

## **Drama Triangles in Nadine Gordimer's “*Once Upon a Time*” and the War in Gaza**

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Yuval Noah Harari: “The same people can be victims and perpetrators at the same time” (Booth 2023).

### **Introduction**

Aimé Césaire stated that colonialism “dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal” (Césaire 2000, 41). A precondition for treating humans like animals is that we degrade animals. Theodor Adorno

noted: “Auschwitz begins whenever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they’re only animals” (Patterson 2002, 53). But humans are also animals, according to James K. Stanescu: “Adorno is making a . . . subtle and . . . convincing argument, about what allows fascism and Auschwitz to exist in the first place. It is because we hate, or to use Adorno’s word “insult”, the animal in ourselves and others that we, we as a society, are able to control and to kill” (Stanescu 2008). In recognition of the struggle to grant personhood and rights to both people and animals, we replace the word “dehumanization” with “depersonalization.”

The depersonalization bred from colonialism persists in a pernicious pattern of roleplaying theorized by Stephen B. Karpman in his Drama Triangle, a model for understanding how game and script roles perpetuate destruction. Karpman works in the field of transactional analysis, which studies people’s dynamic interactions with each other and their interior dialogues with themselves. Describing his drama triangle, Karpman writes, “A person ‘living in a fairy tale’ usually has a simplified view of the world with a minimum of dramatic characters, acting in the destructive roles of victim, perpetrator, and rescuer” (Karpman 1968, 39). The drama triangle models the players’ actions as they move the positions of victim, perpetrator, and rescuer. To be a settler colonialist is to live the roles on this triangle within the transactional frame of a fairy tale. Nadine Gordimer’s short story,

“Once Upon a Time,” brings readers into the hallucinatory world of the settler fairy tale while exposing its pathological dynamics.

These drama roles of victim, perpetrator, and rescuer are performative and psychological and not necessarily actual. As Claude Steiner states, “the Victim is not really as helpless as he feels, the Rescuer is not really helping, and the Persecutor does not really have a valid complaint” (Steiner 1990, 4). Karpman stresses that an actual rescuer responds to others’ request for help without the motive of appearing as a hero or keeping the victim in a powerless position. Actual victims do not play the “role” of victim in a bid to gain sympathy. Perpetrators claim victimhood to justify aggression. Colonizers and settlers pose themselves as all three; they cast themselves as rescuers, offering “gifts” like their civilization and eternal salvation. The failure of others to accept these gifts with the expected gratitude shifts the rescuer to the victim position, which justifies their shift to the perpetrator position.

Both Césaire and Karpman, from quite different perspectives, describe a process of depersonalization – of self and others – that explains the murderous lose-lose dynamic gripping Israelis and Palestinians. No lasting resolution is possible without an end to settler colonialism, though there are steps towards this end that, if it is to be reached, must include self-recognition among

players that they are stuck in fixed transactional patterns. A critical reading of Gordimer's "Once Upon a Time" using Karpman's drama triangle offers us a way out, one that reverses the logic of fairytale roleplaying and moves us toward a fuller sense of humanity that can only be shared with others. To get to this place, we must go beyond just mourning the dead and must also mourn the loss of our collective humanity to colonial fairytale roles and the dynamics of violence they entail.

## **The Student Complaint**

Early in spring semester, 2024, my department chair informed me that a student from my fall 2023 class had filed a complaint of antisemitism against me. At issue was a question on the final exam, one that I had used for over a decade:

The United States, Israel, and South Africa (when it was under the apartheid regime) belong to what category?

1. Settler nations
2. Colonies
3. Native-ruled nations
4. Empires

The best answer to the question is "settler nations" (though all three were former colonies and have acted as empires). I had a hard time squaring the idea that the

question is antisemitic when two of the countries named do not have majority Jewish populations. I was not shown the actual complaint but only heard a summary of it; perhaps the student objected to the juxtaposition of Israel and apartheid South Africa.

The student who complained had previously contacted me on October 8 of 2023 to tell me that her close male friend, a member of the IDF, had been killed by Hamas the day before. I expressed my sympathies, told her I am Jewish, had spent time in Israel, and once visited the same area where her friend was killed. I told her to take as much time as she needed to process the loss and that she could turn in her class work later with no penalty.

The course was literary theory. One of our theories is postcolonialism and one of the literary works we read through this postcolonial lens is Nadine Gordimer's "Once Upon a Time," an allegory of settler nations told as a not-for-children fairy tale. Gordimer was a Nobel Prize-winning white South African author who devoted much of her life to anti-Apartheid activism. My goal in teaching Gordimer's work and postcolonialism is to help students think about the relationships of empires, colonies, settlers, and indigenous people.

Considering the complaint, I reassessed my exam question and decided it was fair and correct; most Israeli Jews are settlers or descendants of settlers, Israel has a large

settler movement which identifies itself as such and has established itself in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights, and which has expressed intentions to expand into Gaza. Perhaps my student interprets the word “settler” as unjustly critical or equates any criticism of Israel as antisemitic. A campaign to equate criticism of Israel with criticism of Judaism has been ongoing for decades and she may have encountered it in one form or another.

In the United States, a campaign run by Kenneth Marcus conflates Judaism and Zionism, using civil rights statutes to, according to Vimal Patel, “crack down on speech supporting Palestinians,” especially on college campuses. Zionist proaganadists like Marcus conflate Judaism and Zionism to unify Jews in support of Israel and reject any criticism of Israel as antisemitic and thus an unjust form of persecution. But this conflation of Judaism and Zionism has become strained to the breaking point because Israel has killed over 35,000 Palestinian in Gaza since the Hamas attack on Israel, with more than two-thirds of those Palestinians killed being women and children, according to United Nations reports (Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 2024). In response to Israeli atrocities in Gaza, South Africa brought charges of genocide against Israel to the United Nations. South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor spoke to journalist Mehdi Hasan about its case:

I think it had to be South Africa. [It's the] only country that has a similar experience to the Palestinian people and that has been firmly attached to the struggle for freedom and human rights. For us to be invisible in a massive human struggle where we know a huge murder is underway [in Gaza], I think that is unacceptable. ... there has to be an ongoing campaign to say to the world: 'This can't be.' (Team Zeteo)

In January 2024, The UN's highest court ruled it was plausible Israel was committing genocide. On March 26, United Nations expert Francesca Albanese reported to the UN Human Rights Council that Israel's campaign in Gaza was genocide. She stated, "I find that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating the commission of the crime of genocide against Palestinians as a group in Gaza has been met" (Farge 2024). Israel's Amos Goldberg, a genocide researcher at the Hebrew University, reached the same conclusion, writing: "Yes, it is genocide. It is so difficult and painful to admit it, but despite all that, and despite all our efforts to think otherwise, after six months of brutal war we can no longer avoid this conclusion" (Goldberg 2024). He adds: "The numerous declarations of extermination by senior Israeli government officials, and the general exterminating tone of the public discourse ... indicate that [genocide] was also the intention." Peter Maass states: "The victims of genocide — which Jews were in the Holocaust — are not gifted with the right to perpetrate

one” (Maass 2024). The conflation of antizionism with antisemitism now perpetuates genocide and defends it from criticism.

Many Jewish people, however, reject Zionism and condemn Israel’s colonial violence. Gabor Maté, a Holocaust survivor and trauma expert, wrote: “In order to make this Jewish dream a reality we had to visit a nightmare on the local population. There’s no way you could have ever created a Jewish state without oppressing and expelling the local population. Jewish Israeli historians have shown without a doubt that the expulsion of Palestinians was persistent, pervasive, cruel, murderous and with deliberate intent – that’s what’s called the ‘Nakba’ in Arabic; the ‘disaster’ or the ‘catastrophe’ (Maté 2024). Yet Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who now faces a warrant request from the International Criminal Court’s prosecutor, stated, “No one in the world will teach us what morality is and what norms are” (Fabian 2024).

Jewish Voice for Peace states:

We have come to see that Zionism was a false and failed answer to the desperately real question many of our ancestors faced of how to protect Jewish lives from murderous antisemitism in Europe. . . the Zionism that took hold and stands today is a settler-colonial movement, establishing an apartheid state where Jews have more rights than others. Our own history



teaches us how dangerous this can be” (Jewish Voice for Peace 2024).

As a result of its activism, Jewish Voice for Peace was suspended by the administration of Columbia University (Huddleston and Mendel, 2023).

Likud, like Hamas, feeds on the increasing cycles of violence and trauma that result from the settler colonial dynamic, at great costs to Jews and Palestinians in the region and even globally. Antisemitism, rising in the United States and elsewhere, undoubtedly poses a threat, though its most dangerous manifestations arise not from left-wing pro-Palestinian activism but from right-wing fanaticism. In 2018, Robert Gregory Bowers killed eleven and wounded six people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. Numerous other shootings of Jewish people have occurred in the U.S.A. since then, all from right-wing perpetrators. Right-wing antisemitic conspiracy theories have multiplied and given rise to more scripted violence, especially since the rise of Trump, who has praised Nazis as “very fine people .”

I do not conflate Judaism and Zionism, nor do I conflate Hamas with Islam or Palestinians. Hamas is a totalitarian fundamentalist death cult and deserves no support, though its rise was a tragic yet predictable outcome of Israeli policy decisions. Rather than recount the history here, I direct readers to “The Story Behind the Rise of

Hamas” (Bolliger, et al 2023), which details how the Israeli government boosted Hamas as a counterweight to Fatah.

## **Post-Colonialism and Settlers**

Post-colonial research explores how different groups – colonists, settlers, and indigenous people – relate to the colonial experience. Colonialism is the subjugation of people by colonizers from another land. Colonizers take direct control of the resources – natural and human – and substitute their own political machinery for that of the subjugated group. Some colonial regimes impose their languages and cultural habits on subjugated groups.

The difference between colonizers and settlers can be understood in terms of political systems, identities, and relations to the land and native inhabitants. Colonizers control the resources and politics of people in other lands. They identify primarily with the “mother country” and may intend to leave the colony. Settlers continue the process begun by colonizers of displacing and exploiting the resources and people in the lands they occupy. Settlers live in occupied lands and intend to stay. They hold more privileges than subjugated people but may have fewer privileges than colonizers. They tend to adopt some of the practices of native people, though they consider native people to be inferior.

British colonizers in the new world took resources and control from native inhabitants. Settlers fought against the colonial power but continued to take resources and control away from native inhabitants, though with even more extreme violence. Alicia Cox, summarizing the work of Lorenzo Veracini wrote:

Whereas colonizers use a logic of commodification to demand that indigenous peoples ‘work for’ them, settler colonizers use a logic of evacuation to demand that indigenous peoples ‘go away,’ clearing the land for agriculture and resource extraction by imported laborers(Cox 2017).

Most colonizers’ overt political control has ended (some countries do maintain a few colonies); but there remain vestiges of colonial control over subjugated people’s resources and culture. As a result of the American Revolution, political power shifted from the British empire to settlers with English heritage who developed their own identity apart from England, though these settlers still spoke English and continued many of the same habits as the colonizers. The new settler regime continued to appropriate resources and control from native inhabitants while fighting against British colonial power.

The parallels between the U.S. and Israel are not exact. During British colonialism in North America, many of the settlers – Puritans, for example – left England for the

colonies to escape British control. Palestine was under a British mandate from 1920 to 1948, but Britain began settling Jewish people from a variety of European, Middle Eastern, and Central Asian areas to Palestine as early as the 1830s. Both Jews who settled in Palestine and Puritans who settled in the American colonies tied their identity to a narrative of persecution and their guiding ideology was a belief that they had a divine mandate to settle on the land.

The British encouraged Jewish migration to Palestine starting in the 1830s as a form of surrogate colonialism, which gave rights to settlers over indigenous people. The British had a variety of purposes which included weakening the power of Egypt and strengthening that of Turkey, increasing cotton production to profit the British, and fulfilling “the Prophecies” based in the doctrine of Christian Zionism, which is the idea that “Jews must be gathered and ‘restored’ to Palestine, where they will convert to Christianity and precipitate the second coming of Christ and usher in the Last Days” (Malm 2024). In opposition to these efforts were movements among many Arabs and Jews to form a state under shared governance (Britannica n.d.). But these efforts were persistently defeated by the British and by extremists among local groups.

Early Jewish settlers engaged in organized and vigilante violence against native inhabitants. Even some Zionists

were appalled at the actions of these Jewish settlers. In 1891, Zionist leader Ahad Ha'am wrote

There is certainly one thing we could have learned from our *past and present* history: how careful we must be not to arouse the anger of other people against ourselves by reprehensible conduct. How much more, then, should we be careful, in our conduct toward a foreign people among whom we live once again, to walk together in love and respect, and needless to say in justice and righteousness. And what do our brethren in Eretz Israel do? Quite the opposite! They were slaves in their land of exile, and they suddenly find themselves with unlimited freedom, the kind of wild freedom to be found only in a country like Turkey. This sudden change has engendered in them an impulse to despotism, as always happens when "a slave becomes a king," and behold they walk with the Arabs in hostility and cruelty, unjustly encroaching on them, shamefully beating them for no good reason, and even bragging about what they do, and there is no one to stand in the breach and call a halt to this dangerous and despicable impulse. (Dowty et al, 2000)

To be clear, Ha'am was not calling for shared governance; his purpose was to find a more efficacious way to accomplish Zionist aims.

Settler colonialism is based upon deadly delusions, which include delusions of grandiosity – "in the fundamental-

ist milieu of the Afrikaners, there was a sense that they were a chosen people, that they were bringing civilization to the blacks” (Garner 1998), persecution (lesser people want to deny us our rightful place), and erotomania (we have a covenant with God, who loves and protects us), frequently combined with possession disorder. The criteria for possession disorder includes the following:

(2) possession trance, a single or episodic alteration in the state of consciousness characterized by the replacement of customary sense of personal identity by a new identity. This is attributed to the influence of a spirit, power, deity, or other person, as evidenced by one (or more) of the following: (a) stereotyped and culturally determined behaviors or movements that are experienced as being controlled by the possession agent (b) full or partial amnesia for the event. (During et al 2011)

The possessing “spirit” of settler colonialism is a form of entitlement based on religious zealotry, ultra-nationalism, and cult-like abeyance to a leader. Its pervasiveness does not make it sane or morally acceptable. As Erich Fromm famously stated: “That millions of people share the same forms of mental pathology does not make these people sane” (Fromm 1955, 15). The settler mentality is a shared psychotic disorder. Drs. Elizabeth Pomeroy and Kathryn Wambach discuss shared psychotic disorder as one in which “a person who is closely associated with someone else with some Psy-

chotic Disorder 'buys into' the delusional system." The authors add, "Although this diagnosis is rarely made, it apparently is more likely when the individual with the original delusions exercises substantial power over the other person. For example, children growing up with a parent who is delusional may well 'buy into' that worldview, at least during their younger years" (Pomeroy and Wambach 2003, 119). The children of delusional settlers tend to adopt their parents' delusions of grandiosity, persecution, and erotomania, as well as their possession disorder.

Such mass delusions and states of possession create moral inversions, which flip the polarities of good and evil, causing people to perpetrate out of a perceived sense of victimhood. Guy Adams writes, "A moral inversion occurs when something evil or destructive has been successfully presented (repackaged) as something positive and worthwhile. Under the conditions of moral inversion, one can engage in evil acts while thinking that one is engaged in something constructive or positive" (Adams 2011, 277). Adams defines evil as "the actions of human beings that unjustly or needlessly inflict pain and suffering and even death on other human beings" (276) and proposes "that there is a continuum of evil and wrongdoing, with horrible, mass eruptions of evil, such as the Holocaust and other, lesser instances of mass murder, at one extreme, and the 'small' white lie, which is somewhat hurtful, at the other. Somewhere along this continuum, wrongdoing turns into evil" (276).

Settler colonialism constitutes “administrative evil”: “The common characteristic of administrative evil is that people can engage in acts of evil without being aware that they are doing anything at all wrong” (Adams, 275). Adorno had stated: “It is part of the mechanism of domination to forbid recognition of the suffering it produces” (Adorno 2006, 63). Predictably, when people perpetrate evil without recognizing what they are doing or accepting responsibility, they continue perpetrating.

### Gordimer's "Once Upon a Time"

This formularization is sharp and important: *to penetrate the veil while retaining its hallucinatory quality . . .* The political and artistic problem is to engage with that, to maintain that hallucinatory quality while effectively turning it against itself. That would be the true catharsis, the great counter-discourse whose poetics we must ponder in the political terrain now urgently exposed today; the form wherein all that appeals and seduces in the iconography and sensuality of the underworld becomes its own force for self-subversion. (Taussig 1984, 471-472)

Gordimer's story enacts Michael Taussig's formulation: *“to penetrate the veil while retaining its hallucinatory quality.”* “Once Upon a Time” functions primarily as a fairy tale and not as critique, yet it turns the logic of the settler fairy tale against itself. “Once upon a Time” is a portrait of South Africa under apartheid, yet Gordimer never



identifies the country. (Gordimer includes a few words as clues to the setting – “tsotsis” [black street thugs], “baas” [boss], and mention of the Chopi and Tsonga peoples.) Why doesn’t Gordimer name the country? Because the paranoia, racism, violence, and insecurity of the place is not unique to apartheid South Africa but can be found in many former colonies in which settlers displaced the native population. Gordimer doesn’t name the family members in the story either; they are simply the man, the wife, and the little boy. They could be any settler family in any settler nation.

The story could be about the United States. Settlers displaced native populations and imported foreigners as slaves and indentured servants. They created a permanent underclass and left it to rot in destitute conditions for hundreds of years. The settler regime of the United States launched regional wars against its neighbors so it could plunder resources. American society is marked by race and class divisions, an increasing wealth gap, an obsession with security – gated suburbs and private guards, and police killing “undesirables” hundreds of times a year – and a vigilante gun culture that justifies homicide anytime white people feel threatened by a non-white kid with a bag of Skittles or who plays loud music in his car.

“Once Upon a Time” begins with an introduction that recounts the white narrator’s terror upon hearing noises in her house and fearing an intruder. While these sounds

were caused by the house creaking and not by an intruder, we infer that the settler is the intruder. The narrator explains the noises by recalling that her house was built above a gold mine and that “when some face trembles, detaches and falls, three thousand feet below, the whole house shifts slightly, bringing uneasy strain to the balance and counterbalance of brick, cement, wood and glass that hold it as a structure around me” (1991, 24). The disruption caused by the moving earth is far more terrifying for the people who might be in the mine: “The misbeats of my heart tailed off like the last muffled flourishes on one of the wooden xylophones made by the Chopi and Tsonga migrant miners who might have been down there, under me in the earth at that moment. The stope where the fall was could have been disused, dripping water from its ruptured veins; or men might now be interred there in the most profound of tombs” (24). Gordimer’s introduction presents the state of paranoia and dread gripping the settler. The world is un-safe, the dead and dying are invisible, and the psyche is haunted. This realization prompts the narrator to tell a story: “I couldn’t find a position in which my mind would let go of my body – release me to sleep again. So I began to tell myself a story; a bedtime story” (25).

In a house, in a suburb, in a city, there were a man and his wife who loved each other very much and were living happily ever after. They had a little boy, and they loved him very much. They had a cat and

a dog that the little boy loved very much. They had a car and a caravan trailer for holidays, and a swimming-pool which was fenced so that the little boy and his playmates would not fall in and drown. They had a housemaid who was absolutely trustworthy and an itinerant gardener who was highly recommended by the neighbors. For when they began to live happily ever after they were warned, by that wise old witch, the husband's mother, not to take on anyone off the street. They were inscribed in a medical benefit society, their pet dog was licensed, they were insured against fire, flood damage and theft, and subscribed to the local Neighborhood Watch, which supplied them with a plaque for their gates lettered YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED over the silhouette of a would-be intruder. He was masked; it could not be said if he was black or white, and therefore proved the property owner was no racist. (26)

Why were the couple “living happily ever after?” This phrase appears at the end of fairy tales, not the beginning. The odd placement of the phrase here raises the question “after what?” After the “other” people have been displaced or forced into submission as servants. The fairy tale fantasy must begin with “after”; it is a timeless time, an eternal paradise for the “right” people, which would be spoiled by references to historical times – the times in which earlier inhabitants were forcibly displaced or future times in which the settler regime could unravel.

Space, like time, is likewise compartmentalized within this fairy tale bubble: “There were riots, but these were outside the city, where people of another color were quartered. These people were not allowed into the suburb except as reliable housemaids and gardeners, so there was nothing to fear, the husband told the wife” (25). The settlers realize how the fantasy bubble is maintained: “Yet she was afraid that some day such people might come up the street and tear off the plaque **YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED** and open the gates and stream in ... Nonsense, my dear, said the husband, there are police and soldiers and tear-gas and guns to keep them away” (26). In settler colonialism, the bubble must be maintained at all costs: “But to please her—for he loved her very much and buses were being burned, cars stoned, and schoolchildren shot by the police in those quarters out of sight and hearing of the suburb—he had electronically controlled gates fitted” (26). Settlers share the burden of security with the state; they expect the state to perpetrate most of the violence, but if they feel the state is insufficiently violent, they will enact vigilante violence.

The settler’s conscience, like their time and their space, is likewise compartmentalized. “The colonial world is a compartmentalized world” (Fanon 2014, 3). The family in “Once Upon a Time,” like many Jewish settlers in Israel, believe that they adhere to high ethical standards

while they perpetrate institutional evil. They reassure themselves they are good people. For example, the wife acts as rescuer to impoverished native people: "The wife could never see anyone go hungry. She sent the trusted housemaid out with bread and tea" (27). Regretfully, the wife stops her charity efforts after advice from her "trusted servant" [who is native] and her husband, who says, "You only encourage them with your bread and tea. They are looking for their chance ..." (28).

The fairy tale world constructed by the settler finds its analogue in the tale of "Sleeping Beauty" (aka "Briar Rose," "Sun, Moon, and Talia," and many others). In the Brothers Grimm version of the tale, the princess is protected in a deadly enclosure: "Then round about that place there grew a hedge of thorns thicker every year, until at last the whole castle was hidden from view, and nothing of it could be seen but the vane on the roof" (97). This enclosure kept out undesirables: "from time to time many Kings' sons came and tried to force their way through the hedge; but it was impossible for them to do so, for the thorns held fast together like strong hands, and the young men were caught by them, and not being able to get free, there died a lamentable death" (97-98). The family in "Once Upon a Time" builds a technological "thorn hedge" to protect them: "it consisted of a continuous coil of stiff and shining metal serrated into jagged blades, so that there would be no way of climbing over it and no way through its tunnel without getting

entangled in its fangs. There would be no way out, only a struggle getting bloodier and bloodier, a deeper and sharper hooking and tearing of flesh” (29).

In Gordimer’s story, the line between fantasy and reality finally collapses: “One evening, the mother read the little boy to sleep with a fairy story from the book the wise old witch [the grandmother] had given him at Christmas. Next day he pretended to be the Prince who braves the terrible thicket of thorns to enter the palace and kiss the Sleeping Beauty back to life” (30). The little boy is not the chosen prince: “the bleeding mass of the little boy was hacked out of the security coil with saws, wire-cutters, choppers, and they carried it—the man, the wife, the hysterical trusted housemaid and the weeping gardener—into the house” (30).

The little boy had been rehearsing the life he was expected to live: a life in a fairy tale, one in which he would be the rescuer. The parallels of Gordimer’s setting to Israel, with its walls and barbed wire to protect settlers against displaced people, is obvious. The Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, demonstrated that the extraordinary security measures the Israelis had put in place created only the illusion of security. Not only did the Israeli perimeter around Gaza prove useless, but its armaments were turned against Israelis. The New York Times wrote: “Israeli military and intelligence officials have concluded that a significant number of weapons used by Hamas

in the Oct. 7 attacks and in the war in Gaza came from an unlikely source: the Israeli military itself” (Abi-Habib 2024). The Times story continues: “ Hamas has been able to build many of its rockets and anti-tank weaponry out of the thousands of munitions that failed to detonate when Israel lobbed them into Gaza. . . Hamas is also arming its fighters with weapons stolen from Israeli military bases.”

The violence of the native population in Gordimer’s story, and that of Hamas, fuels the circular logic of the settlers: it proves that natives are nonpersons and therefore further violence against them is necessary and justified. In “Once Upon a Time,” the man’s mother, a “wise old witch,” encourages the family to invest in ever greater security. She is indeed wise, though in a rather narrow way, for in a situation in which insecurity keeps increasing, the narrowest logic dictates that one should take precautionary measures. But this logic intensifies the problem. The excluded become more desperate, more violent. The ruling minority, believing *they* are the persecuted ones, take ever more fanatical measures to hold off the poor and oppressed, thus perpetuating the cycle. The world becomes Manichean: good vs. evil. Franz Fanon wrote: “The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the

native as a sort of quintessence of evil” (Fanon 2014, 6). He continues, “The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense, he is the absolute evil” (6).

### **Karpman Triangle and Collective Mourning**

“You can’t change a regime on the basis of compassion. There’s got to be something harder. I’m not saying that compassion is not necessary in our lives but you can’t change a regime that way” (Gordimer 1977, 157).

Stephen Karpman, a transactional analyst, published his first work on what became known as the “Karpman Drama Triangle” in 1968. In his work, Karpman details the roles of persecutor, victim, and rescuer within dysfunctional relationships. During conflict, participants switch roles, and they can play more than one role at a time. This drama triangle (below) has become a model for therapists working to fix broken family systems.

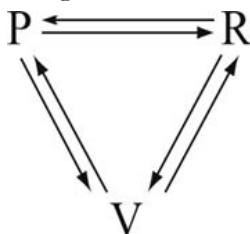




Fig. 1, Karpman, Stephen B. "Drama Triangle," 2007, in "The New Drama Triangles," USATAA/ITAA Conference lecture worksheet. August 11, 2007

A person "living in a fairy tale" usually has a simplified view of the world with a minimum of dramatic characters. The role diagram provides a means of fixing this set number of key identities visually in therapy. When a person knows his "favorite fairy tale" the key roles can be listed in a circle and from there the life roles can be fit. . . (Karpman 1968, 1).

What Karpman identifies as "living in a fairy tale" is a form of depersonalization. Karpman offers a way out the destructive drama triangle through an alternate one he calls the "compassion triangle."

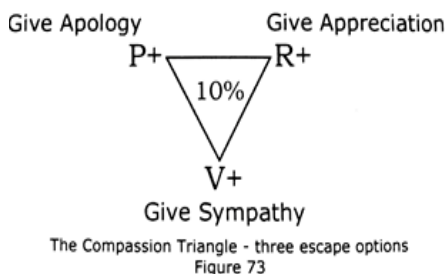


Fig. 2, Karpman, Stephen B. "Compassion Triangle," 2014, in *A Game Free Life: The Definitive Book on the Drama Triangle and Compassion Triangle* by the Originator and Author, 173

Compassion is not enough to change a regime, but it is a key component of a better society. Karpman's compassion triangle requires decision and action to promote the well-being of all players. Karpman poses three escape routes from the destructive game of the drama triangle. To escape the game, players need to accept at least 10% responsibility for playing destructive roles. To escape the perpetrator role, offer an apology. To escape the rescuer role, offer appreciation. To escape the victim role, offer sympathy. These actions are directed not only to other people but also to oneself; we acknowledge the harm that fairy tale roles have exacted on the self and seek to repair them. One only hopes that the family in "Once Upon a Time" begins that healing process after the death of the little boy.

Together the points on the compassion triangle constitute a form of mourning and reparations. Healing the conflict between Jews and Palestinians requires what Karpman calls "three essential steps."

First essential step: identify the games and invitations to the triangle.

Second step: Learn to offer quality relations without innuendo or secret agendas (conscious or unconscious Triangles).

Third step: We will learn an infallible, irresistible method for monitoring relationship contracts.

1. How can I bring up what I observe?
2. How can I bring it up truthfully and address something that is hard to say?
3. How can I make sure that the matter is settled after our exchange, and that the problem won't come up again? (Karpman 2014, 171-172)

To shift from the drama triangle to the compassion triangle, settlers face the most challenging tasks because they must build trust with colonized subjects over time through sustained trustworthy behavior. But the tasks for colonized subjects are also difficult. Gordimer wrote, "It is easier for the former masters to put aside the masks that hid their humanity than for the former slaves to recognise the faces underneath. Or to trust that this is not a new mask these are wearing" (Gordimer 2004, 12). Only by dismantling settler colonialism brick-by-brick can settlers begin to build trust with native people. To escape the drama triangle, Israelis and Palestinians must collectively mourn the loss of their personhood and that of the other, each taking responsibility (even if it's only 10%) for the calamity. The choice is mass mourning or mass murder.

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