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The Performance of Trauma in Contemporary Drama: Philip Ridley, debbie tucker green and Nora Amin

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Abstract

This thesis explores the representations, effects and methods of resolution from traumatic experiences in five plays by contemporary British and Egyptian playwrights, from 2000 to 2019. It considers the dramaturgical choices that each playwright makes in order to present the performance of trauma onstage. The thesis uses psychiatric and cultural trauma theory to analyse the effects and expressions of traumatic anguish in the plays examined. It also seeks to decolonise the study of trauma in the theatre by analysing traumatic experiences and expression across cultural differences. By so doing, the thesis highlights recurrent experiences of oppression and marginalisation. The Introduction of this thesis gives an overview of the ways that contemporary theatre engages with trauma. It also reviews the academic texts that explore this link and establishes that this thesis aims to fill the gap in theatre studies by representing the trauma of minorities and disempowered groups. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the development of psychological trauma as a concept in the fields of psychiatry and cultural trauma theory and establishes the framework for the main topics that I discuss in my thesis. It also introduces the criticism of cultural trauma theory for its perceived lack of inclusivity and its Eurocentric bias. Chapter 2 focuses on Philip Ridley's *Vincent River* and *Leaves of Glass* to argue that the plays reflect the importance of reconstructing traumatic pasts through narrative, a predominant concept in Western trauma studies. Chapter 3 examines debbie tucker green's *hang* and *stoning mary*, to argue that marginalised groups and racial minorities experience different traumatic experiences from the majority and can also express their pain differently. Finally, Chapter 4 is an examination of Nora Amin's *Theatre of Crime*, a play depicting a sexual assault on a woman and the ensuing police investigation, where I argue that the play seeks to make the audience aware of their responsibility in creating and perpetuating the conditions that allow for violence against women and urges them to change these conditions.

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Table of Contents

Introduction…….....6-32

Chapter 1: Trauma Theory: A Critical Context…….…….....33-80

Chapter 2: Resolving and Denying Traumatic Pasts in Philip Ridley's *Vincent River* and *Leaves of Glass*……...……..81-123

Chapter 3: Trauma at the Margins: debbie tucker green's *hang* and *stoning mary*……124-174

Chapter 4: Designing and Resisting Oppression in Nora Amin's *Theatre of Crime*……..175-224

Conclusion……..…….....225-234

Works Cited…….…...…235-245

Appendix A: Permission to translate *Theatre of Crime*……..…….…….....246

Appendix B: *Theatre of Crime* Translation..……...…….....…247-289

Introduction

Trauma, "the thorn in the spirit", wounds us all, but does not pierce the same.[1] It pricks at body and soul, but our screams can be blood-curdling, muffled, silent, or silenced. The prevalence of trauma is particularly true of the contemporary moment, where we are inundated with stories and images of trauma and violence through various media: from that perspective it could even be claimed that we live in an age of trauma. Theatre, as one of the oldest forms of artistic expressions, has expressed this pain in different forms across time, space and cultures. It responds to and reflects this constant stream of visible pain as well as drawing attention to grievances that may not be widely known or acknowledged. This thesis explores the vicissitudes and implications of performing trauma on stage.

Aim and Scope

This thesis analyses the representation of traumatic experiences in plays by contemporary dramatists from the UK and Egypt, arguing that traumatic experiences, and their modes of expression and recovery, are bound by cultural and social contexts. My central dramatic case studies are Philip Ridley's *Vincent River* (2000) and *Leaves of Glass* (2007); debbie tucker green's *stoning mary* (2005) and *hang* (2015); and Nora Amin's *Theatre of Crime* (2019a). A common focus on themes of traumatisation connects these plays, as well as an attention to conditions of marginality or disempowerment that significantly position the dramatists themselves: Philip Ridley as a gay writer, debbie tucker green and Nora Amin as non-white women. I show that each of the three playwrights brings a unique perspective to the topic of

[1] American philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910) used this expression to describe the effect of psychological trauma.

trauma across the divides of gender, sexual orientation, cultural background and race. The thesis is underpinned by the following research questions:

1) What do trauma studies reveal about the ways characters in drama react, cope and attempt to resolve their traumas, and, conversely, what can theatre inform us about traumatic experiences that marginalised people face?

2) What opportunities does theatre present as a distinctive means of representing traumatic experience?

3) What dramaturgical choices do the playwrights make in order to convey traumatic pain? How far do the structures of these plays, the narrative, the silences, the actors' movement and the stage set create spaces where trauma can be effectively represented and received by its audience?

4) How might the strategies for representing trauma that each playwright chooses be understood in relation to their cultural and ethnic background?

The thesis brings together contemporary trauma theory with theatre studies scholarship. It draws on the work of trauma theorists within the fields of psychology and psychiatry, namely Judith Herman, Bessel van der Kolk and Laura S. Brown, postcolonial and decolonial authors Stef Craps and Achille Mbembe, as well as theatre practitioner and theorist Augusto Boal. My aim is to dissect how fictional traumatic experiences are remembered, re-experienced, presented and potentially resolved through the drama, in order to map the theoretical models of trauma against the landscape of the plays. As part of this analysis, the thesis examines how and whether the characters retell their experiences; how far it is possible to resolve trauma; and what kind of strategies these playwrights offer their characters as a means of reaching such a resolution. The thesis also explores traumatic experiences across cultural differences, arguing that characters

representing racial, gender and sexual minorities can be particularly vulnerable to traumatisation because of institutional racism and discrimination, inequality and racial and sexual violence. Finally, and as a question running throughout the study, the thesis examines the specific capacities of drama and performance to address and articulate traumatic experience. Through an analysis of the plays that is further informed by theatre reviews, as well as by personal experience of productions where this has been possible, it is argued first, that theatre, as a live art, has the ability to communicate the pain of trauma immediately and lucidly; second, that theatre's status as a public forum makes it an effective platform for highlighting uncomfortable truths about inequality, oppression and violence that can otherwise be ignored or forgotten.

Trauma: A Definition

The concept of trauma has continuously been defined and redefined. Up until the nineteenth century, trauma was a focus of concern only within the field of medicine to indicate physical injury. As the concept began to intersect with wider fields including psychology, psychoanalysis, law, and recently, literature and culture, its definition expanded to also denote emotional shock, or the distress that the shock causes ('trauma', 2022). For example, literary trauma theorist Cathy Caruth (1996) conceives of trauma as "the shocking and unexpected occurrence of an accident" (p.6) and poses the question: "Is trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?" (p.7). Caruth's argument builds on the concept of trauma as the continuous effect of an originary violent event: the ongoing experience of surviving death, as she puts it. By contrast, I use trauma in this thesis in two different but overlapping senses. As a guiding framework, I use it first of all to refer to a shocking and distressing event. This is regardless of preparedness, how long the event took or the circumstances that preceded or followed it. A shocking and disturbing event is traumatic in and of itself. That said, it is important to note that

referring to trauma as a singular event that is out of the "ordinary" is a problematic concept in mainstream trauma studies, as I go on to argue in Chapter 1. This brings me to my second use of the term, one which is also central to the aims of this thesis. I seek to highlight prolonged and repeated series of traumatic events or traumatisation, especially which women and minority ethnic groups face. In this second definition, trauma is understood as a constant threat which severely impairs the quality of life. Very often, the two kinds of traumatisation overlap, creating layers of trauma. The plays of debbie tucker green (in Chapter 3) and Nora Amin (Chapter 4) capture this intersection clearly, since they represent assaults on women and reveal that these assaults happen in the context of misogyny, racial inequality and the persistent threat of violence.

Theatre and Trauma: Mapping the Field

This thesis comes at a time when there is an abundance of research on trauma but less so on its dramatic performance. Some notable exceptions are the works of theatre scholars Patrick Duggan, namely *Trauma-Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance* (2012), and Miriam Haughton's *Staging Trauma: Bodies in Shadow* (2018). Both Duggan and Haughton note that there has not been sufficient scholarly work on the relationship between trauma, theatre and performance despite theatre's long-standing tradition of presenting suffering and violence. Duggan's *Trauma-Tragedy* is one of the first full-length works dedicated to dissecting this relationship, specifically within the fields of contemporary theatre and performance. Trauma-tragedy in Duggan's terms is both an analytical method of analysing trauma in the theatre as well as a practical framework for theatre-makers. He bases his method of analysis on the premise that contemporary Western society is saturated by images and reports of violence to the point that it has become, as Duggan puts it, "de-cathected, individualised and flattened" (p.174). Trauma-tragedy is therefore proposed as a response to this disengaged structure of feeling. It operates

through two key terms: immediacy and authenticity. Duggan argues that the trauma-tragic mode creates a space where the audience can be present in the trauma and be witnesses to it:

> In trauma-tragedy there is a desire to evoke a sense of being there [in the trauma] in an attempt to generate an effect of 'real' presence, or presence in 'reality' … Trauma-tragedy is trying to bear adequate – which is to say more immediate or more embodied – witness to trauma … it is a tragic mode which responds to our particular, traumatized world in an experiential and embodied manner, relating experience to physical-emotional feeling. (p.43)

Duggan's theory proposes a framework of presenting trauma that is immediate, where the audience witness and experience trauma viscerally within the theatre walls. In other words, the fictional trauma "travels" through the stage, from the actors/performers, and sears into the audience, who would then be able to embody it. Duggan examines a selection of contemporary plays of the 1990s against this framework, as well as examples of performance art whose makers seek to embody and bear witness to trauma in an authentic form (p.42), that is to say in realistic and graphic forms. He argues that by bearing such witness, the audience are led to consider the implications of traumatic experiences as they play out in the real world. Duggan's examples of witness-bearing include Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) and Anthony Neilson's *Normal* (1991), plays whose representational forms bring audiences forcibly close to the atrocities of war, and murder, respectively.

Duggan conceives of theatre not only as a productive space for representing trauma but also one that holds a privileged position among the other arts. Theatre's advantages in this are tied, above all, to its immediacy. Whereas experiences with traumatic events are "mediated", trauma-tragedy, in Duggan's view, can create an effect of witnessing trauma in an embodied

manner. Furthermore, theatre has unique opportunities for this mediation arising from its multiple elements of production. In addition to narrative and dialogue, theatre has the power to evoke trauma through scenography, lighting, costume, as well as the action and physicality of performers, and the proximity of audiences (p.130).

Duggan and Haughton bring attention to a structural similarity between performance in general and trauma: both disappear as soon as they happen but continue to live on in another form. Building on performance artist Peggy Phelan's observation that performance only happens once, live, and that if it is recreated, it will be through another medium (such as a recording or documentation), Duggan contends that traumatic experiences similarly eviscerate as soon as they occur, but continue to *haunt* the sufferer in the form of intrusive thoughts and nightmares (pp.54-55). Haughton identifies the same phenomenon, asserting that "the embodied moment of live performance … disappears the moment it manifests, while the memory of the moment lives on" (p.3). Trauma has the same features; therefore, Duggan and Haughton argue, theatre and performance spaces are privileged sites for staging it.

Haughton's study echoes Duggan's in its emphasis on contemporary theatre but focuses on works by Irish and British women playwrights and directors who dramatise experiences of sexual trauma and abuse. Her case studies are Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* (2000), Laura Wade's *Colder than Here* (2005), Louise Lowe's *Laundry* (2011) and director Teya Sepinuck's dramatisation of Somali refugee Maryama Yuusuf's testimony, *Sanctuary* (2013). Drawing on feminist theorists including Judith Herman, Haughton argues that the staging of trauma, as her case studies suggest: "seeks to acknowledge, illuminate, navigate, and deal with stories and histories of trauma that while deeply distinct and unique in each context, remain troubling and exposing for the society to whom they speak" (p.31). Indeed, Haughton illustrates through her

analysis that the abuse of women is anything but past. By representing the abuse of women in fictional terms, the plays are also drawing attention to a phenomenon that, in the present, she aptly describes as the "extraordinary everyday experience" (p.26) of physical, sexual, and other forms of violence and abuse against women that do not typically make headlines. Nonetheless, the very fact that these plays were produced points to an audience who are willing to listen and would therefore imply at least the potential for positive social change (p.29).

Beyond the work of Duggan and Haughton, another valuable contribution to scholarship addressing the intersection of trauma and theatre is made by Pietro Deandrea, in a chapter contributed to Abigail Ward's edited collection *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance* (2015). Deandrea examines depictions of modern slavery on the contemporary British stage, analysing texts including Abi Morgan's *Fugee* (2008) and Lucy Kirkwood's *It Felt Empty When the Heart Went at First but It Is Alright Now* (2009), and exploring the ways in which the topic impacts the plays' language and structure. Deandrea proposes that these dramatists transform the stage into an "expressionist, non-naturalistic" setting as a reflection of the state of mind of the victims (p.191). Thus, in discussing *Fugee,* for example, Deandrea traces the symptoms of PTSD in characters representing undocumented migrants in a British detention centre, arguing that the play's mode of presentation deliberately blurs the lines between past and present; such blurring works to reinforce thematically the continuing impact of traumatic events on the current situation.

Whilst Duggan contends that contemporary Western society is "depersonalized and disembodied" (p.174) to the point that theatre uses the trauma-tragic mode to create a realistic attempt at being in the trauma (p.56), this thesis advances the counterargument that racial minorities, historically disempowered groups and women in patriarchal societies already

experience trauma regularly. The dominant experience in trauma-tragic modes, as Duggan suggests, is to invigorate and sensitise audiences, but the plays I analyse in this thesis effectively present habitual and underrepresented traumatisation incurred by straight, white, or male, or straight white male systems of privilege and violence. With this recognition, it becomes evident that conception of "Western society" modelled in *Trauma-Tragedy* does not adequately take into account racial and disempowered groups. In other words, racial and sexual minorities, women, and children who are traumatised by an imbalanced structure of power do not need to be in a theatre space to experience trauma, as Duggan's theory suggests; they already experience it habitually, viscerally and often violently. Furthermore, Duggan's selection of case studies (such as Anthony Neilson's *Normal* and Franko B's *Still Life*) only includes works by white Western authors and performers. Haughton similarly highlights the work of white women in Western developed countries (though *Sanctuary* is an exception, being about a Somali refugee). Both authors also rely heavily on trauma theorists Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, scholars whose work, while hugely influential, does not account for the multitudes and complexities of traumatisation among racial minorities. If, as Haughton asserts, "the arts offer spaces of engagement that cross the historical, psychological, political and emotional, humanising the Other" (p.29), academic scholarship of trauma onstage should also extend to include more non-white authors and characters and eschew the Eurocentric focus exhibited in both Duggan's and Haughton's studies. My thesis takes up this challenge and addresses a gap by attending proactively and positively to the thus far inadequate representation in studies of trauma and theatre of minorities, the dispossessed and the disempowered.

It is useful at this point, as a context for examining representations of trauma on stage, to acknowledge some of the recent initiatives and growing debates around decolonising the theatre

space. Decolonising the theatre takes several forms, including diversifying the casting choices for roles that have traditionally been given to white actors (such as the eponymous *Romeo and Juliet* at the Shakespeare's Globe, London, 2021) and showing new work by minority ethnic playwrights. A reflective discussion of these and other decolonising practices is presented in *Decolonizing the Theatre Space: A Conversation* (2024), a documentation of conversations between black and global majority artistic directors and theatre makers that took place during the 2019 coronavirus pandemic which establish, expand and encourage the presence of black artistic leaders. As authors Simeilia Hodge-Dallaway, Kwame Kwei-Armah and Olivia Poglio-Nwabali assert, the book is an act of solidarity by artists with one another and an attempt to break the isolation and loneliness that black leaders experience within the theatre industry. These conversations and their documentation were also inspired by the international momentum and calls for racial justice that followed the murder of George Floyd in the US and the continuous activism of Black Lives Matter (pp.14-16). Further, Laura Edmondson's *Performing Trauma in Central Africa* (2018) explores the ways the Rwandan genocide and the conflict in Congo and Uganda have shaped the performance and theatre practices, for example, how a deeply divided post-genocide Rwanda produced a discriminatory view of society in Katori Hall's *Our Lady of Kibeho* (2014), which asserts Tutsi superiority. Another important contribution to theatre's decolonial project, in my view, is Tiziana Morosetti and Osita Okagbue's edited collection *The Palgrave Handbook of Theatre and Race* (2021), which decentres the Anglo-American theatre productions by including case studies from the Caribbean, Cuba, Turkey and Yorùbá Nigerian theatre. The book's examples also address the portrayal of race and racism in contemporary Global North stages, and the trauma that it engenders, particularly "commonplace, banal" forms of racism that infiltrate everyday experience (p.310). The three books herald a focus on global

perspectives through the inclusion of black and minority ethnic perspectives, with reference to the breadth of author-contributors, the dramatists analysed and the plays' dramatic characters.

Theatre's Engagement with Trauma

Further evidence can be drawn from the contemporary theatrical scene that reinforces the firm link that I have argued exists between theatre and trauma. Theatre engages with trauma in several modes and in my view has a privileged scene for representing it in spite of the relative scarcity of scholarship in the field of trauma and theatre. While this thesis focuses on plays and performance, the potency of the connection between drama/theatre and trauma has long been recognised and formalised in the context of dramatherapy. Originating from psychiatrist Jacob Moreno's twentieth century experiments in psychodrama, dramatherapy developed as a process-based practice drawing on techniques including role-play, improvisation, mask and puppetry. Dramatherapy is used to help participants achieve healing or catharsis and has been described as "a form of dramatic art aimed at enhancing the well-being of the persons involved via the guided exploration on stage of various ways of being in the world and having relationships with other people" (Pitruzzella, 2004, p.1). While dramatherapy is regarded as a specialist method whose operation and potential benefits should be distinguished from the practice and effects of theatre more generally, the premise that underpins this approach further underlines the interconnectedness of psychic and dramatic modes.

Theatre, I suggest, is also uniquely valuable as a vehicle through which to address themes of trauma in so far as the medium inherently works to combat isolation. Witnessing a seemingly private trauma performed within a public setting implicitly invites those watching to reassess their own experience – where this overlaps with the drama represented – and see it from a different perspective; simultaneously, other spectators who previously knew nothing of such

trauma are brought closer to that experience and can engage empathetically with the pain of others. However, the imaginative capacity of theatre extends beyond simply representing trauma, since plays and performances can importantly convey the possibility of recovery: this might take the form of showing ways of connecting with others, creating safe spaces, and sharing stories, all of which are also recognised methods of tackling trauma outside the theatre context. It could even be argued that, in certain cases, witnessing traumatic experience on stage is in itself a potentially therapeutic experience, in part because being part of this audience community combats the isolation that trauma typically creates. This principle can be applied to cases of collective as well as individual trauma. By way of example, the Chichester Festival Theatre production of Sarah Kane's *Crave* (1996) was produced and livestreamed across the globe during the Covid-19 pandemic: in a time when most people craved each other's company, the production attempted to cut through viewers' aloneness and seclusion, connecting them in a unique sense of community (Royal Court Theatre, no date).

Theatre also plays a crucial role in representing, and revealing, the traumatic abuses that take place behind closed doors, both in terms of domestic settings, and the doors that symbolise political oppression. An example of the former is Shelagh Stephenson's *Five Kinds of Silence* (2000), which deals with themes of domestic abuse. The play explores the devastating effects of a father's violence on his wife and daughters, showing how this violence is itself a result of the father's violent upbringing. Similarly taking place in the claustrophobic confine of a room, Harold Pinter's earlier political one-act drama *One for the Road* (1984) shows the catastrophic effects of totalitarian regimes and torture on one family, in an unspecified setting. An explicit indictment of human rights abuses, Pinter's late twentieth-century play is an example of theatre using its potential of dissemination to expose the damage wrought by powerful political regimes.

Theatre also has the ability to address the violence of history in distinctive and powerful ways. Representing historical trauma potentially makes the audience question their experiences. Theatre can provide clues to a pattern of violence or injustice that has its root in the present society. By revisiting and representing historical or generational trauma, theatre sounds the siren for what might become of us in the near future if the injustices of the past persist. In this sense, theatre keeps the memory of past trauma constructively alive. A notable example is Irish playwright Patricia Burke Brogan's *Eclipsed* (1990), which was one of the first works to shed light on the scandal of Ireland's Magdalene laundries. This refusal to bury the past calls attention to the victims of injustices that have not been vindicated. By showing the pattern that created the trauma in the past, theatre operates in the hope of inciting change in the present that will avoid its repetition.

Equally important to theatre's engagement with trauma is its capacity to represent traumas of non-dominant groups and minorities. In socio-political systems that favour the predominant and/or majority race, gender, or sexual orientation, theatre can be influential both as a vent for the traditionally unrepresented groups and by offering a candid view of the trauma that they face. The argument here is that minorities are doubly susceptible to traumatisation. They face the singular traumatic events that the majority face, and in addition, they experience the trauma of lack of representation, racist representation and targeted attacks. Theatre, by contrast, has the capacity to draw attention to the unrepresented and to what may be deemed unrepresentable. A remarkable example is the award-winning *salt.* (2017) by black British theatre-maker Selina Thompson. *salt.* stages the journey made by Thompson to trace the transatlantic slave trade across Ghana, Jamaica and Britain. By undertaking this journey and recreating it through the dramatic piece, Thompson grieves the lives and deaths of millions of

black men, women and children who created the wealth of contemporary Europe (Gardner, 2017). Thompson's summoning of the historical trauma of the slave trade points to a present that not only refuses to acknowledge the horrors of the past that it has created but to a present marred by racial inequality.

British theatre has also imported offshore traumas, both implicitly and explicitly. In 1995, Sarah Kane created a scandal when her play *Blasted* – a work that Duggan discusses – debuted on the Royal Court Theatre. The play presents a date rape in Leeds, UK that spirals into a war zone which strongly alludes to the Bosnian genocide (1992-1995). The stage exploded, at the level of literal dramatic representation, but also metaphorically, with misogynistic and racist abuse and violence, a bomb detonating, and brutal assaults on the main characters. In an interview, Kane lamented the view that "the corpse of Yugoslavia was rotting on our doorstep" while the media was seemingly indifferent (Stephenson and Langridge, 1997, p.131). Critic Aleks Sierz similarly notes that the play was "an indictment of the media's failure to tell the stories no one wants to hear" (2012, p.56). Sierz's view can also be extended to the audience and the wider society for whom the play was written: *Blasted* is an example of a play simultaneously alerting the audiences to domestic and offshore trauma, highlighting the repercussions of male violence that, by extrapolation, can eventually bring about full-scale war.

The playwrights: Philip Ridley, debbie tucker green and Nora Amin

In this section I introduce the three playwrights whose work I examine in detail in Chapters 2 to 4. I situate the plays selected as case studies within the playwright's wider body of work and establish their significance for my analysis and argument. I outline key preoccupations of Ridley's, tucker green's and Amin's drama, highlighting in particular a recurrent engagement with themes of violence and trauma; simultaneously, I draw attention to the contrasting

theatricalities exhibited across the plays and the divergent subject positions from which each author writes.

Philip Ridley

Philip Ridley (1964-) is an English playwright, artist, scriptwriter and novelist. He developed a keen interest in visual art as a teenager, a subject that would influence most of his literary projects. In the 1980s, he wrote several novellas and short stories for adults and children, but his most notable contribution has been to the theatre. He has written more than twenty-five plays since 1991 for adults and children, often gaining notoriety for their references to violence and abuse. He uses vivid visual imagery in his plays, frequently serving to denote suffering or violence: "I've always seen images as engines of emotion", Ridley explains, "I've always sought that one icon-like image that will convey a wordless meaning, an image-aria, if you like" (Sierz, 2000, p.43). He employs imagery of innocence mixed in with cruelty and violence as shown in the title of his plays *The Pitchfork Disney* (1991), *Tender Napalm* (2011) and *Radiant Vermin* (2015). Many of his plays portray parentless young people who are left in a derelict, unforgiving and dangerous world. Ridley's distinctive style, in addition to the visual imagery, is his storytelling. A common motif in his plays is a retelling of the past, whether nostalgically or to narrate traumatic events.

According to theatre director Dominic Dromgoole, Ridley's first play *The Pitchfork Disney* heralded a new direction in British theatre. Theatre critic Dan Rebellato (2011) notes that it "achieved full houses and outraged critics, with its apparently amoral fusion of violence and sexuality, realist setting and intense verbal imagery" (p.426). Furthermore, critic Aleks Sierz contends that Ridley's following plays *The Fastest Clock in the Universe* (1992) and *Ghost from a Perfect Place* (1994) set the scene for in-yer-face theatre, a term that Sierz coined to refer to a

wave of plays in 1990s British theatre which adopted shock tactics including representations of extreme violence, "obscene" language, frank references to and depictions of sex and breaking religious taboos.[2] Ridley has arguably influenced the dark tone of his contemporaries including Sarah Kane, Anthony Neilson and Jez Butterworth (Sierz, 2012, pp.90-91). Ridley's style has evolved from the fantastic in his earlier plays to more realistic settings, with recurrent allusions to East London, to his painting career and to fraternal relationships, all three of which are heavily biographical elements (Rebellato, 2011). These more realistic plays include *Vincent River*, *Leaves of Glass* and *Piranha Heights* (2008). In the introduction to Methuen's 2009 edition of the plays, a collection which also includes the dystopian *Mercury Fur* (2005), Ridley's realism takes an autobiographical turn. His diary-like introduction prefaces the plays with what are presumably memories from his upbringing and his tumultuous relationship with his brother, alongside reflections on his interest in art. Most notably, *Vincent River* was his first play to include identifiably gay characters, a theme that Ridley had lightly touched upon in *The Pitchfork Disney* and *The Fastest Clock in the Universe.* The play can thus be seen as a milestone in Ridley's career as an author writing self-consciously from a gay subject position. In later works, he returns to fantasy once again, combining this with realism (as in *Radiant Vermin*), as well as pursuing new interests in physical theatre and a radically pared down stage setting. For example, his most recent plays to date, *The Poltergeist* (2020) and *Tarantula* (2021), are representative of these interests, as each features one character who reminisces about their memories, identities and dreams and impersonates several characters from their past.

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[2] See also Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995), Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* (1995) and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996).

debbie tucker green[3]

debbie tucker green is a British playwright, screenwriter and director. Her works explore issues of racial violence, personal, collective and generational trauma. The issue of justice as revenge, or justice vs. revenge, also pervades her works. Her early works *dirty butterfly* (2003) and *born bad* (2003) present domestic and sexual abuse contained within the household, the latter earning her the Olivier Award for Most Promising Newcomer. Her writing became more explicitly political in *trade* (2004), where she criticises female sex tourism in the Caribbean, and in *generations* (2005), where a South African family dwindles with every scene, strongly referencing the AIDS pandemic. AIDS is also directly referred to in *stoning mary* (2005) as the disease leaves an impoverished husband and wife fighting over who is most deserving of the limited medication available. Her plays *random* (2008), *truth and reconciliation* (2011), *hang*, and her most recent to date, *ear for eye* (2018), present and critique various forms of (in)justice. Set between the years 1976 and 2007, *truth and reconciliation* is placed by tucker green at the intersection of historical and genocidal traumas in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, South Africa and Zimbabwe; casting doubt on the efficacy of restorative justice in these countries, the play shows glimpses of the truth about the aftermath of violence, in which no reconciliation is achieved.

random is perhaps one of tucker green's most famous works, first produced onstage in 2008 and later turned into a film, for which she won a BAFTA award. This one-woman play follows a black family, each member played by the sole performer, as they receive the news that

[3] tucker green styles her name and the titles of her plays in lower case. Some postcolonial writers (for example, bell hooks) use this style to distinguish themselves as an ethnic minority living in the West or as postcolonial writers.

their son was stabbed to death in a random attack. *random* arguably evokes the racially motivated murder of black British teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993 by a group of white men.[4] The racially motivated crime, the failure of the police response and the slow justice may have also inspired *hang*, which similarly presents an incompetent justice system. Whereas *hang*'s setting is ambiguous, *ear for eye* makes clear the connections and commonality of experiences of racism and failure of justice between black Brits and African Americans; the later play focuses on the everyday racist perception of black people both by other members of the public and reiterated through the processes of law enforcement.

tucker green has a distinctive writing style, including the use of short, overlapping sentences and often monosyllabic responses. Her characters frequently repeat their own and each other's words, sometimes with minor but telling variations, especially in tone. As Lynette Goddard (2007) elucidates, tucker green takes inspiration from rap songs, as well as from the African American poet and playwright Ntozake Shange:

> Like Shange, tucker green rejects the authority of capital letters and conventional spelling, phonetically capturing the sound and rhythm of (black) British urban speech through short simple sentences replete with repetitions, backtracking, interruptions, overlaps, silences, stammers and stutters … Much of the dialogue, both on page and on stage, reads and sounds like a poem or song that carries emotion and meaning as much through rhyme, rhythm and repetition as through the actual content of the conversations. (pp.184-185)

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[4] Police failings in the investigation initially led to the murderers' acquittal, but Lawrence's parents campaigned for years relentlessly. A report led by high court judge Sir William Macpherson concluded that the investigation was "marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers" (1999). Two of the accused evaded justice for nineteen years until they were eventually convicted of murder in 2012.

tucker green also uses ellipses, beats and pauses which serve as (unspoken) lines. In one of her rare interviews, she explains how her dramatic language works:

> I never set out to write plays … I was just messing about, writing stuff down and throwing it away or keeping it if it interested me. Then the writing started to get longer. I didn't know whether it was a poem, the lyrics to a song or a play. It is all much of a muchness to me. It's all words, ain't it? (Gardner, 2005)

The sparse language and incomplete conversations are often interspersed with explosive monologues where characters express anger at the status quo. This technique is most prominent in *stoning mary* as the eponymous character expresses her anger and frustration at the failings of feminist groups. Finally, tucker green's distinctive style combines the antithetical subgenres of realism, dystopia and magical realism (as in her 2014 film *Second Coming*). As Goddard remarks (2007), her linguistic style involving poetical and musical-like repetitions moves her plays away from realism (p.185). However, her work is still consistently engaged with the 'real' in its allusions to historical and current injustices, and the racial inequality that black people experience and fight.

Nora Amin

Nora Amin (1970-) is an Egyptian playwright, dancer, choreographer, novelist and author. She started her career as a dancer by founding the Modern Dance Theatre Company at the Cairo Opera House in 1993. In 2000, she founded Lamusica Independent Theatre Group, a theatre, dance and music company, where she produced and directed thirty-five plays, music and dance productions (Textures, no date). She has published four collections of short stories and four novels. She also translated several books on theatre studies and theatre criticism into Arabic, including Brazilian theatre practitioner and theorist Augusto Boal's *The Rainbow of Desire: The*

Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy (1994, trans. 1997). In this book, he suggests a set of techniques that focus on internalised oppression, which he views as the dominant form of oppression in the West: "the cop in the head", as he puts it (Robinson, 2017). Like Boal, Amin in her own books examines the intersection between the arts and human rights. She authored the first book on theatre and human rights in Arabic, *The Art of Claiming Our Right: The Egyptian Contemporary Theatre and Human Rights* (2000), which discusses experimental theatre during 1980s and 1990s Egypt and the obstacles faced in its staging. In 2011, Amin founded the Egyptian National Project for Theatre of the Oppressed. The Egyptian Revolution of January 25th, 2011, paved the way for Amin to train hundreds of people in Boal's radical participatory theatre method.

Amin's works for performance incorporate kinesthetics, especially dance, as well as forms of dialogue and conversation. Theatre critics Sarah Enany and Nehaid Selaiha (2010) comment on the physicality central to her aesthetic as follows:

> Like many feminists, she believes that the route to female subjectivity lies through the forbidden body – its physicality, desires, traumas, and memories, and of course, all the taboos inscribed upon it. She therefore relies heavily on dance and movement as major structural elements in her performances. (p.642)

Amin indeed utilises the female body as a source of empowerment, in her writing as well as in her choreographic work. As she stresses in her feminist treatise *Migrating the Feminine* (2016b), which I draw on further in Chapter 4, and in her interviews, her dance practice seeks to liberate the female body and by extension express solidarity with and offer support to traumatised women all over the world.

Amin's commitment to represent traumatised women and inspire them to assert ownership of their body, to dance and perform through and in spite of their pain, pervades both her choreographic performances and theatre plays. One of her most critically acclaimed works is *Al-Dafirah* (The Braid), to which she gave the telling title in English *The Box of Our Lives* (2000). The play portrays the power dynamics between a mother and daughter living in a derelict, darkened space. Their co-dependency makes them both trapped in the room which becomes symbolic of their relationship, as well as the very fabric of the piece itself, making them bound to one another like a braid. Like many Egyptian theatre makers and directors, Amin has also adapted European drama as part of the feminist discourse in Egypt and in response to political upheaval. In her 2009 adaptation of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), *Abwaab Nora* (Nora's Doors), Amin recreates the final scene of Nora Helmer slamming the door on her family life. Here, Amin lets the actors/performers, each representing a different Nora, improvise their lines, with her own authorial commentary on their predicament also included in the performance text (Enany and Selaiha, 2010; Ibsen Scope, no date). She also adapted Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882) in 2012 as a form of protest against what she describes as democracy of the boxes, a few months after the Muslim Brotherhood won the presidential elections in Egypt (Amin, 2016a). Currently residing in Berlin, Amin continues to organise dance workshops and put on dance performances that reclaim and decolonise the oriental belly dance. Since Amin's *Theatre of Crime* is written in Arabic, I present my original English language translation of this play in Appendix B, as part of the research contribution of this thesis.

Choice of Texts

This thesis deliberately brings together, unexpectedly, playwrights from contrasting cultural, racial and gendered positions. While all three share a preoccupation with themes of violence as well as a commitment to contesting the ideologies that perpetuate this, they differ in their approaches to dramatising and staging the traumatic effects of such violence, the aftermath of trauma and the possible methods of resolution. Their modes of presentation vary from narration (Ridley) to ambiguity and concealment (tucker green) and eventually to graphic dramatisation (Amin). Each of these dramaturgical choices arguably signifies a different socio-cultural milieu. The same can be said of the traumatic aftermath and the methods of resolution. The various ways in which characters respond to the traumatic experiences and their (in)ability to resolve their trauma point to different forms of violent, dysfunctional and oppressive socio-political systems. While the plays I examine in this thesis diverge considerably in terms of the contexts from which they originate, the explicit themes they address and the theatrical styles they employ, these are works that also speak to one another in many important respects. The plays of Ridley, tucker green and Amin present victims of violence and disempowered individuals, sharing a concern with marginalisation, habitual and widespread traumatisation. These case studies help us better understand the specific forms of traumatic experiences that marginalized people go through, notwithstanding differences of cultural context. The selected plays also illuminate our understanding of traumatic experiences that sexual and racial minorities face. Further, they show the impact of trauma, sometimes via virtually identical stage images - for example, the frozen moment of the traumatic event, and the shock of trauma rendering the characters speechless - and the failures of justice. My analysis in the following chapters reads these plays against perspectives drawn from current postcolonial and feminist strands in trauma studies, simultaneously showing how theatre both substantiates and vitalises these theoretical arguments.

My selection of Philip Ridley, debbie tucker green and Nora Amin intends primarily to advance existing scholarship of trauma studies in the theatre. Firstly, Philip Ridley enriches my argument in two ways. His works epitomise the Western tradition of reconstructing the traumatic event and the attempt to achieve catharsis through narrative. *Vincent River* and *Leaves of Glass* communicate this tradition and engage with the memory of trauma through various theatrical means. In addition, although Ridley is a white male playwright, he does not represent an establishment perspective. Ridley's identity position as a gay writer as well as his marginalised, even ostracised characters place him outside the mainstream of sexual identity representation. There has also been limited critical work about the two plays in general, and no analysis of his plays through the lens of trauma studies to my knowledge. Secondly, the plays of tucker green provide a keen view into the lives of her black characters, specifically women, who face the layered oppressions of marginalisation, (sexual) violence and injustice. I chose *hang* for three reasons: the relative scarcity of critical work about the play at the time I was writing the chapter on tucker green; its complexity; and its unusual dramatic representation of traumatic experience and methods of coping with it. Most of the critical scholarship about tucker green focuses on her earlier plays or was written before the production of *hang*. This includes Nicola Abram's 'Staging the unsayable: debbie tucker green's political theatre' (2014), Lynette Goddard's analysis of the formal qualities and feminist perspectives of *dirty butterfly*, *born bad* and *random* (2015), and Clara Escoda's breakdown of ethics and precariousness in *born bad* in Mireia Aragay and Martin Middeke's *Of Precariousness* (2017). Furthermore, Lea Sawyers' 'Traum-A-Rhythmia On Debbie Tucker Green's In-Yer-Ear Stage' (2018) focuses on the mutual effect between trauma and the musicality of the playwright's language in her earlier plays. It was not until the publication of Siân Adiseshiah and Jacqueline Bolton's edited collection *debbie tucker*

green: Critical Perspectives in 2020 that *hang* received wider critical appreciation. I also find that *hang*'s complex, rich and multilayered presentation and merging of the past, present and future, personal and mass trauma, and local and global racial violence, serve to complicate our understanding of the far-reaching implications of this violence. Moreover, tucker green does not reveal the traumatic experience in full, and this obscurity allows a reading of the play in which silence can be interpreted as one of the methods of overcoming post-traumatic grief. *stoning mary* shares this complexity and innovation with *hang*. It reveals a level of pervasive violence against black people, which is given shape in the play's circular form, as it starts and ends in violence. Both plays that I discuss deepen our understanding of postcolonial trauma and lay bare the multi-faceted forms of racial violence and the systems operating to perpetuate it. Finally, Nora Amin's *Theatre of Crime* reveals and challenges the normalisation of sexual violence against women, particularly of working class and poor backgrounds; her play unpacks the patriarchal and class-based oppression which lead to this violence. More so than Ridley and tucker green, Amin directly and explicitly puts the responsibility of protecting society's most vulnerable onto the people as a whole. Therefore, I argue that her use of Forum theatre techniques is a central strategy that seeks to make the audience aware of this responsibility. My analysis will show that both tucker green's and Amin's plays demonstrate the intersection of multiple sources of oppression, and hence traumatisation, at once.

My choice of the dramatists tucker green and Amin also fulfil my aim in this thesis to further the wider project of decolonising both theatre studies and trauma theory. Over the past decade, there has been a significant shift in direction within trauma theory that attempts to unsettle the predominance of Western definitions of trauma, its expression and methods of recovery. Initially, I intended that my thesis would examine the work of Philip Ridley, Anthony

Neilson and Martin Crimp. Further reading into trauma studies emphasised the importance and the need to decolonise trauma studies and diversify the playwrights within my choices. I then came to realise that this selection - three white male playwrights - would implicitly reinforce the Eurocentrism which I find problematically limiting in the works cited by Duggan and Haughton, and in many contemporary trauma theorists. My original choices did not adequately present marginalised and historically oppressed characters, a move I explicitly seek to make in the thesis I present.

Lastly, my arrangement of the case studies is both chronological (from 2000 to 2019) and designed to trace the development within trauma theory from a focus on narrative and a cathartic resolution (mirrored in the plays of Ridley), to a postcolonial perspective (evident in tucker green's work), to experimental and directly interactive theatrical modes (with Amin). This ordering further represents a move from a domestic setting to a public spectacle. Philip Ridley's plays are contained within the house; tucker green's involve select representatives of the world outside a family unit, and how these representatives interact with, connect and traumatise the family. Finally, Amin's play cascades to show the widest variety of society. In terms of theatricality, Amin's *Theatre of Crime* can be seen as the culmination of this development from the domestic to the public because it involves the audience and calls upon them to act against sexual assault. This arrangement reflects an increasing recognition of trauma as part of a wider system which affects the marginalised most profoundly.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis unfolds in four chapters. In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of the development of the concept of psychological trauma in the fields of psychiatry and cultural trauma theory. I introduce the work of the major contemporary trauma theorists whose work has shaped my

argument. I also present a critical overview of key criticisms made of cultural trauma theory for its perceived lack of inclusivity and Eurocentric bias. Finally in this chapter, I establish the framework for the topics that I discuss in my thesis: trauma and memory, narrative and silence, victims and perpetrators, trauma and the body. Chapter 2 focuses on Philip Ridley's *Vincent River* and *Leaves of Glass*. *Vincent River* unfolds the memories of its two protagonists, Anita and Davey in the aftermath of the murder of Anita's son, and in *Leaves of Glass*, Ridley presents a family's conflicts about their past which conceals the traumas of the father's suicide and the child sexual abuse of Barry, which, it is revealed, was facilitated by his brother. Both plays centre on narrative reconstructions of traumatic pasts and demonstrate that sharing stories can be a vital tool for coping with the pain of trauma; I argue that Ridley puts forward the importance of narrative in such situations, contextualising this by showing the extent to which the plays testify to the traditional psychoanalytic concept that it is essential to verbalise traumatic events so that healing may occur. In Chapter 3, I examine the representation of traumatic experiences in debbie tucker green's *hang* and *stoning mary.* Both are dystopic in setting: *hang* presents a woman given the power to decide the fate of a perpetrator who committed an unpronounced crime against her; *stoning mary* shows a lawless country with a woman waiting to be stoned, a child soldier terrorising his parents, and an ill couple fighting over a prescription. My analysis in this chapter is informed by postcolonial literary trauma theory with the aim of highlighting the traumatization that black people in particular face as depicted in the plays. I argue that tucker green exposes an intrinsically racist judicial system and an audience oblivious to the racial inequalities in Africa and at home. Finally, in Chapter 4, I analyse Nora Amin's *Theatre of Crime*, a one-act play depicting a sexual assault on a woman at the crowded gate of a theatre and the ensuing police investigation. In this play, I argue, Amin reveals the socio-economic and political forces of

oppression that give rise to the habitual abuse and harassment of women. Amin's frank depiction of the assault, the victim and witnesses' testimonies and her adoption of Brazilian theatre practitioner and activist Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre techniques combine to foster awareness in the audience of their collective responsibility in creating these conditions as well as in changing them. The conclusion will restate the main argument and reiterate the most important supporting evidence.

Access to Productions as Research Sources

Before writing the thesis, I intended to watch as many recordings and live productions as possible, both of the plays selected and of other works by their authors. While my critical focus is text-based first and foremost – allowing me to explore the plays' theatrical potential, rather than centring on specific stage realisations – I had hoped to extend my analysis to the visual and physical production of trauma and its effects, thereby gaining further insight into the tone and pacing of the text and how it relates to trauma. As it turned out, I was able to attend one production of *Vincent River* in 2019, and two different productions of *hang* in 2019 and 2022, all of which I discuss as part of my analysis. I also attended two productions of Ridley's *Radiant Vermin* in 2018 and 2019 and watched a recording of Nora Amin's *AlDahfira* or *The Box of Our Lives* on Vimeo. However, I could not find any recorded productions of my case studies, having contacted both Hampstead theatre where *Vincent River* debuted, and consulted The National Video Archive of Performance at The Victoria and Albert Museum. Furthermore, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent closure of the theatres from March 2020 to May 2021 meant that there was no chance to see any more live productions of Ridley or tucker green for the majority of my study in the UK. Nora Amin's *Theatre of Crime* has yet to be produced, so my

analysis is necessarily text-based, whilst also reflecting critically on the bold dramaturgical choices of the work.

Chapter 1: Trauma Theory: A Historical and Critical Context

The literature on trauma theory abounds with stories. These stories can offer us gateways into tracing the origins of the field, understanding its development, knowing its core ideas and, importantly, its contestations. This chapter will map the historical development of the concept of psychological trauma and provide an overview of cultural and literary trauma theory. It will also introduce select theorists who seek to decolonise trauma studies, followed by a framework for the central topics that this thesis is concerned with: memory, narrative and silence, victims and perpetrators, and the body. I preface this discussion with two stories that will prove helpful as an introduction: that of the "hysteria" patient Anna O., and the parable of Tancred and Clorinda.[5] Anna O. became the patient of Austrian physician Josef Breuer (1842-1925). She suffered from then-unexplained symptoms including an inability to speak and paralyses. Breuer first noticed that her symptoms abated when she remembered the event that set them off, and he collaborated with Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), neurologist and father of psychoanalysis, encouraging her to uncover the forgotten memory. [6] Their method of treatment developed through a recreation of the traumatic event in narrative form as well as a release of the strong feelings that accompanied it. Describing how this new method has affected her, Anna O. famously called it "the talking cure" (Breuer and Freud, 2013).

Freud also recounts the fictional story of Tancred and Clorinda from Italian poet Torquato Tasso (1544-1595)'s poem *Gerusalemme Liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered)* (1591) as an example of his theory of repetition compulsion, or the unconscious repetition of traumatic experience. Set

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[5] Anna O. is a pseudonym for Bertha Pappenheim.

[6] Pappenheim was disgusted to see her lady-companion's dog drinking out of a glass, and she was consequently unable to drink. Although she suffered more distressing events later when she attended to her ill father before he died, this initial incident triggered her hysterical symptoms and uncovering it gradually improved her condition (Breuer and Freud, 2013, pp.11-26).

during the First Crusade, the protagonist, Tancred, unknowingly kills his beloved Clorinda in battle. After her burial, he enters a magical forest and randomly strikes a tree with his sword, only to discover that the soul of his beloved is trapped within the tree, and she cries out that he has wounded her once more. The story famously features in Cathy Caruth's seminal work on cultural trauma theory, *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), and she uses it as a prototype for her model of trauma, whereby the traumatic experience is not completely recognised and understood until it is repeated (pp.1-9). According to Caruth, this story exemplifies the unintentional yet unavoidable urge within those affected by trauma to reenact and reexperience their suffering in various forms, such as flashbacks and nightmares. The tragedy of Tancred and Clorinda has since been reinterpreted for its symbolic significance and for the diverse angles of interpretation it invites, recognising for example that the seemingly opposing positions of Tancred and Clorinda are nevertheless connected by their common experience of trauma.

Both examples serve as vantage points to the topics I introduce in this chapter and analyse more broadly in this thesis. Anna O.'s experience as Breuer's patient directs us to the influential early years of psychoanalysis. Her story evokes a history of women and girls who have likely experienced rape and sexual assault, but did not have the means for self-expression, or indeed the capability of achieving justice from their perpetrators. The "talking cure" as Anna O. expressively put it has since remained a dominant therapeutic tool in Western psychiatry. Narrative therefore has been an integral part of trauma studies, and when trauma intersects with literature and drama, it in turn gives rise to divergent opinions on what and whose stories to tell, and to whom, and what shape these stories can take to communicate pain which might otherwise be hidden or avoided. Anna O.'s story is also that of an inaccessible memory. Trauma scholars have continuously sought to understand whether traumatic memories are the same as "ordinary"

memories, and if they are truly forgotten, as the cases of Breuer and Freud's patients suggest, or only remembered in part. The stories in trauma studies tell us that in carrying the indelible imprint of trauma, the body is left to bear the brunt of the unspoken suffering, and so expresses itself in the form of symptoms. The body also features in the story of Tancred and Clorinda as the site of a physical wound which points to psychological trauma. Freud, and later Caruth, uses this story as an allegory for the inevitable repetition of traumatic experiences. More recent work in trauma studies, however, reveals more complex nuances behind the story and unsettles Caruth's interpretation of it. As an example, theorists Ruth Leys (2000) and Amy Novak (2008) point out that Clorinda is Ethiopian, making Tancred not simply a soldier and Clorinda's lover but a white coloniser whose experience is privileged over that of his victim. I see the reading of Tancred and Clorinda, therefore, as a portal towards the crucial decolonisation process of trauma studies. Caruth's treatment of the story is one example of the Eurocentric bias within trauma studies which needs to be challenged and overturned, in order that theory and practice in the field can expand and develop to address the diversity of traumatic experience and response.

The field of trauma studies has evolved markedly since its origins in the 19th century. The topic of trauma and its effects resurfaces typically following incidents of mass trauma. As I highlight in this chapter, trauma theory as it is known today emerged in the West and developed following the 19th century clinical interest in hysteria, the two world wars, the Holocaust, Vietnam, and the work of feminist psychiatrists to uncover the untold but pervasive trauma of female sexual abuse, mainly in the US. Trauma theorists and scholars have also explored different topics that attempt to define and explain the effect of trauma, within the fields of psychology, psychiatry and cultural trauma theory. The fields cover issues of memory, witnessing, testimony, narrative, medication, defining and redefining posttraumatic stress

disorder (PTSD), and the legal aspects in cases of violence. In this chapter, I establish the historical and critical framework for my analysis of trauma. Firstly, I briefly trace the historical development of the concept of psychological trauma that originated in mid-19th century Europe. I outline the major events that shaped the development of the concept of trauma and trauma therapy as it is known today, including the study of hysteria, the creation of the field of psychoanalysis and the birth of PTSD as a diagnosis. Secondly, I provide a critical overview of cultural and literary trauma theory and introduce the work of the major contemporary trauma theorists including Cathy Caruth, Bessel van der Kolk and Stef Craps. I review the criticism that has been levied against mainstream cultural trauma theory for its perceived lack of inclusivity and its Eurocentric focus and bias. I also make a counterargument to the theory's claim that trauma can only be referred indirectly and that it is unspeakable drawing on theatre's varied potential for representing trauma. I subsequently introduce a number of notable theorists and authors who seek to decolonise trauma studies and reshape the field, particularly highlighting the work of Achille Mbembe, and making wider reference to the contributions of Sonya Andermahr, Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga. I then lay out the framework for the topics that I examine closely in my thesis, namely trauma and its connection to memory, narrative and silence, victims and perpetrators, and finally, the body as a medium for explaining the effects of trauma and for managing it. In each of the sections, I identify the potential implications of these issues with reference to drama and theatre and ground my argument and analysis of the plays studied in this thesis within the wider context of psychoanalysis, psychiatry and cultural trauma theory.

19th Century Origins of Trauma Theory

The scientific interest in trauma began purely as an examination of physical wounding. In 19th-century Britain, recurring accidents due to the installation and development of the railway system

prompted surgeon John Eric Erichsen (1818-1896) to study the rising phenomenon and its impact on the body, theorising that it was caused by physical damage to the spine. The most unusual impact of the accidents for Erichsen was the delayed onset of the symptoms; consequently, the term "railway spine" was born as the first indication of psychological trauma in Western medicine (Luckhurst, 2008, pp.19-22). Concurrently, German neurologist Hermann Oppenheim (1858-1919) coined the term "traumatic neurosis" in 1889 in his study of railway and other industrial accidents (Luckhurst, 2008, p.34). He used the Greek term, *trauma*, meaning physical wound, to refer to psychic and emotional stress (Sütterlin, 2020, p.12). For the first time in the West, psychological distress was a diagnosable condition, albeit with no known cure until psychological trauma resurfaced in the public eye in the form of hysteria.

By the end of the 19th century, women and girls suffering an array of physical symptoms sought treatment from notable French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893). Since most of the patients were female, the disorder was at first misattributed to the uterus, and was therefore known as hysteria, from the Greek *hystera* meaning womb. The women variously developed "sudden paralysis, amnesias, sensory loss, and convulsions" (Ringel and Brandell, 2012, p.1), symptoms which Charcot attributed to psychological rather than physical causes. He presented the cases in front of an audience, his lectures thus acquiring an almost theatrical quality.[7] Whereas Charcot did not unravel the mystery of hysteria's aetiology, Freud and psychologist Pierre Janet (1859-1947) undertook this task separately by listening directly to the patients. Eventually, they simultaneously arrived at the same conclusion: that hysteria was caused by psychological trauma (Herman, 1997, pp.10-12). Freud took the analysis further and

[7] Drama theorist Patrick Duggan (2012) takes the example of Charcot's "theatrical" lectures to confirm what he conceives to be a tangible link between the development of trauma theory and theatre (pp.17-21).

concluded that sexual abuse during childhood was at the root of his patients' psychological trauma (1962, p.203). He argued that sexual assault on children was widespread, and his thesis was instrumental in creating the field of psychoanalysis (Herman, 1997, pp.12-14). Janet, Freud and Breuer's endeavours therefore marked the second, more influential interest in trauma as a field of study and established a method for its treatment. Today, even though hysteria is no longer a diagnosable medical condition, it is often voiced as part of an expression of derogatory and misogynistic attitudes, to indicate the inability of women to "check" their emotions. Furthermore, hysteria is sometimes used within medical contexts to discredit and invalidate women's medical conditions and symptoms (Burgess, 2022).

Trauma Theory in the 20th Century

Freud's study of hysteria gave birth to psychoanalysis, which in turn became the influential basis of modern psychotherapy. The birth of psychoanalysis was instrumental since Freud and Breuer put forward the first modern theory of trauma, its aetiology and treatment in Western contexts. Their method of treating abused women took on two aspects: uncovering repressed traumatic memories and putting them into words, as well as releasing the emotions attached to them (Herman, 1997, p.12). They called this process "abreaction" or "catharsis" before Freud eventually referred to it as psychoanalysis. The aim of psychoanalysis, so to speak, was to bring the unconscious thoughts and desires, which include traumatic memories, into consciousness. Even though psychoanalysis has fallen in and out of favour, talk therapy is practised widely today, as in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Furthermore, the concept of catharsis continues to influence our understanding of emotions and feelings, and forges another tie with theatre studies, as Freud's borrowed concept from Aristotle suggests (Turri, 2014).

The influence of Freud on the development of trauma theory and the modern understanding of it also encompasses the concept of "repetition compulsion", a term he coined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Working with traumatised soldiers from World War I, he was puzzled that they experienced recurring nightmares about the conflict even when they had returned to safety. He concluded that such dreams manifested the unconscious mind's desire to process the traumatic experience. As author Luckhurst (2008) explains, for Freud, "the psyche constantly returned to scenes of unpleasure because, by restaging the traumatic moment … it hoped belatedly to process the unassimilable material, to find ways of mastering the trauma retroactively" (p.9). The concept of repetition includes unconscious and self-destructive behaviour of repeating the trauma, as Freud's analogy of Tancred and Clorinda exemplifies. From this perspective, Tancred killing Clorinda "twice" is therefore symbolic of the psyche unknowingly repeating the hurt it goes through in order to make sense of it. The concept has also been adopted by literary trauma theorists as a characteristic of the trauma narrative literary genre. Its use is considered an influence of Freud and signals a retelling of traumatic memories that have not been assimilated (Pederson, 2018, p.104).

It was not until 1980 that psychological trauma officially became a disorder according to Western psychiatric criteria. The turning point came when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) included posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in its diagnostic criteria for the first time. In the several versions of the APA's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*), from 1980 to 2022, the Association has defined, redefined, and revised the diagnostic criteria of PTSD. Despite the importance of this definition, it has drawn criticism for its lack of inclusivity (Brown, 1995; Craps, 2015). While attempts have been made to rectify this lack through the text's repeated revision across the years, I would argue that the manual in its current

form still seriously understates the effects of racism and racial injustice. I illustrate this by drawing briefly on the latest revision to date, the *DSM-5-TR* (2022), showing how the manual centralises particular forms of traumatic disorder while implicitly marginalising or obscuring others.

According to the *DSM-5-TR*, PTSD can occur following "Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (APA, 2022). The APA describes the disorder in four clusters of symptoms. Firstly, it identifies intrusion in the form of painful memories, unpleasant dreams, dissociative reactions and psychological distress, as well as physiological reactions in the case of exposure to "internal or external cues" of the traumatic event(s). Secondly, the APA determines that traumatised people typically avoid any stimuli that might remind them of the trauma, such as memories, thoughts, feelings, people, places and situations. In addition, they usually experience negative alterations in mood and cognitive abilities, and changes in arousal and reactivity (APA, 2022). Significantly and problematically, the APA outlines specific types of traumatic events that affect adults and that may cause PTSD, whether experienced directly or knowing they have happened to a close acquaintance. These include: "exposure to war as a combatant or civilian, actual or threatened physical assault" in addition to "actual or threatened sexual violence or coercion" (APA, 2022). Critics of the model have argued that the *DSM* does not comprise different kinds of repetitive, systematic, and prolonged traumatising experiences such as those attached to racism, homophobia, prolonged sexual abuse and prolonged wartime trauma. The history of PTSD as a diagnosis was set in motion by the effort of Vietnam War veterans returning from war and carrying its repercussions. However, the traumas of non-combative Americans have remained hidden and unstudied. Notably, feminist therapist and psychiatrist Judith Herman highlights the silent trauma of the

abused women and girls within US society, drawing attention to the work of the women's liberation movement in uncovering pervasive sexual and domestic violence against women and children. As Herman (1997) establishes, such violence had previously been underreported and the devastating effects of rape underestimated; she also argues that women in civilian life are far more likely to experience post-traumatic disorders than (male) war veterans. Herman therefore proposes a new diagnosis that aptly describes survivors of prolonged and repeated trauma: complex post-traumatic stress disorder. As she shows, survivors of these extended experiences can develop personality changes, troubled relationships, and distorted identity.

Similarly, feminist psychologist Laura S. Brown criticises the APA's *DSM-III* (1987) for its description of a traumatic event as being "outside the range of human experience" (Brown, 1995, p.100).[8] As a specialist in trauma therapy, Brown argues that the rate of sexual abuse among her female patients is very high. This widespread abuse renders the "traumatic event" as the *DSM-III* puts it too repetitive and long-term to be considered "outside the range of human experience". As far as her patients are concerned, the traumatic event of being sexually abused is their *norm*. She criticises the definition of PTSD in the manual as being too narrow and male oriented. In my view, Brown's insight reaches beyond the 1987 version, and encompasses not only the current version, but recurrent concepts relating to how people face different traumatic experiences according to their age, gender, sexual orientation, and race:

> "Human experience" as referred to in our diagnostic manuals, and as the subject for much of the important writing on trauma, often means "male human experience" or, at the least, an experience common to both women and men. The

[8] In an Epilogue, Brown acknowledges that the definition of a traumatic event has changed in the *DSM IV* (1994). It no longer specifies that a traumatic event is "outside the range of human experience", but that certain traumatic events such as rape are quite frequent (Brown, 1995, p.111).

> range of human experience becomes the range of what is normal and usual in the lives of men of the dominant class; white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men. Trauma is thus that which disrupts these particular human lives, but no other. (1995, p.101)

Brown's argument thus challenges the APA's too-limited definition of what constitutes traumatic experience, pointing out the need within trauma theory and psychology to account for the range of traumatic experiences that, for example, women, specifically women of colour and/or ethnic minorities in the West go through. Today, the "Me Too" movement thrust the topic of violence against women in the spotlight: a string of sexual abuses by powerful men – principally in Hollywood and the film industry – continues to be uncovered and has reverberated around the world.

Postcolonial theorist and author Stef Craps (2015) also criticises the APA's *DSM-5* (2013) for its narrow focus on event-based trauma. According to the manual, traumatic events that can cause PTSD in adults are mostly events that are violent, sudden and not usually repetitive. While it is true that these events are severe and that the criteria have expanded to encompass a broader range of traumatic experience across the versions, Craps reiterates the position voiced by Herman and Brown that these criteria remain too limiting (pp.24-28). Significantly, they exclude the experience of social and ethnic minority groups for whom trauma can be a repetitive, habitual reality - their norm, as Brown puts it. The manual presupposes that traumatic events are out of the ordinary - which is what makes them "events" - but for many groups who face racism, misogyny and other forms of repeated and prolonged abuse, trauma is more continuous and rampant. As a result, and crucially for the arguments I make in this thesis, Craps points to several propositions to expand definitions of trauma, such as Herman's complex PTSD, Duran et al.'s

postcolonial trauma and Maria Root's insidious trauma. Craps emphasises that these widening perspectives can help in understanding "the impact of everyday racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ableism, and other forms of structured oppression" (pp.25-26). To illustrate, forms of prolonged traumatization include lack of access to life-saving resources because of dire poverty and experiencing constant fear and anxiety if living in a war-torn country.

In this respect, psychologist Jude Mary Cénat (2022) proposes the new theoretical framework complex racial trauma (CoRT) as a means of assessing and treating the trauma of Black, indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC). He describes the trauma that BIPOC face as "repetitive, constant, inevitable, and cumulative" (p.675) and contends that racial discrimination affects several aspects of their lives, such as study and work, interpersonal relationships, cognitive abilities and substance abuse. An amalgamation between complex trauma and racial trauma, Cénat points out that it is different from PTSD in its pervasiveness and cannot be attributed to a single event, as there is no "post". The theorisation of CoRT in psychology, Craps' post-colonial trauma and other attempts at expanding the concept of trauma therefore reflect and herald an awareness and change within trauma studies that the experience of trauma is dependent on those who experience it and the power structures in question.

I would here like to reiterate my argument that the APA's specification of traumatic stressors underestimates the profound and debilitating effects of racism, racial violence and racial injustice. Racial discrimination and racism are mentioned in the manual as afterthoughts and as possible factors for developing PTSD. At the same time, the APA indicates that racial minorities (in the US) are more likely to develop the disorder (APA, 2022). This marginalisation of the psychological effects of racism is closely linked to the phrasing of traumatic stressors as "events". PTSD still presumes that an event is an infrequent occurrence, but this does not hold

true for the reality of racial injustice and racial violence. Instead, it is imperative that the psychological effects of racism should take centre stage in the diagnostic manual, since the APA states that PTSD is more common among racial minorities. That said, I take a middle position where the *DSM-TR* is not to be dismissed altogether. PTSD was included in the *DSM* following the advocacy and campaigning of Vietnam war veterans, and the diagnostic criteria of symptoms and traumatic stressors may aptly apply to war veterans in general. PTSD is also arguably applicable to people who have suffered single traumatic events as specified (sexual assault, kidnap, terror attacks etc.) (APA, 2022). Nonetheless, to use it as a diagnosis for all forms of traumatisation risks overlooking the seriousness of repeated racial discrimination and violence, or worse, exacerbating its damaging effects.

Cultural Trauma Theory and its Criticism

Similar criticism of Eurocentricity has been levelled against cultural trauma theory. A surge of writing about representations of traumatic experiences in literature, film, documentaries and works of fiction marked the rise of the theory in the 1990s. Key figures include historian Dominick LaCapra, psychologist Dori Laub, scholar and theorist Cathy Caruth, who provided new theories of trauma in the humanities and sparked a keen interest in it.[9] Much of the writing during this decade concerns representations of the Holocaust and the vicissitudes of witnessing genocide. According to Susannah Radstone (2007), the field of cultural trauma theory owes its development to various disciplines, predominantly deconstruction, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis. It is also informed by clinical work with trauma survivors, mainly in the US (p.10). She identifies two central concepts within cultural trauma theory that can be understood

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[9] For example, see Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992), Dominick LaCapra's *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (1994) and *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), and Kalí Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996).

as foundational: referentiality, and trauma being unrepresentable and unspeakable. In describing referentiality, proponents of the theory hypothesise that any expression of trauma in cultural and literary forms is indirect, and that traumatic experience cannot be recreated or reproduced accurately in any form. Trauma, so to speak, cannot be traced back to the events it seeks to represent. Caruth (1996), for instance, suggests that the texts of psychoanalysis, literature and literary theory speak of a traumatic experience that is not understood or assimilated with previous knowledge, and so they present both what is known, and what is unknown and incomprehensible about traumatic events. Further, she sets the example of railway spine and the delayed onset of the symptoms – what she describes as belatedness – for those who have survived the first railway accidents in Britain as a framework for traumatic experience.

However, Caruth's model, I argue, suggests a sweeping generalisation that does not apply to all human experience of trauma, nor can the railway accident be considered a definitive model of trauma, as Caruth suggests. I therefore adopt a more flexible approach to the expression of trauma across the different conditions and cultures that the plays present, combining the approaches of Stef Craps, Bessel van der Kolk, Achille Mbembe and Nora Amin. I also resist the very notion that traumatic experience can have a catchall model. The position I take and defend in this thesis is that of relativity. The kind of traumatic experiences that people go through can vary greatly based on their gender, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic group. Marginalised and oppressed people face repetitive and continuous traumatic experiences, which calls for a method of analysis that highlights how their quality of life as a whole is compromised. Given that the socioeconomic systems in place function through marginalisation and oppression, they hinder retributive judicial and police responses to these experiences and fail to achieve justice for the already vulnerable victims. Further, when we take cultural differences into

account, it becomes apparent that the expression of the effects of traumatisation also varies. This difference can be represented in cultural media using varying means, from reconstruction through narrative, to the foregrounded use of silence, to reconstruction through enactment. An approach to trauma studies thus needs to be both flexible and sensitive to the specific cultural and socioeconomic conditions within which trauma is experienced.

My thesis also challenges the assumption that trauma is unrepresentable or unspeakable. This concept largely stems from studies of the Holocaust as a mass, far-reaching and inexplicably heinous crime. A trauma of the magnitude of the Holocaust "can only be addressed or acknowledged by a figurative language" (Toremans, 2018, p.51). However, I argue that theatre's imaginative qualities and multiple modes of communication show considerable potential for representing traumatic experiences. Theatre uses narration, allusion, mime, enactment, embodiment, personalisation, as well as documentary screening, to represent trauma. Incidents of mass trauma can be represented in part, and individual trauma can be represented as a whole. Among theatre's multiple modes of representation, the body of the actor is the most prominent. Theatre condenses prolonged and massive instances of traumatisation in one body, which embodies and speaks for a larger group of violated individuals. Not only is this portrayal of conventionally marginalised voices possible, but it is also crucial. In addition, this bodily presence in the theatre has affective implications for the audience and can allow them to *feel* the consequences of traumatisation on the characters. The ensuing feelings of empathy, disgust or even anger among the audience attest to trauma being representable, given the affect it stirs in the theatre audiences.

In addition to the criticism levelled against the APA, postcolonial trauma theorists have challenged cultural trauma theory for its perceived Eurocentricity and for its narrow focus on

individual trauma. They argue that that there is a dearth of research on postcolonial authors and artists within the field and that, even when non-Westerners are referred to, they are misrepresented, or their voices are silenced. To illustrate, Caruth argues in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) that the history of a trauma is essentially bound with the act of listening to another. In the attempt to break the isolation that it creates, trauma is communicated across individuals and ultimately across cultures: "In a catastrophic age, that is, trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures" (p.11). She reiterates this view in *Unclaimed Experience*, arguing that traumatised people are bound together through their shared wounds, and that listening to one will enable us to listen and to understand the trauma of another. Her premise, therefore, is that we can listen to trauma across the divide of cultures through our shared wounds.

Caruth's premise, however, is not realised in the main texts of cultural trauma theory. Craps reveals several inconsistencies and biases within the theory, particularly as it is articulated in Caruth's work, starting with the claim that it developed in the 1990s as part of the ethical turn in the humanities. He points out that textualist approaches to literature and literary scholarship had been accused of being "oblivious to 'what goes on in the real world'" (2015, p.1), but that cultural trauma theory promised to bring real world experience and culturally nuanced ethical analysis to the study of literary and cultural texts. He shows the disparity between this initial promise and what the founding texts of trauma theory provided. Craps demonstrates the exclusionary nature of the theory by arguing that the founding texts within trauma theory do not deliver on their promise of "cross-cultural ethical engagement" (2015, p.2). He contends that:

> [The founding texts] fail on at least four counts: they marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have

> developed out of the history of Western modernity, they often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and they generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas. (p.2)

This failure, as Craps states, risks maintaining and legitimising systems of injustice and inequality: such risks are exemplified, as he shows, by the fact that events affecting (white) Westerners have sustained the interest of mainstream trauma theory at the expense of experiences that happen outside the Euro-American world.

Craps further argues that this Eurocentric vision ignores the experience of racial and religious minorities living in the West who face constant discrimination. Even when scholars of trauma theory represent traumatic experiences outside this cultural and geographic sphere, the trauma of the 'other' has, in his view, largely been marginalised or altogether silenced. His theory informs my thesis in all of the areas for which, he argues, trauma theory has failed to be culturally inclusive and to fulfil its promise of cross-cultural communication. Thus, I present the trauma of minorities for their own sake, and on their own terms, as he puts it (2015, p.19); I demonstrate varied examples of traumatisation that particularly result from different forms of oppression and the range of methods to overcome it; and I highlight the link between metropolitan and minority trauma. While the plays I analyse feature different forms of fragmentation, it is by no means the only form of representing trauma onstage. He clarifies that the theory should not prescribe a certain form of literary structure to bear witness to trauma; my thesis supports that view and evidences it through the diversity of its examples.

Craps (2014) also criticises mainstream trauma theory for what he regards as its narrow focus on individual trauma. Perceiving trauma as an individual problem, he suggests, leaves

unquestioned the wider social, economic and political conditions that enabled trauma to happen in the first instance. In his view, this myopia "can thus lead to psychological recovery being privileged over the transformation of a wounding political, social, or economic system [and] negates the need for taking collective action towards system change" (p.50). While I agree that psychological treatment cannot replace economic and political change, nor can it offer closure for marginalised people who face omnipresent discrimination, there needs to be an acknowledgment of the psychological trauma caused by racial minority discrimination and racial violence. The way forward for cultural trauma theory and for postcolonial scholars needs to acknowledge the plight of individuals, whilst also addressing the wider political and economic forces which foster traumatisation and hinder psychological recovery. I argue that the plays I examine in this thesis expose the bigger picture of routine injustice and forms of oppression and racial inequality. Individual psychology does not suffice to manage these forms of trauma, and the plays demand a social and political change while exploring the psychological effects of trauma.

Decolonising Trauma Studies

Decolonisation involves a position of decentring colonial power, voices, and ideologies, and replacing it with national and local theories and perspectives. A prominent contributor to this ethos is historian, and political theorist Achille Mbembe. Focusing on the experiences of Africa in *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (2021), Mbembe recognizes decolonisation as a process of "emergence and uprising" (p.224) out of the darkness (of colonialism). In his view, it is a vision of *looking away* from an aged, spiritless Europe and resituating Africa as a central beam of knowledge and values (p.230). Trauma studies have largely been the product of North American and European scholarship. Consequently, the work of cultural trauma theory and

psychiatric resources have greatly centred on the experience of white people with traumatic events and their own understanding of the effects of trauma and the methods of recovery. In a postcolonial context, liberation of most of the former colonies has preceded intellectual endeavours to decolonise the concept of traumatisation. These endeavours have mostly, and perhaps ironically, emerged from the heart of imperialist and former colonialist spaces. Scholars and critics including Michael Rothberg (2008), Amy Novak (2008) and Irene Visser (2015, 2018) question the universality of the concepts of trauma, such as trauma being an event out of the ordinary and a narrow focus on individual trauma that leaves the wider systems of oppression uninterrogated. They also challenge the recovery methods prescribed in Western psychiatry and cultural trauma theory and aim to reposition the trauma of marginalised and minority groups to mainstream trauma studies.

Scholars and theorists of decolonisation, including Achille Mbembe, have recurrently turned to Martinique theorist Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) for inspiration. Fanon's writings are some of the earliest attempts at decolonising trauma in a postcolonial and psychiatric context. His work as a psychiatrist in French-Occupied Algeria provided him with the opportunity to dissect the psychological effects of colonisation on its subjects. In his seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), he argues that colonialism ensures its dominion by asserting the white man's superiority over black people. This scheme perpetuates negative perceptions of black people, which in turn can become internalised and can harm their perception of themselves. Fanon's other enduring work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), is considered a call to arms against the colonial powers in Africa: here, he proposes methods of resisting colonialism, which include, but are not limited to, violence. Crucially, as Beatriz Pérez Zapata (2021) points out, Fanon is one of the first voices to critique the event-based model of trauma which cultural

trauma theory fixates on (p.6). Fanon explains that psychiatrists of his time give importance to an event which triggers mental distress in the colonised. However, he makes it clear that the events they are exposed to are that of dehumanisation and destruction brought on by years of colonial violence.

Published just over half a century later, *Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism* (2016), edited by Sonya Andermahr, marks an important shift towards decolonising trauma studies. This collection combines papers from a diverse group of academics who contribute to decolonising trauma studies through their analysis of postcolonial authors including Zadie Smith, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and writings from Australian aboriginals. Following Fanon, the authors of these essays recurrently critique cultural trauma theory's overreliance on the "event" as a defining moment of traumatic impact, the concentrated focus on Freudian psychoanalysis and prescribing a deconstructionist approach as the only possible approach to analysing literary texts (p.8). The event, as Andermahr emphasises, does not account for prolonged traumatisation caused by colonial violence and prolonged postcolonial traumatisation. The essays contained within this edition significantly diversify the range of approaches to treating trauma, for example covering local healing rituals and practices that go beyond the classic psychoanalytical concept of transforming the traumatic memory into narrative, such as religion.

In Egypt, feminist icon Nawal El Saadawi recognises the multiple forces of oppression that Egyptian women face, and her articles, poetry and drama seek to question the patriarchal, religious, political and imperial authorities. El Saadawi's vision of Egyptian, and by extension Arab, women's liberation lies in developing their own theories and ideas. Freedom from oppression, argues El Saadawi, will not be endowed upon them either by Western powers or the

patriarchs of their own societies. Her strong anticolonial feminist sentiment calls for Egyptian women to go back to their roots and reject the values imposed by patriarchy, capitalism, racist and religious societies. The voices I introduce here have shaped this thesis and my argument in several ways. I was inspired to decentre the experiences of historically dominant groups and replace them with those of marginalised groups and people facing discriminatory practices and other forms of violence. The work of Fanon and Mbembe shed light on perceptions of Africa, Africans and black people, in order to expose the lies and fantasies imposed on it by colonial powers. This racist perception also hides the pervasive effects of colonialism's own destructive aftermath, as we can lucidly see in *stoning mary*, for example.

Trauma and Memory

Writing about trauma is writing about memory. It has even been suggested that: "the only memory worth remembering – worth talking about – is the memory of trauma" (Antze and Lambek, 1996, xii). The relation between trauma and memory, much like memory itself, has not been straightforward; it is tightly knit, yet unstable. It is also a relation that is as old as the theory of trauma itself, and memory as a topic merges and intersects with the fields of psychiatry, cultural trauma theory, postcolonial and cultural memory studies, therefore I briefly identify the points of convergence between these fields in this section. For psychiatrists examining trauma from the 19th century to the present day, remembrance is a spectrum: from this perspective, traumatic experiences can be blocked out, remembered vividly or remembered in distorted, disorganised forms. Contemporary psychiatrists and researchers have added more nuance to this proposition by seeking to prove that memories of traumatic experiences are exceptionally and vividly remembered, even as decades go by (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1991). They have also sought to question if traumatic experiences are indeed blocked out of memory, or if this

forgetting has been conditioned by factors that include shame of discussing a traumatic experience around which a cultural taboo exists (Peace, Porter and Brinke, 2008).

In Psychiatry

Early trauma studies is indispensable in our understanding of the processes of remembering traumatic memories. Silke Arnold-De Simine (2018) aptly describes Freud's conception of trauma as a "spectrum from amnesia through to intense, affective memories (with no conscious understanding), to misremembered, mistaken, repressed, displaced, or disguised registration" (p.144). Simultaneous with Freud's writings, psychologist Pierre Janet (1889) distinguished between two processes of memory: narrative or ordinary memory, and traumatic memory. Janet described narrative memory as a conscious process which includes familiar and expected experiences. These memories are easily integrated into consciousness without necessarily remembering all of their details. Traumatic memory, by contrast, constitutes frightening and unfamiliar experiences, which, unlike common experiences, can be remembered vividly. Janet hypothesised that in extreme situations, these experiences are stored in the mind in a way that prevents them from being brought to conscious awareness, and they become dissociated.[10] When such experiences occur, they manifest themselves in the form of reenactments; in other words, the traumatised person unconsciously repeats the memory of the trauma in an effort to understand it. His work, like Freud's, proved valuable for shaping trauma theory as we know it today.

[10] Theatre is also intrigued by dissociation. A notable example is Scottish playwright Anthony Neilson's *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (2004). The play continues to enjoy popularity and new productions in the UK and beyond to this day. It uses the quest theme in the fantasy genre to contrast the female protagonist's bleak reality in a psyche ward, and her darkly comic dissociative episodes.

A century after Janet published his theory, the concept of multiple memory systems became generally accepted. Psychotherapist Babette Rothschild (2000) outlines the explicit and implicit memory as a similar classification for the types of memory. The explicit memory comprises the conscious knowledge of facts and concepts which people are usually capable of verbally recalling in linear form, while the implicit memory carries unconscious emotions and bodily sensations which lack context of space and time (pp.28-29). Unlike explicit memory, implicit memory cannot be expressed in the form of a narrative. This classification explains the concept of "speechless fright" attributed to traumatic experiences (Balaev, 2008). It is more likely that traumatic events are recorded in the implicit memory, since they are recorded in the form of sensations and emotions that lack narrative form. This explains why reexperiencing trauma (for example, through intrusions or triggers) is usually accompanied by the same affective reactions and bodily sensations which happened during the traumatic event(s). Even when the details of the events are distorted, the body remembers the fear and distress that accompany them. Another research into the memory of traumatic experiences has also expanded our understanding of whether traumatic experiences are truly forgotten at all. One study conducted in Canada reveals that sexually traumatic experiences are unique amongst other manifestations of trauma in that they are very well remembered years after the original occurrence. This study included 44 female adult participants and found that memories of child sexual assault can remain reliable over time (Peace, Porter and Brinke, 2008), and therefore indicates an unwillingness, not an inability, to remember traumatic experiences. This is particularly true for experiences of sexual assault. It exemplifies the psychoanalytic concept of repression, but also highlights the fear and shame attached to the assault.

The experiences of trauma I analyse in this thesis convey that trauma is well remembered since its occurrence, and that it continues to affect the present without going through a period of latency or belatedness. It is implied that the traumatic experience is etched in memory even through the intervening years. The flashbacks and the continuous recall of trauma in the present, as shown in the works of Ridley and tucker green, necessitate a method of analysis that goes beyond the theory of belatedness. Furthermore, the plays of tucker green and Amin only present events of violence as examples of wider contexts of oppression. In *stoning mary*, particularly, there is no identifiable traumatic event to begin with. Therefore, the plays show that trauma is experienced as it happens, and that the aftermath can ease it, or make the shock worse, depending on how the characters manage it and how much support they get from their respective communities.

In Cultural Trauma Theory

Whereas the sources of psychiatry indicate that the memory of trauma is indelible, Caruth (1996) argues for the theory of latency. She views the experience of trauma as an event that is largely forgotten and is only understood through its reexperiencing (in nightmares or repetitive actions of the survivor). Commenting on Freud's observation on the effects of railway accidents, she argues that the power of the trauma "is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (p.17). Her hypothesis implies that trauma is located in its re-experiencing, rather than in the original event. I argue that this is a problematic view for two reasons. First, it presupposes that the traumatic experience is forgotten or repressed. Memory studies conceive of memory, including the traumatic, as a spectrum rather than a polar opposite. Second, this claim greatly underestimates the original event. The error of this supposition is that Caruth takes the model of

the railway accident to theorise traumatic experience in general. She goes on to assert that: “For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs” (p.18). The concept of repression itself has been contested, and, as the study by Peace, Porter and Brinke (2008) suggests, it is now believed that it reflects an unwillingness, rather than an inability, to talk about the trauma, regardless of the reason.

In Postcolonial Theory

Writing from a postcolonial position and decolonial perspective, Mbembe (2010) similarly conceives of the memory of the colony in the contemporary African consciousness as a spectrum. The colony is remembered, he argues, in modes of “active commemoration to forgetting, passing via nostalgia, fiction and reappropriation” (p.27). He asserts that the colony leaves behind a loss and absence, both material and abstract, of people, objects, spaces, and ideals. It is a loss that is both infinite and insurmountable. These losses are revived and reshaped in the memory of the colonised subjects in the form of psychic images. As a result, “gaps, ‘lies,’ erasures, and blackouts” (p.28) form the crux of the memory. Building on these insights, his examination of the memory embodied both in African literature and politics emphasises a debt which the colonial powers must pay towards Africa. He argues further that literatures of Africa express this debt by foregrounding the losses suffered during and as a result of the colonial encounter, particularly debts of development and immigration (p.34-35). Unlike other theorists who solely focus on the destructive and dehumanising effects of colonialism, Mbembe unravels “a guilty secret” which marks the memory of the colony alongside its horrors: namely that, in the African consciousness, there is a desire to emulate the colony. The African text, he argues, cannot acknowledge that it is enchanted by the colony and that this desire and enchantment are the reasons for the loss (p.35). It is thus apparent that Mbembe’s interpretation of the memory of

the colony both intersects with and diverts from the theories of memory in psychiatry and cultural trauma theories. Like other forms of individual trauma, the mass trauma of colonialism has similarly left its own gaps in memory and text, of everything lost in the wake of colonialism.

In Cultural Memory Studies

Since the focus of trauma studies is the past, the field is closely associated with that of cultural memory. Cultural memory examines the ways in which memory is mediated and transmitted through literature, film, museums, exhibitions, and public spaces. Like trauma studies, it emerged within the works of several scholars in France, Germany and the US who explored the aftereffects of the Holocaust and its modes of representation in diverse cultural media (Kennedy, 2020). The field studies how current acts of commemoration are represented in cultural media (Kennedy, 2020, p.60). Literature plays a central role in cultural memory and can be a medium for immortalising memory across generations and communities. Ann Rigney (2008) traces the development of memory studies in its shift from a focus on immobile sites (for example, monuments) to more dynamic and malleable forms. In particular, a shift of the focus occurred from "products to processes" of memory, together with a concern around how these processes influence their milieu (p.346). Rigney puts the role of literature centre stage as a helpful mnemonic tool because of its ability to formulate stories that can garner the sympathy of the reader and engage them in histories and events they have not directly witnessed. Fiction provides narratives of historical events which are more memorable to readers even if they have no particular interest in the topic in advance (p.347). It is evident that unlike *static* memory objects, literature has the potential of travelling and traversing time and space, reaching wider audiences and uncovering hidden and silenced histories of marginalised and historically oppressed groups. Kennedy's own example of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* is a testament to this proposal, as she

notes that, prior to its publication in 1987, there was seldom any mention of slavery and its legacy of systemic racism in the US (2020, p.62).

I would here argue that the conception of literature as a memory resource can be extended to the theatre both as a visual and textual medium of memory. Some of the most enduring historical stories have been shaped and immortalised primarily by theatre; Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, for example, likewise his other history plays, comes to mind. Theatre has also referred to and reflected the historical and ideological shifts of its own era in a way, in a more concrete and public form than literary fiction is capable of. The Theatre of the Absurd in particular can be seen as a testament to this view. The Theatre of the Absurd demonstrated the disillusionment in political and social systems and progress by formulating a language and dramatic structure that do not find any meaning in these systems, or in life at large. Even where the memory of World War II was not directly evoked, the nihilism, despair, and emptiness which the theatre gave voice and view of reflected this disillusionment, as in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1957). Further, the belief in theatre as a catalyst for political change invites a connection between certain playwrights and productions and turning points in history, just as the work of Edward Bond shows; his controversial play *Saved* (1965) "helped spur the abolition of theatre censorship in Britain" (Smith, 2024). Similarly, I view the attempt at tearing down the oppressive wall in the final scene of Bond's *Lear* (1971) a prophetic vision of the fall of the Berlin Wall in the following decade. This selective sample of plays exemplifies theatre's potent association with living memory in retrospect.

Of the three playwrights whose work this thesis examines, tucker green's body of drama routinely recalls collective memory and connects it with the personal. Her theatre, I suggest, can be regarded as a portal for memories of violence, subjugation and struggle in the UK and

beyond. Specifically, tucker green's *stoning mary*, *truth and reconciliation*, *hang* and *ear for eye* are works that lay bare memories of the crimes of colonial and oppressive powers, which convey its deliberate absence from mainstream media: this is a form of silencing that, tucker green asserts, directly inspired *stoning mary* (Gardner, 2005). The production and reproduction of these memories raises questions about which historical events are buried, and what the implications of this concealment are. In particular, the plays draw attention to the continuity of violence and oppression in the present both in its straightforward and insidious forms. As an example, in *truth and reconciliation* the ghosts walk on stage as a chilling reminder of the victims of conflict whose murderers may still roam free and where retributive justice has not been done to their communities.

Trauma and Narrative, Silence and Voice

Narrative, as a topic that cuts across the disciplines of psychiatry, cultural trauma theory and drama, has been theorised and utilised in different ways. In Western psychiatric practices, trauma recovery has centred on the importance of telling the story of the trauma, thereby countering the speechless fright that such experiences may create. As the well-known treatment method that Freud and Breuer employed, the importance of narrative is a legacy from psychoanalysis. While this legacy and the centrality of narrative within it have both been challenged, this does not mean that narrative in approaches to treating trauma is strictly a Western recovery method. To illustrate, academics, psychologists and novelists from South Africa explore the healing and transformative potential of narrative in individual and mass trauma such as apartheid in *Trauma, Memory and Narrative in South Africa: Interviews* (2010), a collection of interviews edited by Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga and Karin Orantes. For psychologist and academic Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, narrative in a psychological setting is essential in transforming traumatic

memory to narrative memory since unspoken trauma continues to manifest itself in destructive repetitive patterns or somatic symptoms and affects interpersonal relationships. In this way, Gobodo-Madikizela argues that narrative functions essentially as a means of restoring control of the trauma and reclaiming awareness of its components (Mengel, Borzaga and Orantes, 2010, pp.175-176). Psychiatrist Ashraf Kagee puts forward a similar view, asserting that narrative in a safe, therapeutic setting can assist in recovery, in the form of remembering the event and re-experiencing the emotions that accompanied it, a process identified as prolonged exposure (Mengel, Borzaga and Orantes, 2010, p.132). Nonetheless, both Kagee and Gobodo-Madikizela underscore the importance of having an "empathic listener" in order for the trauma narrative and recovery to be successful. Referring to the act of listening to the South Africans impacted by apartheid as part of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Kagee notes that listening took place as an "official, administrative event, a bureaucratic exercise, rather than a therapeutic encounter" (Mengel, Borzaga and Orantes, 2010, p.130) and therefore it was not a healing experience for many witnesses. Gobodo-Madikizela similarly stresses the relational aspect of narrative, demonstrating that the lack of empathy from workers in the TRC can hamper recovery. In other words, the success of narrative is conditional on the presence of willing and empathic listeners in a safe space for the victims of trauma (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, 2007).

Drawing on these arguments, I propose that theatre, by opening up its space for narrating or staging traumatic experiences, promotes greater understanding of such experiences and, potentially, therapeutic opportunities for actors and audience. There is always the possibility – and fresh hope – of having empathic listeners among the audience in the safe space of its walls with each live performance. As Gobodo-Madikizela asserts, healing can happen when the

dialogue takes place in front of "an audience - a person, or people, who will listen with compassion, with a desire to understand what has happened to us" (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, 2007, p.27). I interpret "audience" here in both senses of the word – a gathering of people and the willingness to listen – to affirm the close link between theatre and trauma studies when it comes to engaging with traumatic narrative. This resemblance is especially important for historically oppressed individuals and groups, since theatre can highlight the specific trauma of oppressed people. In a socio-political framework where they are underrepresented and their voices sidelined, theatre has the capacity to provide a safe – ideally, a free – platform for exploring and sharing the burden of trauma. Tackling what is sometimes thought to be a private experience in public is arguably in itself a political act, not least in combating and challenging isolation, and one which can in turn set the scene for identifying shared trauma and initiating the steps towards radical change. In this way, theatre's ability to uncover and represent trauma can itself become a tool for productive social and political upheaval.

Taking inspiration from psychoanalysis, the field of cultural trauma theory is similarly concerned with narrative. It chiefly conceptualises trauma as inherently anti-narrative. The most influential voices in cultural trauma theory, notably Shoshana Felman and Caruth, argue that the disruption and shock of trauma and its unfamiliarity precludes any coherent narrative. To illustrate, Felman (1992) writes that a testimony about trauma only contains fragments of a memory, rather than a comprehensive statement (p.5). Her point of view anticipates Caruth's assertion that trauma is not experienced as it happens, but rather in its re-occurrence through nightmares, flashbacks or reexperiencing. Caruth (1995) contends that having a comprehensive or comprehensible story of the trauma is impossible. Trauma cannot be retold in full and cannot be understood, and any attempt at telling it will be incomplete. Nonetheless, she posits that

integrating the trauma via narrative is necessary for two reasons: to bear witness to a past that was not completely understood as it occurred, and to heal from it (pp.151-153). Therefore, the traumatised cannot produce a full account of the distressing event and the testimonies. Film or texts that mediate traumatic experience carry out the task of providing this narrative.

If trauma is inherently anti-narrative as proponents of cultural trauma theory suggest, how can literature become a medium for communicating trauma? To resolve this apparent contradiction, theorists including Luckhurst and Joshua Pederson hypothesise that cultural and literary forms that recount or represent traumatic experiences typically share specific formal characteristics that mimic the influence of traumatisation and the disruption that it causes. Luckhurst (2008) observes that some of the works on trauma: "played around with narrative time, disrupting linearity, suspending logical causation, running out of temporal sequence, working backwards towards the inaugurating traumatic event, or playing with belated revelations that retrospectively rewrite narrative significance" (p.80). The non-linearity of literary forms is meant to mimic the traumatised mind, as it constantly goes back to the past in an attempt to make sense of it. The narrative gets forcibly disrupted in the same way that a traumatic event – in the classic, psychoanalytic sense – interrupts and disrupts the "normality", safety, and familiarity of the everyday. Mbembe (2010) also identifies a similar dislocation of time in the (postcolonial) African novel. He describes it as fluid, with the present pulling in both directions. Rather than an identifiable tense, time is described through the physicality of the senses, centring on what the characters can see and hear at a particular moment within the novel's plot.

Whereas Luckhurst's observation is about the formal aspects of the works on trauma, Pederson (2018) approaches both the structure and content of trauma literature. He argues that literary works have a distinctive capacity to present traumatic experience, giving three reasons

why, in his view, literary narrative is especially suited for communicating the wound of trauma: these are literature's imaginative quality, its ability to "capture the feel" of trauma even if it does not communicate facts, and the proposition that trauma and language have similar forms (pp.98-100). Pederson also identifies three common tropes of trauma literature: the use of absence, indirection, and repetition. Absence can manifest itself in gaps, silences or even ruptures in the text itself; indirection in using heavily symbolic language to refer indirectly to the trauma, and repetition in the constant return to the traumatic past as in dreams, flashbacks, and compulsive reenactments (pp.101-105). The structural and thematic aspects of trauma literature as hypothesised by Luckhurst and Pederson describe a text that reflects a pathology. Non-linearity, silence and repetition are meant to display the aftermath of trauma on the mind and the life experience of the traumatised, and a coherent narrative thereby signals recovery, overcoming adversity and integrating traumatic experiences into a life story.

When cultural trauma theorists refer to narrative, they mainly reference works of narrative fiction (such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*), film (*Hiroshima mon Amour)*, documentary (Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*), and poetry (S. T. Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*). Yet I argue that theatre has a unique position among this discourse, being both a textual and performance art. Theatre's multimodal communicative potential puts it at a position to narrate the story of trauma in ways that connect suggestively with trauma theory. For example, traumatic experience can be recalled in dialogues, and sharing stories can be a bonding experience between the characters, aiding them to cope with their shared trauma. Alternatively, a dialogue can be a confrontation aiming at exposing a side who is unwilling to acknowledge the trauma of other characters. The dramaturgical device of the soliloquy - positioned on the border between private and public, between what is subconscious or thought and what is voiced - also offers insight into

feelings that a character may be hiding from others, even perhaps partly from themselves. In addition to speech, theatre can reference trauma using symbols, gestures, embodiments, and personalisation (for example, of ghosts); even one word can evoke a prolonged history of mass trauma. For example, the title of debbie tucker green's *hang* recalls the lynching of African Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The flashing lights that spell out "AIDS Genocide" in *stoning mary* clearly point to the responsibility of developed countries to provide adequate support for AIDS patients as well as the failure to do so. Theatre can in different ways give material form to the tropes and forms used by trauma literature, simultaneously offering the distinctive opportunities that come with the physical body and presence of the actor. The actor's appearance, posture, movement, and voice can all be utilised to bear witness to a trauma that may or may not be explicitly uttered, in the attentive presence of an audience.

While narrative has been regarded as a chief means of alleviating the pain of trauma, recent trends in literary trauma theory have contested its domination as the sole and universal method of managing the traumatic impact. Proponents of this alternative view base their argument on both real-life experiences in loci of conflict, and literary modes of writing where silence, rather than narrative, is used as a tool for mitigating the adverse effects of traumatic experience. Michelle Balaev (2008) builds on the theory of psychiatrist Laurence Kirmayer, as the latter notes that cultural models influence how trauma is registered and recalled. Kirmayer indicates that social norms determine what can be spoken of openly and what needs to remain hidden (p.156). Balaev therefore argues that the perceived "unspeakability" of trauma is not a universal or biological trait that everyone shares, but rather a product of cultural values (p.157). Silence and ambiguity regarding the details of traumatic experience, as Balaev observes, are employed as conscious artistic choices rather than being symptoms of traumatisation. Balaev's

position draws on Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Jacobs' autobiography details her experience of being enslaved and raped by her slave master, but she only refers to the horrors that the slave master inflicted on her indirectly. Balaev makes the argument that "social standards and narrative conventions" dictate what the reader does or does not know regarding traumatic experience. This suggests "other reasons for the silence or lack of vivid description of the exact experience than those based on an abreactive model of trauma that claim it is the 'speechless terror,' the pre-linguistic, contagious, or ontological void of the experience that produces narrative omission" (pp.157-158). Balaev notes that silence is used in some of the trauma novels as a rhetorical device. It is used for the purpose of reflecting the confusion of trauma (p.162). In addition, the trauma novel suggests that Freud's talking cure and healing through narrative recall are not the only remedies for the traumatized protagonists. Instead, healing can be achieved through contact with the natural world and culture-specific rituals (p.164).

Craps (2014) proposes another use of silence in postcolonial literature that challenges the Western hegemony of contemporary trauma theory. In his analysis of Scottish-Sierra Leonean novelist Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* (2010), he presents silence as a means of healing from trauma. The novel, set in post-war Sierra Leone, chronicles the intersecting lives of three men including a British psychologist and a Sierra Leonean surgeon. The British psychologist attempts to apply his Western medical healing strategies to Sierra Leone, but his attempts do not come to fruition. He argues that the novel calls into question the universality of the talking cure, one of the tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis, contemporary psychotherapy and trauma theory. He adds:

> The novel suggests that local coping mechanisms may even trump popular Western ideas about trauma treatment by showing how silence plays a beneficial role in keeping trauma at bay. Silence is repeatedly put forward as a valid way of surviving the suffering inflicted by the war … Rather than merely a symptom of trauma, to be dispelled without a second thought, silence is also a coping mechanism, a conscious choice deserving of respect. (p.55)

Craps also cites a similar real-life situation happening in Sri Lanka. In the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami, Western trauma counsellors were keen to use their method of recounting the traumatic experience with the locals. However, their attempts did more harm than good because they counterposed the Sri Lankan people's choice of using silence as a means of containing violence after the thirty-year civil war (2015, pp.22-23). These examples reflect a more diversified outlook on the role that silence and indirect communication can play in representing and dealing with trauma.

The relation between trauma and narrative, or wound and word, closely informs my analysis of plays by Philip Ridley in Chapter 2 and debbie tucker green in Chapter 3. The dramas I explore here reflect a varied and, by their different emphases, an almost paradoxical view of the function of narrative. Ridley's plays implicitly suggest that narrative is essential for relieving trauma. *Vincent River*'s protagonist, a victim of homophobic trauma, urgently and incessantly asks the other character – and by default the audiences – "Are you listening?" as he weaves the disruptive trauma into his life experience (Ridley, 2009). It is only when he tells his story that healing can begin. By contrast, as I show, tucker green's *hang* reveals the multiple uses of literal and metaphorical silence. My analysis across the work of both playwrights also reflects an awareness of the cultural differences between people when it comes to expressing and managing

the psychological wound. I demonstrate that narrative can be a viable means of overcoming traumatic experience, but my analysis importantly draws attention in addition to other means of healing. Narrative as a recovery mode can seem to imply that trauma is a one-off occurrence, but the postcolonial and feminist revisions of trauma studies have firmly established that for marginalised groups, trauma is a repetitive occurrence. My reading of the plays in these chapters reveals that theatre has the capacity to showcase the multitude of trauma recovery methods beyond and besides narrative.

Whose story? Victims, Perpetrators and Witnesses

I have established that narrative is one of the main cross-disciplinary techniques and areas of interest that connect trauma studies and theatre practice. Within trauma studies, there has been a prevailing understanding that narrative leads to alleviating post-traumatic symptoms and can provide a gateway for recovery. The bulk of trauma studies focuses on man-made disasters, crimes and violations, which arguably creates several categories of people: victims, perpetrators, witnesses (or bystanders) and implicated subjects (Rothberg, 2019).[11] Cultural trauma theorists have written profusely about witnessing, especially in relation to the Holocaust.[12] Nonetheless, the presentation of victims and perpetrators within psychology and psychiatry resources and cultural trauma theory remains problematic. Some of the ground-breaking texts on trauma tend to blur the line between victims and perpetrators at best, ignore or falsely equate their experiences at worst. In this section, I address this issue, showing the need to distinguish between the two categories, and establishing that the arguments of this thesis align with the victims. All the plays

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[11]In *The Implicated Subject* (2019), Rothberg proposes a category of people who are "aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm" (p.1). In this way, they benefit from existing hierarchical and violent regimes without being in direct control of said regimes.

[12] For example, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992), Stef Craps' *Postcolonial Witnessing* (2015) and Carolyn J. Dean's 'Witnessing' (2020).

I have selected for analysis centre on the experiences of victims of violence, a choice that stems from the ethical imperative I recognise to prioritise their voices.

On the question of the tensions between victims and perpetrators in relation to conceptions of trauma, I return first to the American Psychiatric Association's *DSM-5-TR* (2022). The manual lists certain "traumatic events" which can lead to developing PTSD when experienced directly, such as "exposure to war as a combatant or civilian" (2022). For one, this phrasing conflates the differences between perpetrators and victims of combat. It suggests that a combatant and a civilian experience trauma with the same impact, but civilians often suffer from the effects of combat far more widely and severely. Civilians in war-torn areas may have their homes pillaged and destroyed, may suffer shortage of food, water, and medicine, and may have their children forced to join the military or paramilitary forces. The disproportionate traumatisation of civilians in combat calls for recognition of their suffering in their own right, and not in reference to the traumatisation of the combatant. The manual also ignores the fact that a combatant may attack their victims willingly and with little or no provocation. The choice to kill and maim defenceless civilians and threaten their lives and sense of safety is exclusive to combatants.

Another factor that arguably makes the experience of combat distinctively impactful for civilians is that an army veteran will often be honoured in their home country if it is a foreign invasion, or by political and military leaders. Judith Herman (1997) explains the importance of public recognition for returning soldiers and how much the level of social and psychological support they receive can positively influence their mental health. The suffering of returning soldiers may be acknowledged and restitution achieved. By contrast, civilians are rarely remembered through "medals, monuments, parades, holidays, and public ceremonies of

memorial" (p.70) which are usually made and performed for returning soldiers. They are thus left with little or no restitution or political change, as well as severe economic, social, and psychological devastation. The lives of civilians impacted by war are irreversibly damaged, forgotten and/or equated with the traumatic aggression of combatants who were tools in creating the catastrophe in the first place.

Another troublesome example of the ways in which vulnerable civilians can be sidelines in analyses of war trauma is the story Bessel van der Kolk uses at the start of *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014). Here, van der Kolk discusses his experience as a psychiatrist at the Boston Veterans Administration Clinic in the late 1970s, where he began receiving ex-Marine soldiers who had been involved in the war in Vietnam (1955 – 1975). He describes how a certain veteran, Tom, became alcoholic, estranged from his family, and repeatedly had nightmares about the war. As van der Kolk explains, Tom confessed to him that one day after he and his squad were ambushed and all his companions killed, he went into a frenzy, killing Vietnamese children and raping a woman (pp.12-13). While van der Kolk condemns these atrocities, he uses them within the narrative of traumatic experiences that people have helplessly experienced, such as sexual and domestic abuse, whereas the example of Tom is clearly a case of trauma inflicted on defenceless others. These examples show how the modes of telling the stories of perpetrators and victims within theories of trauma tend to ignore the perpetrators' culpability.

Similarly, some of the primary texts within cultural trauma theory begin with a story about a perpetrator of violence to exemplify the idea of the traumatized individual. Caruth's troublesome take on Tancred and Clorinda is a prime example of this obfuscation between victim and perpetrator trauma. Her interpretation has now been recognised as contentious and has been utilised to evidence the tendency within Caruth's work to obscure the effects of violence and

muddle the categories of victims and perpetrators. For example, Ruth Leys (2000) argues that Caruth has changed the meaning of Freud's original parable and made Tancred the victim of trauma, whereas Clorinda is the actual victim of Tancred's assault, albeit unknowingly. Leys contends that Caruth makes "victimhood unlocatable in any particular person or place, thereby permitting it to migrate or spread contagiously to others" (p.296). Balaev (2014) makes a similar observation about Caruth's more general assertion that "trauma is never simply one's own" and that "we are implicated in each other's trauma" (1996, p.24). She argues that it can absolve perpetrators from the responsibility of violence:

> The attempt to include everyone as victims of trauma runs the risk of including everyone as perpetrators … [Caruth's] claim veers toward universalizing the experience of trauma as well as collectivizing the instigator of violence, of which both implications serve to make anonymous the actor and recipient of violence … Theoretically expanding the identification of action from a direct experience to indirect experience conflates cause and effect, and thus conceals questions of responsibility and agency. (p.7)

Balaev indicates that Caruth's claim blurs the line between perpetrator and victim and essentially turns everyone into perpetrator and victim at once. Amy Novak (2008) takes the criticism of Caruth one step further by revealing a colonial dimension to the poem that Caruth overlooks. She illustrates that Clorinda is an Ethiopian woman, a victim of war by a foreign, white invader, who is silenced and sidelined by Caruth's focus on Tancred's trauma. This position, as Novak deduces, demonstrates the difficulty of representing the African Other within contemporary trauma theory.

Craps (2015) takes a middle ground in this debate. He accepts Tancred's status as a trauma survivor but maintains that Caruth's text problematically neglects the experience of Clorinda (pp.14-17). He is particularly concerned that in this example, as well as in Caruth's analysis of Moses' murder, the trauma prototype makes victims out of perpetrators of violence.[13] Furthermore, he points out that all three examples presented by Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* - namely Tancred and Clorinda, Moses and the Israelites and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* - include acts of violence towards a non-European other whose trauma is not acknowledged (pp.14-19). *Hiroshima mon Amour*, for example, focuses on the French woman's story, rather than giving due voice to the history of Hiroshima or to the Japanese man she falls in love with. Leys, Balaev and Craps' compelling arguments suggest an imperative to recognize and listen to the trauma of the victims of violence. They also highlight, to quote Craps, the perils of appropriation, particularly when the victim is non-European and living in a position where the power dynamics do not skew in their favour.

By contrast, Rothberg (2009) argues for the need to distinguish between the categories of victim and that of traumatised subject. He posits that traumatisation does not necessarily make a subject a victim. Based on this premise, perpetrators of violence can be traumatised, and trauma should not be a domain for determining moral value: "The categories of victim and perpetrator derive from either a legal or a moral discourse, but the concept of trauma emerges from a diagnostic realm that lies beyond guilt and innocence or good and evil" (p.90). Similarly, Patrick Anderson and Jisha Menon (2009) call for the necessity of dissolving the hard line between victims and perpetrators in their definition of violence, writing within the context of performance

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[13] Caruth argues that the structure of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism (1939)* reflects Freud's escape from Nazi persecution. However, Ruth Leys (2000) holds the view that Caruth's argument changes the trauma from the Israelites killing Moses to the trauma of their 'separation' from him.

studies. Concerned that violence could perpetually define individuals and communities as victims and diminish any other aspect of their history, they instead suggest treating violence as a disruptive force that does not limit those affected as victims: "we empower those who have experienced the horror of violent acts by refusing to see them as forever classified by victimization" (pp.5-6). In my view, two issues with Anderson and Menon's argument need to be addressed. Firstly, I assert that use of the term "victim" need not signal weakness, passivity or disempowerment. In this thesis, I apply "victim" consciously as a term which clearly shows the impact of individual and mass trauma and I consider the blurring of this term an erasure of the act of violence. Victims of violence can go on to have agency by telling and commemorating their story, effecting change or questioning and challenging the forces of oppression. The plays in the thesis show both the traumatic impact and viable methods of resisting forces bigger than oneself, a challenge explicitly tackled in Amin's *Theatre of Crime*. In addition, interwoven with the cruel systems of violence that tucker green's plays demonstrate, I read a demand on the audience to acknowledge the brutal effects of racial inequality with the hope of creating ripple effects of change that emanate from the theatre. The plays of Ridley, tucker green and Amin do not define the whole lives of victims of violence by their trauma. Instead, they present relationships, childhoods, families, self-image and safety before and after being shattered by these acts of violence. Their history is not diminished, but rather repeatedly interrupted and deeply impacted. Indeed, as in the example of tucker green's *hang*, the play chooses to focus on the arduous judicial process that succeeds the crime, rather than on the crime itself. Secondly, Anderson and Menon consider violence as an "intensely significant moment in the context of historicity" (p.6): this one-sided view that emphasises violence's "moment" feeds into the problematic definition of trauma as event-based that theorists such as Stef Craps critique and that

I argue in this thesis fails to encompass the complexity of diverse experiences of trauma. For example, victims of sexual abuse and racial discrimination face repeated incidents of (systemic) violence and microaggressions rather than one severe blow. The stance of Anderson and Menon therefore risks underestimating the effects of violence and seeking to dislocate these from their sources.

The examples I have drawn upon here show that work within psychiatry resources and cultural trauma theory have recurrently obscured the distinction between the effects of trauma on victims and perpetrators, as well as eliding these groups in terms of the severity of such experience. The sources pose the question of if and how the discrete categories of victims and perpetrators within trauma theory should persist. All of the plays that I examine in this thesis present and primarily give voice to victims of violence in various forms: homophobic assault, and domestic, racial and sexual violence. I align my analysis of these plays with the critical perspectives put forward by Leys, Balaev and Craps. My thesis engages with the line of argument on victims and perpetrators within trauma theory, firmly in support of drawing clear lines between the two sides. Theatre is witness to realities that might otherwise and elsewhere be silenced or censored, so it is one of the few platforms to voice and at times embody the ordeal of the victims. This is not to deny that perpetrator trauma exists, but rather to assert the ethical need for prioritizing the voices of those victims. I also stress that theatre invites its audiences to give credibility to the victims: this is most vividly presented in Amin's *Theatre of Crime*, where I argue that the play seeks to preclude any attempt to deny or mitigate the scale and the devastation of misogyny and sexual assault as one of its corollaries. I here echo the slogan that feminist

activists in Egypt have adopted recently: "نصدق الناجيات" "We believe the survivors".[14] Last but not least, if trauma theory is to honour its promise of taking an ethical turn to real life events, it needs to reconsider the common obfuscation of victims and perpetrators within its analytical writings.

The concepts and contestations about victims and perpetrators are highly pertinent to my study. A play like tucker green's *stoning mary*, for example, shows a glimpse into the devastation of war and lawlessness and reveals how far these experiences immeasurably damage the lives of civilians. Furthermore, my wider analysis of the plays dealt with throughout this thesis addresses the position of the witnesses to violence, in two spheres: within the dramatic or fictional space and in the real world within and beyond the theatre. All theatre by default presumes the presence of an audience who implicitly become witnesses if the plays include acts of violence. As I argue in relation to Amin's *Theatre of Crime*, being a witness to dramatised violence implicitly challenges the audience to question their own role in perpetuating or failing to reduce the spread of violence within their realities. Plays that tackle violence in this way suggest, or invite the inference, that staying silent and passive towards violence makes witnesses complicit with perpetrators. *Vincent River*, *Leaves of Glass*, *hang*, *stoning mary* and *Theatre of Crime* lend their voices – or perhaps, silent screams – to witnesses of violence: Davey witnessing Vincent's murder, Barry's abuse, Three's children, the disjointed family and the crowd gathered outside the theatre gate, respectively. The effect on the witnesses can take the form of a secondary traumatization that is so severe it irreversibly damages their lives (*hang*), or it can form part of a

[14] The Arabic phrase refers specifically to female survivors, as initially all testimonies of abuse shared on the website elmodawana.com came from women.

varying spectrum of attitudes between complicity with the perpetrator, solidarity with or indifference to the plight of the victim (*Theatre of Crime*).

The Return to the Body

Contemporary developments in trauma studies have turned with renewed interest to the body as an anchor for both explaining the effects of trauma and for managing it. The location of trauma within the body has been a subject of debate since trauma as a discipline emerged in the 19th century. Psychiatrists and neurologists have since disagreed whether it is caused by physical damage to the body or a shock that generates physical symptoms. Charcot's breakthrough achievement, followed by Freud and Janet, is his theory that hysteria is a response to psychological trauma. The focus on trauma as a psychological wound has been the driving force behind Western psychiatric practices as well as cultural trauma theory. This in turn necessitated a focus on narrative therapeutic techniques, or the talking cure. In recent years, however, especially with the advancement in technology and the ability to scan brains to assess the effect of traumatic experiences, the direction within psychological studies of trauma has once again turned to the body. More recent publications such as Babette Rothschild's *The Body Remembers* (2000) and Bessel van der Kolk's popular book *The Body Keeps the Score*: *Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2014) ushered in a new interest in the body as a source of understanding the effects of traumatic experience as well as a gateway for trauma treatment.

Rothschild explains the psychophysiology of trauma and provides case studies from her therapy sessions. She aims to bridge the gap between mind and body, since trauma, as she points out, has strong somatic effects. She argues that: "When healing trauma, it is crucial to give attention to both body and mind; you can't have one without the other" (2000, xiv). She elucidates the impact of trauma on mind and body, manifesting for example in the form of

nightmares, flashbacks, startle responses and dissociative behaviours, and stresses the importance of somatic memory: the memories related to the body. She uses talk therapy and non-touch techniques for managing and presenting the somatic memories of trauma.

Van der Kolk (2014) similarly looks to the body as a source for better understanding trauma and as a source of recovery. He draws on advances in neuroscience, developmental psychopathology and interpersonal neurobiology to reveal that trauma causes physiological changes to the brain, and an increase in stress levels (p.2).[15] For van der Kolk, trauma is more than just a story: it is also fundamentally physical and emotional, manifesting in sensations that continue to disrupt the present. On that basis, he insists on the importance of expanding options of healing strategies that go beyond the dominant talking cure and medication to include body therapy. He explains that this method gives the body an opportunity for having experiences that "deeply and viscerally contradict the helplessness, rage, or collapse that result from trauma" (p.3). One of the goals of alleviating post-traumatic effects is limbic system therapy by being self-aware of the body's sensations. Van der Kolk presents research as well as healing practices from around the world that seek to foster self-awareness and self-managing the adverse effects of trauma by methods that do not involve narrating the trauma. These include deep breathing, yoga, mindfulness, building and flourishing relationships, communal rhythms and synchrony, and physical touch. He maintains that alleviating trauma involves finding safety, reassurance and support within oneself and within others. Both Rothschild and van der Kolk aim to transform the damage that trauma causes, both psychological and physiological.

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[15] Developmental psychopathology is "the study of the impact of adverse experiences on the development of mind and brain; and interpersonal neurobiology, the study of how our behaviour influences the emotions, biology, and mind-sets of those around us" (van der Kolk, 2014, p.2).

The body is also an integral subject in postcolonial and decolonial discourses. The discourses focus on the colonised body as a site of violence and a source of extracting infinite labour. For Mbembe, the body particularly bears the brunt of colonialism's brutal tactics, and is reduced to the labour, and therefore the profit, which it can produce for the colonisers. Writing specifically about the black man, he further argues that colonial perception and practices imposed an amalgamation of imaginary attributes on black people that describe the skin or "shell" only, separating it from and denying any other human aspect. He posits that: "the Black Man is above all a body - gigantic and fantastic" (2017, p.39), describing all the deceitful attributes that the colonial discourse has formed and instilled regarding the black body as a "well of fantasies" where "people of African origin" were transformed into "blacks" so that they can become "bodies of extraction and subjects of race" (pp. 39-40). Once the extraction of labour and profit is achieved, they become dispensable and are therefore discarded. Mbembe's view of the body aligns with Fanon who argued that the concept of the Black Man was invented by white people and shaped by the stories that they created about him: "a mechanism of attribution than of self-designation" (p.46). Mbembe shows the schism between how the black man is perceived and his actual lived experience and explains that the roots of this distance go back to slavery and colonialism.

Having certain attributes and restrictions forced on the body is similarly a recurrent topic in feminist writings. Writing about her place as a woman in patriarchal systems and the East/West, North/South divide, Nora Amin (2016b) argues that the female body meshes into the surrounding cultural norms, with the result that women often find themselves restricted in matters ranging from choice of dress, to movement, and to societal action. In a sense, the female body is therefore indoctrinated to adapt to its surrounding and lose its sense of self and

individuality. Amin cites sexual harassment as a chief result of the inherent sense of superiority endowed upon men in patriarchal societies. The omnipresent threat of violence in the form of harassment makes women reject and restrict their femininity. While Amin does not explicitly address the role of religion in attributing certain qualities on the bodies of women or enforcing restrictions on their lives, fellow Egyptian Nadal El Saadawi (2010) argues that religion, patriarchy, imperialism, and capitalism all play a significant role in conditioning women. Like Amin, El Saadawi attacks both East/West socio-economic systems which aim at coercing women: "Religious fanatics shout obscenities at women for not wearing the veil. On the other hand, postmodern neoliberal fanatics shout obscenities at women for wearing the veil" (xvi). The sense of coercion and oppression that women experience according to both Amin and El Saadawi relates to the concept of traumatisation as an everyday experience in the lives of the disempowered. Women living in such systems find that their bodies are constantly subjected to the demands of patriarchy; they are equally made continually aware of the surrounding threat of violence, which is inherently traumatising.

The concepts of connecting with others and transformation can be carried forward to the theatre, the body of the actor being an important resource for communicating traumatic anguish and for representing potential routes towards countering this distress. The body is a site where the disciplines of trauma and theatre meet and address each other. The plays I examine show the effects of traumatic experience: in what follows we will see dramatised examples of such effects, which include depression, numbing, nightmares, insomnia and being on constant alert for danger. Nonetheless, theatre also shows the potential for healing by finding safety and connecting with others on a physical level. The presence of the actors' bodies provides the opportunity for finding solace and connection through touch and countering the aftermath of traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, in theatre, the body can be transformed from a site/sight of trauma and oppression to a site and tool for resistance. It can inspire and instigate change, challenging the hegemony of social and political powers. Finally, decolonial endeavours seek to centre black and minority ethnic actors (BME) on stages of the Global North through casting BME actors in roles that are conventionally assigned to white actors, uncovering histories of violence and oppression through the stage, and challenging audience's perception of their own notions of justice and empathy.

In conclusion, I have established in this chapter that the birth of trauma studies in the nineteenth century has influentially shaped our understanding of trauma today and I demonstrated the ways in which this has impacted cultural and literary trauma studies. I have also shown that the focus of cultural trauma theory has been on experiences common to dominant social groups, and that it is consequently limited in its presentation and understanding of marginalised and oppressed people and the distinctive forms of trauma that may affect them. I have identified trends in contemporary criticism that have sought to decentre the Western experiences and perspectives of trauma and decolonise the theory. My own position within this debate takes a culturally sensitive position of relativity with regard to the expression of traumatic experiences, and refuses to universalise the experience and expression of trauma. I have further introduced some of the central ways in which trauma and the theatre can be seen to intersect, and which prove especially pertinent to the case studies of this thesis: namely, narrative and silence; the portrayal of victims and perpetrators; the centrality of memory in trauma studies; and the roles of the body of the traumatised, and the body of the actors. In the following chapters, through my analyses of plays by Ridley, tucker green and Amin, I address the trauma of characters who represent marginalised and oppressed positions; I interrogate how far theories of trauma and its aftereffects illuminate their conditions; and I assess the extent to which trauma is

shared and expressed across cultural differences, and where it diverges. My thesis in what follows reveals theatre as a form with unique potential to represent, impart knowledge and promote understanding of trauma and its impact.

Chapter 2: Resolving and Denying Traumatic Pasts in Philip Ridley's *Vincent River* and *Leaves of Glass*

In this chapter, I analyse the methods of representing and resolving trauma in Philip Ridley's *Vincent River* (2000), and what I argue is the failure of trauma resolution in *Leaves of Glass* (2007). Like many of Ridley's works including *Ghost from a Perfect Place* (1994) and *The Fastest Clock in the Universe* (1992), *Vincent River* and *Leaves of Glass* explore the challenges and complexities of retelling traumatic pasts. Whereas in *Vincent River* the recovery of the past offers relief and forges a bond between its two characters, *Leaves of Glass*, as I show, offers no such resolution, since the recovery of the past is thwarted. *Vincent River*, the focus of the first part of this chapter, dramatises the unfolding of the memories of its two protagonists: Anita, whose son Vincent was murdered in a homophobic attack, and Davey, his love interest. In Ridley's play, Anita and Davey reminisce about their memories before and after the traumatic event and, crucially, reconstruct the events of Vincent's murder. The later play, *Leaves of Glass*, shows the disintegration of a family because the mother and the older son refuse to acknowledge or narrate their traumatic pasts.

Vincent River and *Leaves of Glass* respectively show the victimisation of a queer couple, and a child. *Vincent River* is representative of its time, when LGBTQI+ people were less visible in UK public life and represents them as a historically marginalised group. *Leaves of Glass* centres on male trauma, specifically child sexual assault, which is still very much a taboo topic in the UK as recent research by Cunnington and Clark (2022) suggests. Both plays have consistently enjoyed revivals, most recently in May and June of 2023 (Beck, 2023; West, 2023). The revivals ascertain that the threat of violence that engulfs LGBTQI+ people and their families is anything but past, and that child sexual abuse remains an urgent issue. Both plays are

significant in their effort to express the voices of the marginalised. In my analysis of *Vincent River*, I argue that Ridley employs various theatrical devices whereby Anita and Davey can achieve trauma resolution. To make sense of their shared trauma and cope with its painful impact, they alternate between storytelling, physical touch and embodiment as a means of healing. I draw my analysis on sources from the field of psychiatry, namely Babette Rothschild, Judith Herman, Bessel van der Kolk and Stuart Stevenson's trauma recovery work, whose work illustrate the impact of trauma and violence, specifically on gay adolescents and men (Stevenson, 2023). The trauma theorists' works also explore the means of recovery with a focus on narrating the trauma and physical touch. In *Leaves of Glass*, I argue that trauma resolution is not achieved because Barry and his father's attempts at communicating their pain and uncovering the past are either thwarted or contested. It therefore shows the consequences and effects of the failure to narrate traumatic memories.

Vincent River

Vincent River is Ridley's fourth play for adults. It premiered at the Hampstead Theatre, London, in September 2000 and was published in his second collection of plays for adults in 2009, alongside *Mercury Fur* (2005), *Leaves of Glass* (2007) and *Piranha Heights* (2008). It is a one-act drama centred on the conversation between fifty-three year-old Anita and seventeen year-old Davey. The third immaterial and ghostly character is Anita's son, Vincent, who is killed in a random homophobic assault a few months before the events of the play. Davey seeks out Anita and initially claims that he discovered Vincent's body during a walk with his fiancée and had her call the police. Anita easily uncovers Davey's lies and confronts him with her knowledge that he had in fact been at the crime scene when the attack took place. She suggests that he may be gay, since the spot where the murder occurred is a well-known haunt for gay men. She insists on

being told everything about her son's murder and on reliving the memory of the crime she had not witnessed, pressuring Davey to tell her the details of the fateful night. Therefore, they agree to take turns in recounting the past. At the centre of the stories is Davey's effort to come to terms with his secret sexual orientation, Anita's past struggles and humiliation as an unwed mother and her discovery of her son's homosexuality. The play culminates in Anita briefly embodying her dead son, with the two of them kissing and hugging passionately as if Vincent is brought to life. Davey subsequently lays the truth bare; he had been in a relationship with Vincent and had witnessed his brutal murder in the toilet of a deserted railway station.

In what follows, I first analyse the visual and physical aspects of traumatisation that the play shows, which are evident in Ridley's description of the stage set and the characters. Secondly, I examine Anita and Davey's pretraumatic, peritraumatic and posttraumatic memories and the ways in which these memories are reproduced and reconstructed in the play. Thirdly, I turn to the body, analysing the effect of trauma on Davey, and demonstrating the ways in which physical touch between the characters, and Anita's embodying of Vincent, lead to what can be seen as a trauma resolution. Fourthly, I consider the final transformation of the traumatic memory from images to narrative, which, as I show, centrally enables such resolution to happen. Finally, I provide an account of a live production of *Vincent River* which I attended at Trafalgar Studios, London, May 2019, and discuss the insights which the performance brings to light. Throughout, my analysis of the play contextualises Ridley's dramatisation of trauma with reference to the recovery methods practised within Western psychotherapy traditions, combining this with critical insights proposed by Stevenson (2023), to examine the intersection of trauma and homophobia and the impact of this on its victims.

A Vision of Grief

Although Ridley provides limited physical description of the characters' appearance and the setting of the play, the little that he does specify is significant. The play begins with Anita and Davey sitting in her derelict flat among several cardboard boxes with Anita dressed in colourful clothes while Davey is in black, with an untreated eye injury (p.9). As the boxes suggest, her flat features as a transitional stage, almost a purgatory, from what I will argue is unassimilated trauma to a path of resolution, and from ignorance of her son's life – and details of his death – to knowledge. This transitional stage, a no man's land, provides a respite from the consistently violent outside world, and so offers a safe space for beginning the road to the recovery. Recent productions of the play directed by Dan Jarvis and Dan Ellis (Bullen, 2022) and James Haddrell (Beck, 2023) have presented the flat as a darkened space in disarray. For example, Beck describes the set as "lifeless", and symbolic of "how very little is left in Anita's life", "where the windows are still whitewashed" and the few furniture in view are dull and dark. Jarvis and Ellis have encircled and perhaps also entangled the two characters in barbed wire and scattered litter (Bullen, 2022). This dramaturgical choice arguably signals that the two characters are bound in space – as well as metaphorically – to the secrets they are about to reveal to each other. The text of the play also makes significant use of props. As the play unfolds, Ridley introduces items that belong to Vincent, such as his shirt and childhood drawings, making his memory tangible and his loss more grievable, both for the characters in the drama and for the audience. In addition, Ridley contrasts Davey's black clothes with Anita's colourful attire, as well as her seemingly calm demeanour: their costuming, I argue, signifies Davey's attempt at hiding his emotions and a mother not yet ready to mourn her son.

Davey's appearance, I suggest, combines the two senses of the word trauma: its original meaning of physical wound, and the psychological injury. As Anita cleanses his bodily injury,

she shares the story of her great-aunt accidentally cutting her knee, ignoring it, and eventually ending up with an amputated leg as her wound festers (p.11). The work of cleansing the wound stands metaphorically for the need to cleanse the mind from the painful memories by sharing and assimilating them. The memory that Anita evokes therefore serves as a metaphor for the trauma paradigm in the play. Davey's physical wound also recalls Cathy Caruth's metaphor of the wound and the "double wound" in her book *Unclaimed Experience* (1996). Caruth refers to the continuous, repetitive assault of traumatic memories on the mind in the form of flashbacks and nightmares as double wounds. In a similar way, Davey tells Anita how he relentlessly re-experiences the trauma of finding the body of Vincent – as he initially alleges – in the form of intrusive thoughts. His wounded eye thus appears to function as a gateway for another, more profound wound of "finding" his body, as he initially claims. Davey tells Anita that he needs to talk with her because of this haunting memory: "He's always there. Everywhere I go. Can't get rid of him … Middle of the street, I start crying. Anything can set it off … I don't wanna keep seeing him. The way he lay there … I want him to get up" (p.15). As his physical wound is attended to, it becomes clear that Davey, together with Anita, also needs to work through the psychological wounds of guilt, injustice and loss.

Trauma and Memory

The representation of memory in the play begins with one main image, evoked through the words of the characters, of Vincent lying dead in the snow. This in turn develops into the telling of pretraumatic, posttraumatic and peritraumatic memories. Images are central to Ridley's concept of theatricality, as he explains in this interview:

> All my plays have that *Sensation* sensibility; their images and set pieces are garish and brash.[16] For me, the visual side of drama has always been vital. I've always seen images as engines of emotion. I've always sought that one icon-like image that will convey a wordless meaning, an image-aria, if you like. (Sierz, 2000, p.43)

Ridley's conception of the image-aria corresponds to the image of Vincent's body in the snow. It conveys a memory that is frozen in time and waiting to be revived or rekindled and creates a visual musicality around which remembering, mourning and seeking a resolution happen.

In a striking resemblance, Ridley's words closely echo the expressions used in the field of psychiatry to describe traumatic memories. To elaborate, psychiatrist Judith Herman (1997) explains the peculiarity of traumatic memories, and why they tend to come back in the form of intrusions:

> [Traumatic memories] are not encoded like the ordinary memories of adults in a verbal, linear narrative that is assimilated into an ongoing life story … They are encoded in the form of vivid *sensations* and *images*. (pp.37-38, my emphasis)

Similarly, the image of Vincent recalls psychiatrists van der Kolk and van der Hart (1991) and van der Kolk (2014)'s description of traumatic memory being stored in the form of frozen and wordless images. Their research indicates that memories of trauma are vividly remembered, remaining unchanged even as years elapse. The memory of Vincent is a "frozen" memory, literally, because Vincent's body lay in the snow, as well as metaphorically. Wanting him to "get

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[16] Ridley refers to the *Sensation* art exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1997, where artists used shocking and controversial images and techniques, such as an image of serial child killer Myra Hindley made out of children's handprints (Reyburn, 2022).

up" stands as a metaphor for a memory that needs to move from being fixed to being a dynamic, moving picture. It also features as a ghost that needs to be laid to rest. The murder of Vincent haunts Davey constantly, whether or not he is triggered by a cue from the crime scene. This haunting can be read in the context of van der Kolk's work with his traumatised patients, conducted using Rorschach tests.[17] That study found that traumatic events greatly affect a person's perception, and that traumatized people "have a tendency to superimpose their trauma on everything around them" (2014, p.17). Davey similarly sees Vincent's body everywhere and interprets everything he sees as cues of the trauma. Thus, as articulated in interview and in the dramatic language he employs, the visual imagery Ridley uses to describe the traumatic event is uncannily close to the language of trauma theory. The resemblance supports the argument that theatre – here, in its image-making capacity – significantly lends itself to the representation of trauma.

Mourning Vincent – which means making the fixed image of the trauma dynamic and seeking a resolution – necessitates narrating pretraumatic, peritraumatic and posttraumatic stories. However, Ridley does not present them in a linear sequence. Instead, Anita and Davey first share posttraumatic memories, pretraumatic memories, then return to the memory of the homophobic crime itself, describing it as a sequence of still images, and eventually recount it in narrative, linear and detailed form. The non-linear structure of the play reflects the mechanism of memory as it keeps moving between the present and the past, but also invites a reading of *Vincent River* as an analogy for a therapy session. I argue that the play sees Davey and Anita

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[17] Rorschach test is a "projective method of psychological testing in which a person is asked to describe what he or she sees in 10 inkblots … It attained peak popularity in the 1960s, when it was widely used to assess cognition and personality and to diagnose certain psychological conditions" ('Rorschach Test', 2018).

alternate between the roles of therapist and patient, mother and son, and lovers, as a means of resolving their shared trauma as well as confronting their individual painful pasts.

Anita and Davey begin in roles that mimic the relationship between therapist and patient, as they explore what happened in the aftermath of the murder. Beginning with post-traumatic events in this way is a technique used in psychotherapy (Rothschild, 2000; van der Kolk, 2014). Patients are encouraged to start the therapy with sharing what happened after the traumatic event: namely what kind of support they received (or did not receive) from family members, friends, and community. This approach has the purpose of splitting up the emotional weight of the trauma and dealing with the critical phase that follows the event, rather than addressing that event directly (Rothschild, 2000). It also has the added benefit of the patient dealing with the trauma knowing that it has, in fact, ended (van der Kolk, 2014), since one of the main characteristics of a traumatic episode is its continuous intrusion in the present in the form of thoughts, flashbacks and/or nightmares. In Ridley's play, Anita and Davey's early exchanges inadvertently follow this therapeutic technique of beginning with the end. Anita starts with the most recent post-traumatic memory of identifying the body and then uncovering the truth of her son's homosexuality a few days later. She is guilt-ridden both for failing to keep her son at home on the night of the murder and for not knowing about his sexual orientation before he died. She tells Davey of the reactions of her neighbours and of the press:

> Shut right up when they see me … I'm a floor below when I hear it … 'Queer.' I shout back, 'I dunno what you've heard but you've heard it wrong' … Then I see the local newspaper. There's a photo of him … Remember what it said underneath? … 'Vincent River: homosexual victim'. (pp.20-21)

Anita tells Davey that, still unable to accept the truth of his sexual orientation, she tries to hide it by getting rid of the magazines that revealed his homosexuality to her. Anita's state of denial contributes to her guilt, and reflects her son being deprived of a supportive environment, his isolation and her own isolation after the murder. Davey is ultimately isolated too and marginalised as a queer teenager. Psychotherapist Stuart Stevenson relays this isolation and pain of homophobic trauma in his article "The impact of homophobic trauma on gay men" (2023). He notes that gay children and adolescents often go through homophobic trauma alone, which creates "alone interior pain" (p. 12). For Stevenson, such psychological problems are a result of:

> gay men, from very young ages, having to manage a wide range of traumatizing negative responses and betrayal from their families and communities, ranging from ostracism to extreme violence and rejection from those who are meant to care for them. (p.3)

This condition is echoed in Ridley's *Vincent River*: the culture that the play portrays is one of marginalisation and fear, precisely evidencing a "wide range of traumatizing negative responses", which, as Stevenson asserts, affects both the victims of such attitudes or behaviours and their families and wider communities.

As they listen to one another and start breaking their individual isolation, Anita and Davey take turns to describe the struggles that they each had growing up in households marked by more traditional or conservative values. The characters' exchanges mimic techniques used in the later stage of psychotherapy when patients are encouraged to share events and circumstances before the traumatic event. As Judith Herman (1997) puts it, this technique serves to:

> 'Re-create the flow' of the patient's life and restore a sense of continuity with the past. The patient should be encouraged to talk about her important relationships, her ideals and dreams, and her struggles and conflicts prior to the traumatic event. (p.204)[18]

Anita tells Davey about giving birth to Vincent outside of marriage, leaving her job and raising him as a single mother. Her family was not supportive of her lifestyle, and she eventually fell out with them and moved out before Vincent was born. I view Anita's telling of this story as an attempt at recovery, and also as an implicit encouragement for Davey to reveal his sexuality and admit that he was in a relationship with Vincent before the murder. Baring this secret and acknowledging his homosexuality would be a major step in bridging the gap in the narrative of Vincent's murder and telling the complete history of the trauma. Instinctively, Anita seeks to know what she does not know about Vincent's double life. Sharing stories of their younger selves therefore functions as a means to integrate the trauma into their life story and to resolve it, as psychotherapists using the psychoanalytic model of trauma therapy contend.

Another pretraumatic experience that Anita shares is a story about cups which, she says, were passed on to her from her grandmother. The cups are seen to be symbolic of the legacy of her family, who, as noted, became hostile to her after she became pregnant. The memory that she tells Davey is of how she had an affair with a married man and became pregnant with Vincent. Her father publicly disparages her: '"You're not gonna be able to hide your shame under a pretty dress. Everyone will see you for what you are soon enough."' (p.36). Sensing that Davey is lying, both about not knowing Vincent and about how he found the body, Anita uses her own

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[18] Herman refers to trauma patients as female throughout the entire book, since her focus is the female experiences of trauma within the domestic sphere, or within wider conflicts such as war.

story to press him to reveal his own: as she implies, the truth will come out; hiding his 'shame' will ultimately prove impossible. For Ridley, the content of the stories that Davey and Anita share represent the core meaning of the play:

> *Vincent River* centres on a very violent, homophobic attack, but that's not what the play is about. It is about what happens when somebody breaks away from the pack … When you break away from the pack, the pack attacks you. (Ridley and Sierz, 2009, p.115)

Despite their differences, Davey and Anita thus have in common the experience of being outcasts. Anita was ostracized and shamed by her family as well as her ex-lover's family. They offer no moral or financial support. She tells Davey that her ex-lover's mother spat in her face on a chance encounter whereas no one blamed the man for having an affair. The murder of Vincent is the reason why Davey reaches out to Anita, but their shared experience of being positioned as an outsider acts as a platform for expressing this trauma in the first place. The audience learns that Davey's mother has implicitly voiced her disapproval of his homosexuality when she finds a half-naked picture of a man in his belongings (pp.57-58). Growing up in this unwelcoming and abusive household, Davey carries with him internalised shame of being gay. His community also forces him to experience homophobic erasure, an experience which Stevenson defines as: "to actively make void and dismiss the experience of those from marginalized groups" (2023, p.8). This analysis supports my reading of the play, which is that Davey feels forced to live a heterosexual life, and even gets engaged to his girlfriend, contributing to his erasure as a gay adolescent.

Reluctant and unable to reveal his homosexuality to Anita, Davey revisits the memory of the murder at intervals during the play, gradually disclosing more details every time. When he

first reconstructs the night's events, his description takes the shape of visual images and sounds: "Big hole in the roof. The walls are enamelled tiles. Cracked sink ... Brickwork showing. At the far end … cubicles. Five. Doors missing. Wooden frames. Graffiti. Snow falling -" (p.27). The shift to the site of the trauma is also signalled by his use of the present tense instead of the past. He can remember the images of rust, rubbish, an old sign and a visual description of the toilet where, he alleges, he found the body. The memory of the traumatic event is primarily ingrained in Davey's mind in visual form. This model of memory reflects the dynamics of traumatic memory as explained in Herman, van der Kolk and Rothschild's writings. Davey is unable to organise the memory of that night up to arriving at Shoreditch Rise where Vincent was killed in a narrative, linear form, so it is registered in the form of fragmented, still images.

The representation of memory in the play takes visual and narrative form. The visual representations – be they Davey's visible wound or the deceased image of Vincent, conjured through description – suggest memories that need to be narrated in order for the work of mourning to happen and to allow for trauma resolution. Where the visual forms are presented as symptoms of unassimilated and unhealed trauma, the use of narrative exchange embeds these traumatic memories into the life stories of the characters and their other "normal" memories. Ultimately, Davey and Anita's sharing of stories works to help them break out of their respective isolation. Finding solace and support in one another through their mutual experience of outsiderness is a crucial component of what I argue is the beginning of their healing journey.

The Body from Trauma to Healing

The body in Ridley's play is a site and sight of trauma, as well as an important vehicle for recovery. In my view, the work of trauma resolution in the play takes multiple forms: reconstructing Anita and Davey's memories in narrative form, physical connection between the

two, as well as materialising and embodying the memory of Vincent. Davey's body carries the brunt of the trauma with exceptional weight. When he visits Anita, he is damaged in body and in spirit. His eye injury reveals not only psychological trauma but also a repeatedly unsafe outside world, as he discloses to Anita that he was randomly attacked on the street the night before meeting her. In his second encounter with presumably homophobic violence, Davey freezes. He tells Anita: "Didn't fight back. Didn't even struggle … I forgot everything. I disappeared. There was nothing. Nothing" (p.55). His dissociative reaction suggests an inability to fight, but also an attempt to avoid the fate that befell Vincent, since dissociation is essentially a survival technique. Van der Kolk and van der Hart (1991) explain that trauma survivors report feeling removed from the scene during the trauma when they experience dissociation: "They look at it from a distance or disappear altogether, leaving other parts of their personality to suffer and store the overwhelming experience" (p.437). Davey similarly splits his consciousness by *removing* himself from the scene. Whereas the assault ends, his body remains at the site of the trauma.

Davey's dissociation during the assault, while being a tool for survival, is nonetheless a maladaptive response. His reaction does not help him deal with the violence and inhibits his ability to come to terms with it. In this light, it can also be interpreted as an unconscious desire for self-destruction. Riddled with guilt after Vincent is murdered, he gives up his body for pain and does not fight back. When he begins to recreate for Anita the scene of finding the body, his body evidences the residue of the trauma and carries it forward to the present: he gasps again, and enacts the *speechless terror* of the initial moment, in van der Kolk's term (2014). Because he has not yet disclosed his homosexuality to Anita, or even fully admitted it to himself, this attempt at recreating the trauma is unsuccessful (pp. 27-28). Therefore, Anita pushes him further. She begins to materialise the memory of Vincent, seeking to reanimate her son for Davey, beyond

just an image in the snow, by producing a shirt he was wearing on the night of the murder. She tells Davey, "You want him to walk out of your head … Gotta make him real to do that" (p.42). Davey reacts with horror to this cue, effectively confirming Anita's suspicion that that he knew Vincent. In involuntary reexperiencing, traumatised people react with the same bodily sensations that they had in the original traumatic event, so Davey involuntarily freezes, just as he freezes when he witnesses Vincent's murder.

In order to counter the overwhelming effects of the trauma both have experienced, Anita and Davey seek comfort in one another's bodies, albeit not sexually. In doing so, they transform their physical selves from sites of trauma and isolation from their abusive families and unwelcoming communities to spaces of truth-seeking, connection and comfort. Van der Kolk and Rothschild address the bodily effects of trauma as a method of healing, in addition to telling the story. Van der Kolk gives examples of body therapy practices that can manage the symptoms of trauma, which includes building and flourishing relationships, physical touch, and massage (2014). He also asserts that alleviating trauma involves finding safety, reassurance, and support within oneself and within others. The focus on the body also recalls Rothschild's assertion that giving attention to both mind and body is essential in healing trauma (2000, xiv). These therapeutic methods are illuminating in framing the ways in which Anita and Davey connect on a physical level. To fully access the traumatic events and be able to assimilate them, Davey initiates touching Anita. He offers to massage her feet, to which she consents, gradually becoming more comfortable (pp.51-54). Davey reveals that after his mother developed cancer, the nurse taught him to practice reflexology on his mother as a method of healing.[19] He would

[19] Reflexology is 'a complementary therapy which works alongside conventional medicine. It uses a foot pressure technique that works on precise reflex points in the feet, based on the theory that these reflex points are relative to

therefore massage his mother and play her relaxing sounds of animals hoping it would help ease her pain. He recalls: “Mum’s skin was so soft. There’s a little mole on the back of her neck. Tiny wrinkles just here. Used to think, Remember everything. Every mark. Don’t ever forget” (p.52). He registers the final memories of his mother in the form of the shape and texture of her skin, making it a point to remember how her touch felt, and to make that touch his access door to remember everything about her.

I argue that this scene creates another dynamic between Anita and Davey: that of mother and son. As Davey massages Anita, past and present are connected through the materiality of the skin, further reflected in the slippage of tense (“There’s a little mole”). His massage of Anita mirrors the way he attended to his mother, and connecting physically in the present becomes the beginning of the process whereby both can further access their traumatic memories. In this way, Davey’s actions on stage suggest his simultaneous connection with both women through the skin, using touch as a means of healing and connecting with them. She becomes a surrogate for his mother, as he is symbolically connecting with his mother too. This moment of the massage in *Vincent River* acknowledges that trauma, as van der Kolk notes, is not only a story: “the emotions and physical sensations that were imprinted during the trauma are experienced not as memories but as disruptive physical reactions in the present” (2014, p.204). When involuntary reexperiencing of the trauma happens, the traumatic memories return in all their vividness and physical sensations. Here, van der Kolk focuses on the often-overlooked brain-body connection in the field of psychotherapy, making the argument that treating the traumatised body is as essential as treating the mind. He explains that the healing methods which focus on regulating

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all parts and functions of the body. Reflexology treats the whole body and is a holistic form of healing, which as well as treating the body covers two other important aspects which are the mind and spirit’ (Niblock, 1999).

emotions and being aware of physical sensations can help control the undesirable intrusive sensations that traumatic reexperiencing brings about. Van der Kolk and other contemporary psychiatrists have therefore focused on body-based therapies (2014, p.217) which can help traumatised individuals be aware of their physical sensations and connect with a trusted other on a physical level, since trauma "results in a breakdown of attuned physical synchrony" (2014, p.213).

Touch, argues van der Kolk, is one of the most effective ways of healing the traumatised bodies. It is a way for someone to feel safe in their own skin, to feel comforting and reassuring sensations that can make them relax, and can overturn the hyperarousal response that is typical of the traumatised body, where expectations of danger are constantly felt. He explains that: "Before plunging into a full-fledged exploration of the trauma itself, patients are helped to build up internal resources that foster safe access to the sensations and emotions that overwhelmed them at the time of the trauma" (2014, pp.217-218). Davey massaging Anita is thus his method of helping her relax into their conversation, and to make her feel more connected to her internal sensations. Establishing this level of trust with him makes it possible for her to dip into her memories with more ease and with less overwhelming reactions. This is encapsulated in Davey's reference to his "Healing hands" (p.54). Physical touch also creates a dynamic between the two that is almost that of lovers. Anita initially hints that she invited him into the apartment for sex (pp.11-12) and Davey also hints at a relationship when he asserts that she and her son are the same to him "You. Him. It's all the same" (p.30), and so would like to know more about her life before the murder. Such intimations create sexual tension and physical touch further heightens it.

The play also shows Anita and Davey using different kinds of drugs as sedatives and relaxants, allowing for trauma reconstruction to happen in a tranquilised body, in addition to the

safe environment. As an extension of the doctor-patient metaphor, I view the chemical substances in the play as a replacement for medicine as she offers him alcohol and he gives her a joint. Both alcohol and drugs act as sedatives that can simultaneously lower inhibitions; for this reason, traumatised people may consume them to induce numbness as a way of coping with their pain (Herman, 1997). The joint sedates Anita and prepares her by acting as a protective shield against the gruesome details of the murder. In turn, alcohol lowers Davey's inhibition, and he eventually reveals his homosexuality, itself a crucial step towards reconstructing the details of the murder. Stevenson also notes that many gay adolescents and men resort to drugs, alcohol and sex or extreme sexual activity as a means of fitting in within their community and exploring their sexuality in places where they can feel accepted (2023). Davey carrying a joint, and meeting Vincent in a hunt frequented by gay men offers insight into what Stevenson describes as "ungoverned spaces" (2023), spaces that hover at the margins of Ridley's play rather than being directly dramatised. In the safety of their numbed, relaxed and safe bodies, the truth can be revealed.

Having shared memories of times in their lives where they were effectively pariahs, and having transformed their bodies from sites of isolation and pain to safety and trust, Davey and Anita are ready to embrace the past physically and symbolically. Davey calmly picks up Vincent's maroon shirt that he previously flinches away from, a gesture signalling that he is more comfortable confronting his past. Anita symbolically embodies her son, effectively carrying out her earlier plea to Davey: that he must make Vincent *real* if he wants to cope with the trauma. They embrace and kiss one another as if Vincent is finally real. Once again, the body becomes a gateway for accessing and coping with the traumatic memory: "**Davey**: 'Feel my heart, Vince.' **/ Davey**: 'Feel it…' */ ... Slowly, very slowly,* **Anita** *puts her hand on* **Davey***'s*

chest" (p.63). This scene further heightens the sexual tension between the onstage characters while also reviving Vincent's memory so that resolution can happen. The scene hinges on the concept of traumatic triggers, whereby traumatic memory can be recalled when the traumatised person is reminded of any of its aspects. Traumatic memory is "evoked … in situations which are reminiscent of the original traumatic situation … When one element of a traumatic experience is evoked, all other elements follow automatically" (Van der Kolk and van der Hart, 1991, pp.430-431). Similarly, Anita deliberately triggers Davey so that he is able to speak openly about what happened to Vincent, and about himself. When she presents the physical element of the shirt, more memories and stories are shared, and their physical intimacy intensifies. This act of embodiment is thus the stepping-stone for Davey finally to admit and articulate how Vincent was killed.

The Resolution

Embodying Vincent symbolically transports both Anita and Davey to the crime scene, and, in my view, enables the trauma resolution to happen as a narrative reconstruction of the traumatic memory. Triggered by the embodiment, Anita begins to envision details of the murder that she has not witnessed, and the two characters describe the scene together, as if she is there:

Anita Shoreditch Rise.

Davey 'Walk carefully.'

Anita Platform. Old waiting room.

Davey 'There it is, Vince.'

Anita I see it.

Davey 'It's empty, Vince. Come on.'

…

Anita … Cracked sink. White tiles. Broken cubicles. (p.65)

If the traumatic experience, according to Caruth's model, is experienced in its return, or in the "double wound" as she put it, and it is not "fully known … until it imposes itself again … in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (Caruth, 1996, p.4), knowing what has happened is Anita's initiatory step towards resolution. If trauma is "always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth, 1996, p.4), counteracting the effect of the trauma and reaching a resolution lies in fully knowing what happened to her son. Anita is tormented not only because her son was brutally murdered, but because she does not exactly know how it has happened. She therefore drives her entire conversation with Davey to get to the point where she can bridge the gap in her knowledge of the details of the murder.

Davey's description of the murder combines the visual and auditory aspects of the memory, as well as a linear description of what happened as soon as he left Vincent alone in the toilet. It is a marked change from the chiefly visual, still and frozen images he uses earlier in the play to describe the scene. Davey's description becomes both dynamic and linear, which I read as a move from pathology to a meaningful assimilation of the trauma. At this point, the different aspects of the memory have fallen into place in a more coherent narrative. In a sense, the memory is now *complete* as it combines both aspects of images and a story:

Davey I walk down the platform … A noise! Footsteps! Voices! Too far away to see faces. But they're men. Late teens. Early twenties.

> There's Vince! He's running out of the toilet … I want to yell out, 'Stay where you are, Vince! Stay where you –' Too late! The one who threw the bottle has seen him … Stands in front of Vince. 'That's where queers hang out,' he says. 'You a queer?' … I hear Vince say, 'No! Not me!' I should go down there and help. My legs won't move. Should call out. If they heard my voice they might leave Vince alone. My voice won't work. Safe where I am. They can't see me. (p.66)

His freezing during the murder compounds his feelings of guilt and shame, recalling the theory that the feeling of helplessness and inability to take action during such an event is one of the main reasons why an experience becomes traumatic (van der Kolk and van der Hart, 1991, p.446).

Davey gives a full, lengthy account of the gruesome murder, while Anita listens in silence:

> They drag him into the toilets. A scream! Vince! Sounds of punching. Kicking. Wood breaking. Wood smashing. Wood on skin. Fist on skin. And screaming. Someone! You must hear this! Anyone! Make it stop! It goes on and on. Put my hands over my ears. Press hard. Block out the sound. Blood rushing. Heart beating. Listen to that. Heart beating … Heart beating … Heart … (p.67)

Davey's monologue is significant in many ways. Ridley's use of language recreates rather than describes the sounds of the scene. The speech arguably seeks to elicit a strong emotional reaction from the audience. Davey's cries for someone to hear him can be read as urging the audience to listen to marginalised and underrepresented victims such as Vincent and intervene to assist them.

The narration trailing off resembles Vincent's heart as it stops beating. Both the visual imagery in Davey's speech and the tempo of his testimony communicate traumatic experience vividly.

I contend that after Davey's narration is complete and the memory is conjured and reconstructed, both Anita and Davey begin the path to resolve their traumas and heal their wounds. Crucially, Davey is able to translate his shock, grief and shame into language. According to the psychoanalytic model of trauma treatment, traumatic memory has to be given a voice and put into words so that it is finally integrated. Transforming the fixed memory of the trauma, as Janet put it, from images and sensations to narrative is the means to integrate it into the person's mental schemes and life history (van der Kolk and van der Hart, 1991, pp.447-448). For Davey, reconstructing the memory after having revealed his sexuality and let go of his inhibitions is a relief and resolution for his trauma.

Furthermore, Anita has an emotional outburst for the first time since the beginning of the play. This is the closest that she comes to a catharsis. Anita appears strangely detached up to hearing the details of the murder, and she shows little grief. Her outward demeanour even prompts Davey at one point to angrily question if she feels anything about her son's murder (p. 18). Anita's benumbed manner earlier in the play points to her own maladaptive response to trauma, whereby she as the traumatised person has become detached from her surroundings, losing the capacity to feel positive or negative emotions (van der Kolk, 2014, pp.14-15). One of the goals of therapy is therefore to restore the traumatised person's capacity to feel (van der Kolk, 2014, p.67). As soon as Anita learns the complete truth, she lets out "*A long, painful cry*" for the first time (p.69). It is the cry of knowing the painful truth, but it is also the cry of releasing emotion after an extended period of constriction. In the same moment she also smashes the last of her mother's cups, a gesture that, for Andrew Wyllie (2013):

> [e]nables the personal memories that Davey and Anita have of Vincent to overcome the cultural memory that condemns him. This is an important symbolic liberation from the deforming impact of a past that would impose respectability on the individual and cast out those who refuse the norm. Anita is enabled to recuperate the memory of the hurt imposed on her by her pariah status, and to connect that hurt to the homophobia that led to Vincent's murder. (p.71)

Similarly, Lyn Gardner (2007) writes in her review of a revival of the play at Trafalgar Studios, London: "As the truth is exhumed and the dead seem to walk again there is a redemptive sense that it is through honesty in our personal relationships that absolution can be found". Anita's explosive and literally shattering reaction to the uncovered truth marks her success in accepting her status as an outcast as well as beginning to recover from the hurt caused by not knowing exactly how her son was murdered. Wyllie views *Vincent River* as a play in which recuperation of the past is celebrated, and that it has a redemptive effect on Davey and a therapeutic effect on Anita (pp.70-71). The act of translating their memories into the form of story allows both characters to confront the truth, however painful, and find some comfort living in it. Anita's change of demeanour further suggests that the emotional release helps her manage the traumatic impact: "*Very slowly,* **Anita** *regains control …* **Davey** *goes to say something –* **Anita** *shakes her head and makes 'shushing' sound*" (p. 69). As she calms down, it can be presumed that grieving Vincent and processing her trauma can finally begin.

Ridley changes Davey's final gesture in different versions of the play. Wyllie notes that in an earlier version, it is implied that Davey leaves Anita's flat (2013, p.71). In the 2009 edition on which my analysis is based, Davey prepares to leave, but never manages to do so. He wavers between staying and leaving, and his remaining in this liminal space is symbolic of the power of

traumatic experiences. Even when they are resolved, traumatic experiences are never really erased. Davey is thus left poised between the space where he felt comfort and found the freedom to be himself and the outside, violent world. In the course of the play, Anita's flat has become a safe space within which there is the possibility of healing from the wounds of a homophobic and randomly violent world. The play thus ends with Davey still seeking refuge at her house from the outside where his partner was killed and he was randomly attacked for no other reason than, as Ridley notes, 'break[ing] away from the pack' (Sierz, 2009, p.115).

The Play in Performance

Vincent River was revived at Trafalgar Studios, London, from May 16th to June 22nd, 2019. Louise Jameson and Thomas Mahy played the roles of Anita and Davey respectively, and it was directed by Robert Chevara (Chevara, 2019). I attended on June 5th, and gained more insight into the dynamics underlying the play. It took place in a small, intimate theatre with no barriers or space between the stage and the audience seating. As soon as the actors appeared, they circled the small stage space/room. They took turns in following one another around, giving the added impression that they have nowhere to escape from the truth that they would reveal: their past lives in troubled homes, and the truth about how Vincent lived and died. Their pacing also gave Anita the air of a detective, relentlessly demanding information from Davey who was hiding more than he let show. Mahy would follow Jameson around when he confronted her with her son's sexuality that she had not fully accepted yet. At one point she actively turned her back on him, refusing to meet his eyes when asked if she guessed Vincent was gay.

This production also heightened the dynamics between the characters in terms of the shifting roles that each plays. These roles serve as a further catalyst to the healing process. Davey changed from a broken child, to a grieving adult, to an excited child again, to a lover. Anita

cleansing Davey's wound at the beginning of the play created a clear mother-son dynamic. She then became Vincent's grieving mother, before shifting to a possible love interest, seductress even. This shift was signalled by Jameson's tone and body language: her voice became soft under the effect of the drugs Davey shared with her, and her stance and gestures more relaxed. As I argued above, Anita's role-playing is crucial as a means of taking Davey back to the final pre-traumatic moments, so that he will ultimately be able to admit the circumstances of Vincent's death. Anita embodies the grieving mother when she recalls the memories of Vincent, and goes through his belongings: in production, Jameson's final gesture marked a return to this mother-like figure, as she smoothed down Davey's clothes before he leaves.

Davey's first appearance on stage resembled that of the broken child that needs to be mended, physically and psychologically. He had an unmistakable black eye and black clothes, with a hoodie and haircut half-covering his face from Anita's inquisitive looks. Mahy appeared with a lighter in hand that he would flick every now and then. The sparks generated signalled a metaphorical space that is about to 'blow up' with the truth. As Davey started to warm to Anita, his attitude changed to a child who had to grow up too soon, witnessing the abuse that his father inflicted on him and his mother and who had to take care of his sick mother. At the point when he asks Anita what kind of headache she suffers from, the actor had the air of a doctor asking his patient about a symptom so that he could write the correct 'prescription' for it. Mahy shifted back to the excited child when Jameson shared Vincent's paintings with him, before becoming the pseudo-lover when Anita embodies Vincent and the characters passionately kiss.

Chevara's production made full use of the small theatre space to perform the trauma, including filling the stage with props. These included many cigarette stubs, suggesting a tormented Anita, and boxes and a suitcase from which the relics of the past were revealed in sync

with the immaterial truth. When Mahy told the memory of the murder, his delivery was quick and urgent, and reenacted the horror and helplessness of the traumatic event. He performed all of the pent-up screaming that Davey was unable to do at the moment of witnessing the murder. In this production, and in contrast to the edition of the text cited above, Davey ultimately leaves, giving more finality and decisiveness to the play's resolution.

Conclusion

I have argued that Anita and Davey begin a path of trauma recovery in the play, by drawing an analogy between their encounter and the fields of psychiatry and psychotherapy. Ridley firstly shows the visible aspects of homophobic violence by showing the injured Davey, and the displaced Anita. The act of cleaning the wound sets in motion the stories they share and the healing they both offer each other. Their stories also mirror a pattern of trauma healing which psychiatrists Herman, Rothschild and Van der Kolk follow, beginning with the post-traumatic events and then working their way to the traumatic impact. Anita and Davey seek solace and a sense of safety in one another, by alternating listening to the other with telling the story of their losses, their traumas, their pariah statuses and their shared loss of Vincent. In my view, the play reflects the necessity of recovering the truth about the past and accepting it in order to be able to live in the present. The acceptance of their realities makes way for mourning Vincent, coming to terms with their traumatic pasts and assimilating these experiences into their lives.

Leaves of Glass

Philip Ridley's *Leaves of Glass*, first performed at the Soho Theatre, London, in 2007, unfolds a family's conflict about their traumatic past. The play, alongside Ridley's *Mercury Fur* (2005) and *Piranha Heights* (2008), is considered part of a "Brothers Trilogy" (Fisher). The three plays have been similarly referred to as "the trilogy of siblings and the apocalypse" (Coveney, 2008),

since they feature the bonds and struggles among siblings against a backdrop of a violent world. *Leaves of Glass'* four characters are brothers Steven, 27 and Barry, 22, their mother Liz, 55, and Steven's wife, Debbie, 33. Multiple traumas permeate their past: the suicide of the father and the sexual abuse of Barry as a child, facilitated by his own brother. The play's seventeen scenes alternate between conversations - between the three family members, the two brothers, and between Steven and Debbie - and soliloquies in which Steven recalls memories about his deceased father and about a sinister figure referred to as Mr Ghost, who is eventually revealed to be Barry's abuser. In *Leaves of Glass*, each character has their own version of the past that they insist is true, but the other character/s constantly deny or contest it. Barry is particularly victim to such resistance: he persistently tries to bring into the open the traumas that he and his family have been through, but becomes walled in when Liz and Steven refute his stories or refuse to talk about it altogether. Furthermore, Steven and Liz suppress their own emotions, and are unwilling to listen to Barry's attempts at expressing his. Consequently, the family disintegrates; the father kills himself and, years later, Barry inexplicably dies in a motorcycle accident. Steven and Liz are ultimately left alone on the stage, seemingly still determined to continue upholding the pretence of family life.

Leaves of Glass serves to develop my examination of representations of trauma in that it implicitly supports the argument for the narration of traumatic experiences. I have argued that *Vincent River* demonstrates the psychiatric approach to trauma healing predominant in the West, where the trauma needs to be revisited and reconstructed into a story. Reconstructing the trauma necessitates honesty and an open expression of emotions: as I show, neither step happens in *Leaves of Glass*. Where *in Vincent River* Anita and Davey begin to assimilate their traumas into their lives, I argue that neither Barry nor his father in *Leaves of Glass* can find such resolution

because their attempts to speak their hurt are either thwarted or contested. The later play therefore shows the consequences and effects of the failure to narrate traumatic memories. The family members refer to the past in distorted, contradictory stories that prevent any trauma resolution from happening. For my analysis, I will use the three common tropes of trauma literature according to critic Joshua Pederson (2018): absence, indirection, and repetition. As he contends, these tropes are characteristic of cultural trauma theory in the 1990s and its quest to show how trauma can mould narrative (pp.100-101). I will demonstrate that absence, indirection and repetition in the play are maladaptive responses to trauma, and that they hinder trauma resolution. Firstly, I present some reviews from recent productions of the play, followed by an analysis of the father's suicide. Though it takes place before the events of the play, the suicide hangs over the present and affects each family member differently: for example, Barry is devastated, while Steven reels between success at work, and having nightmares about being trapped in ice and seeing Mr Ghost. Finally, I discuss Barry's ordeal as a child sexual abuse survivor. As I show, his attempts to face his family, particularly Steven, with the truth about their father's suicide and his abuse are thwarted, resulting in his symbolic and literal demise. Throughout, I analyse Ridley's theatrical tools of staging the traumatic events and their aftermath.

The Play in Performance

Leaves of Glass recently enjoyed a critically acclaimed revival at the Park Theatre, London, directed by Max Harrison, in 2023-2024. While the text does not give any indication of setting and the stage directions are sparse, this production accentuated the dynamics of the play by means of lighting and stage design. Reviewing the play for the blog *Theatre and Tonic*, Eleanor (2024) writes that the lighting made some scenes more powerful, and that one scene was

immersed in the dark, with candles flashing at a few intense moments. In this production, the stage was designed so that the audience surrounded the actors on four sides, giving a claustrophobic and uneasy sense of being thrust within the family drama (Mckenna, 2024; West, 2023). A similar intensity was conveyed by the actors, reviewers suggest, especially by Joseph Potter as Barry, who used a heightened physicality to show the effect of alcoholism and the character's tortured interior state:

> Potter encapsulates that volatility of mental health, physically leaping about the stage, at times harming himself and potentially others, he is always on the edge of extremes: delirious with potential and excitement or in the depths of anguish. (West, 2023)

In a play heavily reliant on memory and the stories that revive or negate it, visible wounds are replaced by visual imagery. Critic Aleks Sierz (2023) refers to Ridley's signature image-arias which "open up the mind with visual suggestions of glittering glass, leafy foliage and the ice of frozen relationships". Sierz' comment refers both to the title of the play, while also touching on the snow where the father's body was found. Indeed, the title of the play – one which carries echoes of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), another drama that deals with troubled memories and mental frailty – implies fragility, and points to a family tree whose leaves are glass and so can be easily shattered. As reviewer Richard Beck (2023) concludes, the title also refers to an expensive ornamental tree that Steven brought Liz, and which the audience eventually learns was procured by Steven's betrayal and partake in the abuse of Barry. In sum, the reviews of the production collectively suggest that this was an interpretation that foregrounded raw feeling, drawing on Ridley's signature style of using words to paint pictures of

emotions and extending this further into the use of lighting and darkness, spatial proxemics and actor physicality.

The Father's Suicide and its Aftermath

Although the character of the father haunts the action from the beginning, the trauma of his suicide remains an unmentionable topic for most of the play. It is revealed only gradually and intermittently that he died by suicide. Absence here figures at least doubly: it is signalled in the absence of the father, and the silence about how he dies. Absence, as Pederson clarifies, presents itself in trauma narrative as gaps, silence or both (2018, pp. 101-102). Although the mother, Liz, and Barry share stories about him, his death is only explicitly mentioned in Scene 8, and the audience does not discover that he died by suicide until Scene 13. The audience also learns about how the father dealt with his own pain, and the effect of his suicide on the family members, through five soliloquies delivered by Steven which are interspersed with the dialogue scenes. These speeches offer a fleeting insight into the emotional impact the father's absence by suicide has had on Steven, feelings that he stifles when talking to the other characters. In the opening soliloquy with which the play begins, Steven describes the day that his father took both boys to see the Thames Barrier. All of Steven's soliloquies involve memories of his father and are the only instance where he speaks at length about him. Soliloquies as device in drama inform the audience about a character's thoughts, feelings and intentions. Unmoderated by any other character, they are therefore presumed to be the speaker's truth; further, since they are uninterrupted by others, as utilised in *Leaves of Glass* they represent a form in which Steven is able to express feelings that, as the play shows, the rest of the family are unwilling or unable to hear. The soliloquy form also arguably frees the speaker of the risk of judgment or, as in the case of Steven, moral consequences: "A soliloquy cannot go beyond the competence and knowledge

of the character, and, as the speaker is alone, cannot be intended to deceive … It tends to be (a) an introspective revelation of character, (b) a reflective commentary on the dramatic action" (Vince, 2003, p.1258). Steven's soliloquies serve both functions: he admits his unkindness towards his brother as a child and that he sought to sever the ties between his father and brother. He also reflects on his memories of his father, in the process revealing his father's silent and inexplicable suffering. Steven tells the soliloquies in a tone and mood that differs from the rest of the play. Whereas his conversations with his brother and wife are usually tense, and he can give the impression of being tough, his soliloquies reveal a rare vulnerability, even weakness, although he still does not admit his guilt towards his brother.

The first memory that Steven shares draws attention to the tendency of Frank, the father, to stifle his emotions. Steven reflects on how his father grew anxious for no compelling reason at the Thames Barrier: "He grabs hold of my hand. So sudden. So tight … The scar by his left eye is sort of twitching. Like it does when Mum's shouting at him and he don't say a single word back" (p.212). This detail brings to mind Davey's injured eye at the beginning of *Vincent River*. Davey's wounded eye conceals the burden of the secrets he has kept from most of the people he knows, and the father's twitching scar similarly represents a past suffering. Anita helps heal Davey's injured eye and eventually his traumatised self. Steven's account of this memory suggests that his father has a lot of pent-up anger and fear that he does not express. His second soliloquy further exposes his father's silent suffering and his unwillingness or inability to express it. Steven shares a memory of seeing him secretly burning notebooks:

> Dad's looking at his notebooks … He's been keeping them for years and years … I'm about to tap on the window when I see Dad's face. It looks odd somehow. All puffy and red. Like he's freezing … He goes over to the tin drum and he drops the

> notebooks into it … Then he strikes a match. Then he holds the match above the tin drum. He looks so calm now ... I look at Dad. There's lots of sparks all around his head. I remember thinking…they look like stars. (p.242)

The obvious visceral effect that burning the notebooks – later revealed as diaries – has on the father indicates a relief of ridding himself of secrets. The secrets, however, are still contained within his own memory and burning their material form does not provide relief, since he eventually kills himself. Ridley describes the memory in a canvas of images, which fits into his concept of "image-aria" (Sierz, 2000, p.43). The father keeps his notebooks in a tin with a picture of snow and a frozen lake. His father's desire to *unfreeze* the memories are described in the image of flickering candles, sparkles and stars. Ridley paints a dynamic picture where the desire for connection and easing Steven's undisclosed burdens with his family contrasts with his icy relationships. This soliloquy is significant because it describes a moment of the father's seemingly troubled life and secretive attitude. This ultimately costs him his life and irreversibly damages his family.

In Scene 8, Liz mentions the father's death for the first time. Steven denies every memory his brother claims to recall, no matter how insignificant. When Barry leaves the stage, Liz, the mother, describes for the first time the effect on her sons of their father's traumatic death. Barry transformed from being a happy and artful child to being significantly distraught, a common reaction to grief; Steven, on the contrary, blossomed (p.248). In the following scene, the third soliloquy, Steven confesses that he has sought to break Barry's spirit when they were children. On the day his father kills himself, Steven lies to Barry, telling him that his father is not interested in Barry's drawings. The particular violence of this is evident in the fact that Barry's drawings are his method of communicating with his father, and the scene also describes many of

his paintings, thereby showing a canvas of images. Steven's narrative includes violent images to describe how much he seeks to hurt his brother: "I look at the pencils. Some are very sharp. I want to stab him in the neck with one" (2009, p.249). In lieu of violence, Steven severs the ties between his brother and his father by lying. This devastates Barry but gives Steven a sense of satisfaction and makes him feel calm (pp.248-250). The soliloquy reveals a facet of Steven's character that he does not show to the other characters. Despite the trauma that he causes Barry, he does not seek to rectify their relationship by confessing and talking to his brother: this in turn further traumatises him.

In Steven's fourth soliloquy, he reveals that his father committed suicide by drowning. Having quietly and deliberately gone outside in his slippers, the boys' father was found frozen in the ice, a fate which again recalls the image of Vincent frozen in the snow:

> 'Ice!' Someone mentioned ice … Barry's next to me. He's crying and he's clutching the banisters – 'Frozen!' Something's been frozen … It's two days since dad went missing … He's been found in the canal by Victoria Park. The canal has frozen over. Dad is in the ice. He looks peaceful. (pp.266-267)

This soliloquy uses both absence and repetition to describe the traumatic experience. It is the final absence of the father, and the image of this absence is frozen, like Vincent's body, to convey a loss that has not been addressed or eased by sharing its memory. Steven's soliloquies subtly uses repetition, in what I view as an analogy between Steven and his father. Three of Steven's soliloquies end with a description of his father's emotions or his own. His father was "calm" after burning his diaries (p.242); Steven himself was "very calm" after hurting Barry's feelings (p.250); and his father looked "peaceful" according to the postmortem (p.267). It is significant that different actions have apparently produced the same emotional response in father

and son. His father appeared peaceful by stifling any hurt or anger he may have felt, but this emotional excess that finds no release kills him eventually. Steven, on the contrary, achieves a form of calm by venting his anger at Barry. Steven's cruel attitude towards his brother, I argue, can be illuminated by an interpretation which sees this as stemming from his fear of living a life similar to his father's and meeting his fate. His attitude can reflect a fear that if he represses his anger, he will end up suffering and killing himself, too. Instead, he releases his negative emotions towards his brother after witnessing the consequences of suppressing it. Steven victimizes and ultimately sacrifices Barry so that he would have the stable family life that his father never had.

In the fifth and final soliloquy, Steven unravels the nature of his father's troubling behavioural episodes. He goes back to the burnt relics of his father's notebooks in an attempt to uncover what lay behind his father's silent anger, an act that can also be interpreted as a symbolic return to the trauma that he has not been able to make sense of:

> I remember … burnt bits of paper – Why am I telling you this? … Burnt pages. Found them in the tin drum. Pages from Dad's notebooks …
>
> Dad – he's … he's so afraid of us! … He looks at us and he's scared … There's a drawing of a black tree. What's that mean? … Burnt tree? … 'Die' … The word 'die' … Dad looks at us … and he's … afraid. From the moment we were born … Dad wanted to die. … Black tree. Burnt feathers. Die … Don't look at me like that. Leave me alone, ghost! Leave me alone! (pp.282-283)

Steven comes to realise that his father was profoundly traumatised by the experience and responsibilities of parenthood. Steven's wish to disclose the memories of his childhood

juxtaposes his father's attempt to get rid of his memories by burning his notebooks. For both men, thoughts feel like a burden that they need to relieve. Whereas his father does not find a release, Steven unburdens himself by speaking these memories aloud. When he asks himself, or perhaps speaks to the "ghost" he is imagining: "Why am I telling you this?", the answer is, as I argue, his wish to avoid his father's fate both as being traumatised by his sons' birth and by his suicide. Further, in another example of repetition, the traumatic loss of the father returns to haunt Steven in the form of nightmares:

> I'm tired … I need to go somewhere dark … Don't want that … Don't want to dream … I don't want that dream again … Not trapped in ice. Not ice in my eyes … in my mouth … my lungs … Just dark. Please. Dreamless dark … dreamless dark … dreamless dark… (p.283)

This recurring nightmare reinforces the view that Steven seeks to avoid the suffering his father experienced, by any means: this explains his actions in victimising Barry.

In addition to Steven's unconscious return to the trauma, the character's final distressed soliloquy employs several facets of absence. It is notably different from his previous speeches in the way that the spaces in the text increase, translating into longer pauses. In the previous soliloquies, Steven recalled the past more smoothly or confidently, with few ellipses/pauses. By contrast, his final soliloquy has considerably more gaps/pauses, which work to communicate the difficulty of speaking as he shows his vulnerability and his suffering from the trauma of his father's suicide. As Joshua Pederson (2018) suggests, the trope of absence can manifest itself as gaps and silences in the trauma narrative. He explains that:

> the traumatic event strikes with such force that it jars the brain and disallows the normal 'recording' of memory … Insofar as trauma is at least initially unavailable to the consciousness, efforts to articulate it often result in silence and textual space. (p.101)

The text ruptures to reflect the "force" with which the trauma or its memory "strikes" consciousness, so to speak. Similarly, Steven's words become incoherent and trail away when he speaks of his most painful memory. He finds it inevitable to tell the story, but when he does, he speaks to the void and the imagined ghost, and what he says comes out fragmented and marked by textual gaps. This structural disintegration is echoed in the communication of narrative, which appears similarly dismembered: Steven does not explain who the ghost is, and he keeps straying from one memory to another, unable to complete or explain any.

Absence also punctuates the conversation between Liz, Steven and Barry about the father's suicide. When Liz moves to a new house, encouraged by Steven, he seeks to detach her from the memory of his father both physically and emotionally. She describes her relocation as follows: "There's nothing to … to remind me … of anything. It's all so polished and … There's no cracks to hold on to. I'm slipping off all the time. I should never have let you persuade me to leave the old place" (p.267). By evading a direct reference to her husband's suicide, Liz signals an unwillingness to resolve the trauma and so actively erases the memory of their father. She prevents any mention of the suicide, both in this conversation and in the memory that Barry brings up: she tears down his painting of his father in the canal (p.276). The painting was Barry's attempt to release and communicate his feelings about his father's death, since she did not allow them to discuss it. Barry faces his family with the effect of the father's suicide on him for the first time in the play, but he is defeated, being met with a seemingly indifferent silence.

Liz's refusal to allow the expression of grief is also manifested in her own lines. She typically uses euphemisms to describe mental distress in others. I view Liz's euphemisms as an example of using indirection to refer to traumatic events. Pederson describes indirection as a narrative that "flows around trauma like a river past a hillock" (p.102). Instead of addressing the trauma directly, another trope of narrative is to use metaphors or indirect means. To illustrate, when Liz becomes aware that Steven is acting abnormally and showing signs of depression, she does not describe what he is actually experiencing, or lets him explain it. Instead, she imposes her own distorted version of what happened to him. She repeats, as if desperate to convince him, that he is only mildly ill:

Liz Listen to Mum. You've got a fluey bug thing and Mum's here to help.

…

Your dad used to have this fluey bug thing. He used to have it so bad you could almost see the fluey bugs hovering in the air all round him. If you got too close, you could feel yourself catching it too. You could feel it infect your blood. (pp.280-281)

Liz's narrative implies that Steven's father used to have the same illness (as she sees it), and that she encouraged him to stay in the shed for weeks at a time with little contact with her. Notably, those episodes happened after the birth of each of his sons. Liz's description of the father isolating himself and not carrying out any activity after the birth of his children suggests that he suffered from postpartum depression. She states earlier that he fainted when he watched her give birth (p.223). Ridley does not reveal the root cause for the father's distress and depression during and after the birth of his children, but the play shows how he passes it on to his family. Steven's

childhood notebook, which records that his father seemed "afraid" when he looked at his sons, further supports this interpretation.

Another example of Liz's avoidance of communicating about her family's mental distress is in her account of conversation with her husband. She describes being around him as though she is "being sucked down a dark plughole" (p.281). She avoids direct reference to her husband's post-traumatic state, and by extension Steven's, and therefore uses the euphemism of "fluey bug thing". She solidifies her claim that it is no use talking about difficulties, falsely assuming that her husband has returned to normal after isolating himself in the shed. Liz says about feeling low: "Talking – brooding – that don't do any good. You have to get over it. You have to move on. Otherwise you might be sucked down that plughole and never manage to claw your way back up" (p.282). Her denial of her husband's suffering leaves him isolated, with no chance of narrating his distress in the hope of easing it.

My analysis has thus far demonstrated that *Leaves of Glass* features absence, indirection, and repetition as narrative techniques, all of which can be seen as maladaptive responses to the trauma of the father's suicide. The boys' father was himself traumatised by their births but did not speak his pain. Piecing his experience and eventual death together through the fragmented dialogue and monologues of the play, it becomes clear that he was isolated both physically and emotionally from his family, especially his wife. Although this traumatic memory remains unmentionable and silenced, it seeps through Steven's soliloquies, and is replaced by metaphors in Liz's conversation. Instead of seeking resolution from the trauma by acknowledging this grief and speaking about it, Steven and Liz's avoidance hinders trauma resolution for themselves, but also for Barry. The denial and silencing of this trauma, coupled with the sex abuse Barry experiences as a child, makes Barry the most severely affected member of the family, as he

becomes alcoholic and depressed. In what follows, I demonstrate the impact of both these traumatic events on Barry, showing how his futile attempts to confront Steven about his role in facilitating this abuse ultimately leads to Barry's destruction, in body and spirit.

Mr Ghost: The Abuse of Barry

Another traumatic memory that evades reconstruction through narrative in *Leaves of Glass* is the abuse of Barry. Ridley builds up to the revelation of this secret in the same way that he gradually unravels the father's death by suicide. Steven habitually undermines the details of any memory that Barry conjures or, more commonly, outright denies it and thwarts Barry's attempts to reconstruct the past. Towards the end, Barry confronts his brother with his complicity in making Barry prey to a sexual predator. Steven denies that the abuse ever happened, and Barry is left with no hope for the resolution of his trauma. I argue that the failure to reconstruct Barry's abuse into narrative leads to his defeat and death, literally and symbolically. I will briefly draw on research by Cunnington and Clark (2022) on child sexual abuse (CSA) in the UK, where the authors identify three common methods that abusers, the victim's family and institutions can use to neutralise disclosure of CSA, namely appeal to higher loyalty, denial of the victim/abuser, and denial of harm.[20] In *Leaves of Glass*, Steven employs the denial of the victim/abuser technique, which silences and defeats Barry.

The audience first sees Barry in Scene 2 in a state of drunkenness and disorientation. He is obsessed with "Mr Ghost" who figures as another haunting entity in the play besides the distressed father. Barry's inebriated state in this early scene allows the inference that he is

[20] Disclosure is the term used for informing others about going through a traumatic event, such as child sexual abuse (Cunnington and Clark, 2022).

hallucinating or imagining the ghost, which has the effect of making the revelation of his abuse towards the end of the play more shocking. Steven denies the ghost's existence and tries to calm Barry down, a denial that will continue throughout the play. In his struggle to reconstruct the past, Barry makes indirect references to the abuse he has experienced. In Scene 5, Barry tells Steven what he remembers about what happened on the day that he got so drunk. Barry works with his brother in a company specialising in erasing graffiti, and on that day, he was supposed to erase some graffiti memorialising a child who was killed in a suicide blast outside their local supermarket the year before. Barry refused to do that because it was a colourful piece of art, saying "I couldn't turn the world all grey again" (p.234). This incident is symbolic of the ongoing conflict between the brothers: where Steven is keen on erasing the physical memory of the traumatic incident, Barry refuses to erase it; in other words, he refuses the erasure of the past, in this example, an especially violent one. The metaphor of graffiti and its potential effacing also reflects Barry's tendency to find relief in art as a method of healing and of communicating feelings, as well as the resistance this is met with. Steven deliberately erases and destroys this means of communication between Barry and his father (pp.249-250), as does their mother when a young Barry draws paintings of his father after his suicide (p.276).

Steven follows a pattern of denying the authenticity of memory and resisting or twisting every memory which Barry brings up, in order to victimise and sacrifice him. Barry himself thinks of memories as illusive and malleable. He revises what he knows about the fairy tale Hansel and Gretel:

> Sometimes you think you remember a story, but you don't. Like when you think of your favourite film. A film you saw when you was a kid, say. For years and years you've been saying, 'I love that bit where…' such-and-such happens. And

> then you see the film again and – it don't happen like that at all. And other bits of the film ... It's like you're seeing them for the first time. (p.230)

But the memory of Barry's abuse that his brother made possible is real, and Barry is only able to refer to it indirectly. Barry again refers to it indirectly by remembering the story of Hansel and Gretel. Hansel and Gretel's capture by the witch is an indirect reference to his abuse and foreshadowing of the memory of his abuse that he will face Steven with in Scene 16. He only begins to hint at it towards the end of the scene, but the scene cuts before a meaningful communication about the trauma can be established**.** Barry insists: "*You* should be the one to fucking start talking about it. / You're the one who did it, Steve. *You!*", to which Steven replies: "What did I do? ... What is it you think I did?" (pp.235-236). At this point, both language and memory fail Barry, as he is unable to face his brother with his misdeed, and he is aware that his brother will have a different version of the truth.

Steven and Barry's final explosive confrontation in Scene 16, as I read it, takes the form of a failed disclosure. Disclosure is usually essential for recovery and can work to mitigate the effects of CSA on the victim's mental health (Cunnington and Clark, 2022). Family in particular can be instrumental in hindering recovery if disclosure is disbelieved or not adequately supported (Cunnington and Clark, 2022). Barry's final appearance before dying sees him laying out the traumatic memory of his abuse. He accuses Steven of receiving money from Mr Ghost to facilitate Barry's abuse, but Steven characteristically refutes all his accusations. Ridley develops this scene through the metaphor of light and darkness. Steven, who is lying in a dark cellar while his wife is in labour, tells Barry he too needs to stay in the dark (p.285). Steven's disoriented state is similar to his father lying in the shed alone after the birth of his son. He imagines seeing a ghost as a moving shadow and so would rather remain in the dark, but his response also carries

the metaphor of refusing to accept that he has victimised Barry. As with Davey's detailed description of the traumatic event in *Vincent River*, here Barry too pieces together the painful memory of his abuse. His abuser lured both boys into his house under the pretext of showing them poems their father wrote. Ridley omits the details of the abuse as recounted in Barry's speeches, but the nature of this can be inferred as he recalls that he came out of the man's room crying, and refusing to return there until Steven hits him and forces him to go.

Steven refuses to acknowledge the authenticity of Barry's story, including challenging its most minor details (pp.289-293). In its place, Steven provides a counternarrative that absolves him of responsibility. Barry attempts to revive the memory and describe the fear and distress that this experience has put him through, but when he is faced with Steven's denial and rewriting of the past, he runs out of words until he falls completely silent (pp.295-299). Barry's silence signals his utter defeat. Steven's substituted, manufactured memory leaves Barry unable to grieve, express his pain or even have it acknowledged. All Barry's attempts to reconstruct the trauma, whether through art or through dialogue, are stifled. Andrew Wyllie (2013) describes the brothers' interaction as a 'destruction' of Barry and connects Steven's behaviour to the wider veneer of respectability that the family as a whole put up:

> [The family] will continue with a performance of family life that is not only fundamentally dishonest, but also serves as a means of perpetuating the damage that they do to themselves and others … The culturally acceptable but false and oppressive memory triumphs over a true memory with its possibility of liberation. Barry can be seen almost as a Messiah figure, whose discomfiting honesty leads to his moral crucifixion. (p.73)

I share Wyllie's view that Barry's silencing and death can be seen as a form of moral crucifixion; his death is both literal and figurative. Beyond the trauma of sexual abuse and a violent, unexplained bereavement, it is the destruction of his every means of expression that effectively kills him before his actual death. Steven denies his disclosure to sacrifice him, and to continue the charade of the family. This argument is made evident in the final scene where the audience learns that Barry dies in a motorcycle accident. The timing of the accident, and Barry's sudden silencing and absence from the play, hints at a possible suicide. Suicide is also subtly suggested when Liz ironically refers to the father's death as an accident (p.303), but the audience already knows her version of the past is false. This example of repetition presents a perpetuation of lies so that the remaining family absolves itself of any responsibility towards their dead. Furthermore, the scene is punctuated and the play ends with the repetition of the same lines thrice: "Is that the baby?" followed by three "No"s from Liz, Steven and his wife Debbie (pp.301-304). This mundane repetition gives an Absurdist, almost Beckettian feel to the final scene. The three characters remain onstage, determinedly divorced from reality, their existence based on the lies they have perpetrated.

Conclusion

Leaves of Glass, as my analysis reveals, demonstrates the necessity of reconstructing the past into narrative and shows the consequences of the failure of this reconstruction. The three tropes of the deceptive narrative of Liz and Steven, and of the structure of the play - absence, indirection and repetition - reveal the trauma hidden in plain sight, and simultaneously hinders its recovery. The question of narrative is therefore an aporia in the play. Steven's soliloquies gradually disclose their father's suicide and his own violence towards his brother, whereas in his conversational exchanges with other characters he buries this hurt and does not acknowledge it.

As I have shown, Liz similarly participates in the silencing of the father and Barry. This dissonance makes trauma recovery impossible for Barry, and for his father, in a deceptive and abusive family. Narrative, a key means of overcoming traumatic experience according to the psychoanalytic therapeutic model, in this play either fails or is disbelieved.

I have argued in this chapter that *Vincent River* and *Leaves of Glass* both demonstrate the need for resolving traumatic experience by accepting it, transforming it into stories and releasing the pent-up emotions. *Vincent River* shows a fruitful recovery of the past as Anita and Davey share their loss and interweave their stories both about Vincent and about their own experiences as outcasts in their respective communities. *Leaves of Glass* shows the repercussions of the refusal to uncover the traumatic past. In both plays, the characters incessantly urge each other to listen. While the response of the onstage recipients of this appeal may vary, in each case, the audience listens to the trauma of the victim and witnesses the consequences of a narrative thwarted. Ridley's plays thus give those victims a voice that might otherwise have remained silenced. I have also demonstrated that in Ridley's drama, trauma is largely represented as a single event that disrupts the lives of those individuals who experience it, even if the violence they suffer and the motivations of the perpetrators bear wider societal implications. In the next chapter my analysis shows that for racial minorities and marginalised groups, trauma is diffused and widespread. Instead of being confined to a domestic sphere, tucker green's plays move to occupy a more public setting, and, instead of narrative, retributive justice is put forward as the hope for trauma recovery.

Chapter 3: Trauma at the Margins: debbie tucker green's *hang* and *stoning mary*

In this chapter, I focus on the representation of traumatic experiences in black British playwright debbie tucker green's *hang* and *stoning mary*. I explore the nature of the traumatic experiences that occur within the worlds of the plays and how they affect the characters, and the dramaturgical choices that tucker green makes to communicate her characters' pain. In Chapter 2, I examined how traumatic events depicted in Philip Ridley's *Vincent River* and *Leaves of Glass* are remembered and reexperienced. I argued that in *Vincent River*, the characters role play doctor/patient, mother/son, and lovers, and use various tools of trauma recovery, with narrative being a particularly transformative step in the recovery process. I used psychotherapeutic methods adopted by Babette Rothschild, Judith Herman, Bessel van der Kolk and Stuart Stevenson to demonstrate these coping and healing strategies. I also argued that *Leaves of Glass* shows the consequences and effects of the failure to narrate traumatic memories, in particular the child sexual abuse of Barry. The refusal of the family members to express their emotions and publicly acknowledge their roles in traumatising him prevents any trauma resolution from happening. The family disintegrates with the suicide of the father and the inexplicable death of Barry. These plays, I have shown, testify to the traditional psychoanalytic concept that narrative can have healing effect and that it is essential to verbalise traumatic events so that healing may occur. My discussion of Ridley as a white playwright helped me show that his plays reflect this predominant focus on narrative in Western psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.

In this chapter, I will argue that, writing from her identity position as a black playwright, tucker green reveals the habitual traumatisation, racial violence, slow justice, and injustice that marginalised black people face. tucker green offers a unique perspective on traumatic experiences and their aftermath that recognises cultural differences, highlights racial inequality

and focuses on retribution. I will analyse the plays in light of the postcolonial trauma and decolonial theories of Stef Craps and Achille Mbembe. The postcolonial theory of Stef Craps resists a model of trauma which is event-based and proposes silence as a valid means of overcoming the trauma of violence; I apply both these concepts to the plays to demonstrate habitual traumatisation and culture-specific means of trauma recovery. Mbembe's writings on perceptions of black people and the body of the traumatised also deepen an understanding of the impact of trauma on marginalised groups. As a framework for my analysis, I propose two main techniques that tucker green uses to show the impact of this trauma: reversal and challenging the audience's perception. The technique of reversal was briefly proposed by Michael Pearce in his analysis of the play in the edited collection *debbie tucker green: Critical Perspectives* (2020). I am building on and expanding this proposal to include other examples of the play that Pearce does not cover. For example, tucker green reverses the audience's possible expectation about the events of *hang*, and the historical patterns of oppression against black people. This technique is closely linked to her technique where she challenges the perception of her audience by presenting the traumatisation of black people through the medium of white characters/actors in *stoning mary*. The first part of this chapter, in which I analyse *hang*, is organised as follows: firstly, I review some of the critical reception of the play and use it as a gateway for my second subsection, the analysis of setting and characterisation. Thirdly, I analyse the visceral and psychological effects of trauma on the characters. I then situate the play within the debate on victims and perpetrators in contemporary trauma theory. In the fifth section, I argue that the play contrasts with the Western predominant conceptions of the event-based trauma, narrative and silence. Lastly, I analyse *hang* as a remembrance, criticism and reversal of the practice of lynching and show how it resonates with the modern-day practices of institutional racism.

hang

hang presents a dystopic vision of events where a black woman, identified as Three, has the power to decide the fate of a white man who has committed an unspecified crime against her. The protagonist goes through a formal decision-making process with characters One and Two, whose jobs are not specified either, but who are implied to be representatives of the legal system. Half-way through the play, One and Two reveal that they received a letter from her attacker, prompting her to describe how far the crime has traumatised her and devastated her marriage and family life. After One and Two relay the various methods of capital punishment that the legal or judicial institution carries out, Three ultimately announces her irrevocable decision that he be hanged. At the end of the play, she starts reading the letter, but the scene cuts without the audience finding out its contents.

Critical Reception

Reviews of the play's debut at the Royal Court Theatre, London in 2015, directed by tucker green, recurrently focus on the stage set, the demeanour of the characters and the effect of the ambiguity of the crime on the audience. In the playtext, tucker green gives the time as "*nearly now*" (p.2) and describes a basic, modern room with automatic, flickering lights and a water cooler (p.3). Different reviewers offer their own interpretations of the different ways and levels of effectiveness with which the futuristic, dystopian setting of the play has been translated into the stage. John Nathan in the Jewish Chronicle describes the room as a "sterile consultation room of an institution that exists to kill those condemned to death by law" (2015, p.601), whereas Sarah Hemming suggests that the neon-lit room offers a "mismatch between clinical, functional location and raw, ragged feeling [that] becomes key in this stark play as it raises prickly questions about the way the justice system handles victims" (2015). This clash between

functionality and emotion is shown in the one-way 'conversation' between One and Two on one hand trying to offer Three refreshments and Three's silence which gradually unveils her suppressed anger. Rachel Halliburton's review describes the setting as a "soulless interview room" that provides the context for a "taut Kafkaesque absurdity to [One and Two's] banter" (2015, p.601). Another reviewer aptly describes Three's attitude in response to the vapid bureaucratic procedure in the play: "[Three] cold-shoulders attempts at small-talk, refuses the tea-and-sympathy platitudes and tacit cautionary nudges from the two liaison officers with her" (Cavendish, 2015, p.600). More recent productions have similarly adopted a modern, clinically pristine design. For example, the stage set was similarly immaculate and brightly lit with cold fluorescent lights in both productions I attended (*hang*, 2019; *hang*, 2022). This bright and "sterile" set serves as a façade for an institution which routinely carries out the death penalty in cold, calculated means. I view this institution as symbolic of the powerful multinational corporations that cause death and perpetrate human rights abuses behind closed doors and in offshore spaces. Despite the revelation towards the end of the play that the perpetrator is white, these early reviews, by their focus on the aspects of productions I have identified, overlook the play's concern with racial violence, and do not link the play to the practice of lynching. I aim to address this gap through the arguments presented in the following sections.

Furthermore, in his review of the 2015 production, Michael Billington mainly focuses on the content of the play and contends that "argument about crime and punishment would be more persuasive if it took place in a recognizable world", where capital punishment is still practised. However, I argue that grounding the play in a specific country, as Billington implies, could encourage a UK audience to detach from the drama, on the premise that it is occurring elsewhere, further suggesting that the violence described has no imminent or immediate

implication for that audience's lives. By contrast, I argue that the events of the play being suspended in both space and time can create a certain level of suspense and even terror. Furthermore, Billington's appraisal of the play can be read as an insinuation that a world where racially aggravated crimes happen is an unrecognizable world, which misses the mark that the play aims at making. The question that can be asked is how soon is this future incoming and how accurately can a similar punitive system be recreated in the real world. The "*nearly now*" of the setting builds the play's dystopian world and, in light of the events dramatised, can be interpreted as an alarm to what does happen, and what may happen in the near future, if racial inequalities and injustice are not confronted.

Casting and Setting

In this proposed near future, tucker green gives her characters names that denote a hierarchy of status, and the casting of the actors makes pertinent suggestions about race relations in the play. In the playtext, tucker green states that characters One and Two can be of any race, whereas the traumatised victim, Three, is black (p.2). In a principal use of audience's perception to demonstrate the race relations, white female actors played One in several productions of the play, namely the Royal Court Theatre debut (2015), the Sheffield Theatres production (*hang*, 2019) and Tron Theatre production (*hang*, 2022), whereas mixed race or actors of Asian ethnicity played Two. Therefore, the directors' choices of who to cast reflects the dynamics of race relations in the play, and their symbolism of UK society. The ambiguous naming and the choice of the characters' race can indicate a hierarchy of importance: One, being white, is a "first class citizen", whereas Three, being black, is the third class citizen; thus the play makes a visible critique of the status quo. Two is the inexperienced staff who attempts at appeasing One, partly through a form of servitude by bringing in the drinks (p.9, pp.17-18), while also being unable to

relate to Three's trauma, anger, or status as a victim. Nonetheless, as the play unfolds, Three disempowers both of them by dismissing their suggestion to change her mind about her decision, or having a family member to share it with. Her determination unsettles and challenges this hierarchy.

The beginning of the play also sets its tone and establishes the main tension of the play. The induction that Three goes through lays out the tension between her and the legal system, for not only does Three have to survive the consequences of the crime every single day, she also has to endure representatives of the legal system who cannot ease her suffering. For the first fifteen pages of text, Three is largely silent while One and Two comment in banal terms on the facilities of the office. All their attempts to provide her with refreshments or ask if she is expecting anyone else to join her are met by silences or short, precise answers (pp.3-18). One and Two's niceties and attempts at small talk hide their unease at the situation. Knowing that the (legal) system has thus far failed her and that their meeting is a turning point in the trial, they try to deflect from their failure to do justice by talking at length about the physical setting of the play and by trying to make her comfortable. Frequently they repeat themselves in a hollow attempt to fill the silence. Theatre critic Georgina Brown notes how "when both echo the other, they give away the fact that they are merely parroting platitudes from the training manual, without thinking, listening, or one jot of compassion" (p. 602). Three does not respond to their offers of hospitality, thus increasing their unease and blunders. She ultimately thwarts their attempts by repeating: "And you couldn't make me comfortable by the way. You couldn't make me – I lost any… / This isn't very 'comfortable' / (*dry*) Just for the record / Not comfortable at all" (p.16). In this way, tucker green's slow building of tension ensures that an outburst is anticipated. The exchanges of One and Two provide the dark comedy element in the play. They are shown to be

laughable, most of their conversation being about their modern office and the kind of mundane problems that they have to deal with such as lack of office supplies. They describe the office facilities as a "nightmare" (p.11, p.14); this is a starkly ironic comparison to what Three actually goes through, the attack being very much still alive for her. In sum, the self-consciously slow-paced, drawn-out beginning of the play reveals that the main conflict is between Three, the black victim of the unnamed crime, and the ineffective and ambiguous legal or judicial system. The play shows, I argue, the double traumatisation of Three and her family, first by the perpetrator, and second by the system that cannot protect or vindicate her.

The Physicality of Traumatisation

tucker green gives visual and aural representations of the aftermath of the traumatic experience. Three "*has a slight, nervous tremble in her hand(s) only*" (p.2), reflecting a trauma that persists even though Three is trying to maintain her composure, and inviting several interpretations on how Three might be perceived. Her hand tremor becomes visible at moments of highest tension in the play: first, when describing the effect of the crime on her family; second, on learning that the perpetrator has written her a letter. Moreover, I see the trembling of her hands as an element of character that threatens to break Three's otherwise unshakeable exterior. From this view, it conveys vulnerability. Commenting on the Royal Court Theatre production, David Ian Rabey describes how the tremor:

> indicated Three's profound visceral impatience in response to the slowly measured tempo of the central procedure, and a consequent, fundamentally separative explosive potential for eruption, reminiscent of the ticking time bomb. This not only indicated traumatic stress as embodied within Three but also suggested a simmering willingness to blast away all available theoretical

> reference points for management which may be applied to her, and insist on her own purposefully appalling demands. (2020, p.193)

Indeed, the controlled detonation which Rabey describes is understood to take place offstage, with the perpetrator's execution. Onstage, the tremble also reaches its strongest when she starts reading the contents of the perpetrator's letter at the very end of the play. This description of Three, nonetheless, is bound by cultural understandings of a hand tremble. Because I watched the Sheffield Theatres production before reading the text, I initially interpreted Three's hand tremble in the way that "shaky hands" denotes in my native language of Arabic: hesitance and indeterminacy (*hang*, 2019). Therefore, I had the expectation that Three would go back on her decision, or that a change in the status quo will happen, both of which were reversed by the ending.

While the audience do not see Three's children, tucker green paints a vivid aural description of the effect of witnessing the traumatic incident on them (pp.35-36). The traumatic residue in Three's body, her hand tremble, is testament to the effects of the trauma persisting in the present. The same effects devastate her children, as she describes: "They can't settle in a school, they can't settle in a class, they can't settle in the house, in a house, in our house, they are *un*-settled, *still* unsettled, have been unsettled – unsettle-able, *un*-settling" (pp.23-24). The trauma leaves her and her family in a limbo, unable to overcome the past or adapt in the present. One reason tucker green suggests for this state of unsettlement is that the justice system is slow and inefficient, as evidenced by One and Two's blunder when telling Three about the letter the perpetrator wrote her. Therefore, she further describes the bodily effects of their incompetence, on her, as she is repeatedly unable to sleep (p.29), and on her children:

> Cos they're on meds to stop them shaking,

meds to force them to a sleep,

meds to stop them dreaming,

meds to wake them up,

meds to keep them awake,

meds to calm them down…

They're medicated day by day. (p.37)

Their devastation, as Three describes it, cannot be undone. The medical interventions fail, and so does Three's motherly touch, from which they flinch (p.37). The reference to touch recalls Anita and Davey comforting one another through touch in *Vincent River*. Physical touch is presented in Ridley's play as a step towards trauma recovery, as well as a gateway towards accessing traumatic memory. In *hang*, however, the constant hypervigilance of the traumatised family members signals their inability to cope, adapt or resolve their trauma. I read this theme as a process of reversal of normal bodily functions. Whilst a loving mother's touch is expected to comfort her children, it gives the opposite effect in the play. Trauma therapists Rothschild and van der Kolk's theorisation that the body needs to heal alongside the mind is not realised in the play, which invalidates the ability of therapy to overturn the effect of racial violence on the victims, and their families.

The traumatisation of Three's children is described as irreversible. tucker green's representation of the psychological effects of trauma correlates with some of the common paradigms of trauma in literature, namely the speechless fright, the destruction of identity and

experiencing temporal gaps. To illustrate, critic Michelle Balaev (2008) notes that contemporary literary trauma theory:

> asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity …
> The popular trauma theory employed today depends upon the abreactive model of trauma, which is used to assert the position that traumatic experience produces a 'temporal gap' and a dissolution of the self. (p.150)

Similarly, Three's daughter experiences this involuntary speechless fright upon witnessing the crime.

> **Three** And I dunno what you would suggest you would have done with a …
>
> nine-year-old that was staring into a space that isn't there.
> For hours …
>
> And I dunno what you would say to the shivering seven-year-old you only noticed hadn't said anything after the screaming nine-year-old's voice had run dry.
> Marcia uttered nuthin. Nothing. For four days after that night. (pp.35-36)

Marcia's reaction corresponds with Herman's explanation of the nature of traumatic memories: "Traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context; rather they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images" (1997, pp.37-38). Three attempts to convey this speechless fright in which she found Marcia in order to decry the new development in her case. Three also laments that Marcia, despite the intervening years between the crime and the events of the play, still cannot find her voice: "I miss Marcia's noise. / I miss my Marcia's chatter ... / She's missing her

noise, her chatter, / her childishness. / Her childhood. / She, wonders where it's gone" (pp.18-19).

Traumatisation adversely affects the bodies of Three's children, but the aural description is also a gateway to demonstrating psychological trauma. It is manifested in their loss of identity, or dissolution of the self, as Balaev puts it (2008, p.150), and in their inability to grasp time as normal. Three explains how her children's characters have transformed by the trauma as the years have gone by. As the above quotation reveals, she laments the loss of her daughter's childhood, and she also describes how the trauma has left a very similar effect on her son, aging them both overnight, as she puts it:

> **Three** Tyrell has gone from that open-faced, open-minded, open-hearted little boy we were filling up with love and laughter and good spirit and proper knowledge ... He's gone from that little boy to…
>
> *Beat.*
>
> Three schools on … six classes, four teaching assistants on now, for both of them, seeing as you're asking – they aged overnight – seeing as you're asking – like me and my husband. (pp.22-23)

Her description shows a family that has not survived the traumatic experience even though they are still alive. Their disconnection with their formal selves and with the home which has shifted overnight to become the site of the trauma is described as irreversible and irredeemable. The shift in their personalities from outgoing to broken and how they have lost the ability to communicate with one another in any meaningful way signals the shattering of their identities.

In the same emotional monologue, tucker green shows how the traumatic experience created a temporal gap in the victims' consciousness. Three does not remember the duration of

the crime, but only the emotional effects that she and her family experienced: “The years me and my husband had of filling them up with the good stuff fucked in less than five minutes. Or was it ten. Or fifteen. Or was it the whole evening? I don’t even fuckin…” (p.36). Similarly, Kalí Tal argues that “the remembrance of trauma is always an approximate account of the past, since traumatic experience precludes knowledge, and, hence, representation” (quoted in Balaev, 2008, p.150). The uncertainty about the details of the traumatic experience makes its remembrance onstage incomplete and it is left to the audience’s imagination to fill in both the verbal and temporal gaps that Three attempts to describe. Three’s description shows that, amidst the failure of medication, and the mother’s touch to mitigate the effects of the trauma, the destabilisation of the hierarchy suggested in the world of the play and the enforcement of justice against the perpetrator are the only means available for Three. The irreversible result of the traumatisation translates to a reversal and a breakdown of the medical effects and bodily functions that normally aid in trauma recovery. The trauma tropes that the play shows further support my hypothesis, as the change of identity and dissonance of time continue long after the violent crime ended.

Representing the Victim

Throughout the play, tucker green foregrounds the experience of the victim and the witnesses to the crime. Three’s story is present – both in and through her body and as an aftermath to the crime – and so are the experiences of her children. When One and Two reveal in a series of blunders that the development in the case is a letter from the perpetrator, it highlights the secondary importance of her and her family’s well-being in the legal procedures. I view *hang* as unique in its foregrounding of the victims in the context of cultural trauma theory and psychiatric trauma studies. I have critiqued in Chapter 1 the tendency within these fields towards muddling the distinction between victims and perpetrators. Trauma studies also often underrepresent or

silence the story of the victims altogether. As a response, I argue in this thesis in favour of distinguishing between victims and perpetrators and align this thesis with the victims of violence and express the need to *see* them and listen to their stories for ethical imperatives.

In my view, tucker green foregrounds the victim in three ways: she gives a visual form to the trauma through Three's body while the perpetrator remains unseen; she gives Three primacy of voice in the narrative surrounding the crime; and gives her the dystopic power to decide the fate of the perpetrator. These three aspects of representing the victim fall under the technique of challenging the audience's perception of victimhood. Three carries both vulnerability and anger, and, as an audience member in the 2019 production, I could not foresee which state or emotion was going to prevail, and how it would affect her decision. It is this precarious perception that tucker green challenges. Furthermore, tucker green gives a platform to the voiceless victims and humanises them, especially that Three is a black woman, a fictional representation of realistic trauma in a white majority country. As a victim, she feels that she is given only secondary importance to the needs of the perpetrator. Here, tucker green presents a legal system that focuses on the perpetrator as much as, or even more than, it duly supports the victim:

Two today is all about / you.

One and we want to focus on you.

Three This isn't about me.

I think it's all about him.

Still.

This isn't about me, today.

He wants to know …

I'm here. So you can know. So you can tell him. So he can find out ...

This isn't about me at all. Is it? (p.20)

tucker green therefore has the perpetrator silenced and the victim speaking about how far the crime had irreversibly ruined her and her family's life. She leaves the platform for her and her alone to tell the story of the trauma. She also gives Three individuality and the power to tell it in her preferred mode, withholding the details of the event itself but highlighting her family's suffering as witnesses to the crime.

By giving Three the power to decide the perpetrator's fate, tucker green reinforces an image of a victim who is strong-willed and has enough power to control people's destiny. In this sense, she subverts the stereotype of helpless victimisation. Within the world of the play, this is in response to how it is implied that Three and her family are being sidelined in this "trial". The lengthy process of bringing the perpetrator to justice proves to be traumatizing for the victim too:

Three Your developments affect my sleep

how I sleep

that I don't sleep. Can't sleep. Still.

It affects their schooling …

Affects where we live …

Affects my health

my husband's health

my kids' health – mental and physical. (p.29)

While the judicial process is, as Three decries, not about her, tucker green makes the play about the woman. When the play is considered in a wider context, and given its implicit reference to lynching, this reversal of the victim status serves as a symbolic undoing of the history of racial

violence. In many ways, tucker green challenges the audience's expectation of what a victim is and what they are capable of doing. Seen in this light, *hang* is therefore at once a reminder, condemnation and reversal of lynching, and her complex representation of Three's victimhood serves this purpose.

Daily Traumatisation

I have argued that tucker green reverses situations that are considered generally normal or acceptable in other contexts, such as physical touch and medication to mitigate the effect of trauma on the body. She also subverts expectations and practices of victims of violence as being powerless and voiceless. In my view, tucker green's technique of reversal is clear in the model of trauma that the play portrays. Her model diverges significantly from the psychoanalytic model of trauma prevalent in the West in two key respects: *hang* shows traumatisation as a habitual occurrence, rather than an identifiable event after which the traumatized can regain a sense of "normalcy"; and casting doubt on the efficacy of narrative in resolving trauma, whilst the psychoanalytic model hinges on transforming the traumatic memory into words. It follows that silence in the play reflects Three's cultural background, her conscious choice and a dramaturgical choice by tucker green, rather than being a sign of pathology as it is generally interpreted in cultural trauma theory and psychiatry. I begin my discussion by arguing that *hang* shows that marginalised racial minorities experience repeated and habitual traumatisation, when compared to other non-marginalised groups.

This argument is first exemplified in the disparity between One and Three's description of their families. In One's attempt to have small talk with Three, she asks how her children have been and describes her own child as a "nightmare", because she is precocious (p.18). Three's emotional response shows how far their experiences are different and what a nightmare really is

from her viewpoint, when she expresses the destruction of Marcia's childhood (pp.18-19). Three therefore turns the table on One, and points out the irony in her questions and in the sort of difficulties that One talks about with the same response, only this time sarcastically: "I can only imagine" (p.22). What One perceives to be the unpleasantness of her day-to-day life becomes a dream for Three, which is now shattered. Three's response signals that, she can only *imagine* because she cannot *know* it first-hand.

Furthermore, One and Two's attempts at empathising with Three are met with derision. She expresses a feeling of alienation from the bureaucratic problems of One and Two, which do not begin to compare to hers:

> **Three** what do *you know? What-the-fuck-do-you-know?* Y'look about twelve years old and sit in front of me and nod your head and drink your drink and tell me 'you know' – you know nothing and you (to One) – you who got a bit of the nine-to-five pressure, just enough to start playing away, what-the-fuck do you know about living with any of this?
>
> And I'm glad – glad amongst all your 'long hours' and untold 'pressure' you somehow managed to find the time to fuck-about cos me and my husband have stopped fucking ever since. What do you exactly (know)? (pp.34-35, tucker green's emphases)

Three's mounting anger reveals how different her traumatization is to the lives of the other characters, who have not been subjected to her ordeal. She points out the irony that the pressure they go through with reference to their day job is temporary, whereas she lives in anguish around the clock. I relate this contrast – and reversal – to Laura S. Brown's (1995) argument that the *DSM-III* describes only the lives of socially dominant groups. For the dominant groups, trauma

can indeed by outside the range of human experience, as the *DSM-III* put it, but for the women from less dominant groups, their experiences are of "everyday pain" (p.110). Similarly, the kinds of pressures that One and Two face during their "nine-to-five" jobs are incomparable to Three's post-traumatic life.

The constant terror that shapes the lives of Three and her family is not only a symptom of the unspecified crime, but, as she shows, a direct result of the failure of the justice system. Her family relives the trauma every single day because of this failure. Reliving traumatic experiences as intrusive flashbacks and/or nightmares is very common among trauma survivors (van der Kolk and van der Hart, 1991). The *DSM-5* also enlists "recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s)" and "recurring distressing dreams in which the content and/or affect of the dream are related to the traumatic event(s)" as two of the intrusion symptoms of PTSD (APA, 2013, p.271). Three's description shows that the case, in its slow progression, continues to retraumatise and destabilise her and her family on a daily basis:

Three Your developments affect …

my day to day

my laundry – washing piss-stained sheets

every day,

changing beds – *every day*

reassuring them *every day* and knowin' it's

not workin. (p.29, playwright's emphases)

tucker green's emotive emphasis on the everyday recalls postcolonial theorist Stef Craps' criticism of the 'event-based model' of trauma predominant in the West and casts doubt on its applicability on everyone despite their race, gender, among other differences. Craps argues that

cultural trauma theory, such as the work of Cathy Caruth, typically follows the Freudian model of trauma as "a single, extraordinary, catastrophic event" (2015, p.31). He argues that this model does not account for racism and other forms of ongoing oppression of racial groups or minorities (2015, p.31). Three's speech also recalls Laura S. Brown's (2008) remark on: "the normative, quotidian aspects of trauma in the lives of many oppressed and disempowered persons" (p.18). Even though the traumatic event in *hang* is a single blow, its after-effects constitute the everyday reality of the family. Moreover, the lengthy trial, I argue, is an example of the ongoing oppression that Three faces. The developments in the case, that do not serve the victim(s), have exacerbated their suffering. In a sense, the family is doubly traumatised by her perpetrator, and by the people and process that should bring him to justice. The legal developments only rub salt into the wound instead of healing it. tucker green therefore offers more breadth to the classical model of trauma that sees this as a short-lived blow; by contrast, the model *hang* poses does not allow for closure and presents a more expansive view of traumatic experience that focuses on the everyday and on the post-traumatic effects and affects.

The Futility of Narrative and the Multiple Uses of Silence

In addition to demonstrating trauma as a renewed and repeated state, I contend that *hang* suggests the futility of narrating traumatic memory, and employs silence in a variety of significant ways. Telling the story of the trauma has been a central tenet in trauma studies since Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet hypothesized reconstructing the traumatic event(s) under hypnosis as a method of treating trauma. The prevalent model of trauma theory in Western psychiatry proposes that transforming the memory of the trauma to narrative is the means to integrate it into the person's life history and achieve recovery (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1991; Herman, 1997; Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008). As cultural trauma theory

is greatly influenced by psychoanalysis, proponents of the theory have similarly proposed narrative recall as a means of overcoming traumatic experiences. Michelle Balaev (2008) notes that: "The popular trauma theory employed today depends upon the abreactive model of trauma … This Freudian concept of trauma and memory emphasizes the necessity to recreate or abreact through narrative recall of the experience" (p.150). Joshua Pederson (2018) similarly declares that: "It is a widely accepted therapeutic truth that the stories we tell about the catastrophes that beset us – both individual and collective – can be crucial tools for recovery" (p.97). Caruth saw that trauma often creates gaps and ruptures in memory as well as narrative (1996, pp.10-24; Pederson, 2018, p.101), which makes silence, according to this Western model of trauma, a pathology. My analysis of *hang* proposes that silence in the play is a nuanced and multifaceted tool which often contrasts with the Western model conception of silence as a symptom of traumatisation. I here identify five uses of silence in the play and show how the play refuses a reliance on narrative, in order to argue that the mainstream trauma theories fall short of representing racial minorities in the West, and that silence reflects the cultural background of Three.

Within the world of the play, the rejection of narrative as a therapeutic tool is first hinted at when One and Two pitch the idea that Three could seek counselling to help with the repercussions of her decision, a suggestion she immediately dismisses, saying that she has already learned to live with a lot (p.47). Counselling typically entails talking, but for Three, language has completely lost its purpose of communication. She explicitly expresses the futility of words as a means of alleviating the fear her family lives in:

> You tell me what to do then.
>
> When they are inconsolable.

When it is unexplainable.

When I am lost for words.

When speaking softly scares them

when my silence hurts them

when my words are wrong

when a raised voice has outrageous repercussions …

When I know, and *they* know I do not have the ability – the capability left in me

to help them *whatsoever* cos ... You tell me that. Cos that's a development. (p.37)

This speech deconstructs narrative in its various forms. No telling of the traumatic memory, in any shape or form, can undo the family's devastation. Even Three asking One and Two to tell her what to do is a metaphorical question and a derisive commentary on the way they are handling the procedures. Therefore, in this sense, the function of language, like (a mother's) physical touch and medicine, is reversed. The family's devastation is so severe that the normal functions of language to communicate comfort and reassurance have ceased.

As a result, silence in the play can be seen, firstly, as a response to the failure of language. Three paradoxically finds that language fails to break down the barrier that trauma inevitably forces on her and her family. In addition to the futility of One and Two's words of sympathy and her own words to try to comfort her family, words also fail her community. Everyone around her eventually falls silent:

Three People are too embarrassed to say anything.

To say anything of use.

To say anything of use any more.

> People say nothing, presume I've stopped waiting for them to say anything.
>
> To say anything useful. People presume I'm, over it.
>
> Over the worst.
>
> People have got tired of talking about it, they're all cried out about it.
>
> (p.24)

Not only is the crime unspeakable, but there is also no use in talking about it. Similarly, even though the traumatic experience has rendered her children speechless, they do not find narrative a viable strategy for resolution.

Secondly, I argue that the play presents silence as a reflection of Three's cultural background, when viewed in the context of postcolonial theory and literary texts. As Stef Craps (2014) elucidates, the therapeutic model of the talking cure emerged in the West and may not always be applicable to the cultures of many people in non-Western contexts or racial minorities in the West. His analysis of Aminatta Forna's novel *The Memory of Love* maintains that silence can be a means of healing from trauma. He argues that the novel calls into question the universality of the talking cure, suggesting further that silence is represented as "a coping mechanism, a conscious choice deserving of respect" (p.55). Michelle Balaev's (2008) argument in her analysis of Jacobs' *Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Morrison's *Beloved* similarly suggests that trauma narrative is bound by cultural conventions in the novel, and so is withholding the narrative: "the 'unspeakability' of trauma claimed by so many literary critics today can be understood less as an epistemological conundrum or neurobiological fact, but more as an outcome of cultural values and ideologies" (p.157). In other words, the counterargument states that storytelling as a therapeutic recall is a cultural construct rather than an inherent

biological fact. I therefore set tucker green's play as an example of a cultural expression of silence to cope with trauma within black communities. All three authors – Forna, Jacobs and Morrison – whose work Craps and Balaev analyse, as well as tucker green, are black, as are their characters in these instances. This suggests a cultural ethos that values silence as a coping mechanism, as Craps suggests. Three's silence is a conscious choice in this light, with tucker green withholding the details of the trauma from the audience, and Three withholding it from the other characters. While outspokenness and public sharing of grief as well as the intimate details of the unknown crime is usually encouraged in many European cultures, silence can be utilized in other cultures to contain the hurt and preserve privacy, as suggested by the play.

The third effect of silence in the play, in my view, is to create agency for the protagonist's situation; the choice of silence is consciously and willingly hers. It clearly distinguishes Three as a victim whose story must be told, in her own way, on her own terms. It is also the story which One and Two would not understand, but "can only imagine" as they reiterate (p.9, p.24), prompting Three to retort that they cannot imagine her suffering, let alone identify or empathise with her (p.24). I relate this inability to identify with her to the fact that they are "from any race", specifically not black. Three's distinctive experience as a black woman who has to endure a terrifying assault, as well as the additional violence of a prolonged legal procedure that lasts for more than three years, cannot be compared to the experiences of other races. Trish Reid (2018) makes a similar remark, drawing attention to tucker green's use of active silences. She argues that Three's silence when asked if someone else is coming to the facility or if she would like to move their appointment is a refusal to go along with the legal representatives. It makes Three a feminist killjoy who refuses to make others around her comfortable by bending her will. This image, Reid argues, speaks against the stereotype of black

female victimhood as "traumatized, silenced, and abject" (p.393). Reid's view intersects with my discussion of the victim writing her own story, and of the many uses that I argue silence has in the play.

In addition to the uses of silences within the world of the play, the device has its implications in relation to the audience. With tucker green withholding much information about the crime from the audience, she leaves them little room for judgment. This strategy puts Three in the spotlight as a victim of, possibly, a racially aggravated crime and invites audience solidarity. The focus on retribution precludes debate that might take place among viewers on whether the punishment fits the crime. This focus also echoes some of the frustration that victims of racial injustice, namely the apartheid in South Africa, have expressed about initiatives such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which employ the Western conception of talking as a form of therapy (Still, 2018, p.301). One participant in the Commission voiced her frustration with the process because it did not change her situation, and her story is only met with expressions of sympathy (Craps, 2014, p.46). Three expresses the same frustration with One and Two's attempts at empathy:

One I know you've heard it a thousand times and I know it's not helpful – can't help but / I'm (sorry) –

Three It's not helpful.

One I really / am –

Three It's not helpful.

And I've not heard it a thousand times before. (p.24)

and again on (p.66). Three has therefore stopped sharing her story to clear the path for action. In the wider sense, tucker green suggests that in cases of racial violence, talking about the trauma and expressing sympathy as listeners are not enough if not supported with retributive justice.

Finally and importantly, silence can be viewed as tucker green's dramaturgical choice to build up suspense and let each audience member imagine what the worst kind of traumatic event may be. This view of the play is inspired by Balaev's (2008) reference to *Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *Beloved.* Both texts present the experiences of black women being raped by white men. Balaev argues that: "By withholding an explicit account, [Jacobs] creates greater suspense and repulsion because it allows the reader to imagine her or his own worst fears of abuse and violation" (p.158). The same can be said of *hang*; withholding the crime can hold the audience's attention and make them wonder if it will be revealed at any point. The silence also magnifies the horror of the unspecified crime in the minds of the audience. It invites them to imagine that the worst has happened to warrant Three's unwavering resort to choosing the perpetrator's slow, agonizing death. They could also be drawing on their actual experience. As director Izzy Rabey puts it, the audience's capability of imagining the nature of the attack can show how much trauma they have, or have not, experienced (2020, p.306). It also leaves what "the worst" is to their imagination. Some of the effects of trauma that Three describes lead to this conclusion: she reveals that she and her husband have not had sex since the incident (p.35), a common response that rape or sexual assault victims can have (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p.272). Furthermore, rape is heavily suggested to be the unnamed crime given the perpetrator's proximity to the victim during the crime (Pearce, 2020). This uncertainty provides another reason why the traumatic experience in the play remains unuttered: to shed light on the shame that might accompany victims who speak out. Shaming the victim in this way can further

traumatise them, and therefore silence can be a form of protection. It precludes any possibility that an audience member might feel less empathy and solidarity with Three. I return to rape in more detail in the next section, where I analyse the play's strong reference to the practice of lynching in the United States.

A Modern-day Lynching

tucker green's technique of reversal culminates with the audience learning towards the end of the play that the perpetrator is white. Having announced her decision that he will be hanged, the play's reference to lynching in the American South is firmly established. It is also strongly suggested that the crime is rape, thereby forging another link to lynching. To illustrate my argument, I analyse the final moments of the play within the overarching framework of reversal and I highlight the several references the play makes to lynching. First, in a lengthy sequence, Three asks the officials how long each method of execution takes; namely lethal injection, gas inhalation, firing squad, beheading, electric chair and eventually hanging (pp.50-58). One and Two describe each of the gruesome methods in a mechanical, matter-of-fact and humorous tone that conveys an institution devoid of humanity where the condemned are dealt with in a transactional mode. For example, Two says that before lethal injection "Everybody knows why there's there and the chaplain's already been – even for the non-believers, who often, suddenly believe and – yeh, client" (p.51). The irony in the scene arises from the clash between the subject matter and the tone, as well as the clean and modern setting which the setting describes and the productions convey on the one hand, and the bloodbath happening behind closed doors on the other hand. Seen in this light, I view the legal institution as symbolic of the multinational corporations who cause death and suffering to their employees or the consumers of their products while maintaining a façade of professionalism and hospitality. tucker green's emphasis on the

office and on the procedures of the case, as well as referring to the rules as "the protocol", the condemned as "clients" and killing them as "a service" is therefore a criticism of these modern institutions. In a sense, this Absurdist scene recalls German philosopher Hannah Arendt's concept of 'the banality of evil' (Arendt, 1963). The staff at this legal institution are doing their job of killing others as if it is a routine, where some parts of the job can even be relished (such as stamping the copies of the death penalty decision (p.65)). Like Nazi officer Adolf Eichmann, the subject of Arendt's notes, One and Two are petty bureaucrats who are just carrying out instructions and doing their job.

On the surface level, Three asks how long each method of execution takes to inflict the most pain on the perpetrator. I also read the scene as a reminder and indictment of the discriminatory and violent systems that white people put in place across the years and societies to terrorise black people and other racial and religious minorities and keep them in a subjugated position. tucker green conjures the Nazi Holocaust (gas inhalation), legal injection – the method currently used in the US states which have the death penalty and executing dissidents in Britain and by the British empire (firing squad). I also interpret the inclusion of the electric chair as an implicit reference to the execution of African American child George Junius Stinney Jr. in 1944 ('George Stinney').[21] The common denominator between these historical methods of execution is their implementation by white people who seek to maintain their power through systemic racial discrimination and violence. From this vantage point, it is not only the nameless perpetrator who is on trial for his crime, but rather the entire history of murder and violence against marginalised

[21] Stinney was wrongfully accused of killing two white girls. He was legally exonerated in 2014, and a Circuit Court judge noted that his trial and conviction were entirely flawed.

people and racial minorities. The reversal technique which tucker green uses here protests against the use and abuse of white power and documents the devastation that it has on its victims.

In particular, Three's choice to have the perpetrator hanged is steeped in African American history. Of all the different methods of execution practised throughout history and that the play mentions, hanging specifically evokes the lynching of African Americans in the Southern States (Head, 2019).[22] Lynching was a method of vigilante justice that punished African Americans suspected of crimes or even a supposed "lack of courtesy" to white people (Digital History, 2019). Between 1882 and 1951, roughly five thousand people were lynched, mostly African Americans (Abbott, 2019). The most common method of execution was hanging, often in the presence of a mob who would keenly witness the event and sometimes partake in dismembering the bodies of the lynched (Abbott, 2019; Finnegan, 2013): "[African Americans] were hanged from trees, bridges, and telephone poles. Victims were often tortured and mutilated before death: burned alive, castrated, and dismembered" (Digital History, 2019). Lynchings were used as public spectacles, announced in advance to attract an audience and carried out in almost festive atmospheres (Digital History, 2019). This contempt for black people is similarly represented in the play, in reverse, through Three's revulsion at any mention of the perpetrator's body. When she announces her decision, tucker green uses the past participle of the verb 'hang' which denotes hanging an animal or other inanimate object: "I want him hung" and "I heard the bowels let go after a body's been hung … That the body shits itself. By itself." (p.58). Three's disgust by the thought of the perpetrator's body is a remembrance of the victims of lynching and the dehumanisation of black people.

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[22] Named after Charles Lynch (1736-1796), a farmer and justice of the peace from Virginia who punished outlaws during the American Revolution (Abbott, 2019).

I therefore propose that tucker green, by summoning the most common method of punishment for innocent black people, challenges a modern audience to look at their present through the lens of a gruesome past. The play can be seen as a reversal of this dark history, with a black woman exacting the same kind of punishment on a white man who is *not* innocent. This scene elicited laughter in both productions I attended: (*hang,* 2019; *hang,* 2022). Similarly, a review of the 2015 Royal Court production notes that the play has such "pitch-black humour that laughs pop like gasps in reverse" (Trueman, 2015). Based on these reactions, and in a certain sense, I argue that the audience watching the play and laughing at its dark humour are placed in a position akin to the mob who dressed up and travelled to witness the lynchings of African Americans. Whereas the modern audience would be laughing at an unreal situation, the laughter is complex because it resembles the celebratory atmosphere the white audiences created while watching the torture and slow deaths of black people. This reversed situation can make the audience look back at history and feel, in a very real way, the extent of the cruelty to which many white people subjected, and continue to subject, black people.

Furthermore, many of the African American victims of lynching were falsely accused of raping white women. Proponents and executors of lynching produced negative stereotypes about black men's sexual energy, but the stereotypes masked economic, social and political fears of the emancipation of the former slaves. The violence only masked the anticipation of many white Americans in the South of social upheaval (Gunning, 1996, pp.3-8). Investigative journalist and activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931) exposed how white women would accuse black men of rape to cover their consensual relationship with them. She draws on these examples of black men who were acquitted by the jury to point out the widespread unfounded accusations of rape that black men faced. She also gives examples of black men who spoke out that they were in

consensual relationships with white women but were lynched nonetheless. Wells exposes the double standards and injustice against the black people in the Southern states, especially that white men who raped black women were routinely acquitted (Wells-Barnett, 1892). I relate this to the unspecified crime that the perpetrator committed against Three in *hang*. The unmentioned and unmentionable crime is strongly suggested to be rape, which I argue can be taken as another allusion to the lynching of African Americans.

Micheal Pearce (2020) makes similar connections between the play and US history and analyses the play within the framework of black rage. He argues that tucker green shares more stylistic features and ideological perspectives with African American authors, playwrights and artists than she does with white British playwrights. He sees Three as an embodiment of black rage which intellectuals including James Baldwin and bell hooks advocated for as an empowering and legitimate response to racial injustice (pp.24-25):

> Rage is Three's weapon against becoming re-victimized. One and Two's constant offers provoke Three until she can no longer contain her fury and her clipped lines succumb to monologues of anguish and recrimination. (p.31)

Pearce also interprets Three's trembling hands, the only physical description that the readers get about Three other than her race, as a reflection of this rage. The reference and extended solidarity with African American history and struggle, as Pearce puts it, is most prominently given form by the choice of hanging and the heavily suggested reference to rape. He writes:

> Three's memory of the perpetrator presents him as fragmented and disembodied—a wicked ghostly presence that haunts her. The only physical details of the perpetrator provided are his blue eyes. This image of a masked face sinisterly recalls the hoods worn by the Ku Klux Klan. This association, combined

> with the knowledge that he will be hanged, speaks to, and reverses, the practice of lynching. The fact that this revelation is couched within a description of what suggests a rape, taken with the knowledge that Three has decided to have him hanged, also speaks to and reverses the taboo of black men having sex with white women, a 'crime' which often resulted in lynching. (p.37)

tucker green reverses the traumatic past that has victimized many black people to the modern age to shed light on the ongoing inequality and violence that plagues black people as ethnic minorities in the West. She combines the common strands between the past and the "nearly now" events of the play of hanging, vigilante justice, racial tension, unhelpful and laughable representatives of the legal system and an audience.

tucker green's representation of trauma from the US, a space and time different from where she lives, can also be interpreted using the theory of intergenerational or transgenerational trauma. Balaev (2008) explains that the theory of intergenerational trauma suggests that trauma can be passed across generations and experienced by individuals or groups who have not directly witnessed it. It can be passed on through verbal or written means to a generation which share the same ethnicity, race, nationality and/or religion as the group who were directly subjected to traumatisation. As she argues:

> The theory indicates that a massive trauma experienced by a group in the historical past can be experienced by an individual living centuries later who shares a similar attribute of the historical group, such as sharing the same race, religion, nationality, or gender due to the timeless, repetitious, and infectious characteristics of traumatic experience and memory. (p.152)

Holocaust theorists Dori Laub and Dominick LaCapra argued that this kind of vicarious traumatisation is transmitted through listening to witness testimony, which can make the secondary witness "take over some of the traumatic burden" (Codde, 2009, p.62). LaCapra makes a similar claim that listening to traumatic experiences can result in "empathic unsettlement". The listener would develop empathy towards the trauma victim and be traumatised vicariously (Codde, 2009, p.62). The theory, argues Balaev, suggests that "a person's contemporary identity can be 'vicariously traumatized' by reading about a historical narrative or due to a shared genealogy that affords the ability to righteously claim the social label of 'victim' as part of personal or public identity" (2008, p.152). The experience of the Middle Passage and the ensuing slavery of millions of Africans in the West, particularly in America and Britain, forms a shared history of black people who were forcibly transferred from their homes to become slaves in a foreign land, the Middle Passage being only the beginning of 'hell' (Dragulescu, 2018, pp.270-283). It was followed by major traumatic events that have shaped African American identity, including the lynching during the Jim Crow era (Dragulescu, 2018, p.271). My analysis reads *hang* as an expression of the race-based trauma which tucker green has inherited from Black history. She has the black woman exact the same kind of punishment that white people meted out on blacks in very similar sham "trials" or rather vigilante justice. The play therefore evokes a violent past to warn about the present and the near future.

Finally, I consider *hang*'s ending to be a *coup de théâtre*. From the moment that One and Two introduce the letter from the perpetrator to Three, tucker green builds up the tension and the audience is tested as to whether this development in the case will mitigate her anger and make her change her mind about her decision to have her attacker hanged. A subtle hint in the character's physical features, the recurrent tremor in her hand that I have discussed, becomes

more visible as the tension reaches an all-time high. However, the play ends as soon as she reads the letter and without any indication that she has changed her mind. At the theatre, the ending is potentially confusing to the audience who have not read the playtext. In both of the productions I attended, the audience waited after the blackout for a few seconds, holding back applause as they were unsure that the play was over. It is a *coup de théâtre* in the sense that the events, unexpectedly, *do not change*. tucker green effectively maintains the status quo for the white perpetrator, in the hope that this brings some normality to the victim and her family, for whom the status quo is also frustratingly and irreversibly unchanged.

In this section, I have argued that tucker green uses the two prevalent techniques of reversal and challenging the audience's perception to demonstrate the traumatisation of Three and her family. She uses the technique of reversal to show the irreversible effects of racially aggravated crime, where the functions of physical touch, medicine and narrative break down. Whereas the predominant model of trauma theory in the West prescribes talk therapy, *hang* suggests that this model is not applicable to racial minorities and cannot be considered universally valid. Whilst most attempts at trauma resolution and recovery constitute narrative, tucker green foregrounds the voice of the victim to keep the focus on retributive justice. Furthermore, I have argued that silence in the play is a multi-faceted tool, which indicates cultural norms and traditions practiced in the face of trauma rather than being symptomatic of traumatisation. Seen in this light, *hang* therefore expands our understanding of the effect of racial trauma, and the means of responding to it. The entire play hinges on the concept of swift retributive justice and presents it as the only viable response to racial violence, rather than medication, narrative or other trauma therapy tools. I also connected *hang* to the transatlantic and intergenerational trauma of lynching, as the play evokes hanging as a method of punishment in a

country (UK) where the death penalty has been abolished. In the next part of this chapter, I examine tucker green's use of reversal and challenging the audience's perception in *stoning mary* as a means of shedding light on traumas of marginalized people.

stoning mary

tucker green's *stoning mary* (2005) is an earlier example of the playwright's concern with the issues of vigilante justice and the trauma that marginalized groups experience. As in *hang*, *stoning mary* presents a nightmarish vision where victims carry out sentences against their perpetrators. The play is written in her signature style which includes repeated, overlapping and one-word lines, silences and ellipses. She also includes Ego characters who give voice to the characters' hidden feelings. tucker green specifies that the play is "Set in the country it is performed in" (p.2) and features characters who are all white. In the remainder of this chapter, I consider the implications of the play's setting and choice of white characters to argue that these are dramaturgical tools seeking to awaken tucker green's audience into a new awareness of the consequences of racial inequality and the suffering of marginalized groups. I also demonstrate how the play represents Stef Craps' and Laura S. Brown's theories on postcolonial trauma and how the event-based model of trauma does not include the experiences of marginalised and disempowered people. I also draw on Babette Rothschild's theory of the connection between the senses and sensory perception on the one hand and traumatic experiences on the other, and Achille Mbembe's commentary on the body in the context of poverty, colonialism and apartheid. I frame my analysis within tucker green's use of reversal and challenging the audience's perception as a means of representing the traumas of marginalized people.

stoning mary consists of three plotlines which converge towards the end: a couple identified as Husband and Wife, who suffer from AIDS but have to choose who gets the

prescription for the medication because of their poverty; a woman, Mary, condemned to death by stoning and seeking to be pardoned by a petition; a mother and father, identified as Mum and Dad, who lost their child and argue over their memories of him. Eventually their child, who is recruited as a child soldier, kills Husband and Wife, and it is revealed that they are Mary's parents, leading her to kill the child in revenge. The play ends with the child's mother, Mum, picking up the first stone to carry out Mary's sentencing herself. Each of the plotlines is signposted with a title in text and in performance. In the first production at the Royal Court Theatre, London, the titles were displayed in neon light and hovered over the action of the play and the back wall (de Jongh, 2005, p.424; Segal, 2005, p.425). As the audience watched, the titles "The AIDS Genocide. The Prescription", "Stoning Mary" and "The Child Soldier", respectively, would appear giving the only context to an otherwise fluid setting. The three plotlines alternate through the scenes, a technique that Elaine Aston describes as layering (2020, pp.151-167). Aston analyses the form of the play within the tradition of black writing, especially in comparison to the work of African American poet and playwright Ntozake Shange whom tucker green cites as one of her influences (Gardner, 2005). Shange's work is an amalgamation of poetry, music and dance. In a similar vein, Aston shows that tucker green structures her plays using a synthesis of theatre and poetry, forgoing the European tradition of realist playwriting that feature a linear exposition, crisis and resolution. Instead, tucker green creates a circular, layered play that gyrates around the crisis (2020, p.154). Indeed, Aston demonstrates how *stoning mary*'s very structure helps reflect its main themes of cycles of violence and traumatization that can be inescapable, a point that I will further analyse under the subsection "A Trial of the Senses".

A Question of Setting

tucker green's specification that the play is "set in the country it is performed in" (p.2) resituates the audience to a different setting than the here and now of a stage in Britain. The setting brings the trauma of other nations or marginalized groups onto the British stage. However, she retains the demographic of most of the audience, as all the characters are white and have working-class, South-east English accents (Hanks, 2005, p.428). tucker green justifies her dramaturgical choices by stating:

> I'm a black woman … I write black characters. That is part of my landscape. But with *Stoning Mary* I was interested in questioning what we don't see and hear. The stories of people who would be in the headlines every day if what was happening to them was happening to white people. It happens all the time … We're always hearing what is happening to the white farmers but what about the black political activists who are also being killed? Where are the news stories about them? (Gardner, 2005)

The disparity between the subject matter of the play and tucker green's choice of white characters reflect a central interest in perception. From the beginning, tucker green challenges the audience's perception by defamiliarizing their experience of an all-white cast. The audience sees white skins but hears the traumas of people from another race. For myself, as someone who is developing analysis in response to the text but has not seen the live production, I find myself imagining that the characters are black, and I always have to remind myself that they are not. This confusion in my perception as a reader goes to show that tucker green's subversive choice is effective in making an audience look at the trauma of the other with fresh eyes. Commenting on the outlandish setting, Elaine Aston notes that the play's production "pulled audiences into an experiential mode of imagining 'what if' the atrocities, hardships, and injustices happening in

parts of Africa were happening here … *stoning mary* impresses upon audiences the need to be sensitized, rather than desensitized, to problems in Africa" (2010, p.588). She also draws parallels between the play and Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995), which is set in Leeds, but whose events gradually develop to represent war-torn Bosnia. tucker green's choice and representation of characters is the first and perhaps the primary example of challenging the audience perception.

The nature of the setting and the characters' race, however, were not well met by some of the critics who reviewed the play's debut. Writing in *The Telegraph*, Charles Spencer (2005) drew attention to the production's specific locale:

> It is undoubtedly a jolt to hear such issues debated by white actors in estuary English. And Green's point, presumably, is that we would take such horrors more seriously, and do more to find a solution to them, if they were being experienced by whites in Britain rather than blacks in Africa …
>
> If Green had shown black Africans behaving so selfishly and cruelly in their distress, I suspect she would have been accused of racism. Western whites are always fair game, of course, but there is a failure of compassion here that I found deeply depressing.

Spencer's concern that the play is an affront to Western whites - a sweeping generalisation which tucker green does not claim - rather than being irked that these traumatic experiences are happening to anyone at all only proves the validity of her choice. Michael Billington, reviewing the play for *The Guardian*, also questions the efficacy of her choice of locale, stating that "the action appeared to happen in some abstract no-man's land" (2005). However, confining the action to one place may have made the audiences feel distanced, whereas as I see it, the play's fluid setting jolts them to witness the uncomfortable truths that may otherwise be ignored. Both

critics also assume that the play is a reference to Africa, but this presumption can limit the play's potential; if the traumas are to be looked at individually, they could also be that of impoverished people or people resorting to vigilante justice in the West. I argue that on the one hand, it challenges an audience in Britain to witness the trauma of other places: this is a technique that tucker green would also adopt in *hang*, subverting the expectations of a predominantly white audience. *stoning mary* can be viewed as implicitly posing the question of how an audience would feel or react if this is the kind of society they live in, where vigilantism is a valid method of implementing justice. It can have the effect of alienating the audience who may think "this can never happen to us because we are white". I contend that tucker green's subversion suggests that the audience would not *see* or give appropriate attention to the trauma of the other unless this other shares the same race and socioeconomic background as them. This view is supported by Lynette Goddard's observation that:

> as such issues are not prominent in the West it is easy to become desensitised to these global atrocities of violence and abuse. Her portrayal signals the importance of being aware of issues about which Western audiences might have become complacent because mediatised representations mean that they are viewed as distant concerns that happen 'over there'. (2015, p.127)

Indeed, I would argue that tucker green calls on the British audience's empathy and at the same time calls them out on their lack of empathy towards what is happening elsewhere. In sum, she uses a deliberately fluid setting to highlight racial inequality and to challenge her audience into seeing the traumas of marginalized and violence-ridden communities.

The dissonance between setting and subject-matter on the one hand, and the characters' race on the other, recalls Achille Mbembe's analysis of the black body. In *Critique of Black*

Reason (2017), he argues that many falsehoods and imaginary attributes were forced on black people within colonial discourses, forming what he calls a "calcified shell" (p.39). It is this *casing*, Mbembe explains, that encloses black people's real lives and identities, thereby transforming them into bodies that can be exploited for labour (pp.38-40). I relate this theory to *stoning mary* in the sense that tucker green removes Mbembe's calcified shell in order for the audience to see the reality of black people living in conflict in a postcolonial world. It is a reality, nonetheless, far removed from Mbembe's description of a vibrant and thriving existence. Instead, it is of suffering and waste under the mill of colonialism and imperialism. His view of the calcified shell is helpful in explaining why tucker green breaks through this casing and makes the overarching reversal of race in the play.

Expanding Trauma

Trauma is represented in the play as a sense of constant as well as impending doom, "a continuing background noise rather than an unusual event", as Laura S. Brown describes prolonged traumatization (1995, p.103). The stoning of Mary is anticipated throughout the play, giving an omen of a trauma that is yet to happen. Unlike the event-based model of PTSD which Stef Craps criticizes as too restrictive to encompass different racial and cultural experiences of trauma, the trauma in *stoning mary* is expanded, diffused and widespread. He argues that cultural trauma theory "continues to adhere to the traditional event-based model of trauma, according to which trauma results from a single, extraordinary, catastrophic event" (2015, p.31) and explains that the history of trauma theory from Freud to Caruth presents a model of trauma centred on an accident that disrupts an otherwise 'ordinary' human experience (2015, p.31). He argues that this structure excludes the experience of racism which, in his own words, "is not related to a particular event, with a before and an after … after all, for many disempowered groups, as we

have seen, trauma is a constant presence" (2015, pp.32-33). The constant presence is similarly represented in the play as Mary's stoning looms. I argue that *stoning mary* attests to the validity of Craps' theory which insists that the event-based model of trauma does not account for the experiences of marginalised and disempowered people. The play shows the consequences of racial inequality and a judicial system that leaves individuals to fend for themselves and carry out their own justice. There are no specific events of racial abuse, and the very structure of the play reflects how racism and the traumatisation it causes does not have a simple beginning or an end. The play begins, ends, and is interspersed with, the threat of death, as well as actual death, resulting from injustice and inequality.

I argue that *stoning mary* dramatizes the position that racial inequality cannot be undone by personal resolution for traumas. The play offers no closure or resolution to traumas of such magnitude as dire poverty, enlisting children as soldiers (armed conflict or guerilla warfare) and all the misfortunes that ensue. This sense of doom has the characters, even though they are related to one another, at each other's throats. Furthermore, the intensity and despondency of their situation leaves no room for empathy among themselves or among members of society as depicted in the play. For example, both Husband and Wife try to save themselves from the current doom at the expense of the other. The Older Sister does not empathise with her younger sister, Mary, who faces certain stoning. As the trauma intensifies and spreads, the social support systems break down. Their tense exchange, shadowed by their Ego characters, initially anticipates a premature death from AIDS. However, they are eventually killed by the child soldier, implying that those whose lives poverty and sickness spare, will die in the spiral of violence in the end. There is no resolution or escape.

A Trial of the Senses

In the same way that tucker green jars the audience's (and potentially a reader's) sensory perception, the senses and sensory perception are a recurring motif in the play. The characters call upon their partners' tactile, visual, auditory and olfactory senses to communicate their agony and to remember their past. They also condemn each other's, and by extension the wider society's, failure to see or hear their suffering, and society's reluctance to end it. As some contemporary psychiatrists and therapists have theorized, the senses are closely linked to traumatic experience. Rothschild (2000) examines at length the role of the senses in experiencing and storing traumatic memories. She explains that unconscious memory stores information in the form of emotions, conditioning, senses and automatic skills and procedures. She also notes that traumatic memories are more often stored in implicit or unconscious memory, as opposed to the explicit or conscious memory of cognition, facts and verbal information (pp.29-31). This can explain why "individuals with PTSD suffer inundation of images, sensations, and behavioral impulses (implicit memory) disconnected from context, concepts and understanding (explicit memory)" (p.35). The memories of the senses are therefore unconscious, like traumatic memories, and this creates a strong connection between them. The senses are strongly linked to storing and retrieving traumatic memories since, as Rothschild points out: "The sum total of experience, and therefore all memory, begins with sensory input. It is through the senses that one perceives the world … It is through the senses that reality takes form" (pp.38-39). This makes the senses the basis of all experiences in general and traumatic ones in particular; the first point of contact between the self and the outside world. This theory also explains why traumatic experiences are mostly non-verbal and are felt in the body before the mind can process it or the tongue can explain it.

stoning mary repeatedly references the senses and the characters remember their past through sensory memory. The first sense called upon in the opening lines of the play is tactility. Scene 1 presents Husband and Wife's quarrel over the prescription and is entitled "The AIDS Genocide. The Prescription". Many reviewers (Bassett, 2005; Letts, 2005; Segal, 2005; pp.424-428) hypothesise that the scenes represent the suffering of black Africans. The AIDS epidemic spread in many sub-Saharan African countries in the 1980s and 1990s. tucker green clearly implicates racial inequality in the death of AIDS victims in Africa, therefore she alters the title to refer to the epidemic as genocide. AIDS often results in drastic loss of weight, therefore it was referred to as slim disease (*The History of Aids in Africa*, 2015). Similarly, Wife argues with her Husband to let her live by calling upon his tactile sense: "If you'd putcha hands – put your hands on me – If you'd put your hands on me then you'd know – " (p.3) and repeats the same demand, with shaking hands. tucker green uses implicature, and Wife does not say what he will find out, but the "AIDS Genocide" sign in the theatre space indicates a body that is wasting away. She presents her shaking hands, but he points out that his hands are just as shaky and so he needs the prescription too. tucker green uses the unusual device of impersonating their egos. The ego characters voice the inner feelings of the characters and the egos fight. Not only does Husband refuse to hold Wife, but he also avoids her gaze. He also briefly falls silent, prompting her to ask many times "You got nuthin to say?" (p.6). Instead of acknowledging her illness, he tells her that she looks fine and well. Their mutual accusations revolve around their inability to see or feel each other's suffering both metaphorically and through their senses. I also read Wife's incessant question as a projection on the audience themselves and relate it to tucker green's own observation that there is little news about Africa in the media (Gardner, 2005). The question

indicates the moral apathy of people who see others languishing in disease and not saying anything in solidarity or support.

The following scenes involving Husband and Wife further develop and demonstrate the struggle between them. She accuses her husband of being selfish, of never taking care of her when she fell ill. She also makes it clear that they have to choose between them who can have the prescription because they can only afford enough medicine for one person. Their argument shows how massive and prolonged traumas such as life-threatening illness compounded by poverty can sever the ties of the closest family members. Their repetition of the phrases "Till death do us apart" (p.5) and "In sickness and in health" (p.14) rings hollow in this context. The phrases, traditionally said in church wedding vows as a promise of a married couple caring and loving one another no matter the circumstances, change their meaning due to the couple's urgent need for the scarce medication. The sacred vows have become tools of manipulation and each of the couple uses them now to remind the other of their failure to uphold them in their time of need. Instead, Husband and Wife get into a fight of survival of the fittest. Their fight is the trauma of choosing who is going to survive.

The conflict between Husband and Wife recalls Mbembe's keen observation of the deterioration of the body in catastrophic conditions. He explains that postcolonial thinking entails analysing not only how the colonized live under the "beast's regime" but also how they die because of it, asserting that: "In the context of extreme poverty, of extreme racialization, and of the omnipresence of death, the body is the first to be affected, the first to be hurt" (Eurozine, 2008). With *stoning mary* starting with Wife's plea to her husband to see how far she is withering away, the play aptly embodies Mbembe's view. All three facets of postcolonial life are intertwined in the play – dire poverty, racialization and the constant risk of death – making the

body the first victim of colonisation. It is worth noting that the deathly consequences of colonisation are also evident in tucker green's *generations* (2005). Family members discuss food and cooking, but keep disappearing one by one throughout the scenes, leaving Grandad saying "This thing. This dying thing … This unease. This dis-ease" and Grandma crying "Oh God" repeatedly (p.84). Both plays show the consequences of these layers of traumatisation through the bodies of their characters, as they disappear both gradually and suddenly. Mbembe's assertion explains why the play begins with a call to pay attention to the body, and how the continuation of the violence will make the bodies disappear as the characters are killed offstage.

The only visible killing machine in the play is, tragically, the Child Soldier. The play is interspersed with his appearance as a spectre-like figure. His sudden and ominous appearance to Husband and Wife, with his blooded machete, adds another layer to their struggle and their suffering. He silently hovers around them, a visual representation of the horrors of war:

> **Husband** *and* **Wife** *(from 'The Prescription').*
>
> *The* **Child Soldier** *still holds his machete.*
>
> Husband There's nuthin –
>
> Wife there is / nuthin –
>
> Husband there is nothing –
>
> Wife we don't have –
>
> Husband nothing – we don't / got – (p.35)

Husband and Wife jointly tell him that they have no food, very little money and few rings. What he wants is the prescription and he only utters one word: "Beg" (p.41). His appearance ruins their life and destroys what is left of it, sealing their fate, as he kills them offstage. No one ultimately survives these multiple inequalities of abject poverty, terminal illness and armed conflict.

Sensory memory also forms the crux of the arguments between Mum and Dad about their child; the Child Soldier. In each of the scenes involving them, they talk about how they remember their now absent child through different senses: his voice, his smell, his touch and how he looks. However, their sensory memory is a point of debate between them and they argue about how accurate their pre-traumatic memories are. tucker green shows how traumatic experience can make the senses an unreliable catalyst for memory. Tension rapidly rises between them as they disagree on whose description of the physical features of the child as well as his smell is accurate. They are in essence questioning the ability of their own memory to register what their senses have seen and lived with. The loss or distortion of the senses is a common consequence of traumatic experience. Jean-Martin Charcot studied sensory loss, since it was one of the common reported symptoms of hysteria, famously concluding that sensory loss, alongside other symptoms such as motor paralyses and convulsions, were the consequence of psychological trauma (Herman, 1997, p.11). Recent studies have provided more information about why traumatized people's sensations can be numbed or distorted. The studies conducted by Ruth Lanius in 2004 on patients with chronic PTSD concluded that:

> [Traumatised people] had learned to shut down the brain areas that transmit the visceral feelings and emotions that accompany and define terror. Yet in everyday life, those same brain areas are responsible for registering the entire range of emotions and sensations that form the foundation of our self-awareness. (van der Kolk, 2014, pp.91-92)

In other words, in the same way that a traumatic memory can be accurately or partially remembered or forgotten, sensory memory can be similarly affected. The child soldier's parents

struggle among each other to reproduce an accurate memory of him. Mum remembers the child lovingly and affectionately through her various senses:

Mum To watch … to watch him. Lovin that … To hold him – his hands his fingers – fingertips, onto him, onto his gaze – into his gaze … To have that to hold …

To smell. Have his smell. Smell his smell, smell his smell on him – smell his smell on me …

Miss it. Umm …Touch. Touch him. Doin that – (pp.18-19)

The mother's sensory memories of her missing child reflect a strong bond between them. As she remembers him, she describes the physical and olfactory aspect of her memory of him as it is the most concrete factor to hold on to and the most entrenched in her traumatized mind.

Dad, however, describes an opposing version of the Child Soldier's physical memory. He describes a violent, sinister child whose presence used to be menacing:

To watch – to watch him. Watch how he'd watch. Watch how he'd watch back. Watch how he'd watch me back. Watch your back while he's watching you. Watch yourself while he's watching. There's that. There was that. (p.20)

He then describes their child as a mere extension of his mother, who is smothered in her disgusting cheap smell as he puts it (pp.21-22). He continues his verbal abuse of his family by saying "you're like them monster seeds spreadin their monster selves outta their monster labs over the happily growin natural shit that was already there, happy growin in the field" (p.23). This scene, and the scenes that follow where the argument between them continues about who is the seed for the monster that has become the Child Soldier, shows a setting of domestic violence that has spurted to produce a killing machine. As he describes how they constantly had to be on

the lookout for violence inside their house and to watch each other, a circle of violence is exposed that has no beginning nor end. This is another example of what I have argued is the diffused and constant trauma that afflicts the lives of people trapped in violent households and, by extension, violent communities.

The cycle of violence continues when the Child Soldier returns home in Scene Nine. The stage directions indicate that he appears passive and silent throughout the scene. It is unclear whether he is only a product of Mum's imagination. She also confronts her husband about his verbal and physical abuse of the child (pp.51-52). As an alleged abuser, he sees his child as no more than an animal and this is reflected in how each of them describes their child's voice. For Dad, he "barks his demands and shouts his curses", whereas for Mum, he simply speaks (p.51). However, she confesses for the first time that she is terrified of her son. The play paints a picture of a violence that spirals out of a domestic setting and returns to entrap them. Mum expresses her terror as if her son is not sitting next to her. This ghostly presence of the Child Soldier continues in Scene Eleven. The encounter is awkwardly filled with silences. Mum finds that she cannot communicate to him directly, whereas Dad can, unlike what she is keen on pointing out earlier. Their conversation is not straightforward, but is rather a loop between the three characters, as if their perception is distorted and they have to communicate *through* one another rather than to each other.

The scenes which include the conversations between Older Sister and the eponymous Mary similarly share the themes of constant trauma, the subsequent severed family ties and the senses. Before Mary appears onstage, the audience know from the very title that the play is at least partially about her stoning. This creates an ominous sense of a trauma waiting to happen, a now obsolete method of punishment in the Western world which will take place onstage in a

Western country. It creates an atmosphere of anticipation – perhaps terror – especially since she does not appear until the second half of the play in Scene Eight. The scenes involving Mary being visited by Older Sister in prison are also entitled "Stoning Mary". Their initial encounter focuses on Mary, whom tucker green also gives the name Younger Sister, wearing new eyeglasses. The sisters' conversation about poor eyesight and visual impairment becomes a metaphor for foresight or the lack thereof. Again, tucker green summons the senses to highlight the characters' traumatisation. In the literal sense, Older Sister laments the fact that her sister was prescribed and given a pair of eyeglasses while in prison whereas she is too poor or neglected to have this *privilege*: "I could be [going blind] an no one would care no one would give a fuck" (p.45). She describes someone living at the fringe of society, uncared for and lacking the (financial) ability to take care of themselves.

Even though Older Sister's tone is unsympathetic, and she only begrudgingly visits her sister, I argue that she shows a hint of sorrow if we consider the metaphorical use of seeing. Older Sister is wary of Mary seeing the outside community for their apathetic reality. She tells her: "see – what, what – and what? So's yous can see what you're doin better – see yourself doin nuthin in here better'n you did before – see what they're doin to you better'n that – you can see what they gonna do better still" (p.46). As she informs her sister in Scene Ten, only 12 people have signed a petition that would save her from being stoned, whereas she needed 6,000 signatures (p.56). tucker green's vision is that of a society ruled by random and selective sympathies. Rather than being judged according to the facts of the case, it is the society who can save her life or effectively kill her. This massive form of vigilante justice also bears truth to the history of black Americans. Similar to the technique in *hang*, the play reverses the situation of white Americans gleefully watching as African Americans were lynched, in a 'punishment'

mostly based on unfounded accusations. Mary similarly refers to the spectacle expected to take place on the day of her stoning: “They’re expectin crowds. / They’re expectin a good crowd. / If they get good weather” (p.61). The reversal is a very powerful technique that tucker green uses to indict the injustice that face black people. By bringing the barbaric practice of public executions to the contemporary stage, she is commenting on the other forms of injustice and habitual racism that black people face.

When Mary realises how her community has failed her, she delivers the longest, most forceful monologue in the play. She specifically vents her anger at the feminists who did not support her. It is simultaneously a criticism of the white majority of feminists that excludes and ignores the experiences of racial minorities. She asks where the different movements within feminism are, including the womanist, feminist, black, mainstream, rebel, underground “bitches”, as she repeats incessantly (pp.61-63) and angrily points out that feminism’s different waves, regardless of its members’ gender, social class, or political views, invariably fail a woman like her and abandon her to her fate. tucker green presents Mary as a victim of a community that only claims to be progressive but leaves her to her doom without signing the petition or protesting for her acquittal, because she is poor. Elaine Aston (2010) describes listening to this speech in the theatre, herself being a feminist, as having a bitter aftertaste. She examines the play as an example of plays by women that represent what she describes as a loss of feminism. Aston argues that the plays she examines, which include Caryl Churchill’s *This is a Chair* (1999) and Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995), attempt to make audiences feel the failure of feminism by creating a strong impression on them of the consequences of this loss. As far as *stoning mary* is concerned, Aston argues that it combines a world of terror and a domestic setting where the lack of sympathy has ravaged even the closest family ties: “Black, female, and angry about the

inequalities between First and Third World countries, tucker green distils her anger into trenchant critiques of a Western failure to care for 'others'" (p.588). Mary's outburst holds particular power in expressing this view. The loss or failure of feminism which Aston hypothesises makes it impossible to empathise with other women or argue for a feminist movement which can support all women. The speech can be read as a "condemnation of feminism for creating the false impression of a genuine care and responsibility for women" (p.590). Indeed, Mary's speech exposes many layers of injustice against women; injustice against black women, injustice against poor (black women), and injustice against women who take matters of justice into their own hands. Maggie Inchley (2020) relates Mary's monologue to the sisters' earlier conversation about seeing: "With her new spectacles, it is as if Younger Sister now senses and understands her own abjection, and the callousness of all women who have failed to show solidarity" (p.177). Her sister refusing to attend her stoning as a gesture of solidarity in Scene Fifteen only reinforces this failure.

The anticipated stoning of Mary is reserved for the last scene, which is made up entirely of gestures. The audience sees Mary having her hair shaved under the rain. The Child Soldier's mother picks up the first stone, and the scene cuts before the stoning happens. tucker green uses a similar strategy in *hang* where she ends the play at a moment of great tension and anticipation. Keeping the violent ending offstage suggests an attempt not to divert the audience's attention in the final moments from all that the play has offered. While rain is traditionally regarded as a metaphor of redemption and renewal, the final scene of the stoning continues the loop of violence without offering hope or relief of this kind. The final image is that of an individual taking justice into her own hands while (a few) others watch in a ticketed entertainment event. I

also interpret the scene as a mirroring of the experience of seeing the play, as the audience watch the suffering of Mary and it is left to them how much solidarity they can show her.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that debbie tucker green invites her audience to listen to the trauma of the other through reversing the stories of black Africans with white people and challenging the audience's perception. In my view, the strategy of having white characters in both plays works effectively to challenge the perception of a predominantly white audience. The visual impact of the characters as well as tucker green's remarkably forceful language can make the audience listen, perhaps uneasily, to the trauma of the other. Had the characters not been white, the play could hardly have had the same effect or similarly caught the critics' attention. My analysis has also revealed the ways in which the plays expand the concept of trauma as it is used in the founding texts of the field of trauma theory. The traditional definition of trauma as a single event which falls outside the range of everyday experiences excludes the experiences of racial inequality, dire poverty or people living in violent communities. tucker green shows the consequences of these three aspects of prolonged traumatisation in the play, as well as dysfunctional families, disconnected couples and people living in constant fear. Further, I have related tucker green's focus on sensory perception and memory in *stoning mary* to how traumatic memories are stored in the mind. Traumatic memories are primarily stored as sensory experiences and they are reexperienced in the same way, which in turn illuminates the way the characters describe their losses and their pain according to what they have seen, touched and smelled.

As a final word, I note that when I was writing the first version of this section on *stoning mary*, African American George Floyd died of asphyxiation after police officer Derek Chauvin

pressed on his chest while arresting him in full view of onlookers, sparking global protests (CNN, 2020). Many social media users have employed the reversal technique to point out the particularly brutal violence that black people can be subjected to (for example, at the time of an arrest) as compared to white people. They showed examples of white people getting arrested without the police using lethal force. The ensuing protests became a hallmark in the Black Lives Matter movement, a topic which tucker green also covers in her latest play to date *ear for eye*. Instead of using reversal, she tackles racist perceptions of black people in the US and the UK head on and denotes that instances of systemic racism are a continuation of the British and Jamaican slave codes, which she includes verbatim in the play. An awareness of that wider context inevitably charged my thinking and writing. Within this global movement, tucker green's technique still holds considerable power to bring forth and critique racial inequality onstage.

Chapter 4: Designing and Resisting Oppression in Nora Amin's *Theatre of Crime*

In this chapter, I analyse Egyptian playwright Nora Amin's *Masrah Al-Gareema* or *Theatre of Crime* (2019a), a one-act play depicting a sexual assault on a woman at the crowded gate of a theatre and the ensuing police investigation. My analysis of the play continues the line of inquiry I started with Philip Ridley's *Vincent River* and *Leaves of Glass* and debbie tucker green's *hang* and *stoning mary* into the effects of traumatic experience on the body and the mind and the different dramatic representations of trauma. In the preceding chapters I examined the cause and effect of theatrical devices that the dramatists use to perform traumatic experiences in their plays, namely narration (Ridley) and ambiguity (tucker green). I argued that Ridley's dramatic device of reconstructing the traumatic event through narrative reflects a long-standing tradition in the Anglo-American world of "the talking cure" to heal trauma: *Vincent River* shows a possibility of healing through recounting stories, whereas *Leaves of Glass* shows the destructive consequences of not narrating the past. By contrast, tucker green uses ambiguity and uncertainty to present the traumatic experiences of black people and critique the conditions that produce them. In the current chapter, I continue this line of inquiry and extend it to analyse the socio-economic and political forces of oppression that give rise to traumatisation. I argue that Amin combines a naturalistic depiction of the assault with presentation of the victim and witnesses' testimonies, coupling this with the Forum Theatre model promoted by Brazilian theatre practitioner and activist Augusto Boal: together, these strategies as I show work to develop the audience's awareness of their collective responsibility in creating and changing the conditions that foster violence against women. I also argue that her use of these dramaturgical tools urges the spectators to change these conditions.

In addition, this chapter presents and draws on my original translation of Amin. Since the critical focus of the thesis is on the representation of trauma, I do not analyse the process of translation. However, I draw attention to some of my translation choices where this serves to illuminate my wider argument. A key point of translation arises at the outset, relating to Amin's Arabic title for the play, *Masrah Al-Gareema*, which draws on the double meaning of the phrase in Arabic. The word "masrah", which means theatre, is also used in legalese to denote a crime scene, and "gareema" means crime. *Masrah Al-Gareema* can be translated as either *Crime Scene,* or *Theatre of Crime*. I adopted the latter choice to call attention to what the audience are about to witness and I consider this translation an indictment of the greedy theatre managers who are responsible for what happens within its premises, and the prejudice of the police when handling sexual assault reports from women. This chapter is organised as follows: Firstly, I introduce some of Nora Amin's work and ideas about theatre and dance as a context for my analysis, and introduce *Masrah Al-Gareema* within the landscape of contemporary Egyptian theatre and society to highlight the play's timeliness and importance. I then shed light on Boal's theory of the Theatre of the Oppressed and Amin's practice of the technique. Thirdly, I highlight the set design of the play and how it brings its potential to life. I follow this by an analysis of the facets of oppression that the play presents, drawing on trauma and theatre scholarship, and arguing that the play conveys a belief in the power of theatre to subvert the status quo.

Theatre of Crime/Masrah Al-Gareema

Theatre of Crime takes place in two spaces: at the gate of a state-owned playhouse and in an investigation room. The scenes alternate between the gate setting (flashbacks) and the investigation of a woman (in the present). In the flashback scenes, two male friends arrive at the theatre to see a play performed by their friends. The fictional play is also entitled *Theatre of*

Crime, but its subject matter is not revealed at any point within the drama. As the audience begin to arrive and gather outside gradually, two security guards inexplicably shut the gate. Tension grows among the crowd as to when and if it will open, whereas the theatre manager makes a quick appearance simply stating that there are not enough spaces for everyone, and that VIPs are expected to show up. The situation prompts the audience to accuse the management of corruption and of relishing the power they wield over ordinary people. Heated arguments and scuffles break out among the growing crowd, who vent their frustration towards one another. The Woman that appears in the investigation scenes arrives at the theatre. The tension culminates when one of the men sexually assaults her by frottage. Unable to voice her distress, she begs to be admitted to the theatre before passing out in shock. Throughout the investigation scenes, the precise nature of the crime remains undisclosed; it is not until Scene Seven, when the assault is shown, that the audience is made aware of it. The investigator makes several accusations at the Woman, for example that she was asking for it, imagining it or that she fabricated the incident to promote a certain cause, to which she retorts that women face violence and harassment on a regular basis. The Investigator later takes statements from some of the witnesses who appear in the flashback scenes. These characters provide different perspectives, ranging from blaming the victim to expressing their fury at the theatre becoming the scene of a crime instead of the sanctuary they seek it to be. The investigation ends with the Molester walking free. This is when two of the theatre makers among the witnesses join the victim, vowing to change the events of the actual play (Amin's) with the help of the actual audience. The final scene is performed entirely in mime, with the actual theatre audience now situated as if they are in the earlier crowd where the crime took place. Amin loosely recreates the scene of the assault, although the stage directions suggest that the assault itself is not performed a second time. The Woman reaches out

to the actual audience, inviting their help: and as the stage directions state, the ending of the play is changeable according to their reaction and willingness to respond. This ending invites an analysis of *Theatre of Crime* as a Boalian play. My reading of it is informed by the Forum theatre technique of recreating the moment of oppression and inviting the audience to reshape the play – and by extension their reality – by responding to and undoing the forces that have produced it. While this critical perspective on the play is essentially my own, the legitimacy of this reading is reinforced by Amin's active engagement in Boal-based practice, as I establish in the next section.

About Nora Amin

Amin started her career as a dancer, which influenced and permeated her theatre and performance productions. She utilises the female body as a source of empowerment in her dances as well as her writings. As she describes at length in this interview, her dance performances seek to acknowledge and offer support to the traumatised women all over the world, and to liberate the female body from the limitations imposed on it in patriarchal societies:

> I have chosen to work with topics that are related to trauma, to migration, to discrimination and to aggression in general. I wanted the performances and dances that I do to support women across the world ... I think we have a universal history of trauma that is related to the patriarchal system and also to all the violence that has been imposed on the bodies of women across history and across cultures. In my performances and dance, I try to retrieve the ownership of my own body, and I try to express the beauty, the authenticity, the power, and also the pain, because the expression of the pain is the first step towards healing it – Nora Amin. (Women Performing Europe, 2021)

In addition to the intersection between dance and drama, Amin's theatre and works of criticism are also concerned with human rights. For example, she authored the first book on theatre and human rights in Arabic, *The Art of Claiming Our Right: The Egyptian Contemporary Theatre and Human Rights* (2000). She shares this concern with Augusto Boal, which inspired her to train in his Theatre of the Oppressed. In 2011, she founded the Egyptian National Project for Theatre of the Oppressed and trained hundreds of theatre practitioners in his radical participatory theatre method.

Similarly, Amin's book *Migrating the Feminine* (2016b) is a feminist treatise on the intersections of the female body, patriarchy, theatre (including Forum Theatre) and dance, the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, and racism. Amin's study offers insight into some of the themes that underlie *Theatre of Crime*, including the presence of the female body in the public space and the habituation of violence against women, specifically in patriarchal systems. She also explores how theatre and dance converge and engage with both topics. In the book, Amin details the experiences of her own body, as well as reflecting on the bodies of other Arab women living in the Arab world and Europe. She speculates on how the body adapts to the cultural norms and is conditioned by its surroundings. The conditioning can take the form of walking in a certain way, avoiding or maintaining eye contact and most importantly, the choice of dress. Adapting to one's surrounding, argues Amin, can result in the loss of one's self, and of being seen as "a social body": that is, a body shaped by its surroundings and losing its femininity, rather than being her true self. Nonetheless, she insists that:

> the presence of the female physicality in public space is in itself political. It disturbs the masculine order and re-identifies the public territory. The female

> presence challenges the paradigms of power and provokes trimming actions in order to confront the threat to the identity of the public sphere. (2016b)

Amin's argument proceeds from her recognition that the patriarchal system inherently makes the female inferior to the male. Women are *allowed* in public spaces by the perceived higher power of the male, but traces of oppression still exist not least in the fact that such 'permission' is required. This oppression, Amin suggests, forces women to adjust their physicality and their behaviour according to the norms and expectations of the male. This adjustment takes a distinctive form for herself, as a foreign woman living in Germany, where both her foreignness and her femaleness need to be "tamed", as she puts it (2016b).

The taming on the part of the male and the adaptation and conditioning on the part of the female can often lead to acts of violence. Amin gives several accounts of aggression and violence that she and other women have experienced in the Arab World and in Europe. She refers to the experience of women being continuously on guard for sexual harassment, interpreting it as a conflict within the harassers between their desire for the female body and an urge to "tame" it. She argues that it is an attempt to mould women into the position of victims so that the men can perpetuate their power. Referring to Egypt, she argues that sexual harassment has had major and long-term effects on women across generations, affecting "everything related to women's behaviour, dress codes, social attitudes, personal dignity and pride, communication, movement dynamics and the gender politics" as well as women's own relation to their gender, making femininity a source of "discomfort" and "shame" (2016b). As a result, she argues that many women develop a sense of shame and hatred towards their femininity, and therefore cope with the oppression by diminishing it.

It is within the walls of the theatre that Amin finds the freedom to express and explore her femininity and to communicate her feelings in public. As a performer, she consciously transforms her body into a tool for presenting a certain image of the self which is separate from the imposed social body: "[In the theatre,] I can move and dance and scream and fall in love, all in public. I can live a life that I cannot have outside" (2016b). In addition to the freedom that adopting multiple personas gives her as an actress, she also utilises dance as a form of freedom and even rebellion against the patriarchal society that seeks to extinguish her "inner flame" as she puts it. She therefore took up the profession of belly dancing which she practises to this day.

Literary and Socio-Political Context of *Theatre of Crime*

I argue that *Theatre of Crime* is a significant play for two reasons: its inclusion of audience participation in the mode of Forum Theatre and its subject-matter of sexual assault. Amin's choice of form is unusual and experimental especially in the context of non-comedic contemporary Egyptian theatre. It is an ambitious and bold contribution to the practice of Forum Theatre in Egypt that Amin initiated in 2004. Instances of audience participation and breaking down the fourth wall, whether scripted or impromptu, remain rare in Egyptian theatre and have largely been restricted to some of the enduringly popular comedies. Some of the most popular Egyptian plays, such as *Madraset El-Moshaghbeen* (School of Mischief) (1973), *El-Eyal Kebret* (The Kids are Grown Up) (1979) are recorded, shown time and again on TV and are also available on demand on Netflix at the time of writing. Even when the grim topic of serial killers Raya and Sakina, who wreaked havoc in Alexandria, Egypt in the early twentieth century was adapted to the theatre in 1980, their story was rewritten as a black comedy, presumably to attract a large audience. This unfamiliar mode of black comedy was successful, and the play eponymously entitled *Raya and Sakina* has been immensely popular ever since. I argue that the

popularity of these plays has inadvertently shaped the perspective of the Egyptian audience in two ways: first, theatre is mostly perceived as an escape from reality and a rest from the toil of everyday life; second, whether the plays are staged in mainstream or in fringe venues, audiences do not usually attend with the expectation of participating or even commenting beyond the usual reactions of laughter or shock, depending on the nature of the content. In this sense, drama and theatre are typically regarded as self-contained and fixed narratives, rather than as material that is open to the possibility of change.

Theatre of Crime is also compelling for its subject-matter. Sexual harassment and the socio-economic and political conditions that set the scene for it are pressing issues and a threat that many women and girls face regularly. For example, according to a 2013 U.N. Women report, 99.3% of Egyptian women have experienced some form of sexual harassment (El-Dabh, 2013). The issue came to light in 2006 after an incident of sexual harassment was recorded and shared by Egyptian bloggers. With the spread of blogs and private TV channels in the 2000s, both media offered more freedom to explore the issue that often includes implicit or explicit criticism of the authorities that they should do more to protect women in public spaces. Since 2020, the Egyptian social media scene has also been going through a "Me Too" moment. As an example, a group of anonymous, independent feminists set up a website, "ElModawana" or "The Blog", to publish anonymous testimonies of rape, abuse and assault by men. The group who founded the website wrote:

> Some of us are sexual violence survivors, and some have fought social and political battles to seize the right to speak up and to be believed, or for the criminals to be prosecuted. Some of us have recovered from this violence, while

> the rest are still on the road to recovery. We all believe that supporting each other is a crucial step in healing. (Elmodawana, 2020)

There have been similar initiatives on Facebook (the Speak-Up اتكلم/ي page) and Instagram (@assaultpolice).[23] These initiatives have been successful to an extent when some of the women, finding that they shared painfully similar stories with the same assailant, were encouraged to file lawsuits. Some of these perpetrators have been named and shamed on social media, arrested and are awaiting trial at the time of writing (BBC Arabic, 2021b). The wave of testimonies and the debate on sexual harassment also led to the Egyptian House of Representatives ratifying the law to make the punishment more severe (BBC Arabic, 2021a). Amin's play therefore comes at a time when the debate on sexual harassment is timely, relevant and important.

To date, *Theatre of Crime* has not been produced in Egypt or Germany, where Amin currently resides. In practice, the play could face obstacles to production because of its criticism of how the state operates (for example, the perceived value the regime puts on its buildings compared to people) and its frank depiction of sexual assault. Egypt's censorship law was passed in 1955 and monitors the production of film, advertisements, songs, plays, monologues and tapes/CDs (El-Waseef, 2017). The perceived aim of the law is to "protect public decency and the higher good of the state" (El-Waseef, 2017). Given *Theatre of Crime*'s potent content – dealing with both sexual assault and criticism of the state - it is likely either that the play would be rejected for performance, or that the dialogue would be watered down. For example, the assault would have to be presented symbolically, rather than in the graphic manner specified by Amin in

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[23] Speak Up اتكلم/ي Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=speak%20up%20%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%84%D9%85%2F%D9%8A, Assault Police Instagram page: https://www.instagram.com/assaultpolice/

the written text and which my translation has sought to preserve. Furthermore, an overt criticism of the regime, such as that voiced by the character Ali in Scene Eight, would either be censored or edited to be less confrontational: “This arrogant authority made enemies out of us, scrambling over bread or even going through a gate! Screw you all! Screw the public facilities that you idolise more than people!” (Amin, 2019a, p.56). To date and to the best of my knowledge, there has not been scholarly work on the play except for theatre critic Hatem Hafez’s introduction to the text and it only exists as a publication and in this thesis.

A Theatre of the Oppressed: From Brazil to Egypt

As a preface for my argument that Amin’s play is influenced by and can be read in context of the work of Augusto Boal (1931-2009), it is helpful to review briefly the socio-political background that gave rise to the Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre and the extent to which this context resembles the situation in Amin’s Egypt. Boal began his career as a playwright and director at the Arena Theatre of São Paulo, Brazil, during a time of economic and political turmoil. The Brazilian society was then, and is now, sharply divided into extremes of wealth and poverty, with the latest statistics indicating that 12.8% are living in poverty (McGeever, 2021). The poverty rate has been a pressing problem throughout the last 70 years, and so has political instability. The country experienced many military coups throughout the twentieth century. This has resulted in periods of political oppression, clamping down on civil liberties and censorship of the arts (Cords, 2019). It is in this climate that Boal spent 15 years at the Arena Theatre, from 1955 until the military authorities ordered his exile in 1971, initially showing foreign plays, but fostering new writing by national playwrights in the late 1950s.

In 1964, a military coup led to stricter measures and censorship of the arts, especially the theatre. As a result, the productions on Arena Theatre were driven to use new modes of

expression that could continue to address socially relevant issues but in different, sometimes subtler ways. For example, they developed a series of musicals that brought together Brazilian history, using Brechtian techniques alongside realism: by setting the play in the past, the artists were able to avoid forces of censorship in the present. During this phase, Boal introduced the concept of the Joker, a figure he would go on to develop within his practice of the Theatre of the Oppressed. The function of the Joker is to be a mediator between the characters and audience and to assist the audience's participation in the play. Meanwhile, the military dictatorship tightened its grip around the theatres, arresting and torturing theatre practitioners, including Boal (Britannica, 2024). The period of oppression culminated in his exile to Argentina in 1971.

During his years in exile, Boal formulated his concept of Theatre of the Oppressed, combining different dramatic techniques that serve to highlight the mechanism of exploitation and oppression using everyday situations (Coudray, 2017). He presented his theory in the eponymous book *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974) along with practical exercises that he went on to develop in later books including *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992) and *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy* (1995). He was directly influenced by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997), specifically Freire's theory of the pedagogy of the oppressed. Freire promoted an educational approach where students are more involved in their learning, rather than being passive recipients of information from their instructors. Freire proposed and practiced the method whereby educators would engage in conversation with Brazilians living in rural areas. The aim would be for the poorer students to recognise the political, economic and social manifestations of oppression and to be empowered to challenge them (Babbage, 2004, pp.18-19).

Building on Freirean principles, Boal developed the theory and practice of Theatre of the Oppressed, which aims to dismantle authoritarianism and give power back to the audience. He states that the main objective of the poetics of the oppressed is to change the spectators from watching passively to being actors and transformers of the dramatic action:

> The *poetics of the oppressed* focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change – in short, trains himself for real action. (1979, p.122)

Boal hypothesises that a history of theatre from the Greeks to the present day shows that theatre is a tool used to disseminate the worldviews of the ruling class. For instance, the Greek tragedies, according to Boal, implicitly conveyed a warning for the spectators not to go against the laws that maintained societal order. He argues that this hegemony of artistic poetics continued into the Middle Ages, whereby the perpetuation of the status quo was encouraged. Similarly, in the Renaissance, the masses were underrepresented and were subject to control of the minority bourgeoisie. According to Boal, Brecht was the first to change what he describes as a coercive system of drama, arguing that epic theatre shows theatre's potential as a tool for change: for Boal, epic theatre's movement of spectators from a passive to an intellectually active position begins to realise the art form's subversive potential (Babbage, 2004, pp.37-38).

Boal developed several techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed throughout the years and different countries/political systems he lived in, the most recognised being Forum Theatre. He hypothesises that in order to transform the spectator into an actor, theatre has to go through four stages: "knowing the body", "making the body expressive", "the theatre as language" and

"the theatre as discourse" (1979, p.102). While first stages of Theatre of the Oppressed involve actors in exercises designed to better understand that the body is socially conditioned, and to learn how to make it newly expressive, Forum Theatre is a fully developed form of performance where the spectators directly intervene in the action to change the play (1979, p.126). Boal explains that in the Forum Theatre, the participants tell a story about a social or political problem. A short skit dramatizing the problem is rehearsed and presented, and solutions are debated. The skit is then performed once more exactly as the first time, but now the participants have the right to replace the actors and change the course of action as they deem best (1979, pp.139-142). The spectator turned actor, whom Boal calls spect-actor, effectively rehearses change. In sum, Boal's ethos is to transform dramatic action into real action, opening the doors for change in reality.

Boal therefore declares in *Theatre of the Oppressed*: "Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!" (1979, p.155). Indeed, Nora Amin's implementation of the Forum Theatre in Egypt preceded the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. As Amin explains in her contribution to *The Routledge Companion to The Theatre of the Oppressed* (2019b), she underwent professional training at the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed, Rio de Janeiro, in 2003. However, implementing the practice in Egypt was profoundly challenging because of the longstanding emergency laws that put restrictions on performance art in the public sphere.[24] The public space by default belonged to the regime, and any gathering for political, social or artistic reason was restricted (Amin, 2016b). Nonetheless,

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[24] According to the Egyptian constitution, the president reserves the right to declare a state of emergency if there is war, a threat of war or terrorism, widespread unrest, natural disasters or epidemics. The law gives the president powers to restrict people's movement, ban any gatherings and protests, and monitor private and mass communication (AbdulHakim, 2021).

she organised workshops for Forum Theatre in Cairo (2004) and in Alexandria (2008). The latter attracted several theatre practitioners and tackled the growing concern over sexual harassment and domestic violence. The plays were confined to spaces that are state-owned or run by NGOs (Amin, 2019b, pp.409-413).

The breakthrough for Amin came with the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 (Amin, 2019b, pp.409-410). The revolution ousted the ex-president Hosni Mubarak, who had been in power for 29 years. The last ten years of his rule particularly marked an increased erosion of civil and political liberties alongside worsening economic conditions. The day on which thousands of Egyptians chose to defy the iron-fist rule is significant because it is the National Police Day.[25] The call for what was initially intended to be demonstrations chose the 25th of January to protest the rampant mistreatment and abuse of the police forces against citizens and the use of the police to clamp down on any form of political life and mass mobilization. The revolution ended the emergency law, albeit temporarily, giving Amin the chance to launch the Egyptian National Project for Theatre of the Oppressed with twelve other theatre makers. She went on to train six hundred people from thirty cities in 2011 and 2012. The project came at a time when, according to Amin:

> the revolution opened the door to acknowledge the possibility of 'doing', the possibility to take action and be freed from the loss of willpower. The revolution

[25] The National Police Day in Egypt marks the anniversary of the battle between British Forces and Egyptian police officers in Ismailia, Egypt, 25th of January, 1952. During the uprising against the British occupation of Egypt, the police forces of Ismailia were ordered to give up their arms and evacuate their premises. Upon the refusal of the governor of Ismailia, the police officers were ordered to stand their ground. The British forces heavily shelled the police barracks for six hours, killing between 50 and 90 Egyptian officers, whereas four British soldiers were killed (State Information Service, no date; Lancashire Fusiliers, no date).

> empowered the Egyptian citizens to believe that they can have an impact. (2019b, p.410)

Amin's emphasis on 'doing' echoes Boal's main objective of Forum Theatre: to transform spectators from passively contemplating the action to being directly involved. Moved by a new sentiment of optimism and can-do attitude, the project set up the first Forum Theatre play within its repertoire after the revolution, *The Story of Samah* (2012), about a despotic father trying to control his 16-year-old daughter. Amin notes that the audience were able to identify the pattern of oppression and draw on the real-life experience of toppling Mubarak. The group's second Forum play had an equally strong correlation to the revolution. *The Story of the Citizen and the Informer* (2012) tells the story of an innocent young man snatched from the street, tortured and eventually killed in a police station. As Amin makes clear, the play is directly related to the events that preceded the revolution and were major triggers in its ignition.[26] In words that echo the terms of Boal's original manifesto for Theatre of the Oppressed, she asserts:

> It was significant for us because it was a moment when performance could be seen as protest, and when— in retrospect— protest would have been a rehearsal for this mode of performance, just as Forum Theatre would be a rehearsal for a revolution. It was as if we had performed the revolution and then we had to go back and rehearse it all over again. (2019b, p.412)

Even after the emergency law was reinstated from August 2013 to October 2021, the practice of Forum Theatre continued in Egypt, although not in the streets as Amin hoped. A case in point is

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[26] The reference is to Khaled Said who was beaten to death by two police informants in June 2010. The Facebook page that was created in his memory, 'Kollena Khaled Said' (We Are All Khaled Said), called for the January 25th protests and henceforth incited the 18 days of the revolution that eventually ousted ex-president Mubarak.

Dawar Arts, an independent cultural centre practising today that regularly conducts Forum Theatre workshops. The centre's vision is to provide a therapeutic experience for its participants who have faced adversity such as war, displacement and poverty (Dawar Arts (a), no date; Egypt Today, 2017). They also run workshops supporting female empowerment and tackling sexual and gender-based violence (Dawar Arts (b), no date). Although the implementation of Forum Theatre in Egypt is confined to independent venues and despite the continuous change in Egypt's socio-political and economic landscape, its continuity reflects an ongoing need for fighting everyday oppression through the medium of theatre.

Designing Oppression

The elements of scenography in *Theatre of Crime* suggest a reading of the play as a space where its actual audience can witness oppression as well as develop the ability to resist it. In the playtext, Amin creates the necessary atmosphere for this simulation to happen through the stage architecture and stage set.[27] She envisions in her stage directions the action happening on two planes: at the gate of the theatre and in the investigation room. She situates the audience in the middle of both spaces, and they would need to adjust their seating with each change of scene. She also conceives a flexible stage architecture, a design whereby the acting and seating areas can be easily modified. In my view, her design reflects Boal's (1995) conception of a Theatre of the Oppressed where the "centre of gravity is in the auditorium, not on the stage" (p.40). The flexible or black-box stage prepares the audience for an experimental performance and to be more involved in it, rather than observing it from a distance (Smith, 2003, p.1196).

[27] Stage architecture refers to the location of the stage in relation to the audience, for example, whether the actors are on an elevated stage or surrounded by the audience (Smith, 2003, p.1196).

In the flashback scenes, an imposing iron gate is the only element of stage decoration in an otherwise pared down setting. As the scenes progress, the crowd grows and so do the tensions between them. To denote the rising tensions, the stage directions describe the gate as a huge prison cell in Scene Five (p.33). The guise of the theatrical space as a prison is further intensified in Scene Six, which is set in the investigation room. The Arabic word describing the cell in the original text is "وهمية" which translates as "imagined", "fake" or even "phantasmal" depending on the context. My preferred translation is "metaphorical" to denote the symbolic imprisonment of the Woman, as she gives her statement:

> *The* **Investigator** *opens the window and turns to face the* **Woman**. *The window seemingly has iron bars. The lighting reflects on the bars, so that we see it from now on as if it is the theatre gate, as if it is a metaphorical prison cell. This reflection remains throughout the following investigation scenes*. (p.37)

The bars of the gate/window/prison symbolically connect the two theatrical planes together, while at the same time engulfing the actual audience seated in the middle space between them. The gate provides a visual cue for oppression, and the bars of the window similarly give the notion that the Woman is trapped in the investigation. I argue that the arrangement of the architecture and stage set construct an experience of confinement, even dehumanisation, not simply for the oppressed protagonist but for the watching audience. In this way, they are positioned in a manner that reflects that of the fictional audience. By mapping out the elements of scenography in this manner, Amin designs a theatre space where the experience of oppression can be understood viscerally. Simultaneously and conversely, she also places her actual audience in the middle so that their proximity to the fictional action can prepare them to be directly involved in the final scene. As the dramatic action proceeds up to the point where it becomes a

Forum play, the three planes spill over each other as the division between the acting space and audience space is blurred. Amin describes how the three spaces merge in Scene Eight:

> *The scene changes to the investigation room. The position of the room on the stage is now swapped with the scenes outside the theatre gate. However, the position of the window, its iron bars and the shadows that they cast also change. This change takes place during the blackout between Scenes Seven and Eight. The audience sit in the area between the two theatrical planes, but they are now surprised with the change when the lights come out.* (p.53)

Having witnessed the different facets of oppression throughout the play, the change in the scenography metaphorically opens the door for the audience to resist it. In the final scene, the fictional audience disperse among the actual audience and Amin moves the gate to the first row, effectively confining both audiences (p.75). The new placement of the gate suggests that, even if the audience remain passive, and as long as there is a section of society that is oppressed, oppression is *coming for* everyone anyway. This scenographic shift instigates a call to action and suggests that passive compliance will not offer exemption from oppression.

The End is the Beginning: Flashbacks and Non-linearity

The non-linear structure of the play and the metatheatrical elements that Amin employs are key in constructing *Theatre of Crime*'s creative ambitions and potential impact. The scenes alternate between past and present, with the final scene where the assault is reenacted combining all past, present and possible futures together. The use of the flashback is a growing tradition within contemporary theatre, as in Philip Ridley's *Leaves of Glass* (2007), as well as tucker green's *truth and reconciliation* (2011). It is similarly a common device in wider arts practice as a means of representing traumatic experiences. As Roger Luckhurst elucidates in his genealogy of the

cinematic flashback, the flashback is meant to mimic the image of the traumatic event, which repeatedly intrudes on the mind in the present. Advancing the argument that such cinematic flashbacks shaped the formulation of PTSD as a diagnosis, he contends that:

> [The flashback] can only ever be explained belatedly, leaving the spectator in varying degrees of disorientation or suspense … this brutal splicing of temporally disadjusted images is the cinema's rendition of the frozen moment of the traumatic impact: it flashes back insistently in the present because this image cannot yet or perhaps ever be narrativized as past. (2008, p.180)

The flashback thus mimics the manner by which traumatic memories intrude on the mind in the present. When the traumatised person comes across a cue from their trauma, they remember and visualise the past, sometimes even reenacting it in the psychoanalytic sense. [28] As Luckhurst suggests, the past holds a continuous grip over the present, especially when the trauma is "disadjusted" and has not been managed. The trauma intrudes on the present, often in the form of an image. In much the same way, Amin starts the play with the flashback of the fictional audience arriving at the theatre without giving any indication that the actual audience are watching action that, within the fiction of the play, takes place in the past. The audience can recognise the shift in time and space in Scene Two with the changes in lighting, as described in the stage directions at the end of Scene One:

> *The lighting is redirected to another spot in the theatre space, which may be behind the audience, so they understand that the scenes are divided geographically in a way that puts the main event – the flashback – in front of the*

[28] In psychoanalysis, reenactment is the pathological reliving or re-creating of traumatic events or patterns (Levy, 1998).

> *audience. The investigation scenes, set in the present, are behind the audience. The audience will need to adjust their seating based on the geographical plane (which also marks a shift in time).* (p.17)

The non-linear sequence as well as the change in lighting create unease and suspense as the audience initially do not know what the crime is. However, it is strongly implied to be sexual assault judging by the accusatory approach taken by the Investigator. The form of *Theatre of Crime* reflects the disoriented mind of the assaulted woman and reveals the ways in which traumatic experiences disrupt the flow of everyday, familiar experiences. Amin's decision to show the assault as a flashback, and to have this acted by the characters rather than narrated, I argue works to demonstrate the difficulty of narration. This dramatic choice throws into question if and ever Luckhurst's momentary shock of trauma can be narrated, and if it is a past that has ended. The image of the frozen moment recalls the traumatic memories in Ridley's *Vincent River* and *Leaves of Glass*. In Ridley's and Amin's plays, the theatrical language resembles the theoretical writings on trauma and its indelible imprint. In the final scene, as the oppressive closure of the gate, the ensuing scuffles and assault on the Woman are self-consciously replayed to allow for audience participation: the non-linear order of events ushers in a repetition of the traumatic event in the present and in the future to denote the reality of the continuous threat that women face.

Metatheatre: Looking Within the Self

Another distinctive feature of *Theatre of Crime* is its use of the metatheatrical elements of the play-within-a-play and self-reference. These strategies serve here not just to foster a critical perspective on the action but to create a complex 'doubled' experience for the audience that brings them closer to the impact of violence that Amin dramatises. The play-within-a-play is a

longstanding tradition within European theatre, a famous early example being Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (c.1589-1601). It is, however, uncommon in mainstream Egyptian theatre. The play-within-a-play:

> describes a strategy for constructing play texts that contain, within the perimeter of their fictional reality, a second or internal theatrical performance, in which actors appear as actors who play an additional role. This duplication of the theatrical reality is often reinforced by the presence onstage of an 'internal audience' which acts as a double to the actual audience. (Fischer and Greiner, 2007, xi)

The purpose of enfolding a play-within-a-play, according to Hornby (1986), is to create a sense of unease and a "dislocation of perception". It reminds the audience that the play they are watching is not real; this helps to explain why the play-within-a-play has been historically popular during times of scepticism, such as in Renaissance England and Europe (pp.45-46). The extreme form of a metadramatic experience would be estrangement or alienation, which prompts the audience to see double (p.32). Similarly, the crowd that gathers at the gate of the theatre is Amin's internal audience, functioning as the actual audience's double, thereby prompting them to consider the possibility of being in their double's situation. Amin, however, subverts the technique by not showing the internal play. As I argue in this section, her use of the play-within-a play and strategy of self-reference puts the actual audience in the same unfavourable position as the internal/fictional audience.

The internal or fictional audience arrive to watch a play also entitled *Theatre of Crime*. Amin merges the play-within-a-play technique with another element of metatheatre that Hornby (1986) identifies as self-reference. He explains that in self-reference, the play brings attention to

itself as a play directly (p.103). Where the play-within-a-play reminds the audience of its fictitiousness indirectly, self-reference is "direct and immediate, a splash of cold water thrown into the face of a dreaming, imagining audience", effectively disrupting the fictitious world of the play (Hornby, 1986, p.104).[29] *Theatre of Crime* makes the shift from its realistic veneer to being self-referential subtly at first, and then abruptly. In Scene One, Ahmad notes that the play they were going to see is only a play in standard Arabic where his friends are acting, implying that it may not attract a very large audience as a result. Similarly, Amin wrote *Theatre of Crime* in standard Arabic, which vastly differs from the more common spoken Egyptian dialect. This reference is only a hint; in Scene Three, the self-referentiality of the play is made explicit. As the crowd outside the gate grows, it is revealed that the fictional play, as I will hereby refer to it, is also entitled *Theatre of Crime*. After this important revelation, the action within the world of the play continues, but the audience are suddenly alerted to the fact that the play is referring to them by referring to itself. Within a serious drama like *Theatre of Crime*, the sudden self-referentiality can create unease and anticipation. This disclosure paves the way for the final scene when the audience are actively invited to participate and physically grapple with the events and – presumably – rewrite the ending. Instead of staying in the comfort of their conviction that this is just a play, *Theatre of Crime* raises the alarm that this is in fact the reality of the violence that women go through. In Scene Seven and before the sexual assault is shown onstage, the audience are again reminded of the self-reference as it seeps through in the conversation between the young actors among the crowd:

Walid It looks like the play is happening here, not inside.

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[29] Hornby gives the example of Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (1867), where Peer is drowning after a shipwreck, only to have another passenger telling him that no one dies in the last act (1986, p. 104).

Mahmoud This is a great idea. Maybe the director created this scene as part of the performance … Maybe some of these people are actually actors but we can't feel it.

Hany And how can we not feel it? We are actors like them. (p.43)

At the end of Scene Eight, the fictional world of the play completely shatters. The actors step out of their respective roles and step into the audience's reality as a means of addressing the violence inflicted on the Woman.

Of its different functions, self-reference is used as a means for self-reflection. As Fischer and Greiner (2007) and Hornby (1986) demonstrate, the internal audience of the-play-within-the-play act as a double to the actual audience. The choice of this form invites the actual audience to reflect on their own positions and experiences. By watching *Theatre of Crime*, the actual audience are called on to contemplate their stance within the central violent assault on the Woman. They could be the victims, bystanders or even perpetrators. They could be a prejudiced investigator. They might hold misogynistic views, which would implicitly make them enablers of violence against women. The play's self-referentiality signals to the audience that they are part of the events shown onstage, and that they are watching their past, present and possible future – unless they intervene.

Furthermore, Amin's use of self-reference points to the actual audience's underprivileged position. The fictional audience are denied access to the play initially for no plausible reason. As a result, the actual audience are also barred from seeing the internal play or knowing its subject matter; they find themselves doubly removed from it. The visual presence of the gate of the fictional theatre also reinforces the state of helplessness and disempowerment of both audiences.

The condition that the fictional audience - as well as their double, the actual audience - find themselves in is an illustration of the traumatisation that injustice and inequality create. Self-reference prompts the audience to look within themselves, and within their position in society, and to question where they stand among the forces that create undue privilege and violence. By examining the play's form, I have shown how its use of the flashback technique mirrors the traumatised mind that constantly returns to the site of the trauma. My examination of the play's self-referentiality reveals how this dimension serves to invite the audience's reflection on their own positions within, and attitudes about, the forces of oppression that the play portrays. In the next section, I argue further that this unprivileged position is created by class discrimination and the arbitrary use of power.

Us and Them: Class Discrimination and Misogyny as Catalysts for Oppression[30]

Throughout the play, Amin proposes that degradation of and violence against women do not happen in a vacuum. The play indicates that the violation of women, as in sexual assault and rape, is the outcome of widespread misogyny, class discrimination and arbitrary use of power. In this section, I dissect these overlapping and interconnected forces as shown in *Theatre of Crime* both in the events leading up to the assault and in the investigation that follows.

As theatre critic Hatem Hafez reiterates in the introduction to the playtext:

> The occurrence of an action is the result of the conditions that allowed it. Any action/crime cannot be separated from its social, political and cultural contexts. Therefore, it is not a question of the crime/the harassment/the rape in itself, how it

[30] This subtitle is taken from the 1973 Pink Floyd song "Us and Them", criticising forms of violence and inequality.

> happened or who the perpetrator is. It is a question of the circumstances that allowed it and made it socially acceptable. [The crime] is fostered by the fabrics of culture that the society upholds, protects and guards. (2019, p.6, my translation)

Viewing the theatre house as a representative of the social mores, as Hafez suggests, is an important vantage point for analysing the play. Amin manifests the symbolism of the fictional theatre as an elitist venue. From the beginning of the play, Amin exposes the segregation between the world of the fictional play and the crowd that arrive to see it. The young actors Ahmad and Walid who first arrive at the theatre wonder how their friends have been able to secure a production at this A-List venue (p.23). Their friends are amateurs, yet VIPs are expected to attend (p.16). Amin also specifies that the crowd are from different walks of life (p.24). The guards' closure of the gate and their silent dismissal of the crowd adds an almost absurdist element to the play. It is a silence that speaks to the dynamics of the relation between the guards, who work in this state-run establishment, and the people. They enforce a power that is arbitrary, unnecessary and has devastating consequences. Therefore, the crowd feel dehumanised, as Ali protests: "They always enjoy humiliating us. There may not even be an audience in the auditorium, and then they complain that no one goes to the theatre" (p.25). This remark is implicitly supported by the arrival of the stage manager, the only character whose attire is described, wearing a shiny, smart suit and having an overall air of elegance. Before saying a word, his polished appearance contrasts with the crowd's agitation. Worst of all, the guards and the manager practise their power in favour of the "big names" whom the manager fears will get angry (p.27). Furthermore, the divide between the unseen, privileged audience inside and the underprivileged who are stuck outside is made clearer with the nonchalant and dismissive

attitude of the manager and his reference to those “big names”. The security guards and the manager thus represent the tools of oppression that crush everyone indiscriminately.

The explicit violence of the closed gate and the implicit violence of the guards’ hostility festers and spreads into the crowd. As the crowd grows, they redirect their anger and frustration at one another and suspect that there is corruption:

Ahmad I bet they are sneakily letting in their friends through the back door.

Mahmoud Shut up, Ahmad. Do you want everyone to smash the gate over your head?

Ahmad And why over my head? Why not tackle the corruption inside?

Ali We are being humiliated only because we came to watch a play. If all of you have no pride, we still do. *(To everyone)* What do you think?

Ahmad Watch your words!

Ali *(Ready and looking for a fight)* Who are you? Come closer so I can see you! (p.34)

The quiet, light-hearted tone between the friends in Scene One has now transformed to become one of almost primitive hostility. With the guards inexplicably barring them from entering, and with the physical space diminishing as more men in the crowd keep showing up, Amin represents the fictional audience as if they are fighting for their territory. Because they are oppressed, they lash out at the perceived ‘weaker’ links in the situation instead of focusing their

anger on the oppressors (for example, the elegant theatre manager) and their subordinates (the security guards). Sequentially, when the perceived weakest link arrives, the Woman, the tall man treats her as fair game and violently assaults her.

As the infighting continues, crossing the gate becomes the prize and seeing the internal *Theatre of Crime* becomes a privilege that it appears the audience(s) will be denied. Ezzat, a member in the crowd, and Ali express this sentiment when they give witness in Scene Eight. The scene provides a condensed yet complex social analysis. The witnesses are invited to give their statements to the Investigator, and by this means, Amin's play reveals different strata of Egyptian society. Ezzat represents people who appease authority and whose self-worth is shattered by oppression to the point that they do not believe they or anyone else deserves a better reality. He tries to side with the symbol of oppression, the security guard, in the hope that he will be favoured: "Please let me go through, sir. I'm alone. Ignore these animals" (p.33). He expresses similar sentiment in his testimony: "I swear they deserve what happened to them. This is who we are. We only conform when we are scared or oppressed. We do deserve this" (p.56). Ezzat's attempts to distance himself from the rest of the crowd who were crushed at the gate by using "they" and "them" are unsuccessful and he remains in denial that he is a victim of inequality as well. He is in a race of social mobility but does not seem to be winning, albeit he delights in the elite venues and how he is always at the front of the queues (pp.56-57), feeding a sense of his own importance.

Similarly, Ali perceives the theatre as an opportunity to step into 'high society'. He expresses his admiration for the material aspects of the experience, such as the air-conditioning, colours and glamour (2019a, p.60). He also offers one of the most astute analyses of society that the play provides. Speaking from a pragmatic, matter-of-fact and street smarts perspective, he

describes how oppression and unfavourable living conditions can trigger hostility and, in consequence, men assaulting women:

> [*To the* **Investigator**]: [The shoving and fighting] was definitely normal, but maybe the upper class like yourself do not know ... Those who don't walk in the street probably don't know the effect of the weather, the traffic jam and long queues on people, specifically those suppressing their anger and powerful oppression. Just standing in this situation for half an hour is enough to drive these people over the edge, stirring up animosity. They start to push one another even if they don't mean to. Each one tries to stray away from the crowd or get others out of the way. People turn into monsters out of the blue, each person thinks they must trample others in order to save themselves, and this attitude spreads to the point that even breathing becomes hostile. The crowd becomes a screaming, self-destructive bloc. They're bound to burst sooner or later, and if there's a woman in the middle it is clear what will happen to her. (pp.60-61)

Ali's testimony asserts that working class and impoverished women are particularly susceptible to assault. These are the women who "walk in the street", increasing their chances of meeting potential predators. In a society where many people struggle to meet their daily needs, violence becomes commonplace. Women, as the perceived weaker members, are no exception. Indeed, it is this intersection of socioeconomic conditions and gender to which Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi (2010) also refers. Where the socioeconomic rights of the majority are denied, El Saadawi insists, "women become the first victims of the general assault against freedom and progress" (p.56). The play addresses this very intersection and shows the aftermath of these traumatising and oppressive factors.

Amin interweaves the investigation scenes with the flashback scenes throughout the play, drawing the threads of class discrimination and misogyny together. The Investigator employs different tactics of questioning that ironically put the Woman in a position of culpability, espousing misogynistic views. He firstly insinuates that she acted in "racy" scenes, enticing the man to assault her when he saw her outside the stage. He blatantly lays the blame on her, saying: "It looks like you put yourself in this situation. Logically, you should have simply left. But your fault led to what happened – or what you say happened" (p.29). He leaves the Woman more horrified and the scene cuts here, leading back to the flashback in Scene Three.

As I established, both theatrical planes act as a pseudo prison cell. The theatre architecture therefore casts the Investigator in the role of jailor. To illustrate, the second tactic he uses is suggesting that she is mentally ill and that therefore she has exaggerated what happened:

Investigator What should we do? How is this our fault if you are mentally unstable or if you are receiving therapy or so?

Woman I will indeed need therapy when I get out of here … I used to have panic attacks three years ago, but they have gradually subsided.

Investigator Panic attacks! No need for exaggeration. Maybe you were just exhausted or upset for some reason.

Woman Upset? No, they were all-out and intense panic attacks.

Investigator And how did these attacks feel like?

Woman I don't wish to remember, I don't want to describe them, even describing them terrifies me.

Investigator And yet you willingly got yourself into this situation in such a state? (p.37)

The Investigator's accusation and dismissal of her mental health are reminiscent of early trauma theory. His attitude recalls the way that traumatised women who sought treatment from Jean-Martin Charcot in the nineteenth century were dealt with and how they were collectively termed hysterical. Both Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud separately concluded that the women had suffered sexual abuse and that it was the specific cause of hysteria (Ringel and Brandell, 2011, p.1). Women have often been dismissed as hysterical to avoid directly addressing the pain or even acknowledging the reality of sexual abuse. The Investigator/jailor is using the same tactic and represents a system of impunity for sexual aggressors. The setting of the scene as a prison cell therefore implies that the Woman is a prisoner of a misogynistic system that perpetuates falsehoods about violence against women. Whereas the traumatic experience of being assaulted has ended, she enters yet another space where she is further victimised. Her continuous victimisation is reminiscent of Three in tucker green's *hang*, who constantly has to assert that she made her decision about her assailant's fate and has to protect herself from the legal developments that prevent her and her family from adapting to the present. Similarly, in Amin's play, while the assault is severe but short term, the investigation is long and arduous: hence her remark that she will need therapy when she exits the room.

As the Woman tries to reason with the investigator, she indicates that the crowd was already beginning to become agitated when she arrived at the theatre:

Investigator So the people were good and orderly, how did they turn into the exact opposite so suddenly?

Woman Maybe because they were already about to burst with anger and I arrived at the moment when their patience turned to anger, maybe. And maybe something happened during the half hour I spent there which made them burst with anger. It was the hardest half an hour in my life. It was like doomsday … or unreal, I don't know. I cannot describe it any other way. I never imagined this would happen to me. (pp.38-39)

The Investigator next suggests she has imagined the assault under the pretext of her panic attack (p.39). In response, the Woman explains the frequency and severity of street harassment and assault that women face:

Woman What if the woman you are investigating now is your wife? …

Investigator My wife would never be in your situation.

Woman Why? Doesn't she walk in the street? Doesn't she walk in crowded places? We live in a reality full of violence and harassment. There hasn't been a girl or woman that has not experienced it. Our society, sir, is the worst environment for the lives of women and their safety. We no longer know what "safety" is. And now you are investigating me as if I am guilty. And if I am not guilty, then I must be mad or imagining things. (p.39)

While the assault is a one-time occurrence within the action of the play, Amin situates it within the wider context of habitual violence against women. The assault is severely traumatising, but Amin also draws attention to the unsaid and routine aggressions that women face in public

spaces. This constant sense of impending danger because of one's gender is expressed by feminist theorists Laura S. Brown and postcolonial trauma theorist Stef Craps. Brown (2008) describes the "normative, quotidian aspects of trauma in the lives of many oppressed and disempowered persons" (p.18). Craps (2015) similarly refers to attempts by different academics and feminists to expand the concept of trauma to "assist in understanding the impact of everyday racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ableism, and other forms of structural oppression" (pp.25-26). The repeated experience of harassment or mistreatment, argues Craps, has been largely ignored by cultural trauma theorists and does not fit the criteria of PTSD set out in the *DSM-5*. The *DSM-5* includes sexual violence, but not the more repetitive harassment that women in particular face (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). As Amin's protagonist expresses it, continuous harassment can destabilise and isolate the victim. It leaves her feeling permanently unsafe, and it would therefore be unlikely to think of the trauma as a matter of the past but as a constant threat of the victim's wellbeing. Trying to spin his web further, the Investigator insinuates that she is presenting a fictitious account since she is an actress (p.39). He even goes as far as accusing her of being "an agent of sorts" (p.40) and that she is seeking fame (p.41). Eventually, the Woman gives up on defending herself and laughs without humour in a kind of desperation, to which he responds: "Lovely. Now let's get you a cold lemonade and listen to the rest of what happened outside the theatre, in detail please, and clearly, and I promise I will not interrupt you" (p.41). The remark is another illustration of his patronising attitude and lack of sensitivity towards the situation. These scenes convey how the state apparatuses and police investigations can re-traumatise the victims of sexual assault. The Woman's speech exemplifies a theme I have pursued in this thesis, also evidenced in tucker green's plays, of the habitual

traumatisation of women. The plays therefore shows the restrictiveness of the concept of trauma in mainstream cultural trauma theory and Western psychiatry.

That the Investigator's misogynistic views are not isolated becomes evident when several characters express similar attitudes in Scene Eight. The witnesses who are invited to give their testimony in the scene can be roughly categorised into two groups: the majority, who represent a reserved and regressive view of women; and a progressive, rebellious minority, who defend the right of women to be safe in the public sphere. The characters Ezzat, Ali, the theatre manager and Afaf (a female staff member) represent this rigid attitude, since Ezzat and Ali's testimonies focus on their conception of theatre-going as a means of social mobility. They also show contempt for the Woman based solely on her gender (p.57, p.59). Even though the theatre manager and the female staff member work at the theatre, which might normally be assumed a progressive venue, Amin presents them as perpetuators and enablers of the abuse of women. The theatre's smart and polished stage manager plays an integral role in the assault on the Woman because he gave the order to shut the gate. The staff member Afaf is portrayed as just a cog in the machine of oppression in general, and particularly against her own gender. In terms of structure, the previous testimonies are written to be staged consecutively. By contrast, Afaf and the Molester's testimonies are concurrent. Their placement insinuates that they are two sides of the same coin. Towards the end of her statement, Afaf reveals that she has been a victim of abuse or harassment herself even though she does not admit it or condemn the men responsible for her ordeal. She embodies a form of traumatised experience whereby the perception of abuse is so distorted that she does not realise her own position as a victim:

> We have all been through what they call – God forbid – 'harassment' or 'violence' since childhood and we never uttered a word. Not a word. We are

> honourable women, and we raised our girls not to speak up to preserve their honour. These are our men, they felt the need to do that. They're kind but they have no choice. Why should this affect us? It shouldn't – we can simply forget or deny it ever happened. (p.69)

Psychiatrist Judith Herman's theory on the effects of child abuse can offer an insight into Afaf's position. Herman argues that:

> repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality ... [The child] must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe ... Unable to care for or protect herself, she must compensate for the failures of adult care and protection with the only means at her disposal, an immature system of psychological defenses. (1997, p.96)

These defences can include an attempt by victims to appease or placate their abusers (Herman, 1997, p.100). It appears that Afaf, and as the play suggests many (female) victims of harassment or abuse like her, has developed these defences.

Afaf is no longer a helpless child: thus the character shows the long-term impact that sexual violence and abuse can manifest well into adulthood. Victims of abuse can suffer lasting physical, psychological and moral effects. These effects:

> can create confusion regarding developing moral codes, and understanding right and wrong. [They] can challenge the ability to understand societal norms of interpersonal parameters, and may manifest in antisocial behaviours and attitudes. (Chisholm, 2013, pp.135-136)

Afaf appears to have her understanding of abuse muddled. She brings to the performance of trauma in the play an example of a victim that shows persistent developmental effects of unhealed trauma. Instead of identifying her abusers for who they are, she projects her own wilful ignorance on the Woman. She therefore accuses her of using the assault to draw sexual attention to herself (p.68). In conjunction with the sexism and misogyny that the male witnesses express, Afaf shows an internalised misogyny. The play manifests the violence of misogyny that cuts across gender and social class.

On the other side of Amin's accusatory spotlight is the Molester. He denies assaulting the woman and speaks about how he frequents the cultural scene in the city centre. He presents himself as an Everyman going about his daily life. However, the young woman Heba, who tries to comfort the Woman after the assault, picks up on his violent energy and identifies him as a molester: "I know that this man is a criminal. I know a criminal the moment I spot them; all women do. I could tell many stories about the likes of him. I've known him since I was nine" (2019a, p.70). The Molester's brief and insignificant statement reinforces the argument that the scene is that of a society on trial, not only the criminal himself. It is a revelatory scene of the kind of ideologies and justifications that allow for predatory behaviours. Ironically, the Molester does not blatantly share a sexist view despite what he did. This further strengthens the argument on which the play is centred: that the crime is a product of the circumstances that allowed it, and that sexual offenders will be emboldened by bystanders who are actually complicit with them due to their own misogyny.

Heba's statement, however, signals a shift to the tone of the scene. She is presented as a foil to Afaf. Heba is herself also a victim of child abuse or harassment as she states that she has known [him] since she was nine. The 'him' here is a generic term for all abusers/molesters, who

are represented in the play by this man, just as Heba becomes another representative of victims. Whereas Afaf is in denial of her victim status to the extent that she effectively sides with the oppressors, Heba shows self-awareness and courage that moves the Woman and even, finally, the Investigator himself. Amin uses stylised language to describe Heba's experience at the intersection between victimhood and womanhood. Heba recognises her position as a victim, while also recognising the Molester for what he did, even though she did not visibly witness the assault. She describes the posttraumatic effect of sexual violence in her statement:

> We are always the ones getting punished, nothing new here. You punish us just for being born female. Maybe you are punishing yourselves for your lust and punishing us for being beautiful. To tell you the truth, we are deformed. I no longer see any femininity or youth in my face. Every day of my life is a desperate attempt not to be assaulted. I have grown to hate my body and my gender. I've become a coward, afraid of life, what worse punishment is there? This woman does not deserve a punishment worse than what she endured tonight. Maybe it's also a punishment for you because you saw with your very eyes how people's sense of justice has become. That is, if you really want to do justice. (p.71)

Her speech is directed to the investigator as much as it is directed to the actual audience. The statement can be viewed as an appeal to the audience's sense of justice after witnessing the assault as well as hearing from the Woman and from Heba herself about its aftereffects. It is also a very lucid account of the prolonged psychological damage that misogyny inflicts.

As the audience have already witnessed the assault themselves in Scene Seven, Scene Eight is not an attempt to arrive at the truth of the assault. Instead, it serves the purpose of presenting various sections of society and their views on women especially as victims of sexual

violence. The scene therefore lays bare some of the social issues that can and do promote violence against women as shown through some of the testimonies. It is essentially a trial of society as a whole. Most of the witnesses, just like the investigator, express regressive views of women and their role in society. However, these witnesses also include some people who work at the theatre such as the manager and the female staff. Their views represent the corruption and deeply entrenched ideas that allow for the violence against women to happen and to persist. Amin arguably shows these realistic examples to encourage her audience to act. As she demonstrates, the forces of class discrimination and misogyny and the oppression that they co-create breed violence against women. In the next section, I analyse the scene of the assault within the debate of representations of trauma in cultural trauma theory, to argue that theatre has a distinctive ability to represent traumatic experience.

The Assault

The dynamics between the security guards, the manager and Afaf on the one hand and the entire crowd on the other is that of both visible and invisible violence. As a result, the crowd gradually becomes aggressive towards one another, with this unrest culminating in the assault of the Woman. Amin makes the dramaturgical choice of showing the sexual assault clearly onstage. In Scene Seven, the crowd grows to forty and more arguments start to break out among their confusion and anger. Taking advantage of the situation, the Molester assaults the Woman during the ongoing scuffles. She faces the ordeal unable to speak but the stage directions describe the assault and her reaction:

> *The tall man starts to sexually assault the* **Woman** *from behind. We see him repeatedly moving his waist as if he is anally raping her, except that their clothes are in the way. He repeats this movement four times continuously and more*

> *aggressively in the dense crowd without anyone noticing. She turns around suddenly and with difficulty, so she is adjacent to him. He stops. She is shocked and truly horrified … Her eyes dilated as she looks at the [tall] man's chest, unable to look into his eyes. She seems paralysed. Her left hand is raised towards him and her fingers set apart as if they are screaming. She turns her gaze with difficulty toward the gate, crying. Her eyes meet two women standing behind the security personnel).*
>
> **Woman** (*Totally horrified, crying*) Please let me in, I can't breathe. I feel sick. I am dying … (*She begins shaking violently and she struggles to breathe. The crowd continues to push one another and shout*). (p.49)

Two of the actors in the fictional audience see her distress but are unable to reach her; one of them "*seems to have dissociated. He desperately tries to open the gate"* (2019a, p. 50). She briefly collapses to the ground, comes round but is unable to explain to the people surrounding her what has happened.

Amin's focus on how the Woman's body responds (her shakiness and fighting for breath) suggests that she is unable to process the attack verbally. The suddenness and unexpectedness of the traumatic event, as is the case with most assaults, can leave victims in a state of shock, feeling as if what is happening is unreal, rendering them speechless, or all of these reactions at once. It is this speechlessness that trauma causes that Bessel van der Kolk calls speechless horror (2014, pp.43-44). He shows that traumatic experience effectively *shuts down* the area of the brain responsible for speech, contending that: "All trauma is preverbal … Trauma by nature drives us to the edge of comprehension, cutting us off from language based on common

experience or an imaginable past" (2014, p.43). Even when traumatised people piece the events together and form a story, "these stories, however, rarely capture the inner truth of the experience" (2014, p.43). Amin presents the common, immediate impact of the trauma. She shows that theatre can be an effective medium in communicating this silent blow. If a story of trauma cannot capture the truth of the experience, as van der Kolk proposes, Amin's play proposes that theatre can be as close a reflection as can be.

Amin's decision to display the sexual assault candidly advances a central debate within trauma theory on whether traumatic experience can be represented, and the possible tools of representation. For example, Cathy Caruth contends that trauma is inherently unrepresentable and that language cannot recreate the experience of being traumatised. Re-experiencing a traumatic past in the form of intrusive images and thoughts, as in the case of PTSD, is not "a testimony to an event, but may also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred" (1995, p.151). Her claim is that traumatic experience is imprinted on the mind with precision but that it still cannot be recalled or narrated consciously, because it happens unexpectedly. Caruth further explains that what returns in the traumatic flashback is:

> Not simply an overwhelming experience that has been obstructed by a later repression or amnesia, but an event that is itself constituted, in part, by its lack of integration into consciousness. Indeed, the literal registration of an event – the capacity to continually, in the flashback, reproduce it in exact detail-appears to be connected, in traumatic experience, precisely with the way it escapes full consciousness as it occurs. (1995, pp.152-153)

She adds that: "The flashback or traumatic re-enactment conveys … both *the truth of an* event, and *the truth of its incomprehensibility*" (1995, p.153). Caruth's claim, therefore, is that a traumatic experience cannot be narrated (it defies linguistic expression), that reenactments are not simply testimonies and that a traumatic experience cannot be fully understood at the time of its occurrence, but only in retrospect. If the mind cannot fully understand the trauma, it cannot represent it in any coherent form. Similarly, Kalí Tal (1996) argues in *Worlds of Hurt* that:

> accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of 'normal' conception. Textual representations – literary, visual, oral – are mediated by language and do not have the impact of the traumatic experience. (p.15)

Caruth and Tal's arguments suggest that the remembrance is never exact or accurate, but only approximate.

I argue that *Theatre of Crime* challenges these views to some extent. Amin does dramatize the traumatic event rather than narrating it, which reinforces the view that traumatic experience cannot simply be narrated in a coherent story. However, the scene of the assault simultaneously throws into question the validity of the theory that trauma is inherently unrepresentable. If traumatic experience cannot be narrated, theatre has the potential to represent it in various other forms and this is what Amin emphasizes and utilises in this shocking scene. She provides a visual testimony to the event, showing how theatre has the ability to transcend language. Through the series of images and actions, it shows violence and its catastrophic effects on the victims without using a single word. The Woman's paralysed body, dilated eyes and gaping mouth are a testimony to the trauma that can happen to the Woman or indeed any woman. Furthermore, the Woman understands well what has happened to her. Her speechlessness is not a

sign of miscomprehension and does not preclude the theatre's ability to communicate suffering, nonetheless. She exhibits an awareness of her situation as she chooses to prosecute immediately and also to put her experience within the wider context of violence against women (p.39). This is where theatre becomes a unique and effective tool of revealing forms of trauma that are otherwise left hidden.

By enacting the assault instead of having it narrated, Amin puts into theatrical images what cannot be put into words. Her choice recalls van der Kolk's argument that traumatic experience is significantly preverbal: on that basis, narration is inherently unable to capture the assault in its immediacy. She places the audience in position of witnesses alongside the fictional crowd so that presumably there would be no room for contention on what actually happened or if the Investigator is justified in his string of accusations. It becomes a case of seeing is believing and given that the staging positions the audience in the middle of the action, it would seem that they are also meant to experience the force of the assault vicariously. The dramatization of the assault would, I suggest, be key in shaping the audience's responses in the final scene when they are invited to participate directly in the action.

I also argue that showing the assault naturalistically and graphically implicitly refutes society's readiness to deny that these assaults happen at all, or, if it is admitted that they do, the perception that such incidents do not severely impact the victim. Watching the assault demands that the audience witnesses it for themselves, further prompting them to assess not just the experience but all the circumstances that led to its occurrence. The undeniability of the assault in the play extends beyond the walls of the theatre, as Amin invites the audience to witness what can happen to a random woman on a random day especially as a result of the interplay of class discrimination and sexism. The play's build-up of the emotions of anger, hurt or shock, though,

is not without release. The final scene invites the audience to act on the basis of the emotions: intervening to change the oppressive ending of *Theatre of Crime* can also be an empowering tool to change their own realities. Effecting social change through theatre is an issue I examine in the next section.

The Transformative Power of Theatre

The oppression that the play presents runs parallel to a profound belief in the power of the theatre to subvert the status quo. Amin's play explores the relations between theatre makers and the society they live in, particularly how the artists perceive society and vice versa. The play demonstrates how oppression and unrest culminate in the assault upon the Woman, but it also suggests that faith and dedication in the power of the theatre can give rise to social change. This belief is expressed both within the world of *Theatre of Crime* and, especially, in its dissolve into reality towards the end. In other words, the play displays the characters freeing themselves from oppression and addressing the traumatic experience the Woman was subjected to, while at the same time creating an opportunity for the play to be a subversive and freeing experience for the wider audience too.

In the investigation scenes, the Woman expresses her eagerness to see the play, especially in support of the young actors. Feeling safe in the theatre, she does not anticipate that anything could go wrong (p.29). The theatre, as she puts it, heightens her awareness of the world around her:

> I felt [how many people there were]. The theatre and acting make us aware of our surroundings, even the things that are not directly in front of us. That's why we have a sense of our surroundings in general. (p.20)

The divide between the artists and the regressive views of society is hinted at when the Investigator suggests that being a female actor has rendered her incapable of seeing the reality (p.30) and that one cannot learn the truth about actors (p.39). Similarly, the actors among the crowd at the gate are enthusiastic and hopeful about seeing the play (p.43). It can be argued that the assault happening in front of a theatre makes the blow more severe for the Woman. What she considers to be an escape hatch, a place for possibilities, turns into a nightmare. The sentiment of hope is shared by the actors in the crowd before the scuffles break out, making their enthusiasm gradually turn sour. The discriminatory practice of being excluded from seeing the play, being dehumanised and for the Woman to be assaulted isolates them and creates yet another barrier between them and the rest of the society. What might seem on the surface a relatively transient experience is part of a wider system that is violently hierarchical.

As we have seen, most of the witnesses giving statements in the group investigation scene express regressive, misogynistic views. By contrast, everyone in the progressive minority are theatre makers, implicitly reflecting Amin's strong belief in theatre as a means of progression and transformation. Their reactions, however, vary from explosive, futile frustration to actively changing their reality. Ahmad sums up the artists' frustration by saying:

> This arrogant authority made enemies out of us, scrambling over bread or even going through a gate! Screw you all! Screw the public facilities that you idolise more than people! And screw your hard-heartedness that killed our love for the theatre! (p.56)

Similarly, Mahmoud expresses the anguish of the theatre's transformation and reduction into the site of a crime. Unlike Ahmad, however, he uses his anger as a fuel for change. He says: "I adore the theatre … The actor who trains and gains experience in the theatre can do anything" (p.62).

This statement can be understood professionally, meaning that he or she can act for the TV and cinema, but also figuratively, meaning the actor can help change society. The audience sees the Woman visibly transforming when he makes this statement "*as if his words are magical*" (p.62). Unlike Ahmad, he transforms his guilt over not being able to assist her by stepping outside of the world of the play in the final scene.

Heba's touching testimony has a similar effect on the Woman. Heba acknowledges an affinity with her gender, an affinity that gives her the power to break the cycle of abuse. She makes a connection between herself, her mother and the Woman:

> I was lucky enough to be at the garden, and not in the hell you were stuck in. Or maybe I was in this middle space so I could catch you, specifically to catch you. Your face was beaming from a distance, like my mother's when I was a child, and like mine when she was younger. When I freed you from the claws of that female staff from hell, I felt like I was doing the first revolutionary act in my life. I faced these monsters alone and caught you. I don't know what would have happened otherwise. You were choking, like a newborn gasping for air, and I was the midwife. Oh God, I was very proud of myself, as if I freed myself, not you. As if you've become my daughter and I your mother, and I realised how strong we are! (pp.71-72)

The imagery of Heba being a midwife recalls Boal's Joker figure whom he likened to a midwife. The Joker's task is to mediate between the characters and the audience (Nimmannitt, 2015). In essence, Heba invokes the physical strength a woman needs to give birth to describe her ability to save the Woman from her distress. The analogy creates new personalities out of both women. They are re-born as women who have the ability to throw off the shackles of their oppression.

Heba tapping into her femininity brings to mind Amin's hypothesis that constant sexual harassment coerces women into erasing their femininity (2016b). If harassment constrains feminine power, reclaiming it would be an effective method of fighting this aggression. This newfound strength, however, requires the solidarity and support of other women as well as wider sections of society. The support comes in the following scene when the audience are invited to rewrite the Woman's story.

Less convincingly, we see the Investigator seemingly transform under Heba's poetic *spell*. The Woman feels empowered to step into reality, and the Investigator offers her an apology for his antagonism earlier. Amin's sudden transformation of the Investigator's attitude can be interpreted as an appeal to even the least sympathetic among the audience members. In other words, his conversion relates to the idea that the dramatization of the assault, the iteration that it is rarely a one-time occurrence for women (as the audience see that all three female characters in the play have been assaulted more than once or suffered abuse, regardless of how this has affected their character) and the devastating effects that assault is seen to have, can together awaken the unaware and the indifferent, and move them to action.

The dramatic structure, whereby action moves from containment within the fictional sphere to the immediate context of the actual audience, is reinforced by the lighting. Both theatrical planes in front of and behind the audience are lit simultaneously. The stage directions state that:

> *The next scene takes place in each plane successively. The audience now appear to be closer to the crowd of 70 people at the theatre gate. They appear to be the crowd itself that now forms the buffer between the investigation room and the*

> *theatre gate; between the present and the past. They may now be able to change the past*. (p.73)

The audience are positioned in the middle space so that they, like Heba, are able to *catch* the Woman, as Heba puts it. The Woman, lost in her thoughts and her anguish, expresses her feeling that she was killed twice over: by the experience of being assaulted at the theatre where she had always felt safe and by the investigation. In a dramatic moment that mixes despondency and hope, the actors step into the reality and breathe life into her. They present themselves specifically as theatre makers. It is the culmination of the theme of the transformative power of theatre. They express a solidarity that cuts across social class and gender, chanting:

> **Mahmoud and Heba** (*Together*) We are the product of theatre; we are theatre makers. We are the ones who can change the ending.
>
> **The Woman** We must change reality first. Reality is not a play.
>
> **Mahmoud** But sometimes, reality and plays converge. This is our only chance to get out of this play and this memory. This time Heba will join us. We must change the ending. The crowd of 70 people has now become 170, and they will not be silent or deluded this time. (p.74)

With the play's actual audience directly invited to change the ending of the play, the proclaimed quest to make them aware of their responsibility to end the violence against women is complete. After making them aware of their own silence, at best, and complicity, at worst, in this cycle of violence, and after revealing the layers of socio-political oppression that can and do contribute to sexual assault and abuse, Amin gives them the key to release themselves from their passive

compliance. The final spoken lines of the play recall Boal's assertion in *Theatre of the Oppressed* that spectator is a "bad word" (2008, p.134). He argues that traditional theatre, which is run by the powerful, "has imposed finished visions of the world" (p.135), a condition which is reflected in the static, accepting positioning of its spectators. The aim of Theatre of the Oppressed by contrast is to reclaim the spectator's ability to act: "The spectators in the people's theatre (i.e., the people themselves) cannot go on being the passive victims of those images" (p.135). The key that enables this transformation is the revelation of theatre's unfixity, its changeability: it is the same key that Heba, Mahmoud and the Woman announce as their means of emancipation from the experience they witnessed and went through, respectively. The scene ends on a marked wave of optimism, signalling the change in the role of the audience from being onlookers to active agents for change.

Amin makes her audience aware of their collective responsibility in creating the conditions that foster systematic violence against women. The final scene of the play inspires the audience to intervene in and ultimately transform these conditions. It is played entirely in mime:

> *As* **Mahmoud** *speaks in the last scene, we see the climax of the play re-enacted on the other side. The* **Woman**, **Mahmoud** *and* **Heba** *walk together very slowly towards the event. They arrive to the first queue of the audience and stop. The security guard sets up an iron gate akin to the gate of the theatre. The gate separates the real audience from the investigation room. It is placed at the front seats, so that the real audience, the* **Woman**, **Mahmoud** *and* **Heba** *are behind the gate in the same way that the crowd was during the assault. The light falls on the gate, so that its reflection forms long, scary lines, as if everyone is now in the prison cell, including the real audience. The crowd chatter, comment and shout.*

> *They walk slowly and intersperse with the actual audience as loud music plays. The* **Woman** *tries to repeat her actions. The attitude of the security guard is even more violent.* **Mahmoud** *stays by her side and tries to protect her but he is too frail.* **Heba** *sticks to her. Chaos breaks out as everyone pushes one another.* **Walid** *and* **Ahmad** *… try to help the* **Woman***, and she asks for the audience's help as if they are part of the incident. Maybe some audience members intervene to reject the violence and remove the iron gate. Maybe nobody does. The ending is not known; it depends on the audience' reaction and their willingness to change the situation. If the audience and the actors successfully change the ending, everyone will have crossed the gate and stood onstage. If they do not and prepare to leave the auditorium, there is a blackout. We hear the* **Woman** *scream, but we do not know if it is out of victory or defeat. The meaning of the scream hangs on the decision the audience makes.* (pp.75-76)

In this final scene, all the components of the play are condensed to signal a new possibility. The actual audience are associated with the fictional crowd's entrapment and dehumanisation. The guards are even more violent, and the crowd is bigger (with the assumption that some of the actual audience join in the drama). However, the actual audience is now more aware of the variations and facets of oppression. They are also made aware that inaction does not exclude them from the traumatising effects of oppression.

In line with Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed method, *Theatre of Crime* resists closure or catharsis. Boal argues that the Aristotelian catharsis is a coercive system where the audience are purged from their strong emotions with the aim of perpetuating the status quo (1979, 1995). According to Boal, the tragic heroes have a flaw that threatens to destabilise society or subvert

the social order. Their flaw is specifically that they seek to oppose the laws set by man (1979, pp.31-32). By contrast, Theatre of the Oppressed aims to create instability and shake the values of society that generate oppression (1995, p.72). Having closure in *Theatre of Crime* would imply that the issue is in the past, rather than being an ongoing threat for women. An ending where poetic justice is achieved, I argue, would be unrealistic, and would leave the impression that resisting the forms of oppression is a fait accompli, and not a task that the audience will need to carry out and carry on in their everyday life. A terrible ending in the style of Aristotelian tragedy could render the audience paralysed by the same kind of despondence that the Woman feels before Mahmoud and Heba step in and *escape* the fictional experience. The open ending makes it clear that it is up to the audience – in other words, everyone in society and particularly those who experience its injustices most acutely – to undo the damage and traumatisation that oppression creates. While the responses to traumatic experience I have examined in this thesis range from narration to a self-preserving silence, Boal and Amin demonstrate that the best response would be to stop it in its tracks. The effects of traumatic experience, as the play suggests, cannot simply be undone. However, a people who are empowered to stand up to their oppressors are capable of intervening and limiting the incidence of traumatisation by defying the patriarchal values of society. The ending, therefore, has a significance beyond protecting the Woman from the Molester. Amin hypothesises that some audience will remove the iron gate (pp.75-76), thereby undoing the situation that left the Woman vulnerable in the first place.

Conclusion

I have argued that the dramaturgy and design of *Theatre of Crime* positions the audience in the middle of the action so they can be as trapped as the fictional crowd. The multi-faceted oppression that the play shows, culminating in the assault of the Woman, is performed in a

manner that is made deliberately difficult to look away from. The audience's placement nonetheless enables them to redirect the play in a stand against oppression. Amin's play seeks to realise the objective of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed: to turn the spectators into spect-actors. *Theatre of Crime* shows the frustration of various sections of society under the double threat of patriarchy and the concentration of power with the upper classes. The mechanisms of oppression transform the theatre from a space of freedom and opportunities to a nightmarish embodiment of the violence of oppression. The trauma of sexual assault is seen as an extension and result of the mass traumatisation caused by oppression and disregard for the people's, and especially women's, welfare. The investigation scenes also suggest that a political solution to the crisis of violence against women alone does not suffice, but that it is the responsibility of everyone. Amin dissects society while putting faith and hope in the hands of theatre and its makers and the support of the wider public to acknowledge and combat sexual assault.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined the intersection of theatre and trauma studies, pursuing the insights that come from the unexpected combination of white queer British, black British and Egyptian playwrights' perspectives. I have shown that the plays of Ridley, tucker green and Amin resemble each other in foregrounding the voices of victims of violence, and that the marginalised groups who are subjected to this violence particularly face traumatisation both in its glaring and insidious forms. The plays I have analysed share visual and aural demonstrations of the physical and psychological effects of this violence, demonstrations that curiously combine the classic and postcolonial interpretations of trauma together. Through the medium of the chosen texts, my analysis provides a deeper understanding of the traumatic experiences that sexual and racial minorities face. I have also argued that, despite their similarities, the plays and their authors present distinctly different experiences of traumatisation, and dissimilar, sometimes directly contrasting, means of expressing the characters' pain. Finally, and importantly, I have shown that the playwrights probe the (im)possibility of trauma resolution. The different experiences of trauma, the methods of expression, and the forms of resolution are revealed to be governed by racial, gendered and cultural norms and differences.

The plays I have analysed reveal the particular experiences of trauma that disempowered people face. In the case of *Vincent River*, Davey is marginalised as a gay teenager and Anita is marginalised as a single mother, and this outsider position brings them together and offers a space for trauma recovery. The play exposes the effect of a homophobic murder on the people closest to the victim and reveals that marginalised people often suffer in isolation and do not necessarily get much needed support from their communities. Therefore, the play implicitly argues for the importance of coming together to resolve the shared trauma of violence and

ostracisation. The study of trauma theory enlightens my analysis of this play as it shows the way Anita and Davey react to their traumas. After being ostracised by her family and shunned by her neighbours, she tries to come to terms with Vincent's sexuality that she is not aware of until he dies. She appears to be emotionally numbed. By contrast, Davey, hurt both in body and in spirit, manifests feelings of shame, anger and desperation. Trauma theory exposes both conditions as maladaptive, which indicates that neither character has managed to resolve their trauma. The theory also postulates that remembrance is a spectrum and that traumatic memories are usually recorded in the brain in the form of images, rather than as a sequential narrative. As Anita and Davey begin to share stories about their past, and about the murder, the memory of the murder moves from describing still images to a more vibrant, linear and developed story. My argument views this transformation as an indication that they are at the path of recovery and adapting to the present. Resolving the trauma in *Vincent River* takes four shapes: accepting their identities, telling the story, releasing pent-up emotions and connecting to one another. Davey coming out to Anita is a necessary step towards this resolution. In addition to transforming the memory of the trauma into narrative, trauma theory, especially the field of psychoanalysis, points to the importance of having a cathartic reaction. Anita's cry that rips through the stage walls is an example of this emotional release. Anita and Davey connect, as mother and son, as lovers, as each other's healers.

Conversely, no such resolution is possible in *Leaves of Glass*. The mother and son, Liz and Steven, refuse to acknowledge their roles in traumatising the father and Barry. While the father does not come from an identity position that makes him historically marginalised, his suffering is dismissed, which I contend drives his suicide. The play shows the family members reacting to the trauma of the father's suicide differently. Liz and Steven silently suffer, with the

theatrical device of Steven's soliloquies offering a non-naturalistic glimpse into feelings of pain that he hides from the rest. They show that Steven re-experiences the image of his father lying in the canal in his dreams and also uncover the father's suffering. The suffering however, is not communicated to anyone (as Steven only reads some of his father's notes after his suicide). This isolates the father and renders him incapable of adapting. Barry suffers the same fate as his father, as Steven and Liz deny the authenticity of the memories he shares, or indeed that they ever happen. His constant pleas to listen are met with silence or denial. Nonetheless, it is the audience who hear the devastation of his abuse as a child. The drama in this way provides a voice for the silenced child and the legacy of the father who similarly did not find support in his community for his psychological ordeal.

The postcolonial strand of contemporary trauma studies reveals the particular forms of traumatisation that racial minorities face. These forms are evident in debbie tucker green's plays. As the works of Craps and Cénat show, conceiving of trauma as a one-time event that is out of the ordinary does not account for the repeated and habitual forms of racial injustice, abuse and misogyny. Both *hang* and *stoning mary* clearly attest to the validity of this theory. Although *hang* centres on the aftermath of an implied racially aggravated rape or sexual assault, it is an irreversible and life-altering event, and the play importantly shows the continuous traumatisation of the arduous and protracted process of bringing Three's assailant to justice. The mental and physical torment that Three and her family live through therefore exemplifies the insidious and repetitive traumatisation of racial minorities. The play also demonstrates that resolution or closure is not always possible. In *stoning mary*, trauma is diffused and dispersed throughout the play, so there is no possibility of closure either; there is no one traumatic event with a beginning and an end. To reiterate, tucker green's plays that I examine in this thesis shed light on the

broken systems of justice that crush the most vulnerable and also reveal the isolation and devastation that trauma causes. For example, Three feels cut off, physically and emotionally, from everyone around her. My analysis has also shown how the wider community of friends, neighbours and women's rights groups (as Mary's impassioned speech indicates) can fail to support the most vulnerable, too.

While the outlook in both *hang* and *stoning mary* appears bleak, Nora Amin's *Theatre of Crime* implies that resolution for the Woman – and all those she represents – is achievable but leaves this for the audience to carry out through, and beyond, the performance. The assault on the Woman is a single event, but my analysis has unpacked the complex layers and intersections of oppression that have resulted in this traumatic outcome. I concluded that the forces of misogyny and class discrimination crush women of working and poorer classes particularly, and leave them vulnerable to abuse on multiple levels. The traumatic event here is also shown within a string of abuses on women, precluding a chance of recovery that does not dismantle the systems of oppression. My interpretation is also supported by the investigation scenes in which the sexual abuse victim is further traumatised, and is symbolically put in a cell as if she is the perpetrator. Like the judicial system in *hang*, the system represented here is exposed as one which exists to safeguard the interests of a privileged class of society at the expense of another: in *hang*, the interests of white men, and in *Theatre of Crime*, those of rich and upper-class men. Nonetheless, the play encourages and promotes change that protects the wellbeing of women.

I have further argued that all the plays discussed display theatre's unique potential to present traumatic experience and to speak – physically and visually, not only verbally – the language of trauma. This potential interrelates with, above all, the condition of being present in the theatre. For an audience who can experience the plays at first hand the communication of

trauma is enabled through the means of narration, watching visible wounds, feeling a spectrum of emotions and sensations emanating from the bodies of the actors, anticipating violence and vigilante justice, and seeing metaphors of light and darkness. The body of the actor in particular carries the potential of communicating trauma immediately and affectively, as occurs in Anita's cathartic cry, Barry's defeated silence, Three's trembling hands, and every gesture Nora Amin's Woman makes during and after the assault. In addition, the body provides an exploration of the sense of touch, a running motif in each of *Vincent River*, *hang* and *stoning mary*. In *Vincent River*, touch is a means of coping and keeping post-traumatic reactions at bay; conversely, in tucker green's plays, touch loses its ability to bring traumatised family members together and bring them comfort. This shows the devastation of intense and widespread trauma, but also further indicates that the traumatisation that certain plays portray needs to be resolved by socio-political and economic change, and not individual healing and comforting methods per se. Nonetheless, theatre simultaneously exploits the potential for healing through the very body of the performer, as well as in the body of the spect-actor, as in Boal's Forum Theatre. *Theatre of Crime* calls for a physical undoing of the conditions which foster violence against women. The opportunity to transform the body of the audience members from a witness to trauma (and potentially itself a site of violence) to an agent for equality and justice is a capability unique to theatre amongst the other art forms that present trauma. In other words, these plays find ways to embody Judith Herman's "vivid sensations and images" (1997, p.38), Roger Luckhurst's "frozen moment of traumatic impact" (2008, p.180), Bessel van der Kolk's speechless horror (2014, p.43) and Achille Mbembe's suffering bodies within the devastation of colonialism. Whilst the body of the actor usually takes centre stage, often with graphic immediacy in contemporary theatre, the plays I have examined go beyond the physicality of actors to utilise the visual and

material opportunities of scenography in stage sets that evoke trauma in their own right. In *Vincent River*, the dark and derelict setting can be interpreted as a reflection of Anita's own trauma, whereas the clinical, modern set of *hang*, I argue, serves as a camouflage to the horrors that happen behind the scenes. This scenographic dimension means that theatre has unique opportunities with each new production to find further visual and visceral means of expressing traumatic impact.

I have used the case studies in this thesis to demonstrate different dramaturgical choices playwrights make to convey traumatic pain. Ridley's plays represent traumatic experience in a combined form of visual and auditory modes and show the influence of his artistic background, as he paints a picture of the memories in the form of still images. When resolution is achieved or attempted, the images become more dynamic, and transform into a story. The stories arguably function to make the audience visualise the scene of the trauma, as if they are watching it. Ridley also creates dramatic spaces where trauma can be represented effectively. In *Vincent River*, Anita's new flat indicates both a transition and a symbolic place where traumatic memories can be reconstructed; after being forced out of her family and her community, this new space offers a renewed opportunity to connect with Davey who alternately represents son, therapist, and lover. *Leaves of Glass*'s spaces are characterised by confinement and metaphors of darkness and light. For example, the shed to which the father often retreats also symbolically contains his memories and feelings that his wife is not willing to acknowledge. The image of snow and ice runs through both Ridley's plays, where both the bodies of Vincent and the father were found: this image recalls van der Kolk and van der Hart's description of traumatic memory as being "inflexible and invariable" (1991, p.431) and is testament to how the vocabularies of drama and theatre can speak the language of trauma.

The language – and silences – of trauma are also communicated in *hang* and *stoning mary*. tucker green employs the dramatic effect of active silence to signify discomfort, or as in *hang*, a refusal to bend Three's will away from her decision. The plays thus demonstrate theatre's potential in presenting trauma through the tempo of the dialogue, through what is left unsaid as much as what is said. The plays' use of ambiguity gestures towards widescale trauma of racial violence which cannot be contained through language. The two plays eschew narrative recall of the traumatic experiences as a means of achieving resolution. Instead, they reveal deep-rooted failures of justice that go beyond individual attempts at resolving trauma through narrative. In addition, the stage set in *stoning mary* evokes through a few words the ravages of war, poverty and the AIDS epidemic. By importing offshore traumas to the UK stage and including white characters, tucker green questions the lack of visibility for black people and the specific injustices they face: in this way, she gives them a platform and a voice. Lastly, Nora Amin's conception of the stage set creates a space where trauma can be effectively represented, and which symbolises the working of oppression. I argued that presenting the sexual assault itself, rather than narrating it, precludes any attempt to dismiss the abuse of women. Amin positions her audience in a liminal space, between past and present, in a place akin to a prison cell, so that they become witnesses to oppression and are inspired to resist it: to change from passive spectators to proactive spect-actors.

In addition, the structures of Ridley's *Vincent River* and *Leaves of Glass*, tucker green's *stoning mary* and Amin's *Theatre of Crime* reflect the thinking process of traumatised people. I have shown that literature that addresses trauma typically follows a non-linear format and uses flashbacks and nightmares to reflect on and represent the way traumatic experience continues to intrude on the mind in the present. The structure of the plays echoes the working of trauma,

where the traumatised mind keeps returning to the past in an effort to understand the experience, mourn or hold their abusers accountable, as in Barry and Steven's complex relationship.

Each of the playwrights in this study presents trauma uniquely, adopting strategies in their dramas that reflect individual identity positions and cultural and racial backgrounds. The traumatic experiences in Ridley's plays are condensed into intense, distressing events. *Vincent River* replicates the psychoanalytic model of therapy that aims, in the words of van der Kolk and van der Hart, "to reproduce [traumatic] memories into words and integrate them into the totality of experience" (1991, p.436). This model remains the prevalent therapeutic model in the West, and the plays' emphasis upon the importance of verbalising traumatic experiences reflects this. The transformation of memory into narrative, and the cathartic release of emotions that Anita experiences, brings finality of a kind to the story of Anita and Davey. In a sense, the play suggests, they can start to adapt to a life without everything and everyone they have lost. This finality, however, is denied the characters in *Leaves of Glass*, *hang*, *stoning mary*, and *Theatre of Crime*. These are plays which reveal a pervasive violence that goes beyond the event-based model. Instead of a concentration in specific, albeit violent, events, the traumatisation explored in these plays is prolonged and habitual and is symptomatic of socio-economic and political systems that especially crush racial minorities, the underprivileged, women, and, intersectionally, women who happen to be from underprivileged and racial minority backgrounds. Therefore, traumatic resolution is much harder to achieve in the landscapes of tucker green's and Amin's plays. As Stef Craps notes, "by narrowly focusing on the level of the individual psyche, one tends to leave unquestioned the conditions that enabled the traumatic abuse, such as political oppression, racism, or economic domination" (2015, p.28). The plays I have examined show that, while everyone experiences trauma in some form and at some point within their lives, we do not

all do so with the same frequency or persistence, at the same magnitude, or of the same order. Less dominant or marginalised groups experience trauma habitually and pervasively: thus, their situation and condition requires new representations as well as new interpretive models in cultural trauma theory. The plays also demonstrate that people respond to trauma according to their cultural backgrounds and communal support available to them. The thesis has presented multi-faceted aspects of the representation of trauma on stage. If a summary of the plays' intimations is possible, it can be said that Ridley's drama urges the audience to *listen*, tucker green's to *see*, and Amin's to *do*.

Further research in this field could valuably consider the role of affect in communicating trauma onstage. The burgeoning field of affect studies focuses on prelinguistic or nonlinguistic forces in various disciplines, including politics, culture, religion and theatre. As author Donovan Schaefer illustrates, affect theory is largely based on the work of the American psychologist Silvan Tomkins, whose early training was in theatre. Schaefer argues that Tomkins' work in the theatre made him realise the importance of the non-linguistic aspects of drama:

> An actor's instrument is not a script, but a body, and effective actors will meticulously use every aspect of their bodies—their voice, hands, face, posture, stride, gaze, gait, and muscles—to build an affective symphony … A play's success is measured by its ability to deliver a feast of affects. (2016)

Schaefer makes clear here the vital connectedness between the fields of theatre and affect. This thesis has likewise addressed this but through the lens of theatre's capacity to represent trauma and its potential for engaging its audiences critically and emotionally to support this end. The publication of Meera Atkinson and Michael Richardson's *Traumatic Affect* (2013) and the more recent collection *Affects in 21st-century British Theatre: Exploring Feeling on Page and Stage*

(2021), edited by Mireia Aragay, Cristina Delgado-Garcia and Martin Middeke further consolidates the links between the three disciplines. The plays that I have analysed, with their strong affective content, highlight the potential for further studies into the intersections between trauma and affect onstage.

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Appendix A: Permission to Translate *Theatre of Crime*

Dear Ms Amin,

I am a postgraduate research student at the University of Sheffield working towards my thesis on *The Performance of Trauma in Selected Contemporary Plays*. I wish to include the following extract in my thesis and am contacting you as the author or rights-holder:

An English language translation of your play:

Amin, N., (2019). *The Theatre of Crime*. Cairo: General Organization of Cultural Palaces.

The electronic version of my thesis will be deposited in the University of Sheffield Library. I would be grateful if you could advise if this will be acceptable.

Kind regards,

Noha Bayoumy

23/12/2021

Hereby I grant you the right to an English translation for the purpose of your thesis.
Berlin, 07.01.2022

Appendix B: *Theatre of Crime* Translation

By Nora Amin

Translated from Arabic by Noha Bayoumy

Scene One

An empty stage except for a huge iron gate left slightly ajar. Yellow lighting as if coming from street lights. Occasionally, neon lights flash as if the space is surrounded by unseen billboards. Two young men enter, chatting. There is no one behind the huge gate. They are in their late twenties.

Ahmad It looks like we have arrived too early.

Walid Never mind. This is a lot better.

Ahmad But we'll be standing for too long, Walid. My feet can no longer bear this. You have dragged me behind you from Bein Al-Sarayat to the city centre without resting. [31] God bless your health!

Walid If someone hears you, they will think you are fifty! It's great that we are the first to arrive. This way we can guarantee that we are the first to get in.

Ahmad I honestly don't understand why you are certain that the auditorium will be full and that the audience will smash the gate so they can get in! Are there any tell-tale signs? It is only a play in standard Arabic in which some of our friends are performing.

Walid No, careful! This play in particular will have a full audience! VIPs are coming to the audience and we have to encourage our brothers and lifelong friends. But it looks like you'd rather escape and go to the coffee shop. Isn't this true?

---

[31] Bein El-Sarayat is an area in the east of Giza, around 4 kilometres from the centre of Cairo.

Ahmad I won't escape, my friend. Screw the theatre that has robbed us of our lives. Let's keep on chasing the mirage. Maybe one day we will know where we're heading.

Walid Call our friends to see if they are close by.

Walid *walks towards the gate while Ahmad tries to make a phone call.*

Walid It looks like they have not opened the gates yet. There are no security guards here although the gate is ajar.

Ahmad 'You do not have enough credit to make this call'. We just have to wait.

Walid When do you think [our friends] will arrive? The play starts in an hour.

Ahmad Nothing in your country starts on time. Let's say the play will start in an hour and a half, but we can get in now if you can.

Walid No. We told our friends that we're meeting at the gate. Let's not lose each other. Also how would you suggest getting in without having the security guards present? Sneaking?

Ahmad My dear Walid, this is a golden opportunity. The gate of glory without a security guard. Let's not contradict ourselves. When we find security guards, we curse our fate and accuse them of oppressing us. And when they are nice to us and leave the gate open, or slightly open, we wait for them to come and oppress us? Truly, a cat loves the person that chokes them![32]

Walid Never mind. I will not dwell on what you're saying this time. Perhaps you'll understand that this is a theatre, not a lawless place!

---

[32] Variation of the Egyptian proverb: El Ott mayhebbish illa khanna'oh, meaning a cat only loves the person that chokes them.

A tall middle-aged man of average weight enters. He seems to be avoiding the two young men. He moves closer to the gate.

Walid See? Another audience member has arrived early but didn't go through the gate. Something tells me you want to run to your coffee shop (laughs).

Ahmad *lights a cigarette.*

Blackout. The lighting is redirected to another spot in the theatre space, which may be behind the audience, so they understand that the scenes are divided geographically in a way that puts the main event – the flashback – in front of the audience. The investigation scenes, set in the present, are behind the audience. The audience will need to adjust their seating based on the geographical plane (which also marks a shift in time). This arrangement will change after Scene Seven.

Scene Two

A man in his forties sits at a desk. There is a very old lampshade and many papers. He is smoking slowly. A woman in her forties sits on the other side. They seem to be in an investigation room at a government facility. The room is otherwise bare.

Investigator So, do you still insist not to drink anything? Let me remind you that we'll be here for long.

The Woman I can't. I won't be able to swallow anything.

Investigator Fine. But don't accuse us later of being stingy! (*laughs*).

Long pause. The **Woman** *seems somewhat lost, even though she looks tidy. She has a dazed look. The* **Investigator** *steals looks at her every now and then as he flicks through the papers at the desk.*

Investigator How many were they?

The Woman I don't know, around 70, or 40.

Investigator There's a huge difference between 40 and 70, Miss.

The Woman I didn't count them.

Investigator Roughly then.

The Woman I already told you, roughly.

Investigator From 40 to 70, is this 'roughly' to you?

The Woman I think there were seven rows of people behind me. Each row was around two or three metres long standing in a semi-circle, so around 70 people.

Investigator I applaud your precision.

The Woman But I'm still not sure.

Investigator How did you know how many rows of people were behind you when you were in the state you describe?

The Woman I felt them. The theatre and acting make us aware of our surroundings, even the things that are not directly in front of us. That's why we have a sense of our surroundings in general.

Investigator Didn't you tell me at the beginning that you are a writer?

The Woman Sorry, I forgot. I am also an actress.

Investigator That's really weird. How can one forget their job?

The Woman My apologies. Take into consideration that the situation wasn't easy. I am still shaken. However, I don't see a big difference between being a writer and being an actress.

Investigator No, no, of course not, Miss. There's a huge difference. Now we will need to edit your initial statement. Don't you think that an audience member had seen you in an indecent role, so he did what he did?

The Woman (*stunned*). What exactly are you saying?

Investigator No! Mind your language, Miss. I know you are in shock, but I advise you to be polite.

The Woman Fine. If we think about it this way, maybe I have written something that led to what happened to me. Isn't that so?

Investigator Of course not, Miss. How can readers see a writer's body? Of course not. Being an actress is completely different. There's no room for comparison.

The Woman Anyway, nobody knows me. I do not appear in films or on screen. All my work is in the theatre.

Investigator True, I have never seen you before. I don't mean to be belittle you, of course. You know what I mean.

Long pause. This time the **Investigator** *does not go through the papers. He puts out his cigarette and looks at the* **Woman** *every now and then. She begins to tense up.*

Investigator You said that the gate was shut when you arrived.

The Woman Yes.

Investigator And how did you know it was shut if you were at the end of the row? How did you see the gate and how did you know it was shut?

The Woman It was a huge crowd and that's why I was sure. Otherwise, why would they be gathering like that?

Investigator (*Stands up, draws closer and leans towards her*). And when you saw this crowd, why did you join them?

The Woman (*Growing increasingly nervous*). I don't understand.

Investigator I mean it looks like you are the one who put yourself in this situation. Logically, you should have simply left. But your mistake led to what happened – or what you say happened

The Woman (*Almost panicking*) Could I have a glass of water please?

Blackout. The scene shifts to the flashback.

Scene Three

There are now seven more men in addition to the three who were already there: **Ahmad***,* **Walid** *and the middle-aged man.*

Ahmad I still don't understand how our friends were able to show their play in this a-list venue.

Walid No, this is normal. Their play won and they got the right to show it here, as an appreciation.

Ahmad As for me, I will remain an audience member forever! Right? (*Laughs*).

The seven men are dispersed. One of them is talking on the phone, another is staring at others, another is staring at the gate. Every now and then one of them moves towards the gate trying to find out what's going on, but comes back quickly.

Mahmoud*, a friend of* **Walid** *and* **Ahmad***, comes quickly. He is of the same age as his friends.*

Ahmad Why are you so late? We've been waiting for almost an hour!

Mahmoud Apologies. I swear I came running after we finished filming. We finished really late today.

Walid Catch your breath, then. Thank God you came in the first place. I'd almost lost hope any friends would show up.

Mahmoud I would never miss a play. Also I promised you, didn't I?

Walid And you fulfilled your promise as usual, my friend.

Ahmad Won't you introduce us to the stars you work with, my famous friend?

Mahmoud (*Laughs*) Famous? I am only a novice. Also, all those you call stars were made in the theatre. And here you are, at one of the greatest theatres.

Walid You are right, Mahmoud. We just wish we were onstage, not at the gate.

Ahmad I hope we can go through!

Mahmoud And why are you worried? The gate is open, and you have been waiting for a while, haven't you?

Two men – security guards – appear and shut the gate using chains.

The people waiting notice what happened and are a bit surprised. They whisper and gather at the gate, but they keep their distance from each other. **Mahmoud***,* **Ahmad** *and* **Walid** *remain next to each other.*

During the following conversation, ten more men of different backgrounds gradually appear and join the crowd at the gate. Some of them stand upstage, some downstage and some in the middle or mingle among friends.

Ahmad (*Jokingly*) What's going on, pal? Won't you ask them to open the gate and let you in since you are a star who appears in TV series and shows?

Walid (*Jokingly*) It looks like they shut the gate as soon as they saw him!

Mahmoud This is no time to make jokes!

One of the men standing close to the gate starts to shout even though he is standing close to the security guards. He is in his early 40s.

Ezzat What are you people doing? We have been standing here for more than an hour!

Ahmad (*Whispering*) Liar. He has just arrived.

Ezzat Won't anyone answer me?

Another man in the crowd chimes in. He is in his mid-30s.

Ali That's what they always do. They take pleasure in humiliating us. There may not even be anyone in the auditorium, and then they complain that no one goes to the theatre.

Ahmad You are absolutely right! Maybe it's a scheme to make us hate theatre!

Mahmoud Calm down, Ahmad, don't let him bait you.

Walid (*To Ali*) Surely they are fixing something and will open the gate as soon as the play starts.

Ali Doubtful. Let's wait and see.

Another man in his early 30s takes part in the conversation.

Hani We are actors too, not passers-by, and they should let us in first.

Ezzat Wait until one of them appears and answers us.

The security guards pretend not to hear anything and look away. They steal looks at the crowd every now and then.

The ten people who have arrived are now dispersed throughout the crowd, so that there are twenty men at the gate and two behind it. We notice throughout the next conversation that the tall, middle-aged man, probably in his early 40s, moves around slowly and changes his position frequently.

Hani (*To all*) What is the title of this play? (*Nobody answers*) Hello! What is the title of the play in progress? (*The noise from the side talks and general discontent increases*). Oh, God! You can't even hear!

Ezzat (*Turning to find* **Hani**) What's wrong with you? You shouldn't be berating us! We already have our hands full!

Hani I asked a simple question and no one paid any attention.

Ali Take it easy. Maybe they don't know the title in the first place.

Mahmoud (*To* **Hani***, even though he is standing very far from him*) Apologies. The title is *Theatre of Crime*.

Ali And why didn't you answer him from the beginning? He kept repeating the question and no one answered him!

Hani Never mind. Thank you.

The theatre **Manager** *suddenly appears wearing a shiny, smart suit. He has an overall air of elegance and seriousness. He speaks to the security guards while everyone else falls silent.*

The Manager I order you not to open the gate! I won't say it again! If anybody goes through, you're going to be severely punished! The theatre cannot accommodate all of these people and I will not bear the brunt of the VIPs' anger alone!

The security guards obediently shake their heads in agreement.

The **Manager** *looks at everyone with hostility and disappears.*

Walid (*To Ahmad*) You, come here! Why are you standing far away?

Ahmad I wish I had gone to the coffee shop, but I am unlucky. What an unfortunate companionship.

Walid Come here, calm down.

Blackout. The scene shifts to the investigation room.

Scene Four

The **Woman** *drinks the water in one gulp and puts the glass on the desk.*

The Woman Thank you.

Investigator Didn't I tell you we'll be here long?

The Woman I'm at your service.

Investigator Thank you. I'd like to ask you, Miss, when you saw the crowd and how the people were, why did you stand among them?

The Woman I was very excited about watching the play. I had just arrived, and I was happy, especially that it is a play by young people in this great venue. I didn't feel worried at all. I walked among the people normally, until I reached the spot where I was standing.

Investigator Do you mean that no one bothered you at all?

The Woman No, no one helped me, and no one bothered me either.

Investigator And you arrived half an hour before the play starts.

The Woman Yes.

Investigator If you don't mind me asking, don't you think it's strange that a woman leads herself to a situation where she's standing among all these men?

The Woman I don't understand!

Investigator I mean, it's a bit strange in our country for a woman to see all these men and insist on standing in the middle.

The Woman Are you accusing me, sir? I'm reminding you I'm the one who came here and gave a statement. I am the victim. I am the one who was on the verge of death.

Investigator (*Mockingly*) No need to exaggerate. It looks like the theatre and writing have distorted your sense of reality.

The Woman Are you calling me mad or saying that I'm at least exaggerating what happened?

Investigator Slow down now. (*In an intimidating tone*) Didn't I warn you to mind your language?

The Woman …

Investigator I am not accusing you of being mad or anything. You are the one saying so, not me.

The Woman …

The **Investigator** *walks around the room.*

Investigator You saw men gathering in a crowd, their anger growing, like you said. And yet you insisted on passing through them. What were you hoping to do? What were you thinking?

The Woman …

Investigator I am waiting for an answer, Miss. Why aren't you answering?

The Woman I wasn't thinking about anything, and maybe that is the problem. However, I reject your insinuation that I knew what was going to happen to me, or that I wanted it.

Investigator (*Approaching her provocatively*) So you didn't want it to happen?

The Woman (*Cries slowly*)

Investigator I urge you to confess the truth instead of dragging all these innocent people into this. You are a well-educated woman. I think you know quite well what will happen to you if we find out that you made up this story.

The Woman (*Crying*) Are you threatening me instead of doing me justice?

Investigator God forbid. Never. I mean people. These people. Nobody knows exactly what they're capable of. Of course, you are under our protection here. But if you go back to your house and your life, we cannot guarantee what will happen to you.

The Woman Please open the window.

Investigator It doesn't open.

The Woman I can't breathe.

Investigator Care for a cigarette?

The Woman (*Almost choking*) Please, I am begging you.

The **Investigator** *tries to open the window. Light fades. The scene shifts to the theatre gate.*

Scene Five

Ten more men arrive at the gate of the theatre during the next conversation. They are dispersed. The lighting gradually shifts so that the shadow of the gate appears as if it is of a huge prison cell. The shift in lighting happens slowly and gradually. It is barely noticeable.

Security Guard 1 I'm warning you of coming close to the gate! I'm warning you not to touch it! I will not say it again!

Ezzat Please let me go through, sir. I'm alone. Ignore these animals.

Security Guard 1 (*Turns away*).

Ezzat (*Offers him a cigarette*) Have a lovely morning and relax.

Security Guard 2 (*More aggressively than* **Security Guard 1***)* How stupid of you!

Hani Alright .. alright.

Walid (*To his friends*) What's all this? Are we being humiliated just so we can watch a play?

Ahmad Not only that. I bet they are sneakily letting in their friends through the back door.

Mahmoud Shut up, Ahmad. Do you want everyone to smash the gate over your head?

Ahmad And why over my head? Why not tackle the corruption inside?

Walid And how do you know there is corruption?

Ahmad It stinks! Can't you smell it?

Mahmoud Never mind. We can wait. It's alright.

Ali No, it isn't. We are being humiliated only because we came to watch a play. If all of you have no pride, we still do. (*To everyone*) What do you think?

Ahmad Mind your language!

Ali (*Ready and looking for a fight*) Who are you? Come closer so I can see you!

Walid (*To* **Ahmad**) I beg you to calm down. We will be assaulted.

Two female theatre staff appear and join the security guards.

Hani Tell us when you're planning to open the gate. We just want to know so that we're clear on that.

Ezzat He just told you he's not opening it. Can't you hear?

Hani No, this is unacceptable. You have to know that you're dealing with artists.

Ezzat And are we pieces of shit?

Ali Hey, you! Who are you calling pieces of shit? Speak only about yourself!

Ezzat (*To* **Security Guard 1**) Do you see what's happening to me just because I'm standing here protecting the gate?

Security Guard 1 Shut up! Don't say a word! Do you hear me?

The crowd has grown to 30 men. There is some jostling as the ten men who has just arrived try to find a place. The space between them has diminished.

Mahmoud I will try to call any of our friends inside. Maybe they will find a solution.

Walid Be quick, or else Ahmad will accuse you of being corrupt as well.

Mahmoud (*Tries to make a phone call with difficulty*).

Ahmad I am not going in. You can go without me.

Walid Please don't be rash. They haven't even opened the gate yet.

Mahmoud No one is answering. They must be in rehearsal and have left their mobile phones in their rooms.

Walid (*To* **Ahmad**) Are you reassured now?

Ahmad No. (*Sarcastically*) Let's enjoy this beautiful companionship until we see where this story ends.

Hani (*To* **Security Guard 1** *from a distance*) Excuse me, is there any other gate?

The voices rise, asking the same question in different ways. Blackout.

Scene Six

The **Investigator** *opens the window and turns to face the* **Woman**. *The window seemingly has iron bars. The lighting reflects on the bars, so that we see it from now on as if it is the theatre gates; as if it is a metaphorical prison cell. This reflection remains throughout the following investigation scenes.*

Investigator Is this better?

The Woman Yes. I still can't feel the air.

Investigator And what should we do? How is this our fault if you are mentally unstable or if you are undergoing therapy or so?

The Woman I will indeed need therapy when I get out of here.

Investigator It looks like you have trouble breathing normally.

The Woman I used to have panic attacks three years ago but they have gradually subsided.

Investigator Panic attacks! No need for exaggeration. Maybe you were just exhausted or upset for some reason.

The Woman Upset? No, they were severe, full-scale panic attacks.

Investigator And how did these attacks feel like?

The Woman I don't wish to remember; I don't want to describe them. Even describing them terrifies me.

Investigator And yet you willingly got yourself into this situation in such a state? Glory be to God!

The Woman I told you that the attacks had subsided.

Investigator And what do you call what happened to you then? Isn't this a textbook panic attack?

The Woman I didn't plan for it to occur and I didn't expect what happened. How was I to expect that I would experience what I already healed from within minutes?

Investigator You could have expected it or stayed at home.

The Woman It looks like you are determined to blame it all on me.

Investigator Truth be told, I don't understand what made you go there.

The Woman (*Laughs and cries at the same time*)

Investigator Let's go back to the timeline of the incident. You said that you didn't have any trouble walking among the crowd, correct?

The Woman Correct.

Investigator So the people were good and orderly, how did they turn into the exact opposite so suddenly?

The Woman I don't know, but you should.

Investigator I am the one who asks questions here, and you should only answer.

The Woman Maybe because they were already about to burst with anger and I arrived at the moment when they their patience turned to anger, maybe. And maybe something happened during the half hour I spent there which made them burst with anger. It was the hardest half hour in my life. It was like doomsday .. or unreal, I don't know. I cannot describe it any other way. I never imagined this would happen to me. I never imagined this would happen to me at my age.

Investigator Are you sure it even happened?

The Woman There are a lot of witnesses. And you can perform a medical examination on me right away, and you will know what happened to me before coming here.

Investigator No one can know the truth about actors.

The Woman This kind of thinking is old-fashioned. There used to be a time when an actor's testimony would not be reliable in court because they are capricious and lie as a profession. Not anymore.

Investigator My apologies, Ma'am. No offence.

The Woman Are you married?

Investigator Yes, thank God.

The Woman What if the woman you are questioning now is your wife? Wouldn't you believe her right away instead of accusing her of lying and tormenting her further?

Investigator My wife would never be in your place.

The Woman Why? Doesn't she walk in the street? Doesn't she walk in crowded places? We live in a reality full of violence and harassment. There hasn't been a girl or woman that has not experienced it. Our society, sir, is the worst environment for

the lives of women and their safety. We no longer know what “safety” is. And now you are investigating me as if I am guilty. And if I am not guilty, then I must be mad .. imagining things .. a lying actress. It’s like I must be accused anyway, because there’s no way I can be a victim deserving of justice.

Investigator (*Interrupting*) Enough! Enough! Do you think you are pleading a feminist cause? You must be an agent of sorts. Someone must have pushed you to smear our country! I felt from the beginning that something is fishy. I couldn’t stop questioning every word you said. What society are you talking about? Ours? In our society, women should stay at home and uphold their honour. An honourable woman doesn’t bring shame to her family no matter what, if she has a family. She doesn’t publicly announce her shame like that! You are every bit as guilty as everyone who was there! You went there voluntarily, no one forced you!

The Woman God is sufficient for me, and He is the most trustworthy.

Investigator What? Speak up, Miss! I didn’t hear that.

The Woman Every time you call me ‘Miss’ I feel like you are insulting me! Why? Why are you insulting me? Are you saying that I deserve what happened to me? Are you saying I sought it?

Investigator I swear I didn’t say anything of the sort. You did. You told the whole truth.

The Woman What do you want from me?

Investigator If it turns out that you are wasting our time, you will be duly punished. I advise you to reconsider quickly.

The Woman Nothing is worse than what I have experienced. Nothing can scare me or make me withdraw my statement.

Investigator It looks like you are seeking fake publicity to make up for your failure in writing and acting. It's very clear that you are aiming to be under the spotlight and to get media attention. You said it yourself at the beginning of the investigation: nobody knows you and you are only a theatre actress. Of course, this is a great opportunity for you to be recognised so that acting offers come pouring in before it's too late.

The Woman (*Laughs hysterically*)

Investigator Lovely. Now let's get you a cold lemonade and listen to the rest of what happened at the theatre, in detail please, and clearly. And I promise I will not interrupt you.

Blackout. The scene shifts to the theatre gate.

Scene Seven

Ten more men arrive at the theatre throughout this conversation. There is now a total of 40.

Security Guard 1 (*Shouting*) I won't say it again. You are standing in front of a public facility. If you create any disorder, I will call the police straight away. If this gate gets scratched, you will all be duly punished. Shouting and touching the gate are prohibited. Do you get it?

Ali We only want to watch the play, sir. Maybe a few of us have made you angry, but they're only a few. Don't punish us for their mistakes!

Ahmad (*To his friends*) I could beat this guy up with a clear conscience!

Walid It looks like the play is happening here, not inside.

Mahmoud Great idea. Maybe the director created this whole scene as part of the play.

Hani (*Drawing closer to the three friends*) How so? We have stood here since the beginning and we haven't seen any directors [or actors].

Mahmoud (*Smiling*) No, you're right. Maybe some of these people are actually actors but we can't feel it.

Hani And how can we not feel it? We are actors like them.

Ahmad Nice to meet you. What's your name?

Hani Hani.

Ahmad Ahmad.

Hani Do you see it as a chance to make friends?

Walid (*Laughs out loud*)

Three people talk loudly throughout the past conversation until we find them suddenly shouting.

Journalist (*Shouting at the security guards*) We are journalists, and we need to go through. We have IDs. Please let us in. This is unacceptable.

Critic I am Sayed Muhammad, the theatre critic. You know me. Somebody open the gate for us, or we should speak to someone in charge.

Lecturer And I'm a university lecturer. My students are coming right now to see the play. We have booked our seats, please fix the situation.

Ali Answer them. Even if we don't deserve a response, respond to the VIPs here, or they will shame you in the newspapers. I promise you. [33]

Ezzat No, they will open the gate for them of course and leave us. Rest assured, smartie!

Ali Do you know who you're talking to?

Ezzat Who I'm talking to? If you were anywhere closer I would show you who you're talking to!

Lecturer No need for all that! If they let us in, you will all be with us. We are one audience.

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[33] Referring to the journalist, lecturer and critic's perceived high social status.

Journalist (*Discreetly*) Don't exaggerate, of course not all of them will be let in, this is unacceptable.

Critic If they let us in but bar you, you can revolt.

Hani There will be no need for words then.

Walid (*Sarcastically*) Calm down, artist.

Ahmad We're in a whole other universe. They won't listen to us.

Security Guard 2 (*To the* **Critic**) Excuse me, Mr Sayed. I'm only doing what I was told. You know how things go.

Critic We need to talk to someone in charge, then.

Journalist And here's my ID.

Security Guard 1 Who wants to talk to whom? I don't get it! No one is going in! (*Shouting*) Do you not understand?

A stunned silence. There are now forty people standing.

The **Woman** *[from the investigation scenes] enters, smiling. She walks through the crowd until she is one queue away from the gate. As she walks, everyone gives her a puzzled look. They are still oppressed and silent after the guard yelled at them.*

The Woman (*To* **Ahmad***, who happens to be standing next to her*) When are they opening the gate?

Ahmad (*Doesn't answer*).

The Woman (*To the tall, middle-aged man who happens to be standing behind her*) Do you know when they're letting in the audience?

The man (*Doesn't answer*).

The Woman (*Looks at her watch, then speaking to the security guards*). Excuse me, shouldn't you be opening the gate now? Or is the play running late?

Ezzat My lady, nothing in our country starts on time. (*To himself*) Where on Earth did she come from?

The Woman (*Looks around, her smile and enthusiasm fading gradually. She looks for something in her purse but can't find it. She closes her purse carefully*).

The theatre **Manager** *appears behind the gate and stares at the crowd. He goes to* **Security Guard 1** *and points at the critic. He looks at everyone with disgust, strikes his hands together and disappears.* [34] *Everyone is whispering.* **Security Guard 1** *opens the gate ajar whereas* **Security Guard 2** *holds it so that it doesn't open any further or no one throws it open. They let the critic in quickly and close the gate again.*

Ahmad (*Loudly, to his friends*) See the corruption?! I bet you they let in their friends through the back door. I am sure this critic is stupid and didn't know there's another door, and that's how he ended up here.

Hani (*To the crowd*) Isn't this the same person who told us to revolt if they let him in and bar us? He was the first to go through and leave us outside! And if they let anyone else in, that person will let go of us straight away!

Ali Very well! It's all clear now!

Everyone starts to jostle.

The Woman (*To* **Security Guard 1**) Excuse me, I have to get in. Please let me in.

Ezzat And here's another case of corruption!

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[34] Striking the hands is a gesture denoting frustration.

The Woman I swear it's not corruption. I have to get in, not to the auditorium, just to the garden. I need to sit there.

Shouting and jostling increases.

Ahmad (*To his friends, until he realises they lost each other*) I wish I were at my favourite coffee shop now, smoking and drinking tea like a king. Where are you? Where did you go? May God punish you for this stupid mistake! What a terrible night!

Walid Mahmoud .. Mahmoud .. where are you?

Mahmoud (*Waves his arm so that* **Walid** *can see him*)

Journalist Here's my ID!

Lecturer (*We realise that the ten people who have recently arrived are his students*). I booked eleven tickets for myself and my students. They need to submit a term paper about this play. If they're not able to, it's all your fault.

Shouting and unintelligible screaming.

The Woman (*Pleading to* **Security Guard 1***, standing close to him on the other side of the gate*) Please, I have a medical condition, I can't ..

Security Guard 1 (*Shouting in a hostile manner*) And what should I do? What do you want me to do?

The Woman (*Falls silent, shocked*)

Jostling continues.

Ali We are going through! Nothing is gonna stop us! Even if we have to smash the gate!

Shouting. Some say 'We are people like you', 'We've made a mistake coming here', 'We swear we will smash this gate over your heads', 'May God avenge us'.

The tall man appears behind the Woman and presses his body tightly against hers.

The Woman (*Seems to be choking, horrified*) Please .. please ..

Ahmad (*Moves away from her because of the jostling and pushing*) Could you at least let this woman in? She looks like she's going to pass out.

The tall man starts to sexually assault the **Woman** *from behind. We see him repeatedly moving his waist as if he is anally raping her, except that their clothes are in the way. He repeats this movement four times continuously and more aggressively in the dense crowd without anyone noticing. She turns around suddenly and with difficulty, so she is adjacent to him. He stops. She is shocked and truly horrified, her distress at the crowd compounded by the assault. Her eyes protrude as she looks at his chest, unable to look into his eyes. She seems paralysed. Her left hand is raised towards him and her fingers set apart as if they are screaming. She turns her gaze with difficulty toward the gate, crying. Her eyes meet two women standing behind the security guards).*

The Woman (*Totally horrified, crying*) Please let me in, I can't breathe. I feel sick. I am dying ..

Mahmoud (*From a distance*) Please save her, she's Ms. Mona AbdulMoneim!

The Woman (*She doesn't hear* **Mahmoud**. *She begins to shake violently and struggles to breathe. The crowd continues to push one another and scream*).

The **Woman***'s eyes meet those of a young actor clinging to the gate. He is one of her students from a theatre course. He is tiny and appears to be disabled. He seems like he has dissociated. He desperately tries to open the gate while looking at her. She cries even more.*

The Tall Man Open the gate, let her in, shame on you!

The **Woman** *seems about to break down*. **Security Guard 1** *opens the gate very carefully and pulls her inside violently. Her student tries to go through as well but is forcibly pushed by*

Security Guard 1. *The student's arm gets caught in the gate as the* **Guard** *closes it, causing him bruises.*

Random shouting: 'Let him in, he's with her. He's helping her'.

As soon as she passes through the gate, she heavily collapses. The female theatre staff gather around her and sprinkle her face with water. She comes round suddenly, gasping for air.

The Woman I'm dying .. air .. air ..

(**Security Guard 2** *carries her*).

The Woman (*weakly*) Leave me .. air .. air ..

Female staff (*Shouting angrily*) Nothing that terrible happened! Why are you exaggerating? What's that?

A young woman who was in the theatre garden appears.

Young Woman Excuse me, she needs some air. No need to give her water now.

Female staff (*Shouting at the* **Woman**) We have to remove you from here! They'll trample you if they come in!

Security Guard 2 *carries the* **Woman** *and sits her on a chair. The* **Journalist** *and* **Lecturer** *go through the gate quickly; they could have truly trampled her.*

Young Woman Can you move?

The Woman (*Completely lost and having a nervous breakdown, she speaks with difficulty*) Yes .. I have to .. I'm going to the garden.

The young woman helps her walk a few steps to the garden.

Young Woman I'm Heba. I'm with you, next you, I will not leave you.

The Woman (*Breaks down, lowers her head*).

Blackout

Scene Eight

The scene changes to the investigation room. The position of the room on the stage is now swapped with the scenes outside the theatre gate. However, the position of the window, its iron bars and the shadows that they cast also change. This change takes place during the blackout between Scenes Seven and Eight. The audience sit in the area between the two theatrical planes, but they are now surprised with the change when the lights come out. From now on, the investigation scene becomes the main scene, taking precedence over the flashback [theatre gate] scenes.

The Woman (*An empty glass of lemonade in front of her. She is holding a tissue*) That is all.

Investigator That is all from your point of view. We must listen to all sides.

The Woman Do as you wish.

Investigator I am observing the law and only the law here. And to prove to you that I am sympathetic, I will make an exception and let you stay in the room while the rest of the investigation goes on. There in that corner. You will listen to the witnesses. Who knows? You may remember new pieces of information and wish to add them to the investigation.

The Woman Thank you.

She sits in a darkened corner. She moves with difficulty, as if she is in the same physical state that she went through after the incident.

The following investigations have an accelerating rhythm, making them appear like fragments with no beginning or end. The questions and answers correspond to one another as if the characters are collating each others' pieces of information, sometimes in response to the **Investigator***'s questions. Each character being interrogated appears under a different spotlight*

to show that they are isolated from one another in terms of time and space. The **Investigator** *moves around freely whereas the other characters sit in fixed places.*

Walid My name is Walid Abdullah.

Investigator What made you go to the theatre?

Walid I went with my friend Ahmad to watch the play that our friends and colleagues at university produced.

Investigator Are you an actor too?

Walid No, I'm a writer and amateur director. Ahmad is an actor.

Investigator Describe what you have seen, what the Woman went through.

Walid I didn't see clearly, it was very crowded and everyone was in a rage. But I noticed that she's an elderly woman and that she was alone. I also heard her begging the security guards to let her in, but they didn't do anything.

Investigator But you're saying they let her in.

Walid Eventually they did, when she went through a panic and was shaking. I thought she was going to die.

Investigator And how did you know she was in a panic?

Walid I'd seen female colleagues in a similar state.

Investigator And why didn't you try to help her?

Walid I couldn't help her, and I couldn't see what was happening. I was in a terrible situation myself .. everyone was crushing me. I also lost Ahmad and Mahmoud.

Investigator Who's Mahmoud?

Walid Our third friend, an actor. He's appeared lately in some TV shows. How lucky.

Investigator You and Ahmad will follow suit, don't worry (*laughs*).

Spotlight on **Ahmad** *in a different space,* **Walid***'s spotlight fades.*

Ahmad No, I no longer want to be an actor, I've had enough. I couldn't even be in the audience; how can I act? How can anyone act onstage if they can't even go through the theatre gate?

Investigator Calm down, will you?

Ahmad (*Interrupting*) Who should calm down? I am tired of this phrase! When people were pushing each other, Mahmoud and Walid kept telling everyone to calm down, and now we're all oppressed!

Investigator I have the right to throw you out right away, I'm warning you not to raise your voice again, boy!

Ahmad Boy! If it weren't for what happened to that poor woman, I wouldn't be here with the likes of you! This arrogant authority made enemies out of us, scrambling over bread or even going through a gate! Screw you all! Screw the public facilities that you idolise more than people! And screw your hard-heartedness that killed our love for the theatre!

Investigator Out!

Ezzat *appears suddenly under a spotlight, and* **Ahmad***'s fades.*

Ezzat I swear they deserve what happened to them. This is who we are, we only conform when we are scared or oppressed. We do deserve this. The security guard warned them, bless him, and told them not to say a word. But they kept on shouting anyway, and this is not appropriate for the venue.

Investigator So you saw what happened to the woman, Ezzat?

Ezzat I was the closest to the gate and held the bar. Of course I didn't see exactly what happened to her as I was preoccupied and I wasn't going to leave my spot for someone else to steal it .. (*smiling*) that was my spot. I've always loved trendy places, especially where people tend to crowd. I just rush to it. You can always find me at the front rows, and no one has ever taken my spot. I am always at the front, especially at busy posh places. You could say I love big crowds as long as I am first to arrive.

Investigator But she says she was standing really close to you .. I mean close to the gate.

Ezzat Yes, it's probably true, but there were too many people separating us and I was preoccupied. I was having a chat with the kind security guard and he was complaining to me about people's bad manners. Also she's an elderly woman, she wouldn't catch my eye anyway. I don't know why she went in the first place!

Hani *appears under a different spotlight, and* **Ezzat***'s fades.*

Hani I know her of course, she's a writer of sorts. But Mr Sayed, the critic, and the journalist with him did not know her. Of course, I had heard of her, we're artists and we all know each other.

Investigator Do you mean that you're an actor?

Hani Of course, sir, but I'm mediocre. I haven't landed any roles so far, but I'm working on being present. I don't go to the theatre often .. but they said there were stars and VIPs going to the theatre that day .. so I hurried there in the hope of getting to know one of the stars, take a photo with them or appear in the background of a group photo in some newspaper. But the security guards tormented us, may God avenge us. I kept telling them that I'm an artist so that they let me in, but they didn't.

Investigator (*Interrupting*) Enough with the jibber-jabber! What exactly happened to the woman?

Hani I didn't see, I heard.

Investigator What did you hear, Mr. Artist?

Hani I heard her scream. I honestly felt like she's posh. A lot worse could have happened to a lady like her but thank God it went well.

The **Woman** *springs out of her seat and faces* **Hani**.

The Woman Do you really think it went well?! Well how? What if it went badly? Would it have been any worse?

Hani (*Shaking*) What's that? What is that lunatic doing here?

The Woman You also want me to be a lunatic! That is so unfair!

Investigator Please remain seated, don't make me throw you out!

Hani All of us endured that hell! She wasn't alone! You are only giving her attention because she's a woman! And by the way, she's no artist! I want to change my statement! They shut all of us out of the gate! They always do that to insinuate that we're unwanted and that it is for VIPs only. We know this, that's how we were raised. Sometimes we revolt, sometimes we compromise, other times we stay quiet and consent, or they threaten us until we do. The security guard did this and no one listened to him, but everyone understood what was going on. Only this lunatic didn't and made too many mistakes. It looks like she's a foreigner or something.

The **Woman** *returns to her seat in a state of shock.*

Ali *appears under a spotlight, while* **Hani***'s fades.*

Ali Yes, sir, I saw everything.

Investigator But everyone says you were standing at the back.

Ali And what's wrong with that?

Investigator And this woman stood near the gate from the start.

Ali But I'm an expert, sir. I see details and everything going on, it's my job. Ever since she arrived, I was sure she's bad news.

Investigator And why didn't you stop her Mr Ali?

Ali I thought maybe she enjoyed what was happening to her (*laughs*).

Investigator What do you do for a living?

Ali I'm unemployed, but sometimes I get lucky and work with VIPs on certain occasions.

Investigator And why did you go there [to the theatre]?

Ali I love the theatre, its ambience and its people, especially the big, clean theatres. They are air-conditioned and fresh, a respite from the horrors of life. Beautiful women .. colours .. glamour, anything to make everyday life easier. But this woman has nothing to do with the theatre.

Investigator What makes you think that?

Ali Because if she were, she would have gone through the actors' entrance .. but she didn't know any actors or staff members. Even when everyone was pushing one another, she didn't think of calling family or anyone who could save her. It's bad enough that she went on her own. Is this even normal? I swear there was something fishy about her .. dear God.

The **Woman** *springs up again, ready to claw out* **Ali***'s skin. She stops midway when the investigator gives her a warning look and remains standing.*

Investigator And do you think all this pushing and hostility was normal?

Ali Of course, sir, it was normal. But posh people like you may not know.

Investigator (*Interrupting*) I'm not posh and please don't stray from the topic.

Ali Excuse me, sir. I mean those who don't walk in the street probably don't know the effect of the weather, the traffic jam and long queues on people, specifically those suppressing their anger and powerful oppression. Just standing in this situation for half an hour is enough to drive these people over the edge, stirring up animosity. They start to push one another even if they don't mean to. Each one tries to stray away from the crowd or get others out of the way. People turn into monsters out of the blue, each person thinks they must trample others in order to save themselves, and this attitude spreads to the point that even breathing becomes hostile. The crowd becomes a screaming, self-destructive bloc .. It's bound to burst sooner or later, and if there's a woman in the middle it is clear what will happen to her. This is what I know.

Investigator And what an extensive experience you have! They say you have been inciting everyone.

Ali Me? Never! I was just helping. As I told you before, these scenes are familiar to me, especially the city centre. It's my favourite area. Everything added up to create this unfortunate situation. I am an expert in these matters .. a strategic expert (*laughs*).

Mahmoud *appears suddenly under a spotlight, and* **Ali***'s fades.*

Mahmoud I know her well ..

Investigator Strange, you're the first to say that, and it looks like you do know her.

Mahmoud In the beginning I couldn't recognise her. It was very crowded and I didn't expect to see her. Ms. Mona trained us in the theatre arts at the start of our careers. You could say she paved the way for us in the theatre. I attended one of her courses, and even though I didn't continue, I have followed her work and looked for her

the same way I look for my schoolteachers. She is a fighter who gave her life to the theatre. Everyone standing there should have recognised her. Unfortunately, most of those who live their lives in the theatre are content with the lack of recognition, fame or money until the day they die, unlike television actors.

Investigator You are the only one in this investigation who speaks so fondly of the theatre, although your friend Walid said you are a television actor.

Mahmoud I adore the theatre. (*The* **Woman** *appears in her previous spot under a faint but visible light. She listens to* **Mahmoud**. *We see her transforming as if his words are magical*). I have spent most of my life in the theatre. I learned everything in it, everything. Any actor knows well that the theatre is the true space for acting. The actor who trains and gains experience in the theatre can do anything. I am blessed to be a television actor, yet I don't miss any chance of going to the theatre, it's the theatre's right/it's my duty towards the theatre. It is also the theatre's duty towards us not to be insulted. What happened to Ms. Mona is extremely painful.

The theatre **Manager** *appears in a fourth spotlight, in addition to those of* **Mahmoud**, *the* **Investigator** *and the* **Woman**. *The following cross-examination takes place with each of them standing separately, but they often comment.*

Manager We are not responsible for what happens outside the theatre.

Investigator But the gate is part of the theatre.

Manager Legally, the gate was shut. Those people were standing in the street.

Mahmoud I never imagined that the woman who taught us theatre would endure all of that at the theatre.

The Woman I am sorry, Mahmoud.

Manager Consequently, each person is responsible for themselves. We have graciously opened the gate and saved the woman, even though we didn't have to.

Mahmoud I am deeply upset that I wasn't able to save you .. I couldn't do anything.

Manager In fact, we were not responsible for saving her, but God knows what would have happened otherwise. The press and the money-backed media would accuse us of instigating this.[35] They might even make up stories claiming that we planned the incident. Even now – after foregoing a lot of rules in order to help her– no one has thanked us.

Investigator So you were gracious enough to open the gate and save her?

Manager My security guards are keenly aware; thank God they were able to intervene in time.

The Woman I am sorry you saw me in this state, Mahmoud. I am sorry you saw your teacher being humiliated.

Manager And we thank God she's ok. But I don't understand why you told me to come forward. Did anything else happen that I don't know about?

Investigator Why did you give orders to close the gate?

Manager Excuse me, sir, we shouldn't sum up the situation with the closed gate. It is only a minor detail that has nothing to do with what happened to her or all the pushing and jostling.

Investigator Are you aware of what you're saying? You are defying logic.

Manager This mob would have done the same if the gate were open, in my opinion.

Investigator This is not about your opinion of them! Answer the question!

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[35] Meaning that they have an agenda or are biased.

Manager Closing the gate where necessary is within my capacity as manager. Many people don't know that shutting it is far more important than keeping it open. Shutting it can sometimes save hundreds of lives and keep clear boundaries with the outside. Keeping it open makes no difference and most of the time passes unnoticed.

Mahmoud I owe you a lot, but what happened has nothing to do with the theatre that we lived and grew up in.

Manager In this case, the auditorium was full. We had to stop people getting in to protect those inside. If anything had gone wrong by letting them in, I would've borne the brunt alone.

The Woman And how did the auditorium become full? How and when did the audience get in? Which gate did they go through? We were thrown outside like we were slaves! We were treated inhumanely! And there were people inside? The play was about to start? What about the play outside? The people who were dehumanised just to see a play that others were enjoying and being treated as first class citizens! Who is responsible for this division? Who decided that some will remain inside and the rest outside? Who said some are people and the rest are scum? You, with your shiny suit and clean shoes, do you consider yourself a human being? Do you really think you have saved the lives of those inside according to the safety measures or whatever? Those in the auditorium were probably just a number to you! Everyone is a number! Just numbers! You stand here as if you are a broker, counting people, closing the gate and opening it! You killed seventy people standing outside! You broke their spirits and their humanity!

Manager (*Clapping*) Bravo, Ms. Mona. Very touching monologue. I hope you are happy now that you had your moment in the sun and landed the lead role you have always dreamed of. But not at our theatre. I am the only one who has the key to our stage, and your dirty feet will not tread on it. If I were at the gate, I would have left you to die instead of ever allowing my men to open the gate for you. The likes of you bring shame to our homeland, to the theatre and to art. Enough with inciting young people. What wrong did the wonderful, talented Mahmoud do so that you imprint such terrible ideas on his mind? Stop ruining people's minds! And now you are playing the victim! Oh dear! Oh dear!

The **Manager***'s spotlight fades and the* **Female Staff** *member appears in the same spot. The investigator, the* **Woman** *and* **Mahmoud***'s spots remain visible and unchanged.*

Female staff I am Mrs. Afaf. I've been working at the theatre for 30 years. I started out as a cashier and now I am the cashier's supervisor. I stand at the gate everyday checking the tickets, sometimes I search the women. Sometimes the metal detector goes off and we have to search everyone. Of course, women are searched by women, and I am the boss at the gate.

Investigator And do you like what you do, Mrs. Afaf?

Female staff Do you mean searching women?

Investigator I mean your job at the theatre.

Female staff This is my job, there's no room for enjoyment. I'm not sure I understand what you mean. What does it mean? We don't use this word at our job.

Investigator Are you married?

Female staff Yes, thirty years now. I have five sons and daughters, they all work in the national sector, thank God.

Investigator Where were you standing when the incident took place?

Female staff I don't know what incident, but I was standing in my usual spot when it turned chaotic, if that's what you mean. Behind the gate next to the cashier.

Mahmoud*'s spotlight fades and he is quickly replaced by the* **Molester***. The* **Female Staff** *member, the* **Woman***, the* **Investigator** *and the* **Molester** *are visible.*

Investigator Have you seen this woman before? (*Pointing at the* **Woman** *in her spot*)

Female staff (*Disgusted*) Yes, I have. I don't understand what the fuss is all about. A-list actresses go to our theatre and none of them has had so much attention as that woman.

Investigator Can you describe what happened to her?

Female staff Nothing. Nothing out of the ordinary.

The Woman You are a blind, heartless woman! You did see everything and our eyes met. I begged you [to let me in] but you're just cruel!

Female staff How dare you lunatic speak to me like that? Do you even see yourself as a woman? Take a look at yourself in the mirror. You'll see a sorry freak! Who are you? Just a sick woman throwing out accusations!

Molester My name is Adel Abdul-Ghaffar.

The Woman Oh, how sad and miserable you are!

Female staff Nothing really happened to you. No one hurt you. You kept shaking as if you were possessed. We women now quite well these actions. And when our eyes met as you say, I was certain you're a deceptive fool. I am more experienced than the

likes of you. You have failed to convince me. I am experienced and I met so many kinds of women. I know you very well. You play the victim so that everyone is convinced you are sexy! Oh God! So many tricks to attract men! But you're hopeless!

Molester I am immersed in the culture scene. I have been to all the cultural activities in the city centre in the last 20 years, it's one of my favourite hobbies. I am not worried by crowded places; I prefer crowds to being alone and secluded. I especially love plays by young people. I feel really happy to see young talents presenting their art, and I enjoy mixing with young people who are carving out their career.

The Woman I would kill you right here and right now except that I'll be hanged for it!

Female staff The man did not hurt her. Maybe he touched her, but it was so packed everyone was pressing against each other. Maybe he pressed his body against her as well. Poor man, where was he supposed to go? Everyone was pushing others like animals, and he didn't do anything abnormal in this context. Maybe she got suspicious because he was standing behind her, but she brought it all on herself. Again, I am telling you I am an old hand and I know these types of women. Please don't waste your time. This man seems kind, all our men are. I swear all the sexual harassment reports are just ploys to grab attention. We have all been through what they call – God forbid – 'harassment' or 'violence' since childhood and we never uttered a word. Not a word. We are honourable women, and we raised our girls not to speak up to preserve their honour. These are our men, they felt the need to do that. They're kind but they have no choice. Why should this affect us? It shouldn't – we can simply forget or deny it ever happened. As you

could see, the woman did not have her clothes torn off, so nothing happened to her. She is certainly still a virgin, if she was. If not, this isn't our issue. She has no right to speak up if she wasn't. Married women like me know this quite well. In any case, everything happened with their clothes on. I saw it in detail.

Molester Yes, there was a woman in front of me. She was alone and I couldn't understand why she was standing there among the men. I saw her suffocating because of the pushing, and I tried to step in.

Investigator How did you step in? By pressing up against her?

Molester God forbid. I was very careful not to touch her. She was in a strange state, and I feared for her in this hot weather. I made enough space for her as I could, but it was a very small area. When she started shaking, I shouted for the security guards to open the gate. It's the most I could do.

The **Female Staff** *member's spotlight fades.*

Investigator What do you do for a living?

Molester I'm a nurse.

Investigator Don't you think that, as a nurse, you could have assisted her when she had a panic attack?

Molester Unfortunately, I wasn't prepared for this moment. I go to enjoy the cultural scene, leaving behind my stressful job. I work at a maternity hospital and we have endless cases coming in every day. We adore children, and our job is tough. That's why I was unable to work during my entertainment time.

Heba *appears in the* **Female Staff***'s previous spotlight.*

Heba I'm 32 and I work as an actress. My name is Heba. I know that this man is a criminal. I know a criminal the moment I spot them, all women do. I could tell many stories about the likes of him. I've known him since I was nine. Can you believe it? These people ruin children, not just women.

Investigator Calm down, Miss. I haven't even asked you any questions yet.

Molester I have to go now, sir. I work at a hospital and can't be absent. I am responsible for people's lives .. women and children. I wish the lady a speedy recovery. Excuse me.

The Woman (*To* **Investigator**) Are you going to let him walk away? So he can ruin other women's lives? Do something! Do something!

Investigator (*Firmly*) We don't have any evidence against him. Stay seated or I will end this investigation immediately and hold you accountable for wasting our time!

Heba We are always the ones getting punished, nothing new here. You punish us just for being born female. Maybe you are punishing yourselves for your lust and punishing us for being beautiful. To tell you the truth, we are deformed. I no longer see any femininity or youth in my face. Every day of my life is a desperate attempt not to be assaulted. I have grown to hate my body and my gender. I've become a coward, afraid of life, what worse punishment is there? This woman does not deserve a punishment worse than what she endured tonight. Maybe it's also a punishment for you because you saw with your very eyes how people's sense of justice has become. That is, if you really want to do justice.

The Woman Heba, I am sorry you were born in the wrong age.

Heba I am the one who should apologise to you. I saw your face beaming from a distance. I was in the theatre garden because I couldn't enter. However, I was lucky enough to be at

the garden, and not in the hell you were stuck in. Or maybe I was in this middle space so I could catch you, specifically to catch you. Your face was beaming from a distance, like my mother's when I was a child, and like mine when she was younger. When I freed you from the claws of that female staff from hell, I felt like I was doing the first revolutionary act in my life. I faced these monsters alone and caught you. I don't know what would have happened otherwise. You were choking, like a newborn gasping for air, and I was the midwife. Oh God, I was very proud of myself, as if I freed myself, not you. As if you've become my daughter and I your mother, and I realised how strong we are!

The Woman (*Laughing and crying simultaneously*) How beautiful, how can such beauty come forth from hell?!

Investigator Maybe it comes forth from bravery and self-sacrifice.

The Woman I am ashamed that a girl as young as my daughter stands up for me, it should be the way around. I should create a present worthy of her and her dreams, not to be the ruin that I now am.

Mahmoud *appears in the fourth spotlight.*

The Woman (*Broken, the same way she was during the assault, speaking unintelligibly*) I have wasted my life. I'm a burden for everyone. I want to die.

Mahmoud I beg you not to say this. I can barely handle my guilt and helplessness.

The Woman I was killed twice today. The investigation killed me again, but the first time was much worse and more painful. The theatre killed me. It's always been the one space where I felt safe and accomplished. It's become the space where I was destroyed and humiliated. I no longer have a home .. I have wasted my life. I am nothing.

Mahmoud and **Heba** (*Together*) I am beside you. I am with you. I will never leave you.

The second theatre plane where the **Investigator** *and the* **Woman** *were appears behind the audience. Both planes are lit, and the next scene takes place in each plane successively. The audience now appears to be closer to the crowd of 70 people at the theatre gate. The audience now appear to be the crowd itself that forms the buffer between the investigation room and the theatre gate; between the present and the past. They may now be able to change the past.*

The **Woman**, **Mahmoud** *and* **Heba** *look at the other side where all the characters who were in the incident are standing, as well as everyone who has just left the investigation room. The* **Woman** *stands up with the help of* **Mahmoud** *and* **Heba**.

Investigator Is this how the place looked like, Ms. Mona?

The Woman Yes. Mahmoud was standing in the middle.

Mahmoud And you were standing there, I am the one who shouted: 'This is Ms. Mona! Let her in!'.

The Woman I didn't hear you.

Heba And you didn't see me, but I saw you.

Investigator I have to apologise for everything that you've gone through. I am sorry that I wasn't on your side from the beginning. Maybe this time the ending will change. I am sorry. Forgive me.

He disappears and his spotlight fades.

Mahmoud We have to get out of here, from this experience.

The Woman How? I want to. I don't want to be stuck in this moment all my life, in this death.

Mahmoud and Heba (*Together*) We are the product of theatre; we are theatre makers. We are the ones who can change the ending.

The Woman We must change reality first. Reality is not a play.

Mahmoud But sometimes, reality and plays converge. This is our only chance to get out of this play and this memory. This time Heba will join us. We must change the ending. The crowd of 70 people has now become 170, and they will not be silent or deluded this time.

Final scene

As **Mahmoud** *speaks in the last scene, we see the climax of the play re-enacted on the other side. The* **Woman**, **Mahmoud** *and* **Heba** *walk together very slowly towards the event. They arrive to the first queue of the audience and stop. The security guard sets up an iron gate akin to the gate of the theatre. The gate separates the real audience from the investigation room. It is placed at the front seats, so that the real audience, the* **Woman**, **Mahmoud** *and* **Heba** *are behind the gate in the same way that the crowd was during the assault. The light falls on the gate, so that its reflection forms long, scary lines, as if everyone is now in the prison cell, including the real audience. The crowd chatter, comment and shout. They walk slowly and intersperse the real audience as loud music plays. The* **Woman** *tries to repeat her actions. The attitude of the security guard is even more violent.* **Mahmoud** *stays by her side and tries to protect her but he is too frail.* **Heba** *sticks to her. Chaos breaks out as everyone pushes one another.* **Walid** *and* **Ahmad** *search for* **Mahmoud** *and find him as well as the* **Woman** *and* **Heba**. *They try to help the* **Woman**, *and she asks for the audience's help as if they are part of the incident. Maybe some audience members intervene to reject the violence and remove the iron gate. Maybe nobody does. The ending is not known; it depends on the audience' reaction and their willingness to change the situation. If the audience and the actors successfully change the ending, everyone will have crossed the gate and stood onstage. If they do not and prepare to leave the auditorium, there is a*

blackout. We hear the **Woman** *scream, but we do not know if it is out of victory or defeat. The meaning of the scream hangs on the decision the audience makes.*