

BASED ON THE ORESTEIA TRILOGY  
Adapted & Directed by

Yael Farber

THE FARBER FOUNDRY'S

**MOLORA**

**PRESS  
MATERIALS**

# MOLORA

## PRESS QUOTES

**THE LONDON TIMES \*\*\*\*\* [FIVE STARS]**

**"Raw and Unflinching... This is art from the gut. I cannot recommend it highly enough"**

**TIMEOUT, LONDON \*\*\*\*\* [FIVE STARS]**

**"Most explosive, viscid productions of Aeschylus' Oresteia trilogy imaginable...**

**Farber's direction is seering... Scorching production"**

**THE GUARDIAN, LONDON \*\*\*\* [FOUR STARS]**

**"Mesmerizing... All the spare savagery of Greek Tragedy"**

**METRO, LONDON \*\*\*\*\* [FIVE STARS]**

**"Potent symbol of a country"**

**THE STAR, JOHANNESBURG \*\*\*\*\* [FIVE STARS]**

**"Sophisticated theatre in its rawest form... Gut-wrenching stuff... It is Farber's phenomenal ability to tell a story which, in all its simplicity, becomes intensely complex"**

**THE NEW BLACK MAGAZINE, LONDON \*\*\*\* [FOUR STARS]**

**"Farber has once again gone to the deep reserve of her resources as a writer and director"**

**THE GAZETTE, MONTREAL**

**"Simply one of the best productions this critic has ever seen anywhere"**

**AMERICAN THEATRE**

**"Mesmerizing production by a young auteur."**

## **BBC OXFORD**

**"Farber's direction is astounding"**

**"[The] acting from the cast some of the best I've seen in years... A one of a kind theatrical experience"**

## **THE OXFORD TIMES**

**"Yael Farber is in the premier league of directors. A must-see"**

## **SUNDAY TIMES - JOHANNESBURG**

**"Gripping and effective meditation on the cycles of revenge... Dazzling artistic vision"**

**"Farber's work is not embellished with Africanism; it is essentially African"**

## **SUNDAY INDEPENDENT - JOHANNESBURG**

**"Farber has not simply Africanized Aeschylus's play... she dissolves some of the superficial barriers that separate African and European expression"**

## **THE BRITISH THEATRE GUIDE**

**"Passionate, blood-soaked and very moving telling... powerfully played... Not for the faint-hearted... A sense here of how theatre might once have served to define the shape of the world"**

## **DAILY INFO OXFORD**

**"Watch this house rise again and The Farber Foundry at work"**

## **OXFORD MAIL**

**"Challenging and compelling drama. It should not be missed"**

## **ROGUES & VAGABONDS**

**"Electrifying and evocative... Farber has directed a stunning play, full of moments of great beauty and resonance... Theatre at its most intense and inspiring"**

**"Its heart beats with a luminous humanity"**

## BIOGRAPHY: Yael Farber

International award winning writer and director Yael Farber was named the Standard Bank *Artist of the Year* in South Africa in 2003. In her 10 years of directing and writing, she has created a body of highly acclaimed original South African works which have toured extensively internationally, earning her a reputation for controversial & challenging work of the highest artistic standard.

Ms. Farber directed and collaboratively wrote with Thembi Mtshali "A Woman in Waiting" which played on London's West End in 2002, and won several international awards – including *A Scotsman Fringe First* in Edinburgh, and the prestigious *BBC Gold Sony Award for Best Drama*. The production has toured the United Kingdom

extensively, was awarded *Best Performance* at The Carthage Festival in Tunisia in 2001; played the Du Maurier Word Stage Festival in Toronto 2002; The World Stage Flying Solo Festival, as well as The National Arts Centre in Ottawa, Canada 2005 to critical acclaim. Commissioned by the Haus de Kultur in Berlin – in 2002 Farber directed and collaboratively wrote "He Left Quietly" – with Duma Kumalo, a survivor of apartheid South Africa's Death Row – which received audience and critical acclaim both in Africa and Europe. "SeZaR" - her radical African re-visioning of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar - won Ms. Farber several awards, including *Best Production* and *Best Director* in South Africa. This production was travelled extensively by Oxford Playhouse, in the United Kingdom & opened the Queen's Festival in Belfast, Northern Ireland. "Amajuba" – directed and written by Ms. Farber in collaboration with her cast – was toured by Oxford Playhouse in the UK, appearing at The Barbican in London in 2004 to critical and audience acclaim and transferring to the West End. The production garnered *The Herald Angel Award* at The Edinburgh Festival in 2004, and earned top reviews across the board. Amajuba has since performed across Australia; at the prestigious Spoleto Festival in Charleston, USA; in Ireland; and most recently Off-Broadway in Manhattan. Most recently, Ms. Farber directed her adaptation of the ancient Greek Oresteia Trilogy - "Molona" – which was commissioned & premiered by The National Arts Festival in South Africa. The production played to critical acclaim at The Loakoon Kampnagel Festival in Hamburg, Germany in 2004 and in Yokohama, Japan in 2006. It is set to tour to the UK – including a season at the Barbican in 2007, and the USA in 2008.

Yael Farber won her first national *Best Director Award* at the age of 28 for her multiple award-winning production of Mark Ravenhill's "Shopping and F\*\*king". She is a past invitee & participant at the *Lincoln Theatre Director's Workshop*; A resident artist at the respected *Mabou Mines Theatre Company* in New York; Directed Fugard's "Hello and Goodbye" for the Access Theatre in Manhattan; and was invited to develop a new text at the *Sundance Theatre Laboratory* in Utah, USA. Farber was recently nominated for the international Master-Protégé Rolex Award. She is currently writing the biography of the late Duma Kumalo - capturing his experiences in South Africa's Apartheid Death Row. She has recently formalized her body of work under the umbrella of her company **The Farber Foundry**, which enables the extensive touring of her work internationally – as well as facilitating the rigorous creative process she conducts for each new work.



## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

"This thing called reconciliation...If I am understanding it correctly ... if it means this perpetrator, this man who has killed my son, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back ... then I agree, I support it all"

*[Cynthia Ngwenyu – mother of one of the murdered Gugulethu 7]*

In the aftermath of South Africa's transition into democracy in 1994, the world held its collective breath in anticipation of a civil war that would surely unleash the rage of generations shattered by the Apartheid Regime. South Africa defied expectations, however – lighting the way forward for all nations trapped in quagmires of vengeance. But such a journey is neither simple nor easy, and has little to do with the reductive notions of a miraculously forgiving Rainbow Nation or "turning the other cheek". In the epic eye of South Africa's storm, it was not the gods - nor any *deus ex machina* device that delivered us from ourselves... but the common everyman and everywoman who - in the years following democracy – gathered in modest halls across the country, to face their perpetrators across a table and find a way forward for us all. I had long been interested in creating a work that explores the journey back from the dark heart of unspeakable trauma and pain – towards the choice of revenge or redemptive forgiveness.

The ancient Oresteia Trilogy tells the story of the rightful heirs to House of Atreus - dispossessed of their inheritance. Forced to live as a servant in the Halls of her own father's house, Elektra waits for her brother Orestes to return from forced Exile to the land of his ancestors and take back what is rightfully theirs.

# MOLORA

The premise of this ancient story was striking to me as a powerful canvas on which to possibly explore the history of dispossession, violence and human rights violations, and the choices that face those violated by such a past. "MOLORA" is the SeSotho word for "ash". In the long nights following the devastating attack on the World Trade Centre, amidst the grief, recriminations and the Bush Administrations indiscriminant wielding of revenge... A fine white powdery substance floated gently, silently down upon the devastated city. Our story begins with a handful of ash that Orestes delivers to his mother's door. From the ruins of Hiroshima, Baghdad, Palestine, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Bosnia, the concentration camps of Europe - to the simple ash around the fire after the storytelling is done... In the aftermath of War, we are reminded again and again that this residue is all that remains and to where we must all return – regardless of which side of the given divide we come from.

**Yael Farber**  
**ADAPTOR & DIRECTOR**

## Re-visioning an Ancient Text

**Molora** is an original work, based on the ancient Oresteia Trilogy. Yael Farber has created a radical re-visioning of the Elektra story with extracts from various sources. The Elektra texts of Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides and Sartre - as well as the Agamemnon - were explored before rewriting the text into a modern South African context. Set in one of the countless halls across South Africa, in which people gathered to testify at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in this retelling of an ancient classic – Klytemnestra and Elektra, mother and daughter, perpetrator and victim – finally face one another in an attempt to come to terms with their violent past. Much like the countless survivors of gross human rights violations in South Africa, Elektra has come to hear the testimony of the person who she witnessed brutally murdering her father when she was a child. This dramatic confrontation between victim and perpetrator was re-enacted thousands of times across South Africa during the course of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, while the country held its collective breath and watched events unfold.

Farber's version of the Elektra story uses the Truth and Reconciliation commission as a present narrative which moves between past and present, tracking the history of the cursed House of Atreus. The parallel is boldly created in the production

by use of horrifying images familiar to many who have suffered under a violent regime. Brutal torture methods are re-enacted by Klytemnestra as evidence before the commission. The metaphor of the Oresteia provides a powerful context in which the company of **Molora** enact a country's torn past. Orestes and Elektra are children dispossessed of their birthright, portrayed by black South African artists. This re-visioning of a classic seeks to dramatically represent the horrors endured by the majority of the South African population at the hands of the abuser - portrayed by a white Klytemnestra. The context offers a potent metaphorical representation of how, like Elektra, countless South Africans came to live as, "...servants in the Halls of their Father's House".

Scholars for centuries have sought the Oresteia as a commentary on the theme of Vengeance. Revenge is the natural course of events in the ancient texts. Farber has chosen to represent the extraordinary events of her own country, by re-visioning the choice Elektra and Orestes make by the play's end. After the first democratic elections in 1994, the world waited as South Africa was poised for a blood bath – which never came. The exceptional capacity for forgiveness displayed by millions across our land, shaped South Africa's future and defined a nation. In essence – an ancient text was rewritten. **Molora** is an examination of violence and dispossession – and the choice to transcend this history and break the cycles of revenge.

# The Chorus reinvented

In **MOLORA**, the device of the ancient Greek chorus is also radically reinvented in the form of a deeply traditional, rural Xhosa aesthetic. Farber chose to collaborate with The Ngqoko Cultural Group – to reinvent the notion of the Chorus. The Ngqoko Cultural Group hail from deep in rural Transkei, South Africa. Trained in the ancient art of Split Tone Singing, these women have been trained from an early age in the skill of creating this vocal phenomenon that has an almost unearthly sound. Ancient musical instruments are used by the group intrinsically in everyday life. The mouth-bows, calabash-bows, mouth harps and milking drums form an array of traditional musical instruments that they – as Chorus – play in accompaniment to the dramatic action of **MOLORA**. The sounds of these unique Xhosa Artists lend a haunting texture of sound to the work that is unfamiliar to most modern ears, and evokes a deeply emotional accompaniment to this work. Farber’s choice to use The Ngqoko Group is far from simply an aesthetic one.

The envisaging of the chorus as a group of “ordinary” African women provides the context of the Truth Commission which witnessed thousands of such “ordinary” folks gathering in dusty halls across the country, who came to hear the details of a loved one’s death at the hands of the State. The individuals that constitute The Ngqoko Cultural Group represent, in this context, a unique grace and dignity evident in the “common man” who chose a different path for South Africa.

In the final scene of **MOLORA** in which Elektra is determined to exact her revenge

from her mother Klytemnestra – it is not the gods who intervene – but these women who hold her as she grieves. Within The Ngqoko Group are two Spiritual Diviners who are trained in the channelling of Ancestral powers. While these women are restrained in their use of authentic trance on stage -their authority in spiritual conduct allows the final scene to transcend the artifice of theatre...

And become a moment in which the audience may experience a deep participation in a prayer to our ancestors for an end to the cycle of violence in our country – and indeed the world.

## Scene Breakdown

*This story is enacted in a bare hall or room – much like the drab and simple venues in which most of the testimonies were heard during the course of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.*

### Act One

#### SCENE 1

During the years of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa – perpetrators of gross human rights violations faced their victims and gave detailed accounts of their grim deeds – in exchange for amnesty granted by the Commission. Thus Klytemnestra faces her daughter Elektra to confess to the murder of her husband Agamemnon – in retribution for the murder of her daughter Iphigenia – by her husband years prior.

Elektra tells her mother there can be no forgiveness for what she has done.

#### SCENE 2

Between the two tables of testimony – memory falls. We visit the night of the murder 17 years before – when Elektra (like many children of those murdered by the Apartheid Government) witnessed the murder of her father.

### SCENE 3

Elektra tells the Commission how she stole her baby brother Orestes from his bed that night and gave the child to the Xhosa women of her father's tribe – to hide him in the mountains until he reached manhood and would return to avenge their bloodline. Young men joining Umkhonto we Sizwe (the armed wing of the ANC during the years of the struggle) would be sent across the border for military training.

### SCENE 4

Klytemnestra uses methods of torture in an attempt to extract the information as to where her son, Orestes, has been hidden. Many of the gross human rights violations of South Africa's past occurred in police custody as they tried to destroy the network of the growing armed struggle. Like Elektra – people endured extraordinary degrees of torture to protect the whereabouts or identity of fellow “comrades”.

### SCENE 5

Returning to the present Truth Commission, Klytemnestra tells the Commission that despite her conviction in what she did all those years ago – she is still plagued by nightmares of her deeds. Those testifying at the actual Truth and Reconciliation Commission displayed severe signs of post-traumatic stress, detailing the way their own violent deeds impacted upon their psyches – despite a conscious conviction in their actions.

### SCENE 6

The years pass and Elektra waits for her brother Orestes to grow and return to avenge their bloodline. Her mother Klytemnestra and her mother's lover, Ayesthus – have their own children who have become the unrighteous “masters” who will inherit her house. She has been dispossessed and forced into service, and her brother is in exile. Her only place of comfort is her father's grave, speaking to the dead and asking her ancestors to send her brother to come and avenge their bloodline.

### SCENE 7

Elektra awakes in the early morning to find her mother Klytemnestra standing over her with a “sjambok” (traditional South African whip used by the police to suppress uprisings during

apartheid). They have a bitter argument here in the graveyard over Agamemnon's grave.

Klytemnestra tells Elektra how her father murdered her sister, Iphigenia. She justifies her murdering her husband in revenge. Elektra tells her to beware of moralizing murder – for by that system of justice, Klytemnestra would be the first to die.

### SCENE 8

We return to the Truth Commission of the present. Elektra asks that Klytemnestra demonstrate for the Commission how she would interrogate Elektra in order to extract information as to her brother's whereabouts.

Klytemnestra demonstrates the “wet bag method”. This was a brutal means of torture used by Security Forces in South Africa in interrogating resistance fighters. During the actual TRC – this method was chillingly re-enacted for a room full of witnesses and journalists by one of South Africa's most notorious interrogators. This potent image was seared into the public's consciousness.

### SCENE 9

Orestes has reached the day of his initiation that young Xhosa men celebrate. We watch this ceremony, as he is given his new blanket – symbolizing his manhood. It is time for him to return to his father's house and claim his rightful inheritance.

### SCENE 10

Klytemnestra tells the Commission that every night in the years after the murder – she waited for her son to return, seeking his revenge. She did not suspect he would arrive pretending to be a stranger – with a tin of human ash – announcing her son Orestes' death.

Her husband Ayesthus is away. She is suspicious of the stranger at her door – but Klytemnestra cannot hide her relief at the news of her son's death. She invites this stranger to return for dinner tonight – since he has travelled a long way to bring her this news.

### SCENE 11

Elektra is inconsolable at the news of Orestes' death. She hears someone coming into the graveyard and, fearing it is her mother, hides. She sees the young man who brought her mother Orestes' ashes. He kneels at her father's grave and address Agamemnon as Father. He spills the



traditional beer in honour of his ancestors and swears vengeance.

Elektra steps into view. The stranger confesses he is Orestes her brother – now a man.

They reunite and swear to avenge Agammemnon. Tonight Orestes will come to their home for dinner.

He will catch his stepfather Ayesthus in the field on his return and cut out his heart.

He will then return and murder his mother.

## SCENE 12

Elektra returns to find Klytemnestra bitter and violent. She brutalizes her daughter – unbeknown to her – for the last time.

## *Act Two*

### SCENE 1

Klytemnestra and Orestes are sitting at the family dinner table. She is unaware that it is her son who is her guest. She weeps for Orestes, believing he is dead. She is drunk and emotional during the course of dinner. She speaks of the night she murdered Agammemnon. Elektra is in attendance as a servant.

Klytemnestra passes out – and Elektra tells Orestes to take her to her room. He must first set out towards the field to murder Ayesthus as he returns home – and then return to murder his mother.

### SCENE 2

Elektra tells Orestes to leave her and fulfil their destiny by murdering their step-father.

Orestes begins the steady walk towards the field and the deed he must do.

The ancestors of their bloodline watch silently.

### SCENE 3

Klytemnestra is asleep – having passed out from excessive drinking.

Elektra curses the house with a dead animal that she hangs over the family table.

### SCENE 3

Orestes runs towards his destiny, striking at Ayesthus and tearing out his heart.

### SCENE 4

Out in the field, Elektra finds Orestes holding his dead stepfather's heart.

Orestes is deeply shaken by the act he has committed. He is silent.

Elektra takes the heart in her hands and curses it for the years of pain she has suffered.

She tells Orestes to prepare for the greater deed – the murder of their mother.

### SCENE 5

Klytemnestra finds them plotting her death. Elektra shows her the heart of her Ayesthus. Klytemnestra falls to her knees in grief. She begs for her life.

### SCENE 6

Orestes raises the axe to murder her – but finds he cannot do the deed. By doing this he will become his mother – he will choose the endless spiral of vengeance.

### SCENE 7

Elektra grabs the axe and rushes towards her mother to murder her ...

But the women of the chorus grab Elektra, remove the axe from her hands and hold her as she weeps for all the injustices done to her, her brother and her father.

The women chant and pray for the children of our country who must overcome the impulse for vengeance and break the cycle of violence.

Elektra and Orestes help Klytemnestra to her feet and let her go.

The cycle has been broken - an ancient ending rewritten.

### SCENE 8

We return to the Truth Commission. Klytemnestra is testifying.

She acknowledges that :

“We who made the sons and daughters of this land

Servants in the halls of their forefathers – we know:

We are still only here by grace alone.

Look now – dawn is coming.

This house rises up.

For too long it has lain in ash on the ground.”

*The full company stand in silence looking at the audience Ash gently floats down on them as lights fade to black.*

From The London Times

April 11, 2008

## Molora at the Barbican Pit



by Sam Marlowe



Watching Yael Farber's extraordinary relocation of Greek myth to a Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing in South Africa was among the most difficult experiences I have ever had in the theatre. All the more reason to see it. This Farber Foudry production, first presented in association with Johannesburg's Market Theatre, is harrowing almost beyond endurance. It is also potently, elementally theatrical, mesmerisingly ritualistic and deeply and uncompromisingly humane. Raw and unflinching, even as it horrifies, it demands attention.

Based mainly on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* but drawing, too, on Sophocles, Farber's production brilliantly translates the bloody cycle of vengeance in the House of Atreus to the atrocities of apartheid-era South Africa. The Chorus, who bear witness at the hearing, are played by the Ngqoko Cultural Group, made up of Xhosa tribeswomen (and one man), who create an unearthly soundscape around the action.

Calabashes and skin drums blend eerily with voices that soar, wail or groan gutturally. There are some straight-backed chairs and two tables. In the centre of the stage is a grave. Here Dorothy Ann Gould's white farmer Klytemnestra, in grubby scarlet dress and dusty rubber boots, confronts her daughter Elektra (Jabulile Tshabalala). *Molora* means ash in Sesotho. Here, the ashes Elektra believes are the burnt body of her brother Orestes symbolise the razed remains of a ravaged nation. And they recall the pale powdery residue that fell over New York after September 11.

Farber shows with frightening ferocity where thirst for retribution can lead. Gould swings a pickaxe with a terrifying cry of bloodlust; her husband slain, desperate to find Orestes, she inflicts shocking acts of torture on the daughter whom earlier she held in a crushingly tight embrace. Sweating, unbalanced, her voice a low growl, she is without mercy, made almost bestial by rage. Tshabalala, at first a terrified child, then a humiliated yet dignified young woman, gradually and horrifyingly begins to turn into the very thing she hates. "You've become me. You choose the curse," Gould's Klytemnestra cautions.

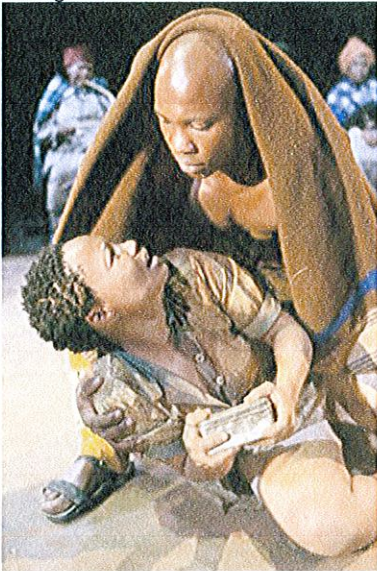
It's close to unbearable. Yet there's also beauty here, as when Sandile Matsheni's Orestes is reunited with his sister, or at the achingly hopeful conclusion when ashes fall silently upon the family, their fury perhaps stilled at last. This is art from the gut. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

## Molora

Until Apr 19

Barbican Theatre, Silk St, London, EC2Y 8DS

Rating: ★★★★★



© Ruphin Coudyzer

By Lucy Powell

Posted: Mon Apr 14

A homely, ageing black woman shuffles onto Yael Farber's stage, bare but for the straight-backed chairs and two expectant desks that denote a South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing. She takes her time, pulling a huge sheet of tarpaulin from a small, silent hump beneath it. What she unveils is a sandy grave, the unendurable weight of South Africa's hideous past, and the stage is set for one of the most explosive, viscid productions of Aeschylus' Oresteia trilogy imaginable.

Dorothy Ann Gould's Klytemnestra is a white farmer, stalking the stage in a tatty red dress and working boots, smoking endless cigarettes, alternating between fury at the violence done to her by her black husband Agamemnon and the gnawing terror that their son, Orestes, will return to avenge his father's murder. Jabulile Tshabalala's Elektra is made a slave in her father's halls, waiting patiently for her brother's inevitable appearance, nursing her matricidal hatred like some unholy, hungry child.

When Orestes arrives, he does so steeped in the ceremonial traditions of Africa, the utterly bewitching Ngqoko Cultural Group providing a haunting musical and dramatic chorus to the action. Visually, Farber's direction is searing, the sand of her continent and the ashes of countless dead falling on Aeschylus' central characters with equal, uncaring persistence. And if Sandile Matsheni's Orestes lacks the edge of his female counterparts, and if Gould's Klytemnestra occasionally lapses into melodramatic villainy, it is difficult to imagine a more gut-wrenching retelling of this ageless tale of vengeance. You have a choice, Klytemnestra tells Elektra, holding the farming tool that killed her ancestors in her hands, do not become me. An eye for an eye, Ghandi once warned, will turn the whole world blind; Farber's scorching production unforgettably illustrates as much.

# Molora

★★★★ The Pit, London

Lyn Gardner  
Monday April 14, 2008  
[The Guardian](#)

In The Oresteia, Elektra, the daughter of Agamemnon and Klytemnestra is raised as a servant in her dead father's house as she awaits the return of her brother, Orestes. The pair are determined to take revenge on Klytemnestra for her vengeful slaying of her husband. Yael Farber's hard, grief-filled production transposes the story to the present-day rural Xhosa community in South Africa to examine the cycle of violence and vengeance, and to ask whether, in such circumstances, forgiveness is ever possible. It is a performance characterised by ritual, with the mesmerising, deep-throated split tone singing of the Ngqoko Cultural Group. Ash that falls like rain is reminiscent not just of the victims of apartheid, but of other holocausts, too.

The framing device that pits mother opposite daughter at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission feels a little forced, but the piece has all the spare savagery of Greek tragedy as the white, gumboot-wearing Klytemnestra subjects her black daughter to the apartheid-era, "wet bag" torture. With intransigence and silence her only weapons, Jabulile Tshabalala's watchful Elektra bides her time until vengeance can be hers. But the outstanding performance is from Dorothy Ann Gould as the troubled, hard-drinking queen whose real punishment is that she knows, through her actions, she has destroyed her very humanity. "The darkness is in your eyes. You have become me," she warns Elektra as the latter prepares her murderous revenge.

A sand-covered grave and an axe set the visual tone for an evening that is stark, dark and bloody, and if there are occasional moments when the action becomes a little overwrought, it is always grounded by the growling chorus and a sense that all is dust if we cannot find it in our hearts to forgive.

## Theatre and Dance

You are in: [Oxford](#) > [Entertainment](#) > [Theatre and Dance](#) > Molora at the Playhouse



Dorothy Ann Gould (by Ruphin Coudyzer)

## Molora at the Playhouse

By Andrew Pedroza

**An Oxford Playhouse and Farber Foundry co-production in association with BarbicanBite 08, Wednesday 2 - Saturday 5 April**

Yael Farber's "Molora", an adaptation from the Greek Trilogy "Oresteia", is a must see production. Set in South Africa during a time of recovery and transition from a post-apartheid nation, it tells the tragic story of Klytemnestra and Elektra, mother and daughter, perpetrator and victim, and the confrontation between the two as they testify at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission about the brutality they endured and caused towards each other in a time of turmoil.

What made this show special and unique was the layout of the stage. Instead of being seated in the main auditorium, the audience abandons the house seats and is directed to a studio constructed directly onstage. Seated from three sides surrounding the newly designed stage, the audience members are literally feet away from the actors. This intimacy between actors and audience members heightened the show's intensity and made the encounters witnessed in the production a hundred times more haunting.

Farber's direction is astounding and her passion is apparent while watching the production. So much detail went into the show, from the subtle shadows that dance across the stage, to the flawless transitions she incorporates from scene to scene. Her use of stage is impressive. She demonstrates through limited sets a creative clear cut vision that makes the performance, however agonizing to watch because of the show's content, artistically beautiful.

Not only does the direction shine in this production, the acting from the cast is some of the best I've ever seen. The cast is true to their characters and dish out flawless emotions throughout the entire performance. Unafraid to release the demons within themselves, the cast spills their hearts across the stage in sweat, blood, and tears. From the unnerving and malicious Klytemnestra, played by Dorothy Ann Gould, the abused and vengeful Elektra played by Jabulile Tshabalala, and the savior Orestes played by Sandile Matsheni, the cast unleashes hellfire upon each other.

Another aspect that carried the show was the Ngqoko Cultural Group which represented the chorus which I thought was exceptional. Revolutionising the chorus used in ancient Greek theatre, this ensemble performed as musicians and various other characters through song, chant, and dance.

"Molora" is a one of a kind theatrical experience that I highly recommend. Although violent and extreme at moments, the story has a powerful message that examines the choice between revenge and redemption.



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the new black



## REVIEW: MOLORA

By **Belinda Otas**

Thursday, April 10, 2008.

### 4 Stars

When you get an actress, who lives and breathes the words of her character on stage and exteriorises every action, you are onto something. Set within the intimate confines of the Pit, at the Barbican, the playwright and director Yael Farber has taken the ancient Oresteia Trilogy and given it a modern day South African twist.

*Molora*, which means *ash*, is based on the Greek tragedy of Klytemnestra and revolves round her relationship with her daughter Elektra and her son Orestes.

Elektra watches on as her mother takes the life of her beloved father. She is soon resigned to the role of a slave in her father's home - a place that is rightly her inheritance. She is also subjected to inhumane torture at the hands of the woman who gave birth to her. At the same token, she awaits the return of her brother Orestes.

The stage action is gruesome as Klytemnestra inflicts the pain of cigarette burns, drowning and the use of the wet-bag to try and suffocate her daughter. Klytemnestra heartlessness was on display for all to see during the first half of this play.

However, the road to reconciliation is even harder as they face up to the reality of life and the fate it has dealt them as a family.

Elektra's hunger for vengeance consumes her to the point where she poses this question: "If you rob us, shall we not revenge?"

Farber cleverly adapts the Oresteia trilogy to tell the story behind the painful healing process experienced by the survivors of post-Apartheid South Africa. The play is set loosely in the atmosphere of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: a time in South Africa in the mid 1990s when perpetrators of crimes under apartheid were given the chance to come clean and their victims were given the chance to know the truth.

For many people on both sides, this was a huge relief. There is an ancient African philosophy that seeks unity and reconciliation rather than revenge and punishment; this play, in the end, is the embodiment of that philosophy.

The performances are equally to be commended as is the writing and direction. Jabulile Tshabalala is formidable as Elektra and takes responsibility for her character throughout the play. At no point did she lose the momentum of the emotions created on stage. Dorothy Ann Gould is enigmatic as Klytemnestra.

At the heart of Farber's interpretation is our ability to forgive when the deeds against us is unforgivable. When do you get to that point where revenge is no longer what drives you but a will to live. Farber has once again gone to the deep reserve of her resources as a writer and director to show what the human mind is capable of.

She is also keen to let you know that revenge is consuming and the ability to move on begins to manifest when you let go of your past in order to regain your future.

*Molora* is intensely powerful, hypnotic and truly engaging.

**It is currently showing at The Barbican until 19 April.**  
For more information, visit: [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)



## **Molora**

By Claire Allfree - Friday, April 11, 2008

The Truth & Reconciliation Commission has enabled South Africa to confront the murderous legacy of apartheid and move towards reparation.

The ancient Greek trilogy The Oresteia, in which a family is torn apart by a cycle of vengeance, isn't a perfect analogy for South African racial politics but it does provide a personal story in which to explore resonant themes of revenge and forgiveness.

The Farber Foundry's stark, bloody production transplants Aeschylus's tale to a rural Xhosa community where Electra (Jabulile Tshabalala) and her brother Orestes (Sandile Matsheni, pictured with Tshabalala) are planning to kill their mother Klytemnestra to avenge their father's murder. This is folk theatre at its most raw.

Director Yael Farber fuses a Peter Brook aesthetic with a rough and ready sense of ritual, casting the fantastic Ngqoko Cultural Group with their split-tone singing (umngqokolo) as the chorus.

Dorothy Ann Gould's superb, white Klytemnestra is a Wellington boot-wearing, boozy chain-smoker, who casually uses the wet-bag treatment to torture Electra – a direct reference to a common form of torture in apartheid South Africa.

Her battered body, semi prostrate before a murderous but faltering Orestes, serves as a symbol for apartheid South Africa itself, almost crippled by revenge, hatred and grief. Tshabalala's Electra is also almost destroyed by the ecstasy of blood-lust.

Farber frames the action with a Truth & Reconciliation testimony in which daughter faces mother. It's a potent symbol of a country that needs everyone to look within in order to heal.

*Until Apr 19, Barbican, Silk Street EC2, Mon to Sat 7.45pm, £15. Tel: 0845 120 7550. [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk) Tube: Barbican/Moorgate*

# THE GAZETTE

## Molora: Greek tragedy transformed and audience transfixed

BY PAT DONNELLY,  
GAZETTE CULTURE CRITIC JANUARY 24, 2009



D  
Dorothy Ann Gould, as the murderous Clytemnestra, testifies before the South African-style Greek chorus in a rehearsal of Yael Farber's play *Molora* at Cinquième Salle of Place des Arts. Photograph by: Pierre Obendrauf.

*Molora* has arrived. And theatrical magic is afoot in the Cinquième Salle of Place des Arts. This Greek tragedy transformed by auteur director Yael Farber into a South African ritual for the 21st century is simply one of the best productions this critic has ever seen, anywhere.

Such solemnity. *Molora* (it means ashes in Sesotho) feels like a communal incantation informed by the wars and wisdom of the ages.

Such passion. The performers throw themselves into their roles as if their lives depended on each line, each gesture. Such simplicity. All is to a purpose, nothing wasted.

Such gravitas. The South African village chorus sows the ceremonial tone and continues to up the ante as the (Xhosa language) voice of conscience throughout, each chant, gesture or musical intervention (by mouth harp, calabash-bow or milking drum) is invested with meaning, serving the story. And what a compelling, durable story, handed down to us through the ages with the help of Homer, Euripides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and any number of interlocutors in between. (The Aeschylus trilogy known as *The Oresteia* is most familiar, along with *Elektra*, by Euripides.)

In Farber's hands the ancient Greek myth of the fall of the House of Atreus has become an African quilt of many sources, including the Old Testament and William Shakespeare. (*Elektra* delivers an altered version of the "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech from *The Merchant of Venice*.)

At the same time, Farber has pared it down to the dysfunctional family essentials, within a South African



context: a cigarette-puffing, gumboot-wearing, alcoholic mother, Klytemnestra (Dorothy Ann Gould), who murders her husband, Agamemnon, with a pickaxe; an abused, enraged daughter, Elektra (Jabulile Tshabalala), faithful to her father's memory, who prays for the return of her brother, Orestes; and a noble warrior of a brother, Orestes (Sandile Matsheni), who returns, in disguise, bearing false ashes, to avenge his father's death. Agamemnon's mistress, Cassandra, has been edited out. And the presence of Klytemnestra's lover, Aegisthus, is only suggested by his clothing.

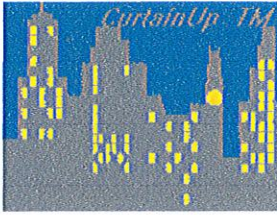
Compared to Ariane Mnouchkine's *Les Atrides* (same story, four plays, 10 hours), which played here in 1992, this two-hour *Molora* is miraculously succinct. The entry of the chorus (six women in plaid blankets and turbans, one man in a suit), one-by-one from the audience, is quiet and deliberate. But the dramatic build soon takes hold and intensifies as the bloody drama of the fall of the House of Atreus unfolds. From the face-off between mother and daughter behind microphones within the context of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to the otherworldly ending, *Molora* never ceases to fascinate.

Gould, who won the South African 2008 National Best Actress award for *Molora*, is a powerhouse of Glenda Jackson/Judi Dench calibre. That her inaugural Canadian performance (and that of the play) is taking place in Montreal rather than Toronto is a coup.

Tshabalala's Elektra is heart-wrenching, fierce and brave. Matsheni's Orestes is bold, majestic – athletic. At one point, he soars above the stage. In ancient Greece, theatre was obligatory because it was deemed necessary to maintain a healthy society. Citizens were fined for not going. *Molora* helps us understand why.

***Molora***, by Yael Farber, continues at the Cinquième Salle of Place des Arts until Feb. 1. Tickets \$30, or \$15 (30 and under) at [www.laplacedesarts.com](http://www.laplacedesarts.com) or 514-842-2112.

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*CurtainUp*

The Internet Theater Magazine of Reviews, Features, Annotated Listings  
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A *CurtainUp*  London Review

## *Molora*

by [Charlotte Loveridge](#)

In *Molora*, the South African director Yael Farber who was responsible for 2004's hit *Amajuba*, turns to Greek Tragedy. Based on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* but also incorporating elements from Sophocles' *Electra*, this version relocates the ancient myth to contemporary South Africa, exploring its themes of revenge and forgiveness with special relevance to the establishment of democracy in the 1990s and the appeasement of avenging anger after the abuses of a white minority.

Mainly following the action of the trilogy's middle play, the *Choephoroe*, Agamemnon's murder at the hands of his unfaithful wife (Dorothy Ann Gould) is recounted as a past event. Their grieving daughter Elektra (Jabulile Tshabalala) is now trapped at home under Klytemnestra's indomitable tyranny but determined to exact vengeance on her murderous mother. Her brother Orestes (Sandile Matsheni), who was smuggled away as an infant, is now grown up and fully capable of executing this revenge. Instead of long Aeschylean monologues or choral odes, the narrative and back-story are portrayed via interwoven sequences and live graphic brilliance. For example, Klytemnestra's dream that she gives birth to a snake who suckles blood from her breast, fuelled both by guilt and prophecy prior to Orestes' return, is gruesomely acted out onstage. A sand pile representing Agamemnon's tomb is central to the stage throughout, around which the action revolves both physically and figuratively. In this way, the audience share a strong sense of this primeval tragedy's viscerality.

Adding to the production's earthy, primitive feel are the chorus of rural Xhosa tribeswomen who provide traditional "split tone" singing with incredible vocal strains and texture. Permanently onstage, their role as a truth and reconciliation commission is hinted at and they become the perfect observers and jury of the action.

Key to this reimagining of the myth, the chorus represent the end of the curse on the house of Atreus. They intervene in the action (contrary to the convention of Attic tragedy) to prevent the matricide and they represent humanity's capacity for forgiveness by forming the committee which explores and absolves past crimes. Aeschylus' gods are thus replaced by this paradigm for humanity. In the *Oresteia*, the human solution (democratic legal justice) results in an impasse when the jury's votes are equally split and the goddess Athena only ends the curse by appeasing the Erinyes with promise of civic inclusion.

*Molora*, on the other hand, presents a more hopeful and generally humanistic resolution: the end to the self-perpetuating cycle of revenge lies in men's own ability to achieve reconciliation via forgiveness. This version conclusively answers questions which Aeschylus provocatively left unresolved. Nevertheless, it cannot be accused of self-complacency in view of its truthful inspiration: the successful establishment of peaceful democracy in South Africa. Uncomfortable in many places (including sequences of onstage tortures) and unafraid of using silences and pauses in action, this is a vivid, untamed production which is ultimately a paean to humanity in the midst of self-destructive violence.

# The British Theatre Guide

## **Molora**

By Yael Farber (after Aeschylus and Sophocles) Farber Foundry Production @ The Pit, Barbican  
Review by Howard Loxton (2008)

Originally produced in association with the Market Theatre, Johannesburg, in 2003 and having its British premier at Oxford Playhouse (British co-produces) earlier this month, this is a South African take on *The Libation Bearers*, the second play of the Oresteia, drawing also on ideas from *The Eumenides*, the final play in which Orestes and the ghost of Klytemnestra present their cases before the goddess Athena and an Athenian jury. The setting is not archaic Greece but a Xhosa village and the libation bearers supporting Elektra at her father Agamemnon's grave are played by the singer-musicians of the Ngqoka Cultural Group, the sound of whose split-tone singing and traditional mouth harps, calabash bows and drums establish the atmosphere that pervades this work.

A dusty black plastic sheet covers the stage in front of a row of chairs, to one side at the rear a table with a microphone, on the other side another. A woman slowly drags the plastic into a bundle, uncovering a mound of sand with a mattock beside it. One by one other women enter from the corners of the theatre. They wear head-cloths and plaid blankets over their shoulders, as their fugue-like song builds they take their places on the chairs, joined by a solitary man. An older woman, white and dressed in red, sits at the upstage table, a young woman, black, at the one on the other side of the stage. The white woman speaks into the microphone, in English, her voice quiet but strong, confident and masculine. This is Klytemnestra telling us why she killed her husband Agamemnon. The younger woman is her daughter Elektra, speaking sometimes in English, but mainly in Xhosa. They act out some of their story before us. Klytemnestra pulls out another bundle of black plastic and out of it rolls the body of Agamemnon which she buries in the sand. Elektra, frightened for the safety of Orestes, her baby brother, has him taken far away. Klytemnestra tortures her trying to find out where he is. Seventeen years pass and a grown Orestes returns...The action follows that of Aeschylus but as Elektra cries for an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, urging Orestes to strike the final blow and kill their mother the chorus intervene. In 1995, post-apartheid South Africa convened the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The new South Africa has its own way of turning the vengeful Furies into 'The Kindly Ones.'

This is a passionate, blood-soaked and very moving telling of the ancient epic, powerfully played. A viscerally physical performance -- Elektra is held with her head under water, burned with a glowing cigarette, or gripped in a contradictory motherly embrace; Orestes swings a mattock wildly around his head, Klytemnestra gives birth to a writhing snake -- it is not for the faint-hearted.

The Xhosa singing and dancing enhance the ritual element but it is a pity that we have no way of knowing what comment on or contribution to the argument these villagers are making. Language also made it impossible to fully understand Jabulile Tshabalala's deeply felt Elektra; nor, from my seat at the extreme side, could I always clearly hear Dorothy Ann Gould's impressive Klytemnestra when she was speaking away from me. However, the intensity of their playing ensured that one was always emotionally engaged. Into their conflicting world comes Sandile Matsheni's Orestes, draped in a white blanket, a Christ-like symbol of innocence. Yet, since he pretends to be bringing his own ashes, he cannot be without guile and perhaps the exchange of the white for a brown blanket has a particular African significance. There is a quiet calm about him and, though Elektra drives him to kill Aegisthus and tear his heart from his body (symbolised by drawing a dripping organ from a Wellington boot), he clearly represents the new spirit of the nation and it is no accident that such a fine looking actor has been cast.

*Molora* apparently means 'ash' in the Sesotho language and here we have not just the ashes that Orestes brings but the play ends with a fine shower of ash falling from above, a ritual for all those lost in the bitter years of the apartheid era.

*At the Barbican until 19th April; touring to Rose Kingston-upon-Thames 20th-24th May, Northern Stage Newcastle-upon-Tyne 3rd-5th June 2008*

# EVERYTHING REMAINS RAW

Tuesday May 22nd 2007

THE STARTONIGHT

## MOLORA

REVIEW BY DIANNE DE BEER

RATING \* \* \* \* \*

In selecting a Greek Tragedy to explore the cycle of violence, and the irresistible human impulse for revenge, uncompromising director Yael Farber creates sophisticated theatre in its rawest form.

It is gut-wrenching stuff as the emotional and immediate impact of the production overwhelms on a purely sensory level.

The guttural sounds of the Chorus grab you by the pit of the stomach and never let go. Dorothy Ann Gould's Clytemnestra echoes the sounds of the Chorus as she plunges her voice into what seems an almost dark void. Her character takes you into a world most would shy away from.

This is not a play for the faint-hearted. Through the measured removal of the floor cover, which appears to contain a story that unfolds layer for layer, Farber creates a painting in visual splendour with not a brushstroke out of place.

It's the age old story of revenge, told in a rich ritualistic style, as a mother and her daughter tempt and torture one another - the torturer trading places with the tortured in her nightmares and life.

"Notions of a rainbow nation gliding effortlessly into forgiveness are absurd", writes Farber in her director's note. While Cynthia Ngwenya, mother of one of the Guguletu Seven said: "If it means... this

man who has killed my son, if it means he becomes human again... so that all of us get our humanity back... then I support it all".

"It seems", reasons Farber, that never before have we faced ourselves and our capacity for vengeance more than since the shocking events of September 11th 2001. It is the response of the victims of apartheid, followed by high praise from the world community and then the attack of vengeance post 9/11, that all play a part in the creation of this astonishing work.

But it is Farber's phenomenal ability to tell a story which, in all its simplicity, becomes intensely complex. Her use of the Ngqoko Cultural Group is sheer genius, as they are both the chorus and the conscience while infiltrating the text on every possible level. Their other-worldly chanting, the ancient musical sounds and their omnipotence, drives the production and thrusts the Greek tragedy powerfully into an African context.

From Gould's almost beastly interpretation, to Tshabalala's potent performance, the two women tragically draw the horrific picture of an uninterrupted vengeance that can even take a playful turn.

As Matsheni takes flight, he completes the cycle of vengeance, and reason - which has been banished up to this point - is given its rightful place.

*Molora [Ash]* can be viewed from many different perspectives, but these discussions only come in a more sober retrospection of the work. While watching, one is irresistibly drawn into the vortex of a dismantled family who turn on, rather than to, each other.

THE MARKET THEATRE  
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

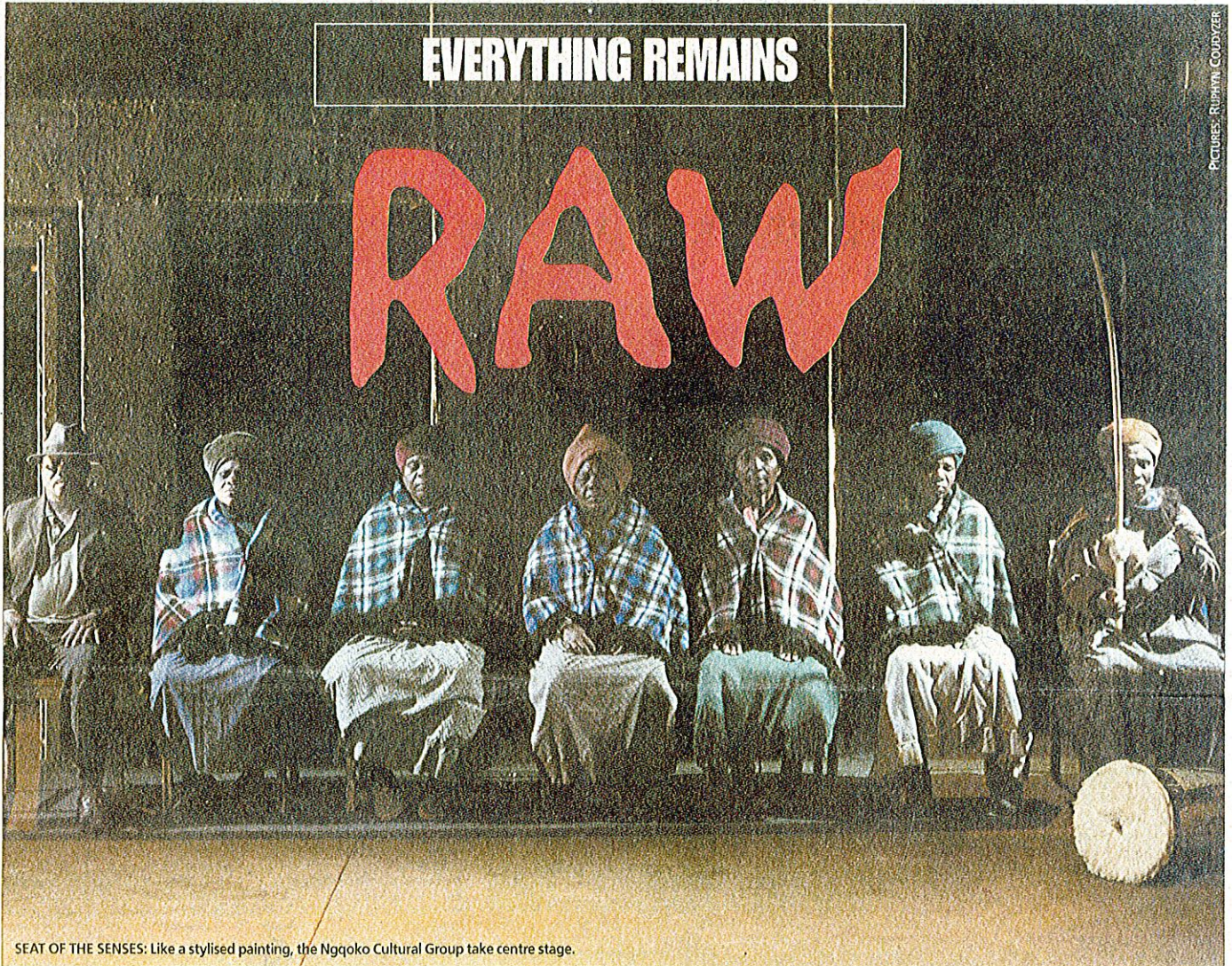


# TONIGHT

As the challenges reveal, Tyra Banks sure is tough on her band of modelling wannabes and tonight is no different. The girls are given a full makeover, before having to dangle from wires suspended 100m in the air for a photoshoot. And here we thought modelling was just about looking pretty! *America's Next Top Model*, 9pm.

## EVERYTHING REMAINS

# RAW



PICTURES: RUIWAI COUDRYZER

SEAT OF THE SENSES: Like a stylised painting, the Ngqoko Cultural Group take centre stage.

### THEATRE



By  
**DIANE DE BEER**

**Molora**  
The Market's Barney Simon Theatre  
Director: Yael Farber  
Cast: Dorothy Ann Gould, Jabulile Tshabalala, Sandile Matsheni, The Ngqoko Cultural Group  
Rating: ★★★★★



**SPITTING BLOOD:** Sandile Matsheni (above), Dorothy Ann Gould and Jabulile Tshabalala (far right)

Notions of a Rainbow Nation gliding effortlessly into forgiveness are absurd

In selecting a Greek tragedy to explore the cycle of violence, and the irresistible human impulse for revenge, uncompromising director Yael Farber creates sophisticated theatre in its rawest form.

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the chorus as she plunges her voice into what seems an almost dark void. Her character takes you into a world most would shy away from.

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and torture one another – the torturer trading places with the tortured in her nightmares and life. "Notions of a Rainbow Nation gliding effortlessly into forgiveness are absurd," writes Farber in her director's notes. While Cynthia Ngunyena, mother of one of the Guguletu Seven said: "If it means ... this man who has killed my son, if it means he becomes human again ... so that all of us get our humanity back ... then I support it all" "It seems," reasons Farber, "that

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*Molora (Ash)* can be viewed from many different perspectives, but these discussions only come in a more sober retrospective of the work. While watching, one is mesmerised and irresistibly drawn into the vortex of a dismantled family who turn on, rather than to, one another.



Friday 4th April 2008

**Theatre Review | MOLORA | The Farber Foundry @ Oxford Playhouse [tour]**

A woman, dressed in rough clothes and a knitted shawl, pulls a black tarpaulin away to reveal a small stage with a burial mound in the centre. The proscenium arch of the Playhouse has been transformed with scaffolding and plastic chairs. Two tables sit at the corners of the stage, with microphones. As the woman sings, others join, weaving in from the audience to take their seats, chanting eerily.

This is an adaptation of the *Oresteia*, and Aeschylus has been transformed by Yael Farber's use of the Ngqoko Cultural Group as Chorus, and by faultless artistic decisions in set, casting and direction. The opening is electrifying and evocative in the small space, and it is the voice of Klytaemnestra which breaks a long silence. Dorothy Ann Gould's magnificent performance begins here. Everything about her manner evokes passionate contradiction: murderous violence pressed against deep emotional sadness; a tough, manly voice and the broken heart of a mother; a courageous and ferocious heart coupled with a mind beset by anguished nights and paranoid days. It is ravishing and exhausting simply to watch her. Elektra is softer, more girlish, less monstrous and makes a strong contrast with her mother. Sandile Matsheni first appears as the naked corpse of Agamemnon but returns to the stage at the climax as an Orestes as physically beautiful as he is intimidating.

The choreography of the work is outstanding, and in such an intimate space the characters loom large, driving us back in horror at the same time as they drag us into their bloody tragedy. Klytaemnestra stands on a table bearing a pick, pregnant with savage lust, and Orestes glides across the stage like a black angel intent on fulfilling his curse of vengeance. Yael Farber has directed a stunning play, full of moments of great beauty and resonance: as Klytaemnestra, drunk, crushes her cigarette in a piece of chicken on her plate at dinner, the image is vividly evoked of her crushing another cigarette on the body of her daughter in a brutal attempt to elicit the whereabouts of Orestes. As Orestes daubs himself in hot blood, the audience is reminded of Klytaemnestra's monstrous tableau at the beginning of the play after the murder of Agamemnon when she smears her arms and face with gore.

It is a tribute to the power of this production that the audience wants Orestes to murder his mother. Farber evokes, compellingly and uncomfortably, a base desire for revenge in her audience, only to deny the animal satisfaction at the end to reflect the reality of post-apartheid life in South Africa. Farber stirs up all our sympathies, directs them in hatred and horror and anger, and ultimately illuminates the futility of these impulses. Brilliantly, she makes Klytaemnestras of us all.

The play is not without its faults, and I wouldn't have chosen to quote *Hamlet*, nor to rely quite so heavily on the unintelligible SeSotho dialect for the Chorus (it diminishes the choral qualities of reflection and explanation on events and does not do justice to Aeschylus' handling of this device). But I left knowing that something special had occurred onstage at the Playhouse. When Tish Francis steps down on the 7 April to hand over to Michelle Dickson as Artistic Director, this production will make a memorable end to her tenure, and her work has been a credit to theatre in the UK. But that is not why you should clear your diary for *Molora*. The reason is that this is theatre at its most intense and inspiring. It is wonderfully adapted from the Greek, and although it takes South African apartheid as its context, its heart beats with a luminous humanity.

*Jason Millar* © 2008

# From the Ashes, a New South Africa

*Molóra*, directed by Yael Farber, achieves something startlingly similar through its profound reinterpretation of *The Oresteia*, which she adapted and workshopped with her actors. This mesmerizing production by a young auteur leads me to believe that South Africa has far outgrown its old position as whipping boy for the world. It is now poised to be our teacher.

*Molóra* opens as a chorus of six Xhosa women and one man remove a groundcloth revealing a hump of dirt center stage. It is Agamemnon's fresh grave, which becomes the focus of the production, an earthy variation on Peter Brook's magic circle. Fearing the revenge Orestes is ordained to take for the murder of his father, Clytemnestra, who is white, badgers Electra, who is black, "Where is my son? Where is Orestes?" When Electra resists, Clytemnestra plunges her daughter's head into a bucket of water, gags her mouth and burns her with cigarettes. No torture breaks Electra, who comforts herself by writhing in the dirt of her father's grave. Clytemnestra assuages herself with a simple belief, "My ally is justice."

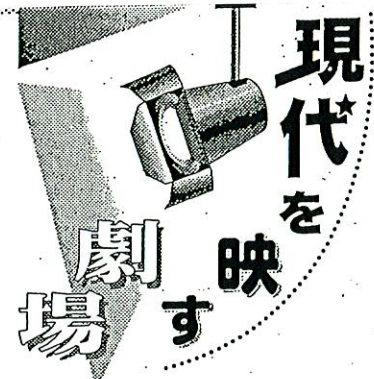
The chorus sits upstage, like jurors, as Electra leans calmly into a table microphone and asks her mother, "Tell this commission how you tried to drag out from me my brother's whereabouts." Farber transmutes Greek tragedy into South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Headed by Bishop Desmond Tutu after the dismantling of apartheid, the TRC offered amnesty for past crimes in exchange for the truth. (See sidebar.)

Orestes, played by a black actor, finally arrives and Electra encourages him: "If we don't revenge, what are we? Collaborators in our own death." When Orestes falters, Electra embraces his responsibility until the chorus prevents her from the vengeful murder Orestes cannot commit. There will be no further murders and no revenge. Justice begins.

Like all successful productions of the classics, *Molóra* is about the present. It answers the question posed by every Greek tragedy—What is to be done?—by endorsing justice over revenge, life over death, hope for the future over bitterness about the past. The chorus embodies the common people of South Africa. They, rather than a Greek god appearing suddenly, possess the wisdom to end the cycle of violence.

BY RUSSELL VANDENBROUCKE

# 南アの舞台「モローラ」、米映画「ミュンヘン」など



現代を映す劇場

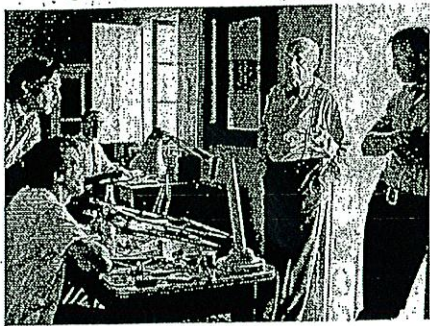
アメリカの「9・11」同時多発テロから、5年がたとうとしている。

米国は、愛国者法を成立させ、対テロ総力戦を宣言、イラク戦争を含め強行路線を突き進むばかりだ。日本も、米国の後をすくこと追従している感じがする。

今月、「正義のために」の大



①「モローラ」の一場面—佐藤日登美撮影  
②「ミュンヘン」の一場面



## 「9・11」報復の連鎖を断ち切るために

合唱による復讐の繰り返しという現状を考える上で、示唆に富む外国からの映画と舞台に出会うことができた。

映画はステイファン・スピルバーグ監督の「ミュンヘン」だ。1972年、ミュンヘン五輪でパレスチナゲリラがイスラエル選手団を襲撃する事件が起きた。イスラエル秘密情報機関は、報復として首謀者の暗殺を計画する。暗殺チームのリーダーが主人公で、指令通り殺人を重ねるにつれ、正義の確信は揺らぎ、

不安と恐怖に襲われる。「私たちは正しいのか？」と主人公をまがき苦しませた疑問は、そのまま現在の米国の方針への鋭い問い掛けとなっている。スピルバーグだから完成が許された映画とも言えて、3月5日に発表の「第78回アカデミー賞」で、オスカーを獲得できるのか、関心が増す。

今月に最も心打たれた舞台は、横浜市の神奈川県立青少年センターホールで日本初演された南アフリカの「モローラ」

たエレクトラ、オレステスの姉弟が、報復のため母と愛人を殺害する物語である。

「モローラ」は、この和解委員会の公聴会が舞台となる。白

舞台のラストにも、アフリカの焚き火の灰が柔らかに降った。灰こそは再生のシンボル。コロスの地の底からわくような音楽を含めて、私たちの心に染み込んでいる舞台だった。

東京国際芸術祭とアラブ映画祭も

今月から2カ月間、東京で東京国際芸術祭(TIFF)2006が開催されている。「演劇の社会性、思想性、政治性を問う」作品が並んでいるのが特徴だ。来月に注目作が2本並ぶ。

154日に東京・にしすがも創造舎特設劇場でイスラエルのヤスミン・ゴデル振り付けの「ストロベリークリームと火薬」。ビデオで見たが、腕を銃のように構えて相手の口に突き刺す男性、ひきつった顔のまま凍り付く女性など、戦争と暴力のイメージに満ちた「光景」が連鎖し、変容していき、圧倒された。10月16日のクウェートのスレイマン・アルバサーム・シアター「カリラ・ワ・ディムナ—王子たちの鏡」は、世界初演だ。TIFFは03・5961・5202。

仄である。

南ア出身の35歳の女性演出家・劇作家ヤエル・ファーパーが、ギリシャ悲劇のオレスティア3部作を大胆に翻案した。中心となるのは、父アガメムノンを母クリテムネストラに殺され

人女優が演じる母クリテムネストラと、黒人の娘エレクトラが対決する。母の告白につれて過去が再現される。他国に逃れていた弟オレステスが成人して帰国、復讐の時は迫った。

「コロスとして古来からの」のど歌(倍音唱法)と民族楽器を継承するコーサ族のグループが出演している。この人々がエレクトラの手から復讐の斧を取り上げるのだ。

エレクトラが母殺しを断念する幕切れは、報復の連鎖を断ち切りたいというコロス、民衆の祈りを感じさせる。表題の「モローラ」は「灰」の意味で、ナチスドイツの強制収容所の被害者の遺灰、「9・11」の生存者に降りかかった灰、なすを指す。

アラブ映画祭2006(03・30265・1040)が3月11日に東京・国際交流基金フォーラムで開催される。今年が2回映画が「夢」(ムハンマド・アルダラッシ監督)と「イラク、わが故郷」(ハッディ・マフィド監督)と2本もあり、映画を通してアラブに触れられる。

毎月最終火曜日に掲載します

高橋豊(専門編集委員)



*[TRANSLATED FROM JAPANESE REVIEW]*

**Mainich Shimbun**  
**By Yutaka Takahashi**

**February 28, 2006**

## **9.11 For ending the chain of revenge**

Almost 5 years since 9.11. [Description on social climate] [...] This month, when I reflect upon the reality of our world's repeated cycles of revenge "for the great cause," I am thankful for the highly suggestive movie and theater we receive from abroad.  
[...]

The stage that struck me most powerfully this month was MOLORA.

A 35-years old director from South Africa, Yael Farber, confidently adapted the Oresteia Trilogy. The core story-line is comprised of Electra and her brother Orestes' attempt to kill their mother in revenge for having killed their father Agamemnon.

Farber successfully imports the issues that post-Apartheid South Africa struggles with. [Explanation of the Truth Commission] [...]

MOLORA is set at the public hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Klytemnestra (played by a white actress) confronts her daughter Elektra (played by a black actress). As mother testifies, the past unravels. When the now adult Orestes, after

years of exile, returns - the time for revenge has come.

A group of Xhosa performers sing in ancient split-tone and play ancient musical instruments. They are the very people who take the ax of revenge from Elektra's hands.

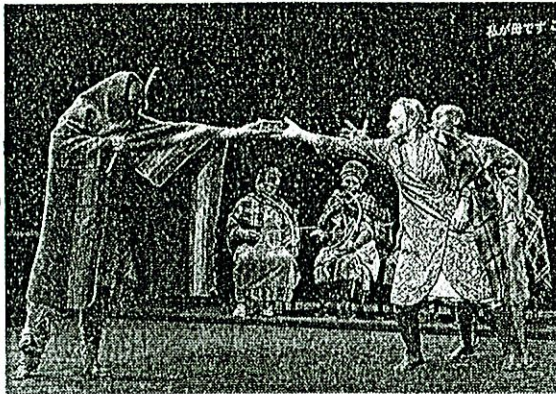
The conclusion in which Electra finally forgoes killing her mother, made me feel the powerful prayer of the Chorus— the ordinary people—offered as a plea to cease the chain of revenge. The title Molora means "ash," and it may suggest the ash of those murdered at Nazi concentration camps, and the ash that fall upon survivors of 9.11. In the closing moments, ash falls upon the stage. Ash is a symbol of the return of life. As the ancient music of the Chorus, echoing as though it flows out from an abyss, resonates on us... deeply soaking this stage into our minds.

南アフリカ共和国からの来日公演「モローラ〜灰」は、ギリシャ悲劇オレスティア三部作の翻案劇だ。ギリシャ悲劇と聞くと、日本の多くの演劇ファンは修辞のかった様式性の強い二ナガワ版ギリシャ悲劇を思い浮かべがちだが、きわめてリアルな演技に賞されたこの「モローラ」は、そうした格調高いギリシャ悲劇とはまた別の狙いをもつ。

上演形式の上では舞台奥の、鮮やかな民族衣装の男女がクロスにあたるわけだが、彼女ら（男性は一名）の役割は狩猟用の弓を転用した弦楽器、口琴、いくつかのパーカッションなど古来の楽器をかなで、独特な喉使い（倍音唱法）の歌をうたうことであり、ときに演技エリアで力強いステップをふむこともあるが、登場人物との直接的交渉はほとんどない。皆、ンゴコ文化

## 南アフリカの「ギリシャ悲劇」

江原 吉博



上演された「モローラ〜灰」の一場面（佐藤日登美撮影）

### 切迫している世界を色濃く映す

グループのメンバーで、特に役者としての訓練をうけているわけではない。冒頭、演技エリアをほざんで上手下手に一つずつ、マイクをのせた証言台が置かれ、下手にはクリテムネ

ストラ、上手にはエレクトラが着席している。南ア共和国の真実和解委員会の場という設定で、まずクリテムネストラが夫アガメムノン殺しを証言し、次女のエレクトラは母を絶対に許さないと告げる。

アバー演出には見逃せない変化が二つある。まずクリテムネストラだけが白人であること、次に彼女が復讐を恐れ、息子オレステスの居所を聞きだすためエレクトラに見るもむごい拷問を

受けてはしを振りあげたエレクトラのたぎる心をクロスが祈るようになだめる。そのラストシーン。空から静かに降り注ぐ灰は、9・11テロの暗示であると同時に、戦争終結に向けた演出家の切なる願いだ。

が、真実和解委員会

イラク戦争をはじめ、世界の現実には神話や様式美ではつくせぬくらい切迫している。クリテムネストラ（ジェニフアー・ステイン）、エレクトラ（ムバリ・ンコシディンツイ）、オレステス（サンディール・マチェーニ）の泥にまみれ血しぶきを飛ばす迫真の演技は、そうした現実を色濃く映しているように見えた。

評論家

はそこまで。クリテムネストラが証言台の下からシートにくるんだ夫の死体を引きずりだすと、場面は一転して過去の回想へとさかのぼる。そこからはほぼ原典どおりの筋運びだが、登場人物をクリテムネストラ、エレクトラ、オレステスの三人に絞ったこと以外に、ヤエル・フ

\*「モローラ〜灰」は17日、神奈川県立青少年センターホールで上演された。

*[TRANSLATED FROM JAPANESE REVIEW]*

Tokyo Shimbun  
By Yoshihiro Ehara

February 25, 2006

## **“South African Greek Tragedy truly reflects our world”**

"Molora," from South Africa, is an adaptation of the Oresteia Trilogy. When it comes to Greek tragedies, many Japanese theatergoers may be struck by memories of past presentations with style and rhetoric - directed by Yukio Ninagawa. This "Molora", however, is consistently performed with such truthful acting, that it aims at other objectives than such high-tone.

A group of men and women, seated upstage in folkloric costumes of vivid colors, play the Chorus. Those women (as well as a single male) also play the role of musicians, and use such ancient instruments as calabash bows, mouth bows, percussion, as well as singing with split tones (throat singing). They also step into the acting area—but rarely make direct contact with characters in the play. They are members of Ngqoko Cultural Group, who are not trained as professional actors.

At the start, Klytemnestra and Elektra face each other over the acting area - where a desk with a microphone is set on each wing outside of the center acting area. The setting is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Klytemnestra begins by testifying how she murdered her husband Agamemnon. Elektra then tells her mother that she will never forgive her. The Truth and Reconciliation commission context

recedes, as Klytemnestra pulls her dead husband (wrapped in black vinyl) from beneath the table of Commission. We are suddenly immersed in a reflection of the past. Hereon out, the play almost follows the original story. Director Yael Farber has, however, reduced the number of character to three (Klytemnestra, Elektra, and Orestes). There are also two radical departures from the original text that we cannot overlook:

Klytemnestra is the only white character onstage. And she brutally tortures her daughter to find out where her missing son, Orestes, is. Both changes actually reflect inhuman policies of South Africa's past legislation. Using the framework of Greek Tragedy, one reflects profoundly upon discrimination and segregation between races. In addition we reflect upon the tortures perpetrated by the defense force, for crushing resistance. From another perspective, it forces us to confront the negative chain of revenge.

Perhaps this is why this director provides a reconciliatory ending. Orestes suddenly refuses to kill his mother, and his enraged sister Elektra takes up the ax to complete the act of revenge. At this moment - the chorus forcefully stops her, calms her burning heart and prays for the children. Ash falls from sky as a metaphor of 9.11. It is, at the same time, the fervent desire of the Director toward ending all wars.

It is not the Iraq War alone, whose reality in the world is so tense it can only be describe d with myths. The truthful acting of Klytemnestra (Jennifer Steyn), Elektra (Mbali Ngkosidintsi) and Orestes (Sandile Matsheni), covered with mud and splashing blood, seem to reflect the wider reality clearly.

# Breaking a cycle of violence gives us hope

We are programmed to expect brutality to breed brutality, so a way out comes as a surprise – and a disappointment

**MOLORA**  
directed by Yael Farber

Review: Mary Corrigan

Smoke twirls from an open pot where a live, orange flame flickers. Thick clouds of dust fill the air. Standing over his father's grave, a bare-chested Orestes contemplates killing his mother.

A chorus of Xhosa women ululate, commiserate and yell. A thump on a drum reverberates. The mood is anxious. Will Orestes revenge the death of his father?

It is not just the Afrocentric twist to Aeschylus's *Oresteia Trilogy* that makes *Molora* zing but also the heady mix of potent visuals, natural elements – dust, fire and water – explicit, emotive language and deep, groggy sounds that seem to emanate from the bowels of the earth. They render it a sensual and intellectual adventure.

Stripped of the elements that obscure the primal impulses that define the human condition, *Molora* presents the complexities of raw human emotions unadorned. The characters almost beg for a reprieve as their spirits writhe and thrash about in a struggle to liberate themselves from the overwhelming and instinctual emotions that imprison them. It is the unrelenting urge for revenge that casts a spell over *Molora*'s cast.

Vengeance isn't just an age-old theme drawn from Greek tragedy. Director Yael Farber presents this fraught impulse as a gut reaction, an instinctual response to death, violence and betrayal. The eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth motif isn't just paraphrased in *Molora*, every strand of its intricate nature comes under the spotlight.

So, while the base emotions that drive vengeance are accessed, *Molora*, in the tradition of Greek theatre, also poses a cerebral puzzle: is revenge ever justified? Can vengeance obliterate hatred?

*Molora* opens with Clytemnestra, superbly played by Dorothy Ann Gould, admitting to killing her husband, Agamemnon, father to Electra (Jabulile Tshabalala) and Orestes (Sandle Matsheni).

Her confession takes place at a desk in front of a microphone, recalling familiar scenes from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. The reference to the TRC may be subtle, but the allusion has wider implications that are woven into every thread of this emotive story and reflect on the TRC's role in averting vengeance.

Clytemnestra's confession does not absolve her guilt. During waking hours, she can rationalise her actions but, at night, her remorse haunts and tortures her.

For Electra, Clytemnestra's admission also does little to shift her feelings. In fact, the hatred she harbours against her mother is intensified by her willingness to confess her crimes. That Clytemnestra's confession veers on boastful adds to the growing tension between mother and daughter, who are bound together by loathing, not



Initiating violence transforms Clytemnestra (Dorothy Ann Gould) into a sadistic character who abuses her daughter Electra (Jabulile Tshabalala), who in turn becomes consumed by revenge

affection.

*Molora* articulates the frustration inherent in the TRC process: confessions do little to satisfy the desire for revenge; instead, they can operate as a trigger. Is there a practice that can rid victims and perpetrators of the burdens they carry?

In the noxious relationship between Electra and Clytemnestra,

Electra takes on the role of victim – she is paralysed by anger and fear. Her hatred consumes her and gnaws at her to such a degree that she surrenders her entire being to the pursuit of obliterating Clytemnestra. It does not dawn on her that avenging her father's death makes her no different to her sworn enemy: her mother.

It is through Clytemnestra that the consequences of revenge come into plain view: Agamemnon's death has not liberated her from the pain he caused; instead, her violent actions have paved the way for a sadistic persona. And so the cycle of violence becomes entrenched.

Ultimately, Clytemnestra learns that there is no escaping the weight

of her actions. "What is done is done," she repeats, like a mantra, even though it falls on deaf ears. Her murderous actions cannot be overturned. No further measures can be taken to reverse what has already taken place.

This obvious fact should render revenge a futile operation, but it doesn't. Not for Clytemnestra, Electra nor in a universal sense – though an illogical impulse, it continues to be played out on political stages.

Farber suggests that the urge to commit revenge is as instinctual as guilt. Both are the residue left by the wake of malevolence. It all depends on which position you assume – perpetrator or victim.

As *Molora* develops, perpetrators and victims become interchangeable – Electra becomes the architect of a brutal act, while Clytemnestra assumes the role of victim, underpinning the cyclical nature of violence.

Although Matsheni delivers a wooden performance (he does not reveal the conflict that no doubt brows within his troubled soul), his character is central to the resolution of the play.

It is up to Orestes to make a choice – either he can end the cycle of violence or perpetuate it.

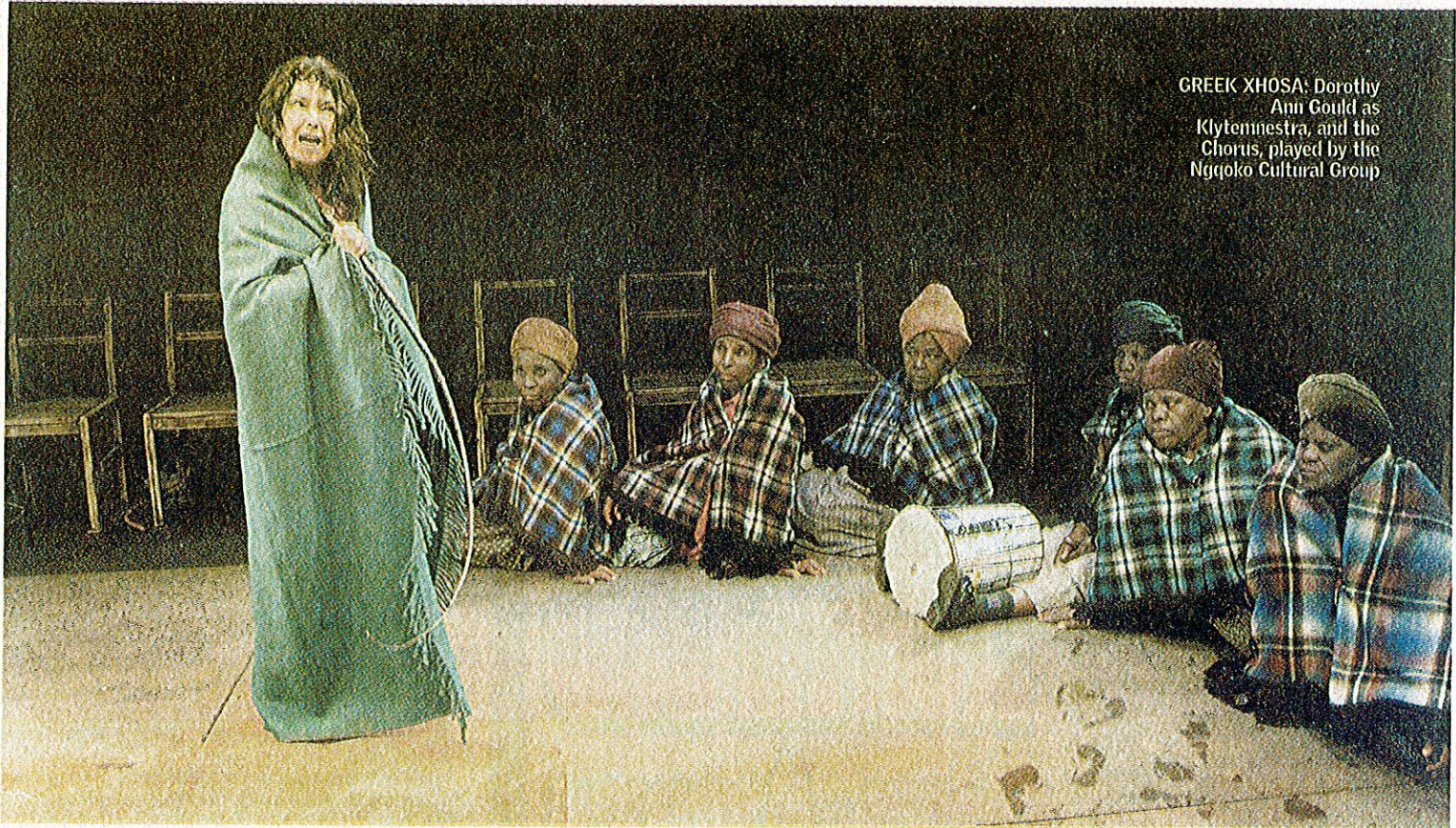
Farber suggests that victims have agency. Revenge is such a tempting action for victims because it appears to furnish them with what they have lost: power. But Farber suggests that the choice afforded to victims automatically confers upon them influence – they have the power to halt the cycle of violence.

In this way *Molora* echoes Aeschylus's trilogy, which also reveals the tension between reason and intuition. Of course, Aeschylus employed reason to justify revenge rather than to avert it.

But Farber has adapted Aeschylus's tragedy to suit contemporary mores or, more specifically, the South African context, where vengeance has no place in the ideology that defines our Rainbow Nation. Farber has not simply "Africanised" Aeschylus's play as a means of subverting western culture in order to sever ties from the colonial authority that has overshadowed African culture for so long. Rather, by conjuring the cornerstones of western theatre that echo contemporary South African issues, she dissolves some of the superficial barriers that separate African and European expression.

This reconciliatory ethos is, of course, echoed in the play's joyful denouement. Although Aeschylus's tragedy also ended on a cheerful note, one can't help feeling thwarted. From the moment the play kicks off, one prepares for a bloody climax, and it is here that Farber forces introspection on her audience. It becomes obvious that we are programmed to "vie for blood". And it is not just an instinctual response, vengeance is a concept that is embedded in cultural expression.

So, although one leaves *Molora* ebullient with optimism, there is an overwhelming sense of discomfort. Where does justice fit into this happy ending? Has the concept of justice been redefined in South Africa?



GREEK XHOSA: Dorothy Ann Gould as Klytemnestra, and the Chorus, played by the Ngqoko Cultural Group

# Mercy stays revenge's hand

Reworking of classic trilogy opts for what may be a very South African ending

SCOTT BURNETT

**Y**AEL Farber's gripping and effective meditation on cycles of revenge, *MoLoRa*, has finally come to Joburg four years after its premiere in Grahamstown.

Soon it will embark on an international tour that will take it to the Barbican in London later this year, and the Netherlands and the US next year.

Farber serves as an artistic ambassador of sorts for Africa — her universally significant work is not embellished with Africanism; it is essentially African, even archetypically so. She is simultaneously concerned with classical narratives: *SeZaR* was African Shakespeare; *MoLoRa* is Aeschylus's Oresteian trilogy; she is now working on an adaptation of King Lear set in the Middle East.

The three protagonists at

the centre of *MoLoRa* (*molora* means 'ash' in Sotho) are exceptionally competent. Sandile Matsheni as Orestes manages a clear, stylised male anger; Jabulile Tshabalala as Elektra is as bloodthirsty when hysterically vengeful as she is pitiful when clawing at her mother for affection; Dorothy Ann Gould as Klytemnestra achieves a fragility and humanity that accentuate, instead of opposing, her brutality.

It is thanks largely to Gould's success that *MoLoRa* can depart convincingly from Aeschylus, and Orestes can choose to spare his mother's life. Her pleading with him to not become "like me" — empty, violent, black-hearted — is partly what stays his hand.

That being said, the real star of *MoLoRa* is the chorus. The play would lack the dazzling artistic vision it achieves if it weren't for the



BLOOD MUMMY: Dorothy Ann Gould as Klytemnestra

six women and one man who surround it.

Tsolwana Mpayipheli, the one man, co-founded the Ngqoko Cultural Group in Lady Frere in 1980, and now directs it.

Nofenishala Mvotyo inherited the calling to become a diviner, and is a sought-after praise singer. Nogcinile Yekani plays all

traditional Xhosa bows. Nokhaya Mvotyo is a widower with four children and five grandchildren, as well as a bow player, overtone singer, and beat dancer. Nopasile Mvotyo is the eldest — she plays *umnibhe* (mouth bow), *uhadi* (percussion bow), and is an overtone singer.

Nosomething Ntese is the group's jester and a master musician. Tandiwe Lungisa plays bows and jew's-harp. Together, they would make Aeschylus long to have been born in the Eastern Cape.

Their solemn presence, formal purity, and mystical engagement with the action on stage makes them central as well as peripheral. Indeed, their hinting at what the Furies will do to Orestes as revenge for matricide combines with Gould's Klytemnestra to change the course of the classical narrative.

The dramatic tension of *MoLoRa* is created by the

seemingly inexorable movement of the son exiled, and thus saved, by his sister, towards revenging with her his father who was killed by his mother.

But the original cruelty was the father's: Agamemnon killed Klytemnestra's baby, then raped and later married her. Will Orestes become like Agamemnon? Will the cycle of revenge be perpetuated by the slaying of the mother by her son?

In ancient Greece, Aeschylus answered yes; in Farber's vision, the answer is no. Her director's notes pointing to Palestine, religious fundamentalism, and other revenge cycles, suggests that she thinks South Africa's greatest export might be the ability — like that of the chorus — to practise mercy as if it were a musical instrument.

● *MoLoRa* is at the Barney Simon Theatre in the Market Theatre complex until June 3.

Oxford Mail - Oxford, UK  
15.06.2008

## **Molora, @ Oxford Playhouse, until tomorrow**



THE first thing you notice is that the Oxford Playhouse's interior has been completely redesigned for *Molora*.

The usual circle and stall seating is out of use. A new bank of steeply tiered seats looks down on the stage, which is significantly reduced in size because there are more members of the audience on either side of it.

The arrangement has the effect of concentrating attention on the action. And what action it is! Thrilling, gripping and sometimes so bloody that you feel you must look away.

*Molora* comes from the Farber Foundation, a South African-based company whose

earlier productions of *Amujuba* and *SeZaR* made a big impact on Playhouse audiences.

Essentially, it offers a reworking of the Greek tragedy *The Oresteia* with its central themes of revenge and forgiveness placed in the context of recent events in South Africa.

The power of the piece is hugely increased by a seven-strong chorus (all but one women). They sing, dance, chant and perform on a number of instruments.

At 95 minutes, without interval *Moloba* offers challenging and compelling drama. It should not be missed.

CHRIS GRAY

# Daily Info Oxford

## *Molora (review)*

**Reworking of Greek classic Oresteia, set in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Mother and daughter, victim and perpetrator face up to one another. With a chorus of Xhosa tribeswomen.**

Yael Farber cleverly adapts the Oresteia trilogy to tell the story behind the painful healing process experienced by the survivors of post-Apartheid South Africa, centring around the dynamics of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The structure of the Greek plays offers a satisfying context from which to see the evolution of a judicial system that replaces the understandable yearning for the 'an eye for an eye' style of revenge. The witnesses are the Greek Chorus, played exquisitely by The Ngqoko Cultural Group, from the town of Lady Frere, who exert a presence from the moment the audience enters the space. These blanket-wearing beat-dancing elders perform indigenous South African Music with string and mouth bows in the tradition of the Xhosa communities. The bird's eye view from the raked on-stage seating in the round is engulfing as the action switches from blood-strewn entrails, made by violent actions, to the formal Commission meeting hall where a case is being staged in such a way that the audience feels like witnesses. A black South African daughter (Elektra) is reporting mistreatment such as strangulation, cigarette burns and drowning, which the audience witnesses, at the hands of her white South African mother (Klytemnestra). 'You have made a child of me through fear' accuses Elektra, scintillatingly played by Jabulile Tshabalala, of her hard-bitten chain-smoking drunken mum, Klytemnestra, a role performed with vigorous energy by Dorothy Ann Gould. Whilst a metaphor for Apartheid is established in this relationship, Farber's direction ensures it is always a real family that is portrayed with genuine dysfunctions, for example the mother is plagued by the fact she loves her son, the exiled Orestes, much more than her daughter.

It is reassuring that Farber still sees victim and perpetrator as a family unit and both are in agreement that neither group wants a 'history without a future' but one problem remains, as Elektra puts it 'how can we move on until the debt is paid?' Many insights are offered as to how the perpetrators feel, as Klytemnestra reveals 'we are still only here by grace alone'. Justifying her actions she confronts Elektra with the wrongdoings of Agamemnon, the husband Klytemnestra murdered. Elektra interprets the offering of her sister Iphigenia's life at the hands of Agamemnon as the 'price of war'. Civil war scars one and all as Klytemnestra's mental state deteriorates and she waits for the consequences of her actions to literally knock on the door. Heralded by the reverberation of a big drum a stranger offers her the ashes of her son, Orestes. So clearly told, 'Molora' (or 'Ash') offers a great introduction to the Oresteia and a climactic ending approaches. As the cycle of revenge becomes overwhelming, can the strong axe-wielding Orestes (Sandile Matsheni) be moved to kill his own mother or can the very painful process of healing begin? The action is subdued only by the soft fall of ash from above. This visual effect is inescapably similar to the fine powder that fell for days in Downtown Manhattan after the bombings of September 11th. In this moment the company offers us the possibility of something beautiful occurring that is unconscious of the cruelty that has created it. Those warm hearts of The Ngqoko Cultural Group send us home with a song, reminding us that in South Africa, as well as in Greek tragedy, strong beliefs exist to break down any revenge cycle. In a show that gets standing ovations in South Africa and now Oxford there has to be a universal truth, and for me it is if we stop picking our scabs long enough then eventually they will heal. Watch this house rise again and the Farber Foundry at work!

**Lita Doolan, 14/06/07**

## Reviews

### *Molora*

Based on the *Oresteia*, adapted by Yael Farber  
Oxford Playhouse and the Farber Foundry  
Northern Stage, Newcastle, and touring

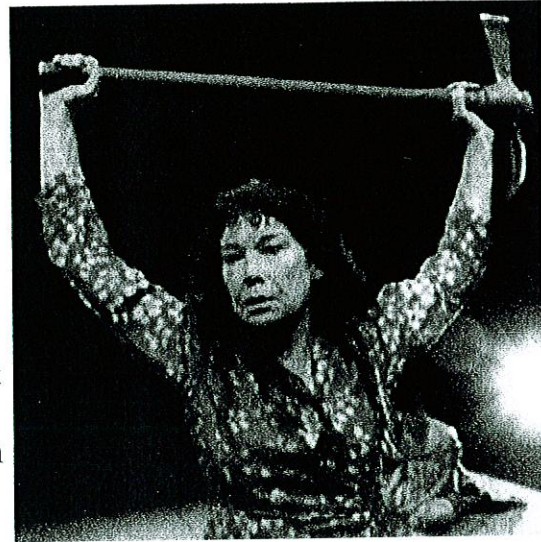
Review by Gail-Nina Anderson (2008)

The modernisation of classic Greek drama is usually a doomed venture. The problem lies not in its themes (still pretty universal) or characters (we meet them everyday) but in form and context. The sense of a shared ritual is difficult to convey from the stage of a theatre, while an unforced awareness that it has a

meaning, reinforcing some vital element in our world, effecting a change in the very air we breathe – well, that’s asking a bit much from the revival of a centuries-old play, however we dress it up.

The odd thing about *Molora* is how little sense one has that this is a modernisation of Aeschylus’ original of some 2500 years ago. Yes, there’s no doubt that this version is set in South Africa in the wake of Apartheid, but the alienating dissociation that usually cuts in between ancient drama and modern setting just isn’t present. Form and content are so unified that there really is a sense here of how theatre might once have served to define the shape of the world.

The story is demonstrably the old one of the wounds created when individuals, family, clan and society tug in different directions. Klytemnestra has killed her husband Agamemnon, just when she should have been celebrating his triumphant return from war. Nobody seems to have thought through that his sacrifice of their daughter (not to mention the savage killing of Klytemnestra’s first husband and child) might have left his wife damaged, just as she fails to realise that this conjugal murder will call down the furies of bitterness and festering hatred. Revenge doesn’t have a logical end, so





Klytemnestra's son Orestes may grow up to avenge his father, to prevent which his mother plans to kill him until sister Elektra spirits him away to grow up in safety. The absent figure of Orestes is, for much of this version, an unseen focus for the conflicting energies of the two driven women, mother and daughter. Klytemnestra has reduced Elektra to the status of a servant in her house, beaten and tortured because she holds the secret of her dangerous brother's whereabouts. Elektra survives unbroken because she feeds off fantasies of an avenging Orestes who can put things right by killing their mother and taking the place of their lost father.

It's familiar, potent territory played out with a visceral physicality by the two actresses, Dorothy Ann Gould as a white Klytemnestra and Jabulile Tshabalala as her black daughter. Gould does drunk as convincingly as I've ever seen on the stage, but she can also pull off icy determination edged with self-doubting terror. Compelling as these performances are, what gives them their rare resonance is a chorus of singers and musicians (six women, one man) from the Xhosa-speaking Ngqoko Cultural Group. Their split-tone singing, bows, drums and resonators re-think the formal Greek chorus into a language of sound that ranges from the conversational to the unearthly, suggesting something enduring and rooted yet immediate and direct. And no, it didn't seem to matter that the language was entirely unfamiliar. It clearly created a containing wall for the central drama, with the singers commenting, observing and exhorting characters locked into their cycle of mutual destruction.

The end of the *Oresteia* is difficult for modern audiences who have to take on board not just supernatural furies but also judicial deities for whom mothers matter less than fathers. Wisely, this gets concentrated down here to a much more essential climax that echoes the Human Rights Violations Committee hearings that took place in South Africa following the abolition of apartheid in the previous decade. The parallels, however, aren't hammered home so much as elided into a satisfying whole. Orestes does return, at first winning a welcome from his mother by pretending to be merely the messenger of his own death. When he and his sister join forces their visceral need for the closure that only revenge can bring is almost painful to watch, but the end of the *Oresteia* (and, one hopes, of South Africa's trials) comes not with the mathematical solution of a death for a death and a blood feud played out until there is nothing left but ashes (the meaning of *Molera*.) The Greek tragedy doesn't finish in a wave of blood but in the realisation that there can be a different way to move forward. Here the most tellingly original moment, freshly re-imagined for this new context, came when Elektra, driven into a frenzied need for revenge that leaves her twitching with inchoate rage, is quietly bundled up and cradled into calmness by the female chorus, suggesting that the new way forward is also rooted in the age-old wisdom of simple humanity.

*Howard Loxton reviewed this production at the Barbican Pit*

# Blood will have blood

## Theatre

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Molora, at The Oxford Playhouse, from Tuesday, June 12 to Saturday, June 16

**IN an astonishing transformation, the Oxford Playhouse was reconfigured from a proscenium arch theatre into an intimate studio space for the production of *Molora* last week.**

Director Yael Farber now has a strong relationship with the Playhouse and it must have taken some convincing to radically alter the staging. And what a change it makes. Although audience numbers are fewer, those that are lucky to have tickets gain considerably in intensity of experience.

*Molora*, meaning 'ash', is a re-imagining of *The Oresteia*, working as an allegory of contemporary South Africa.

Klytemnestra (an awesome performance by Dorothy Ann Gould, projecting simultaneously great love and affection, and deep loathing and fear) is brought to trial at something resembling the Truth and Reconciliation Committee.

A huge microphone is scraped along a wooden table as she recites how she murdered her husband, Agamemnon. It is a crime of passion, as well as a carefully planned axe-job against a man who slew her first husband, her unborn child and then sacrificed one of their three children in a war ritual. By revealing her past, the state could move towards some element of forgiveness.

Her accuser in court is her daughter Elektra (Jabulile Tshabalala, last seen in Oxford in Farber's landmark *Amajuba*, and, like her character, electrifying). Elektra is blood-hungry for revenge against her mother, and convinces her athletic brother Orestes (Sandile Matsheni) to join her in her plot.

Their momentum is hurried along by a literal chorus, the Ngqoko Cultural Group who sing, dance, chant and play a wide range of musical instruments. It is as if WOMAD has come early: scary ceremonies are accompanied by the 'whoomp whoomp' of some sort of drum-box; war dances are a howl of drumming and shakers. There are some gorgeous mini-bows with whistles for more reflective moments.

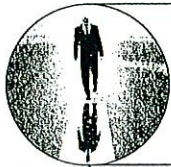
At times stylised, the immense grandeur of the music and sound effects, and the terror of re-played torture scenes inflicted on Elektra by a gum-booted, whip-waving Klytemnestra, is overpowering.

Yael Farber is in the premier league of directors. A must-see.

JOHN LEWIS

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Yael Farber is in the premier league of directors. A must-see.



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# Laokoon-Festival auf Kampnagel Den Teufelskreis der Rache durchbrechen

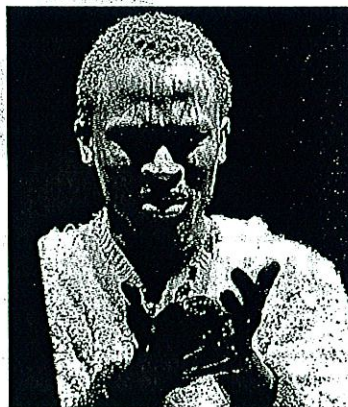
„MICH HABEN IMMER die Begriffe des ‚gerechten‘ Blutvergießens und der Rache interessiert“, begründet die südafrikanische Regisseurin Yael Farber ihre Entscheidung, ein Schauspiel auf der Basis der Orestie zu inszenieren, das vom 26. bis zum 28. dieses Monats im Rahmen des Sommerfestivals Laokoon auf Kampnagel zu sehen sein wird. „Molóra“ (Asche), heißt die europäische Erstaufführung, die Elektra-Texte der klassischen griechischen Dramatiker Sophokles, Aischylos und Euripides mit Sartres erstem Stück „Die Fliegen“ verwebt. Aktueller Anlass dieser ungewöhnlich radikalen Deutung waren die Anhörungen der südafrikanischen „Wahrheitskommission“, die Mitte der neunziger Jahre die Menschenrechtsverletzungen des Apartheidregimes aufarbeiten sollte.

Sie habe sich lange gewünscht ein Werk zu schaffen, das den Zyklus von Gewalt darstellt und den Zwiespalt von Menschen, die unter der Gewalt gelitten haben und nun vor der Wahl stehen, sich zu rächen oder denen zu vergeben, die ihnen Schlimmes angetan haben, erläutert die Regisseurin, die seit zehn Jahren in der „Farber Foundry“ mit südafrikanischen Künstlern arbeitet, ihre Intentionen. Sie selbst entscheidet sich in ihrer Inszenierung für einen versöhnlichen Schluss, im Gegensatz zur „Orestie“, in der der Teufelskreis der Rache nicht durchbrochen wird.

Der Chor, getanz und gesungen von der Ngqoko Cultural Group – Männer und Frauen der Xhosa-Gemeinschaften, die auf traditionellen Musikinstrumenten und mit rituellen Obertongesängen das Geschehen begleiten und kommentieren – beenden das grausige Tun, nachdem Klytaimnestra abgeschlachtet worden ist mit Gebeten: „Genug ist genug.“ Nicht Gott,

sondern sie als Repräsentanten des gemeinen Volks durchbrechen den Zyklus der Gewalt.

Klytaimnestra wird dabei von einer weißen Schauspielerin verkörpert, Elektra und ihr Bruder Orest aber werden von schwarzen Darstellern gespielt. „In unserer vielfältigen und so reichen Kultur gibt es nicht nur eine Wahrheit“, sagt die Regisseurin, die gerade die Besonderheiten der Xhosa-Gruppe besonders schätzt: „Ihr einzigartiger Obertongesang bringt einen altertümlichen und überirdischen Klang in die Inszenierung.“



Ein Südafrikaner fragt im Theater nach der Wahrheit KAMPNAGEL

Es sei ein Wunder, staunt die Regisseurin, dass es während der Umwandlung Südafrikas kein Blutbad gegeben habe, dass die Menschen nicht dem Impuls der Rache nachgegeben hätten wie nach der Attacke am 11. September in New York. „Ich habe immer noch das lebendige Bild von Asche und Blut vor meinen Augen.“ Asche sei die Grundwahrheit, auf die alles am Ende reduziert sei. Deshalb auch nennt sie das Stück „Molóra“. Monika Nellissen

Kampnagel: „Molóra“ Kl, 26. bis 28. August, jeweils 19.30 Uhr.

# **BREAKING THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF VENGEANCE**

**THE OBSERVER 22.08.2004**

**[TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN  
REVIEW]**

“The notion of “righteous bloodshed and revenge has always interested me.” This is the reason South African director Yael Farber gives for her decision to direct a play based on the Oresteia. The play will be presented from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of his month under the auspices of the “Loakoon auf Kampnagel” summer festival. “Molora” (Ash) is the name of the European premiere, which intertwines the classical Greek Electra texts by Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides with Sartre’s first play, “The Flies”. The inspiration for this unusually radical interpretation lies in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. In the mid-nineties, this commission was created to come to terms with the apartheid regime’s human rights abuses.

For a long time Farber had wanted to create a piece that depicts the cycle of violence and the dichotomy of those who suffered violence and now have the choice to take revenge or to forgive those who harmed them. This is how the director, who has been working with South African artists in her “Farber Foundry” for the last ten years, explains her intention. In her production, she chooses a conciliatory ending, in contrast to the Oresteia in which the vicious cycle of violence is not broken.

The choir, sung and danced by the Ngqoko Cultural Group – men and women from the Xhosa community who accompany and comment on the play’s events using traditional musical instruments and split tone

singing – bring the gruesome action to a close after Clytemnestra’s massacre with prayers, “Enough is enough.” The choir, as representatives of common folk breaks the cycle of violence, rather than God.

A white actress plays Clytemnestra. Electra and her brother Orestes, however, are portrayed by black performers. “In our diverse and rich culture there is more than one truth,” says the director who appreciates the characteristics of the Xhosa community in particular. “Their unique split tone singing adds an antiquated and celestial sound to the piece.”

Farber marvels that it is a miracle that there was no bloodbath during South Africa’s transformation; that people did not give in to the impulse to take revenge, as was the case after the 9/11 attacks in New York. “I still have a vivid image of the ash and blood in front of my eyes.” Ashes are the essential truth to which all things are reduced in the end. That is also why she calls the play “Molora.” “

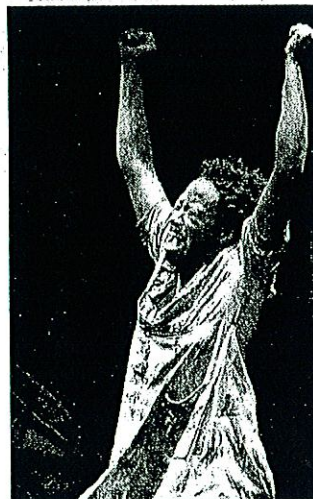
**[photo caption: A South African asks for Truth  
in Theatre]**

laakoon festival

## Afrikanische Orestie

Orest (Lebohang Elephant) verbrennt in einem Tongefäß Kräuter. Deren Rauch steigt in den Kampnagel-Himmel auf, ein süßlicher Duft strömt ins Publikum, vermischt sich mit dem Geruch von verbranntem Holz. Orest kniet auf dem Erdhaufen in der Mitte der Bühne, dem Grab seines Vaters Agamemnon. Immer wieder speit er Wasser in den Kräuterrauch, schwört, Rache zu nehmen an seiner Mutter Klytämnestra (Dorothy Ann Gould), die den Vater einst tötete. „Molóra“ – Asche – heißt die Adaption der Orestie, dem griechischen Mythos um Liebe und Rache. Die südafrikanische Autorin und Regisseurin Yael Farber transportiert die Tragödie nach Südafrika. Sie setzt die weiße Mutter Klytämnestra an einen Holztisch. Dort hat sie sich zu verantworten vor ihrer schwarzen Tochter Elektra (Lindi Chibi). So wie die weißen Farmer in den südafrikanischen Wahrheitskommissionen Mitte der neunziger Jahre. So authentisch, dass einem der Atem stockt, wirft die stolze, doch angsterfüllte Farmerin in den schwarzen Gummistiefeln mit Hasstiraden um sich. Mit den Worten „This right hand, a masterpiece of justice“ hält sie triumphierend ihre Mörderinnenhand in die Höhe. „You are my ruin“, grollt die Tochter der Mutter entgegen. Die Frauen ringen, nicht nur mit Worten, sondern auch körperlich. Klytämnestra taucht den Kopf ihrer Tochter mehr als eine Minute lang unter Wasser, lässt sie unter einer grauen Plastiktüte fast ersticken. Nichts ist hier stilisiert, Farber erspart niemandem die bange Frage, ob die Tochter lebend unter dieser Plastiktüte wieder hervorkommen wird. Fast unaushaltbar ist das, wären da nicht die sechs Frauen und der alte Mann der „Ngqoko Cultural Group“. Ihr Obertongesang bringt den Raum zum Schwirren und lässt die Hoffnung aufkommen, dass alles gut wird. Auch wenn Orest sich mit dem Blut des Stiefvaters Aigisthos besudelt, im Glauben daran, dass sein Menschenopfer Recht ist, weil Tradition.

Zwischen den einzelnen Szenen setzt sich der Chor in Bewegung, leichtfüßig bewegen die Frauen



Archaisches, theatralisiertes Entsetzen – über die südafrikanische Apartheid. FOTO: FESTIVAL

ihre schweren Körper auf dem flachen Holzpodest, die Gruppe schwingt wie ein einziger Leib. Dabei bauen sie unmerklich die Requisiten für die nächste Szene auf. Mal ist der Tisch plötzlich verschwunden, dann wieder da, mit Kerzenständern und Abendbrotgeschirr versehen. Beschmiert mit Erde, Blut und Wasser, stehen sich Kinder und Mutter gegenüber. Yael Farber setzt die Naturelemente verschwenderisch ein. Das funktioniert hervorragend. Im Unterschied zu den antiken Textvorlagen morden die Kinder bei Farber ihre Mutter letzten Endes nicht. Dank der singenden und betenden sechs Powerfrauen in ihren karierten Wollstolen. KATRIN JÄGER

Weitere Vorstellung: 28.8., 19.30 Uhr, Kampnagel Hamburg

# African Oresteia

**DIE TAGESZUITUNG 28.08.04**

**[TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN  
REVIEW]**

Orestes (Lebohang Elephant) burns herbs in a clay jar. The smoke rises into the Kampnagel sky, a sweet smell that streams into the audience and mixes with the smell of burnt wood. Orestes kneels on the mound of earth in the middle of the stage; his father Agamemnon's grave. Repeatedly, he spits water on the smoking herbs, swearing to take revenge upon his mother, Clytemnestra (Dorothy Ann Gould) for having killed his father.

"Molora" – Ash – is the name of the adaptation of the Oresteia, the Greek myth of love and revenge. The South African author and director Yael Farber has transported the tragedy to South Africa. She seats the white mother Clytemnestra at a wooden table. There she has to justify herself to her black daughter Electra (Lindi Chibi) - just like the white farmers at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the mid-nineties. With breathtaking authenticity the proud yet fearful farmer's wife in black gum boots flings her hate-filled tirades about. With the words "this right hand, a masterpiece of justice" she triumphantly holds up her murdering hand. "You are my ruin," the daughter growls at her mother. The women do not wrestle merely with words, but also physically. Clytemnestra holds her daughter's head underwater for over a minute and almost suffocates her under a grey plastic bag. Nothing is stylized; Farber does not spare anyone the anxious question of whether or not the daughter will reappear alive from under

the plastic bag. It is almost unbearable, save for the six women and one old man from the Ngqoko Cultural Group. Their split tone singing makes the space vibrate and allows one to hope that everything will be all right - even if Orestes is tainted with the blood of his stepfather Aegisthus, whose human sacrifice he believes to be justified as it stems from tradition.

In between individual scenes the choir sets itself in motion; with great ease the women move their heavy bodies on the flat, wooden platform as the group sways as one. In the process they imperceptibly set up the props for the next scene. Suddenly, the table has disappeared and then it reappears, bearing candle holders and crockery. Besmeared with soil, blood and water the mother and her children oppose each other.

Yael Farber uses natural elements extravagantly. It works superbly. In contrast to the ancient texts, the children ultimately do not murder their mother thanks to the six singing and praying power-ladies in their chequered wool scarves.

LAOKOON-FESTIVAL AUF KAMPNAGEL

## Antikes Drama im südafrikanischen Gewand

**Hamburg** – Das Atriden-Drama ist uralt. Und doch von packender Aktualität. Die südafrikanische Regisseurin Yael Farber zeigt beim Laokoon-Festival auf Kampnagel ihre hoch emotionale Version des Kampfes zwischen Klytämnestra und Elektra um Gerechtigkeit und Rache. Sie bündigt mit dem Frauenchor „The Nggoko Cultural Group“ die Rededuelle der beiden starken Darstellerinnen im Theaterritual von „Molóra“. Es bedeutet „Asche“ in der Sprache der Sesotho.

Wie Totenvögel hocken die Alten am Grabhügel und singen

dumpfe Klagen. An zwei Tischen gegenüber sitzen sich Mutter und Tochter. Weiß die eine (Dorothy Ann Gould), farbig die andere (Lindi Chibi). Die Erzfeindinnen sind verbunden im Blut. Doch hassentzweit durch den Mord an Agamemnon. Farber zeigt den Kreislauf von Rache und Vergeltung mit Anspielungen auf das Apartheid-Regime sowie den Krieg gegen den Terrorismus. Parallelen zur Gegenwart zwingen sich auf, ohne dass der Mythos platt modernisiert würde. Bräunlich ist die fast schon „altmodisch“ wirkende physische

Intensität und Sprachkraft, in der die Frauen die inneren Konflikte austragen.

Beide Parteien sind mit ihren Argumenten zu verstehen in diesem Erzähltheater mit nie folkloristisch wirkendem Gesang und Tanz. Und doch ergreift Farber Partei: für Vergeltung und Frieden. Sie lässt im lehrhaft wirkenden Schluss den Rächersohn Orestes (Lebohang Elephant) auf den Mutttermord verzichten, unterbricht den Zyklus von Blutvergießen und Vergeltung. (-itz)

■ 28. 8., 19.30 Uhr, Kampnagel;  
Kartennr.: 27 09 49 49.



Eine expressive Elektra (Lindi Chibi). Sie klagt mit der Asche um ihren vermeintlich gestorbenen Bruder Orestes.

FOTO: ENGER

# Ancient Drama in South African Garb

HAMBURGER ABENDBLATT

28.04.2004

[TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN  
REVIEW]

Hamburg – The Atrides Drama is ancient, yet hauntingly topical. South African director Yael Farber presents her highly emotional version of the battle between Clytemnestra and Electra for justice and revenge at the “Laokoon auf Kampnagel” festival. In the theatre-ritual “Molora”, she tames the verbal sparring matches between the two strong female performers with the Ngqoko Cultural Group, a female choir. “Molora” means “ash” in the Sesotho language.

Like vultures, the old folks sit on the burial mound singing dark laments. Mother and daughter are seated opposite one another at two tables. One is white (Dorothy Ann Gould), while the other is black (Lindi Chibi). The archenemies are blood-related, but had a hate-filled falling out over Agamemnon’s murder. Farber depicts the vicious cycle of revenge and retaliation, alluding to the apartheid regime as well as the war on terror. Parallels to today impose themselves even without a shallow modernisation of the myth. The almost old-fashioned physical intensity and eloquence with which the women wage the internal battle is astounding.

Both parties’ positions are comprehensible in this narrative theatre piece with its seemingly folkloric song and dance. And yet Farber does take sides: for forgiveness and peace. She lets the vengeful son Orestes (Lebohang

Elephant) forgo matricide in the apparently didactic ending, thus breaking the cycle of bloodshed and retribution.

[photo caption: An expressive Electra (Lindi Chibi). With ashes she laments the supposed death of her brother Orestes.]



# Vom »Recht auf Rache«

Laokoon-Festival auf Kampnagel mit »Molóra« aus Südafrika

„Wir haben keine Wahl – wir sind die Kinder von Agamemnon und Klytämnestra.“ So werden also Elektra und ihr Bruder Orestes töten, werden die Tat rächen, die ihrer-

seits Rache war. Der blutige Kreislauf der Vergeltung – so steht er in der Orestie.

Die südafrikanische Theatermacherin Yael Farber hat den antiken Stoff neu geschrie-

ben. In „Molóra“ wird der Teufelskreis durchbrochen: Die Geschwister schenken ihrer Mutter das Leben. Ein Stück der Hoffnung in Zeiten von Vergeltungskriegen – bejubelt beim Laokoon-Festival auf Kampnagel.

Es ist eine ausdrucksstarke Truppe: die Schauspieler Dorothy Ann Gould (Klytämnestra) und Lindi Chibi (Elektra), Lebohang Elephant (Orestes) und der Chor Nqkoko Cultural Group. Die konzentrierte Kraft und die Hingabe an die Charaktere, die Mischung aus Schauspiel, Gesängen und Tänzen raubt zwei Stunden lang den Atem – und ist doch so still und schlicht und unspektakulär.

Den Rahmen des Theaterstücks, das übersetzt „Asche“ heißt, bilden die Anhörungen der südafrikanischen „Wahrheitskommission“. Mitte der 90er Jahre wurde sie gegründet, um die Menschenrechtsverletzungen des Apartheidregimes aufzuarbeiten. Klytämnestra und Elektra liefern sich da einen verbalen Schlagabtausch. Strittig ist nicht die Tat: Klytämnestra tötete Elektras Vater Agamemnon. Was beide Frauen einklagen, ist „das Recht auf Rache“. Es ist ein Fluch, weiß Yael Farber. Die „Vergeltungsschläge“ unserer Zeit beweisen es.

SUSANN OBERACKER

Kampnagel,  
heute, 19.30 Uhr, Karten 14 bis 22  
Euro, Tel. 27 09 49 49

Üben grausame Vergeltung:  
Orestes (Lebohang Elephant)  
und seine Schwester Elektra  
(Lindi Chibi)

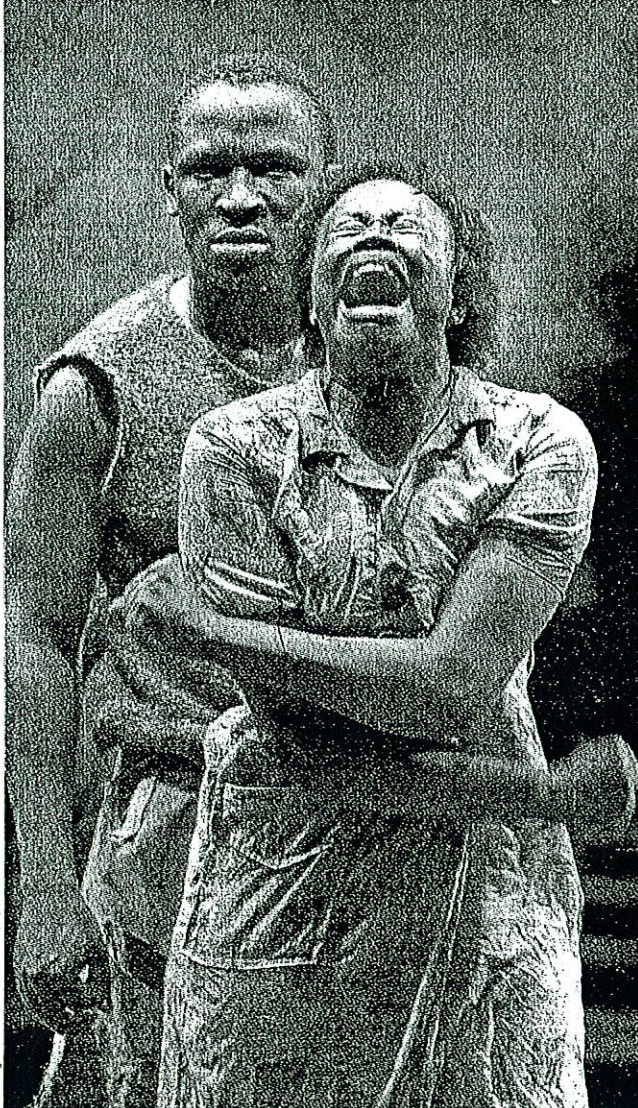


Foto: Enger

# The Right to Avenge

Laokoon auf Kampnagel Festival with  
"Molora" from South Africa

HAMBURGER MORGENPOST

28.04.2004

[TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN  
REVIEW]

"We have no choice – we are the children of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra." Thus Electra and her brother Orestes will also kill and so avenge a deed that was itself a vengeful act. The bloody cycle of retribution – as it is written in the Oresteia.

South African director Yael Farber has rewritten the ancient text. In "Molora" the vicious cycle is broken – the siblings allow their mother to live. A little bit of hope in an age of wars of retaliation, hailed at the "Laokoon auf Kampnagel" festival.

This is an expressive troupe: the actresses Dorothy Ann Gould (Clytemnestra) and Lindi Chibi (Electra), Lebohang Elephant (Orestes) and the Ngqoko Cultural Group Choir. The concentrated strength, the commitment to the characters and the blend of acting, song and dance takes one's breath away for two hours – and yet it is so quiet and simple and unspectacular.

The structure of the play, whose name translates as "Ash", is set by the South African Truth Commission hearings. The commission was created in the mid-nineties to come to terms with human rights abuses committed by the apartheid regime. Clytemnestra and Electra engage in a verbal sparring match. The act is not contested: Clytemnestra killed Electra's father

Agamemnon, yet what both women are asserting is "the right to avenge". It's a curse, as Yael Farber well understands and the "retaliatory strikes" of our time are proof.

[photo caption: Executing cruel retribution:  
Orestes (Lebohang Elephant) and his sister  
Electra (Lindi Chibi)]

# Molora laat gewis die toneelvure hoog brand!

**Molora**  
**Barney Simon-teater,**  
**Mark, Newtown**  
**Kobus Burger**

'n Mens weet eintlik al naastenby wat om van 'n Yael Farber-produksie te verwag: grond, stof, skottels bloed en organe. En steeds kan dié indrukwekkende teaterskepper en regisseur 'n mens verras.

*Molora* (die Sotho-woord vir "as") is Farber se siening van Aeschylus se *Oresteia*-trilogie – 'n Griekse tragedie wat eintlik op 'n heel hoopvolle noot eindig.

In dié opsig sluit *Molora* aan by Farber se *SeZaR* – haar verwerking van *Julius Caesar*, wat sy propvol (regtel!) bloed en derms na Afrika verplaas het. (*SeZaR* laat die flik *Last King of Scotland* na 'n kinderpartytjie lyk.)

*Molora* begin as 'n Waarheid-en-Versoeningskommissie-verhoor (WVK) waarin Klytemnestra (Dorothy-Ann Gould) bely dat sy haar man, Agamemnon, uit weerwraak vermoor het. Haar woedende, getraumatiseerde dogter, Elektra (Jabulile Tshabalala), moet dit aanhoor.

Op haar beurt wil Elektra wraak neem en sy glo nie haar ma se bewegredes vir dié gru-moord nie. Elektra hoop egter dat haar broer, Orestes (Sandile Matsheni), eendag sal terugkeer en haar ma sal laat boet vir haar dade.

In nóg 'n kruisverwysing na die WVK laat Farber die gehoor sien hoe Klytemnestra haar eie dogter martel en probeer vermoor. Eers probeer sy vir Elektra in 'n skottel water verdrink. Later wil sy haar in 'n plastiëksak vermoor.

Dit is skokkende tonele wat die hoogste eise aan die spelers stel,

maar Farber is nie naastenby 'n Quentin Tarantino van die toneelverhoog nie. Sy het baie meer in gedagte as om haar gehoor slegs op een vlak te stimuleer.

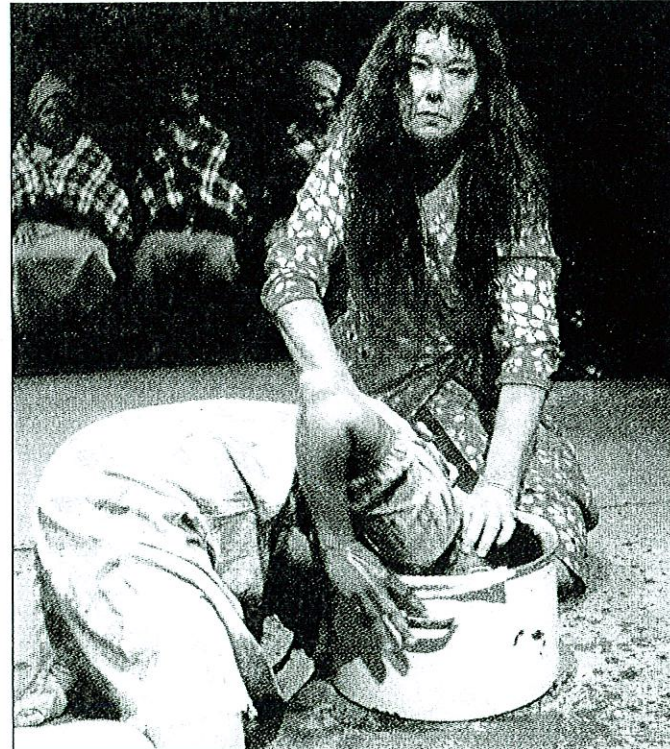
Sien, alles binne dié drama geskied binne 'n veilige speelruimte wat deur 'n groep Xhosa-sangers en -musikante, die Ngcobo-kulturele groep van Transkei, geskep word.

Dié vroue en man, die vertaler, sit eers in die gehoor en berei dan die ruimte voor vir wat ons as gehoor aanskou. 'n Stuk swart bouersplastiek bedek die verhoog en word eers deur een van die vroue opgerol om 'n speelvlak, 'n graf (hopie grond) en 'n pik te onthul. Soos tydens die WVK-verhoor word ons hier herinner dat daar geheime onder die oppervlak skuil.

Dié groep word 'n alsiende oog wat alles aanskou. Nes die gode, kyk hulle neer op die mens se doen en late. Op 'n ander vlak is hulle soos 'n gemeenskap wat buite die geweld en struweling saamstaan sodat die goeie kan seëvier; 'n gewete.

Hulle moedig aan, vertroos, vier fees en tree op die regte oomblikke die speelruimte binne om ondersteuning en leiding te bied. Hul musiek word op tradisionele instrumente soos die mondboog en *uhadi* gemaak, terwyl hulle met bo-aardse glottale klanke 'n agterdoek vir die aksie bied.

Die feit dat 'n mens Gould skaars 'n maand gelede in Edna O'Brien se *Triptych* gesien het, lewer bykommende waardering vir haar aardskuddende spel as Klytemnestra. Sy strompel gemaklik tussen waansin, woede, magteloosheid, blinde wraak, ysere gevoelloosheid en totale wanhoop deur. Gould se palet van emosies en handelinge is só verreikend dat 'n mens eintlik die produksie 'n tweede keer wil beleef



**Klytemnestra (Dorothy-Ann Gould) teister haar eie dogter, Elektra (Jabulile Tshabalala), in Yael Farber se *Molora*, tans in die Markteater, Newtown.**

om haar insette te waardeer.

En tog steel Gould nié die kollig nie.

Tshabalala is 'n tierende Elektra, 'n rol wat voorheen deur wyle Lindiwe Chibi vertolk is. As haar karakter moet Tshabalala letterlik herhaaldelik by die dood omdraai. Wat erger kan 'n regisseur van 'n aktrise verwag?

Dit is asof Tshabalala deur 'n vleismeul gedruk word en 'n mens word met 'n naarheid oorval as jy haar marteling aanskou.

Die kille Klytemnestra sê immers: "n oog vir 'n oog, 'n tand vir 'n

tand... dit is die mens se enigste waarheid".

Matsheni se Orestes – die enigste manlike teenwoordigheid in dié driehoek – is 'n karakter vol tweespalt. As akteur bied Matsheni hier 'n kragdadige teenwoordigheid en boesem hy ontsag in. Terselfdertyd kan hy ook die verwarring en smagting na vergifnis en 'n ander einde as bloeddorstige wraak na vore bring. Molo Orestes sê dus later aan sy suster: "Ons is verlore!"

Maar Elektra is gevoelloos: "Daar kán geen vergifnis wees nie!"

Klytemnestra, wat dan moet boet

vir haar dade, antwoord: "Ons is hier deur genade alleen."

Dit het my nie gepla dat Farber, soos in vorige dramas, haar spelers Engels, Xhosa en Zoeloe laat praat nie. Daar was wél sleutelmomente waarin 'n mens graag die dialoog en koorsang in Engels sou wou hoor, al is dit dan net in die programnotas.

Die as, wat uiteindelik soos 'n miswolk uit die hemel oor die spelers neerdaal, is 'n belangrike tema, wat op meer as net sterflikheid dui.

Farber laat haar verwerking by die wêreldpolitiek en onlangse oorloë aansluit en wys op die mens se dierlike oerdrange wat binne 'n hoogs ordentlike samelewing tot sulke angswekkende laagtepunte kan daal.

Orestes bied 'n saadjie van hoop binne die verhaalkonteks, veral vir Elektra. Maar hy word die vergeftalting van haar wraak.

In Farber se *Molora* sien 'n mens later die koor, die gemeenskap, as die hoop. Indien die mensdom kan saamstaan, is daar tog 'n moontlikheid van liefde en vergifnis.

*Molora* het waarskynlik ook iets te sê oor Afrika (die swart kinders) en die Weste (die wit moeder) en "die konflik tussen die twee. Dalk kan die Markteater gespreksessies ná vertonings reël sodat gehore oor hul insigte en ervarings kan gesels?

Faber het 'n besonderse gawe om betrokke teater in Suid-Afrika se post-protesteater te skep – met én sonder 'n oerteks as bron. Sels haar *Amajuba* en *He Left Quietly* het die genesingswaarde van stories en die teater as medium bevestig.

*Molora* laat die toneelvure hoog brand.

Gaan kyk! Voordat ons net met nóg 'n hopie (of blikkie) as sit.

■ Tot 3 Junie.

# MOLORA TRULY FUELS THE FIRES of DRAMA

TRANSLATED FROM THE  
AFRIKAANS REVIEW IN DIE BEELD  
BY KOBUS BURGER

One already knows - more or less - what to expect from a Yael Farber production: Earth, dust, basins of blood and organs. Yet this impressive theatre creator and producer can still astonish one.

MOLORA (the Sesotho word for "ash") is Farber's interpretation of Aeschylus's Oresteia Trilogy - a Greek tragedy that actually ends on a fairly hopeful note. In some respects, MOLORA follows SeZaR - her adaptation of Julius Caesar, which she recontextualized to Africa - chock-a-block full of (real!) blood and entrails. [SeZaR made the recent film THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND look like a children's party].

MOLORA starts like a Truth & Reconciliation Hearing, in which Klytemnestra (Dorothy Ann Gould) confesses that she has murdered her husband Agamemnon, out of revenge. Her traumatized, enraged daughter Elektra (Jabulile Tshabalala) has to listen to this confession. Elektra hungers for revenge. She does not accept her mother's justification for this gruesome murder. She longs for her brother Orestes (Sandile Matsheni) to return someday and make her mother pay for her deed. In another cross-reference to the TRC, Farber allows the audience to see how Klytemnestra tortures her own daughter. She will later simulate smothering her with a plastic bag. These are shocking scenes that demand the ultimate from the actors. But Farber is not merely a Quentin Tarantino for the stage. She has much more on her mind that stimulating her audience on a single level. Everything within this drama takes place within a safe space held by a group of Xhosa singers and musicians - the Ngqoko Cultural Group from the Transkei. These women and the single man, who is the translator) begin in the audience but prepare the space for what we are about to witness. A piece of black builder's plastic covers the stage at the start. One of the women of the Chorus slowly draw the

plastic away to reveal a stage, a grave and a pickaxe. Like during the TRC - we are reminded here how secrets are hidden beneath the surface. The Chorus becomes the all-seeing eyes that witness everything. Like the gods, they look down upon humanity's doings. On another level - they stand together like a community - a conscience - outside the violence and conflict so that virtue can triumph. They encourage, comfort, celebrate and - at certain moments - enter the space to offer support and guidance. Their music is played on such instruments as the mouth and uhadi bow, while with supernatural, glottal sounds, they provide a backdrop for the action.

The fact that it has hardly been a month since we saw Gould in Edna O'Brien's TRIPTYCH, provides extra appreciation for her earth shattering performance as Klytemnestra. She moves with ease between madness, fury, powerlessness, blind vengeance, icy insensitivity and total despair. Gould's palette of emotions and actions are so far-reaching that one actually wants to experience the production a second time - just to appreciate her contribution. Yet Gould does not steal the limelight.

Tshabalala is a fiery Elektra - a role previously portrayed by the late Lindiwe Chibi. As her character, Tshabalala must literally and repeatedly escape death narrowly. What more can a director expect from her actress? It is as though Tshabalala is put through a meat grinder and one is nauseated by the sight of her torture.

After all, the frigid Klytemnestra says: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth... It is and will always be man's only truth". Matsheni's Orestes - the only male presence in this triangle - is a character full of discord. Here is an actor who offers a powerful presence and overawes one. Simultaneously he brings to the fore Orestes's confusion... his desire for forgiveness and an ending other than blood thirsty revenge. He later cries out: "We are lost" but his sister is callous: "There can be no forgiveness!" Klytemnestra - who must pay for her deeds - finally states: "We are still only here by grace alone".

As in her previous works, Farber has her actors speaking English, Xhosa and Zulu. This did not detract. But there were key moments I longed for the Chorus to sing in English - or, at least, to have

understood them through a helpful programme note.

The ash, which ultimately descends from the heavens over the players like a misty cloud, is a crucial theme indicating much more than mere mortality. Farber allows her adaptation to touch the wider world politics of recent wars. She points towards the possibility of any decent community descending to nightmarish bestial, primitive urges. Orestes offers the seed of hope within the context of the story - notably for Elektra. Yet he becomes the embodiment of her vengeance.

In Farber's *MOLORA* - one later regards the choir, the community, as hope. If humanity can stand together, the possibility of love and forgiveness may exist. *MOLORA* has much to say about Africa (her black children) and the West (a white mother) and the conflict between the two. The Market Theatre should, perhaps, arrange shows so that the audiences might discuss their insights and experiences.

Farber has a special gift for creating topical theatre in post apartheid South Africa - with or without an ancient text as her source. Her plays *AMAJUBA* and *HE LEFT QUIETLY* have validated the healing value of stories and the theatre as medium. *MOLORA* fuels the fires of drama. Go see it before we are left with nothing but a heap (or tin full) of ash!

**KOBUS BURGER**

## *Molora* : tragédie sud-africaine

Sylvie St-Jacques La Presse



En pénétrant dans la Cinquième salle de la Place des Arts, où est présentée la pièce *Molora*, les premiers regards qui nous interpellent sont ceux des six femmes (et un homme) noirs, aux épaules couvertes d'épais châles de laine.

À partir de ce prélude silencieux jusqu'à la conclusion triomphante de cet inclassable spectacle, on sera captivé par les membres du Ngqoko Cultural Group.

Avec leurs hululements rythmés, leurs chants, leurs danses, ils portent en eux des rituels ancestraux qui perdurent, malgré les heurts de la colonisation et les ravages de l'apartheid. Rappel qu'en Afrique, le théâtre, la mise en scène, la musique, ne sont pas séparés de la «vraie» vie.

En leur troublante présence, se déroulera la métaphore théâtrale de l'Afrique du Sud post-apartheid. Un sanguinaire duel entre Électre l'oppressée et Clytemnestre la persécutrice se jouera avec fougue et émotions violentes.

Établie à Montréal depuis trois ans, la metteuse en scène d'origine sud-africaine Yael Farber est certainement une artiste à surveiller. *Molora*, qu'elle a créée en 2003, est une pièce inspirée de la commission Vérité et Réconciliation, un exercice de confrontation entre bourreaux et victimes sud-africains. Farber s'approprie ici la tragédie grecque pour rendre universelles les blessures d'un régime oppressif.

### Sportif et sanguinaire

L'actrice sud-africaine Dorothy Ann Gould (seule Blanche sur scène) endosse son personnage d'assassine avec violence, rage et une certaine folie. Quant à Jabulile Tshabalala, qui incarne Électre, sa performance est tout aussi «sportive» et sanguinaire. Témoin du meurtre d'Agamemnon, Électre est ici comparée à des enfants de l'apartheid. La commission Vérité et Réconciliation est suggérée par la culpabilité de Clytemnestre. Et ainsi sont reconstitués les faits, dans une juxtaposition de la tragédie et de l'histoire.

La rencontre sur une même scène d'un jeu extrême et violent et des membres du Ngqoko Cultural Group intensifie l'étrangeté. Vraiment, nous sommes ici en présence d'un objet bizarre, qui bouscule les repères.

Bien que l'on sente clairement le souci de Yael Farber d'expliquer la société sud-africaine post-apartheid, avec la tragédie, l'expérience de *Molora* s'avère surtout sensorielle et émotive. En fin de course, c'est la puissance du chœur africain qui l'emporte sur le théâtre grec. *Molora* est un spectacle à voir, surtout pour découvrir la voix unique de Farber et le sublime Ngqoko Cultural Group. Allez-y sans attente, avec l'esprit ouvert...

## Molora: South African tragedy



The experience is especially *Molora* sensory and emotional. In the end, it is the power of the African choir that outweighs the Greek theater.

Photo: supplied by the production



[Sylvie St-Jacques](#)

Press

On entering the room Fifth Place des Arts, which is made part *Molora* the first glance that concern us are those of six women (and men) black, shoulders covered with thick woolen shawls.

From this quiet prelude to the triumphant conclusion of this unclassifiable entertainment, there will be captivated by the members of Ngqoko Cultural Group.

With their rhythmic hooting their songs, their dances, they wear them as ancestral rituals that persist, despite the shocks of colonization and the ravages of apartheid. Recall that in Africa, theater, staging, music, are not separated from the "real" life.

In their unsettling presence there will be the theatrical metaphor of South Africa's post-apartheid. A bloody battle between Electra and Clytemnestra oppressed the persecutor

will play with passion and violent emotions.

Headquartered in Montreal for three years, the stage director of South African Yael Farber is certainly an artist to watch. *Molora*, she founded in 2003, is a play inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, an exercise confrontation between perpetrators and victims of South Africa. Farber appropriated by Greek tragedy to make universal the wounds of an oppressive regime.

### Sport and bloody

The South African actress Dorothy Ann Gould (only white onstage) assumes the character of violent murders, rage and a certain madness. As for Jabulile Tshabalala, who plays Elektra, his performance is just as "sporty" and bloody. Witness the murder of Agamemnon, Electra is here compared to children of apartheid. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is suggested by Clytemnestra's guilt. And so the facts are reconstituted in a juxtaposition of tragedy and history.

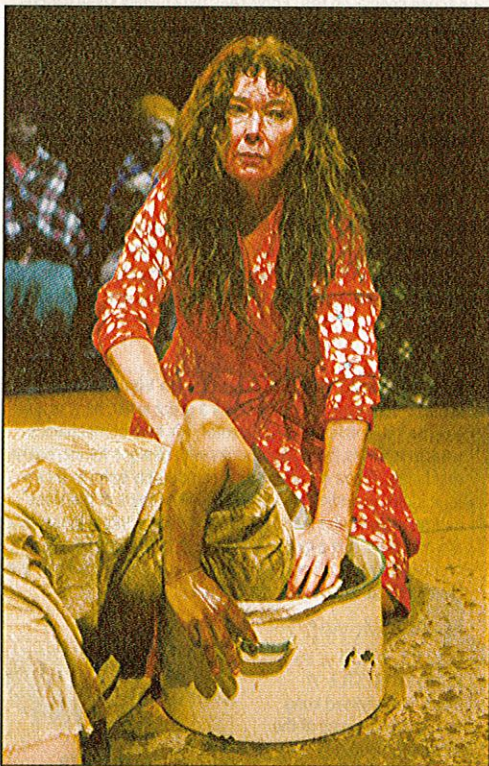
The meeting on the same stage of a game extreme and violent members of Ngqoko Cultural Group intensifies the strangeness. Really, we're here with a strange object, which pushes the benchmarks.

Although we feel clearly the concern of Yael Farber to explain the South African society post-apartheid, with the tragedy, the experience is especially *Molora* sensory and emotional. In the end, it is the power of the African choir that outweighs the Greek theater. *Molora* is a sight to see, especially to discover the unique voice of the Farber and sublime Ngqoko Cultural Group. Go ahead without waiting, with an open mind ...

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Molora, Yael Farber, the Cinquième Salle of Place des Arts until 1 February.

## Relevant revelations on reconciliation



Dorothy Ann Gould and Jabulile Tshabalala in *Molora*

**T**he art world continues to feed off the South African Truth and Reconciliation process, this time with *Molora*, which premiered in Germany in 2004.

The play, directed by Yael Farber, is an adaptation of the *Oresteia Trilogy* by Aeschylus (525-456 BC). In it, the queen, Clytemnestra, played by Dorothy Ann Gould, has murdered her husband, Agamemnon, and must now face her daughter Electra (Jabulile Tshabalala), who witnessed the act as a child, and has since plotted revenge, together with her brother Orestes (Sandile Matsheni).

*Molora* — which gets its title from the Sotho word for ash — weaves the above ancient Greek text together with tales from the recent South African past. For instance, Clytemnestra uses apartheid-era interrogation methods, such as the wet bag technique, while trying to extract information from Electra on Orestes's whereabouts.

What makes the play relevant to a contemporary audience is the music and acting from the Ngqoko Cultural Group, who are trained in the ancient art of split-tone singing. They make use of what the playmakers have termed a "rural Xhosa aesthetic", and this helps render the play an artistically authentic depiction of the South African reconciliation process.

Using mouth-bows, calabash bows and other traditional instruments, the group's singing and chanting creates a surreal atmosphere, not unlike what one would experience at a traditional Xhosa ceremony. The intensely emotive music works to create cadences of pathos which successfully carry the production. One critic was enthralled, and applauded the director for using the traditional sounds not merely as an adornment but to propel the soul of the play, which is currently showing at the Market Theatre.

When I received the *Molora* press pack, which had an under-13 age restriction, I wondered if the play would really strike fear into the hearts of a generation of young adolescents who are exposed to extreme violence on television and in computer games anyway.

But, an episode in which Clytemnestra gives birth to a snake in a dream was so convincing that I flinched. This vivid production attempts to make sense of the South African experience and how apartheid's cycle of vengeance was broken — it's a creative look at a sociopolitical development that the rest of the world is still trying to fathom. — Percy Zvomuya

**At the Market Theatre's Barney Simon Theatre until June 3**



# Aeschylus with a fascinating Xhosa twist

**Show:** "Molora" (Barney Simon Theatre, Market Theatre Complex, Newtown. (011) 832-1641)

**Cast:** Dorothy Ann Gould, Sandile Matsheni, Jabulile Tshabalala

**Chorus:** Tandiwe Lungisa, Tsolwana B Mpayipheli, Nofenishala Mvotyo, Nokhaya Mvotyo, Nopasile Mvotyo, Nogcinile Yekani (Ngqoka Cultural Group)

**Director:** Yael Farber

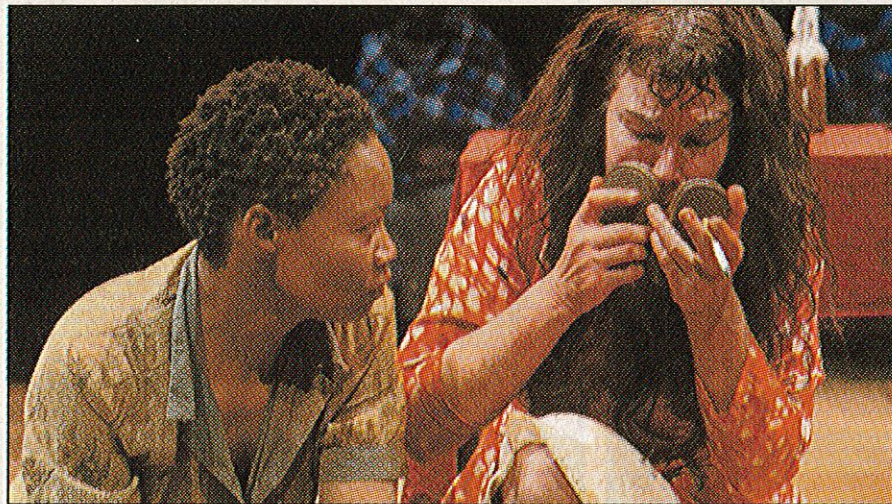
**Until:** June 3

**REVIEWED BY ROBYN SASSEN**  
**PHOTOGRAPHS: RUPHIN COUDYZER**

THE FINE white residue, which floated down on crushed Manhattan in the wake of September 11 2001, is a hook which director Yael Farber uses to link contemporary atrocity to classic Greek tragedy.

But this connection only becomes clear retrospectively. There are no blatant contemporary political overtures in "Molora". Rather, this extraordinary collaboration of skills ranging from spiritual divination, to some of the tightest and most passionate acting seen on Johannesburg stages for years, to the simple telling of a horrific tale, carries its own, rendering the horror of Greek tragedy tangibly relevant and frighteningly entertaining.

This horror reflects off well-honed choreography, sound, and set design. Central to it is the per-



**Clytemnestra (Dorothy Ann Gould) mourns her son, Orestes, who she believes is dead, while Electra (Jabulile Tshabalala) looks on.**

formance of the Ngqoka Cultural Group, six Xhosa-speaking women and one man, hailing from deep rural Transkei and committed to Xhosa music and traditions.

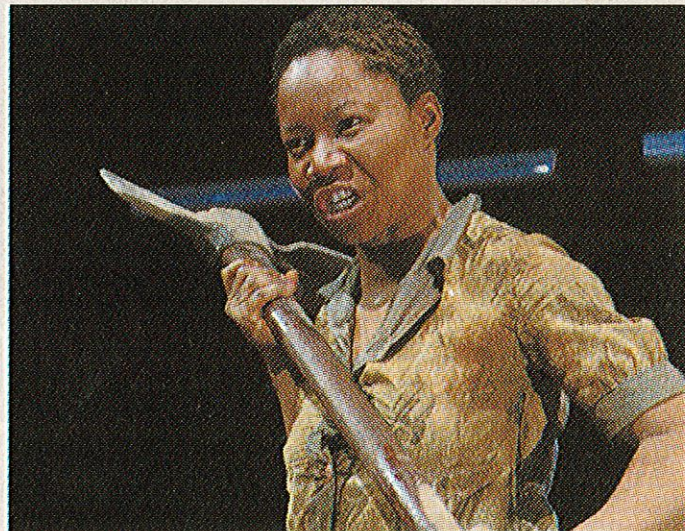
They are trained in various ancient performances, including the art of umngqokolo (split-tone singing), a vocal phenomenon that presents a guttural unearthly sound. They use traditional musical instruments, ranging from the Jew's harp to the harmonica, the friction drum to the calabash drum.

The nuanced unmusicality, unusual to unaccustomed Western ears, gives play to the history that acknowledges connections bet-

ween Xhosa practices and those of the ancient San. Their performance sets a mesmerising tone to "Molora", playing an understanding of the ancient classical Greek chorus into authentic Xhosa practices.

Further to that, the songs and dances of these elderly practitioners construct a real African backdrop, which in retrospect, fits into devastating place as a commentary on the need for vengeance and forgiveness in the wake of local atrocity.

The story draws simply from the complexities of the Oresteia Trilogy, written in 458 BC by Aeschylus: In the presence of her children, Electra and Orestes,



**Murderous, vengeful Electra (Jabulile Tshabalala).**

Clytemnestra (Gould) brutally slays her husband, Agamemnon, King of Mycenae because of atrocities committed in the past.

Electra (Tshabalala), secretly sends young Orestes away into exile. Seventeen years later, Orestes (Matsheni) returns, to seek vengeance on Clytemnestra.

"Molora" powerfully draws together diverse associations and is subtle in its metaphorical connections - "Molora" means "ash" in seSotho - but brutal in its extrapolation on horror.

While the blood and guts are literal, the violence is rendered the more shocking through the descriptive language in the work

but also in the chorus, which interweaves superbly and sinisterly with the narrative relayed and the complex social messages it offers.

"Molora" is a thoughtfully crafted piece of theatre, entertaining in the truest sense of the word: from the smell of the indigenous herbs, *Alepidea amatymbica*, burnt to call on the spirits of Xhosa ancestors, to the utterly riveting performance of the cast, this play will not leave you when you go home.

The ingeniously simply designed images cast by startling use of props, the gestures and the simplicity of the tale, are transforming, timeless and shattering in their collective potency

# Greek tragedy of the spiral of revenge

*The Oresteia lends itself well to a South African slant, as CHRISTINA KENNEDY discovers*

IT IS often said there is a finite number of stories in this world, which are told over and over again in different incarnations. In keeping with this belief, a 2 500-year-old ancient Greek text has been reinterpreted to resonate in SA today.

In fact, the myth of The Oresteia needed little adapting to slot in seamlessly with the South African reality, says Yael Farber, the creator of the play Molora, which is on at the Market Theatre in Newtown until June 3.

This trilogy of tragedies, written by Aeschylus circa 458BC, has spawned a wealth of spin-offs in popular culture through the ages. The tale of the vengeful queen Clytemnestra — who murders her husband Agamemnon after he returns from the Trojan War, causing her son Orestes to be secreted in exile and her daughter Electra to endure unspeakable oppression — has been retold in various guises by the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre and TS Eliot.

Enterprising playwright and director Farber, a previous recipient of a Standard Bank Young Artist Award and the brains

behind productions such as Shopping and F\*\*king, SeZaR and A Woman in Waiting, has turned her hand to the Oresteia tale.

Weaving in the supernatural lore of the ancestors to replace the deities of the original, as well as traditional music and custom, Molora has been re-imagined as a South African morality or cautionary tale, set against the backdrop of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings. It unflinchingly shows how the South African dream could so easily have turned into a nightmare. In fact, given expectations, precedent and even “destiny”, all indications were that it should have, but reason prevailed. Yet the play is so creative and allegorical that it comes as a breath of fresh air among the avalanche of “worthy but boring” struggle plays and films.

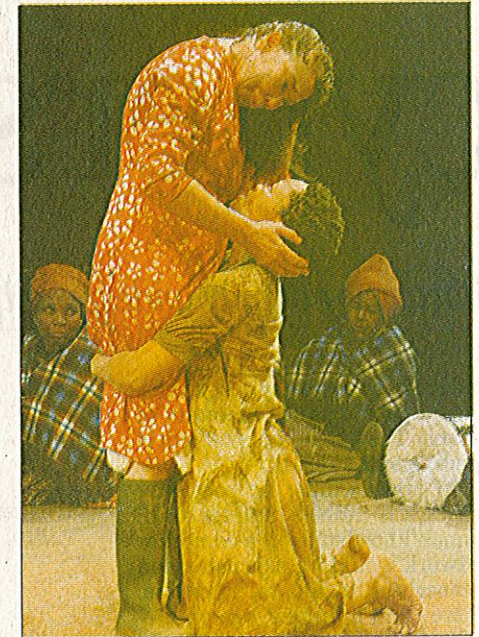
“I was looking for something that could be seen as a metaphor for the history of SA,” explains Farber on the day after its Joburg premiere, just weeks before it sets out for a run in Oxford. She thought of doing a play based on the many moving TRC testimonies

she had researched, but it seemed “contrived”. Then she read The Oresteia, and the “never-ending spiral” of vengeance begetting vengeance struck a chord.

Initially, the cast was composed of black actors, but fate conspired to ensure that the villainous Clytemnestra was ultimately played by a white actress, the celebrated Dorothy Ann Gould. This tale could be read as the white apartheid state (Clytemnestra, justifying her actions all the way) oppressing the black populace (Electra), while the exiled saviour Nelson Mandela (Orestes) waits in the wings to right past wrongs.

The Furies or Chorus — played here by members of the Xhosa Ngqoko Cultural Group — serve as the conscience of the everyman; the voice of reason. They are also the silent mamas from the TRC hearings, who somehow managed to forgive.

And the universal story of a cancerous hatred that can rot one to the core, causing a monster to beget a monster, and an eye to be exchanged for an eye, is one of the most classic stories to be found — TRC or no TRC.



**VENGEANCE AND FORGIVENESS:** Dorothy Ann Gould plays the villainous Clytemnestra, with Jabulile Tshabalala in the role of Electra.

## Yael Farber: théâtre de réconciliation

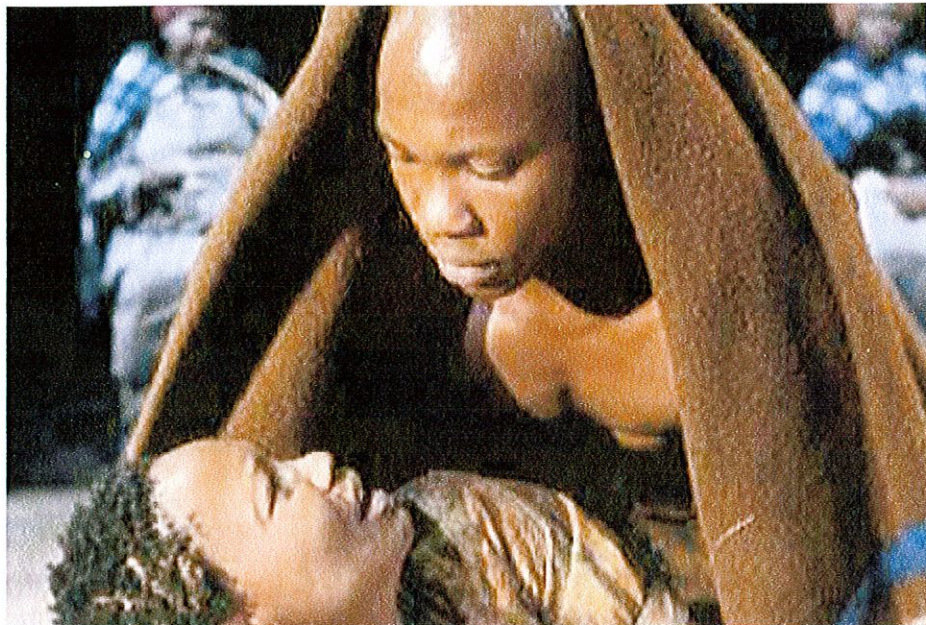


Photo fournie par Communications Papineau-Couture



[Sylvie St-Jacques](#)

La Presse

Depuis le milieu des années 90, Yael Farber parcourt le monde avec son théâtre. Établie à Montréal depuis trois ans - son mari, repéreur pour le Cirque du Soleil, l'a «trouvée» en Afrique du Sud - la dramaturge et metteuse en scène demeure toutefois inconnue du public d'ici. Avec *Molora*, qui prend cette semaine l'affiche de la Cinquième salle de la Place des Arts, Farber s'empare de la tragédie grecque pour suggérer la possibilité de briser le cycle de la violence.

«Je viens d'un pays qui, pendant un demi-siècle, a été dirigé par un des régimes les plus brutaux de tous les temps. Un régime qui a tout fait pour maintenir le pouvoir des Blancs, allant jusqu'à assassiner des gens et faisant des bains de sang dans les *townships*. Tout a été mis en oeuvre pour

empêcher l'intégration», explique Farber, lors d'une rencontre avec la presse montréalaise, pour parler de *Molora*.

Les privilèges alloués à la communauté blanche n'ont pas empêché l'appauvrissement spirituel et moral, témoigne Farber, elle-même de descendances lituanienne et irlandaise. «L'apartheid a forgé la personne que je suis», dit celle qui s'est inspirée de la commission Vérité et Réconciliation (dont elle fut témoin) pour *Molora*, une transposition de la tragédie d'Oreste et Électre sur la réalité sud-africaine.

«Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de faire un théâtre qui éveille», lâche Farber, marquée pour toujours par les témoignages des victimes de l'apartheid. «Des gens de milieux appauvris ont eu l'occasion de parler de raconter leurs histoires. J'ai vu des gens démontrer une capacité de pardon incroyable.»

### Renaître de ses cendres

Profondément touchée par l'expérience humaine de la commission Vérité et Réconciliation, Yael Farber ne savait trop comment s'y prendre pour créer un spectacle inspiré de l'expérience de l'Afrique du Sud post-apartheid. En lisant les classiques grecs, elle a trouvé matière à réflexion, dans le traitement des cycles de violence et du destin inexorable.

Et puis, il y a eu le 11 septembre 2001.

«Je regardais les reportages télévisés et me trouvais fascinée par cette cendre blanche qui doucement a flotté sur la ville pendant des jours. *Molora* signifie «cendre.» La cendre est un élément fondamental: on la retrouve autour du feu, pendant qu'on raconte des histoires, il y a la cendre des camps de concentration, celle des génocides», évoque celle qui se dit intéressée par un théâtre «ritualisé.»

«Cela m'a frappée d'entendre l'administration Bush qui, au lendemain des attentats, annonçait que quelqu'un devrait payer pour les attentats. Pendant ce temps, un pays en développement (l'Afrique du Sud) a mis en place un système incroyablement sophistiqué pour sortir de la douleur.»

À son tour, Yael Farber fait passer la réconciliation par le théâtre. Une première percée sur l'oeuvre d'une Montréalaise d'adoption, qu'il faudra assurément surveiller de près.

***Molora*, de Yael Farber, à la Cinquième Salle de la Place des Arts du 22 janvier au 1er février (billet à 15\$ pour les moins de 30 ans).**



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Plus Théâtre

## Tragédie vérité et réconciliation

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Un texte de Lili Marin

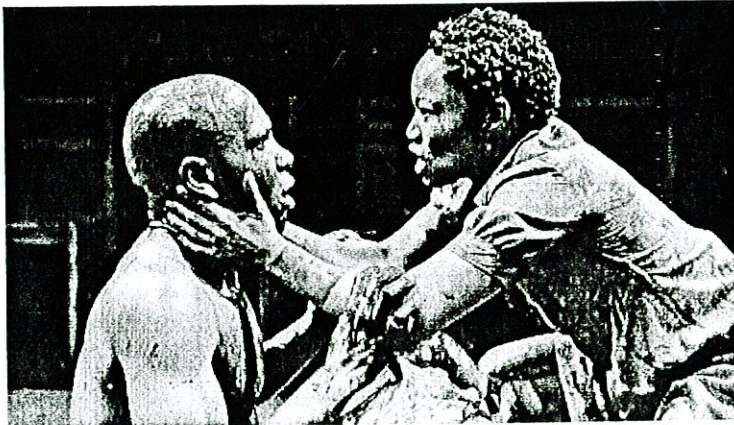


Photo: Ruphin Coudyzer  
Molora

Les victimes et les bourreaux de l'apartheid en personnages d'une tragédie grecque? C'est ce qu'a imaginé la jeune metteuse en scène Yael Farber, qui présente en première canadienne sa pièce *Molora*, créée en Afrique du Sud en 2003 et saluée un peu partout dans le monde.

Installée depuis trois ans à Montréal, où elle a suivi l'amour (un artiste du Cirque du Soleil), Yael Farber a grandi au pays de Nelson Mandela. Cela a forgé sa façon d'appréhender le théâtre. Bien qu'elle ne rejette pas sa fonction de

divertissement, pour elle, c'est d'abord un art qui éveille les consciences.

Témoin de la toute première Commission de la vérité et de la réconciliation, dont elle a regardé les audiences à la télévision, Yael Farber voulait créer une oeuvre « qui sonde le voyage de retour depuis les innombrables profondeurs de la souffrance et des blessures jusqu'au choix de la vengeance ou du pardon rédempteur ». Or, à partir de rien, c'était très difficile de raconter une telle histoire.

En plongeant dans la lecture de l'Orestie d'Eschyle, elle a été frappée par l'actualité de la violence qui y est dépeinte. Puis, sont survenus les attentats du 11 septembre 2001, et la riposte de l'administration Bush, qui a voulu, d'après elle, que quelqu'un paie pour tous ces morts.

En comparaison avec les États-Unis, un pays très développé, l'Afrique du Sud a opposé à la douleur une réponse incroyablement sophistiquée.

— Yael Farber

Les cendres qui ont mis des jours à se déposer au sol après l'effondrement des tours jumelles ont inspiré Yael Farber, qui a alors transposé l'histoire des Atrides dans le contexte d'une commission comme celle qui a assuré la transition entre l'apartheid et la démocratie. « Électre se retrouve à être la servante de son père. J'ai trouvé que c'était une belle métaphore de l'Afrique du Sud », explique la dramaturge, qui rappelle que 80 % de la population vivait sur 30 % des terres.



De la tragédie grecque, elle a aussi gardé le chœur. Pour l'actualiser, elle a fait appel à un ensemble musical, le Ngqoko Cultural Group, qui perpétue la tradition xhosa (une des langues officielles d'Afrique du Sud). Peu importe qu'on ne comprenne pas les mots, pense Yael Farber, car *Molora* résonne de manière viscérale. « Plusieurs spectateurs qui l'ont vue en Afrique du Sud n'avaient pas l'anglais comme langue maternelle. »

En Allemagne, où les souvenirs de l'horreur nazie sont encore douloureux, la salle est restée dans le silence plusieurs minutes après la représentation.

*L'actrice qui jouait initialement le rôle d'Électre a connu une mort violente en Afrique du Sud. Le spectacle est maintenant dédié à sa mémoire.*

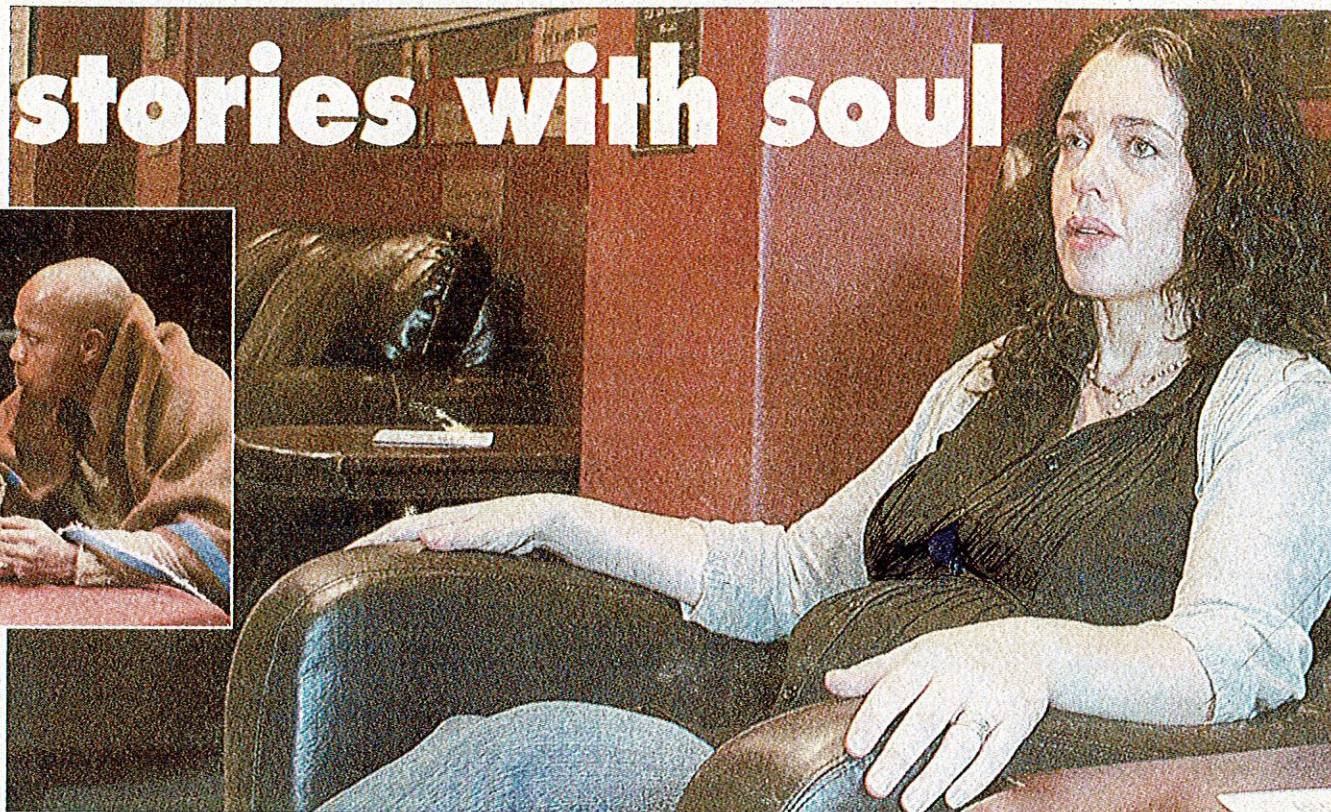
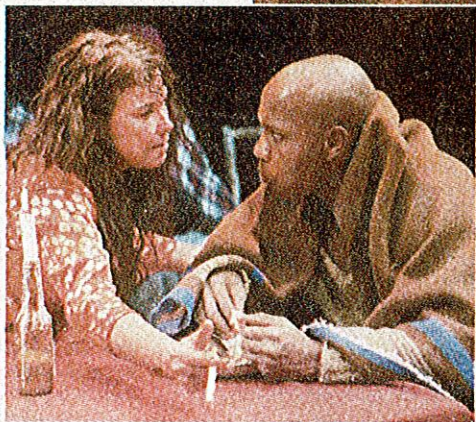
**Un coup de coeur**

# Telling stories with soul

From Japan to Germany, Yael Farber's *Molora* has travelled the world.

Following its debut a few years back in Grahamstown, it's finally home for a run at the Market's

Barney Simon Theatre. **Diane de Beer** speaks to the glorious creator and director of the play



**I**t was our other top (woman) director Lara Foot Newton who turned Yael Farber to directing – fulltime. “She asked me when I was going to stop being an average actor and start being a brilliant director!”

She was right, of course, not about the average actor – because Yael was more than that – but her voice is much stronger as a director where she makes an impact around the world as she touches both hearts and minds while telling South African stories with a universal impact. “There’s still this fascination with everything South African, but you can’t rest on your laurels.

“We have a certain romantic idea about ourselves, but that’s not enough,” says Yael, who is married to a French Canadian with Haitian parents and currently has her home address in Montreal where her husband, a talent scout for Cirque du Soleil, lives.

“Don’t know what is going to emerge from here,” she says patting her first-time seven-month-pregnant tummy.

What she does know is that her world travels won’t suddenly come to a halt with the start of a family. Yael has always been some-

**MAMA AFRICA:** South African director Yael Farber, who is directing *Molora* at The Market Theatre (PICTURE: MATTHEWS BALOYI) and (inset) Dorothy Ann Gould and Sandile Matsheni in *Molora* (PICTURE: RUPHIN COUDYZER).

one who is driven and believes she has a calling.

With *Molora* she says: “I have long wanted to create a work that explores the cycle of violence; and the dilemma of survivors who have to choose between the impulse to avenge and the impulse to forgive.”

And probably if theatre wasn’t so difficult to create here we would see more of her productions, but the resources are just too little and the climate too tough for the arts. But, of course, her stories come from African soil and she returns four to five times a year to rehearse with a group of actors for their next theatrical travels.

“We have the most amazing actors,” she says as she shakes her head about the loss of her first leading lady and longtime friend, Lindiwe Chibi, whose funeral was on the same day as the opening of *Molora* last Thursday and the one to whom the play is dedicated.

Yet, more than before, Yael understands that life goes on with, for example, this production running like a thread through her personal as well as professional life.

She’s fully aware that this season has been touched by both death as well as life with the new Farber’s arrival imminent. It was also the play that first brought her husband into her life. “He was in Grahamstown scouting for prospective artists when he came to see *Molora*.”

*Molora* is an adaptation of the *Oristeia Trilogy* set in a South African context, portraying some of the appalling incidents that came to light at the country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in the ‘90s. She feels very strongly that while the TRC was not the perfect solution, at least as a country we tried for reconciliation rather than revenge.

What did the so-called First World do post-9/11? “South Africa went the adult route,”

says Yael, who has an amazing perspective on this country which she constantly loves and leaves.

One of the inspired choices for the play was her unique chorus. “I’ve always witnessed the Greek chorus as a group of people doing bad poetry on stage,” she laments.

But listening to world music while doing research for this play she heard the unique and extraordinary sounds of the Ngqoko Cultural Group and went in search of them in the Transkei where they lived in a remote village.

“I told them the story of the play,” she says. And how she wanted to bring them into her world and an amazing partnership was born.

But then that is Yael Farber’s extraordinary talent. She tells stories with an African soul, finds a way to dig into the furthest corners of the heart and then blows you away with not only the content, but also the artists she presents on stage.



MARCOS TOWNSEND THE GAZETTE

Yael Farber says her play *Molora* is a classic Greek tragedy adapted to modern, post-apartheid South Africa.

## Give peace, and theatre a chance

Romance brought South Africa's Yael Farber to Montreal and the stage is all the better for it

**G**reek tragedy, South African-style, is coming to Place des Arts next week in a play called *Molora* by auteur director Yael Farber.

Behind the scenes lies a heartwarming love story with a Cirque du Soleil twist.

**"I'm always interested in stories about conflict and the pain that comes about because of it."**

Auteur director Yael Farber

When people ask Farber, 37, why she moved to Montreal from South Africa four years

ago, her standard reply is, "With these winters, it can only be love."

The romance began several years ago after she noticed a young man wearing a Cirque du Soleil jacket in the audience at one of her shows.

When she met him later at a press conference, Welby Alt-

dor told her that he was a talent scout for the Cirque and that he was interested in her



PAT DONNELLY

work.

"Then we just started talking and we ended up closing the bar four or five nights after that," she recalled. "And I thought, 'This guy is special.'"

So special that she soon agreed to pay a four-month visit to Montreal, during which he proposed. "And here I am, in Montreal, with a baby and a husband," she said.

Montreal hadn't even been on Farber's radar before meeting Altidor, who was born here to Haitian immigrant parents.

"So he's francophone," she said. "I'm anglophone and we have a little girl (17-month-old Ella) who's getting both languages. She's everything from Haitian to Montreal to Jewish to South African." Not to mention Irish and Afrikaner, on Farber's mother's side. Farber's paternal grandparents were Lithuanian Jews.

Very much the globe-trotting international, Farber has won accolades in Britain and Europe for innovative works such as *A Woman in Waiting* and *Sezar* (a retelling of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*) and has been a resident artist with Mabou Mines Theatre in New York City. In 2003, she was acclaimed South African Artist of the Year.

Since *Molora* premiered in Johannesburg in 2003, it has travelled to Germany, Japan, London, Amsterdam – and

Athens. She's currently working on adaptations of the Hindu text, *The Ramayana*, and Shakespeare's *King Lear* – set in the Middle East.

Still, Farber remains a South African at heart. Leaving South Africa was a "huge wrench," she said, during a press conference at PdA this week.

"You give up so much, your community, your everything." That included her production company, The Farber Foundry. And the renowned Market Theatre, which has been her home base for most of her career.

Farber frequently travels back and forth to South Africa to oversee remounted shows. But until now, none of her work has been seen in Montreal. Which is why she's so thrilled to bring *Molora* here.

Another reason to celebrate: a second South African play, *Tshepang*, written and directed by her best friend and mentor, Lara Foot Newton, is about to arrive at Théâtre de la Chapelle on Feb. 24 thanks to MoPo Productions, which is headed by former Centaur Theatre director Maurice Podbrey.

"He's a wonderful man," she said of Podbrey. "He's doing wonderful work in South Africa."

*Molora*, as Farber describes it, is both a post-apartheid and post-9/11 play.

After the long-awaited lifting of apartheid in South Africa was accomplished in 1994, many expected a bloodbath, she said.

Only it didn't happen.

Desire for vengeance was transformed into public forgiveness by an unprecedented exercise in conflict resolution called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Perpetrators were offered amnesty in exchange for public confession of their crimes. Thousands of heartbreaking stories were told, helping to bring about closure for those who had lost their loved ones.

Farber sees the time of the Commission as her country's finest hour. In contrast, she regards the vengeful response of the George W. Bush administration to the attack on the World Trade towers as one of that country's darkest hours.

So she took the Greek Trilogies of the *Oresteia*, by Aeschyl-

lus, and placed the bloody events of the fall of the House of Atreus within the framework of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The image of ashes falling like snow on New York City after the destruction of the World Trade Centre, inspired her to name the play *Molora* – which means ashes in the Sesotho language of South Africa. A chorus of Xhosa women enhance the ritualistic nature of the piece.

"The sense of purpose is very deep because we are South Africans," Farber said. "I feel a calling to tell these kinds of stories. Now I'm pushing out into the international community in terms of sourcing stories. I'm always interested in stories about conflict and the pain that comes about because of it."

Within South African theatre, the only other alternative is escapist fluff, she added. There is no in-between.

Sadly, the actress seen as Elektra in the promotional video for *Molora*, has since passed away – a victim of the domestic violence that still plagues the country.

"She was probably the best actress I've ever worked with," Farber said. "The show is now dedicated to her."

For her coming *King Lear*, Farber plans to have Israeli and Palestinian actors working together on the project. "*Lear* really is about the division of land," she said. "And the war that occurs within a family. I just think it will be an amazing metaphor."

Her reaction to current events in Gaza?

"It's horrifying. I don't think there's any right or wrong, it's just horrific. But again, because I'm a mother, I just think of the children. I see footage on TV. It's just horrifying. It's a nightmare."

All she is saying, basically, is give theatre a chance, to make peace, the South African way.

*Molora*, written and directed by Yael Farber, opens Thurs- day at the Cinquième Salle of Place des Arts, and runs until Feb. 1. Tickets are \$30, or \$15 (for those age 30 and under) at [www.laplacedesarts.com](http://www.laplacedesarts.com) or 514-842-2112.

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## A cathartic moment lingers

There was much magic on Montreal stages in 2009, but a show from South Africa impressed the most

BY PAT DONNELLY, THE GAZETTE    DECEMBER 26, 2009



Jabuliile Tshabalala (left) and Dorothy Ann Gould in a rehearsal of *Molora*, which critic Pat Donnelly describes as "a stunning mix of Greek tragedy and African ritual."

Photograph by: PIERRE OBENDRAUF, GAZETTE FILE PHOTO, The Gazette

Two South African shows, *Molora* and *Tshepang*, visited Montreal early last year. And, of all the shows that unfolded before my eyes in 2009, I have to say that *Molora*, a stunning mix of Greek tragedy and African ritual directed by Yael Farber, was the most impressive. It stopped time for a cathartic, thought-provoking moment that still lingers in the mind.

**THE GAZETTE - Montreal, Canada [Extract from original feature by Pat Donnelly]**

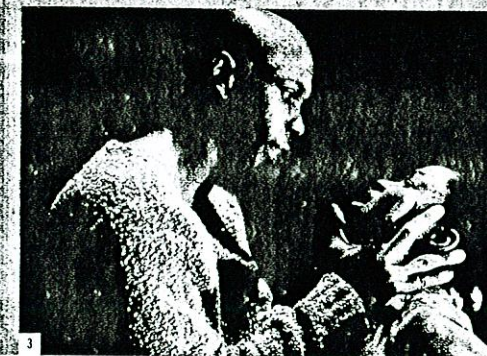


(1-2-3) *Molora* / Photos : Ruphin Coudyzer

## MOLORA EXONERATION RISING FROM THE ASHES

Lesley McCubbin

Raw, harrowing and ultimately liberating, *Molora* recounts the pain of the post-apartheid healing process in South Africa. This extraordinary retelling of a Greek tragedy—Aeschylus's *Oresteia* trilogy, written more than 2,500 years ago—examines the age-old question of revenge versus forgiveness, a matter of vital importance to a nation struggling to overcome its dark past. Is justice best served through retribution, or are there more life-affirming ways of dealing with violence?



MOLORA IS THE SOTHO  
WORD FOR ASH.

Director Yael Farber's play throws the victims and perpetrators of violence into dramatic confrontation. Weaving Aeschylus's epic tale with contemporary history, she transposes the action from ancient Greece to a post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing—a forum instituted to give a voice to both the victims and perpetrators of state-sanctioned violence. Hearing her mother, Clytemnestra, confess to killing her father Agamemnon, Elektra furiously involves her brother Orestes in a plot to avenge the murder. Yet as the drama unfolds, the line between perpetrator and victim blurs. In her thirst for justice, Elektra sets out to commit a misdeed of equal enormity; while Clytemnestra turns from oppressor to victim, underscoring the cyclical nature of violence. The action is given rare resonance by the Chorus, a device used in ancient Greek theatre, reinvented here as a traditional group of Xhosa singers, whose eerie split-tone vocals lend a haunting texture to the narrative and evoke a powerful emotional response.

*Molora* is the Sotho word for ash. Ash falls like rain throughout *Molora*, evoking not just the victims of apartheid, but also cremated human remains, the vestiges of history, and 9/11 images of panicked New Yorkers covered in white dust—images that Farber says helped inspire the work's creation. Her play is a passionate appeal to stop the endless spiral of violence from playing out until there is nothing left but ashes. Farber attempts to answer the universal questions raised by Aeschylus's blood-soaked trilogy by promoting clemency over revenge, life over death, in so doing, raising the possibility of "a more creative response to injustice than hatred." A must-see production.

Lesley McCubbin, writer and translator.

*Molora* – The Farber Foundry – Série Cinquième Salle – January, 22 to 25, 27 to 31, also on February 1, 2009 5\*



# Forging justice

The Farber Foundry reckons with apartheid through the lens of Greek tragedy

BY BYRON WOODS

Trust the Greeks to show us just how far we haven't come in 2,500 years.

In depicting a series of homicides spanning three generations of a royal family, *The Oresteia*, a trilogy of classic Greek tragedies, confronts us with dilemmas we still haven't solved. How do we distinguish justice from vengeance? What is the appropriate punishment for murder? And once a cycle of reciprocal "eye for an eye" violence has become ingrained in a culture, how can it be stopped?

After creating a series of "testimonial plays" based on the work of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in the 1990s, playwright Yael Farber approached a group of women from the Xhosa people—who were members of the Ngqoko cultural group—in 2008 and told them the story of the *Oresteia*.

At the time, she was looking for *umngqokolo*—traditional overtone throat singers for her new project, but their response to the tale shocked the playwright. Without prompting or prior knowledge of the theatrical convention, what Farber terms a "powerhouse of matriarchs" immediately began responding as a Greek chorus to the tale, regularly interrupting her account to deliberate among themselves. In the process, that organic African chorus sought—and, ultimately, arrived at—a solution to the ancient dilemma of justice. That solution differs from the one found in the writings of Aeschylus.

This week, those women, their musicians and three actors sing and enact their conclusions

they've reached in the Farber Foundry production of *MoLoRa (Ash)* at Reynolds Industries Theater.

We spoke with Yael Farber by phone for an hour on March 11. These excerpts are from the conversation. A more complete version of the interview can be found online at Artery, the *Indy's* arts blog.

**INDEPENDENT:** How would you describe the voices of the Xhosa women?

**FARBER:** As sonic wisdom. I had asked what a Greek chorus is—besides an unsuccessful device onstage. Finally, I realized it's community, it's the wisdom, it's the gravel that sits beneath; what moves a community and what holds it together. It's truth.

Then, when I heard their sound, I felt this is what wisdom, what forefathers sound like; what ancient truth, what that gravel sounds like.

It's an absolutely unearthly sound. It makes me think of what it must be like to hear the outside world from within the womb. The technique reduces sound to resonances and bass notes that create ... a calling,

back to something ancestral,

regardless of what culture you come from. It grounds the emotional storyline that the three actors carry.

When I heard it, I said, "I don't need [them] to say a word. If they can just make that sound, I'll come home to whatever bitter truth you're trying to make me face. Just hold me in that sound, watch, every horrifying and difficult scene to between, and I will stay the course with you."

When I was watching the [TRC] trials, I became aware of a chorus of women there as well: these matriarchs of South Africa, who

would sit and stoically listen, and absorb the pain for the community. In their acts of prayer, acts of song, there's a way all of these high emotions get downloaded in a very ancestral way. The sound of the women bestows all of that ritual, that grounding, that basic truth we need to be held by in order to face our most difficult stories. That's really what chorus is and should be: It's a group that metabolizes events for us.

*The TRC had a profound influence on your work. What lessons haven't the rest of the world learned from it yet?*

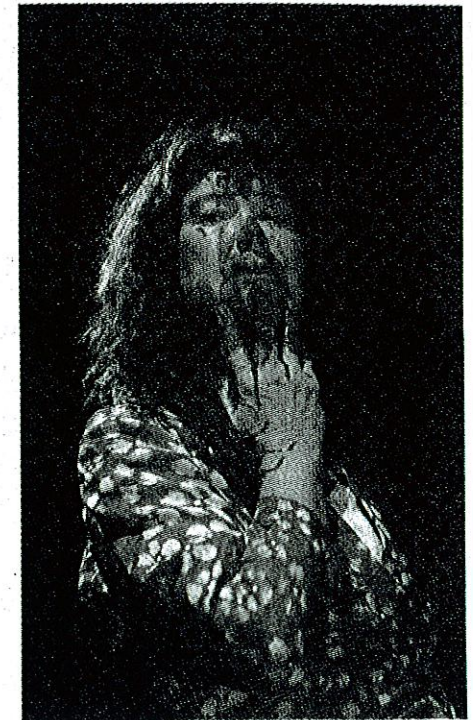
I was struck by the humility of the hearings we witnessed in makeshift halls in South Africa: the low-tech nature of it—and yet the incredible spiritual sophistication of the event.

It put me in mind of the way Greek tragedies create a scenario that is so personal, and feels so intimate, and yet it's epic. It's just between Cynthia Ngweyu (mother of a slain activist) and the man who killed her son, seated across the table.

You sit down opposite the perpetrator. You ask that they come with the truth about that event so that, human to human, you try to reach some kind of reconciliation—or not. It feels so intimate. And yet it becomes this lens, this prism that reflects us back at ourselves in many ways.

Let's be very humble about this: There's no consummated healing at an event like this. But in this ritual there's the beginning of healing for the entire community. There are many, many problems we face; this is not to idealize any society. But I was moved to create a piece that could express the miracle of that period in South Africa's history and how it shined a light on what could be a real way forward for the rest of the world.

*When Klytemnestra's children are described as "bred ... like wolves whose savage hearts do not*



Dorothy Ann Gould as Klytemnestra in *MoLoRa* PHOTO COURTESY OF DUKE PERFORMANCES

*relent," MoLoRa describes how vengeance ultimately dehumanizes those who seek it. Is this the trap of justice?*

As the children are chanting these words, they do so with tremendous pride. It's not even a decision; you feel it in their language—it's a foregone conclusion.

I want to take on this particular tribalism that I don't believe we've ever let go of. It helps us to the extent we take identity. But there's also this incredible sense of separation. As soon as one is dehumanized by violence, one must further dehumanize oneself to meet that violence head-on, to meet fire with fire. But the final notion of the piece is, when you meet fire with fire, nothing can ultimately remain but ash. ☒

# Yael's next hit is a myth

*Molóra is a seSotho word describing the powdery residue left after the combustion of any substance. It's also the title of Yael Farber's new play, a take on Electra, which, in its current creation process, is generating a number of creative explosions, writes Adrienne Sichel*

A pick-axe crashes on a metal table, cleaving a silence through of a wall of ancient singing. Klytemnestra (played by Dorothy-Ann Gould, no less) has symbolically chopped up her husband Agamemnon, and the chorus of Xhosa grandmothers (six members of the world-renowned Ngqoko Cultural Group's split-tone singers) are shocked to the core while an innocent Elektra (Lindiwe Chibi) is about to be bombarded by her mother's cruelty.

The rehearsal space, in the Ububele Centre on the rim of Alexandra township, is filled with extraordinary strands of performance traditions. Then again, no one expects the ordinary from theatremaker Yael Farber.

*Molóra* premieres at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown on June 27, showcasing her prowess as the recipient of the 2003 Standard Bank Young Artist for drama.

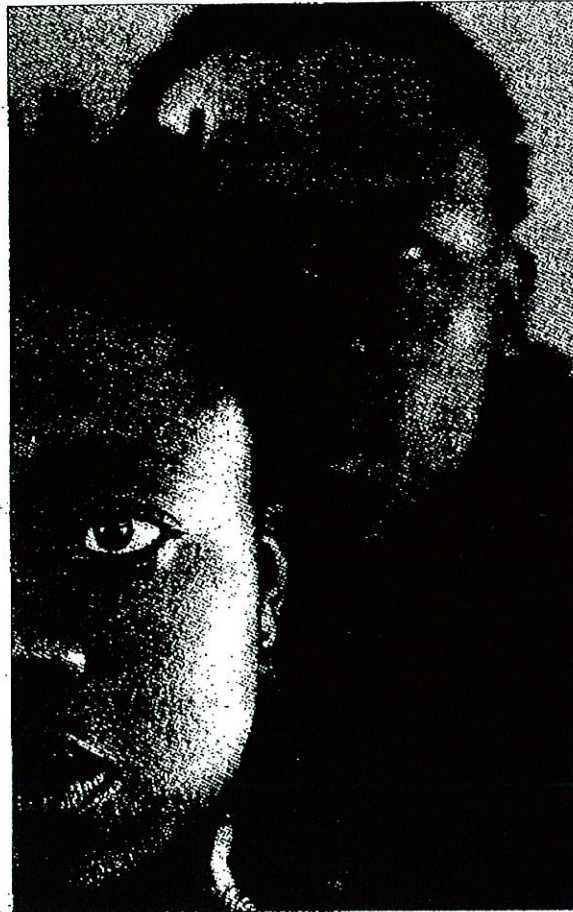
**Has being the Young Artist put more pressure on you?**

No, because it's always a terrifying, gorgeous process. It's always so uncertain. Until those lights go up, I actually don't know what I've got till I have that other character in the play - the audience.

**Why do a Greek tragedy in South Africa, and what is your approach to the chorus?**

I've always been fascinated by the Greek tragedies because everybody does them. I've never really seen how the device of the chorus works. I've never understood it. Then, working with my assistant director Ionna Sakelaris - who is Greek - it came to me. It's about wisdom, about the community, how no story can happen without a context, without us understanding how the community either reacts, or doesn't react.

This chorus of women could not be people who speak pretty poetry on the side, but are the frame that holds the story. I don't think there are many countries in the world that can boast the kind of richness and wisdom we can find in our chorus because, certainly in the rural areas, there is such importance placed on the elderly people. I went to the



**Brutal beauties**  
... Lindiwe Chibi (front) and Lebohang Elephant are cast as the vengeful Elektra and her brother Orestes in Yael Farber's *Molóra*, which premieres in G'town.

PHOTO: JOHN HOGG

women's village. They welcomed me into the hut. I had to choose six ladies for the group of 18. And here they are in Jozi. They've only been here a week. They were days late because they had to get their pensions! They don't speak a word of English. When I told them the story through a translator (Tsolwana Mpayiphell), their reaction was so powerful I didn't have to look any further to provide a context.

Why do a Greek tragedy in South Africa? It is about at what point does the community choose to get involved? How potent is that? Each person on the stage brings their history. Lebohang Elephant (as Elektra's exiled brother Orestes) and Lindi are the new generation of theatrical talent. Dorothy brings her years of immense professionalism.

It's incredible that there are people like Dorothy who will step into the fire. The

other incredibly powerful thing is that my original concept was to set this in a (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) context and make a very strong statement about retribution, revenge, guilt. Victim and perpetrator live beside one another.

I suppose I was shy of casting a white Klytemnestra. But the truth will out. The universe will conspire against you. I had to go with my original idea and also to try find that tribal junction between the young and old generations. Using the group as the chorus is

about placing people that belong, with their wisdom and sense of training, on stage. Getting those balances right. We have a very limited notion, conventionally, of what is a trained performer.

**From previous shows like *Amajuba*, which returns to the Fringe this year, it's obvious you are obsessed with ritual. Why?**

I trust anything that is ancient. Split-tone singing, Greek tragedy, theatre as a tradition. Whatever kind of group I work with to tell a story, it will always come back to ancient roots. I believe in genetic memory. Each of us meets our roots in, through ritual. It is the space where different worlds meet. We all wander around colliding with each other's strangeness. As a theatremaker I believe in the power of the story, of ritual.

**You've created a script inspired by *The Flies*, Jean-Paul Sartre's 1940s adaptation of *Electra*, and the Greeks?**

We've taken from the Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschylus, Sartre and then I've written new text to give it a more contemporary context. Ionna and I have worked together to structure that. The TRC is used as a springboard. In other words, the moment the perpetrator (Klytemnestra) and victim (Elektra) face each other over the table, then we go into the past to tell the story. That vast space between the two tables is where memory lands.





## ON MOLORA AND MOVING FORWARD IN SOUTH AFRICA

Tuesday, April 29, 2008.

Yael Farber is an award-winning playwright and director who was born and raised in Johannesburg, South Africa. She read Dramatic Art at the University of Witwatersrand, and has since directed numerous productions.

Her highly successful production of "Shopping and F\*\*king" received seven South African National Vita Awards including Best Director and Best Production.

In 1998, Yael was invited to attend The Lincoln Theatre Directors Workshop in New York. After a ten month break of travelling in Ireland, Yael went on to direct Fugard's "Hello and Goodbye" at the Access Theatre in Manhattan, New York. While there, she conceived, wrote and directed "A Woman in Waiting" with Thembi Mtshali at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre.

The production garnered several awards including a Fringe First at the Edinburgh Festival, a Best Performer award at the Carthage Festival, A Best New Script Vita Nomination, and a prestigious Gold Sony Award for Radio Drama for the BBC recording of the piece.

"A Woman in Waiting" did an extensive UK Tour in 2001 and opened on London's West End a year later. Early in 2000, Yael was an Artist in Residence at Mabou Mines Theatre Company in New York - during which she created a new work "Switch Track", which was invited for development at The Sundance Theater Laboratory in Utah, USA.

Yael also organised, wrote and directed "Amajuba" for the North West Arts Council in Mmabatho, South Africa. She was awarded the Vita Best Director Award for her African adaptation of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar "SeZaR" .

Other critically-acclaimed works include Zafara (2003) and "He Left Quietly" (2002) based on the life events of Duma Kumalo - a Death Row survivor of Apartheid South Africa).

Her latest work, *Molora*, is powerful interpretation about the process of truth and reconciliation. The NewBlack magazine recently caught up with Yael Farber to tell us why she went deep into the reserve of a painful era in the history of South Africa to recreate a poignant stage production.

### **What's the inspiration behind *Molora*?**

The inspiration behind '*Molora*' was a strong desire to represent to the world and the extraordinary acts of grace and general transcendent ability of the everyman and woman in South Africa. Who was able to lead South Africa away from what seemed like the inevitable continuation of the cycles of vengeance that usually follow gross human rights violations.

The image of the ash that floated down on New York City in the days that followed the attack on the World Trade Centres was the trigger for the poignant aftermath of these cycles that reduce us all to ash. (*Molora* means "ash" in Sesotho).

**Can you please describe what 'Molora' encapsulates to people who have only ever heard about South Africa's history but never experienced it, and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?**

'Molora' encapsulates the great darkness and violence done to generations of South Africans. It does not hold back in representing the violations of the past. But it is an attempt to show how the pursuit of satisfaction to the pain of these violations would clearly have wrought generations of further pain.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a process intended to at least come to terms with the existence of the pain, to break the silence and stop the denial. It is debatable how successful the Commission was in this regard – but it was a beginning for a healing, a humble beginning. 'Molora' tries to encapsulate both the limits and the possibility of testimony in the healing process.

**What has the response to the production been like in places you have toured?**

The response to the work has generally been extraordinary in South Africa, Japan, Germany, Holland and the UK. There are those who found the work too dark or difficult – but for those who are open to the journey that the work invites you on... the response has been very powerful.

**What are the significant differences 'Molora' and your other previous productions to date?**

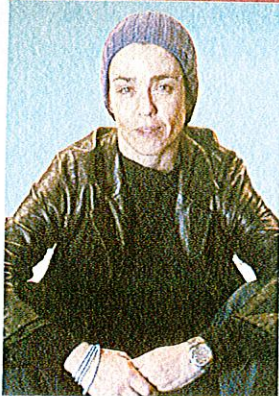
I have worked both on testimonial work and adaptations of classics. This is an adaptation – but all my work tends to be about pursuing a certain truth and getting to the marrow of South Africa's past and present. The differences tend to be stylistic – but the spirit in which the work is created is the same: to try to chase the truth of the experience from within a country torn apart by the insanity of ideas of superiority and the sanctioned suffering of people in the name of this deluded superiority.

**What do you want people to take away with them when they see your work?**

I want people to leave the theatre a little closer to their own truth. If one is moved by theatre – I believe the artists have done their job.

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**Interview by Belinda Otas. She is a London-based freelance journalist and The New Black Magazine's features and theatre editor. She can be reached at [belindaotas@thenewblackmagazine.com](mailto:belindaotas@thenewblackmagazine.com)**



〈救し〉が〈復讐〉にとって代わった場所、それが私の国、南アフリカです。

私は、ギリシア悲劇のように困難と苦悩を伴う物語を通して、このことを目に見えるようにしたかったのです。

INTERVIEW

ヤエル・ファーバー

いま、世界の演劇界で最も注目を集めている気鋭のアーティスト、南アフリカ出身のヤエル・ファーバー。日本でも、その作品の上演が待たれていましたが、いよいよ代表作『モローラ』が、2006年2月に上演されることが決定しました。ギリシア悲劇オresteia三部作を、現代の南アフリカを舞台に、大胆に翻案した『モローラ』。〈復讐とは何か? 救しとは何か?〉という大きなテーマに正面から取り組んだヤエル・ファーバーに、話を聞きました。



祝祭!  
舞台フェスティバル  
〜神奈川・東京、舞台芸術の中心〜

演劇を始めたきっかけを教えてください。

私は、ずっと世の中の「目に見えない」部分、隠された真実というものに惹かれてきました。アパルトヘイト時代の南アフリカに育った私たちには、権力によって様々な形にゆがめられた真実が届いていました。けれど、ある時から、現実を求め、真実と嘘を見分けることは、個人の責任となってきます。マーケットシアター(当時の南アフリカで唯一の人種混合劇場)でプロテスト演劇を見た時に、10代だった私は、演劇が持っている真実を語る力——見えないものを見えるようにする力——というものに衝撃を受けました。

演劇はまた、儀式的な経験に引きこまれる場所でもあります。私にとって演劇は、古くから伝わる儀式に参加し、真実を語る機会を与えてくれるものなのです。聖なるものにもっとも私を近づけてくれるもの、それが演劇です。

今回上演される『モローラ』はどのようにして生まれたのでしょうか。

南アフリカは、長くひどい人権侵害があった後に、「真実と和解」のプロセスを採用した世界でも数少ない国のひとつです。犯罪者が被害者に対面し、〈恩赦を受けるために自ら犯した罪を告白する〉という方法が持つ目の覚めるような力に、私は圧倒されました。南アフリカがファシスト国家兼レイシスト(人種主義者)国家から民主主義国家に移行する際、被害者が復讐をするために大量殺人を起こすのではないかと多くの人は心配しました。しかし、そのような内乱は起こりませんでした。

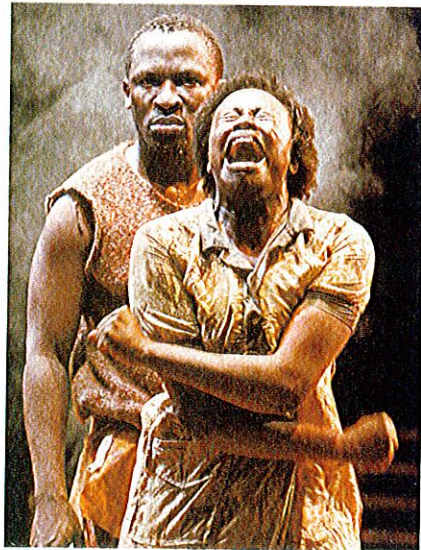
私は、人々がいかに復讐の衝動を乗り越えてきたか、復讐についての作品を創ろうと思いました。9.11以降のブッシュ政権の反応と無差別の報復を目の当たりにして、私は南アフリカで目にした抑止する能力というものを感しました。

『モローラ』のもとになっているギリシア悲劇は、復讐についての素晴らしい物語です。暴力には暴力をもって、終わりのない受難の悪循環を永続する、という物語ですから。私は、「目には目を、歯には歯を」という古代からの衝動を最も力強く語ることが出来るのは、復讐に呪われたクリテムネストラとその子供たちの、このアトレウス家の物語だと感じたのです。

あなたの母国であり、『モローラ』の舞台となっている南アフリカについて教えてください。

私は、このアトレウス家の物語は南アフリカの歴史にとって完璧な例えだと思いました。クリテムネストラは、最初の夫との間の子供たちを父の家の食堂で働く奴隷に変えました——アフリカに降り立ったヨーロッパ人たちの末裔が、もともと土地の所有者たちをその土地の奴隷に変えたように。

南アフリカは、苦難の歴史を歩んできたにもかかわらず、その苦難を増幅する道を選びませんでした。人々が見せた格別の恩情は、いくつもの「力のある」大国が困難に際し見せることができなかった、精神



的かつ道徳上の大勝利でした。被害にあった人々の苦悩を軽んじるつもりはありません。私自身はそのような救しを想像することすらできませんし、むしろ、私はこのような寛容さを理解するために戦っている。救すために必要な大きな勇気と力を、暗闇の中から明るみに出したかったのです。何百万もの語られることのない物語の中で、救しが復讐にとって代わった場所、それが私の国、南アフリカです。

『モローラ』を通して伝えたいことは何ですか。

『モローラ』でクリテムネストラは、審判の場で娘エレトラに向かい、みずからの罪を告白し恩赦を

求めます。この家族の物語と南アフリカの物語が、同時に観客の前で明らかにされます。

南アフリカで比較的平和裡におこなわれた民主主義への移行は奇跡的で、そのことが示唆する人間の精神の大きな可能性をこの作品で示したいと思います。私たちは奇跡の国から来ました。私は、ギリシア悲劇のように困難と苦悩をともなう物語を通して、このことを目に見えるようにしたかったのです。

『モローラ』では、女性グループが奏でる音楽がとても印象的ですね。

ンゴコ女性文化合唱団の歌と楽器演奏を聞いたとき、これが古代のコロスだと直感しました。古典のコロスはその社会の智慧を代表しています。

コーサ族の音楽は大昔のままのものです。彼女らの「倍音唱法」は、喉の奥深くで声を出し、超自然的な音を出す、喉歌という歌い方です。楽器はとても簡単な材料から作られ、数百年変わらぬ音色を奏でます。これらのコーサ族の伝統は、まさにこの女性たちを限りに消えてゆきます。というのは若い世代はもうこの技術を体得していないからです。皆さんがお聞きになるのは、何百年も変わらずに続いてきて、しかし間もなく消えてなくなる音楽です。

この力強い音楽とオresteia三部作の力強い物語を組み合わせると、物語に最もふさわしい器ができあがります。この音楽なしに、この作品は完成しなかったでしょう。テキスト同様、重要なものです。この音楽がテキストそのものだともいえます。

最後に、日本の観客にメッセージをお願いします。

私たちは、演劇という古くからある芸術を通して、新たな政治的、精神的、そして心理的な視点をお届けしたいと思います。日本の観客の皆さんに、ほかにない演劇的な体験をしていただく機会がもてることを大変名誉に思っています。

モローラ — 灰  
2006 2/17(金)~21(火)  
神奈川県立青少年センター  
※詳細はp9をご覧ください。

ヤエル・ファーバー © Yael Farber

南アフリカ出身。演出、脚本創作を始めたこの10年間に、南アフリカを題材にした作品を多数発表し、その鋭敏な現代性と芸術性の高さから、国際的に高く評価され、数々の賞を受賞している。『モローラ』は、南アフリカのナショナル・アーツ・フェスティバルの委嘱により初演され、2004年9月にはドイツ・ハンブルクのラオクーン・フェスティバルに招かれ絶賛された。

# South African drama about forgiveness

**H**ow can the victims of violence forgive the perpetrators and stop the vicious cycle of vengeance? South African stage director Yael Farber is going to suggest an answer to the question in her production of *Molora*, which will be staged this week and next in Yokohama.

Borrowing tragic themes from the ancient Greek *Oresteia Trilogy*, a collection of stories about the cycle of revenge, Farber will present the story of a South African family in which one parent murdered the other. Farber said the "grace of forgiveness" the country learned through its hard experience after apartheid is well reflected in the production.

"In South Africa, people persecuted under apartheid's racist laws were subjected to the most extreme violations of human rights," said Farber, 34, who also wrote the script.

"But there was a grace and exceptional ability to transcend the pain and degradation as well as a commitment to a peaceful transition," she said in an e-mail interview three days prior to the first Tokyo show.

"I wanted to show this exceptional aspect of the history of South Africa's transition," said Farber, adding that the Greek classics made a perfect vehicle for examining the nature of vengeance.

Farber said she wants to present at the same time "how we have remained slaves to this ancient impulse."

"The response of the [U.S. President George W.] Bush administration to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the country showed that even a country with advanced technology was operating within the 'tooth for a tooth' dynamic," she said.

Farber said the image of ashes raining down on New York for days after the attacks also inspired *Molora*, which means "ash" in the Sesotho language. *Molora* was premiered in South Africa in 2003 and performed in Hamburg in 2004.



Yael Farber

This will be the first time for it to be shown in Japan.

On the stage, there will be only three main performers, accompanied by members of Ngqoko Women's Cultural Group, a chorus of women from the Xhosa tribe in South Africa.

*Molora* will begin with a scene in which a woman admits before a committee for "truth and reconciliation" her crime of killing her husband.

The committee is based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up in South Africa after apartheid for public hearings to clarify the extent of crimes by bringing perpetrators and their victims together. The ultimate goal of the commission was to grant pardons to the former



"Molora" shows how victims of violence forgive the perpetrators.

after having them confess their crimes.

The story then turns to reenactments of past happenings, including the daughter witnessing her mother's killing of her father. Vengeance is initially sought by the children, but in keeping with Farber's theatrical theme, the ending does not flow to the denouement of the Greek tragedy.

"I believe South Africa has more to tell the world than simply about poverty, famine and HIV," Farber said. "Africa is a profoundly diverse continent."

"South Africa has a very damaged history, and this has impacted profoundly on millions of lives. But I have seen from the people the possibility for a more creative response to injustice than hatred," she said.

Farber said people who saw *Molora* will understand the violence and pain of the past. "But more importantly, the audience will witness how the cycle of vengeance must be broken."

—Kumi Matsumaru

*Molora* will be staged Friday, Monday and Tuesday at 7 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday at 3 p.m. at Kanagawa Prefectural Youth Center Hall in Yokohama, (045) 662-8866. It will be performed in English with Japanese subtitles.

# Dispelling the residue of revenge

Interview

**Yael Farber**

By Marita Kritzing

*Cue* reporter

“Ash is the single unifying factor that we all experience: It represents death and pain. It is the residue of something destructive. But it is light in the way it falls from the sky. It can also give life because it has many nutrients in it,” said director Yael Farber, 2003 winner of the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year Award for drama. Her new play is entitled *Molóra*, which means ‘ash’ in Sotho.

*Molóra* is an adapted work based loosely on the epic Greek *Oresteia* trilogy, written by Aeschylus in 458 BC. The final play in this tragedy, *The Eumenides*, is unique in that it ends on a note of reconciliation and optimism. Despite the play’s ancient origins, Farber felt some of its themes relate to a modern context, particularly to that of South Africa.

“It is about forgiveness and revenge; how we deal with wrongs done to us in the past,” she said.

“It is a miracle that there was no bloodbath during South Africa’s transformation. The fact that people did not act on the basic impulse of vengeance was astonishing when one compares the reaction after the 9/11 attacks,” she said.

“I have this vivid image after the 9/11 attacks of people covered in ash and blood. Ash is about coming down to a basic truth to which everything is reduced,” she explained.

“History is unfolding on a mass scale,” she said. In *Molóra*, she used the “bigger picture of one cursed family” as a symbol of victims and perpetrators living side by side.

“Looking back at my work over the years I can see an underlying theme of grappling with the present climate

because of our potent history, which has a resonance and power in itself,” she said.

“We are quite advanced in the process of grappling with our history but at times we can also be depressingly naïve,” she said of South Africa.

Farber explained she did not stick faithfully to the original text for specific reasons. In *Molóra*, brother and sister Orestes and Electra have a choice. They are able to defy their fate of vengeance, of killing the perpetrator. Through this they go against the instinct that “somebody has to pay”.

The play evolved around a process of workshops with a group of Xhosa women from Lady Frere in the Eastern Cape.

“In our diverse culture, you have to approach theatre with humility because there is no one truth,” she said. “You deprive yourself if you do not incorporate other voices.”

“The Xhosa group bring with them an enormous richness,” she said.

The role of the chorus in Greek tragedies never made much sense to Farber. She came up with a new interpretation of the

chorus by using the Xhosa women. “They are a silenced group of people but they carry much wisdom with them,” she said.

Their presence is also powerful because of their voices. “Their unique split-tone singing brings an ancient and unearthly sound to the performance,” she said.

Yael Farber says she has not slept in three days, but in truth she has not really slept for the past two months. Despite the gruelling process of putting together a play in six weeks, Farber felt it was “absolutely delicious” at the same time. She equated it to throwing together all the ingredients and hoping that the resulting cake is edible. **The last two performances of *Molóra* run today at Graeme College, at 10.30am and 2pm.**

*“Their unique split-tone singing brings an ancient and unearthly sound to the performance.”*



Yael Farber's *Morola* is a workshopped work of murder and revenge based on the Oresteia trilogy. It's audacious, brave and carefully composed

PHOTOGRAPHS: JOHN HOGG



# Molora: a Greek tragedy for the South African stage



Jabulile Tshabalala as Elektra in Molora.

Last night in Montreal I went to Molora, the play adapted and directed from the ancient Oresteia tragedy by South African Yael Farber (who now lives in Montreal). Through the telling of a family tragedy of death, violence, despair and loss, Molora (means “ash” in Sesotho) excavates the ruins of a broken humanity, viscerally pushing the players and the audience toward reconciliation and away from the more immediately-gratifying spoils of revenge. Past crimes—no matter how heinous—must be forgiven so that society and indeed families, may move on into a future that is marked by compassion and love for each other, not hatred and violence. It is a powerful performance that takes the Greek tragedy text implanted into the context of post-apartheid South Africa, told through the agonizing distortions of a dysfunctional family falling into the abyss of cyclic violence.

The play is a confrontational piece and at least twice I felt my body trying to remove me from my seat so that I could go help Elektra, played by Jabulile Tshabalala, who has violence done to her so realistically I actually feared for her safety. The perpetrator of the violence is played in the conspicuously symbolic white skin of the amazingly talented Dorothy Ann Gould whose Klytemnestra is the wicked mother who tortures her daughter with cigarettes, near-drownings and suffocations in attempts to extract information from her as to the family’s only son’s whereabouts.

The Greek Chorus, that is the witnesses to the events, is performed magnificently by The Ngqoko Cultural Group, from the town of Lady Frere, a group of blanket-wrapped foot-shuffling throat-singing elders who add indigenous South African Music that brings to life the traditions of the Xhosa communities.

Molora stirs the soul in uncomfortable ways. While physically detached in the audience, emotional connections entangle all the witnesses to tragedy, implicating anyone with a pulse. Through agonizing screams, cathartic physical release, music, and the violent reckoning of a culture confronting its horrific past, the struggle to forgive and the certitude to renounce revenge rein in on the stage as ash falls gently on the players in the end, signalling not a time to forget but indeed to remember as we all move toward forgiveness.