to struggle with the racially determined binary identities of colonization (civilized/primitive, master/servant, inferior/superior) they have inherited in the Self/Other arrangement of perception. It gradually dawns on the characters and audience that the binary has been employed to construct their identities. Ironically, as they discover aspects of each other beyond their learnt stereotypes and stereotyping process, the unspoken grief at this discovery greatly increases for both characters and audience. They sense that this stereotyping process has enabled crime to rule

for centuries at the unseen core of colonization. This is the crime of categorizing persons in terms of racial inferiority/superiority, primitive/civilized – the crime of an ideology founded on racial binaries. In Kleinian terms, this encourages and inculcates the process of splitting good and bad objects, not just between individual subjects, but as core to hegemonic ideological structures. The play takes place in the vast, empty, desolate Karoo desert, and in the hearts of the characters - the desolate, desert onstage heightens the sense that the infiltration of the crime of colonization is everywhere, unseen, subtle, pervasive. It is also an image of an indifferent eye on the ceaseless ebb and flow of shifting notions of colonization, binaries, their collapse, grief, and evolving new perceptions. Perhaps, history is the history of colonization and the never-ending contestation of it in a dialectics of endless struggle.

*Bush Tale* captures the timeless feel of a fleeting encounter in which the influence of the Truth Commission can be sensed. Through the collective experience of this grief the audience sees how binary identities break down and identities emerge where perceptions of Self and Other are changed since the great historical crime of colonization is seen as being located in all societal participants (colonizer and colonized). In this way, a trigger for a new perception of collective memory is observed and this is how resistance to the grand narrative of colonization is re-imagined. Fanon's notion of mutual recognition of human worth and Amin's proposition of how the liberated periphery dialogues with the centre, can be seen as the aspiration of the play.<sup>13</sup>

*Relativity: Township Stories* by Paul Grootboom and Presley Chweneyagae (2005) is about a serial killer on the loose in a township. The gritty, physicalized and harsh violence (rape, murder, assault) in the play is captured in a highly visual, post-modern cinematic style with a soundtrack to manipulate mood. Since the late 90-s - post the Mandela and Truth Commission period – South Africa has become one of the most violent countries on earth. “(20,000 murders a year, 40,000 rapes, including thousands of baby rapes, 150,000 assaults, rampant car hijacking, robbery, bombing of banks.<sup>14</sup>).” “Life is hard, death is easy” is the phrase from the play that expresses its central concern. With such extreme violence by poverty-stricken, township men with nothing to lose, is the sense of an identity brutalized beyond humanity, revealed with sharp, dark humor. This is not the “rainbow nation” aspiration of Bishop Tutu's, but part of a very South African identity burnt into the soul by its collective memory. Freedom has brought a sense of belonging for some, but many remain marginalized from the partial spreading of wealth through patronage and corruption, and minimal access to the bare essentials of life, let alone jobs. Survival becomes the core of life and identity has been constructed in the margins, and rage and grief inhabit this

core. This is what we, the audience, witness, and it is not sensationalized violence.

While in *Bush Tale* the great colonial crime permeates the collective memory and is individualized in all concerned, in *Relativity: Township Stories* daily crime is what the society experiences. This is viscerally located in the play in the harsh, urban, downtown Johannesburg and Soweto streets of broken dreams. Broken dreams from the ideologically informed new binary construct of the new democracy/fascist past; from current political and economic promises and their minimal delivery; from promises of education (and health, housing, sanitation) and their minimal delivery; from the promises of jobs and the reality of life in the streets - the list goes on. Here, the binary plays out in the contested arenas of the tough streets. In the new democratic South Africa, the binary is resurrected, albeit in new clothes. This does not just arise from poverty, political and police corruption, and the rage of unemployed persons. As we watch the play, we empathize with the violent 'criminals' because we grasp that, for them, the great crime of colonization and apartheid has resulted in a new binary identity formation which has delayed their access to the promises of post-apartheid life. This forces the key characters to remain in the Kleinian split of good and bad objects. Or, to paraphrase Hall,<sup>15</sup> the system still has the power to make them experience themselves as Other, and, in the play, as an abandoned Other. Because of this, the characters enact terrible violence on certain characters. But, I would propose that, as the play progresses, the audience ceases to view their violence as individualized, but observes that the characters remain trapped in the colonial and apartheid binary, and that this ideological frame is the real crime. Further, in the play, the characters' agency has been promised by the end of apartheid, but denied given the post-apartheid realities of poverty. Power (in all societies) needs to promise yet delay agency in order to prevent or contain resistance against itself. Agency is delayed or diverted to serve the interests of the State. In the play, this postcolonial context is thus nuanced as it portrays the emerging State's need for the revival of the binary in order to maintain power in the new political paradigm.

This need to delay or divert agency leads to a deeper nuance in the understanding of the criminalization of history and daily life in the colonial and postcolonial eras. We see that the binary arrangement of ideology gives rise to something much deeper than rage against corruption; it gives rise to the notion that the inherited ideological construction can be perceived as the norm. In *Bush Tale*, the characters struggle with the postcolonial inherited crime of historically internalized forces (with its attendant binaries). In *Relativity*, they struggle with

the new binary of the promise of agency versus the State's need to divert agency to serve the State's interests. Without sanctioned employment, this battle takes place in the streets; a well noted arena of contestation in many cultures throughout history. When agency cannot serve the State (through lack of employment or access to bare essentials), it knows it must serve itself to survive. Thus the crime is the ideological promise of agency knowing agency will be diverted through lack of employment.

In *Relativity*, with such extreme violence by poverty-stricken, township men with nothing to lose, lies the sense of an identity ferociously brutalized; but it is important to note how these men are constructed. The play suggests this deeper nuance as, ironically, the State has revived the binary yet again in the physical form of the 'black criminal' body, the antithetical site of 'civilised mores'. Echoing the colonial past, the great historical crime of colonization is located in the politics of the black body. The violated black body embodies the criminalized/violent social subject; history and the present reside in a body which has already been ideologically framed as criminalized and violent, and thus the audience, while observing the immediate criminal onstage, also sense the history of the historically constructed black body. But, importantly, the play portrays this history and its attendant grief and trauma as underpinning the 'black body's construction', and the audience engages with this altered perception.

By the end of the play, similar to Durrenmatt's *Andorra*, what the audience sees represented on stage is the criminalization of history, the present, the entire society, not just the black body. Similar to the other plays, this has been achieved by the audience realizing all are complicit in the great crime, and that this realization is seen in the breakdown of binary constructed identities through a grieving process that the TRC and Kleinian psychoanalysis illuminate. In Kleinian terms, the characters do not choose to remain in the psychic phase of splitting their good and bad objects. Rather, they have been forced to remain in this split as society denies them the means by which they might be able to integrate the splitting of internalized objects. Thus, in the play, the audience experiences the grief process and, through this, understands the great crime that has driven the men to this position.<sup>16</sup>

*Bush Tale* has a dreamlike, surreal atmosphere. *Relativity*, like *Hallelujah!* by Mxolisi Norman (2002) delves into the violent, poverty-racked reality of township life. In the play, this is relieved by moments of rough township humor and jazz music. Popular in South Africa, *Hallelujah!* is the play "black audiences

hate to love” as the author puts it.<sup>17</sup> The narrative follows the ordinary lives of one black family. We watch them at home, and in a jazz club in the huge, sprawling township of Soweto. But within this story of family life, love and generation conflict, lies a vision of life full of vivid, extreme personal experiences forged in the death throes of apartheid. The Truth Commission’s aim of trying to “humanize” the brutality burning in the collective memory can be felt as the characters’ humanity, wit, and compassion emerge to help them to live with the past. But the true power of the play occurs in a moment of great dramatic irony. Just as they are drawn into the warmth of the characters’ humanity, they fall prey to the murderous, random violence engulfing the country. These are the “the silences in the euphoria of the new democracy,”<sup>18</sup> as the author puts it.

Central to the play, is the haunting township jazz music that is played live. Paradoxically, as the audience is drawn deeper into the daily fear of murder South Africans live with, the music inspires one by incorporating traditional Xhosa music within an urban, jazz township sound. The blues and jazz sounds come from the memories of a pastoral past that counters the harsh landscape of Johannesburg. The singing, and the evocative chanting, invest both the singer and the audience with a kind of hope, “a stubbornness to the harshness that mediates the brutal events in the play....the characters struggle to negotiate the rough, post-apartheid landscape, but they and the audience find solace in the jazz’<sup>19</sup>. Living between the extremes of new freedom and fear, the characters live out their hopes and anxieties in the shadow of legacies of past and present realities. Again, grief and violence are experienced by the characters and, again, the great historical crime is laid bare for the audience as they witness the characters’ destruction.

In *Relativity: Township Stories* the ultimate site of great historical crime of colonization is located in the politics of the black body. The crime of colonization required criminalizing the black body. As one watch the play, one observes these to be the real crimes, not just the obvious violence of the characters. It is the audience, not the characters, who perceive this and who thus collapse the binaries, or Object-Relations splits in the Kleinian sense. Further, echoing Amin, it is the audience who experience the need to liberate the periphery, the criminalized black body, and enable the body to not just resist the inherited ideology of the centre, to but bring its own multiple narratives and multiple identities to dialogue with the master narrative.

In *Hallelujah!* the murder is gratuitous, random, without motivation. It happens in a desolate part of the tough township and the characters struggle to make

sense of what has no rationality. Being random, it could happen anywhere. Thus, the central character, Lady, starts to see criminality in her lover, her family, her society. All are potential criminals to her. Realistic fear blurs into creeping paranoia. Eventually, the one murder causes the township to implode. Here, the politics of the constructed criminalized black body are not viscerally represented. Similarly, in Durrenmatt's play *Andorra*, what the audience sees represented on stage is the criminalization of history, the present, and the entire society. The victory of the binary is briefly lifted by the one random murder, and the grief of the nation's history and the present, are collectively experienced as the characters and audience gaze beneath the trauma of the murder. This implodes the binary and the grief reveals the Kleinian psychic splits to the audience who then can begin to partially integrate them.

As the audience experiences the shock of the bullet, grief is required to complete the dismantling of the binary, the random murder being the catalyst. In the play, the politics of the black male body is not foregrounded as the site of crime and violence. Instead, it is history, the present, the entire society of racially constructed subjects – black, white, mixed race - who are all criminalized. As Hall posits: 'The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization''<sup>20</sup>. In *Reach* by Lara Newton (2007), history and memory are subtly investigated ironically since the play is set in the future. Memory and historical denial, partly exploded by the Truth Commission, are relentlessly revealed and one observes the breaking of identity binaries. The Kleinian good and bad object splits are revealed as the racially categorized characters interrogate, surprise, please, accuse, show compassion, outwit, and, finally, see each other as human, all too human. The audience is drawn into a stage world of characters who slowly, painfully reveal their lived multiple identities and their complex psychological inner conflicts, traumas, and realities. One sees their identities grapple with a racialized, colonial past and a present, multi-faceted subaltern world. As the binaries collapse, they literally reach for each other and achieve the possibility of some mutual understanding. The play is a profound attempt at the liberated periphery dialoguing with the centre, with prejudice and stereotyping partially lifted as the play evolves.

*Reach* tells the story of an elderly white South African woman living near a former "blacks only" township, and her lively relationship with a young black man who visits her. The play is set in a remote, rural unforgiving landscape. This conveys a distilled poetic atmosphere, between the shifting worlds of realism and a haunting surrealism. This constant shift between a "real" and a surreal

theatrical experience is found in some new South African plays – it is an aesthetic which tries to incorporate global influences, which had minimally influenced South African Protest Theatre during the apartheid era, as the focus was on the exigencies of challenging the fascist/criminal period. *Reach's* subject matter delicately portrays a lawless South Africa lurching towards an uncertain future. In the play, the black man has a terrible secret to tell the white woman about her murdered son, and his implication in the murder. When this secret is revealed, there is an unsentimental redemption, an elusive glimmer of what a South African future could be. However, the play is not just about the revealing of buried secrets and the hope for redemption their revelation holds; it is also about the experience of personal and historical abandonment. As in *Relativity* and *Hallelujah!*, a sense of being abandoned by the post-apartheid democracy – broken dreams - is accompanied by an immediate, profound grief that is experienced by the characters and audience.

In *Hallelujah!*, the crime of murder is sited in a rough, poverty-stricken huge township, but in *Reach* it has happened in a remote, isolated and desolate part of the Karoo desert in South Africa. Similar to the other plays explored, a black male has perpetrated the crime and the truly important question is whether the murder is seen in the context of the overall historical processes of criminality, grief, violence, the binaries and the great crime of colonialism. In the play, the characters are portrayed as stereotyped in the beginning, but, as the play evolves, the narrative drives them to go above their binary identity construction and see aspects of their multi-dimensional, non-binary selves. As seen in the other plays, this occurs when the trauma of the truth of how the violence and murder happened is gradually revealed to the audience. Again, we see another recent South African play sensing the deep structure of the great historical crime of colonization and apartheid. Thus, as with *Hallelujah!*, the politics of the black male body are not seen as the primary site of crime or grief. Rather, history, collective memory, and the complicit society as a whole, are seen as criminalized and the actions of the characters merely the embodiment of that historical and lived process. It is through the grief that the characters experience that the audience realizes the great historical crime. Further, in the play, the collapse of the binary leads to the authority of the master narrative being countered. This is because it enables the central characters to live their multiple stories and portray their multiple identities. This is the meaning of the liberated periphery dialoguing with the centre. As Ngozi Adichie puts it: 'The danger of a Single Story...of what books are...of what Africa is...of how to show a people as one thing...is it creates stereotypes...binaries...and so are incomplete...one story becomes the only story'.<sup>21</sup>

*Armed Response*, by David Peimer, aspires to portray a similar deep structure in grasping the nuances of the processes of societal criminalization, rather than locating the site of crime in the politics of the black male body - in the play, both black and white characters are seen to be organizing and carrying out crime and violence. *Armed Response* follows a young German photographer who arrives to do an assignment in Johannesburg. Excited and free-spirited, she meets Vusi who works for the Armed Response private security company. Vusi is a streetwise, township man whose friends are gangsters who also work for the company. As she meets her neighbours, corrupt police, gangsters, certain strange, frightening experiences happen to her and she succumbs to the omnipresent fear of being murdered in liberated South Africa.

*Armed Response* is cinematic in form. As in *Relativity*, each scene is visually composed within the overall emerging image. The play moves from the aesthetics of realism into a haunting, surreal dreamlike world as Anna and Vusi become entwined in a web of events over which they have very little control. Anna is a photographer and the play evokes a world where, like a photograph, a moment in time is lifted out of reality and framed in a visually poetic image. The play's existential themes of freedom and fear within the new democracy are located within the context of the massive neo-liberal inspired privatization of security in South Africa. Here, armed private security guards outnumber police by 5 to 1 in a multi-billion business. What happens to ordinary people, hegemonic ideological constructs and societal perception of itself when policing is privatized? For these companies, no crime means no business, no profit. Crime does pay. When security is privatized, surely there is a seductive temptation for police to be bought off by this new, mass scale business. Criminalisation has new clothes as security is privatised, new binaries are arranged, and the society resurrects the gleam of a new master/slave, civilized/primitive, perpetrator/victim dialectic. A new kind of binary is born, and grief relegated to the future when this binary will itself implode. *Armed Response* explores the nuances of what it means to live in a democratic society framed by security for profit. Thus, what differentiates this play from the others is the play's context – the privatization of security and its motive of profit. Within this context, we experience the primary characters (not the corrupt private company boss and corrupt police inspector) as ordinary people caught in the dilemma of trying to distinguish between valid fear and paranoia. What happens to individuals and a society when these emotions constitute a blurring of the binaries? In a poorly policed society, how do freedom and fear work in individuals caught in the grip of a security driven business for profit? Living in a society where the historical

and present paradigm of criminalization is a “norm”, the characters grasp that Faustian bargains are the reality, and democratic ideals the dream. Thus in the play, when one lifts the membrane of sophisticated ideology (freedom, democracy, human rights), one discovers the myth of Faust as the central, enduring reality of human interaction and societal construction in the South African context.

As in some of the other plays, here the characters struggle with the new binary of the great democratic promise of agency and the State’s need to divert agency to serve business, which is in the State’s interest (as the State increases tax and has another method to control the masses). Further, privatization of police goes beyond consumerist ideology. It diverts individual agency itself as fear of crime limits notions of free choice as citizens surrender freedom and pay for privatized security. The legacy of the crime of colonization echoes from history in the play, and, as one era of the gleam of the binary fades, another is born. But the immediate primary focus of the play is the linking of the privatization of security with business. This requires the State to abdicate its responsibility for citizens’ security. The result? State abdication here can be seen as a covert diverting of agency towards fear and thus, further State control of the people. This is in the State’s interests in terms of the way power requires the acquiescence of the population. Also as in some of the other plays, this need to delay or divert agency leads us to a deeper nuance in the understanding of the criminalization of history and daily life in the colonial and postcolonial eras. We see that the binary arrangement of ideology and its attendant internalization in identity construction gives rise to something much deeper than rage against (or, as in the play, collusion with) corruption. It gives rise to the notion that the colonial arrangement of binaries has returned, albeit in new clothes. The play also suggests that individuals can only survive and surmount or outwit this when they participate in the lived notion that the reality is to arrange daily life according to the Faustian bargain. As in *Relativity*, survival is the obvious driving theme in the play. But, in *Armed Response*, it is the Faustian bargain, rather than rage and violence, which helps the characters resolve their inner conflict. In this way, the play adds to the representation of crime and violence as articulated in the other plays and suggests that the great crime occurs on a deeper level.

This level is that the normalizing of the criminalization of society is taken a step further as the State, business and the police are not simply in corrupt collusion, but are portrayed as the victims of crime as much as the ordinary individual. Crime is depicted as all pervasive so all State institutions are also victims and business is shown as merely trying to help the State and the individual. Thus all

institutions and individuals are victims of crime, with business being the ironic, reluctant rescuer. The concealment of profit (for business and the State through taxes on business and keeping the individual in fear, thus diverting agency) is the crime and this furthers the entrenchment of the process of normalizing crime and violence. The politics of the black, white or mixed race characters is that the binary surrenders to the Faustian bargain wherein one sees that all the socially constructed subjects are reduced to making Faustian bargains. Moreover, this is seen as being at the core of all human, societal and institutional interaction. Further, in the play, when this bargain is revealed as core, the society begins to profoundly fracture. In these moments, great grief ensues in the audience – grief at history, at how the society is being newly constructed, and grief for an uncertain future. Noting the core argument in this article, it is in such moments of grief that one perceives how the greater historical crime infiltrates, and, in new clothes, ‘colonizes’ the present. Perhaps history really is the history of colonization and resistance.

## **Conclusion**

These plays “photograph” a post-revolutionary South African society. They reveal a dynamically changing sense of identity with attendant conceptual trends. The plays present this brief moment in history, and invite audience to see the entanglements of historical, colonial and contemporary forces. Or, to put it poetically, history really is ‘a nightmare from which we are trying to awake’<sup>22</sup>, as Joyce wrote.

In relation to the plays, it is important to note Hall’s insight: “Cultural identity, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past’<sup>23</sup>.

The plays capture the ceaseless ebb and flow of human conflict, of the crime of colonisation and apartheid, of the ever-changing nature of the Self/Other

dynamic and of the realities in the post-apartheid era. They also represent the varied ways grief is staged and the great crime that this process reveals. In this context, the plays show the current South Africa in a period that can be observed as a rough, adventurous, and dynamic moment of dialogue between the liberated periphery and the inherited legacy of the central, master narrative. Ultimately, these writers go to the root of these all too human dramatic conflict of ideas.

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## References

1. Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. UK. Pluto Press. 1986. p 42: ‘The Negro enslaved by his inferiority... the white man enslaved by his superiority...’
2. Margherita Laera. *Theatre and Adaptation*. London. Bloomsbury. 2014. p 27
3. Ibid. p 22, 23
4. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. *On Death and Dying*. London. Simon and Schuster. 1969.
5. Melanie Klein, the founder of Object-Relations Theory in Psychology, caused the major split from the Freudian School of Psychology in Britain, and globally. Object-Relations Theory puts the relationships between persons, or our inner relations to our own internalized good and bad objects at the core of its theory, rather than the ego, id, superego of Freudian thought. Towards the end of his life, Freud was moving towards this insight and her work is regarded as one of the most significant developments in psychoanalysis.
6. Hanna Segal. *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*. London. Karnac Books. 2006. Chapter 1, 2.
7. Segal, p, 93
8. Hegel. *Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford. OUP. 2010. (Chapter on The Paradox of Recognition)
9. Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. UK. Pluto Press. 1986. p 78. One notes the influence of Hegel on Fanon. Hegel in his chapter on The Paradoxical Nature of Recognition argues that the primary drive in human beings is the individual’s need for recognition by an Other. Hegel uses the metaphor of the master and slave relationship.

He posits that the master is not a master unless accorded that recognition by the slave, and vice versa. That is the paradox. Hegel then expands on this drive for recognition with further examples and philosophical thought.

10. It is worth noting that if apartheid and the Holocaust are termed 'crimes against humanity', then so must colonization be.

11. Ash Amin (in *Conversations in Postcolonial Thought*. in Katy P. Sian (ed.); Palgrave Macmillan, New York. 2014. p 98).

12. Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Padmini Mongia (ed.). London: Arnold, 1996. p 115

13. Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. UK. Pluto Press. 1986. p 78

Ash Amin (in *Conversations in Postcolonial Thought*. in Katy P. Sian (ed.); Palgrave Macmillan, New York. 2014. p 98).

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14. "Crime Stats. A wake-up call for government" in: *Mail and Guardian Newspaper*. Johannesburg, 3 July 2007

15. Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Padmini Mongia (ed.). London: Arnold, 1996. p 115

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16. It can be suggested that, in Kleinian psychology, the TRC gave a certain amount of agency to the survivors or their families and they thus had the possibility of, at least partly, integrating good and bad objects, and not remaining in the splitting phase.

17. Mxolisi Norman. *Unpublished Interview*. Johannesburg (2008)

18. Mxolisi Norman. *Unpublished Interview*. Johannesburg (2008)

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20. S. Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Padmini Mongia. (ed.). London: Arnold, 1996. p 117

21. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009). YouTube; <http://www.ted.com.7October 2017>

22. James Joyce. *Ulysses*. UK. Vintage. 1990. p 1

23. Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". In *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Padmini Mongia. (Ed.). London: Arnold, 1996: p 118