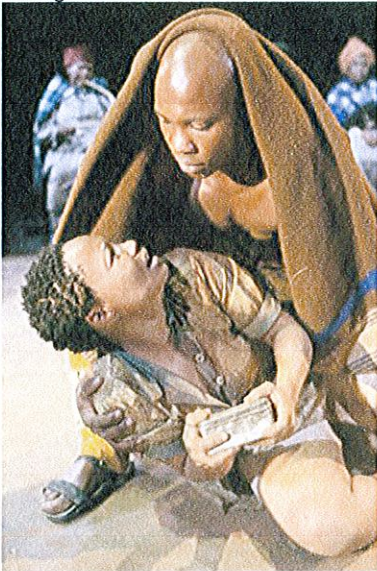


## Molora

Until Apr 19

Barbican Theatre, Silk St, London, EC2Y 8DS

Rating: ★★★★★



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By Lucy Powell

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

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

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