

The Dialectic of the “Self” and “Other” in Athol Fugard’s *My children! My Africa!* As a Post-colonial Play

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Abstract— In most of Athol Fugard’s plays, the dialectic of the ‘self’ and ‘other’ is present in the characters who are affected by the people surrounding them and by the situations in which they are put in. These plays of Fugard depict not only the political and social conditions of South Africa during the vicious regime of apartheid, which started in 1948 to 1991, but they also describe the human conditions of black and coloured people. One of these plays is, *My children! My Africa!* which represents Fugard’s hope of united, democratic, non racial South Africa governed by the wise and well educated Black and White people. The play witnesses the creation of the “new self” that represents a sign of hope after the inevitable end of apartheid. This new self will lead the country to a promising future rather than a bloodbath when the country is governed by the mob.

Keywords: Apartheid, Fugard, self and other, *My children! My Africa!*, The National Boycott.

I. INTRODUCTION

IT is said by Andre Brink, the famous novelist from South Africa, that “an artist is a problem finder not a problem solver”. However, for playwrights from South Africa, especially Fugard, the matter may seem different¹. For Fugard the main solution that the artist can present is to bridge the gap as much between whites and blacks as between genders. This can be achieved only through “reconciliation and forgiveness” which Fugard considers South Africa’s hope for a new, democratic and multi racial country in which all races have the same rights without any social and political discrimination.² The decade of the eighties in South Africa is special for it witnessed the real beginning of the dismantling of apartheid due to the external and most importantly the internal pressures of not only the active resistance of the majority of the blacks, but also of some of the brave whites who started to see the complete picture of injustice of apartheid³. And for it witnessed the National Boycotts of black students against Bantu Education Act: another law applied by apartheid used to distinguish students according to their race, colour and nationality. Teachers and students protested against such kind of education, for it was humiliated, glorified the colonizer and eliminated the history of the colonized. The school teacher Ezekiel Mphahlele, in a statement before the Eiselen Commission, declared:

I condemned the textbooks ordered by the Education Department for use in African schools: a history book with several distortions meant to glorify white colonization, frontier wars, the defeat of African tribes, and white rule; Afrikaans grammar books which abound with examples like *the Kaffir has stolen a*

knife; that is a lazy kaffir...and a literature that teems with non-white characters who are savages or blundering idiots to be despised and laughed at; characters who are inevitably frustrated creatures of city life and decide to return ‘home’-to the Reserves.⁴

In the same respect, the beginning of the eighties, specifically in 1983, witnessed the appearance of the United Democratic Front UDF, which attracted many middle class anti-government white South African people who, along with the blacks, found a space to make conferences, publish books, newspapers spread the new culture of a non-racial, free South Africa⁵. Thus, according to what presented, *My Children! My Africa!* comes to carry an ovation directed to the black and white audiences who see it as an affirmation of their hopes and fears of the social and political changes took place so rapidly in their country during the eighties.⁶

II. THE DIALECTIC OF THE “SELF” AND “OTHER” IN ATHOL FUGARD’S *MY CHILDREN! MY AFRICA!* AS A POST-COLONIAL PLAY.

Clearly, the characters of Fugard’s late plays are different from that of the sixties and seventies. In his article “Fugard in need of new kind of heroes to fuel the flickering creative fires”, Irena Oppenheim, a magazine writer, suggested that Fugard needs a new hero that suits the changes that took place in South Africa in the late eighties and the beginning of the nineties⁷. In fact Fugard’s plays of the sixties and seventies are dark plays for they hold the recognition that the end of tyranny, white supremacy and injustice of apartheid look impossible. Wherefore, the characters of these plays are decent human beings like Zach or Sizwe who try to survive during an endless period of oppression. With the rapid changes happened during the eighties and the dismantling of apartheid seems imminent, Fugard’s characters are those people of different races who prepare themselves for a new period empty of apartheid and who are going to leave behind more than forty years of oppression. They have got a new burden of changing South Africa into a bloodbath or to “forge a new society never envisioned by their parents”⁸.

My Children! My Africa! is set in 1984 during the school boycotts protesting against Bantu Education system. It is a three-hander that places a young black township activist, Thami, in opposition to his teacher Mr. M who Thami loved and who got “necklaced” for collaborating with the white authorities, while Isabel, the white school girl is left to

pronounce Mr. M's epitaph⁹ "The future is ours, Mr. M"¹⁰. It holds the recognition that apartheid days are numbered and about to end. At the same time it foreshadows the future of South Africa and prepares people of South Africa, the new generation of black and white, to the new stage when South Africa is free and a multiracial democratic country¹¹. The play is a direct response to an event five years before the murder on township streets in the Eastern Cape of a school teacher by some students who thought him a police collaborator. The teacher was tortured by using the strategy of 'necklace'. The play shows Fugard's power and authority in response to contemporary issues¹².

The play is presented in 1989 by the Market theatre which, for decades, was the shelter for the playwrights and actors who found the opportunity to present their dramatic works freely, without the interference of the apartheid policy.¹³

In this play, Fugard doesn't only present his aspirations of a non racial country for all people regardless of their colour, race or gender, his view of a future empty of violence, but he also dives deep into the complex question of ethnicity and the deeply rooted racial conflict between the whites and the blacks. He attacks the essence of violence, the educational system which leads only to more segregation. Through the form of a 'debate' between the three protagonists, the solution of freedom and racial equality is presented as the only way to achieve peace in a country torn up by the wrong policy of the whites.¹⁴

Fugard draws the dialectic of the 'self' and 'other' through the brilliant use of a school debate that took place in a classroom at Zolile High School in an Eastern Cape black township. It becomes the setting of the whole acts of the play¹⁵. This makes *My Children! My Africa!* a teaching play in which pedagogical terms are presented in the form of interrogation. It is a didactic play since it is not only about morals, but also deals with the problems of education and teaching in black South African schools¹⁶. The debate is between two students, schools and two opposite poles of South Africa. It is between Thami Mbikwana, the top debater of the black student at the black township school and Isabel Dyson, white student from the town's all white Camdeboo Girls High School. The subject of the debate, which is about to end first is women's rights. The debate is supervised by the black teacher, Mr. Anela Myalatya or Mr. M as he prefers to be called. Then the two are made to form one team to compete in the field of English literature.¹⁷

According to Nicholas Visser, what is important in the play is that its political vision is presented not through language and dialogues, although it has some, but through the metaphorical use of two important symbols of 'debate' and the 'dictionary book' which Mr. M holds all the time. The debate stands for 'order' which people of South Africa most needed in the present and near future.¹⁸ The debate represents Fugard's social vision for the new South Africa which is governed by law and order rather than violence and murder. It is about white and black young men and women who can solve their political problems through negotiation and live together without fears from each other in the near future.¹⁹ Although he is the product of a long reign of Bantu education: a system set up by the whites to ensure only one fact that the African citizens would be turned into productive workers who

must be guided to serve their own community which, in turn, is a serve for the colonizer's interests, and who are learned their cultural heritage through what the European powers granted²⁰, Mr. M is seen as a revolutionary teacher who uses his education, books and talent of teaching as a way to create an educated society governed by order. He is humble, dedicated man whose 'self' is recognized through the power of words and through education.²¹ In other words, Mr. M is seen as 'self' for he crosses the limits of colour and gender during apartheid, and for he makes a new friendship based on morals and reason between the blacks and whites²². However, Mr. M is also seen as 'other' for he represents the group of black teachers who accept the Bantu education system as an instrument of segregation, and who teach according to the Eurocentric culture of the West or the white in particular.²³

Moreover, being a black teacher in a black school, Mr. M finds a way to change for the good, to create his 'self' and to aspire over the level of animals and ignorant. For Mr. M, the change to 'self' can be got through books and the knowledge they present. The texts which he teaches become inseparable part of his life. Teaching, reading and books for Mr. M is a good career for it brings change from the state of slavery, ignorance, subordination and 'otherness' to the state of mastery and self establishment²⁴. He explains to Thami the importance of books and education as the means of mastering the entire world:

Mr.M: This was my home, my life, my one and only ambition..to be a good teacher!..... it is all in the books and I have read the books and if you work hard in the Whenever my spirit was low and I sat alone in my room, I said to myself: Walk Anela! Walk... I walked back into the world, a proud man, because I was an African and all the splendor was my birthright. (*M.C.M.A* 67-68)

Clearly, 'Order' has a definition in Mr. M's dictionary. It becomes a metaphor that echoes with increasing and different meaning. It is a reference to an order that will become a main social and political feature in contemporary South Africa and in the new life of its people after the inevitable end of apartheid²⁵. In fact, Mr M.'s dictionary is considered an inanimate character in the play, and the definition of a debate matches Fugard's understanding of the meaningful theatre which should, like a debate or politics, require enthusiasm for a cause mixed or overwhelmed by discipline or order in the presentation of different viewpoints.²⁶ After the end of the debate about the full rights for women between Thami and Isabel, Mr. M raises a very important issue of 'vote', and how to vote as respected, free citizens of South Africa, who are denied this right for decades.²⁷ During the apartheid regime, only the whites have the right to vote and only white political parties and white politicians have the right to nominate and be elected. The issue of voting changed all the students to the state of being 'self'. They have the same rights as the white.²⁸

Mr. M, as a confident, wise man, directs his speech to the audience as the debate audience, asking them to vote for whom they think is the best. He asks the students of the Zolili High school (the audience) to prove that they are rational, that

they have the right to vote, and that order is going to be a hallmark in their life.²⁹

Mr. M: We come now to the vote. But before we do that, a word of caution. We have had a wonderful experience this afternoon. Don't let it end on a frivolous and irresponsible note. Serious issues have been debated. Vote accordingly...If you believe that we have the right to vote out there in the big world, then show it here in the classroom, that know how to use it. (*M.C.M.A5*)

It is well-known that post-colonial theory is based on the concept of 'otherness' that states the differences between the colonizer and the colonized on the bases of certain cultural, ethical or geographical differences that might include race, gender and colour. According to this concept, the colonized is characterized as primitive, savage, cannibal and unable to make decisions³⁰. Thus, The right to vote represents a struggle for freedom, a struggle to gain 'self' identity which is a dominant theme in the play. Also, it foreshadows the new and free South Africa in which the blacks have the right to vote freely.³¹ By voting, Mr. M celebrates not the debaters, but the audiences who take his advices and use their minds when choosing:

Mr. M: But the fact that you (Thami) didn't succeed is what makes me happy. I am very proud of our audience. In my humble opinion they are the real winners this afternoon. You two just had to talk and argue. Anybody can do that. They had to listen...intelligently. (*M.C.M.A7*)

Obviously, the differences between the 'self' and 'other' are apparent when the two debaters, the white girl, Isabel Dyson and the black boy ThamiMbikwana, left alone without any teacherly supervisor. Before being in one team, it is important to give them the chance to know each other and discover how each one of them can imagine the world of the other. It seems that a new friendship is going to occur between Thami and Isabel³². The relation between them foreshadows the kind of relation that might gather the white and the black in South Africa after apartheid.³³

However, the differences between Isabel and Thami are a dramatization of the differences between the 'self and 'other'. Isabel is described as a princess surrounded by her servants who are ready to do everything for her. She is a white girl from the other side of the city which Thami hardly knows. Her contact with the black is only when blacks are servants. She has a black maid called 'Auntie', and the black boy who helps her father in the pharmacy he owns.³⁴

THAMI: Dyson! That's an English name.

ISABEL: Sober, Sensible, English-speaking South African. I'm the third generation.

THAMI: What does your dad do?

ISABEL: He is a chemist. The chemist shop in town. Karoo Pharmacy. That's ours..

THAMI: Any brothers?

ISABEL: No, Just the four of us.

THAMI: A happy family. (*M.C.M.A 9*)

Most important is a Thami's ironical question about Isabel's breakfast. It draws the distinction between the two races, the way of their life and who is seen as the 'self' and who is the 'other'.³⁵

THAMI: Yes, what did you have for breakfast this morning?

ISABEL: Auntie, our maid, put down in front of me a plate of steaming, delicious jungle oats over which I sprinkled a crust of golden brown sugar, and while that was melting on top I added a little moat of chilled milk all around the side. That was followed by brown-bread toast, quince jam and lots and lots of tea.

THAMI: Yes, you are a writer.

ISABEL: You think so?

THAMI: you made me hungry. (*M.C.M.A10*)

Isabel looks as a 'self' for different reasons: First, the relation between her and the blacks is that of a master and a slave.³⁶ She is always seen as "The bass's daughter" (*M.C.M.A 17*). Second, she doesn't recognize the "colonial irony" of the white girl feeding on a breakfast cereal called "Jungle Oats". Most importantly, Isabel takes the role of Auntie, the black maid. She cancels Auntie's existing and then identity. Auntie is deprived of her African name. And, in order to make her living, she is obliged to travel from Thami's Township to Isabel's house to serve a school girl who needs only to wake up and sit down at the breakfast table and enjoy the different kinds of food presented by the African woman³⁷. In fact Fugard, according to Edward Said's point of view, cited in Justin D. Edward belongs to the writers who break the silence of "cultural exploitation" through exposing the existent relation between the colonizer and the colonized that have developed out of the colonial project. It seems that the experiences of ruler and ruled cannot be separated, changed, divided or disentangled.³⁸ Fugard, in this sense, makes a strong hint that the prosperity and wealth of the white is gained through centuries of exploitation and hard labor of the black natives. Blacks and coloureds were used to work in the mines, fields and factories to support and increase the wealth and prosperity of the 'others', of European countries³⁹.

Further, the white happy family of Isabel is met and compared with the gloomy state of Thami's black family that lived on the edge of life and that, because of the white oppression, is meant to suffer. Thami is the son of a domestic and railroad worker who lives with his grandmother. He is one of the blacks who are deprived, isolated and prisoned not only with their environment, but also within themselves.⁴⁰

ISABEL: Let's start with your family.

THAMI: Mbikwana! (*He clears his throat*) Mbikwana is an old Bantu name and my mother and my father are good, reliable, ordinary, hardworking Bantu-speaking black South African natives. I am the one- hundred-thousands generation.

ISABEL: You really like teasing, don't you.

THAMI: My mother is a domestic and my father works for the railways. I stay her with my grandmother and married sister. I was sent to

school in the peaceful platteland because it is so much safer. (*M.C.M.A11*)

Scene two starts with a long monologue of Isabel, who gives a vivid picture of the state of schools in the black areas and how life is hard for the blacks. She makes an indirect comparison between her place, where she lives and Thami and Auntie's city. Also between her school and that of Thami: ⁴¹

ISABEL: We've got a lot of nicely restored National Monument houses and buildings. Specially in the Main Street. Our shop is one of them. The location is quite an eyesore by comparison. Most of the houses –if you can call them that! –are made of bits of old corrugated iron or anything else they could find to make four walls and a roof. There are no gardens or anything like that. You have got to drive in first gear all the time because of the potholes and stones, and when the wind is blowing .. all the dust and rubbish flying around... (*M.C.M.A15*)

This, in fact, may remind the audience with the scene of the lake in *TheBloodKnot*, (1961) in which there is a description of the dust, rubbish and bad smell everywhere in the city⁴². It is a declaration that the lives of the black 'others' wouldn't change during the decades of apartheid. Clearly, like some of the white who see their skin colour as a stigma⁴³,

ISABEL: Iv'e actually been into it quite a few times. With my mother to visit Auntie, our maid, when she was sick. And...I can remember one visit, just sitting in the car and staring out of the window, trying to imagine what it would be like to live my whole life in one of those little pondoks. No electricity, no running water, no privacy! Auntie's little house has only got two small rooms and nine of them sleep there. I ended up being damn glad I was born with a white skin. (*M.C.M.A15*)

In spite of being a white 'self', master, winner of the debate, princess like, who is served by the black, Isabel declares that she finds her true 'self' when she comes in contact with the real world of the blacks. She points out to an important fact that the whites are blind because they don't see the other side of the city where the blacks live. The whites are prisoned in their rationality and must be freed by the emotional side of the blacks. Fugard, in fact, clears the differences between what is rational and what is emotional. It is an aspect of the differences between the two races.⁴⁴

ISABEL: ...The most real experience I have ever had. I have never before had so...so exciting ...a sense of myself! Because that is what we all want, isn't it? For things to be real, our lives, our thoughts, what we say and do? That's what I want, now. I didn't really know it before that debate, but I do now. You see I finally worked out what happened to me

in the classroom. I discovered a new world! I've always thought about the location as just a sort of embarrassing backyards to our neat and proper little white world, where our maids and our gardeners and our delivery boys went at the end of the day. But it isn't. It's a whole world of its own with its own life that has nothing to do with us... What I thought was out there for me...no! It's worse than that! It's what I was made to believe was out there for me. (*M.C.M.A 17-18*)

After the successful end of the first debate about women's full rights, Mr. M, later on, felt that the debate is no more than "a waste". He comes with the idea that Isabel and Thami should join their forces and form one team that is going to compete in the area of Romantic English poetry at the Grahamstown Schools Festival.⁴⁵

As the product of the apartheid institutional education, Mr. M, whether directly or indirectly, uses two manners of invitation, that will decide who is the 'self' and the 'other', to address the two debaters: The differential manner towards the white girl, and the imperative manner towards the boy. Isabel is different from Thami and from Mr. M himself. She is made as part of the whole system which Mr. M follows. She is the white 'self'. She is asked politely to join the team. Whereas Thami is the subjugated, the follower, the one who has no opinion and whose decision is taken by others. He is made to follow orders blindly like his tutor.⁴⁶

ISABEL: I am in the team...Mr. M you are a genius!...What about my teammate. What does he say? Have you asked him yet?

Mr. M: No, I haven'tasked him Isabel and I won't. I will tellhim ,and when I do I trust he will express as much enthusiasm as you have. I am an old-fashioned traditionalist in most things young lady, and my classroom is no exception. I teach, Thami learns. He understands and accepts that that is the way it should be. You don't like the sound of that do you.

ISABEL: Does sound a bit dictatorial you know? (*M.C.M.A 23-24*)

Respectively, when Isabel invites Mr. M and Thami to meet her Dad and Mom to her house, Mr. M accepts the invitation without asking Thami's opinions. He regards it as a "delight and a privilege" to be invited by a white family. Near the white, Mr. M might feel with power and dignity:

Mr. M: Of course we accept Isabel. It will be a pleasure and a privilege for us to meet Mr. and Mrs. Dyson. Tell them we accept most gratefully.

ISABEL: Thami?

Mr. M: Don't worry about him, Isabel. I'll put it in my diary and remind him at school.. (*Mr. M leaves*)

THAMI: (*Edge at his voice*): Didn't you hear Mr. M? "A delight and a privilege! We accept most gratefully"...

ISABEL: Was he speaking for you as well?

THAMI: He speaks for me on nothing!(*M.C.M.A 40-41*)

By a "traditionalist", Mr. M admits that he belongs to Bantu Education which distinguishes between students on the bases of race and colour. It is another conspiracy, applied by the West, that makes the black teachers as tools to assert the mastery of the white race as the most culturally and spirirally race that has been chosen by God to lead and civilize others.⁴⁷.

Fugard raises an important issue in post-colonial literature that is of using the literature and language of the colonizer to define the history and culture of the colonized. It is a process of cancelling the whole country, its heritage and traditions. This issue of the missing African literature is what makes Thami rebel against Mr. M and the whole educational institution that prefers Eurocentric, colonizers' culture over the literature and culture of the natives⁴⁸. In fact Fugard wants to point to what is called the "old canonical texts" which refers to the canon of English literature: the writers and their work which are believed to be of particular, rare value for reasons of aesthetic beauty and moral sense. The teaching of English literature in the colonies has been understood by some critics as one of the many ways in which Western colonies powers such as Britain asserted their cultural and moral superiority while at the same time devaluing indigenous cultural products⁴⁹

However, the three agree about the subject of the competition, which is the Romantic poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Southey and the two sonnets of Masefield's "Sea-Fever" and Shelley's "Ozymandias" which should be memorized to be presented in the competition. It seems that the two sonnets, especially Shelly's, have new meanings when read in the context of South African apartheid and the reality of the black Township⁵⁰. When read in a South African context of apartheid, Ozymandias becomes an "ironic commentary" on the ultimate fate of the white apartheid policy and oppression.⁵¹

ISABEL: You'll be interested to know, gentlemen that Ozymandias is not a fiction of Mr. Shelley's very fertile imagination. He was a real, live Egyptian king, Rameses the second...his oppressive rule left Egypt impoverished and suffering from an incurable decline

THAMI : I had a book of Bible stories when I was small, and there was a picture in it showing the building of the pyramids by the slaves Thousands of them, like ants, pulling the big blocks of stone with ropes, being guarded by soldiers with whips and spears .According to the picture the slaves must have easily outnumbered the soldiers, one hundred to one....

ISABEL: What are you up to, Mbikwana? Trying to stir up a little social unrest in the time of the pharaohs, are you?

THAMI : Don't joke about it, Miss Dyson. There are quite a few Ozymandiases in this country waiting to be toppled. And with any luck you will live to see it happen. We won't leave it to Time to bring them down (*M.C.M.A38*)

Now the relation between Thami and his teacher is cut off. The project of the competition is cancelled because Thami joins the school boycott⁵². He has been changed from being a subordinate, and a complaint disciple to "interpellating adversary" whose rebellion includes his objection on the education sponsored by OamDawie(Uncle Dave) :the Inspector of Bantu Cape Schools, by whites, an education that seeks to remove black culture and history by replacing them with false white version⁵³. In a long monologue directed to the audience, Thami dramatizes the differences between the 'self' and 'other', and how the policy of the British colonization changed the black majority into poor, helpless margins:

THAMI: I don't remember much about what OamDawie said after that because my head was trying to deal with that one word: the Future! He kept using it... "our future", "the country's future", "a wonderful future of peace and prosperity". What does he really mean, I kept asking. Why does my heart go hard and tight as a stone when he says it? I look around me in the location at the men and women who went out into that "wonderful future" before me. What do I see? Happy and contented shareholders in this exciting enterprise called the Republic of South Africa? No, I see a generation of tired, defeated men and women crawling back to their miserable little pondoks at the end of the day work for the white bass or madam. And those are the lucky ones. They've at least got work. Most of them are just sitting around wasting their lives while they wait helplessly for a miracle to feed their families, a miracle that never comes. Those men and women are our fathers and mothers. We have grown up watching their humiliation. We have to live every day with the sight of them begging for food in this land of their birth, of their parents birth (*M.C.M.A 49*)

The play, in this sense, distinguishes between two trends in the struggle against apartheid and in the way of achieving freedom and self estimation: Mr. M's way that depends on learning and reading books and getting knowledge, which Thami considers as "the old- fashion", and Thami's way in which violence and boycotts are the only possible way to get rid of Bantu Education and the white control. It is a presentation of what is old, peaceful and wise way of Mr. M and what is new, physically protest of the youth⁵⁴. Thami is

seen as aloof, warm and polite on the outside, but seething with rage on the inside. Brilliantly, he captures the ethos of young black South Africans and regarded Mr. M as a man whose voice is no more heard and his old-fashion is no more valid⁵⁵. A contrast between the 'self' of the two protagonist is made by Thami:

ISABEL: He's watching you.

THAMI: So, He can watch me as much as he likes. I've got nothing to hide... Even if I had he'd be the last person to find out. He sees nothing Isabel.

ISABEL: I think you are very wrong.

THAMI: No, I'm not. That's his trouble. He's got eyes and ears but he sees nothing and hears nothing... He is out of touch with what is really happening to us blacks and the way we feel about things. He thinks the world is still the way it was when he was young. It's not! It's different now, but he is too blind to see it. He doesn't open his eyes and ears and see what is happening around him or listen to what people are saying.

ISABEL: What have they saying?

THAMI: They have got no patience, Isabel. They want change. They want it now!

ISABEL: But he agrees with that. He never stops saying it himself.

THAMI: No, his ideas about change are the old-fashioned ones. And what have they achieved? Nothing. We are worse off now than we were. The people don't want to listen to his kind of talk anymore. (*M.C.M.A* 42-43)

Thami is, in fact, the child who Ngugi describes as being made to stand outside himself to look at himself, because the culture and language of his country and of which he is proud to learn and study is being exposed, substituted to a culture that was a product of a world external to himself. Thus, the child then sees his culture and his language as secondary and an adoption⁵⁶. In the same respect, Ngugi states that "the physical violence of the battle field was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom". Accordingly, Ngugi links the choice of language with the struggle against neocolonialism. Characterizing the colonial educational system which alienated the colonized, (student) from the sources of his own African culture.⁵⁷

As a sign of change from the state of 'other' to 'self' and a sign of protest against Bantu education, Thami goes on in one of his monologues to explain his increasing frustration with the Eurocentric education that OomDawie presented for years and that emphasizes the relation of white mastery and subaltern race slavery. Thami exclaims passionately and powerfully to the audience⁵⁸

THAMI: Do you understand me, good people? Do you understand now why it is not as easy as it used to be to sit behind that desk and learn only what OomDawie has decided I must know? My head is rebellious. It refuses now to remember when the Dutch landed, and the Huguenots landed, and the

British landed. It has already forgotten when the old Union became the proud young republic. But it doesn't know what happened in Kliptown in 1955, in Sharpeville on 21st March, 1960, and in Soweto on the 16th of June, 1976. Do you? Better find out because those are dates your children will have to learn one day. We don't need Zolile classrooms anymore. We know what they really are- traps which have been carefully set to catch our minds, our souls. No good people. We have woken up at last. We have found another school- the streets, anywhere the people meet and whisper names we have been told to forget, the dates of events they try to tell us never happened, and the speeches they try to say were never made. These are the lessons we are eager and proud to learn, because they are lessons of our history, about our heroes. But the time for whispering them is past. Tomorrow we start shouting. *AMANDLA (M.C.M.A 50)*

Worthy to add that one of the main effects of colonization is the distortion of the interests of the colonized in order to create the image of the negative 'self' for the benefit and advantage of the colonizing power. This is done through reforming the political, cultural and economic relationships within the colony in the way that suits the ultimate goals of the colonizer. It is said by professor Paget Henry, the famous sociologist and political theorist of the Caribbean, that one of the main reasons for the distorted self-image is "the seasoning of slaves to deprive of them of African habits and culture". He adds "to the extent that people have been colonized will find themselves in possession of a false or distorted consciousness, just as they find themselves with distorted economic, cultural, and political institutions."⁵⁹

In this sense, *My Children! My Africa!* is a didactic play whose subject matter is about teaching and about schools in South Africa. But, to see the play from this angle only is to undervalue Fugard's brilliant craftsmanship and insight. In fact, the play deals with things very important in shaping the near future of the country and in determining the kind of relation between the whites and the blacks and between the blacks themselves. The first and most important lesson the play presents is "integration" through which the differences between the 'self' and 'other' are melted. The audiences share Mr. M's pleasure at seeing the social and intellectual power generated when the white and the black students work together as a team. It is the celebration of the liberal feelings of South African people after apartheid⁶⁰. The contest between Thami and Isabel, although interesting, but is considered a "waste" by Mr. M for it is a fight between the two races:

Mr. M: What a contest! But at the same time what a waste I thought! Yes, you heard me correctly. A waste! They shouldn't be fighting each other. They should be fighting together. If the sight of them as opponents is so exciting, imagine what it would be like if they were

allies. If those two stood side by side and joined forces, they could take on anybody...and win! For the next few days that is all I could think of. It tormented me. (*M.C.M.A 20*)

Furthermore, Thami is seen as 'self' when he appears as an equivalent debater and joins forces with Isabel. As a deprived black teenager, Thami shows a complete understanding of English poetry, which is not his native's poetry and that he can "match wits and skills with an advantaged white"⁶¹.

However, Mr. M's personality is somehow a mystery in the sense that the dialectic of the 'self' and 'other' is involved in his sphere. He is the 'other' who accepts to ignore the rich heritage of South African literature and teach his students the literature and culture of the colonizer. Also, with the boycott continues and classes are empty of students, Mr. M takes the role of an informer and tells the authority the names of the activists. He shows himself as a completely subordinate of the system. For his betrayal, Mr. M is killed by the same students he once taught⁶². Mr. M seems to be a victim of the colonial educational policy to estrange educated blacks from their native history and traditions. One tends to state that his action is done due to white supremacist brainwashing. He believes that he is doing it out of concern for his students.. "I sat here before going to the police station saying to myself that it was my duty, to my conscience, to you, to the whole community to do whatever I could to put an end to this madness of boycotts and arson." (*M.C.M.A 66*). Emmanuel Obiechina, the author of *Language and Themes: Assays on African Literature*, comments on that "the supreme sin of colonialism was its devaluation of African culture and alienation of educated blacks from their native traditions and history." Mr. M becomes a traitor in the eyes of his own students and his people, a treason which makes him pay the price dearly in the form of execution.⁶³

Further, in an opposite point of view, Mr. M is a man of knowledge, a man who believes in the power of words, language and books as the only means for achieving change and freedom. He is committed to the liberation of mind through education. All the books that he has read shaped his political ideas that no any political activity than words can be used as a solution for the dilemma of South Africa. And this explains his rejection of violence, boycott as a political activity instead of learning⁶⁴. He realizes his position as one of the black 'others' who lost the sense of "Hope". Yet, his 'self' is granted through education, words and teaching:

Mr. M: You think I am exaggerating? Pushing my metaphor a little too far? Then I'd like to put you inside a black skin and ask you to keep Hope alive, find food for it on these streets where our children, our loved and precious children go hungry and die of malnutrition. No, believe me, it is a dangerous animal for a black man to have prowling around in his heart. So how do I manage to keep mine alive, You ask. Friends, I am going to let you in on a terrible secret. That is why I am a teacher. (*M.C.M.A28*)

It is a hallmark of Fugard's work that in the construction of the identity of his characters he tends to locate himself in a character to the extent that an overt correlation can be established between personal events at a given time and the character that emerges from the play at the same time⁶⁵. Fugard's views of absolute education leads him to reject the school boycott of the 1980's regarding it as "One of the greatest social disasters of recent South Africa". Thus, Fugard, through the wise Mr. M, reveals the ideology that the country should have and follow. According to this ideology any political activity has nothing to do with students and schools. Leaders of politics should understand that school classes and students' minds are not the arena getting certain political advantages. Students are not well qualified to involve with politics. They need education first. Mr. M makes the audience know that "education should be absolute value", when he tells the story of one of the rebels who wrote on the wall "Liberation first, then Education" and asked him to correct his spelling:⁶⁶

Mr. M: The only person there was little Siphofondidi from Standard Six, writing on the wall: "Liberation first, then Education". He saw me and he called out: "Is the spelling right Mr. M?" and he meant it! (*M.C.M.A 61*)

In spite of being treated as an ally to the Bantu Education, Mr. M is fully aware that this kind of education is unfair and that his duty is to "sabotage it". He obviously thinks that the relation between him and the texts is "traditional" in the sense that they carry wisdom, morals that should be transmitted to other generations. It is the traditional role of the teachers.⁶⁷

Mr. M: Oh Thami..., do you think I agree with this inferior "Bantu Education" that is being forced on you?

THAMI: You teach it.

Mr. M: But unhappily so! Most unhappily, unhappily so! Don't you know that? Did you have your fingers in your ears the thousand times I have said so in the classroom? Where were you when I stood there and said I regarded it as my duty, my deepest obligation to you young men and women to sabotage it, and that my conscience would not let me rest until I had succeeded. And I have! Yes, I have succeeded! I have got irrefutable proof of my success. You!...because I have also had a struggle and I have won mine. I have liberated your mind in spite of what the Bantu Education was trying to do to it. (*M.C.M.A57-58*)

But, unfortunately, Thami and his revolutionary comrades replace the authority of Mr. M, the lover of words and poetry whose most treasured possession is his dictionary book, with a new authority of violence, boycott and physical discipline. Thami explains to Mr. M that getting freedom doesn't need "big words"⁶⁸

THAMI: Your's were lessons in whispering. There are men now who are teaching us to shout. Those little tricks and jokes of yours

in the classroom liberated nothing. The struggle doesn't need the big English words you taught me how to spell. (*M.C.M.A* 58)

In fact, Thami and his mates try to find their 'self' through violence which Frantz Fanon regard as a "cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect." In this sense, Fanon insists that violence is more necessary than any political method or tool to force the removal of the European oppressor. For Fanon violence is a vital means of psychic and social liberation. And he states that "violence is man recreating himself: the native cures himself through force of arms". The decolonization process, Fanon adds, is somehow aborted and liberation is considered incomplete if the colonialist withdraws peacefully without struggle or without violence, because the motive in this case is going to remain an enslaved person "in a neo-colonial frame of mind"⁶⁹

However, the play supports the idea that true liberation comes through education, knowledge that liberate the mind ⁷⁰. Differences between the 'self' and 'other', white and black or man and woman are not found when people are truly educated. Mr. M and his texts have created the circumstances for moral change in the world. They have enriched Mr.M 's life and they have enabled a subversive engagement between a black and a white student to occur in spite of a fascist apartheid regime. With the aid of Mr. M and his favorites- Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Arnold, Shelly- Thami and Isabel forge a close relationship during a time when their paths might otherwise not cross at all. ⁷¹

At every chance Mr. M gives Thami and the audience the opportunity to have faith in words as the power that can control the world and possess the souls⁷². Just before his murder, Mr. M, who knows that he is going to be killed and refuses to escape, holds his dictionary in one hand and a stone thrown into his window by the rebels outside the school. It is the central image of the play. Although their weight almost the same, the stone remains one little word in the English language found in that little book. ⁷³

Mr. M: (*picks up his dictionary. The stone in one hand, the book in the other*) You know something interesting, Thami...if you put these two on a scale I think you would find that they weighed just the same. But in this hand I am holding the whole English language. This...(*The stone*) is just one word in that language. (*M.C.M.A* 63-64)

Through the smart use of theatre as a forum of debate between the two races, Fugard tries to show an important issue of violence and murder in the name of freedom. This issue is worthy to be studied and acted since it will decide the future of the country. In this respect, the violence on the stage becomes a kind of therapy and the lesson behind this murderous violence of Mr. M is that "thwarted aspirations inevitably turn in on themselves, that repression breeds explosive acts of destruction of the self and other and that peace can be achieved only on the basis of justice". ⁷⁴

However, It seems that the dialogue between Isabel and Mr. M reveals the birth of the new South African 'self' and the new personality that combines between European rationalism,

represented by Isabel who describes herself as "the sober, sensible English speaking South African" and the "putative spontaneous emotional fervor of Africans" that is represented by Mr.M. The South African new 'self' is characterized as "unruly behavior", that gathers the African soul and the European discipline and that represent a "culturally synthesis identity"⁷⁵

ISABEL...Being with black people on an equal footing, you know...as equals, because that is how I ended up feeling with Thami and his friends...To be honest Mr. M that family of yours was a bit scary at first. But not anymore! I feel I've made friends with Thami and the others, so now, it's different.

Mr. M: Simple as that.

Isabel: Simple as that.

Mr. M: Knowledge has banished fear.

Isabel: That's right

Mr. M: Bravo... From the moment I shocked hands with you I knew you were a kindred spirit. (*M.C.M.A* 23)

In his defense of the boycott and his Comrades ,Thami shows Isabel the state of being a black 'Other' governed by a system that changes the blacks' nature and that considers them as mobs because they rise against the whites laws . He provides a touching explanation of the conditions which can cause a desperate, alienated and frustrated group of people to turn into a mob that takes the law into its own hands against an informer, such as Mr. M was believed to be: ⁷⁶

Thami: Try to understand, Isabel. Try to imagine what it is like to be a black person, choking inside with rage and frustration, bitterness, and then to discover that one of your own kind is a traitor, has betrayed you to those responsible for the suffering and misery of your family, of your people. What would you do? Remember there is no magistrate or court you can drag him to and demand that he be tried for that crime. There is no justice for black people in this country other than what we make for ourselves. When you judge us for what happened in front of that school four days ago just remember that you carry a share of the responsibility for it. It is your laws that have made simple, decent black people so desperate that they turn into "mad mobs" (*M.C.M.A*74).

Through the association with the black community, especially Mr. M, Isabel has discovered a new world of truth and rejected her old one which she thought as perfect and rational. She is turned to "an ethical-political exemplar", a projection of Fugard's best 'self'. She becomes one of a Mr. M's best child who is "wise, stubborn, temperate, rational, determined" to keep her master's faith that the future is in the hands of the youth. It is a sign of optimism in spite of all the difficulties and of the murder of Mr. M. ⁷⁷. This murder makes Isabel reevaluates her life. She promises Mr. M and the audience that she will never waste her life as being a 'self' who looks with meanness to the "other", but to be a truly 'self', whose life is devoted to all races of South Africa:

ISABEL: A promise. I am going to make Anela Myalatya a promise. You gave me a little lecture once about wasted lives. How much of it you had seen, how much you hated it, how much you didn't that to happen to Thami and me. I sort of understood what you meant at the time. Now I most certainly do. Your death has seen to that. My promise to you is that I am going to try as hard as I can, in every way as I can to see that it doesn't happen to me. I am going to try my best to make my life useful in the way yours was. I want you to be proud of me. After all, I am one of your children you know. You did welcome me to your family (A pause) The future is still ours Mr. M. (M.C.M.A 78)

III. CONCLUSION

Through his creative imagination Fugard has reshaped the national consciousness of the Afrikaners who, due to certain conditions, are made as masters or owners of the country. He gives them the chance to look at themselves as humans, to free their minds and be true citizens live side by side with the natives⁷⁸. In the same respect, Fugard rejected all kinds of violence especially the National Boycott. He refuses that freedom and 'self' recognition is gained through killing others. The sacrifice of Mr M. leads to free Thami from the complex of being the 'other'. He presented his point of view and now he, like Isabel, has found his truly self through education and through his master's words.

VI. NOTES

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4. Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, (London: Routledge, 2013), 55-56.
5. Nicholas Visser, "Drama and Politics in a State of Emergency: Athol Fugard's *My Children! My Africa!*," *Twentieth Century Literature*. Vol.39, no.4, Athol Fugard Issue. (May 1993) [http://jstor.org/stable 1441583](http://jstor.org/stable/1441583). (accessed 22/ 12/ 2015), 488-489.
6. Ibid., 486.
7. Annette L. Cambrink, 57.
8. Albert Werthhhnhnhhheim, *The Dramatic Art of Athol Fugard From South Africa to the World*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000), 177-178.

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18. Nicholas Visser, 489.
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23. Albert Wertheim, 180.
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- ⁴⁹. John Mcleod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010), 145-146.
- ⁵⁰. Isam M. Shehada, 28.
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- ⁵⁶. NgugiWaThiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Education Publishers, 1986), 17.
- ⁵⁷. Geoffrey V. Davis, *Voices of Justice and Reason: Apartheid and Beyond in South African Literature*, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2003), 10.
- ⁵⁸. Albert Wertheim, 183.
- ⁵⁹. E. Kofi Agorsah and G. Tucker Childs, *African and The African Diaspora: Cultural Adaptation and Resistance*, (Indiana: Author House, 2006), 127-128.
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- ⁶¹. Ibid.
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