

*Performance of Identities in Post- Apartheid South Africa: Reza
De Wet's 'Diepe Grond' and 'African Gothic'.*

by

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Abstract:

The subject matter of this thesis all boils down to how identity is performed in South Africa:

Diepe Grond focuses on identity in the Apartheid period and *African Gothic* in the Post-

Apartheid period. Both these plays are written by South African playwright, Reza De Wet. I aim

to examine the work of this playwright who exposes uncomfortable issues about South Africa's scarred past, its unstable present, and its precarious future: issues that are ignored far too often.

She presents worlds in which different cultures and beliefs are not separate, yet form

interweaved tapestries depicting the inherent hybridity of every South African citizen. De Wet

finds a way to use language, (English and Afrikaans), culture and heightened realism to create

new realities onstage, which question and challenge the existing state of society and culture in

South Africa.

Preface:

This thesis is an original work by Lauren Suzanne Steyn. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

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Introduction

The subject matter of this thesis all boils down to how identity is performed in South Africa: *Diepe Grond* focuses on identity in the Apartheid period and *African Gothic* in the Post-Apartheid period. Both these plays are written by South African playwright, Reza De Wet. Before delving into what South African theatre looks like and De Wet's position in it, I will present a brief description of the sociopolitical and sociocultural environment. The time periods in South Africa that I will be focusing on are during Apartheid (1940's-1990's) and after Apartheid (1990's-present). Apartheid was a policy that constitutionally and socially endorsed racism, discrimination and oppression of people of colour in South Africa. It was instituted by the National Party government who believed in a superior white Afrikaner race. During Apartheid, races and cultures were physically separated and White Afrikaner culture was heavily promoted. What this meant, was that people's identities became tied into public racialized policies that were being enforced. Thus, when Apartheid officially ended in 1990, South Africans of all races had to relearn how to interact with one another: the past discrimination haunted many and reconciliation became increasingly difficult as tools for this process were not provided.

During these periods, the theatre that was being produced mirrored the social concerns of the country: during Apartheid, theatre was either geared toward supporting the ideals of Apartheid or protesting it. In the post- Apartheid period, theatre still refers to the past and the injustices that accompanied it, yet some theatre seeks to use the past as a way of looking how to move forward in the new multicultural and democratic South Africa. This is the type of theatre De Wet explored.

Reza De Wet was a huge name in Afrikaans theatre. She began writing in Afrikaans during the Apartheid period: she wrote *Diepe Grond* 1986 and it was first performed in 1988. It was the first play that she wrote based on her experiences and perceptions of social reality in South Africa. After Apartheid, De Wet adapted her plays into English to cater to a more multicultural audience and society who was now encouraged to use English to communicate in rather than Afrikaans. My interest lies in how identities are performed in both these periods. Thus, I have focussed on an Afrikaans work of De Wet's, *Diepe Grond*, and what I argue to be not its translation, but its English adaptation, *African Gothic*, written in 2005.

In order to explore this concept of performing identities, I access many critical sources as well as blogs in order to support my close reading of both plays. The approach that I take in this thesis is one that focuses on a close reading of the plays, teasing out the arguments and details they contain and using many different theoretical frameworks to support my close reading of them. In the reading of these plays, I focus on the identity formation and difficulties experienced, primarily of white Afrikaner people, through a sociocultural lens. There is a secondary focus on minority versus majority culture, due to the fact that there are two races present on stage in both plays. Although not theoretically driven, there are some theories and theorists that I have sought out in order to frame the context of my exploration and discussion. "Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis" (2002), a critical article by Jaqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert, has provided me with highly useful working definitions of Multicultural, Intercultural and Intracultural theatre. These theatre typologies help situate *Diepe Grond* and *African Gothic* in the broader scope of theatrical works within and outside of South Africa. Christopher Balme's definition of Syncretic theatre has proved the most useful framework for exploring how cultures

interact in both of these plays. The historical texts that I have accessed are mostly sources regarding the development of theatre in South Africa.

The resources that I have relied most heavily on are ones that have been written by South African director, actor and University of Rhodes professor, Anton Krueger. His book *Experiments in Freedom* is one that explores the nature of theatre in South Africa in relation to the sociocultural climate of the country. He also dedicates an entire chapter to Reza De Wet in this book and makes chapters on De Wet, which he has written for an upcoming text on South African Theatre, available. Not only does Krueger provide useful insights into De Wet's work but he is also an active part of the South African theatre community. He was also very receptive to helping me when I contacted him via email: he provided me with manuscripts and avenues of research. Beyond this, my views on De Wet's works and South African theatre in general, as it informs the identities of South African society, are very much in line with the views and explorations Krueger records through his body of work.

Although the scripts have been my main resource, I have accessed a few reviews on the play. Unfortunately, there are very few production photos and records: A huge body of South African research is not digitized and thus it is difficult to access in Canada. Reza De Wet, is not publically and politically manifest like other South African playwrights, such as Athol Fugard, and thus does not record her process in something like Fugard's published *Notebooks*. Neither is there an organized archive on her writing. There is a film version of the English adaptation, *African Gothic*: I do not refer to this resource extensively as only the preview and reviews of the film are currently available to the public. Through investigating sociological interviews and blogs, I place these plays in physical time, place and society, to gauge public experience and perception of race and culture in South Africa. It is necessary to explore a myriad of sources in

order to engage with the inherent hybridity of the plays. The most difficult task has been to anchor these sources in the sociocultural climate of South Africa's realities whilst simultaneously ensuring that they are in line with the sentiments, characters and ideals expressed in both these scripts. Through the exploration of these scripts, it has been revealed that theatre cannot be separated from the playwright, the playwright's background and most importantly in the case of De Wet, the places and spaces it is connected to. A challenge that I came across when talking about these plays was that I found it impossible not to use the binary of white and black.

Unfortunately, when speaking about South Africa, these racialized terms are unavoidable. There are places where I have used terms like 'black nannies' or "Superior White Afrikaners". While using these terms, I do not seek to reinforce the oppressive systems that upheld them. Instead, I am using these terms because these are the terms used in the South Africa that I grew up in.

Although they may not seem politically correct to some, they have become part of a quotidian vernacular. As I am working with texts in both Afrikaans and English, I have also used critical sources in both these languages. Quotations are in the original language, and the translations provided are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

In Chapter One, I briefly describe the social climate of South Africa and how this impacts the theatrical culture of the country. After this I introduce De Wet as a playwright, where exactly in this theatrical culture she is situated, her background and a brief engagement with her body of work. Chapter Two entails a close reading of her first Afrikaans play *Diepe Grond*: through a close examination of the events, characters and dialogue in this play, I reveal much about South African identity, culture, and society. Finally, in Chapter Three, I look at how *Diepe Grond* has transformed and adapted into *African Gothic*. I will examine why this adaptation came about, and its significance thirty years after the original was written. *African Gothic* keeps the

sentiments of the playwright alive, we shall see, even in the altered social situation in post-Apartheid SA

The over-arching questions that I seek to address in this thesis are: how do South Africans define culture? Is it possible to break down the racial binaries that were created by the Apartheid system? Is reconciliation in South Africa possible and lastly, what role does the theatre of Reza De Wet play in shaping and deconstructing the perceptions and experiences that South Africans have of their own identities? Overall, what I aim to examine is the work of a playwright who exposes uncomfortable issues about South Africa's scarred past, its unstable present, and its precarious future: issues that are ignored far too often. However, when brought to the surface they help us discover how to start addressing South African identity in relation to the physical country and its long, diverse history

Chapter One: Reza De Wet and the Theatre of South Africa

The word that most aptly describes South African Theatre, both currently and historically, is diversity. Due to the inherent cultural diversity of South Africa and the multiplicity of languages spoken and written, there are numerous forms, dramaturgies and traditions that make up this theatrical landscape. Because parts of South Africa were colonized by the British (1795) and Dutch (1652), there is much European influence that is sometimes ‘mixed- in’ with the pointedly African voice which this theatre possesses. Anton Krueger is a professor at Rhodes University in South Africa and has written extensively on theatre in South Africa and on Reza De Wet and he is a frequent source for my arguments. Krueger acknowledges that at some points in South African history, these voices are kept from interacting, and quite aptly states, that “... theatre in South Africa is not *essentially* European or African; rather it *takes place* between and within practices, forms and institutions variously and contentiously associated with Europe, Africa and America... (17)”.

There are many different forms of theatre in South Africa due to the cultural diversity of the people that inhabit it. During Apartheid the most prominent theatre form was Afrikaans theatre. It took place to support Afrikaans Language organizations supported by the National Party government. It was expressing the themes and ideologies of the current government and the people that supported them. The second form of theatre that has existed, before, during and after the Apartheid regime, (yet very much a construct of the British Colonial influence), is English state Repertory theatre like the *Royal Theatre* in Durban and the *Johannesburg State Theatre*. The seasons at these theatres are comprised of popular non-political works, like famous ballets, musicals and play classics from the United States and Britain. The rest of the theatre in

South Africa during Apartheid (1948-1990) and after Apartheid (1990-present) are either indigenous forms of storytelling, and political or resistance theatre. There is no theatre form in South Africa that represents the wildly diverse society: it is unclear, and always has been, as to what theatre form can represent this multicultural society not excluding any nations, creeds and races. Thus, what we are left with are many branches that stem from the same root: the root being the place, South Africa and the branches being the different forms of theatre that different groups of South Africans engage in as a way to express what their connection is to their country, its people, what their culture is and more importantly how to activate this connection within the vast political, social and cultural landscape of South Africa.

The different theatre forms that are present in South Africa are very connected to events that occur in history, such as many different political events and national celebrations which inform cultural formation: a process that is still occurring due to the constantly changing social, cultural and political landscape of the country. Not only are the theatre forms connected to these events, yet I would argue that they are highly connected to space and place. I define space as a non-specific, physical location and place as space that has become specific and has acquired a purpose. This point will be most evident when discussing the specific theatre forms that developed during Apartheid, as this political system with its censorship laws and presumed national themes and ideologies, literally forced specific theatre forms to be performed in various, mostly isolated places and spaces. The crossover of these spaces after Apartheid has brought about many complex issues for theatre artists when trying to define themselves. The Apartheid era starting in 1948 and officially ending in 1990, (yet many see the end more effectively in 1994 when Nelson Mandela was voted in as president), is by far the biggest social, political and cultural policy that affected the nature of the theatre performed and written during these years. I

will be focussing on what the conditions of South Africa were in 1986-88, during Apartheid when *Diepe Grond* was written and 2005, after Apartheid when *African Gothic* was written. The following survey of what theatre looks like in these periods will help situating Reza De Wet, within the existing theatrical systems and social practices and her position on the South African stage, adhering to very idiosyncratic ideologies born out of her experience within the South African landscape.

South Africa is a country of “many cultures, one nation” (Kruger 2). The most prominent theatre during the Apartheid era was Afrikaans and English theatre and forms. Since 1994, more indigenous languages have been incorporated in order “...to reach multilingual audiences, engaged in the local appropriation of a range of englishes... (sic)” (Kruger 19). This statement alludes to how syncretic, not only the culture in South Africa is, but also the spoken languages are. When reading or viewing any theatrical piece one needs to keep in mind the position of the South African theatre practitioner as being one that has been formed and embedded in a myriad of linguistic social and cultural practices: They are the multifaceted practitioner who Steadman argues “[...] have many subject positions,” (Steadman in Orkin 51). What Steadman is pointing to here, is, that even if a writer is born into one specific language and culture, and embraces a practice of this specific language, they are exposed to many different cultural experiences and languages that inherently influence their own. Thus, they have incorporated other ideas and voices into their worldview, which becomes evident in their writing practice.

Not only do the contemporary theatre practitioners of South Africa have a multiplicity of subject positions, yet they also deal with multiple temporalities. A challenge that arises after any significant social and political event, is how to describe “...the present while looking at the past” (Van Heerden 98-99). This is a question that South Africans face, not only in the theatre but in

reality too. It is difficult to frame any theatrical piece without referring to the countries past policies. The best examples are the policies of Apartheid, which trapped cultures and people into designated areas. This isolation forced them to define their identities in relation to other groups of people- mostly as White or Not-White- and not as part of a society in which both existed. What happens after Apartheid is that the identities that isolated groups of people have created for themselves are then challenged. These groups now have to negotiate how to interact with other people and cultures that they had previously defined themselves in opposition to. Thus, space and people struggle to define what and who they are without referring to the trauma from the past. Many playwrights, including Reza De Wet, and novelists such as J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer, have addressed these identity complexities that ultimately stem from, and exist in multiple subject positions, places and temporalities.

Theatre, being a medium that takes place in a space and can play with multiple temporalities and subject positions, may be the most suitable medium through which these challenges can be expressed and explored. There are certainly other mediums, which can explore these issues: Film may be ideal, however, there was no way to distribute films that explored resistance to Apartheid during this era as they would have been banned. During Apartheid theatre was put on for specific groups of people in specific places in which they were permitted to be and thus had access to. Literature, too, as described above, explored these issues. However, it was difficult for the majority of the population to access these resources. Many also lacked education due to poverty. Theatre was and is a medium in South Africa, which can be transported to physically accessible locations. It communicates stories that need a voice through language and physical bodies, and perhaps, most importantly, allows people to see themselves onstage. Although these laws and access has changed, South Africa is still facing the vast

consequences of the Apartheid system. What this means about the theatre that comes out of South Africa is that it is unavoidably political. South African playwright Athol Fugard describes the relationship between politics of South Africa and his playwriting:

[...] I answer with total honesty that I don't really give the matter any thought. I point out that, as far as I am concerned, in the South African context the two are inseparable. I think of myself essentially as a story-teller, and as such, the notion that there could be such a thing as an apolitical South African story is a contradiction in terms. (Fugard in Mda 195)

Thus, in order to describe contemporary theatre forms and the style of theatre that Reza De Wet writes, it is necessary to look at the political period and climate in which she wrote *Diepe Grond* and when it took place, because, with Fugard in mind, the South African play and the political situation out of which it was born cannot be separated.

The most obvious, yet necessary statement about theatre during Apartheid is that it was segregated and had an ideological function in order to further the ideals and culture of the Afrikaner National Party. Theatre was used as a propaganda tool to teach white Afrikaners ideals, which the Apartheid system embodied, where they came from as a people and how they should be living their lives. Because this is aimed at and created by one very specific group of people, any theatre that went against these ideals or debunked the idea of White Afrikaners being the superior race who trumped all others, was censored and not permitted to be performed publicly. As Crow states, “By its very nature that system denied, in the name of so-called ‘separate development’¹, the common humanity which must be the basis of the open-ended potential for mutual expressiveness”(14). Through the policy of separate development, cultures

¹ The Separate Development policy was a series of laws which started as far back as 1927, and then gained more steam in the late 1940's during the Apartheid era. These laws relegated people of colour to areas outside of the cities in South Africa, to reserves called Bantustans, on the outskirts of major cities. The idea was to give these areas governing power over their own people so that they could develop completely separately from white people and vice versa.

where forced to negate their experiences of a multiracial and multicultural society and redefine themselves according to race: most importantly who they were in relation to the “Superior Afrikaner race.” Most of the theatre that arose out of the Apartheid period “...identified and protested against the political and social evils of the system” (Crow 15). There are two plays that do this pointedly: *The Hungry Earth* (1978) by Maishe Maponya and *Sophiatown* (1986) by Junction Avenue Theatre Company. *The Hungry Earth* is a resistance play that actively protests the migrant labour laws that black mine workers suffered under the Apartheid regime.

Sophiatown highlights a specific act that was enforced during Apartheid: the forced removal act, which forcibly removed families from their homes and relocated them to townships away from white people. Sophiatown was historically one of these towns and became known as Triomf (Triumph). Due to the censorship enforced by the Nationalist Party, it proved difficult for theatre aimed at expressing the trauma, politics, protests and social landscape of the Apartheid period, to be showcased at established theatres. Performances occurred in liberal universities, township halls, and at some smaller theatre companies such as the Market theatre in Johannesburg, where *Sophiatown* premiered (Kruger 103). Most Afrikaans theatre and Afrikaans writers were “largely exempt from censorship” as what they were writing was in the Afrikaans language and thus was assumed to uphold Afrikaner culture (Kruger 101). However, as will be discussed later, De Wet used this fact to her advantage to cleverly debunk the Afrikaner mythology of a superior race by using her privilege of an established Afrikaans voice in the cultural and theatrical community.

Although resistance theatre was censored and not favoured by the Apartheid government, it still found a place to be staged and viewed. What one has to remember is that it was difficult to control this resistance form of theatre because, as the Soweto Uprising of 1976² made

² The Soweto Uprising, also known as 16 June, were a series of protests led by high school students in South Africa that began on the morning of 16 June 1976. Students from numerous Sowetan schools began to protest in the

increasingly clear, white Afrikaners were by no means a majority population in South Africa. The sociocultural atmosphere changed with this event: protest became stronger and the protest against the system within the theatrical community mirrored this. The government was being over-run and protested by many different groups who had more base support than they did. There were white Afrikaners and sometimes white English South Africans backing the National Party government, a group of people that was by far smaller than non-whites who were affected by the Apartheid regime. Thus, there is no majority culture race or culture in South Africa. In fact, Orkin goes as far to state that he doubts whether there ever was, is or will be an “authentic majority voice” in South African theatre (49). The lack of a majority voice means that there was no clear direction for theatre to follow as South Africa began to aspire to democratic peace “Theatre in South Africa is more diverse but also more conflicted” (Kruger 21).

Beside Afrikaans theatre mentioned above, during the Apartheid era, especially in the 1950's and 1960's theatre had a distinct and clear goal: protest (Mazibuko 220). After this period, theatre began to prepare for democratic change in the 1980's (Mazibuko 220). With the African National Congress's (ANC) election into government in 1994, theatre was bound to change. South Africa was set to go through immense social, cultural and political challenges as it began to increase democratic participation on all fronts of life. Theatrical practice, like all cultural practices in South Africa, would also have to transform (Davis and Fuchs *Introduction* 4). It became inevitable that new forms would emerge. Before looking at this, it may help to briefly survey the forms of theatre that existed- and some of which continue to exist- before the change in 1994.

streets of Soweto in response to the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in local schools. (<http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/governance-projects/june16/june16.htm>)

As previously described, the types and forms of theatre that are found in South Africa are as varied as its cultural and social landscape. Not only were there a multiplicity of theatre forms, yet these forms also played multiple and different social and cultural functions (Mda 197). The two most prominent theatre forms were English theatre, which was “...characterized by a colonial mentality...” (Angrove in Mda 197) and Afrikaans theatre which aimed at fostering a cultural Afrikaner identity and increasing the Afrikaner literary base (Mda 197). I will discuss the latter more in-depth later as it is the tradition that Reza De Wet began writing in and became a part of. Besides these two giant traditions – there were many other theatre forms that developed and operated on the fringe of society. These are indigenous theatre modes of performance: praise poetry, dance performance, rituals and folk narratives, which varied between ethnic groups (Mda 198). In Natal (now Kwa-Zulu Natal) there was a thriving Indian theatre scene (Davis and Fuchs *Introduction* 8) and Township theatre.

Township theatre was a dominant theatre form for thirty years in South Africa (Mda 198). It derives its name and traditions from the places in which they occurred: the townships, to which people of colour were confined and forcibly removed to as per the Separate Development Policy which came into effect in 1959. This was certainly theatre that protested the injustices experienced during Apartheid, however, it was also a theatre of exploration, music, jazz and most notably community. Like 19th Century American Melodramas, township theatre was formulaic; it had archetypal characters and plots (Mda 199). Melodrama was perhaps the safest and best choice for this form of protest theatre due to the massive and often brutal amount of trauma and social distress that it portrayed (Kruger 104). One of the most important factors to note about this theatre form is that it was highly syncretic: it borrowed from both Western and indigenous theatre forms and was multilingual (Mda 200). *Woza Albert!* (1983), by Percy Mtwa,

Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon, was one of the first examples of a township play and became a strong model for the ones that followed (Simon 228). The play has a clear narrative line, stock characters and message like the melodramas described above (Balme *Theatre* 67). The play was based on the premise that the 2nd coming of Christ should happen in South Africa and it is through this story that the oppression, police brutality and poverty that many faced during the Apartheid era was exposed (Balme 67).

Another theatre form and process that began during the highly restrictive Apartheid period was workshop theatre. This process was a “successful strategy for overcoming one of the factors of apartheid, which was to make different people completely ignorant of the details of the lives of large sections of other groups in the country” (Kentridge in Davis and Fuchs *Interview* 145). People came together from all walks of life to explore theatre. It was a multiracial theatre process and form where renowned South African playwrights such as Maishe Maponya and Athol Fugard began and established their theatrical careers. Purkey describes the workshop space as “...a space where South Africans can momentarily leave the monster of apartheid behind them and meet as equals, without prejudice, to work creatively together” (156). In this creative process, many ideas were workshopped, explored and in some cases, where they weren’t shut down, performed for an audience. There was a very specific dramaturgy that developed out of this collaborative form that emerged from distinct and well-nourished relationships between actor/director/author as well as the collaborations between different races (Crow 15). Due to the collaborative nature of this process and form, this theatre technique became and is still used as a democratic means of working in theatre in the New South Africa (Crow 24). An example of a production, which was created using this workshopping process, (collating and exploring the ideas of many into a script) is being performed at Market Theatre in Johannesburg in 2015.

Cincinnati by Barney Simon and company, explores personal stories surrounding race, laws and relationships (Market Theatre).

The final theatrical trend that needs attention before describing the Afrikaans theatre tradition is the South African festival circuit. There have been multidisciplinary festivals in both the old and new South Africa, however, "...the role and the impact of arts festivals changed markedly after 1994" (Van Heerden 88). This was mostly because after the democratic elections which resulted in the ANC becoming the leading political party, some feared that Afrikaans, because it was not the majority language, would become a language of no use and the cultural identity tied into it would be lost (Van Heerden 88; Hauptfleisch *Event*. 186). Unfortunately, theatre and literature in this language is being publically boycotted by the ANC in South Africa today. Prior to the democratic elections, English and Afrikaans "... were used almost exclusively on festival stages", which in turn dictated the audience members that would attend these festivals (Van Heerden 91). The biggest and most well-known of these festivals, which still occur annually, is: The Grahamstown Festival (The Standard Bank National Arts festival). This Festival comprised mostly of Afrikaans and a few English acts during Apartheid, yet in Post-Apartheid South Africa, this festival becomes a multicultural arts hub. In the fledgling democracy, much work went into creating spaces for multiracial, multicultural and multilingual productions, yet it would take a long time to integrate these types of performances as well as attract multicultural audiences who had not previously been privy to these festivals (Van Heerden 91). One of the most significant factors to note about theatre after Apartheid is that the theatre now needed to deal with new "social and political realities": realities that are complex, stories that are complex and perhaps most importantly a more complex audience who had "new habits, needs and expectations" (Van Heerden 109) This was the case, not only for the white

performers and audiences, but even more pointedly for the artists and audiences whose voices were silenced during Apartheid: they now had a place to speak and had to configure and navigate a way to do so.

Reza De Wet emerged and was an integral part of Afrikaans theatre. A distinction that needs to be made is that Afrikaans is a language that emerged out of the Dutch settlement in the Cape in 1652 and people of Afrikaner culture speak this language. However, this Afrikaner culture consists primarily of White Afrikaans speakers not people of colour who spoke Afrikaans: they were excluded from this culture (Van Heerden 88). What is important to note here when speaking about the Afrikaner theatre tradition is that the “promotion” of this culture and language through theatre was not extended to coloured³ theatre practitioners or audience members for which Afrikaans was their native tongue (Kruger 102).

Afrikaans theatre was often used as a propaganda tool by the Apartheid government, and was thus very well-funded by the state, to establish the sense that Afrikaners were part of a “privileged cultural group” (Van Heerden 99). The National Party committed to “Afrikanerization” of the country: “national education is the cardinal task of theatre, to establish language, national sentiment... and the entire life of the nation” (Kruger 101). This “Afrikanerization” was meant for the white people of South Africa, who were said to develop separately from non-whites. It began with the translation of important English plays like those of Shakespeare. However, with the push for Afrikaner identity awareness during the 1940’s-1960’s, stories became more geared toward the struggle of the Afrikaner people and their nostalgia for

³ The name South Africans give to a person of mixed race: usually of white and black heritage.

“better times” with re-enactments of historically significant events like the journey of the Voortrekkers⁴ and the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck⁵ (Kruger 15).

Unlike most of the theatre created in the Apartheid period described above, Afrikaans theatre tended to stick to a more scripted and traditional form of playwriting unlike the workshop creation process (Hauptfleisch *Event* 187). The reason for this is because what was key in Afrikaans theatre was its specific use of the language. . It paid special attention to what cadence was used, from what region it originated and what ideas all of these conveyed (Hauptfleisch *Event* 187). This too, was important to Reza De Wet who began writing in Afrikaans, yet even when she wrote in English, insisted on the rhythm of the English dialect and the speech as being distinctly Afrikaans (De Wet *African* 17). Reza De Wet wrote *Diepe Grond* in 1985, which was a period during which the themes of Afrikaans drama shifted noticeably: Mazibuko classifies the 1980s as a period she labels as the “progressive culture” where most theatre practitioners were preparing for a new democratic country and culture (220).

These new themes, however, could be seen developing as early as the 1960’s with plays such as *Putsonderwater* (1962) by Bartho Smit and *Siener in die Suburbs* (1971) by P.G. Du Plessis (Kruger 102). These plays, like many of De Wet’s, explore “...the contradictions in the Calvinist precepts of (sexual) self-control...” and the isolation and alienation of the Afrikaner in the “...so-called Afrikaner republic...” due to the immense pressure created by the government for racial, religious and social purity of its people (Kruger 102). Depictions of sexual repression, deprivation, social isolations and oppressive Afrikaner patriarchy filled the works of playwrights

⁴ The Voortrekkers were Afrikaner emigrants during the 1830s and 1840s who left the Cape Colony (British at the time, but founded by the Dutch) moving into the interior of what is now South Africa in what is known as the Great Trek.

⁵ Jan Van Riebeeck was a Dutch colonial administrator who founded Cape Town, South Africa in 1652.

such as Fugard⁶, and Smit and later of course, Reza De Wet. *Diepe Grond* was staged thirty years after Smit's *Putsonderwater*, yet now it was being presented to a "more critical generation of Afrikaners" (Kruger 126).

Reza De Wet in the Afrikaans Theatre Tradition

De Wet was born and raised in the small town of Senekal in Free State South Africa and attended school in Bloemfontein. She stayed close to her roots and studied Drama and English literature at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, after which she embarked on a professional acting career and later pursued graduate studies (Krueger *Reza* 1-2). The rest of her life played out in Grahamstown at Rhodes University where she taught Drama and English before dying of leukemia in 2012 at age 60 (Krueger *Reza* 2). Although she is not as well-known overseas as playwrights such as Athol Fugard, she has in fact "...won more awards for her scripts than any other playwright in the history of South African letters" (Krueger *Reza* 1).

What makes De Wet markedly different from most of the contemporary theatre in South Africa is that she writes plays that are fairly traditional in structure and with content that is often not synonymous with the main theatrical trends (Krueger *Reza* 1). Although she is definitely part of the Afrikaans theatre tradition, her works are strongly influenced by Western theatre: she "...has been compared to that of Chekhov, Strindberg, Lorca and Genet; as well a Tennessee Williams" (Krueger *Reza* 1). Temple Hauptfleisch points out a number of specific factors that make Reza De Wet a playwright that is accepted "...beyond the boundaries of the Afrikaans

⁶ Although Athol Fugard wrote primarily in English, he spoke Afrikaans and came from an Afrikaner family. Thus, most of the people he writes about are Afrikaners. The difference is that he writes characters who can speak Afrikaans yet aren't necessarily white.

establishment...” (*Unwilling* 54). De Wet writes primarily in Afrikaans, is a woman playwright in a male dominated business and she writes social rather than political plays (*Unwilling* 54).

Firstly, although she writes primarily in Afrikaans, she has a very distinct and interesting way of using the language to her advantage as far as message and themes go. The way in which she uses the language to protest the Afrikaner Calvinistic Apartheid regime differed greatly from what the State wanted: to further the agenda, culture and language of the National Party. She uses the language as a way to express a specific standpoint, which I will discuss in detail later, on the danger of isolation and repression that the Afrikaner culture created. By writing in Afrikaans, she also avoided the censorship laws in theatre that were rife during Apartheid (Hauptfleisch *Unwilling* 54). However, as Krueger states, although she became known as an Afrikaans playwright, she also published twelve plays in English, as she sought to reach a wider audience and by no means wanted to “...become a figurehead for Afrikaner Nationalism” (*Reza* 2-3). The second point is quite self-explanatory: De Wet, although she doesn’t enjoy being labeled as such, is a distinguished female playwright in a theatrical tradition that was and still is highly male dominant (Hauptfleisch *Unwilling* 54).

The third point is more contentious. Hauptfleisch is of the opinion that she writes social rather than political plays, however, one cannot, as previously expressed by Fugard, separate politics from any South African story. What De Wet deals with are the social consequences and situations of a political regime that promulgated an ideology of Afrikaner superiority. Thus, by proxy, her work is inherently political. It warns of the social danger that comes with this political line of thinking. She differs from more overtly political writing, however, in *intention*. She does not write her plays with the intent of pursuing a political agenda or reinforcing one for that matter. Hauptfleisch describes her plays as being “[...] focussed on

specific socio-cultural issues related to her Afrikaner roots and her identity as a woman within that context, *not* on what appeared to be the burning political issues of the day” (*Unwilling* 56). De Wet writes with the intent of putting the domestic and social dangers and paradoxes on stage that have been born out of the oppressive system of Apartheid: not necessarily to protest it, but to expose it through multiple different realities. As Krueger states, “De Wet positions herself from within the world of the Afrikaner, and yet emphasizes the danger of trying to maintain an exclusive, isolationist culture” (Krueger *Keeping* 48).

Although De Wet writes about Afrikaners, she constantly acknowledges that she is influenced by “... African folklore and mythology which, she claims, inform every Afrikaner experience” (Krueger *Keeping* 48). She states: “I can only speak from an Afrikaans point of view, how close Afrikaners are brought up with African experience or black experience. It’s very close, there’s an enormous bond between these two tribes” (Krueger *Keeping* 59). In 2003, De Wet sees “a curious symbiosis” that has been fostered between black and Afrikaner culture: a sentiment that would not have been accepted under the strict policy of Apartheid (Krueger *Keeping* 48). Thus, as most playwrights working in South Africa, De Wet was caught up in the myriad of cultures that bled into each other even before Apartheid, then these cultures were forced into isolation during Apartheid, only to be thrown back together again after 1990 (Hauptfleisch *Unwilling* 54).

Another aspect of De Wet’s theatre that differs from other Afrikaans theatre, (and will be discussed in more detail later), is that she doesn’t seek to recreate reality onstage. Although influenced by realism, she seeks the “...re-enchantment of theatre which has become very pedantic”: stuck in narratives that attempt to mirror reality instead of recreate and discover new ones through abstracting real experiences and relationships from a specific standpoint

(Solberg in Krueger *Keeping* 57). She instead wishes theatre to be a transformational space in which new and alternate realities can be explored and mysteries uncovered (Solberg in Krueger *Keeping* 57).

Although the domestic situations in real places give her plays the mask of realism, there is something “off” about the situations that she presents that make it not so. The realism of many South African plays like those of Athol Fugard’s, (*Hello and Goodbye* (1965), *People are Living There* (1970), *Boesman and Lena* (1983) to name a few), mirrored South African society onstage in real situations, in worlds which function according to the rules of the society it mirrors. However, the stories that De Wet tells, although seemingly quite simple and straightforward (being classified as fairy tales, magic and Postmodern) Basson states that they are deceptive “...in the same way that the reflection of the sky in a pond with floating leaves is a pleasant illusion, masking a rich soup of rotting vegetation or worse,” (Krueger *Keeping* 57). This is most certainly the case in her play *Breathing In*: A mother and daughter who take refuge in an old barn offered to them by a soldier who helped them get their wagon out of a ditch, appear to have good intentions: they are repaying the Soldier back for his kindness by looking after the Soldier’s General who had been wounded, while he is out fighting. This illusion of a reciprocally kind situation is the perfect example of how a seemingly normal situation covers up a rotting secret that these women are keeping. The mother literally believes that they need to seek out the dying breath of a strong man to keep her daughter alive. The rules which they live by are surrounded by this fantastical truth and survival game which has become their reality (De Wet *Plays Two* 133-191). This exposes the magical Realism style in which De Wet writes: she introduces real characters, who are dealing with real problems, yet the way in which they deal with them are shrouded in

mystery and connected to outside influence that they are in opposition to. This is most certainly the case in *Crossing*, in which sisters Hermien and Sussie shape their lives around for filling the legacy of their mother: warning gold seekers not to cross the river due to the high risk of drowning in it. They are controlled by the river and their mothers' spirit, and they explore the spirit world themselves in order to find out the names of and bury the victims of the river, that they feel are their duty to put to rest (De Wet *Plays One* 61-107). All the worlds that De Wet creates seem to be governed by laws that only make sense in the context of these characters' minds even though they are present in spaces and places that resemble reality.

De Wet's preoccupation with theatre began at a young age. She watched her mother perform in Operettas and she also speaks of the magic of the circus enthralling her (Krueger *Reza* 2). It is not a surprise then, that she values a sense of play in both the way she approaches writing and the characters and situations in her scripts. De Wet told Riaan De Villiers "When you're small ... [t]here are so many possibilities. Then suddenly other norms are forced down on you and the rich inner world becomes impoverished" (Krueger *Reza* 2). This feeling of one's growth and desires being repressed by imposed social norms is a huge theme in *Diepe Grond (African Gothic)*, as well as the other two plays *Op dees Aarde (Good Heavens)* and *Nag, Generaal*, which make up a trilogy called *Die Vrystaat Trilogie (The Freestate Trilogy)*. This theme not only exists in this trilogy but in most of her plays. For example in her play *Missing*, mother and daughter, Miem and Meisie, spend their lives locked up in their house afraid of the outside world. The most pointed indication that the outside world is dangerous to their way of life is the way Miem gets angry when Meisie sneaks a peek at the circus outside- the music filtering into the house (De Wet *Plays One* 19).

Miem is trying to protect her daughter from what she believes to be secular, evil and corrupted people who will poison her daughter's mind.

She wrote another, very different trilogy, called *A Russian Trilogy*. This trilogy is evidence of her fascination with Russian playwright Anton Chekov (Krueger *Reza* 10-11). De Wet was first introduced to Chekov when she was fifteen: "...it seemed so magical and evocative. At the same time it seems familiar; it had the quality of memory for me..." (Krueger *Reza* 8).

One can definitely sense this feeling of 'familiarity' in her plays and the notion of memory is very present in *Diepe Grond*: the parents of these siblings are dead yet they keep their memory, personalities, rituals and beliefs alive by re-enacting them daily. In a more eccentric vein, De Wet believed that Chekov as well as her deceased grandmother were helping her as she wrote (Krueger *Reza* 2).

With reference to *Vrystraat Trilogie*, it is put forward that there are three themes that emerge from the trilogy:

- "...die **patriargie** binne die **Afrikanerhuisgesin**." ⁷
- "die **patriargie** binne die sfeer van die **Afrikanergodsdiens**." ⁸
- "die **patriargie** binne die konteks van die **Afrikanergeskiedenis**" ⁹ (Swanepoel in Van der Wal 21).

⁷ patriarchy in the Afrikaner immediate family

⁸ patriarchy in the atmosphere of Afrikaner religion

⁹ patriarchy in the context of Afrikaner history

The themes above are most certainly ones that De Wet would have been exposed to in her upbringing. Although these three themes are discussed in terms of the *Vrystaat Trilogie*, I would argue they are present in most of her plays. All three of these themes are certainly present in *Diepe Grond*: the siblings are still bound by the word of their father even after his death; Religion and its rules as put forward by God are a major source of fear, isolation and repression; and lastly, the way in which these siblings re-enact their family relations, is supposed to be how families are “correctly run” in the Afrikaner tradition. The sense of patriarchy is present in the figure of the father, the head of the household and God, the head of religion. Both are sentiments that Reza De Wet was privy to, having grown up in the Afrikaner tradition.

Apart from these thematic foci, it is also useful to examine her writing style itself. As stated previously, De Wet rejected Realism, which was and some may consider still is the dominant mode of theatrical representation in South Africa. In fact, she went further in this rejection: “Realism is just an illusion...it’s a distortion of reality.” For De Wet reality has more to do with the unseen “psyche and fantasy” (Krueger *Reza* 9). What this reveals is her feeling that human beings and more importantly the human experience cannot be reduced to only what can be seen in reality and represented by realism: there is a mythic quality to the very nature of our existence that she wishes to explore (Krueger *Keeping* 47). She delves deeper: “Instead of trying to mirror social reality, theatre, for her, should concern itself rather with the mysteries and rituals of “the unknowable” (Krueger *Keeping* 47). This results in the magical realism, as described earlier, that she employs.

De Wets plays are set in the past: in the 1930’s, during the Anglo–Boer war, during Apartheid (1950’s-1980’s), and in the case of her *Russian Trilogy*, in the first few decades of the nineteenth century (Krueger *Reza* 9). Although De Wet transports us to a time in the past, the

way she writes and how she positions these characters in relation to their surroundings, each other and their social interactions, makes the past feel like a “strangely familiar place” (Krueger *Reza* 9). The effect that this creates is that it allows the audience enough distance from the subject matter and time in which these stories take place, to take in the social message and story that is relevant to their own situations and lives.

She explores the “spanning tussen werklikheid en fantasie (of realisme en romantiek), en die reaksie op tradisionele Afrikanerwaardes en –ideologiee- teen n Vrystaatse plattelandse milieu”¹⁰ (Van der Wal 20). This tension that she explores is the state of most of her plays and not only does she react to traditional Afrikaner truths and ideologies in this specific location, yet she also proves how dangerous and repressive these ideologies and assumed truths can be in isolation. This also speaks to the strong connection that can be seen in her plays between the natural world- what is outside in the immediate environment (Africa) - and the domestic world, in which insularity and abidance by rules is paramount (Krueger *Keeping* 55). For example, in *Breathing In*, the sounds of nature, the gusts of wind and rain, and the sounds and smells of the farm, are very important in the play as they convey a sense of atmosphere and place: A desolated farm near the end of the Anglo- Boer War, where everything, including the weather breeds discontent.

De Wet’s plays “could be seen as grotesque parodies of staunch Afrikaner society” yet this was not so for her two English plays which, “are direct attacks on English colonialism in South Africa and its patronising attitude towards both Afrikaner and Black cultures” (Krueger *Reza* 3) Thus, the way in which she uses the English Language is similar to the way in which she

¹⁰ My translation. The relationship between reality and fantasy (of realism and romanticism) and its reaction to traditional Afrikaner values and ideals, against the background of the flat lands (usually farming communities) of the Free State.

uses Afrikaans. She uses both languages to satirize the very culture she uses linguistically: Afrikaans, to expose the oppression and isolation caused by the strict adherence to Afrikaner Calvinistic and racist values; and English to expose the injustices and the oppression caused by the colonial systems in South Africa (Krueger *Reza* 3). She uses Afrikaans to depict the way in which Afrikaner culture, when adhered to, shapes one's reality and experiences: she exposes "...the devastating effects of repression, and the paradoxical desire which the denial of the other arouses," (Krueger *Keeping* 47).

"Denial of the other" sparks another key theme in her work, which goes hand in hand with the syncretic relationship she sees existing between black tribes and Afrikaners. This syncretic relationship is subtle as it has developed over time as white South Africans of European descent adopted and learnt from the methods of survival and ways of life that they observed by coming into contact with black tribes. Although this relationship exists, white Afrikaners would not dare admit to having adopted the ways of people that they deem primitive. Thus, when the reality of this syncretic relationship collides with the superiority complex of the White Afrikaners, it breeds a fear that white culture will be tainted with ethnic elements and mixed romantic relationships. She seeks to "...demonstrate the consequences of a fear of amalgamation; a dread of hybridity" (Krueger *Keeping* 45). This was one of the key "fears" that drove the separate development policy during Apartheid. De Wet shows how absurd this policy was as it denied the obvious cultural exchanges and amalgamations that already existed between different ethnic groups in South Africa. These exchanges, whether they were from first contact, social interactions or working relationships in places like mines, proved that culture, especially the Afrikaner culture, does not and did not develop in isolation. Thus, by forcing cultures into isolation during Apartheid, (the white people in the cities and suburbs of South Africa and the

people of colour on the outskirts), the similarities encountered during the exchange between races are drowned out by repressive and suppressive beliefs and ideologies that different groups were forced to adhere to.

Before delving into a discussion on the Afrikaner family and Afrikaner Calvinism I would like to address De Wet's position as a woman and her political stand point. De Wet has, on numerous occasions, avoided being called a feminist playwright even if people see her as one (Krueger *Reza* 8). She is not concerned with a feminist argument: she simply seeks to create full characters that are undergoing human experiences and is "...more interested in creating a mood, a dark atmosphere in which to play" (Krueger *Reza* 8). It cannot be denied though, that De Wet's plays have a "sinister undertone of matriarchal domination" and that these plays carefully explore women in relation to men and vice versa: how their relationships develop, what rules these relationships are governed by and what they deny exploring in relation to one another due to overarching Afrikaner ideologies (Krueger *Reza* 7).

As already suggested, the work of Reza De Wet is by no means overtly political. She is often documented as not believing in writing to a political end, stating that she feels "terribly strongly that theatre should not be used as a political platform...it has to have integrity of its own ... it should reflect a personal vision" (Krueger *Reza* 10). The most clearly socio-political sentiments in her work come more from the thematic content and social position she writes from. The strongest theme that comes across as being political is the sense that "...in some way her work is about liberation from repression" (Krueger *Keeping* 57-58). There is also "a sense of creative freedom" in her writing when it comes to constructing alternate realities and satires of South African, mostly Afrikaner society (Krueger *Keeping* 57-58). Thus, although not overtly political, one can easily see how political themes and parallels can be drawn from her works.

The final two themes and arguably the most prominent in her work are Afrikaner Calvinism and the Afrikaner family and most pointedly, how these two are related to each other and interact. Afrikaner Calvinism developed out of three distinct religious traditions: Protestant Dutch Settlers, the French Huguenots and the Scottish ministers who were followers of John Knox (Van der Wal 23). Out of these influences came a very specific form of Calvinism that adhered to the insular and repressive Afrikaner hegemony that followed the principles of “...die nooit-gesede, die nooit-gehoorde, and die nooit-gesiene¹¹” (Van der Wal 22). This religion is governed by and premised on denial: in De Wet’s case particularly denial of sexual desire. There is also an obsession with purity, both sexually as well as socially, like mixing with people one is not supposed to (including incest, paedophilia and racial mixtures) which threatens the purity of one’s bloodline (Krueger *Keeping* 54).

The Afrikaner families that we encounter in De Wet’s plays are imbued with these values. The insularity of the families presented in her stories speaks both to the religious and social impurities they may encounter if they interact with people outside of their immediate families. If there are any indiscretions within the families themselves, they are covered up with “privacy masks” as there is a fear of disgrace and shame, which “permeates the family relationships” and seeks to threaten the appearance of purity (Krueger *Keeping* 52). An example of one of these masks is when the siblings in *Good Heavens (Op Dees Aarde)* constantly remind one another of their father’s legacy: owning and running the best Funeral parlour in town, following the way he taught them to behave and constantly restating his ideological teachings and beliefs to hide the disgrace and shame they feel has been brought on their family: one of the sisters, Minnie, had an abortion as she fell pregnant out of wedlock and another sister, Baby, ran

¹¹ Never to speak, never to be heard, never to be seen. [Hear no evil, See no evil, Speak no evil]

away with a man, abandoning her family and betraying their beliefs. Both the acts would be viewed as shameful (De Wet *Plays One* 81-128).

In her plays, the display of these situations and masks reveals the "...danger inherent in a repression of desire..." maintaining of appearance of purity in both the family and the Afrikaner Volk is of the utmost importance. De Wet achieves this through the subversion of the masks and "safe" insularity: "What is cloistered, nurtured and protected within the purity of the family, has by the end of the play, become the hallmark of perversity" (Krueger *Keeping* 56). An example of this in *Breathing In*: Through the mask of helping the General recover and allowing the soldier to become engaged to Annie, validating their relationship, the supposed good and noble intentions of the mother and daughter are revealed to be false as their goal is to kill a man in order to ensure Annie's survival: a perverse myth for which both mother and daughter are literally willing to kill in order to preserve.

This chapter has aimed at describing what theatre in South Africa looks like and more importantly, where Reza De Wet is positioned in this theatrical landscape. This overview has been given as context for the upcoming chapter: a close reading and discussion of Reza De Wet's first play *Diepe Grond*. I will explore its relevance, reception, and importance in using the stage as a transformational vehicle to describe, and attempt to "try on" the alternate and syncretic realities that South Africans are faced with.

Chapter Two: *Diepe Grond*: Reza De Wet during Apartheid

In her play *Diepe Grond* Reza De Wet subverts and alienates the idea of a white monolithic cultural identity by placing white Afrikaners in a syncretic cultural setting: their primary contact is with a black woman who is their caregiver. Through the behaviour, actions and personality traits of the characters, the playwright succinctly displays the damage a repressive and oppressive identity category can cause when forced upon people who inherently interact and are influenced by other African cultures. *Diepe Grond*, can be considered a great tool for identity experiments and cultural observation: De Wet used the accepted authoritarian language of the time (Afrikaans) to portray subverted and syncretic Afrikaner identities. Instead of using Afrikaans to support oppressive and isolationist Afrikaner culture, De Wet used it to dispel the myths of the White Afrikaner identity.

When an English version of this play, under the title *African Gothic*, was published and performed in 2007, it still had this effect. It continued to expose a white syncretic identity in an atmosphere where the previous racial and cultural categories of Apartheid still existed and were being enforced as reality for some. Continuing the research on this play will help South Africans, black and white, whose constructed identities and monolithic ideas of culture have denied the inherent syncretic relationship between cultures. The acknowledgement of this syncretism has the ability to open up new possibilities for these cultures to exist peacefully in the same cultural, societal and temporal epoch. *Diepe Grond* allows one to step back from one's current, learnt and constructed identity as a South African. It guides one to explore new realities: ones that allow for the radical acceptance of the inherent cultural hybridity in contemporary South African society.

In South Africa it is, and may always be, a struggle to define one's identity. Being a South African is not one thing but a multiplicity of cultural influences and hybrid histories that

mix to form something new and unique in every individual citizen. The exploration of this constant identity struggle is one that is not being explored fully enough in the theatre, especially where white South Africans are concerned. Apartheid, the ideals it embodies and the aftershock of confusion it created, in assuming a white monolithic Afrikaner culture and language ever existed, denies the hybridity and plethora of cultural and spiritual influences that constituted this identity.

The Afrikaans people in South Africa are descendants of Dutch immigrants who colonized South Africa in the 1600's, and thus they in themselves, are a people who have created a culture from foreign colonial roots. The relationship between the white Afrikaners and the black African natives is further complicated by these colonial roots extending themselves into the policy of Apartheid, where this supposed 'superior white race' dominated and subordinated African natives. Apartheid enacts its own form and brand of colonial oppression. In the case of Apartheid, the biggest colonial action takes place through epistemic violence and physical relocating of native peoples. The goal is to keep "the savage" at bay and use them as cheap labour for the benefit of one group. I would classify this play as one that resists this violence and system through subversion of language and culture.

As the previous chapter states, Reza De Wet began using the Afrikaans language and her cultural experience in the Afrikaner community, to write plays that make an attempt to describe and portray the Afrikaner cultural syncretism and the effects of many years of repressing notions of hybridity in the name of a fictional monolithic Afrikaner identity (Krueger Keeping 45-49). To discuss this focus of De Wet's work and the overall search for identity in South Africa, I will be exploring her play *Diepe Grond*, which was first published in 1986. After a brief synopsis of the work, an explanation of isolationist Afrikaner culture, identity subversion, and cultural

syncretism will follow in reference to the play. I would also like to explore the relevance of the black woman in the play as the caregiver and, at points, controller and overseer of the action throughout and how this speaks of cultural syncretism: how her presence proves that this play provides a lens through which one can see how syncretic identities are inherent in South Africa. Through this analysis, I wish to explore the notion that by exercising the identities portrayed in *Diepe Grond*, one may be able to break the cycle of previous cultural and religious Afrikaner repression and begin to transform oneself (referring here to the audience) through revelation and recognition. Many black cultural traditions deal with the mythical and ritualized elements of culture (Jamal in Krueger Keeping 47). *Diepe Grond* is a parody of South African writer, Alba Bouwer's mythical farm stories, *Stories van Rivierplaas* (Krueger Keeping 50). Thus, the mythical and ritual elements of Afrikaner story telling are inherent in the play and can be said to have a parallel exchange with the same tradition of storytelling in Black South African culture.

Diepe Grond provides a "[...] stinging critique of a stable Afrikaner identity by portraying two incestuous children who respond to years of Calvinistic oppression by murdering their parents" (Krueger Keeping 50). The play takes place on an Afrikaner farm homestead where siblings, Soekie and Frikkie, live in the home that belonged to their parents, which they inherited after their mysterious death, later revealed as an act of parenticide on their part: The parents attempted to stop their "indecent", incestuous, sexual behaviour and were killed as a result. Although they are portrayed as adults, their childhood nanny still lives with them and takes care of them: a powerful and well respected Sotho Woman, Ou Alina. The siblings live in highly dilapidated and minimalistic conditions as they have traded all their belongings for essentials like oil and toilet paper so that they don't have to leave the isolation and 'safety' of their homestead. These siblings spend their days sleeping and their evenings digging for water

(as there is a severe drought) and enacting and re-enacting ritualized stories and actions involving their parents. At times, the siblings adopt the persona of their parents reprimanding one of the children for a specific “sin”. The most important ritual re-enacted is the killing of their parents, where the forth character, a lawyer from the city of Bloemfontein named Grove, becomes the sacrifice for the ritual. We enter the world of these characters on an extraordinary day: there is a visitor, the lawyer, who has come to finalize legal matters regarding their Aunt’s part ownership of the farm. Once Grove has been admitted into this pure isolation and exposed to the physical and psychological conditions that these siblings inhabit, he cannot possibly be permitted to leave. He thus becomes the perfect sacrifice for their highly specific and ultimate cleansing ritual.

Before delving into exactly how De Wet achieves this effect of subversion and weaved syncretism, it may be useful to describe what the Pure Afrikaner culture was packaged as by the Apartheid government. Henrik Verwoerd (1901-1966), who was Prime Minister of South Africa from 1958 -1966 at the height of Apartheid, attempted to promote a white Afrikaner elite positing that Afrikaner culture developed and was constructed in “[...] isolation from other cultural influences” (Krueger *Keeping* 48). This statement reflected that the white Afrikaner was pure and not tainted by what he deemed to be “black danger” (Die Swart Gewaar). This culture was seen as the moral pillar of society, an “[...] ethnic and religious minority [...]” in fact deemed by the Afrikaner nationalists as “[...] ‘God’s chosen people’, surrounded by ‘black heathens’ [...]” (Purkett and Burgess qtd. in Krueger *Keeping* 48). This was a complete construction: a created and built up identity bought into by many, and still bought into by some in contemporary society. For example, Bok van Blerk, who is a white Afrikaner singer, wrote a song about a Boer general in the Second Boer War, Koos De La Rey: this song reinforces that

this ‘blessed’ group of people, White Afrikaners, need a strong leader who fights for their ideals and culture. It also serves to remind South Africans that Afrikaner culture is still alive and being fought for (Van der Waal 68).

Krueger explains that it is impossible to assume that Afrikaner culture is one that developed in isolation: since the Dutch arrival in South Africa in the 1600’s, the two cultures, African and European, cannot have remained completely detached from one another (*Experiments* 148). The idea of “pure Afrikaner culture” assumes that it developed and continues to develop in isolation. However, as this play suggests, the cultures are so melded that attempting to maintain cultural isolation and the idea of a pure identity, becomes detrimental, because of the inherent hybridity that is being denied. It is thus easy to see, how problematic trying to establish ‘unity of self’ and identity in South Africa is, when such identity confinements and descriptions were law (Krueger *Experiments* 4).

The fact is, as Hofmeyer rightly posits, there is no such thing as a pure white Afrikaner culture: “[...] it is incorrect to assume that Afrikaners have ever been a monolithic volk. [...] notion of a unified Afrikaner people was in many ways an artificial construction encouraged by the deliberate creation of a nationalising Afrikaner literature and [he] writes that as late as the 1900’s some multiracial communities of Afrikaners could be found” (Krueger *Keeping* 49). This construction is highly problematized in *Diepe Grond*: the dangers of this isolation and obsession with purity are exposed. Even when the Afrikaner culture is kept in isolation, as is the culture of the siblings who have hardly any contact with the outside world, it is still exposed to African culture. This fact is exemplified in *Diepe Grond* through the siblings’ interaction with their caregiver and adviser: their black nanny, Alina.

The most pointed way that De Wet shows Afrikaner purity to be a construction is by showing that these identities can be subverted due to their instability and artificial nature. The reason that this play in particular created a stir was because of, “[...] the degree to which familiar identity structures, such as the traditional Afrikaner family on a farm, were subverted” (Krueger *Keeping* 50). The degree of subversion is even acknowledged by the lawyer, Mr. Grove, when he enters the Cilliers residence. He questions the siblings as to how they live in such horrible seemingly poverty stricken conditions (De Wet *Diepe* 23-25). He does not understand what they are surviving on: “Ek wil graag weet hoe u dit bekostig om so hier aan te bly sonder om ‘n oes op te lewer. [...] Het u ‘n ander inkomste?”¹² (*Diepe* 23). This exposes key points about the constructed nature of Afrikaner identity: Grove’s reaction proves that the common idea of Afrikaner culture and identity as described above is not actualized in the siblings’ reality. This family has followed all the “rules” of the culture, they speak the Afrikaans language, live on an Afrikaner homestead, and have kept themselves away from society due to fear of “contamination”. However, they are far from what Grove considers pure, due to the way in which they live. Grove continues to state that they live in scandalous conditions: selling all their possessions just to get by when they have a farm they should be taking care of and can profit from:

Grove: “U moet tog besef dat dit nie so kan voortgaan nie! Wanneer u al die meubels verkwansel het, wat bly dan oor? Waar sal u dan geld kry om lewensbenodighede mee te bekom? [...] Dit is ‘n skande dat u net hier sit en geen poging aanwend om die situasie te verbeter nie”.¹³ (*Diepe* 27)

¹² I would like to know how you afford to live here without yielding a harvest. Do you have any other income? “

¹³ “You must realize that you can’t go forward like this. Once you have bartered all your furniture, what is left? Where are you going to get the money to pay for life’s necessities? It is a scandal that you are sitting here not even attempting to better the situation”

What does this say about the development of the Afrikaner culture? What is inherent about white Afrikaners that keep them “above” impoverishment? As De Wet proves: nothing. In fact, the only reason they are surviving in these impoverished conditions is due to the intervention of their black- African maid: Alina. She makes sure they are fed, and get out of bed each night: She comforts them when their irrational fears consume them. The only thing that these individuals do to pass time is highly influenced by the African tradition of invoking the ancestors through ritual practice and sacrifice with the aim of purification (De Wet 50).

Frikkie’s hostile attitude toward Grove is the second important aspect of this idea that the Afrikaner culture is constructed: they do not hold outsiders to their “way of life” in very high regard. What this essentially points to is that “[...] Afrikaner culture is insular, mistrusting of outsiders and that this desperate desire for purity can become an obsession” (Krueger *Keeping* 56). The obsessive desire for this insular purity is further exemplified in the excessive and constant digging for water that the siblings engage in: they dig for water so that they can be cleansed of their sins. Soekie states this goal of their incessant digging after their highly sacrificial and ritualized killing of Grove “[...] as die water uitspruit vanonder uit die grond... [...] sal dit soos ‘n vloed deur die huis spoel...en dit sal alles saamspoel...als...Ma se kisklere en Pa se manel, die sambok, die donskombers, die dekens...als, Pappie, als[...]”¹⁴(De Wet 53). Of course, we never see this happen: freedom that comes with cleansing. This absence of cleansing may lead one to believe that there is nothing to be cleansed as the purity that these characters are seeking, the ideals and values which their parents claimed to be correct and pure, can never be actualized, because this purity of existence and isolated culture does not in fact exist.

¹⁴“...when the water sprays out of the ground...it will rinse the house like a flood... and it will clean everything with it... everything... Mom’s chest of clothes, and Dad’s suit, the eiderdown, the blankets, everything, daddy, everything”

I would argue that the way in which De Wet portrays the inherent constructed nature of the Afrikaner identity is through subversion of the expectations of what should constitute a typical Afrikaner family. This concept of subversion will be discussed in detail later with specific reference to *Diepe Grond*, yet on the whole, the effect of this subversion is what allows for the recognition of this process through which identity should be constituted: the subversion transports the audience, “[...] into unfamiliar territory [...]” which evokes an uncanny element of alienation and distance (Krueger keeping 47). Thus, the audience are faced with an image of the Afrikaner which seems oddly familiar: they are speaking Afrikaans (the dominant and preferred language of the government and most likely the audience) and living in the right place. However, their actions are perverted and seem out of place which allows for just enough recognition for the audience to relate to the characters but creates enough distance, for them from their reality, in order to examine their identity construction with some degree of objectivity (Krueger *Experiments* 26). In *Diepe Grond*, although the characters speak Afrikaans, live in a traditional Afrikaner farm and are born of Afrikaner parents, their actions of parenticide and their morose living conditions taint the “purity” of their assumed Afrikaner identity. This technique of alienation that De Wet uses allows the audience enough physical and emotional distance, which allows a specific acknowledgment of their (the audience) created identity in relation to the identities being portrayed onstage (Krueger *Experiments* 26).

Through the detailed portrayal of the siblings’ mental state and their ritualized actions, De Wet exposes the “[...] danger of trying to maintain an exclusive and isolationist culture [...]” (Krueger *Keeping* 48), an overriding theme that will be discussed in detail. Krueger states that there are still, in 2007, many who cling to the “[...] categories of identity previously established under apartheid [...]” (*Experiments* 4). Thus, the idea of a pure white Afrikaner race, that exists

separately and in isolation from the rest of the country, is a principle and way of life that is very much still alive in contemporary South African society. On the other hand, we have white and black South Africans who are trapped in this post-apartheid hangover period, who are also desperately attempting to construct a “[...] unity of self [...]” out of the fractured and multicultural society into which they were born and brought up in (Krueger *Experiments* 4). What this play allows, is a removed analysis of subjective identity construction and provides an example of how South Africans need to embrace the syncretic nature of their identities to avoid the repression, obsession and isolation that comes with trying to preserve the ideology of a “pure” culture and race. Krueger posits that “[...] in order to be free it may be necessary to abandon the pursuit of who we think we are” (*Experiments* xv).

With this in mind, it needs to be stressed that this play was written in 1986: a period in theatre where artists were trying to write more politically balanced plays as the Apartheid government was starting to crumble. What this meant was that many would be questioning their established identities constructed through and in relation to the ideals of this government. Playwrights like De Wet used theatre as a vehicle to explore what this would mean for South African society: how the past fear of hybridity needed to be addressed as Separate Development laws would soon be abolished; how to navigate the fact their identities were tied into the National Party and their promotion of the Superior Afrikaner race which was being exposed as oppressive to the point that it needed to be overthrown. White Afrikaners had to start recognizing what similarities they shared with other cultures and races in South Africa and the stage was a great place to be exposed to what this discovery would look like. The subversion of identity and the exposure of the danger of Afrikaner puritanical isolation in *Diepe Grond*, allows one the distance to do so.

Before I delve into a detailed reading of *Diepe Grond*, I would like to describe and identify a few terms which operate as useful theoretical frameworks when situating this play in a greater conception of South African culture and theatre. These theories are: Multicultural theatre, Intracultural theatre and Syncretic theatre. Patrice Pavis describes multicultural theatre as theatre that incorporates the “[...] cross influences between various ethnic or linguistic groups in multicultural societies [...]” (*Intercultural* 8). Because this play takes place in South Africa, which is a multicultural society due to the diversity of races, languages and ethnicities in South African society, and the fact that two different cultures and races are present on stage, Afrikaner and Sotho, I would definitely classify *Diepe Grond* as a piece of multicultural theatre. In *Diepe Grond*, Alina represents the voice of the Sotho culture, Grove the supposed pure Afrikaner, and the siblings represent the voice of a new generation of Afrikaners who have to start learning to accept other cultures. However, they struggle to marry this with how pervading and rigid the ideals of their parents are. Although both these cultures are present, denoting a multicultural element, the way in which these two cultures interact, instead of exist in isolation, makes it equally or perhaps more, an example of Intracultural Theatre.

In their article “Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis”, Lo and Gilbert define Intracultural Theatre as a specific element or form of theatre, which “[...] denote cultural encounters between and across specific communities and regions within a nation state” (38). The encounter between the Sotho caregiver and the Afrikaner ‘children’ make *Diepe Grond* an example of Intracultural theatre: these two cultures certainly encounter each other in the same temporal and physical space (the nation state), feeding off of each other: creating a truly hybridized cultural environment. However, this encounter develops beyond just the meeting of two cultures. They interact to the point where boundaries between the two are no longer

recognizable: there is a disappearance and reappearance of both cultures in the simultaneous presence, interaction and assimilation of the two, creating new cultural identities and forms. It is due to this degree of interaction that I would frame this play most pointedly as an example of Syncretic Theatre.

The word Syncretism derives its meaning from the Greek concept of *synkretismos*: “a merger of communities (Krueger *Experiments* 143). The term Syncretic theatre was coined by Christopher Balme, as the “[...] creative interpretation of heterogeneous cultural material resulting in the formation of new configurations” (Pavis *Intercultural* 9). The new configuration, which De Wet explores in *Diepe Grond*, is a result of the cultural subversion of her characters and the presentation of their identities as containing multiple influences instead of a stable recognizable one. The alienation effect that this subversion causes, as explained earlier, is a direct result of syncretism: the melding of different cultural elements that she explores. The syncretic elements of the play that exist in both Black and Afrikaner culture include the invocations of rituals, the belief in the unknown and the power of storytelling (Jamal qtd. in Krueger *Experiments* 47). These definitions prove useful when looking at the play and how this multiculturalism, intraculturalism and most pointedly syncretism is highly visible in the work.

Taking a step away from multiculturalism and syncretism, the Apartheid policy created an obsession with trying to keep the supposed “pure identity” of white Afrikaners from being influenced by other cultures. Krueger states that “[...] Afrikaner culture is insular and mistrusting of outsiders and that this desperate desire for purity can become an obsession” (Krueger *Keeping* 56). What is ironic and tragic about this obsession, is that nothing can give these people “purity” as that, in itself, is a construct that the siblings have bought into. However, the positive way to look at this statement is that these siblings attempt to be cleansing

themselves, (through ritual) and their surroundings that constitute their constructed identity. This however, is not seen in the play. The third way in which this sentiment is expressed is in the mistrust the siblings have of Grove. The obsession for the purity of identity presupposes the fear of hybridity. In this case Grove is the other “tainting” their created culture and reality.

There are two images in the play, which express this fear and sentiment. The first image, is when Soekie describes the Dahlias that grow in their garden: She describes dahlias of many colours, yet remembers the white ones being taller than the rest and the most beautiful. “Maar die wittes was die grootste... in die donker het hulle geblink soos sterre.”¹⁵(De Wet *Diepe* 18). This brings up two images: firstly, that the white Dahlias are in some way more beautiful and better than the dahlias of other colours and secondly, when put against a dark background they shine. This can be read as highly allegorical symbols: the white dahlias being the “Superior white Afrikaner race standing head and shoulders above people of colour and outshining the dark: which can be read as a symbol for black South Africans. However, what is interesting about this image is twofold: although the white dahlias are bigger, they are still grown from the same soil as the others. White Afrikaners come from the same soil, South Africa, as people of colour. Thus, they develop side by side in relation to each other. The white Dahlias, i.e. the white Afrikaners however, at this point in history, are the ones that are more nourished. The second aspect of this image that is revealed later, is how De Wet mixes these dahlias with the image of black hair: the two are intertwined when Frikkie describes his wet dream. “En toe sien ek haar hare, Ma-donker hare... Dit het orals om haar gele tussen die dahlias en sover as wat ek kon sien”¹⁶ (De Wet *Diepe* 36). Firstly, we have dark hair mixing with white dahlias and her white

¹⁵ But the white ones were the biggest.... In the dark they shone like stars.

¹⁶ And then I saw her hair, Mom- dark hair... It lay all around her... between the dahlias and as far as I could see.

skin. Secondly, the fact that Frikkie is being scolded by his mother for this sinful dream, suggests that this mixing image is a sin: hence highlighting the fear of hybridity. This dream also highlights the obsession with sexuality and the law forbidding sexual contact with black people. What is interesting about *Diepe Grond*, is that race is never overtly mentioned: it is only adhered to through allegory and metaphor. The second image that evokes this fear of hybridity is when Soekie questions who the blood, from a mosquito that she kills, belongs to (De Wet *Diepe* 42-43). This blood could be the blood of any one in the room: Alina the Sotho woman, Grove the ideal Afrikaner or the siblings- the new generation of Afrikaners. What this alludes to is one of two things: it could be a mixture of all of their blood in the mosquito which emphasizes that all cultures in South Africa come from the same place, or it could mean that the identity of the blood is unknown. This second point would not be important if it were not for Soekie's following action: she licks the blood. This makes Grove grimace and directly refers to how literal "blood mixing" was feared by White Afrikaners during the Apartheid era (De Wet *Diepe* 42-43)

What De Wet does by exposing the obsession with purity that comes from the belief that cultures develop in isolation and thus are unable to be influenced by other South African cultures is, give people a cautionary tale as to the "[...] danger of trying to maintain an exclusive and isolationist culture" and "[...] warns one of the danger that comes with repressing desire through adaptation of ideologies" (Krueger *Keeping* 48). The way in which she achieves this warning is through a form of resistance to the dominant culture: subverting the identities of the characters.

By displaying these subverted characters, De Wet also exposes the hybridity and syncretic nature of white Afrikaner identity: These siblings are clearly influenced by their black nanny, as she is the only person that they interact with on a daily basis, who they respect and believe to have their best interests at heart. Krueger states that "Talk of an Afrikaans identity

arising out of this kind of mixture is a radical departure from the identity mooted by Hendrik Verwoerd who encouraged a view of Afrikaner history in Africa as having taken place in isolation from other cultural influences” (*Keeping* 48). One has to acknowledge at this point, that although the siblings (part of the dominant culture) are being changed and influenced by Ou Alina (part of the subordinate culture) that the precolonial culture, the culture of Ou Alina, is also being changed by the culture that is in power. Thus, her African identity is also syncretic in nature: she knows how to speak and understand Afrikaans: she in fact used the fact that she can speak the language to establish her authority with the children and guide them through survival. She thus takes on the language of the “oppressor” along with its culture and environmental significance and uses it to empower herself in her relationship with the siblings. Ou Alina is a native Sotho speaker: this is evidenced by the fact that she sings in Sotho at the end of the play with ease, as opposed to the broken Afrikaans in which she speaks to the children. De Wet also captures the Sotho accent in the way in which Alina speaks Afrikaans. The importance of the way this subversion manifests itself in the play is that it exposes many of the syncretic relationships and influences that exist between and within both the cultures of the white South African and the black South African. The most important area of observation in which the siblings’ syncretic identity is made visible is through their relationship with their black nanny, Alina, which will be discussed in further detail, as I believe this character deserves to be highlighted more specifically than the other elements of the play that expose a possible Afrikaner/Black syncretic identity.

Beside the syncretism described above, there are very specific parallels between African and Afrikaans culture exposed by De Wet in *Diepe Grond*. Jamal states that, “Many black cultural traditions deal with mythical and ritualized elements of culture,” (Krueger *Keeping*

47). The most pointed way that this is evident in the play is through the children re-enacting the ritual of killing their parents when Grove visits. The way in which rituals and the myth of the ancestors is invoked is via the children adopting their parents' persona at various moments throughout the play. The siblings also literally evoke the spirits of their parents by looking at their dead bodies under the floorboards, where they "put them away" preceding their ritual as to ensure their presence (De Wet Diepe 50). A tradition that these two cultures have in common and thus, naturally influence and inform one another is the tradition of storytelling. In order to keep their history and identity alive, the children constantly re-enact and share stories from their past. This nostalgic re-enactment is also a great indicator that the siblings are traumatized by their actions and their past and need to remind themselves every day as to the reasons they had to kill their parents. In many cultures, stories are told in order for the past not to be forgotten: either for the sake of nostalgia for a better time before trauma and tragedy occurred, or to remind one of how the trauma that was and is being experienced (in the case of the siblings' identity crisis) cannot be repeated. The play as a whole "[...]describe(s) a curious symbiosis which she [De Wet] sees as having developed between the Afrikaner and black cultures of South Africa, an encounter which has already lead to richly syncretic amalgamations" (Krueger *Keeping* 48).

The person who most fully embodies the syncretic relationship between White Afrikaner and Sotho culture is the black nanny: Ou Alina. The most postcolonial and syncretic aspect of this play is the fact that this white homestead is run by a black woman. De Wet develops the relationship between the siblings and Ou Alina from her own experience growing up: her black nanny made her, "[...] realise many new realities [...] you make it a part of you in which case it is unforgettable and it forms you utterly," (De Wet in Krueger *Keeping* 48). Black nannies have had a huge influence on white Afrikaner children and still do to this day. These children often

spend more time with their nannies than with their parents and in the case of *Diepe Grond*, Ou Alina has literally replaced the siblings' parents.

One of the first clues that hints that the characters' cultural behaviours are influenced by Africa, the country and the people, is the importance the playwright places on conveying the spirit of the environment in which they are bound to: A White Afrikaner farm in South Africa. At the top of the play the stage directions state the following: "Byklanke speel 'n belangrike rol in hierdie stuk [...] hoendergeluide vervang met Afrika se naggeluide"¹⁷(De Wet 9-10). This strongly suggests that these sound effects -"Byklanke" en "geluide" - are directly connected to and influence what happens in the play. This place is distinctly African: even if you behave in a completely European way, and force a way of life other than the one the natives live, you cannot escape the influence of other cultural groups, ways of life and forces of nature that make up the cultural and social topography of the country. There are no records of what this sounded like in production. However, one can imagine that this set the atmosphere and tone of a staged production: a sort of omnipresence. The sounds of South Africa: the Afrikaner homestead and the jackals howling as they stalk their prey. These realities are inescapable. There is a sense of claustrophobia: the siblings are confined to the one room in the house. This is the space where all the seen action takes place. This sense of being surrounded by sound, could increase this feeling of claustrophobia and isolation. Another image that comes to mind, is this room being the eye of the storm and, outside of it, danger: Hence they cannot leave as the siblings do not want the reality of South Africa to impose on their own created one.

¹⁷ "Sound effects play an important role in this piece. [...] chicken noises which are then substituted by the night sounds of Africa"

In this same vein, De Wet, who as an Afrikaner girl grew up with a black nanny, similar to the siblings in the play, states that Afrikaners have "...an understanding of a kind of myth, the magical thinking that has been integral to the black experience in Africa. But then tinged with a more European consciousness" (Krueger *Keeping* 48). The "magical thinking" which De Wet is referring to here, is the way in which black South Africans evoke spirits, read bones and create potions, which are believed to help cure and prevent disease and they perform very specific rituals in order to get something they need. Sangomas (South African witch doctors) often evoke the spirits of the ancestors that they believe are mythically powerful and can guide them through certain situations, help them create potions and read people's futures in their bone throwing readings. Not only do sangomas evoke the spirits of the ancestors, but many different African tribes have a strong respect for spirits that have passed into another world and truly believe that they influence their current existences. The way in which this understanding of myth, ritual and the type of power that they both invoke/evoke is seen through the type of "[...] imaginary realm [...] that these characters so often inhabit and embody instead of simply presenting a [...] lost reality" (Krueger *Experiments* 150). When Soekie and Frikkie 'transform into' their parents, or younger versions of themselves, they place themselves in a dream world of metaphors in which they strongly believe. Soekie adopts the voice and stature of her mother as she and Frikkie re-enact the first time Frikkie received a ritualistic punishment from his father for having a wet dream. Frikkie, on the other hand transforms into a younger version of himself, cowering and obeying his 'mother'. The fact that these rituals of punishment, storytelling and sacrifice are enacted daily, shows the parallels between white Afrikaner South Africans and Black South Africans with regards to how they both incorporate rituals and storytelling as components and defining factors of their identities. They are rituals of respect for those who have passed: they do

things just as their “Ma and Pa” used to, even wearing their clothes (De Wet *Diepe* 13-15).

However, in performance, there is most certainly a touch of humour that can be seen in these “adult children” adopting the personas of their parents: the actors are constantly and suddenly flipping between voices and stature and when they wear the clothes that belonged to their parents, they clearly do not fit (De Wet *Diepe* 14-16). Thus, the audience is presented with adults playing dress up, embodying their dead parents by adopting their statures and voices and absurdly trying to fit into their clothes. Although morbid, the absurdity of their “games” is quite humorous.

The other way in which this ritualistic story telling shares a syncretic relationship with African culture is that it stresses the importance of oral culture to keep tradition alive. Is this oral tradition a strictly Afrikaner or a strictly Black South African ritual or is the type of storytelling engaged in similar between cultures? These are the type of questions that De Wet brings to the surface in this play in order to problematize the notion of a monolithic Afrikaner culture. There are two aspects of the storytelling that highlight the “Afrikaner history” and beliefs that their parents passed onto them: The first is that they tell each other stories and enact these stories in order to look back to the time before they became “tainted” by committing parenticide. Soekie tries to entice her brother to enact stories with the intention of evoking this type of nostalgia for a past purer time: “Wil jy nie speel nie, Frikkie”¹⁸ (11). The second aspect to the story telling is the desperate attempt to cling onto specific ideologies they were brought up with. For example, when Soekie and the lawyer are left alone, the lawyer shows her pictures of his family. When he does this, Soekie explains to Grove something her mother taught her. Soekie wishes to be pretty: “Ek wens ek het ook mooimaakgoed gehad- ‘n witgepoeiderde gesig in ‘n bloedrooi mond...

¹⁸ “Do you not want to play, Frikkie”

Maar dis duiwelsdinge daardie “¹⁹(22). However, although this is what she is telling Grove she believes as truth, she proves this Afrikaner viewpoint false: Soekie, a woman covered in dirt and wearing her mother’s old church dress, a “good Afrikaner girl” who supposedly doesn’t give into temptation, is attempting to seduce the lawyer. This is again, the perfect example of how the isolation, oppression and repression of these siblings enforced on them by the ideology of the Afrikaner monolithic culture, forces them to “act out” in dangerous ways: seduction, killing and human sacrifice is the only way to exercise their base impulses which are constrained within this constructed identity.

Another very strongly suggested reason for these siblings “acting out” is due to the sexual abuse and oppression that they experienced when their parents were alive. The most obvious indicator of the type of sexual abuse that occurred is the way Soekie remembers interacting with her father. In one of the “games” that Soekie and Frikkie play, they re- enact how Soekie would sit on her father’s lap before going to bed:

Frikkie: Dis goed, my kind. Gaan slaap nou.

Soekie: Kan ek ‘n drukkier kry, Pappie?

Frikkie: Nou goed, my kind. (*Gee haar ‘n ongemaklike drukkier*)

Soekie: En ‘n soentjie, Pappie?

Frikkie: Goed, my kind. (*Gee haar ‘n piksoentjie*)

Soekie: Nog ‘n soentjie, Pappie!

Frikkie: Nou goed, my kind.

(*Hulle kyk na mekaar. Dan gigue hulle en val op die bed*) ²⁰ (37)

¹⁹ “I wish I had, had makeup- a white powdered face, and a blood-red mouth... But those things are of the devil. “

²⁰ Frikkie: That’s good, my child. Now go and sleep

Soekie: Can I get a small hug, Daddy?

Frikkie: Okay, my child. (*Gives her an uncomfortable hug*)

Soekie: And a kiss, Daddy?

Frikkie: Okay, my child. (*Gives her a peck*)

This excerpt speaks to a number of things: firstly, it suggests that Soekie may have been starved of physical attention. Secondly, the only place that she could seek this attention is with the only men she knew: her father and her brother. This game and the way the siblings break it off before the next kiss, implies that the kissing continued between father and daughter. Lastly, the fact that Soekie is playing this game with her brother, suggests that she wants this attention from him too. In reality, they are kissing siblings, which is frowned upon, yet they justify it by personifying the parental relationship between father and daughter, which was obviously condoned by their parents and thus, in their minds, it cannot be wrong. The other way in which the siblings may justify the fact that they have a very close physical relationship, is that when they play the games they do when in front of Grove, both pretending to be their parents, they see each other as man and wife: “Frikkie: Ek het gese, as jy dit weer doen, dan slaan ek die velle van jou lyf af! Is dit nie so nie, my vrou? Soekie: Dit is so, my man”²¹ (51). Thus, because they are in their minds literally man and wife in these games, whatever they do sexually is justified as they are in fact following the religious laws that they may only have a sexual relationship within a marriage. In this way, De Wet shows how the siblings have perverted the religious beliefs, ideals and values in order to justify the way they behave. This is ironic as it shows that these laws can be skewed in many ways in order to pursue a specific reality which is exactly what happened with Apartheid: The ideas and values surrounding the existence of a superior Afrikaans race that were

Soekie: Another kiss, Daddy?

Frikkie: Okay, my child.

(They look at each other. Then giggle and fall on the bed)

²¹ Frikkie: I told you that if you did that again, then I would hit the skin of your body! Is that not so my wife?

Soekie: It is so, my husband.

the backbone of Apartheid were used to a highly perverted end: to strip people of their culture, alienate them from their land and subject them to incredible oppression and discrimination.

Frikkie's oedipal attraction to his mother - and I would also argue hers to him - is expressed in the game, "Ma vra vir Frikkie oor die lakens"²², that him and Soekie play. The first indication of the mother's invested interest in her son's sexual well-being is that she asks him to tell her everything about the wet dream that she knows he had due to the fact that he ejaculated into his sheets: "Soekie: Toe, my seun, jy moet my alles vertel! Jy moet verlos word van die bouse!"²³ (34). His mother believes that by purging his dirty thoughts to her that he will be on the road to being saved. What is unusual about this interaction is that it seems unusual that a mother, instead of a father would approach their son about these issues. We then find out that Frikkie must love and trust his mother, as she speaks with him, whereas his father beats him. What this leads to is the revelation that Frikkie sexualizes his mother's attention in his dreams: "Frikkie: Ja, Ma... dit was 'n mooi gesig, Ma... Ek het gevoel asof ek haar ken... sy...haai, sy't na Ma gelyk!"²⁴ To which she replies "Soekie (erg ontstokte): Nee, Frederik, dit duld ek nie!"²⁵ (36). The mother does not want to admit that she is the source of her son's sexual repression. Frikkie is told not to express himself sexually because doing so is evil: he should not desire anything more than he has. However, this repressed sexuality comes to the surface: Because his mother is the only woman he is permitted to come into contact with, she becomes the object of his sexual desire. After this reaction, Frederik is beaten by his father for having such thoughts: he is being punished for thoughts that stem from a repression that his parents have nurtured and

²² Mom asks Frikkie about the sheets.

²³ Soekie: Come on my child you must tell me everything! You must be saved from the evil!

²⁴ Frikkie: Yes, Mom... it was a pretty face, Mom... I felt as if I knew her... she... goodness, she looked just like you Mom!

²⁵ Soekie (very enraged): No, Frederik, I will not tolerate this!

taught. Thus, it is no surprise that when Frikkie and Soekie are caught together by their parents that they want to separate the siblings. However, because the siblings have experienced similar oppressions, as described above, and thus found solace in each other, they believe they instead have to punish their parents from threatening to take that relationship away. As Soekie states before the killing Grove, who has been exposed to their reality, “[...] Sien, hulle wou alles bederf- net soos jy.”²⁶ (De Wet Diepe 54). Thus, they had to kill Grove, just like they did their parents, for threatening to spoil everything that they had created in order to deal with the repressive and oppressive traumas that they experienced.

The character that most pointedly encompasses how Afrikaner culture has been influenced and continues to be influenced by African culture is the character of the black Sotho nanny, Alina. Not only do these cultures influence one another but they exist simultaneously in the same cultural space. Ou Alina is the same age as these children’s parents would be if they were still alive and thus naturally becomes the authority figure in their lives. Although it is common place for White families in South Africa to have a black nanny, the relationship here is extended as she is now the primary caregiver. Alina is literally placed as the overseer of all the action in the play: I would argue that she could get the children to stop at any point in their final ritual, however, she oversees how the white Afrikaner lawyer becomes a sacrifice. Alina is established as the provider throughout the play: she tends to the vegetable garden, which is often the only source of food; she makes sure that they get out of bed and have something to drink and finally, she helps them carry out the steps of the rituals providing them with tea and bedding for the guest, ensuring that their victim receives a last supper, overseeing the ritual and finally comforting the children in the aftermath of it all with a Sotho lullaby. Alina is an essential part of

²⁶ See, they wanted to spoil everything-just like you.

their lives: her support, comfort and quiet wisdom become part of the siblings' everyday experience (De Wet qtd. in Krueger *Keeping* 48). These children do not only rely on her but they respect her and listen to her: when she tells them to drink their coffee and Frikkie refuses to do so, Alina commands that he must: she won't ask more than twice, and he obeys. This is a highly subverted image of authority in white Afrikaner culture as it would not be accepted that a black person could possess this much authority even though she speaks in Afrikaans: the constituted language of supremacy and authority. However, in reality, this is what happened: most black nannies are highly respected by the children they bring up: there is a quiet and mutual understanding of their syncretic cultures, which governed and informed their interactions and relationships.

There is a catch, however, with how she interacts with the siblings: she essentially has two functions. The first function is that she is their caregiver, as explained above. However, she only assumes this role when the siblings are themselves i.e. they are not impersonating their parents. When the siblings are themselves it is Alina's job to take care of them and ensure they are safe as this is what her job as a nanny entails. The second function, is that she enables the siblings' stories and rituals to be re-enacted by playing along with the roles they assume: when they order her to do something when "they are their parents", she obeys because this is how she has to interact with her white employers. This happens in many instances throughout the play: Soekie orders Alina to make the guest, Grove tea (16), make and serve them dinner (40), and Frikkie commands her to help him when he is murdering Grove in the kitchen as he has adopted the persona of his father who she also has to obey (52). Moreover, she obeys Frikkie because they are in the kitchen: where maids do their jobs. Thus, Alina too, is stuck in two different personas: the persona of the caregiver and the persona of the oppressed maid. This makes her

both the person in power and the object of colonial oppression. She is therefore an integral part of the children's created reality. This also speaks to the reason why she cannot interject in their games: she literally has no voice to do so as she cannot speak out against her employers.

However, she is very vocal when scolding the children and taking care of their well-being. For example, we see this shift happening when Soekie has spoken to Alina as if she were her mother, getting her to prepare dinner. Yet, when Soekie is helping Alina set the table as herself, Alina has no problem with scolding her for doing it incorrectly: "Ou Alina (kwaai): Nonnatjie, die lepel, jy set hom skef", to which Soekie promptly apologizes "'Skuus. Ou Alina.", as she would to her parents (40).

The way Alina "obeys her employers", even after their deaths, is a further criticism of and an example as to how deeply the systematic violence of colonial action and hierarchies are imbricated into the fabric of these characters daily lives. Ou Alina, although she holds the authority to stop them, cannot. She can only guide the siblings and ensure their survival because, at the end of the day, it is sadly her job. She cannot cross this boundary even when her employees (the parents) are no longer around. Her job is not to tell them what to do. However, the fact that she is always present as part of the siblings' reality, that she is placed in a privileged position of observation and that she is the source of survival, proves the siblings need her: the black Sotho woman who is discriminated against according to the laws of Apartheid, to survive. This stresses the point that the different cultures in South Africa could be better off if they learnt to work together towards common national sentiments versus defining themselves in opposition to one another.

A very specific tactic is employed by De Wet to show how the dominant power, the superior white Afrikaner as embodied by Grove, is relegated to the position of the outsider: one

who threatens to destroy a syncretic way of life and thus needs to be sacrificed (in the case of the Apartheid government, it was overthrown in this manner two years after the play was written in 1990). To start off with, Grove is set up as the epitome of a “pure and true” Afrikaner. He is a married man, with a perfect family, attends church and speaks Afrikaans in a controlled and precise manner. Although Grove is the character that comes the closest to being a member of the “Pure Afrikaner Volk” that Verwoerd referred to, as he embodies the ideals of religion, family and the Apartheid government, he is in fact revealed to be the threat: he is a threat to the truer syncretic identity which the siblings have established. Not only is he a discriminatory threat to Alina (as he speaks down to her and belittles her with terms like “bediende” which means cleaner and “ousie”: term for black nanny’s) but he is a threat to the children too. The reason that the children have to sacrifice Grove is that he holds what can be assumed to be the same oppressive Calvinistic view as their parents. Thus, the threat to culture in this case, at the time this play is set and in the world of the play, is assumed to be the dominant power: The White Afrikaner. Just before killing Grove, Soekie justifies why they had to get rid of him: “Dis die waarheid ...Sien, hulle wou alles bederf- net soos jy. En hulle’t ook so geraas- net soos jy,”²⁷ (De Wet Diepe 50). The siblings killed their parents as their oppressive ideas, ideologies and religion kept them from experiencing desire. Because the siblings are on the outskirts of society, and don’t intersect with other people, they resort to incest: De Wet uses this as a metaphor for how damaging it can be to someone’s well-being if they are led to believe that cultures develop in isolation. The siblings purposely isolate themselves from the outside world and the values and ideals it imposes, from encroaching on them.

²⁷“It’s the truth they wanted to spoil everything... like you... and they scolded us...just like you.”

Thus, what we are left with, is not African Black versus Afrikaner white culture but a new form of cultural resistance: a hybrid, syncretic form of Black Sotho woman who is familiar with white Afrikaner culture and the white Afrikaner- the siblings- who are in turn exposed to Sotho culture: these cultures influence and support each other against the oppression, repression and influence of the epitome of the monolithic Afrikaner ideal: Grové. Whereas the black people in South Africa were seen under Verwoerd as being inferior to the white man, here Alina and her traditions, wisdom and support that she lends the siblings, becomes the only beacon of hope for the children: the only light that continually pervades the darkness embedded in their upbringing. Alina is both a symbol of hope for the new South Africa and a nostalgic figure for the old South Africa. She is the one who is given power and provides solace for the siblings at the end of the play and ensures their safety throughout, proving that she is resilient. She also fosters the syncretism that informs the siblings' identity by singing to them in Sotho daily: she makes sure that they do not forget their culture whilst learning to accept other cultures. Alina is a nostalgic figure because, when she obeys the commands of the siblings when they are impersonating their parents, it harkens back to a time in South Africa when the Apartheid government had complete control of Black people: they were forced to work for and under white people. At a time in South Africa when many changes were occurring, the biggest being the Apartheid government began to crumble, it is no surprise that White Afrikaners would be nostalgic for a time in which they had complete power.

Does this play present a possibility for the two cultures to be acknowledged as influencing each other? I believe it exposes something that has always been present, and never been fully addressed. The failure to acknowledge the dangers of trying to maintain a "pure Afrikaner culture" and the denial of the syncretism that exists between the many cultures which has

produced an entirely interweaved hybrid, is why I believe South Africans of all races, tribes and languages, still face a crisis of identity. *Diepe Grond* only presents two different cultures interacting, as this is the simplest way in which to show how cultures influence each other: by highlighting two under a microscope. However, it is possibly intended to be extrapolated to the fact that all cultures in South Africa: white English South Africans, Zulu and Xhosa people, the racially, genetically and culturally hybrid Coloured people, all intersect and interact with each other and influence how each culture is formed and cultivated. In my opinion, this play gives the audience an opportunity to look at their subjective identities from a distance and begin to see the clear inherent syncretism and influence that takes place in the form of exchange between cultures. More importantly, it warns what may happen, even in the presence of this hybrid culture, if one continues to strive for purity of a constructed idea of identity. One becomes victim, as these siblings do, to the tyrannical enforcement of artificial beliefs and ideals which make up an idea of identity.

The reason that the siblings do not break out of isolation is because they fear the outside world. They were brought up being told by their parents that there was a specific way in which they had to live in order to be considered part of their immediate family as well as the privileged race and culture in South Africa. Although their parents are dead, the fact that they are still always watching them from under the floorboards where the siblings have put them away (De Wet *Diepe* 50), means that they cannot leave the farm as it is their duty to make sure they find water to cleanse themselves and the farm of the sin of parenticide. The fact that Frikkie states that the rain stopped and everything dried up just after the death of his parents suggests that the dry spell is linked to their actions (De Wet *Diepe* 20). Thus, until they find water to cleanse them of all the sins that they have committed, namely parenticide, incest and the ritual killing of

Grove, they cannot leave the farm. The siblings also need to re-enact the stories of themselves and their parents daily as to not forget the values and ideals they were brought up on and to stick to them in order to become pure again. Grove threatens this routine as he thinks that the squalor they are living in as well as their mental states are not sound: he suggests that they leave the farm (De Wet *Diepe* 46). They protest for two reasons: firstly, that they cannot leave because they belong here until they have cleansed themselves. Secondly, having someone telling them that they need to give up each other and the life they have built together is reminiscent of what the siblings' parents told them before Frikkie and Soekie killed them. Thus, Grove threatens to take their existence away, so he has to be sacrificed in order to maintain the myth of obtaining purity that the siblings have dedicated their existences to.

The original version of this play was written during Apartheid and thus this play exposed the underlying principle, the myth of a “superior white Afrikaner race”, of the system and laws that governed the country, was false. Moreover, it proved that buying into this myth weakened the dominant power as culture does not develop in isolation and thus this principle can never be actualized. This has the effect of destabilizing the idea of a unified self as it questions one's identity, which has been constructed around such principles. In 2007, the English version of this play sought to further exposed and breakdown the fragile identities of South Africans of all races and creeds. When a type of colonial system, like Apartheid, fails and becomes replaced by a seemingly more democratic system, people are forced to negotiate their identities in line with the new social and political realities that they are presented with. *African Gothic*, written after Apartheid, exposes how constructed the identities of South Africans are and that in order to negotiate the new social, cultural and political realities, cultural identities need to be deconstructed. The reason that these identities need to be negotiated is due to the change in

relationship between black and white South Africans that accompanied the end of Apartheid. As a South African, especially a White Afrikaner, you are forced to redefine your place in society as you are still a reminder of the oppression that was rife during Apartheid. Regardless of your race, you are given the opportunity to allow yourself to take advantage of the permission to interact with other cultures. The challenge lies in how to take and negotiate this opportunity. I believe that the reason there are still so many identity issues and so much racism in South Africa is that there are far too many people who either still believe there is such a thing as a “Pure Afrikaner Race” and don’t wish to interact with people of colour, and/or that people of colour have no interest in reconciling with the people they see as their oppressors.

In *Diepe Grond* De Wet shows us both sides of the coin. She shows the dangers of continuing to believe in the idea of a “Pure Afrikaner race” and the obsession of preserving it. She also shows how difficult it is for the other to break out of established oppressive roles, even when they are given the power to do so (as in the case of Ou Alina). However, the positive aspect to her portrayal of South African cultural relations is that she exposes some of the parallels and influences that are inherent between different cultures. This leaves a space for negotiation to occur between and within cultures. *Diepe Grond* does not “[...] seek to simply represent identities but to create them [...] through a transformative, active and visible process of reading and rewriting culture onstage” (Krueger *Experiments* 230). By putting this identity struggle onstage, De Wet opens up a conversation as to how it is possible for one to reconcile one’s differences with another culture. This is most present in the relationship between the siblings and Alina: although the siblings come from a vastly different cultural group than Alina, they are forced to rely on each other because the identities that they have bought into, force them to share the same space. In fact they have created and defined their identities in relation to on

another. Thus, they learn from each other's cultural experiences. This forced and necessary interaction between the siblings and Alina literally makes them compromise and negotiate their cultures in order for them to be part of their created and interweaved realities. This concept is not as overtly present as it would be in the New South Africa when it was expected for different races and cultures to interact politically, socially and personally. There are hints of these cultures influencing each other - Alina speaking broken Afrikaans, the children falling asleep to a Sotho lullaby: What this is saying in 1988, is that change is inevitable and is coming but not yet. The Afrikaner myth of purity will have to be pushed aside in order for cultures to occupy the same space after Apartheid.

The key to this play is the recognition that the epistemic violence that created the imbalance of power between cultures and races runs deep: that it is so imbricated into the fabric of our identities as South Africans that there needs to be a deconstruction and relearning of identities so that new possibilities can be discovered, other cultures being respected as having influenced others and respecting those cultures in their own right. As Krueger states, "Like so much of South African cultural life, it is not what must be learnt that is important but what must be unlearned" (*Experiments* 230). I do not pose that this play gives any solutions to the identity problems which South Africans face: what it does do, is expose where the imbalance of power lies and where we can, as a nation, begin to negotiate in our similarities instead of allowing our differences to drive us apart. It also proves how the Apartheid system was oppressive and that we need to work at discovering a system, which allows for diversity and hybridity. The way in which this play proves this is that the person who is an allegorical character for the Apartheid system -Grove- is literally overthrown and killed by two different cultures working together in order to get rid of a common enemy. The siblings rebelled against their parents, who also

believed in the Apartheid laws and the core values of Afrikaner Calvinism and white Afrikaner culture, and replaced their caregiving role with someone they knew they could trust to help them survive: a black woman. The siblings develop a partnership with Alina, and they rely on each other when an outsider comes in and threatens to destroy that partnership and the new reality they have created for themselves.

What *Diepe Grond* allows us to do is practice how to adopt the instability and uncertainties of our identities instead of assumed givens (which aren't true at all) that define our social actions and behaviour (Krueger *Keeping* 148). This piece of theatre, and the audience that it would have been presented to -white Afrikaners- is an example of how resistance starts with active awareness and recognition of the society in which we live and how we navigate our relationships and ideologies that are a part of it. This would have been a performance that started to make White Afrikaners think about how they have defined themselves in relation to other cultures, how detrimental defining one's identity through the false myth of White Afrikaner superiority is, and perhaps recognize that different cultures can work together in order to create a new reality in which to live.

De Wet paints a theatricalized picture of Afrikaner life in her style of magic realism: she exposes the Afrikaner identity as having flexible boundaries that are always open for cross/multicultural influence. Because of the constant ebb and flow of culture, she shows "[...] the failings of a too-rigid adherence to past identifications" (Krueger *Experiments* 230). It is a text which aims at "letting go" : does "[...] not necessarily tear down old identities in hope of erecting new forms in their place, but [...] let go of the idea that holding onto an identity is a vital part of engaging with culture and creating meaning" (Krueger *Experiments* 230). She exposes the dangers of impulses and actions that accompanied the Apartheid system in South

Africa. She explores the subversion of the roles of the colonizer (the siblings) and the colonized (Ou Alina) and the possibility for them to exist in a world not plagued by these dichotomies. This is exemplified in the closing image of the play without stripping either culture of its voice:

Frikkie: Moenie gaan nie, ou Alina

Soekie: Ja, Ou Alina... ons is bang.

Frikkie: Bly by ons, ou Alina...

Soekie: Net tot ons slap... 'seblief...

*(skud haar kop en klap haar tong 'n paar keer: [...] begin saggies 'n Sotho-slaapleidge sing terwyl die ligte uitdoof)*²⁸ (54)

These people from different cultures need each other, they soothe each other, and they know each other's languages and communicate with each other in ways that can only be understood through the acceptance and inherent understanding of one another's cultures. This being said, this moment exemplifies the authority that the other can hold because of the fragility of the myth of purity that is established by colonial systems.

Another interesting fact about this final moment is revealed in the translation of the Sotho lullaby, which is: "You are lost children who have wandered far away from home. Now you are in a strange place. But I will look after you and comfort you (De Wet *African* 73). What this translation reveals is that Alina recognizes that these siblings, although still living in the same place in which they grew up, are lost. Their house has become strange to them because they are

²⁸ Frikkie: Don't leave us Ou Alina

Soekie: Ja, Ou Alina. We're scared.

Frikkie: Stay with us Ou Alina....

Soekie: Just until we sleep.

(Alina shakes her head and clicks her tongue a couple of times. [...] She begins to softly sing a Sotho lullaby while the lights fade out)

living in a fictional, self-created reality. They do not have their parents' guidance anymore: this is tragic because they wanted to get rid of their parents yet they had no other grounding except their parents' and the ideals that their parents passed onto them. Thus, although they took a necessary step in their minds, to preserve their way of life, they in fact do not have the coping mechanisms to do so as they have been purposely kept from the world outside the farm by their parents. Without their parents, these siblings inhabit a space that is strange to them: a place in which they don't know how to function as adults. Alina recognizes this, and takes on the role of the adult that can help them sustain and navigate the reality they are faced with and how to wade through situations they are unable to comprehend. The siblings were literally stunted by their parents. This is one of the reasons why they have to continually relive situations in which they interacted and were taught by their parents: because these situations are the only ones that the siblings are emotionally and mentally equipped to handle. The interesting comment that De Wet makes by giving this role of parent to Alina, guiding lost children through their new world, is that she has put control in the hands of a black woman. This is because De Wet realizes that the only one capable and removed enough to objectively help and guide these siblings is Alina: the fact that she is black makes no difference because there is no inherent difference between white and black South Africans: all the cultures in South Africa are present with and influence one another. This is an outrageous implication to make during Apartheid as the Apartheid government would never agree to a black person being in a position of authority over a white person. This reliance on Alina, is the impulse of two humans, trusting another human being, because they share the same space and are familiar with each other's lives: their races and cultures do not come into the equation. The support of each other's cultures, fears, traditions and beliefs, is what allows Alina and the siblings to interact peacefully and look out for each other.

Diepe Grond successfully presents an image of what needs to be avoided in order for the new South Africa to begin to flourish in its rich cultural soil made up of many different cultures, races and traditions. It suggests we start to unlearn the cultural rigidity imposed on us by past systems and learn how freedom and identity can blossom in the inherent hybridity and syncretism that makes up all South Africans: freedom through identity which can finally become visible through acknowledgement and radical acceptance (Press qtd. in Kruger *Experiments* 230).

Chapter Three: African Gothic: Reza De Wet Post-Apartheid

In 2005, *Diepe Grond* was adapted into an English version, *African Gothic* by Reza De Wet. Most sources site this as being the English translation, yet it is my aim in this chapter to tease out the differences between the two plays and argue that the English version has been adapted to address white Afrikaner identity in Post- Apartheid South Africa. Before 1997, when her colleague Steven Stead, (an acclaimed South African actor and director), approached her with the idea of translating her body of work, De Wet explains that she didn't feel the need to transport her works into another country, (the U.K), and language, (English) (De Wet *Plays One* 9). However, she goes on to state that there is a "thematic link" which she believes is brought out in both the English and Afrikaans versions of her plays: "the presence of the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary" (De Wet *Plays One* 9). This will certainly be evident in my exploration of the two in relation to one another. However, this is not to say that the rhythm and cadence of the Afrikaans in *Diepe Grond* has been lost in *African Gothic*. In fact, De Wet states at the beginning of *African Gothic* that no English South African accent is required because the characters are meant to be speaking Afrikaans (De Wet *Plays Two* 17). This statement immediately points to how important the Afrikaans language is to De Wet and that she wants to keep the spirit of this language alive in the characters. However, as will be explained later, updating *Diepe Grond* to an English version made this play more accessible in the new South Africa. *African Gothic* is an adaptation which seeks to update De Wet's story to include the new social realities in the new democratic South Africa.

African Gothic was first re-written under the working *Run to Ground* and performed in Durban, South Africa and Sydney in Australia in 2003. It only acquired the title *African Gothic* in 2005, yet the content remained the same. A film version of the same name was made in 2014.

This film, however, is not currently available to the public. A trailer can be watched online and there are reviews of the film that I will be referring to as I believe that what is gleaned by people who have watched the film is of importance, especially concerning the relationships between the characters. The English and Afrikaans versions of these plays have some fundamental differences: *African Gothic* contains overt racism, multicultural elements and a physicalized past in the form of a graveyard whereas in *Diepe Grond*, racism is inherent and implied, multiculturalism is feared and the past is not removed from the immediate house in which the siblings live. This could possibly have implications in production as in *Diepe Grond* there is a greater sense of immediate isolation and containment, whereas in *African Gothic* there is a strong sense of a broader space encircling the siblings: possibly a layered space.

Before delving into a close comparison of how the two plays differ it is important to have a closer look at Post-Apartheid South Africa. There is little known about the social realities and identity issues that South Africans of all races and nations experience outside of Africa. It is important to address how the use of language was affected when Apartheid ended in 1990 due to the races and cultures of the individuals that we meet in *African Gothic*. The Afrikaans language, as spoken by White Afrikaner people, went from being the dominant of two official languages, English and Afrikaans, to being one of now eleven constitutionally endorsed languages (Van der Waal 69). Before the democratic constitution of South Africa made these eleven languages official on 4 February 1997, the A.N.C. promoted the use of English, not Afrikaans, as the language of government (“The Languages”). Beside this promotion and constitutional ruling, it became difficult to identify oneself with the Afrikaans language and culture due to the “central place” it held in “...the racist, supremacist Afrikaner nationalism that produced and sustained apartheid,” (Verwey and Quayle 563).

Thus, not only did adapting *Diepe Grond* into an English version broaden the scope of the audience (nationally and internationally), but it also depoliticized the play linguistically. This was not the first time that De Wet used the opportunities she was afforded by governmental systems: when writing *Diepe Grond*, she knew that she could disseminate her ideas by using the accepted language that was free of censorship. With the shift in government, she saw an opportunity to use the system again, to translate and adapt her plays to make them palatable for the contemporary South African audiences. By removing “the language of oppression”, yet keeping the cadence and rhythm of the culture alive, the play became, necessarily, more relevant to the current society it was representing. This was the perfect move by De Wet to keep her personal sentiments about playwriting and her central themes alive in the New South Africa. Although *African Gothic* is an English adaptation, I would argue that there are original Afrikaans and Sotho words inserted in order to open up the play to a multilingual audience, thus mirroring the multilingual reality and mixture of cultures in post- Apartheid South Africa: one of the many criteria for syncretic theatre as put forward by Balme (120).

Through the adaptation of *Diepe Grond*, a play which focusses on a dominant ethnic group into *African Gothic*, it is revealed that one runs the risk of limiting the scope of a play due to its inherent exclusivity when focussing on a dominant group (Krueger *Experiments* 116). Thus, by creating this version one can deduce that more than one ethnic group can have access to the ideas and themes portrayed in the play. It must be stressed that this is not because other ethnic groups could not understand Afrikaans, but because after 1990, English became the most popular and publically spoken languages in South Africa due to the promotion of it by the South African Government. In several interviews, Verwey and Quayle asked white Afrikaners about the place of Afrikaans in Post-Apartheid South Africa. One subject stated, “The future of the

new democratic government is premised on the demise of everything that Afrikaner nationalism has always stood for. Afrikaners cannot escape the fact that the apartheid system was put in place *in their name*” (554). What is disturbing about this statement is that while South Africa seemed to the rest of the world as a newly reformed democratic multicultural hub of acceptance, cultures were being actively weaned out and frowned upon in the new governmental policies as well as social interactions. Afrikaans was the language of the National Party Apartheid government: thus when the ANC came into power and began actively promoting English, not the previously established Afrikaans, as the language of government, it was focussing on making this Afrikaans hold less significance and power. For example, not only is Afrikaans still being boycotted by the A.N.C. but by the public too: there are currently protests happening at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, against the use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction as students believe it is used to promote racism (Page). This is because it is still viewed by many as the language of oppression (Page). The biggest question that this raises for the younger generations of Afrikaners is: where does this dichotomy of acceptance and denial of the only culture they know and are proud of leave them? How are they meant to function in a society and under a government which claims to accept them yet always haunts them with the ghosts of the past? Post-Apartheid South Africa is a different reality for all who live there: a reality in which one’s identity and upbringing is challenged daily. What De Wet presents in *African Gothic* is a familiar place which has been made strange to the characters, which they cannot leave because they do not want to face the ghosts of the past and because they have literally not been given the tools to know how to negotiate this new reality. De Wet very cleverly expresses the new realities that South Africans are faced with in *African Gothic* and more importantly she incorporates key differences between the realities of 1986 *Diepe Grond* and South Africa in 2005.

Before delving into my reading of the differences, I find it useful to explore how the play was received. Reviewer Madeline Shaner, reporting for *Backstage*, describes that she sees Frikkie and Sussie as victims that were oppressed and abused by their parents. This reviewer then goes on to deduce that Alina is a reminder of Apartheid and its oppression, which thus, too, makes her a victim of circumstance (1). Joe Miller of *Exeunt*, describes these characters as “...imprisoned by the rituals of its ancestral colonial oppressors”. The two main arguments that I want to explore that are sparked on by these comments are: how has the relationship between the white characters (Sussie and Frikkie) and the black character (Alina) on the farm changed compared to *Diepe Grond* and does this change how the “white outsider” (Grove) is treated? Secondly, how does De Wet use race and racism as a tool to expose how South Africans are still imprisoned by their colonial rituals and values?

During Apartheid, it would be assumed that the black character in *Diepe Grond* would automatically be socially inferior to the white characters by means of the constitutional and socio-cultural reality of the time. However, in 2005, although some people may read this as still the case, legally, white and black people were put on the same level and were permitted – in fact, encouraged- to share space and lives with each other, free from the discriminatory laws of Apartheid. This brings up the question: why, in *African Gothic*, Alina (the black character who reminds us of Apartheid and its injustices) stays with the siblings? The answer lies in Shaner’s observation: in post-Apartheid South Africa, all three of these characters can be seen as victims of Apartheid. Sussie and Frikkie were victims of the oppressive Afrikaner Calvinism that was a key characteristic of Apartheid and Alina was a victim of the racism that the system employed. Thus, it was in the interest of both the siblings and Alina to get rid of the parents, the physical embodiment of the system that kept them imprisoned. This also justifies why they murder Grove

at the end, as he too, is the epitome of all that was racist and limiting about the Afrikaner Nationalist government. This then means, that not only are these three characters all, in different ways, victims of the same oppressive system, yet they are also co-conspirators in destroying what they believe to be the physical embodiment of the system. However, in realizing that the oppression extends beyond the people living in the house and the outsiders who enter it, which I discuss later when examining the family graveyard, they seek to create their own functional and twisted reality in order to survive and not be threatened by this oppression again. Thus, they share a common goal and support each other in keeping their created reality safe (Miller). Unfortunately or fortunately, as film reviewer, Tony Manyangdze of *Jornalismiziko* gleans from his experience of the film, “It is because of physical and emotional abuse that the three victims grew a common affection for each other”.

There is much evidence in *African Gothic* that suggests that the three work together in order to preserve their created reality. In *Diepe Grond*, Soekie orders Alina to do everything for her and never helps out. In *African Gothic*, however, Sussie asks if she can help Alina in the kitchen and Alina accepts her help (De Wet *African* 55-56). Thus, they are not only working together to keep their reality functional but also show parallels to the current South African social situation: black and white people have now been permitted and have slowly begun to work together to create a new reality. Alina also plays a more clearly defined role when it comes to the rejection, the rituals surrounding it and killing of Grove. At first, she emphatically ignores him when he addresses her: an indication that she is not happy that he is there and that he is upsetting the siblings. Alina also puts all the props from the ritual away when the murder of Grove is completed: a clear indication that she knows what needs to be done in order for the “game” to be performed, what is needed for the game and when the sacrifice is complete. Alina is thus privy to

all that the siblings are. Grove needs to be sacrificed in order for the sibling's reality to be maintained. He has to die in order for their game of "putting their parents away" to be complete. However, there is a Christ-like image of sacrifice here too: Grove has to die for the siblings' sins. If the siblings hadn't sinned in the eyes of their parents, then they wouldn't have killed them and created this new reality in which they constantly have to justify their sins and behavior through living in the past and imitating their parents' marriage. Grove is sacrificed to allow this created reality to continue: it is an interim cleanse through sacrifice, before the ultimate cleanse the children are seeking through a flood.

The second argument, how De Wet uses race and racism as a tool to expose how South Africans are still imprisoned by their colonial rituals and values, lies in the most noticeable difference between *Diepe Grond* and *African Gothic*: implied versus overt racism, respectively. When reading the plays side by side one notices that in *Diepe Grond*, the colour of the characters' skin is never brought up by Grove. One possibility as to why this is so, is because in 1980's, when the play was released and written, racism was part of public and constitutional policy and procedure. Thus, mentioning the colour of the characters skin was not necessary as the system of Apartheid presupposed the differences and oppression brought with skin colour: Racism was a public affair, it was assumed as social practice. However, in *African Gothic*, the first statement that Grove makes brings attention to what he views as the inherent difference between white and black people: "...This is all quite a shock. I never expected anything like this. Let me be quite honest. I've never seen white people live like this." (De Wet *African* 27). What this automatically implies is that he believes black people, not white people, live in squalor and dilapidated conditions. The image of this squalor is exemplified in the film trailer of *African Gothic*: there is a bed in the centre of the dusty room which the siblings inhabit, there are flies

everywhere, dirt all over the floor and the siblings and an old bed pan (Bologna). Grove does not say this in *Diepe Grond* because, during Apartheid, no matter what the living conditions of the siblings were (and they were terrible), they are white and that trumped everything during the Apartheid period. In post-Apartheid South Africa, racism was not part of public policy yet there is much private racism that takes place amongst white communities. What De Wet cleverly does, is physicalize and publicize the now *private* racism in post- Apartheid South Africa, which in turn further problematizes the identity of South Africans.

In their study, Verwey and Quayle explore this concept of private racism: an idea catalysed by a statement made by Afrikaans author Annelie Botes:

“I don’t like black people [...] in my formative years at Uniondale there were no black people. If one was walking around it was a trespassing crook. And then you must run, because he’s going to catch you [...] I know they are just people like me. I know they have the same rights as me. But I don’t understand them. And then... I don’t like them. I avoid them because I am scared of them.”(552)

They later describe how she calls black people “...violent, uneducated, unskilled, incompetent, baboon-like and criminal” (552). What for Botes is a clear reality, is in fact, based on prejudice and lack of understanding, which leads to racism, and it is echoed by Grove in his treatment of Alina. He observes “She looks dangerous to me. I wouldn’t trust her if I were you” (De Wet *African* 3). This is because he hasn’t heard or understood something that Alina muttered, yet instead of accepting it as a miscommunication, Grove immediately jumps to the fact that she is out to harm them due to the colour of her skin and her language. Grove also expresses the fact that he believes Alina or “the blacks” are uneducated by refusing to use any home-made “primitive concoctions” to put on his wounds that he got from walking to find another farm to help him fix his car (De Wet *African* 53). Thus, Grove’s sentiments in the play are very similar to the prejudice and neurosis of Botes’ testimony. Both realities are rooted in post-Apartheid

South Africa. It is well known that, although Apartheid was officially over, the “[...] worst colonial and apartheid ideologies” were and are far from gone in the private sphere (Verwey and Quayle 573).

Although parricide is still the true cause of death of the siblings’ parents in *African Gothic*, De Wet has added a description - which is not in *Diepe Grond* - as to how it is publicly believed the parents were killed. Grove states when inquiring about their deaths:

No one will forget that in a hurry. Not the robbery and the murder. That happens every day. But mutilation! To do something like that! It’s because they hate us, and that’s the truth! They’d like to kill and torture every one of us! You can see it in their eyes! [...] Statistics show that there is very often an insider involved in these brutal murders. They’re the ones who supply the information. Who open the doors while everyone is asleep (*African* 31-32)?

There are a few sentiments here about post-Apartheid South Africa that are revealed by De Wet. Firstly, how crime has severely increased in South Africa since 1991 and most pointedly crimes against white farms and farmers (Conway-Smith). South African government statistics show that between 1991 and 2003 there have been a total of 9,154 farm attacks and 1,613 people killed during these reported attacks. The description of one of these attacks, as having happened to the siblings’ parents, refers to the opinion of some Afrikaner politicians. They label the violence perpetrated against white Afrikaner farmers as genocide (Verwey and Quayle 574). Thus, De Wet successfully exposes the type of racial hatred and conflict that is happening in contemporary, post-Apartheid South Africa, thereby updating her play for a modern, multicultural audience. She does this by weaving this story, based strongly in reality, into *African Gothic*. She uses it as a tactic to allow contemporary audiences to be drawn into the story unfolding onstage as they are familiar with this reality while simultaneously exposing a social problem that arose after Apartheid.

The second sentiment that this reveals about post-Apartheid South Africa is where blame automatically lands in the minds of white South Africans. Many white people attribute the increase in crime not only to black people, but also to the A.N.C. system of government. One of the people interviewed states, “I’m sorry, standards lower immediately when there are no more white people involved. Because kaffirs’ standards are lower than our standards. They are busy swallowing us and it is getting worse and worse,” (Verwey and Quayle 569). Unfortunately, in the case of the farm attacks, murders and mutilations, statistics support this claim. However, it is not as simple as statistics and racial hatred due to the colour of one’s skin. The complication is that the racism has become violent in post- Apartheid South Africa: After the giant Apartheid system had been toppled, the new South Africa as was labelled and promoted as a democratic, multicultural and peaceful society. This swift change from a highly regimented system of governance to a fledgling democracy created many challenges: most pointedly that the personal and social consequences that came with ending this system that were not addressed. These were left to simmer in the privacy of one’s home, which ultimately resulted in an outpouring of violent racial hatred. There was and is no system in place to help South Africans to learn how to live with each other, to respect one another’s cultures and to address the identity crises that accompanied this massive change.

In *African Gothic*, Grove’s story is *not* how the parents were actually murdered. Thus, De Wet cleverly exposes this sentiment about post-Apartheid South Africa, but ultimately shows how both white and black people are experiencing identity issues and behaviour problems due to many pent up years of unaddressed oppression and discrimination. She has Grove tell this story to express what the social feelings of white traditional Afrikaners are toward the current racial attacks in the country. Grove is the traditional white Afrikaner and thus, it only seems fitting,

that he be the one to express these sentiments. The ideology that the sibling's parents oppressed their children with, the same ideals that were the hallmarks of the Apartheid regime, was ultimately what pushed their white children over the edge to kill them. In this way, De Wet exposes that South Africans, together with the new and past governmental systems, share the blame for the social situation in post-Apartheid South Africa and the violence and hatred that accompanies it.

In *African Gothic* as well as *Diepe Grond*, there are moments that conjure up the idea of a multicultural mixed society: Sussie kills a mosquito and then contemplates while examining the blood "[...] is it mine...or yours or Alina's... (They all look at Grove) Or is it his?" (De Wet *African* 58). In *Diepe Grond*, Soekie then licks the blood, heightening the fear of blood mixing and hybrid possibilities that were illegal during the Apartheid period. In the English adaptation, however, the question is contemplated and then not brought up again, perhaps because in post-Apartheid South Africa it shouldn't matter who the blood belongs to. The image of blood brings up some strong arguments surrounding Mahmood Mamdani's question, "when does a settler become a native?" (Matthews 14). This raises the argument as to who has the right to be in South Africa versus who has always belonged there. Because Afrikaners stemmed from Dutch settlers, they are often viewed as not being South African natives. There are other ethnicities that are not viewed as natives, like the white English speakers of British decent, yet the White Afrikaners are under the microscope in De Wets work. What this image of blood points out is, that no matter where the blood has come from, all of them exist in that mosquito and have been collected from the same area: South Africa – the country in which all these people have history and rights. One of Matthews' research subjects states,

Being African should not be about the colour of your skin. Yes, it's true that originally white people are not from Africa, but over many generations they grew into loving this place as much as we black people do. I believe that being African is a feeling of predestination and a sense of belonging that one has towards his continent. (4)

Another student describes the issue of blood and how it is linked to skin colour in the following way: "If you are white, you have European blood-simple, even if you were born in Africa. [...] It's simple-if you are white, you're not African" (Matthews 5). Matthews formulates an apt reply to this, echoing both De Wet's image of mosquito blood and Mamdani's question: "this general definition of an African cannot exclude the minorities living in the continent! I am speaking from the perspective of a 6th generation white South African.... I pose the question: how can I even consider myself European" (3). De Wet's mosquito sequence problematizes how one defines one's identity as a South African in a post-Apartheid South Africa: The idea of how interacting with people of other ethnicities in the new South Africa meant that South Africans were forced to redefine their identities: identities which had previously been intricately prescribed the Apartheid regime.

Another multicultural image in *African Gothic* is: when Sussie looks at a photo of Grove's honeymoon: the picture includes him and his wife riding a rickshaw being drawn by a Zulu man in traditional regalia (De Wet 35). Although this is a tourist attraction and a sign that other cultures are permitted to express themselves in post-Apartheid South Africa, this photograph also carries a highly colonial yet contemporary sentiment, that of cultural appropriation. In this photograph, Grove and his wife are *using* the native culture in Kwa-Zulu Natal: they purchase the ride from an "exotic native": they buy the native's time to experience their tradition. This is so far removed from what traditional regalia are supposed to be used for, yet it is seen as a novelty pleasure by white people. From a post-colonial standpoint, the positive

spin on this image, is that the native is using and regaining their culture to their advantage by gaining profit from these people who previously disadvantaged them. However, as true as this may be, one cannot escape an overall sense of how the regalia and tradition itself is being hollowed out and used in every way but for its correct purpose. The atmosphere surrounding and the attitude toward culture that exists in post-Apartheid South Africa creates the perfect environment for the type of appropriation described above to occur.

Although *African Gothic* is written for the post-Apartheid period, it does not go without inherently carrying and expressing nostalgic longings for the past as well as harbouring fear for it. In the play, the siblings *remember* often: they remember their aunt, they tell each other past stories in an attempt to hang on to them and through their re-enactments, they long for a worry-free time when they had all they needed to survive, accompanied by green trees, flowing water and beautiful flowers. In this way, one can definitely sense that there were better times for these characters. While in *Diepe Grond* there are certainly veiled references to the motif of an incestuous relationship between the two siblings, this is much more explicitly dealt with in *African Gothic*. We find out that the children were caught by their parents, holding each other in bed (De Wet *African* 67-69). The children were lying together as Sussie was scared of the thunderstorm and thus ran to her brother for protection, yet their mother did not see this or allow them to explain. She immediately saw it as the sin of incest and accused the two of bringing shame on the family (De Wet *African* 68). The children then go on to tell Grove of how they punished them by playing “Boetie and Sussie put Pa and Ma away” before they could be split up and sent suffer the same fate, as he too scolds and judges them for their created reality. Another interesting fact about the parents’ death that is revealed, which is different from *Diepe Grond*, is that the children bury their parents in the family graveyard instead of under the floorboards.

However they keep some body parts under the floorboards, which allow them to enact their oppressive rituals/games - Ma's piercing eyes that watched over them like a hawk and Pa's strong hand that abused Frikkie- giving an absurd twist to the aforementioned mutilation (De Wet *African* 69).

Indeed, the fear of the oppressive system of Apartheid as well as the ideals which it stood for and supported, are brought to the surface by De Wet in one central image: the family graveyard. Frikkie and Sussie express the danger of the graveyard to Grove:

Frikkie: Five generations of Cilliers are buried there.

Sussie: You must never... ever go there (51)

This danger is actively encountered by the siblings on a couple of occasions. We learn that Sussie does not leave the house, through her conversation alone with Grove, as she expresses that she is scared of what is out there. The siblings are convinced that these spirits may be able to escape the graveyard and threaten their new reality with their previous oppressive rules and behaviours:

Frikkie: They're both dead! Dead and buried in the family graveyard...

Sussie: ...Maybe...they're up there now. Maybe they're looking at you, Boetie. Watching you. Maybe they can see everything you do.

Frikkie: ...Don't think about that. You must never think about that! (51)

This is one of the highly allegorical images that De Wet uses in *African Gothic*: the parents stand in for the Apartheid system and its ideals: many South Africans who were brought up with these ideals cannot escape the past which haunts them. The indoctrination was so strong that going against these ideals was something that people feared. It is always glooming, just like the "eyes of the parents" are in *African Gothic*. The siblings are clearly afraid of the past and the ideals that their parents and ancestors embodied, and, we know – also in *Diepe Grond* -, these are the ideals

that drove the Apartheid system. The interesting thing here is that they are distanced from the past and have literally buried it – just like the policy of Apartheid. However, it still lingers, threatens, and complicates the realities and identities of white Afrikaners who were not part of the Apartheid generation yet are indoctrinated with the ideals of that era. The sad reality for these siblings is they are stuck in a liminal reality: they cannot leave the farm because it is all they know and, even if they did, they know that the graveyard and all it symbolizes is out there waiting for them. They create their own form of isolated reality in which black (Alina) and white victims can recuperate after Apartheid without facing the real world in which the consequences of Apartheid, as described above, are still being felt without having the tools to navigate and negotiate these structural legacies. They are safe with Alina and with each other. Outside of that, everything seems threatening. The isolation that these siblings experience is physically embodied in *The Barebones Project*, (Sussex U.K.), production of African Gothic in 2010: This production took place in a confined, found space: a cellar (Wirthner). The siblings have clearly outgrown the space, indicated by the fact that their heads are almost touching the ceiling and the fact that the space and bed that they play in is tiny (Wirthner). In this production, there seems to be no indication of the outside world: the siblings are bound to the space they are in and the reality that they have fashioned (Wirthner). This production is contrasted by the film which has a highly realistic aesthetic. Although the siblings are confined to their homestead, there is indication of them being in a space that is on relation to the world outside: the garden and fields, the road leading to their farm and possibly the graveyard outside of the physical home they inhabit is visible (Bologna). This aesthetic provides a stronger comparison between outside and inside world. Due to the nature of film, it is also possible for “flashbacks” of memories exactly as they happened including the characters involved to be seen by the audience: onstage, these memories

are enacted by the siblings in the same space and they are the only bodies there to enact them (Bologna). Thus, the way in which the siblings switch to embody their parents or younger versions of themselves in both the English and Afrikaans versions of the play, is vital for the staging of them as flashbacks cannot occur as they do in film

Once the siblings are put to bed by Alina, there is one last image of them fearing being haunted by this past:

Sussie: Can you hear them Boetie?

Frikkie: Sussie... you mustn't.

Sussie: They want to get in. They want me to open the windows and doors [...]

Sussie: They are waiting for us, Boetie. Out there [...] they are waiting for us.

(De Wet *African* 72-3)

At this point the siblings call Alina to sing them a lullaby in order to ward off the evil spirits. They beg her not to leave them as they seem to believe that she is the only one who can help them navigate their created reality as she is the only one who has witnessed what they have experienced. This impact also endows Alina with a mystic quality: the one who has the capability of warding off spirits and moreover, this is a capability that the siblings believe in. This is different from *Diepe Grond* : although there is the indication that the siblings in *Diepe Grond* are being “watched by their parents”, the concrete symbol of the graveyard points to, that in post-Apartheid South Africa, there is a past that continuously haunts one’s reality. The fact that these white Afrikaners entrust this black woman with this vital task, using methods they don’t know and can’t understand, also speaks to the acceptance of other cultures as part of ones reality in the new South Africa. The fact that the siblings behave in a much younger manner than they actually are when interacting with Alina, exemplifies their child-like innocence: their

growth literally came to a halt when they murdered their parents. It also highlights some key parallels between the mystic superstitions in the Afrikaner and African cultures.

In the final image of the play, Alina sings the siblings to sleep: The lullaby is sung in Sotho by Alina, a South African language spoken in the Gauteng province in townships, which is used to soothe the siblings. Sotho is also spoken in Lesotho, which is considered its own kingdom within South Africa. It is not indicated if Alina is from Lesotho or South Africa: either way she is speaking a language from a place that is foreign to the children. In English, (which is included in the adaptation) the lullaby translates as: “You are lost children who have wandered far away from home. Now you are in a strange place. But I will look after you and comfort you.” (De Wet *African* 73). What this lullaby indicates is the children have created a new reality for themselves in order to survive. This reality is foreign as it is a reality that they have created and are forced to navigate differently, the rules aren’t known as they were when the siblings’ parents were alive, and it needs to be reassessed continually. Thus, the siblings’ reality, just like the realities of South Africans in post-Apartheid South Africa are in a state of constant flux. Because she is a black woman, Alina was privy to the Apartheid system: she would have experienced the abuse and oppression that her race was subject to during this period. Her job was to assist people who discriminated against her, the siblings parents, in the upbringing of their children: it was in this setting that she witnessed how oppressive the ideals of the children’s parents were, and how this made for an abusive and oppressive setting for the siblings to grow up in. She could thus empathize with the children, as she saw them suffering under the strict Afrikaner ideals, bar in different ways, just as she did. Thus, it seems only fitting in their reality, as well as the reality of post- Apartheid South Africa where black people have regained their voices, that she guides them as they journey through their new syncretic identities.

African Gothic certainly deals with how white Afrikaner identity is problematized by the end of Apartheid. This system embodied not only racial discrimination and oppression yet had an entire culture's identity tied into it. Thus, when it ended, a whole new set of identity issues and racial arguments came about. However, they were ignored under the banner of the democratic Rainbow Nation. *African Gothic* aptly portrays the identity struggle of South Africans: constantly reminding one of the past in order to start letting it go of it, yet despite this positive portrayal, like many dramas of this period “ [...] they remain anchored to the grand narrative, one foot in the past, struggling to move on” (Fleishman qtd. in Krueger Experiments 93). Reza De Wet certainly had a foot in both past and present South Africa: this is how she presents her experience in an attempt to start reconciling the two realities or at least that reconciliation, because it can be imagined, may be possible.

Conclusion

Some of the most precious memories I have about growing up in South Africa happened in a very specific location and in a very specific time period : These were the moments I spent enthralled by plays and playwrights like Tennessee's Williams, Thornton Wilder and Arthur Miller, to name a few, in Mr. Colbeck's grade 10- 12 drama classroom. Unveiling the images and dissecting the meaning of these plays always fascinated my teenage brain, yet none struck a chord more than the ones from home: I became engrossed in the existential hubs of Fugard, in stitches over Susan-Pam Grants well thought out tragicomedies and in tears after hearing the words of *Sophiatown* that carried my country's scarred history. These words and images were the words of my people, but nothing sticks more vividly in my mind than the poster Mr. Coldbeck had hanging on the wall: brother and sister covered in mud intertwined in each other with parts of their naked bodies covered by green sheets. It was then that I heard of *Diepe Grond*. My teacher's synopsis of the story gave me goosebumps at 16 and recalling it while contemplating my Master's research in Canada ten years later gave me the same reaction. With the impulse to discover the play for myself, I immediately downloaded it, and read it in thirty minutes. Not only was this a play from South Africa, it was an Afrikaans play: A language that I am slowly losing and that I fear South Africa and the world may be losing too.

The exploration of Reza De Wet's plays, *Diepe Grond* and *African Gothic* have revealed much about how identity is performed, constructed and also changes with the varied sociopolitical situations that South Africa has and continues to cycle through. De Wet found a way to use language, culture and heightened realism to create new realities onstage, which questioned and challenged the existing state of society and culture in South Africa. This exploration began with an interest in larger than life characters in an absurdly twisted situation

and has ended – with the intent to further explore- how the staging of such familiar stories can make one aware of how identity is performed and constructed in Post- Apartheid South Africa.

In the first chapter, it became evident that the sociopolitical landscape of South Africa plays an intricate part in shaping the kind of theatre that is promoted and takes place at any given time period. During Apartheid, many artists were forced into refuge and silence by the strict and overbearing Apartheid laws. Cultures and races were physically separated from one another; there were strict censorship laws as to where certain theatre genres could be performed and who could see them, who could perform in them and what language they could be in. Much of the theatre in this period focussed either on supporting the national linguistic, political and racial policies or protesting them. After 1990 when the A.N.C. came into power, there was a stark and radical change: different cultures could now interact with each other, multiple races could be simultaneously present onstage and theatre became multicultural yet still remained anchored in the past injustices and experiences during Apartheid. However, many productions started to gear toward learning how to live peacefully in the New South Africa and deal with the vast identity issues that South Africans were faced with. These are the situations and challenges that De Wet deals with in her plays: she begins writing in Afrikaans as this is the language she grew up speaking and the culture she had experienced. Writing in Afrikaans also made her less vulnerable to censorship. However, the brilliance of De Wet and her position in the theatrical sphere in South Africa, was not what language she wrote in , (as she adapted all of her works into English versions), but how she tailored her works to subtly speak to the social and identity issues that South Africans experienced by adapting her works as time changed.

Chapter two exposes, the oppressive, isolationist and abusive nature of white Afrikaner Calvinism through a thorough analysis of *Diepe Grond*. De Wet paints an apt picture of what

domestic situations may have looked like in South Africa in the 1980's in a white Afrikaner household and how these situations affected the people who were subject to them as Soekie, Frikkie and Alina were. She then enters the realm of magic realism when she creates a game: an alternate created reality for these characters to cope with the consequences of the years of oppression they suffered whilst trying to stick to the impossible ideals of their parents. In an allegorical manner, she explores how these ideals correlate and embody the political and sociocultural sentiments of the time. The Apartheid government posited the myth of a superior and pure White Afrikaner tribe who were free and necessarily needed to be separated from all African cultural experiences. Through the realities of these characters, De Wet debunks this myth of superiority and exposes the danger of believing that such a thing as pure culture exists.

Chapter Three on *African Gothic*, takes this sentiment and places it in the context of the new realities that South Africans are facing after Apartheid: how people of all races, particularly white Afrikaners, struggle to define themselves in relation to the new sociocultural atmosphere. Different cultures and races are now permitted to interact, In *African Gothic*, it is revealed that this only happens in certain situations and is difficult to foster and navigate as this completely discombobulates one's sense of identity, which was previously defined in opposition to different races and ideals. She paints a vivid picture of a thirst for an alternate reality, where all past and current actions and identities can be justified whilst simultaneously being haunted by the past. It is here that she employs the allegorical symbol of the graveyard as a physical space holding the past, which although dead, still has the capability to haunt one and eschew one's perception of how to interact with a new reality.

Although Reza De Wet has now passed away, her work certainly strikes many chords in the hearts and minds of South Africans. She was a playwright who wished to show the

possibilities afforded to all South Africans who allowed themselves to re-examine their identities in relation to the inherent cultural similarities and experiences among all races and creeds in South Africa. Her contribution to Afrikaans theatre was immense, and even when she wrote in English, the spirit of her language and culture was maintained. Unlike most playwrights in South Africa who are highly recognized for the political nature and presence of their work, such as Athol Fugard and Maishe Maponya, Reza De Wet puts the struggle of identity on a familial and domestic level onstage. She makes very private experiences of identity, public, and breathes life into characters that can imagine and create their own realities.

African Gothic was made into a feature film in 2014: directed by Gabriel Bologna who seems to stay true to the story of these characters. This being said, I have only had access to reviews and previews of the film. What I can glean from these sources is the aesthetic: I am not entirely sure that De Wet would approve of the highly realistic nature of the film as she sought to move beyond this realism in her work. The cast in the film, for example, is bigger than the stage cast: there are the base characters Frikkie (Damon Shalit), Sussie (Chella Ferrow), Grove (Jonny Coyne) and Alina (Connie Jackson). Damon Shalit, who also wrote the screenplay, adds to the characters of the mother, father, and girl in Frikkie's dream. This takes away one of the most prevalent actions of the play: the physical and emotional transformation of Frikkie and Sussie into their parents: actions that they need to employ in order to justify their realities. For example, in chapter three I argue that by "becoming" their parents, Sussie and Frikkie are able to justify their, otherwise questionable, physical relationship. The fact that the film could not be accessed, in spite of considerable effort, hampered my ability to explore it. I would assume that the film was made to ensure that many people could have access to this story as, by the nature of the

medium, more people have can be exposed to it. It is surprising to me that this film has not been released in South Africa.

This leads to a broader question: what impact does South African theatre have on contemporary South African Society? Is there still a place for these plays to have theatre audience's look at their own conceptions of realities and identities? This has been the difficulty of this exploration. De Wet has captured a slice of South Africa that is very rarely spoken about, but, if this play is rarely performed, what impact can it have? These plays raise many questions about the identities of South Africans. It is a shame that there are not more productions of them in South African theatres. However, what is exciting about *African Gothic* being transported overseas is that they debunk some of the misunderstanding that people have about the sociocultural environment in South Africa during and after Apartheid. De Wet provides an intimate look into the lives of South Africans, how they experience culture, struggle with the realities they are subject to and how they have to adjust their own realities, usually without the tools necessary to do so. Through *African Gothic*, she exposes the instability of culture, the fear of the past and the utter confusion that South Africans were faced with when immense change was enacted by the A..N.C. government. Studying these works have made me aware, as a South African, of how little we address these issues in our daily lives. Talking about the past puts cultures and races at odds with one another: As a white person with mixed Afrikaans and English background, it seems impossible to speak about my heritage, without it being tainted by the fact that my race and my culture bears the burden of blame for Apartheid. As a black or coloured person, it may difficult to speak of the past and aim for reconciliation when your heritage was oppressed and discriminated for so many years. It is very difficult to escape the perpetrator and victim dichotomy.

This is where I have found solace and brilliance through De Wet's work. She brings these issues to a safe, common space: the theatre. Through her carefully crafted plays she allows her characters and audiences to be transported to a world where there is no clear right or wrong: both white and black cultures share a sense of blame and confusion from the continued racism and oppression that exists in South Africa on a sociocultural level. She presents worlds in which different cultures and beliefs are not separate, yet form interweaved tapestries depicting the hybridity of every South African citizen. I have discovered a great respect for the work of this playwright far beyond just the content of her work: the subtlety she employs and the delicacy of detail with which she captures an essence of South Africa that does not exist in the history books, is astounding. Beyond this, she allows one to practice vicariously through the experience of these characters, the possibility of binary breakdown and reintegration and recognition of the inherent cultural hybridity that humans living in one space are bound to possess.

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