

Lara Foot Newton's *Tshephang: The Third Testament* And Danai Gurira's *Eclipsed: A Theatre of War and Hope*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to delineate misogyny, violence and war against women in Africa. Whilst staging misogyny and elaborating a gender discourse of war in their theatres, African women playwrights give attention to the cultural, material and economic conditions that ferment injustices experienced by both women and men in a range of circumstances. The paper also examines how African women playwrights emerge triumphant despite the atrocities by inviting all human beings to participate in their dilemmas of fear and violence through a humane critical lens and an empathy that allows the acceptance of otherness and the transformation of women's victimization into a human condition of brutality. Thence, hope arises in the future of a unified horizon of understanding and agency for the rights of all .

Danai Gurira's *Eclipsed* (2010) gives an account of political factions fighting for power in Liberia. The play elucidates how sex and servitude are exchanged for survival in a performance that draws attention to the victimization of women. Violence against women becomes a strategy for the masculine practices of governmental and non-governmental militias .

Lara Foot-Newton's *Tshephang: The Third Testament* (2003) is based on the actual 2001 rape of a nine month old baby, Sisie, by her Mother's lover. The playwright highlights the fact that the socio-psychic consequences of years of social economic and political oppression have left people without agency, seeking oblivion in wine, sex, sleep or death. Both men and women have been brutalized by the socio-economic conditions of apartheid .

In her essay, "Women and War", Alexis Greene draws attention to the rise of a generation of women playwrights who "deconstruct the concept of war time heroism, draw a connection between violence in battle and violence in the home, and further investigate the age-old connection between war and sex". Africana Womanist theory, Queer theory and post-colonial theory are applied to demonstrate Africana sisterhood, to deconstruct femaleness and maleness and to sabotage a post-colonial agenda of marginalized agency and lack of freedom of choice for Africana people. Indeed, both Danai Gurira from Zimbabwe and Lara Foot-Newton from South Africa address the social and political status of African women, experiencing violence and witnessing brutality, in order to revise a canonized narrative of war that excels heroism and naturalizes war's horror. Both playwrights document the local to touch on the global. Both playwrights raise hope by inviting the full humanity of each and every human soul on earth to recognize others as human too, despite previous inhuman experiences .

**مسرح الحرب و الأمل في مسرحية تشيبانج :العهد
الثالث للارا فوت نيوتن و الكسوف لداناى جريرة
فاطمة المهيري
الملخص**

يهدف هذا البحث لرسم صورة للحرب و العنف و الكراهية ضد النساء في القارة الأفريقية. وتلقي الكاتبات الأفريقيات الضوء علي الظروف الإجتماعية و الاقتصادية و السياسية التي يتعرض لهل كل من النساء و الرجال معا و ينتج عنها الأحداث الغير عادله التي تتعرض لهل النساء في تلك الظروف.

يتناول البحث ايضا بالتحليل و التدقيق انتصار تلك الكاتبات و غيرهن من النساء في قاره أفريقيا علي ما يتعرضن له من عنف و ظلم و طغيان عن طريق إثارة الرأي العام و كسب التعاطف و التضامن مع الآخر في كل مكان. تظهر المسرحيات موضوع البحث أيضا الأمل في مستقبل يسوده تفهم الحقوق و الواجبات لكل البشر.

تعرض مسرحية الكسوف لداناى جريرة صراع الاحزاب السياسية علي السلطه في ليبيريا بينما تتناول مسرحية تشيبانج:العهد الثالث للارا فوت نيوتن حادثه الأعتداء الجنسي علي الطفلة سيبي ذات التسعة أشهر وما نتج عنها من تحليل للظروف القاسية التي يتعرض لها سكان القارة من تفرقة عنصرية.

و تتناول الناقدة الكسيس جرين في مقالها " النساء و الحرب" الكاتبات اللاتي تعمل علي تفكيك فكرة البطولة في الحرب و الربط بين العنف المعركة و العنف في المنزل و مناقشة العلاقة القديمة بين الحرب و الجنس.

وتظهر هذه النظرية النقدية بوضوح في مسرحيتي جريرة و فوت نيوتن.

The aim of this paper is to prove that in war, women's bodies are battlefields. In Africa, whether the war is ethnic or tribal between Americo-Liberians and indigenous people as in Liberia, or racial and civil as a result of discrimination and apartheid as in South Africa, or even domestic and familial when the home becomes the location of battering, a gender based violence prevails and women's bodies become the target of assault. Coupled with racism, sexism and classism, gender violence is fundamentally a cultural construct. As such the specificity of African women's bodies crucially outlines the racist and biased Euro-Atlantic and Western American cultures through colonialism and globalization. This paper categorizes the war on African women into gender based violence and structural violence. Gender based violence distinguishes violence that targets individuals or groups on the basis of their gender, in this case women, from other forms of violence. Gender based violence includes violent acts such as rape, torture, sexual slavery, forced impregnation and murder. Structural violence, on the other hand, affects the everyday life of people. It accounts for severe cases of poverty, displacement, hunger, disease, unemployment, and destitution. Concealed within a hegemony of ordinariness, structural violence is normalized and kept invisible. In post-colonial societies, large-scale environmental degradation, social exclusion of rural migrants to the city, unemployment, residence in squatter settlements give rise to violent crime and anger riots. Violence of police and security forces accentuates the situation.

The fact is that the culture of violence against women is everywhere. Yet the hierarchies of race, class, sexual orientation and national origin escalate such violence and endows it with a political, economic and social framework. Subsequent work in Womanist, Queer and Post-colonial theories has helped in understanding how the bodies, particularly women's bodies, are made to function in relation "to invading and occupying power, before, during, and after violent assault" (Thislethwaite 32). The paper thus examines the war on African Women along Womanist, Queer and Post-colonial theories. It questions the notion of power and the ideology of occupation which consider women's bodies, minds and spirits,

commodities to be owned and traded or objects to be possessed. This occupation has proved to be socially and culturally sanctioned and supported by a threat of force or violent attack. "It is sanctioned by custom, religion and often law" (Hope 39).

This paper substantiates the fact that despite the violence, the horror and the atrocity of war, African women emerge with new hope and new visions for a future of transformation and renewal. Through the theater, as a power of expression, African playwrights as Lara Foot Newton (1967 -) of South Africa and Danai Gurira (1978-) from Zimbabwe are able to portray violence against women, narrate untold women's stories and extract light from looming darkness. Both *Tshepang: The Third Testament* (2005) and *Eclipsed* (2010) respectively delineate the gender-based violence and the structural violence implemented in the war on women in Africa and raise political questions as to a new world of gender relations. Both playwrights, each in her own way, arouse awareness as to the new choices offered to both women and men in a contemporary world where no one is an innocent bystander in this arena of change. Through women's solidarity and sisterhood; through womanist embracement of the wholeness of humanity; by queering the body's performativity and by sabotaging the post-colonial agenda in African countries under globalization, women evolve triumphant and self-conscious free agents

In order to examine the notion of women's bodies as battlefield during war in Africa, Africana Womanist Theory is a primary tool. As a starting point, Africana womanism separates African women from the general category: non-African women. The theory of Africana womanism unites all African women in a common language of oppression. Yet it does not deny the differences of race, class, culture and experience that separates them. Africana Womanism "fills a void created by the disassociation of African women from movements that foster inequality and keep them languishing on the fringes of the white world" (Nitri 310). Focusing on the experience, needs, desires and stories of African women, Africana womanism embraces men as well as women in a survival that includes the wholeness of all people. United by a struggle against oppression and racial discrimination, both women and men

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of the African diaspora have struggled against political injustice, economic exploitation and social dispossession. Consequently, womanism is centered around the natural order of life, family and a complimentary relationship with men and women. In addition to family centeredness, genuine sisterhood and a belief in positive female-male relationships, the need for self-defining and self-naming are major aspects of identity (Hudson-Weems 'Nommo' 302).

Characteristics of Africana Womanism are best clarified in Foot Newton's *Tshepang* and Gurira's *Eclipsed* where the female protagonists in both plays often reveal family centeredness, sisterhood and positive male female relationships despite the violence, the rape and the oppression. Africana womanists share the recognition of African roots, the struggle to rectify sexist attitudes and the pattern of black women's standpoint with black Feminism. But unlike Black Feminism which is mainly preoccupied with Western issues, Womanism, according to Carmen Mojica, "is all inclusive and universal". In fact, "as more women around the world take a stand against the injustices each respective country has, the need for global solidarity continues to grow... But it has to be made clear that all realities are not defined by the same standards" (Mojica).

African women's bodies as battlefield is further investigated by Queer theory wherein "to queer a subject is to make its very normativity problematic" (Laughlin 9). In a striking critique of modern society, Michel Foucault argues that the rise of parliamentary institutions and the new conceptions of political liberty are accompanied by the emergence of unprecedented disciplines that invade the body and seek to regulate its forces and operations. Power has now become anonymous while the project of control has brought into being anew individuality. The effects of such power "circulatethrough progressively finer channels, giving access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions"(Foucault Power/Knowledge 151). Both women and men are born female or male but not feminine or masculine. Hence, "an aesthetic of femininity, for example, that mandates fragility and a lack of muscular strength produces female

bodies that can offer little resistance to physical abuse” (Barthky 454). The social construction of the female body thus produces a subjected and inferiorized body that is a systematic development of a larger discipline, an oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination. Along these lines women are turned into docile and compliant partners, companions or followers of men serving a system of gender subordination wherein the female body enters “a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 138). Hence, a transformation in the performer takes place. No longer is the enemy man, but rather the growing power of the image in a society that induces in many women “a state of conscious permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” and that promotes a kind of self-surveillance which is “a form of obedience to patriarchy” (Barthky 460).

Building on Foucauldian notions, Judith Butler queers the very category “subject” and applies her genealogical analysis to assume that the subject is not just there from the beginning. It is rather instituted in specific contexts and specific times to perpetuate specific agendas of subjectification. Similarly, “the subject may be instituted differently in ways that do not simply reinforce existing power structures” (Salih 10). Butler’s genealogical critique of the category subject is essential to Africana Womanism. As long as gender is an act that brings into being a masculine man or a feminine woman i.e. identities that are constructed and constituted by language, then it is language and discourse that do gender and not the other way round. It is in this sense that gender identity according to Butler, is “performative” (Butler 145). Identity becomes a political construct that can be deconstructed, subverted and reified in new scenes of agency. In the words of Sarah Salih, “the idea that the subject is not a pre-existing essential identity and that our identities are constructed means that it is possible for identities to be reconstructed in ways that challenge and subvert existing power structures” (Salih 11). Along with womanism, Queer theory thus displaces the injury and rape of women from within the power structure of dominance and submission where it has resided for so long and places it outside beyond the confines of normal. “Seeing

them becomes not the performance of the customary but of identifying the criminal" (Thislethwaite 33).

Post-colonial theory extends the deconstruction of power structures to what Gayatri Spivak calls "affirmative sabotage" (Brohi). Disadvantaged people are not denied agency, rather some kind of unreasonable and brutal agency is imposed upon them adjusting them within a physical, unintellectual kind of labour. The power inherent in this physical agency eventually intimidates the oppressors when transformed into violence. This violence becomes the only possible identity. As such, this identity is demonized and described as essentially evil, criminal or even murderous. Under globalization, capitalism and the nation state, law is not justice and resistance to oppression becomes a grave violation. Inferior groups like poor people, servants and women are subalterns, to use Antonio Gramsci's word, who cannot speak. Subalterns cannot speak because there is no justice. By deconstructing the political and economic texts of globalization, Gayatri Spivak exposes the dominant perspective and geopolitical location of the 'First World' to the exclusion of other disenfranchised groups in India, China and Africa. Hence, by sabotaging the economic and political discourses of globalization, Spivak questions the idea of free agency and freedom of choice.

Evolving with new identities free of subjectification and subordination in a social and cultural hierarchy of power, African women seek new outlets. The hegemony of neoliberalism, the naturalization of the globe and the accompanying growth of the prison industry have posed great challenges to African women. Chandra Mohatny comments: "Globalization colonizes women's as well as men's lives around the world, and we need an anti-imperialist, anticapitalist, and contextualized feminist project to expose and make visible the various over-lapping forms of subjugation of women's lives" (Mohatny 544).

In her essay "Women and War", Alexis Greene observes how war has been excluded from women writers narrative in Western culture. Even when war becomes a major theme, theatre has never been "the primary Outlet" (Greene 83). Recently, a theatre of war

has emerged wherein women playwrights “deconstruct the concept of wartime herorism, draw a connection between violence in battle and violence in the home, and furthermore investigate the age-old connection between war and sex” (84-5).

Lara Foot Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament* (2005) is based on a South African true story of the brutal rape of a nine-month old baby girl named Siessie, by her mother, and later renamed baby Tshepang, by the community. Wrongly assumed, six men were accused of a gang rape of baby Tshepang. Later it was discovered that the rape has been perpetrated by the mother’s boyfriend. Once this story hit the headlines, a volcano erupted and hundreds of similar stories followed. Each story was equally horrific. Rape of five-month old babies, two-year old girls and many more accounts extended the list.

Foot Newton’s spare one act drama is narrated and re-enacted by a single speaker, Simon, who gives an account of the rape, the life of the village people and the story of his companion, Ruth, the mother of baby Tshepang. The stage directions on the very first page inform us that “Simon tells the entire story and acts out all the characters”, that “Ruth is silent” and that “The loaf of bread represents the baby, and the broom represents Alfred Sorrows”, the rapist, whereas “In the dark we hear the sound of salt being rubbed into animal skin” (*Tshepang* 11). Simon’s first utterance is “here ... the heat is different. Not like there in other places. Here the heat knows it’s hot. And it enjoys being hot” (11). This remark on the heat introduces the fact that “No one can sleep here” and that people normally drink because “we’re thirsty” and finally “nothing ever happens here. Nothing. Nikes” (12). Simon’s narration thus accounts for the town’s inhabitants as people battered by drought, poverty and thirst quenched by “Valwyn”, a wine made from rotten grapes which farmers give their laborers, albeit illegally, instead of wages, and by random sex with a “houvrou” (13) (a woman they can keep and let go according to whims, unlike wives whom they cannot dispense with).

‘Nothing happens here’ becomes a refrain or mantra that is repeated again and again throughout the play to delineate the town’s social, economic as well as political environment. Simon points at Sarah, the woman with a “loose panty” (12), who watched the rape

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but “who did nothing when it happened. Just lit a match and walked out of the room” (13). He refers to the carved nativities which he sells just to keep him going but “No one ever buys things here, no one at all” (15). Trompie, a supervisor at the dried fruit factory who got retrenched, has failed to kill himself for so many years despite his repeated attempts “to gas himself”, to throw “himself in the crocodile River” and “to hang himself from a beam in the old kark”(16), because “you can’t kill yourself here, because here, nothing much happens” (17). Simon recapitulates “May be it’s the dust, or maybe it’s the heat, but nothing ever happens” (17). Even Dewaal, who is like a grandfather of baby Tshepang, spends all his time “untangling fishing lines” although “he never goes fishing” (18) and he never goes on holiday “Because here, nobody ever goes anywhere” (19), and “nobody ever comes here either” (19). When Dewaal lost his nine-year-old son, “the police were supposed to conduct a proper search with dogs and helicopters” but it didn’t happen. Because here nothing ever happens. Nothing at all (21). What the male inhabitants of this town do is:

Wake, wipe, eat, drink, naai, sleep.

Wake, wipe, eat, drink, naai, sleep.

Wake, wipe, eat, drink, naai, sleep.

Wake, wipe, eat, drink, naai, sleep (26).

Simon’s only daughter, Mary, whose mother “buggered off to Cape Town” and left her on a bed next to him, was taken away from him when this mother “had a good job”. Simon, heartbroken, was pleased that Mary “doesn’t live here because here, nothing ever happens” (35-36). Even after the horrific rape of baby Tshepang, “No one said anything, no one moved” (42), “nothing much happened for quite a while. But then nothing much happens here” (43). When Alfred Sorrows Ruth’s friend who raped and sodomised baby Tshepang was captured, sentenced and found guilty, “he didn’t even flinch. He was neither here nor there. It didn’t matter. Nothing ever really mattered. Because nothing ever matters here. Nothing at all” (52).

In Lara Foot Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament*, violence occurs on many levels. A culture of evasion, concealment, denial,

hopelessness, poverty, the hell of nothingness, boredom and despair pervade the society of South African Johannesburg and Cape Town. Foot Newton “uses comic irony to highlight the socio-psychic consequences of years of social, economic, and political oppression that have left those people without agency, seeking oblivion in wine, sex, sleep or death” (Hutchinson 155). In Foot Newton’s play, there is no actual war. There is no bombing nor shooting. There are no guns and no tanks but the very distinction between war and peace becomes superficial. In a society where people are continually marginalized, and exploited, structural violence and systemic oppression create a situation of perpetual war. Simon’s narrative is no longer simply an account of the violent experiences, often unspeakable, untold and disavowed in South Africa, rather a political discourse where meanings are contested and power-relations determined. The delineation of the inhabitants as surplus people abandoned by the South African State and the post-apartheid government highlights a post-colonial discourse wherein “the new black elite... have presided over a wealth gap that has left the poor even worse than under apartheid” (Kruger 196). The normalization of economic exploitation, political deprivation and structural violence in the play perfectly illustrate the post-colonial theory of hegemony and sabotage. The social scene of *Tshepang: The Third Testament* makes visible the ongoing war, not between men and women, rather between instituted and constructed political and economic power, on the one hand, and poor, disenfranchised individuals on the other. As such “hegemony functions to assert, reproduce, and maintain unequal power relations” and it refers to “circumstances where meanings are so embedded in social relations and the social structure that representational and institutionalized power become naturalized, taken for granted, and therefore, almost invisible so that it goes uncontested” (Gurd 75).

In post-colonial societies, violence is part of a system of domination but also a measure of its imperfection. A structure of inequality involving massive dispossession of social resources will eventually pile up violence both structural and gendered. Because women’s bodies are by acculturation the inferior gender, the privileged group will always unleash its violence against women

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merely as receptacles of downtrodden humanity. Foot Newton's portrayal of a depraved, marginalized society in *Tshepang* foregrounds Africana Womanism where man is not the enemy but society at large. Queer theory highlights the fact that women's bodies are not subordinated because of their femininity but rather because of an institutional social construction wherein sexual encounter in the play is presented as "anonymous, indiscriminate and disconnected from human contact" and "associated with annihilation, oblivion" (Hutchinson 155). Both men and women have been brutalized by the socio-economic conditions of apartheid. Sexual encounters are not inter-personal encounters, but rather means of releasing mental anguish.

On the other hand, gender-based violence in *Tshepang* is best exemplified in the rape of baby Tshepang as well as the repetitive sexual encounters referred to in the play. Moffett states that "South Africa has the worst known figures for gender-based violence for a country not at war. The rates of sexual violence against women and children, as well as the signal failure of the criminal justice and health systems to curtail the crisis, suggest an unacknowledged gender civil war" (129). Typical of post-colonial discourse, narratives about rape continue to be written as stories about race rather than gender. Sexual violence is continually camouflaged by a socially endorsed punitive project for maintaining patriarchal order. Yet Foot Newton's Africana Womanism best dramatizes the situation by presenting Alfred Sorrows, baby Tshepang's rapist, as a victim of social oppression.

Simon narrates how Alfred Sorrows has undergone severe psychological trauma as a young boy. We learn how his father's "houvrou", Margret, "was angry all the time. Especially when Alfred wet his pants, because it was she who had to do the washing" (*Tshepang* 28). Laughing hilariously at some stupid joke and peeing in his pants, Margret "grabbed a broom and started to beat Alfred" (29) until the broom was broken. It was Simon's mother who later picked young Alfred and nursed his broken body when out of hospital for several months. Simon then clarifies the fact that "Alfred was drunk. He wanted sex. Ruth (hisouvrou) wanted to drink and

wasn't interested. She left her baby on the bed and went to the tavern" (51). The rape was discovered when Sarah heard Siesie screaming, witnessed Alfred raping her, left the room and did nothing. "Then Alfred continued. Later he dumped her in the veld where Dewaal found her" (52). Simon's description of the "raped, sodomised, disemboweled" (40) baby is galvanizing.

at first I thought it was some part of a sheep...
a sacrifice of sorts ...and then,
slowly, the picture became clearer – an
arm ,...some fingers, two tiny little arms....
hands a small little crumpled face a
little pot belly fat little thighs and in
between her thighs lay a mass like a
cauliflower; red, gooey ... her derms ... all
bloody, her tiny, tiny, little ...split open (40).

Foot Newton challenges essentialist constructions of masculinity and suggests that there are many and complex reasons for violence. She deconstructs the stereotype of the African man as a violent sexual predator by contextualizing destructive behavior within particularly oppressive experiences of apartheid. That black men are generally assumed to be the perpetrators of sexual violence in South Africa is due to the post-colonial narratives that have been internalized. The truth is that the majority of rapists in South Africa are black because the majority of the South African population is black. Lara Foot Newton thus battles to shake off the legacy of institutionalized racism by deconstructing gender and a post-colonial discourse of black men's violence. Foot Newton does not justify Alfred's crime. She only explains how manhood has been stripped from black men through various acts of brutality, terror and familial destruction throughout the eras of slavery and post-emancipation" (Kimmel 32).

Psychological trauma is however, a profound and serious injury in the war on women. When violation takes place at the hands of the most intimate, the hurt is crippling. Domestic violence perpetrated by a family member, a husband or a lover causes loss of trust and tremendous psychic trauma. When the battlefield is a woman's body, the injuries are often "denied, excused or minimized or the victim is told she is the one at fault" (Simpson 264-68). In *Tshepang: The*

Third Testament, "De Villiers, who runs the wine farm with the dop system" says "it was because women had started wearing miniskirts" and "that's the reason for everything" (43). Blaming 'Ruth' for everything, the media accused her of irresponsibility and deviance. Questions like "And what about her?", "What about the mother? Where was she? Drunk. Left her child and went drinking? (47)", "And What do you think of the shame she's brought to your town?" aroused Simon's anger.

Simon.

Shame on

you! Shame on all of you! Who do you think you are? Coming here with your cameras and your accusations. Pointing your painted ugly fingers at us. Where were you, where are you? What are you doing here? Get out of here! Take your cameras and get out! This town was raped long ago. This town was fucking gang-raped a long, long, long time ago! shame on us? Shame on you, shame on all of us (48-49).

In an attempt to save the rapist's masculinity, power and aggression against women and children are exercised to retrieve a sense of powerlessness and a perceived emasculation. Child rape is often considered punishment for the mother who consequently feels guilty and ashamed of herself. Antjie Krog comments: "Guilt is linked to violation; shame is linked to failure. Shame requires an audience. Guilt does not. And shame is more overwhelming and more isolating than guilt (6). Ruth experiences shame, is devastated by guilt and tries unsuccessfully to end her life by cutting her breast. But Simon declares all the villagers, including the participants in this crime, responsible doers and tarnished by shame. Kaufmann calls shame "a sickness of the soul" (5). In fact it is the whole town that has failed to defy atrocious gender violence. Factors such as alcohol and substance abuse, unemployment, entrenched poverty, lack of infrastructure, lack of opportunity and despair, post-traumatic stress syndrome, oppressive cultural and religious mores, gang rape, peer pressure, break down of the family and clan structures, have

definitely exacerbated the problem of gender violence against women, yet the fact remains that in violence, structural or gender based, again and again women's bodies pay the price of impoverished manhood, lack of power and control. Judith Butler explains: "the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives" (Butler Performative 469).

For three years after baby Tshepang's rape, Ruth never spoke. Waiting for Siesie to get better, waiting for Siesie to come back, Ruth fell into complete silence. Ruth's silence is her articulation of pain. Quite often the communication of pain rests on words, gestures and silence. Fiona Ross proposes that "some horror is not and cannot be articulated: silence marks particular kind of knowing, and further, silence may be gendered" and points to "constructions of agency that do not lie in linguistic competency, but in the refusal to allow it" (Ross 2). Throughout her silence, Ruth keeps rubbing salt in animal skin. When exposed to domestic violence, sexual assault and rape, women exhibit symptoms of what is now called "post-traumatic stress disorder" which combined with denying, minimizing and excusing of the victimizer gives rise to "a combat neuroses of the sex war" (Herman 28). Consequently, women experiencing gender based violence are able to express their losses in metaphors from their domestic roles. Domesticity becomes the only space over which women have control, having been deprived of control over their bodies. Hence, Ruth's manual labour maps the interpolation of violence in her life.

Attempting to heal the wounds, Foot Newton offers no solution to violence. She resorts to biblical symbolism. As the play is subtitled "The Third Testament", Foot Newton highlights the First Testament and its reference to paradise in the garden of Eden, and the Second Testament which ends with the revelation and the New Jerusalem. A Third Testament has never really existed. It is the aim of Foot Newton to create a new heaven full of hope and healing out of the context of violence, heat, poverty and depravity. The miracle of the play is that Siesie has survived the rape and the trauma. For Simon and the other villagers, this is a sign from God. "That Siessie was the girl Christ. The saviour. That she had taken on the sins of the

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world, just like Jesus, - and from now on all children would be saved. Tshepang. Tshepang-saviour, hope. That's what it means. The girl Christ had come" (46). For Foot Newton, "hope is necessary because it gives you ability to survive within a dark context" (Thurman Interview).

Foot Newton attempts to find purpose and possibility in situations where there appears to be none. Hers is a theatre that engages the audience and the characters with the human condition as a whole. By invoking everybody – men and women alike – from the South African community into her story and by implicating them in the socio – economic structures that determine the history and society of their country, Foot Newton is engaging everybody to deconstruct a post – colonial South Africa and in the spirit of Africana Womanism to embrace a truly new South Africa. In Simon, who sides with Ruth till the end, "loved her more than before" (54), picks her up and takes her to hospital, refuses to go to the tavern and leave her, rests his head on her shoulder, prepares her bed and stays with her, a new vision of masculinity and humanity for South Africa evolves. The Third Testament is a challenge to South Africans to find a way through the cycles of gender based violence, structural and domestic violence provoked by poverty and socio-political brutality. "Tshepang" is the only word pronounced by Ruth ending the play on a highnote implying hope (56). "Perhaps *Tshepang* is a play about love" comments Marianne Thamm, and adds "Love as a relationship. Love as comfort in our human journey, which for so many people, is one through hell, but which becomes tolerable and hopeful with another's empathy" (Thamm). In her endeavor to heal the wounds of her country, Foot Newton creates plays that are "cathartic cathedrals" (Sichel). Lara Foot Newton's theatre is one of hope, redemption and forgiveness. Healing as a process involves empathy and consciousness – raising. With the rise of The Truth and Reconciliation Committees in South Africa, Foot Newton is able to subvert violence, refuse modes of vengeance, and promote an essential societal process of healing through a theatre of war and hope.

Unlike Lara Foot Newton's *Tshepang*, Danai Gurira's *Eclipsed* stages an actual civil war story of political factions fighting for power and resources in Liberia. Like *Tshepang*, *Eclipsed* features gender based violence as well as structural violence. Set in 2003 just prior to President Charles Taylor's forced resignation, four women are held hostage by a rebel leader, a member of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) during the Liberian civil war. The women, deprived of names and identities and reduced to mere members, are referred to as "wives" of the commanding officer (CO), someone who never appears and whose presence overshadows the scene. These women survive in a compound where they are sheltered in a site of bullet holes and mortar residue, providing housekeeping and sexual services in return for protection from the random assaults of other men.

Historically, the descendants of freed American slaves in Liberia are called the Americo-Liberians. The latter maintained ties with their American cultural heritage, bringing American customs and architecture and looking down on the indigenous people. Though these settlers left America to escape social discrimination, they did not consider themselves African. Tension erupted between the two factions as the indigenous people outnumbered the Americo-Liberians while the latter controlled the economy, access to education and politics including the right-to-vote. Africans were obligated to pay taxes to the government and were forced to work as laborers or slaves for the Americo-Liberian elite. Legally and socially, the indigenous people of Liberia were second class citizens on their own land. This is structural violence par excellence.

Interestingly, Western playwrights rendering violence in war stories situated in Africa strive for what Sara Ahmed terms "ethical encounters" with distant "others" in ways that avoid and screen the cultural imperialism in appropriating their stories and at the same time distancing them through a pure lens of "pure relativism" (Ahmed 174). Danai Gurira, along post-colonial theory lines, powerfully sabotages and deconstructs the Western portrayal of the African war story, making women's roles visible where they have been eclipsed. Gurira evokes "critical empathy" rather than voyeurism when representing sexualized violence by "denaturalizing

the gendered, radicalized, sexualized, and classed dynamics through which war operates for perpetrators and victims" (Friedman 127).

As the play opens, wives number 1 and 3 are conversing. Meanwhile they hide The Girl who is almost fifteen years old under a tub to protect her from CO's sexual desire and consequent rape. As soon as CO appears "Helena jumps and puts tub roughly over The Girl, and sits on it. Bessie resumes her position. Both look up at a man and watch him, they jump into line as though in an army formation. Bessie responds to him, gestures at herself, puts on her wig and walks out, following him, - the audience cannot see him. Helena watches them go, and lets The Girl out from under the tub" (*Eclipsed* 8). What is most shocking is that both wives have accepted their roles most complacently. Besides, the act of rape is normalized and taken for granted. The gender based violence in the Liberian war has "normalized and sanctioned what Liberians refer to as sexual exploitation and assault (SEA)" (Chandler Speaking 31). "Soon Bessie (wife #3) enters, goes and wipes between her legs with a cloth, comes and joins them, pulls off her wig and sits back down for Helena (wife #1) to finish braiding" her hair (*Eclipsed* 9). Obviously the gender arrangements in these compounds or refugee camps wherein the women were captivated and subordinated for many years were such that men occupied a higher order. The women would be privileged to stay willfully in such camps and be protected from the assaults of other men as long as they surrendered themselves sexually and socially to a male conduit. "It was more important for these women in these groups to remain insiders by countering racism rather than outsiders constantly challenging gender role in such a way that men could perceive as a threat" to their masculinity (Jennings). Helena verifies the situation when she shouts at the Girl who walked out while they were sleeping: "I Wife Number One to Commanding Officer General. Dat mean, he trust me de most - I even tell oda men what to do - if I tell him about you ye go'- (*Eclipsed* 12). Having accepted her role as such, Helena has lost complete track of her identity, her age and her roots. She can only remember that she was in 'Nimba County, and Doe men come and dat when I first taken'(9). And adds "Dey find me in de bush

when I run” (9). But Helena has no memory of when was that, how old she was and how long ago. Bessie similarly narrates: “I was living in de nort and taylor men everywhere, den de rebels come and start de fighting – dat’s when I woz taken. But I tink I been’ere since I woz almost a woman” (10).

Indeed rape has been a pervasive tool of war and means of displacement. Yet the raped women rarely report such gender based violence or sexual assaults or even seek medical, psychological or legal assistance due to the shame and stigma of public exposure. Besides in post – colonial societies, there is no faith in legal penalties. In refugee camps, women are still vulnerable to sexual violence from men in the receiving community, men in the camp or even local police forces. A common problem would be the need to leave for distant latrines or to go for firewood. As soon as The Girl went out of the camp to the bathroom, she was trapped, raped, sodomised and declared as wife “Number Four” (13). Rape in war and ethnic conflicts is by no means a shameful action but rather a conquest. “Military forces use sexualized forms of violence to establish control over subordinated populations, including those who are captured.

Colonialism, created through military conquest, is maintained through violence, including rape and battering of subordinate-group women by dominant – group men. Men of the conquering group can typically abuse or kill subordinate women with impunity” (Merry 156). The fact is that rape in war is not merely a sexual desire but rather a war tactic to perpetuate patriarchal power of men over women, terrorize and demoralize victims and members of opposing ethnic groups. Along these lines rape is justified as a tool of war. Women are dehumanized and designated as a national ethnic enemy. Political motivations provide opportunity and justification of rape. “Authority guided rhetoric encompassing the negative aspects of patriarchal sexism and radical exclusivist nationalism provides political and moral excuses for rape made convenient through non punishment and allowed to reach massive proportions” (Zabeida 19). Rape in war stresses the fact the women’s bodies are battlefields. As gender based violence and as structural violence, rape perpetuates the post-colonial discourse. It serves as the ultimate violation of a

human being's integrity, dignity, safety and emotional and physical wellbeing. Rape is also carried out as victory over the enemy. Within post-colonial discourse, it becomes a discourse of survival "us against them". Because of their bodies and reproductive functions, women become the property of the national collective and therefore raping them denies the purity of the nation. As property, women's rape becomes a message of male-to male communication. In this case men become the actual targets of sexual violence, failing as men and as soldiers to protect their women. Besides, rape of women, brings disgrace and shame to their male relatives. Rape is also used as a "push effect" to drive people off their land, escaping from a doomed fate. Retaliation against men who have committed rapes and retaliation for past rapes and injustices are also functions of rape. Women made pregnant were refused an abortion and kept in captivity in order that potential babies would inherit the rapist ethnicity and contaminate the purity of their identity (20-27). As such rape is a gender based violence perpetrated against women bodies, not their identities, for maintaining a post-colonial discourse which Africana womanists deconstruct and challenge and weaken to create a new reality in thought and in action. Queer theory best analyses rape where Butler remarks: "There is no identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (Butler Gender 25).

Calling the women in *Eclipsed* by numbers instead of names is structural violence. The concept of Nommo is a powerful and empowering concept in African cosmology that evokes material existence. Having been denied the authority of not only naming self, but also of defining self, it has become imperative for Africana people to take control over this determining factor of their lives if they hope to avoid degradation, isolation and annihilation in a world of greed, violence and pandemonium (Nnaemeka). Danai Gurira believes that "the ritual of naming is the most important way in which an individual can establish an identity in Liberian culture" (Najera).

A rising capitalist consumer culture adds substantially to an eroticized structural violence against women. A construction of desire is violently adopted to sell products. The wives in *Eclipsed* are mostly preoccupied with consumer products. Bessie needs” a “comb”, a “new wig”, wants to look like “Janet Jackson” (11) and desires ‘hair extensions’ (*Eclipsed* 25). Being pregnant, she realizes that she will “get bigger and ugly” and she needs her hair “to look nice AT LEAST” (26). Predatory capitalism is thus intimately related to war in general, and to women’s bodies as battlefield in particular. In the words of Susan Brooks, “Predatory capitalism constructs desire to sell its products, drawing on a well-spring of images and concepts from Western culture of the erotic as the degradation and submission of women. This construct is dangerously accelerating in the age of the new media” (Brook 122). Foucault argues that the transition to modern societies has been characterized by a profound transformation in the exercise of power by what he calls “a reversal of the political axis of individualization” (Foucault Discipline 44). Indeed, the new machinations of power through capitalist channels have circulated progressively “gaining access to individuals, their bodies, their gestures and their daily lives” (Foucault Power 17). Dani Gurira criticizes the technologies of femininity which inflect women with a continual sense of failure and bodily deficiency. As a set up to prolong the subjugation of women, a woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal other.

Two more characters enter the picture in *Eclipsed* each representing other choices besides being under the protection and exploration of the warlord or Co. The former wife number 2, whose real name long ago was Maima, has become a woman warrior and joined the military. She has named herself “Disgruntled” (*Eclipsed* 8) and carries an AK-47 rifle slung over her shoulder. She tells Bessie: “I woz a wife like you. Den I wake up” and adds: “I no cook, dat de job you do” and “ I know you missin’me while I out dere, fighting for freedom” (17). The return of wife number 2 is quite unsettling. She has chosen, unlike the other women, to be an accessory of male violence rather than its victim. Indeed by means of a process of acculturation, “masculinity must be attained by means

of opposition to the concrete world of daily life, by escaping from contact with the female world of the household into the masculine world of politics and public life. This experience of two worlds, lies at the heart of a series of dualisms-abstract/concrete, mind/body, culture/nature, ideal/real, statis/change. And these dualisms are overlaid by gender; only the first of each pair is associated with the male” (Harstock 361).

In addition to masculinity, patriarchy also provides the cultural infrastructure for militarism. Along these lines femininities give aid and succor to militarized masculinities. Whether they be mothers, lovers, wives, nurses or prostitutes, women play a critical role in gender projects participating in the legitimization of militarism. Attributes of hegemonic masculinities across time and space reference warrior traditions that emphasize bravery, toughness, daring, honor, strength and courage. Looking for a new recruit, Wife number 2 lures The Girl to join her. Step by step she initiates her into the rites of warfare: murder, bondage, plundering, justifying these acts with the doctrine destroy or be destroyed. Helena warns the girl “How you no gon’do dat? You go’do whot da commanda tell you you go do. If he till you go kill dat village and bring him tree wives, you go’ have to do dat” (*Eclipsed* 35). Bidding the girl fire other men and hunt captive women to hand them over to the warlords, Maima calls The Girl, Number Four, and informs her that to survive, she has to protect herself, by offering other women. “You feed dem, you not get eaten. Dat simple” (38). For Maima, this is the only means of survival. It is the only way of restoring Liberia to its rightful people as the “enemy is no longer human being” and they are fighting “de monkey Charles Taylor” (38). Hence, in order to survive, The Girl must choose “which part of herself she’s willing to let die”, her humanity or her femininity. (Mc Nulty). Either way, The Girl has unconsciously become a weapon of war in a way that she did not sign up for when she originally enlisted. Giving herself the name “Moda’s Blessing” (49), and crying herself to death for handing the “Commandas” a captive girl to rape, who in turn, cursed her and bled to death, The Girl is presented as a woman in a three-way struggle. What Gurira argues is that the gendered sexual nature

of war is not simply a historical artifact of warfare or the military, but is an ongoing, evoking feature of military organization and operations. Gendered violence in war is both patriarchal as well as masculine. Maima sums up the situation: “It best to work wit’de system, and right now-de system it war” (40). The fact is, in war, a gender based violence dictates that women play a host of militarized roles: “to boost morale, to provide comfort during and after wars, to reproduce the next generation of soldiers, to serve as symbols of a homeland worth risking one’s life for, to replace men when the pool of suitable male recruits is low” (Enloe 44).

Rita, a member of the Liberian Women Initiative for Peace, looking for her daughter whom she lost in war, presents a third option for survival. Rita exhorts the girl and Maima to put down their weapons and obey the ceasefire. Rita is “a part of a large network of women peacemakers whose “mission (is) to end dis war (29)” by putting down the guns and convincing the different warlords to opt for peace. Rita offers The Girl different options for a better life: to go to school, to get her own business, to have her own house and take care of her own children. She also persuades Helena (wife # 1) “to join a camp in Cote D’ivoire (30)” and to consider her life “beyond this bondage (she) is stuck in now” (30). Indeed, one of the hardest things for those dedicated to peace to do is “to break through the weak/strong dichotomy, where war, as masculinized, is considered strong and peace, as feminized, is considered weak” (Thislethwaite 180). Maima rejects the peace process, refuses to put down her gun and mocks Rita’s manoeuvres for reconciliation.

Maima.

See, I know whot you women try to do. You trying
to mek us weak. You want us to start to feel like
gals crying ___ “Ooh, I lost my ma, ooh, ooh, I lost
my Pa, dey hurt me, dey rape me”. I no do da no
more, go to de villages if you looking for stupid gal
like dat. I help mek women strong. Dat Who I do. You
want cryin’ little ladies, go to de Commandant wives.
Me, I no care about ____ (*Eclipsed* 40).

For Maima, peacemakers are weak as their work is not heroic strength but rather feminine and dependent. Both war and peace are gendered along these lines.

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By the end of the play, war is over. Charles Taylor has fled to Nijeria. CO calls Helena, bids her sit down for the first time in so many years and asks her to pack her things and go. CO has captured Helena as a young girl, put her child to death, raped her so badly that she can no longer conceive and finally cast her away as nothing. Cooking all his meals, serving all his needs, Helena is shocked into awareness. She will go to school in Monrovia and start her life all over. Bessie on the other hand, decides to remain with CO, bring up his child whom she names "Clintine" from Clinton whose name represented the American dream of power, wealth and attraction.

For Danai Gurira no solution is perfect. Yet despite the obstacles, the hardships, the violence and the rape, the women in the play survive. They go through harrowing things, but they retain their humanity. They retain their agency and their desire to move forward. According to Miriam Cooke, the new role of women in war is to live war not as victims but as survivors. The new women brought to their war participation "the awareness that if practical victory is to have any meaning at all, it must entail social transformation" (Gabriel).

Although Maima (Wife # 2) refuses to join the other women in their mission of peace, after the war is over and attempts to persuade The Girl (Wife # 4) to join her, The Girl opts for humanity and accompanies Rita and Helena. Yet her choice is not without pain and loss. Having no family to go back to and no one to belong to, The Girl comments: "I don't think I have any, my pa dead and my ma da, dey, dey tek ha and den dey ____" and the stage directions read: (The Girl stares at Bessie – her face immobile. The women all stare back at her in a prolonged silence, absorbing all that isn't said in full understanding" (*Eclipsed* 54). Gurira believes that perhaps women are politically powerless but they do possess moral strength, dignity and compassion to draw upon and survive man-made wars without giving up their survival. The Girl's choice represents the dramatic climax of the play. She may be too young and inexperienced to know the different paths but she is made to listen to both soldiers and peacemakers. Gurira is unafraid to give every woman a voice in her own destiny. By so doing, she endorses the Africana womanist

theory in its veneration of the differences of race, class, culture and life experiences of African Women. “African women are not only afforded an opportunity to talk about their lives in their own terms but here is an opportunity for them to demonstrate all their positive values” (Tendai).

Hope in Gurira’s *Eclipsed* arises primarily from the playwright’s breaking the silence and the taboo. By resisting social silencing and placing African women at the center of textual representation, Gurira refuses marginality and restores for women a position of centrality in culture as well as self-definition. Gurira challenges the oppression and deconstructs the colonial discourse that forces women’s lives only in response to subordination and marginalization. “The idea of calling it *Eclipsed* was about saying there is great light in these breathing, vivid characters who have personality and flavor”, Gurira adds “The idea is that their light has not been destroyed, it’s been blocked. But an eclipse is temporary. So, the hope in the title is that we will eventually start to see these women’s faces, to hear and know them” (Rathe Dujour).

In a world where women are still disproportionately victimized, attacked, put into inhumane circumstances and left to feel unsafe, a playwright’s voice becomes invaluable in highlighting the complex perspective of the African diaspora. By addressing both Western as well as African audiences, Gurira is able to shock them into a most “unsettling and eye-opening” awareness as to the plight of African women, their colonization, their bodies exploited as battlefields and their Africana Womanism which binds them all in a human struggle against oppression but preserves their differences and respects their voices (Dziemianowicz). Gurira does not categorize her play as feminist or even political. “In very many ways, my focus as an artist is about getting African women’s voices out there”, she says, and adds “If that ends up having a label attached, I don’t mind” (Gates). For a nation traumatized by a fourteen-year civil war, wherein two of every three women have been victims of rape during bloody conflicts, the election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a woman, as president is great victory. Despite the emotional and psychological scars and in spite of the gendered and structural violence, Liberians have emerged triumphant and Johnson-Sirleaf has announced “Zero

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tolerance” for such violence. She has enforced the Rape Law which came into effect the day after her inauguration. According to Robin Chandler, the narratives of post war atrocities are clearly connected to, and driven by poverty, a disproportionately high unemployment rate, and by high rates of illiteracy (structural violence). “Liberia’s Gender-based Violence National Action Plan (2008) stated that over half of Liberian women are survivors of GBV (gender-based violence), so it has a multi sectional strategy for combating the pandemic that carries with it “harmful traditional and cultural practices that perpetuate violence against women” (Chandler Speaking 38).

The aim of this paper is to present a theatre of war and hope in Africa’s dramatic narratives. Lara Foot Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament* (2005) and Danai Gurira’s *Eclipsed* (2010) from South Africa and Zimbabwe, respectively, are quite representative of this theatre. Both playwrights have demonstrated how in war, women’s bodies are battlefields. Both dramatists have delineated violence in unacknowledged racial civil war in South Africa’s post-apartheid, and in a fourteen-year ethnic and tribal war in Liberia respectively. In both cases racism, sexism and classism have joined forces to expose African women to the most atrocious gender based violence as well as structural violence. In both cases, voices from the African diaspora have proved different from the African American and Western African cultures wherein colonialism, neo-liberalism and globalization are major factors in Africa’s plight. Patriarchy and its culture of subordination and marginalization accentuate the crisis of women in Africa.

Gender based violence distinguishes violence that targets individuals or groups on the basis of their gender, in this paper women, from other forms of violence. Structural violence on the other hand, affects the everyday life of all people. Gender based violence includes rape, sexual violence, slavery, impregnation and murder. Structural violence is concealed by a hegemony of ordinariness wherein it is normalized and made invisible. Poverty, depravity, unemployment, shabby and squatter residence, large-scale

environmental degradation are vital factors of structural violence in post-colonial societies.

The paper proves however that despite the horrifying atrocities of war and the physical and psychological trauma which African women have undergone, they have emerged triumphant and their light has vanquished the darkness through a new hope for transformation and renewal of survival.

In order to substantiate the notion of women's bodies as battlefield in war, the violence and the subsequent consciousness-raising and hope in future, theoretical analysis engaging Africana Womanism, Queer theory and Post-colonial theory has been applied. Africana Womanism unites African women in a collective sisterhood that is family-entered and that adopts positive male-female relationships. Men and women in Africana Womanism are united in a struggle against oppression, racism and injustice. Africana womanists advocate global solidarity with other women but acknowledge the fact that their realities are not defined by the same standards. Hence, choices are granted by the dramatists at the end of the plays.

Queer theory questions the social construction of the female body. Gender is a social and institutionalized category that serves to curtail a body's agency and displace its identity. Language and discourse are tools to perpetuate a kind of performativity, to use Judith Butler's term, that perpetuates the pre-existing essentialist notion of identity. Hence, by the very same logic, language and discourse can be used to deconstruct and reconstruct identity to challenge and subvert existing power structures. Rape of women or children in both plays is a point in evidence.

Post-colonial theory further clarifies the unreasonable and brutal agency imposed upon disadvantaged colonized societies in the third world as opposed to the free agents of the First World countries. Under globalization, capitalism and the nation state, law is not justice and any resistance to oppression becomes grave violation. Gayatri Spivak's affirmative sabotage becomes quite illustrative in revealing the colonization of women's bodies, minds and spirits through capitalist consumer culture and the militarization of the globe under an umbrella of anti-terrorism and neo-modernism. In

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both plays, the squalid conditions of life to which women are exposed as captives in refugee camps, or even prostitutes in domestically violent situations subject them to further injustice and physical, sexual and psychological traumatic damage.

The female body is never a body without social, political economic racial and gender context. A just rape tradition implies that women's bodies are normal war territory in a society wherein radicalized colonization reinforces aggression and violence towards women through patriarchal notions of subordination and marginalization. A predatory capitalist culture accentuates the violence by invading women's bodies and minds, a colonization more imperialistic than invading their countries. The subject woman becomes a slave to the eye of the other. Her image is magnified, exploited and commercialized by the media to perpetuate further violence and normalize further commodification.

In *Tshepang: The Third Testament*, the rape of the nine-month-old baby Tshepang by her mother's boyfriend, is a galvanizing and horrifying violent act. Yet Lara Foot is able to draw attention to the stagnant situation of a people deprived of justice, of opportunity, of life and of any freedom of choice in a place where nothing happens. Without justifying the rape, Lara Foot blames the whole of a society that has been gang-raped for so many years. The continual rape of the wives in *Eclipsed* underline the same horror and manifest degradation and humiliation that women undergo, trading sexual services for protection from assault and further violence by other men. Ruth's (the mother of baby Tshepang) silence for three years and the CO's wives' acceptance of their roles in *Eclipsed* are similar reactions to violence both gendered and structural.

The numbers, the boredom, the drink, the sex and the "houvrou" arrangement in Lara Foot's play are equated by the numbering instead of the naming technique in Gurira's play. Women in both cases become commodities in the gruesome economy of war. Dissociating themselves from the people they used to be is a way of denying the permanence of their awful exploitation.

Domestic violence in *Tshepang* and civil violence in *Eclipsed* are similar in stereotyping the essentialist constructions of

masculinity. By addressing the notions of shame and guilt in *Tshepang*, Lara Foot vindicates women from unjust accusations and breaks through a silence that articulates pain and horror through the character of Ruth. The acceptance of the women in *Eclipsed* of their roles as sexual receptacles for male anguish or lust is also addressed by Gurira and overcome by the survival options she grants her characters at the end of the play. The pervasive horror of civil war which leaves women with no power over their lives is cleverly distorted by the choices made available for a new survival and the possibility of social transformation.

Lara Foot resorts to biblical symbolism and religious interpretation to grant her readers and audience hope. There is no third testament in reality, it only exists in the play to offer people new options for a better life wherein Jesus's sister, in the form of baby Tshepang, has come to save them from imminent despair. That the word 'tshepang' means hope, that the play ends with articulation of that name as the last word and that the baby has survived the rape and the physical as well as psychological trauma become a sign from God. There is compassion and mercy after all. Simon's sympathetic relationship with Ruth promises a better future wherein women in Africana Womanism share their lives with their male partners in a positively humane environment. Danai Gurira, on the other hand, makes use of women peacemakers who provide hope amidst a situation of severe aggression negotiating peace and convincing warlords to put down their guns. Such hope is extremely difficult when violence and aggression are respected as masculine and heroic, while peace is rejected as feminine and weak. By offering several options and choices for survival, Gurira gives hope for a new survival in African thought and action.

Both playwrights give voices to African women and tackle issues that affect African women and that have been conceived as taboo. Both playwrights protest against patriarchal dominance, post-colonial subjugation, capitalist imperialism and essentialist constructions of the body and social acculturation. Both dramatists break the enforced silence of women to embrace the other. Both raise an awareness about African women's centrality to human existence and retrieve their position in historical narratives wherein

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they have been marginalized and oppressed. Both dramatists resist social silencing and place women at the center of textual representation defying exclusion and misrepresentation. Through a theatre of war and hope, Lara Foot Newton from South Africa and Danai Gurira from Zimbabwe have portrayed violence and survival, death and renewal.

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