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NEGOTIATING MEMORY AND NATION BUILDING IN NEW SOUTH AFRICAN DRAMA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the representation of trauma and memory in six post-Apartheid plays. The topic is explored through a treatment of the tropes of racial segregation, different forms of dispossession as well as violence. The thesis draws its inspiration from the critical and self-reflexive engagements with which South African playwrights depict the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The dramatists are concerned with the contested nature of the TRC as an experiential and historical archive. Others explore the idea of disputed and seemingly elusive notions of truth (from the embodied to the forensic). Through the unpacking of the TRC, as reflected in three of the plays, the thesis argues that apart from the idea of an absolute or forensic truth, the TRC is also characterised by the repression of truth. Furthermore, there is a consideration of debates around amnesty, justice, and reparations.

Underpinning the politics and representations of trauma and memory, the thesis also interrogates the concomitant explorations and implications of identity and citizenship in the dramas. In the experience of violence, subjugation and exile, the characters in the dramas wrestle with the physical and psychological implications of their lived experiences. This creates anxieties around notions of self and community whether at home or in exile and such representations foreground the centrality of memory in identity construction. All these complex personal and social challenges are further exacerbated by the presence of endemic violence against women and children as well as that of rampart crime. The thesis, therefore, explores the negotiation of memory and identity in relation to how trauma could be mitigated or healing could be attained. The thesis substantially blurs the orthodox lines of differentiation between race and class, but emphasises the centrality of the individual or self in recent post-Apartheid engagements.

KEYWORDS: Post-Apartheid Drama, Transition, Nation-Building, Memory, Identity, 'Self' and 'Other', New Historicism, Crime and Corruption, Public Space.