

The Flip Side of the Coin: Africana Womanist's Post-Apartheid Triple Quandary in Thulani Mtshali's Weemen^(*)

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Abstract

This paper investigates how post-apartheid South African playwrights have used theatre to eliminate the apartheid's legacy and raise people's awareness of women's issues. It accentuates the triple jeopardy from which an African woman suffers; i.e. racism, classism and sexism and emphasizes her struggle to fight these evils as discussed in Thulani Mtshali's *Weemen* (1998). Although this play was written by a man, he succeeded to stress women's anguish in South Africa. The paper also underscores the cultural restrictions that lead to establishing the masculine supremacy and, as a consequence, cause the wretchedness of women. Further, it underlines the repercussions of colonialism and highlights the poverty and ignorance in which South African people lived in the post-apartheid period. The hegemony of the white and subservience of the black are also highlighted in this paper. Further, this paper emphasizes how Mtshali rejected the hegemonic misrepresentation of African women in Western discourse and presented them as agents of social change. Moreover, this paper presents an Africana womanist reading of Mtshali's play and shows how far the dramatist portrayed a true image of the Africana womanist as Clenora Hudson-Weems portrayed her in the theory which she developed in the late 1980s to enable African women to address their needs and experiences from an Afrocentric perspective and which she differentiated from the other female-centered theories.

Keywords

Post-Apartheid South African theatre, triple quandary, Africana womanist, culture restrictions, gender issues

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يتناول هذه البحث كيفية استخدام الكتاب المسرحيين في جنوب إفريقيا في فترة ما بعد الفصل العنصري للمسرح للقضاء على إرث الفصل العنصري وزيادة وعي الناس بقضايا المرأة. ويبرز هذا البحث الخطر الثلاثي الذي تعاني منه المرأة الأفريقية، أي العنصرية والطبقية والتمييز على أساس الجنس ويؤكد نضالها لمحاربة هذه الشرور كما نوقش في مسرحية (النساء) التي كتبها (ثولاني متشالي) عام (١٩٩٨). وعلى الرغم من أن هذه المسرحية كتبها رجل ، إلا أنه نجح في التأكيد على معاناة النساء في جنوب إفريقيا. كما يتناول هذا البحث أيضا القيود التي يفرضها المجتمع على المرأة والتي تؤدي إلى ترسيخ سيادة الرجل ، ونتيجة لذلك ، تتسبب في شقاء المرأة. علاوة على ذلك ، فإن هذه الورقة البحثية تؤكد تداعيات الاستعمار وتسلب الضوء على الفقر والجهل الذي عاش فيه شعب جنوب إفريقيا في فترة ما بعد الفصل العنصري.

كما يسلط هذا البحث الضوء أيضًا على هيمنة الأبيض وخضوع الأسود. علاوة على ذلك فإن هذه الورقة البحثية تؤكد كيف رفض (ثولاني متشالي) تشويه صورة المرأة الأفريقية في الخطاب الغربي وكيف قدمها في مسرحيته وسائر أعماله بصورة مغايرة عن تلك التي قدمتها الكثير من الأعمال الغربية. علاوة على ذلك ، تقدم هذه الورقة البحثية قراءة نسوية أفريقية لمسرحية (متشالي) وتوضح إلى أي مدى نجح الكاتب في تقديم صورة حقيقية للمرأة الأفريقية كما صورتها (كلينورا هيدسون ويمز) لاعطاء الفرصة للنساء الأفريقيات للتعبير عن مشكلاتهن من منظور أفريقي وذلك الذي ميز هذه النظرية عن سائر النظريات الأخرى التي تتعامل مع مشكلات المرأة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : مسرح جنوب أفريقيا بعد الفصل العنصري، مأزق ثلاثي، المرأة الأفريقية، قيود مجتمعية ، قضايا الجنسين

"Without question, she is the flip side of the coin, the co-partner in the struggle for her people..."

(Sojourner Truth, 'And Ain't I A Woman')

Introduction

In South Africa, a country that has suffered several years of apartheid which negatively affected most political and social institutions, women were long deprived of their basic rights. After South Africa got its independence in 1994, its literati began to discuss African women's problems in their works, such as male-violence, poverty and ignorance. In post-apartheid South Africa, many black dramatists have propagated for a new country where women do not have to suffer because of their gender or color. In several plays, they have struggled to ruin the very legacy of the apartheid and stir people

to attain social change. As it was frequently devoted to the exposure and denouncement of the disparaging effects of apartheid during the “Black Consciousness Movement” in the 1970s and 1980s, drama has specifically been employed by many South African writers to depict the trials and tribulations of black women in South Africa.

Male violence against women is one of the major themes that were repeatedly addressed in South African plays in the post-apartheid period. In these plays, women were the central characters as they were portrayed as the agents of social change. But whereas most of the plays during the “Black Consciousness Movement” were written by male dramatists who tended to emphasize the deteriorating conditions of black people under apartheid, South African theatre in the post-apartheid period depended on both male and female dramatists to discuss gender issues. Thulani S. Mtshali (1963- 2002) is one of those male dramatists who addressed women's problems since he believed that women's traumata are essentially social issues that affect the whole society. Mtshali is a celebrated South African playwright, poet, producer and director. He wrote *Weemen* to depict the real experience of his aunt who suffered at the hands of a brutal husband. Mtshali maintained, "This was an experience of someone close to the family, an aunt who was in that kind of a situation. The play is basically based on her experience, although I have taken experiences of other people that I know and have seen; but mainly her experience because the husband used to be ruthless to her. He would hack her with an axe and she would have all sorts of scars and blue-eyes" (102). In *Weemen*, he expressed his dissatisfaction, as a man, with the behavior of other South African men who deprive women of many of their rights in order not to threaten their manhood.

Weemen is a play which addresses the experiences of women in the patriarchal society of South Africa. It was published in 1998 in an anthology of plays entitled *Black South African Women: An Anthology of Plays*, edited by Kathy Perkins (1954-). This anthology includes some plays that handle the problems of black women in South Africa and accentuate the stresses and strains they face in their male-centered society. Perkins believes that women's issues in South Africa need to

be deeply discussed. In her introduction to the anthology, she states that she has “always been fascinated by drama’s unique power to educate audiences about histories and cultures” (2). Thulani Mtshali's *Weemen* addresses the difficulties from which Black women suffer within their national contexts. Perkins maintains that “WEEMEN explores physical and mental spousal abuse, and is one of the few plays that take us into the home of a township couple to address this issue” (6). She believes that South African dramatists have to promote women's issues and condemn violence against women which is part of the apartheid's legacy.

The hypothesis of this paper is to prove that women’s issues in South Africa have not fully been covered and need to be thoroughly addressed; discussing extensively the ill treatment of men to women. Furthermore, it shows how far Thulani Mtshali has succeeded, in his play *Weemen*, to fill in this gap. In addition, this paper poses the hypothesis that Africana womanism is much more suitable to express the problems of African women than feminism, black feminism and womanism that could not fully fulfill the needs of black women.

To maintain this hypothesis, the paper raises certain questions such as: what is the triple quandary of women in South Africa in the post-apartheid period and what is the mechanism they adopt to get rid of this quandary? The second query that this paper poses is: how can women react to the norms and laws of their patriarchy-centered culture? The third question raised is: what are the repercussions of colonialism that South African women suffer from in the post-apartheid period? Moreover, this paper underscores how far the portrayal of female characters differs in post-apartheid plays from that during apartheid. In addition, it questions the ability of male dramatists to depict the trials and tribulations of women meticulously and realistically, raise people's awareness of the trauma of downgraded women in patriarchal societies and encourage women to be self-empowered. Further, it explores how far the protagonist of the play reflects the image of the Africana womanist as presented in the theory of Clenora Hudson-Weems (1945-) and to what extent she manages to achieve victory in the end and succeed in preserving her

family and developing her individualism. Besides, this paper seeks to refute the hegemonic misrepresentation of women of color in Western discourse and shatter the misconceptions about South African women. Finally, it tries to prove that dramatists can use theatre to put an end to male abuse of women and solve women's problems.

To my knowledge, there are few academic studies of *Weemen*. For example, Majid Al-Hachami's article, "Facing Spouse Abuse in Thulani Mtshali's *Weemen*" (2019) examines some of the psychopathological and socio-cultural reasons that lead to violence and abuse actions against women in South Africa and emphasizes the strategies the heroine follows to face the physical and mental abuse that her husband exercises upon her. Francis L. Rangoajane's doctoral dissertation, "Political Shifts and Black Theatre in South Africa" (2011) shows how the democratization of South Africa has changed the militant and protest nature of its theatre and divided it into three categories based on the age and gender of South African dramatists. These are the older generation, young generation and female black dramatists. Each group discusses the themes that it regards of utmost importance. Moreover, Rangoajane emphasizes how these political shifts changed the attitude of the state towards black theatre and black institutions of dramatic art and forced these institutions, in turn, to change their attitude towards the state. Rangoajane considers Thulani Mtshali one of the promising figures of the young generation of black dramatists and analyzes his play *Weemen* that shows how political shifts have enabled South African dramatists to address the problems and concerns they could not previously handle during apartheid. Further, Olga Barrios' paper, "Male Violence against Women and Hybrid Identities in Post-Apartheid South African Black Theatre" (2012), underscores how black South African dramatists in the post-apartheid period have endeavored to ruin the apartheid's legacy and create new communities where women do not suffer because of their gender or color. Barrios studies Thulani Mtshali's *Weemen* as well as some of the plays of Magi N. Williams, Malika Ndlovu and Ismail Mahomed as examples of those works of art in which South African

dramatists presented women as agents of social change and struggled to raise people's awareness of social change.

The present study analyzes *Weemen* from an Africana womanist perspective and accentuates the triple predicament of South African women in the Post-Apartheid period. The paper begins by shedding light on some female-oriented theories, such as mainstream feminism, black feminism and womanism, all believed to lead to the emergence of Africana womanism. Then, the paper explores South African theatre in the post-apartheid period and emphasizes how black male dramatists, in this period, got interested in women's problems. The paper, then, explores the very concept of black patriarchy in South Africa, through analyzing Thulani Mtshali's *Weemen*. The aftermaths of colonialism are also closely referred to.

Investigating Africana Womanism and its Female-Centered Predecessors

Africana womanism is a theory originated by Clenora Hudson-Weems in the late 1980s to enable African women to address their problems from an Afrocentric outlook and help them change their reality¹. Hudson-Weems developed Africana womanism to make up for the deficiencies of feminism and other female-centered theories such as black feminism and Alice Walker's womanism.

A. Feminism

Clenora Hudson-Weems believes that feminism, which emerged in the United States in 1848 to call for suffrage and women's equality with men, cannot express the problems and needs of African women for two reasons. First of all, it prioritizes gender inequality over other kinds of oppression from which women suffer; hence, it cannot address African women's problems. Feminism abounds in some European hypothetical principles, such as the problematic relationship between men and women, with the former regarded as enemies for the latter.² Yet, this does not apply to the relationship between African men and women. In the racist society in which they live, African men have been deprived of institutional power; hence, they do not have the ability to persecute African women as white men do. Throughout their history, African women have not regarded African men as their

enemies. On the contrary, both of them have found it obligatory to unite with each other in order to help their country get rid of colonization and its repercussions (Hooks 34). Hudson-Weems emphasizes that life requires the presence and collaboration of black men and women together since they have the same enemy; i.e. the white oppressor (*Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* 20-30). Accordingly, gender issues are not of much concern to African women. Thus, the main reason that led white women to revolt against men is not of the same importance for black women.

Secondly, feminism was a racist theory when it emerged. Although it started as the women's suffrage movement and called for the elimination of slavery as well as social equality for all the people, regardless of their race, class or gender, feminists objected to the Fifteenth Amendment which gave the voting right to African American men and did not grant it to white women (Thompson 177-184). White feminists' desire to obtain a female voting right and annul the black male one emphasizes the willingness of the white to uphold supremacy over the black and underscores the racist nature of the first wave of feminism. Accordingly, Hudson Weems believes that feminism cannot address the beliefs and needs of African women; therefore, the latter needed a different theory to express them. She maintains, "As we approach the last hour leading up to the next millennium, I cannot stress enough the critical need today for Africana scholars throughout the world to create our own paradigms and theoretical frameworks for assessing our works. We need our own Africana theorists, not scholars who duplicate or use theories created by others in analyzing Africana texts" ("*Africana Womanism and the Critical Need for Africana Theory and Thought*" 79). Thus, instead of depending on foreign female-based theories to handle the concerns of African women, Hudson-Weems believes in the need of having a purely African female-based ideology to express the needs and experiences of black women.

B. Black Feminism

Another theoretical predecessor to Africana womanism is black feminism, a movement which began in the 1970s with the African-American liberation movement. African-American women were ignored in both the African male-led liberation movement as well as in the Western feminist ideology. On the one hand, the conflict between men and women occurred in the African black movement owing to sexism. On the other hand, the prioritization of gender issues over other interests of black women as well as the racist nature of the Euro-centric feminist movement led to the collision between black and white feminists (Collins 149-159). Hence, black feminists decided to develop a theory through which they can discuss race, class and gender conflicts. Black feminism addresses the experiences of black females in their own voices and promotes black female self-naming and empowerment.

However, there have been some criticisms of this theory. While black feminists' main purpose was to create a theory according to which they can address the triple jeopardy from which the African woman suffers; i.e. color, gender and class, some critics maintained that black feminists, like mainstream feminists, prioritize gender-based oppression over other issues such as race and class. Hudson-Weems asserts that black feminism “either directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly includes anti-male sentiments, and gender exclusivity, or at least the prioritization of gender issues at the risk of downplaying the critical significance of race priority for Africans” (Africana Womanism Literary Theory xx). Hence, she believes that black feminism is inappropriate to address the African women experience because the issue of race is of a secondary concern in this theory. A second critique of black feminism is that it addresses the experiences of black women according to the history and needs of white feminists. Hudson-Weems maintains that black feminism “may relate to sexual discrimination outside the African community, but cannot claim to resolve the critical problems within it, which are influenced by racism or classism” (Africana Womanism: Reclaiming

Ourselves 35). Thus, it cannot express the concerns of African women or reflect their own problems.

C. Womanism

A third female-centered theoretical predecessor to African womanism is Alice Walker's womanism. In 1979, the African-American novelist Alice Walker (1944-) mentioned the term *womanist* for the first time in her short story *Coming Apart*³. Walker's womanism addresses black women's experiences and supports black female discernibility and liberation. It condemns oppression and calls for women's emancipation from all kinds of existing and future subjugation. Further, womanism aims to "raise the black woman to the level not just of black men, but of white men and white women, too, to the level of any of God's people, whether of the black, the white, or any other race" (Overbea 22). Moreover, it calls for communication and negotiation among all people. Womanism permits corporation with men if they respect women's relationships with family and friends and care about the mental and physical health of all women (Phillips xxiv).

However, the theory has its critics. It is Walker's first definitions of womanism that have created debate. The theory has been criticized for its obvious association with mainstream feminism by describing a womanist as "A Black feminist or feminist of color" (Phillips 19). Owing to its deep roots in Eurocentric feminism, womanism critics believe that it cannot address the experiences of African women. Hudson-Weems states that, similar to feminism and black feminism, womanism prioritizes gender problems over those of race while the vital concerns of African people must be "racism, with classism intertwined within" (African Womanism Literary Theory 30). The second charge directed against womanism is that it adopts an air of moral superiority over white feminism. Walker defines womanists as black feminists and feminists of color, therefore, some critics believe that, in this way, she separates black and white women and excludes the latter from the interests of this theory. Walker's definition portrays black women as responsible and sacrificing mothers and wives while it represents white women as immature dolls

who ignore their duties as mothers and wives. Whether this portrayal of black and white women is premeditated or not, womanism's race-centered dualistic representations of black and white women as responsible and irresponsible women contradicts the notions of solidarity and wholeness that the theory adopts (Charles 361-401). A third critique is that womanism does not regard the differences between the experiences of African women and claims that all black women share the same lives and concerns. It does not pay attention to the different languages, histories, experiences, and cultures of African women (Barbara 30-40). Although Walker associates womanism with black feminism, she disregards an important tenet of black feminism; i.e. the diversity of black women's experiences (Phillips 191-193). Hence, Hudson-Weems asserts that all these female-centered theories; i.e. feminism, black feminism, and womanism cannot express the needs and experiences of black women. She claims that these theories are "problematic as labels for the true Africana woman" owing to their inability to precisely address the experiences of black women (Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves 18). Accordingly, she began to think of a theory that can express the problems and concerns of African women from an Afro-centric perspective.

D. Africana Womanism

In stead of white feminism, black feminism and Alice Walker's womanism, Hudson-Weems developed a theory that originates from the African culture and addresses the experiences and interests of African women, which she calls Africana womanism. To identify the essence of Africana womanism, Hudson-Weems asserts, "Neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism, Africana womanism is not Black feminism, African feminism, or Walker's womanism that some Africana women have come to embrace" (Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves 24). However, this movement does not reject all the demands of white feminism, black feminism or Alice Walker's womanism such as their call for women's right to learn, work and vote as well as their rejection for women discrimination, sexual assault and domestic violence, but it presents a Pan-African perspective that is relevant to African women and African people in general. Africana

womanism is concerned with the whole black family. It does not disregard men or even those of different sexualities. On the contrary, it calls for solidarity and collaboration between men and women and encourages heterosexual relationships (Ntiri 163-7). This theory, which is applicable to all women of African origin, addresses the injustices relevant to race, gender, sexuality and other concerns not formerly handled in the other female-centered theories.

The word "Africana" is the feminine form of the Latin word "Africanus", which means "of Africa", and is much favored by Hudson-Weems than the word "African". She maintains:

The first part of the coinage, Africana, identifies the ethnicity of the woman being considered, and this reference to her ethnicity, establishing her cultural identity, relates directly to her ancestry and land base—Africa. The second part of the term Womanism, recalls Sojourner Truth's powerful impromptu speech 'And Ain't I A Woman,' one in which she battle's with the dominant alienating forces in her life as a struggling Africana Woman, questioning the accepted idea of womanhood. (Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves 22-23)

Africana womanism addresses gender disparities from which African women suffer in their patriarchal societies through a Pan-African stance. It tries to create comradeship and solidarity among all people of African origin, whether they live in Africa or not.

Africana womanism brings to the minds the position of African women before colonization and tries to refurbish it. In pre-colonial Africa, women were not regarded as men's chattels or treated as inferior creatures. They were not deprived of their rights to learn, work and participate with men in the different fields of society. Nor was such abuse of women that prevailed later in Africa. It was colonialism that brought gender inequality to Africa. Besides,

homosexuality was not regarded as something filthy. In post-colonial Africa, homophobia, suppression of black women and domestic abuse of black women spread due to the impact of the white patriarchal capitalism on Africans (Austin 50-62). Africana womanism tries to decolonize the minds of African people and create more unified families and communities. Africana womanists do not ask African women to choose between being independent women or loyal African citizens because, according to Africana womanists, both are part and parcel of each other and they aim at restoring both of them to Africa (Hill 1811–1815). Africana womanists reject this gender-based violence that some African men, influenced by the colonizers' patriarchal ideology, practice against black women and believe that those black men, who harm their women and children, must be excluded from the African communities. Thus, Africana womanism tries to restore the position of women in pre-colonial Africa.

Africana womanism rejects sexism, racism and classism and discards all the forms of violence that white domination exerts against Africans. In her book, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, Hudson-Weems emphasizes that "Africana womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women. . . The primary goal of Africana women, then, is to create their own criteria for assessing their realities, both in thought and in action" (50). This theory is based on eighteen crucial principles. They are: self-naming, self-definition, family-centeredness, wholeness, role flexibility, adaptability, authenticity, black female sisterhood, struggling with males against oppression, male compatibility, recognition, ambition, nurturing, strength, respect, elders' reverence, mothering and spirituality. Each one of these tenets has a certain meaning and they together create the foundation of Africana womanism.

Exploring South African Theatre in the Post-Apartheid Period

During the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s and 1980s, theatre in South Africa was used to raise people's awareness of

the dangers of colonization and to urge South Africans to fight the colonizers and liberate their country. Gender issues were not addressed at all during this period. Moreover, nearly all the plays were written, produced, acted and directed by men. Women were not present in the theatrical scene during this time. Fatima Dike (1948-) is one of the very few female dramatists who published and produced plays in the 1970s. Even in the few plays that were performed by South African women during apartheid, women's issues were not deeply addressed. Lizbeth Goodman maintained, "I spoke to many women working in South African theatres, and most concurred with my simple hypothesis: that feminism was not the hot potato it is elsewhere, perhaps because racial, economic, and other 'larger' political issues took precedence" (7). It was only after South Africa managed to achieve democracy in 1994 that gender issues began to be addressed in South African theatre. Among these male and female South African playwrights, who were interested in the issue of the liberation of women in South Africa and wrote plays in which women are the central characters, are Thulani S. Mtshali (1963- 2002), Ismail Mahomed (1965-), Malika Ndlovu (1971-) and Magi Noninzi Williams (1965-).

As previously mentioned, *Weemen* was written by a male dramatist who was agitated by the extreme violence to which his aunt was exposed at the hands of her husband. Mtshali's aunt was one of numerous African women who have been continuously beaten and humiliated by their husbands. Hence, he wrote this play to dramatize her experience as well as the ordeal of other women in South Africa. Mtshali believed that changing the position of women in South Africa is a struggle that requires the collaboration of men and women in order to attain social transformation. Perkins maintains that "After seeing [WEEMEN], many people were surprised that a man had written this play — some were even suspicious. But in general, African men responded favorably to the piece" (102- 103). The fact that this play was written by a male dramatist shows how women's problems in South Africa after apartheid were regarded as social problems that have an impact on men and women alike. In this play,

Mtshali underscored the fact that women must not fight their battle alone but they must be supported by men in order to improve the whole society, thus, he gave an example for other male dramatists to follow. **Reconnoitering Black Patriarchy in Weemen**

In *Weemen*, Mtshali addressed black patriarchy in South Africa and the dilemma of married black women, specifically those poor ones, who are abused by their husbands. Marta Fernández-Morales states, "Our civilization abounds in examples of violence perpetrated against women and in general, against all those who in some way appear to be weak or inferior" (15). In order to understand the oppressive attitude of Mlitshe, the husband, towards Tsoarelo, his wife, in *Weemen*, we must examine the concept of marriage in black culture. In the majority of African cultures, a woman is regarded as a slave or an inferior creature that does not have the ability to think or decide for herself. Hence, she cannot express her opinion regarding those who propose to her. If a girl refuses to marry the man that her parents choose for her, a *lesika*, a thin wire, which looks like a string, is knotted around her finger until she yields. Then, the mother of the bride gathers with other women from the village to give her some instructions that she must follow after getting married. According to these instructions, a woman must obey and respect her husband whatever he does. She must carry out all his orders and be submissive to him. Moreover, she must not ask for a divorce even if he beats or betrays her. If an African woman dares to ask her husband to divorce her or if she escapes from his house, the *lobola*, or the dowry he paid to her family before marriage, must return to him again. If it happens that her parents consume the *lobola*, the groom's family rebukes them and says everywhere in the whole village that they spent the *lobola* fast but failed to bring up their daughter. Thus, the bride's family is shamed until it pays the money back (Rangoajane 287-288). Mlitshe knows these traditions well; hence, he always humiliates Tsoarelo. He realizes that she does not have the audacity to rebel or defy the traditions. Therefore, he always degrades and abuses her: "Woman...I say one, you say two! [Takes an axe wanting to chop her] Is that what they taught you when I married you?... I am the only man here... this

mouth says the final word here... you, you are just like this furniture! ...bloody damn shit..." (104). This opening speech emphasizes the verbal, physical and psychological abuse Tsoarelo suffers at the hands of her husband. Moreover, it carries a foreshadowing of what is to follow in the whole play and explains the nature of marriage and the position of women in South Africa.

The violence against the heroine starts at the beginning of the play with the drunken husband's loud knock on the door. He shouts at his wife, "...bloody woman! Why take your time... This is my house woman, and you are my wife...when I knock you must not take more than an hour to open up!...why are you staring at me like that?... Bring the bloody plate" (104). He always hurts her dignity and accuses her of stealing his money and giving it to her family, though he is the one who exploits her, "From today all the money is controlled by me ...You get that? " (109). For Mlitshe, the wife is like a piece of furniture who does not have any rights in the house, "you are just like this furniture!...bloody damn shit" (104). Mlitshe is an authoritarian husband that gives himself the right to interfere in all the personal affairs of his wife, even the dresses she buys. He thinks that he is the only decision-maker and master of the house and that his wife does not have the right to discuss anything with him. He always orders her not to argue with him and feels astonished and disgusted if she tries to express her view-point regarding any issue, "In my house now you have your own things and decisions?...where do you get all these filthy ideas?...You indirectly mean I am useless?... Don't answer me back! ..." (109). The superior attitude Mlitshe always adopts when he deals with Tsoarelo and the humiliating words he usually uses when he addresses her emphasize how he regards her as an inferior creature. His offensive treatment to his wife underscores the ordeal of the majority of South African women who are demeaned and subjugated by their husbands.

Most of the verbal, physical and psychological abuse which Mlitshe exerts against Tsoarelo is due to his alcohol addiction. In this play, the dramatist sheds light on one of the most important problems from which numerous African families suffer even if they undergo abject

poverty; i.e. alcohol abuse. Alcohol addiction is one of the reasons that lead to Mlitshe's endless violence against his wife. In *The Psychology of Female Violence*, Anna Motz maintains that “The problems of substance and alcohol addiction may further contribute to the development of violence and other types of offending” (210). The dramatist emphasizes how Mlitshe, the drunkard husband, loses his job because of his addiction to alcohol. However, in spite of all the mischief he causes to his wife, she endures in order to sustain the stability of her family.

One of the distinguishing qualities of the Africana womanist in *Weemen* is the heroine's family-centeredness and her unyielding preoccupation with the happiness of her family. As Hudson-Weems emphasizes, the Africana womanist “is more concerned with her entire family rather than with just herself ...” (*Africana Womanism and Race and Gender* 58). Hudson-Weems believes that the development of the African community mainly depends on the unity and collaboration of all the members of the African family. Hence, in spite of all the domestic violence Tsoarelo undergoes, she is determined to maintain her family. She always endures the excessive control that her husband exercises upon her and the maltreatment she suffers for the sake of her children. Therefore, she always accepts his apology despite his feeling of superiority, possessive attitude and inhumane treatment to her and says to him, “Through pain and happiness you are mine... Didn’t we make vows in church, witnessed by all?” (107). Her deep-rooted loyalty to her family leads her to forget all her husband's cruelty and give him new chances all the time. In this regard, the Africana womanist is completely different from the White feminist who cares more about her personal happiness and success. Hudson-Weems affirms, “While the concern for the survival of her family, both personal and collective, are of utmost importance to the Africana womanist, the mainstream feminist is self-centered, or female-centered, interested in self-realization and personal gratification” (*Africana Womanism and Race and Gender* 58-59). Thus, despite all the stresses and strains Tsoarelo suffers, she has always been a dedicated and self-sacrificing woman who gives her whole-hearted

support to her family. Although she has been leading a life of self-denial to be able to bring up her children and preserve her family, her acts of self-sacrifice and self-denial have never been appreciated by her husband whose ego-centricity is more important to him than anything else. Even though he always violates her rights and treats her with contempt, she endures for the sake of her family. Her genuine concern to maintain her family always strengthens her resolve to endure the verbal, physical and psychological abuse she suffers at the hands of her husband. **Scrutinizing Cultural Restrictions in Weemen**

Weemen emphasizes how some South African cultures oppress women and lead to their humiliation and degradation by men. Not only is Tsoarelo forced to obey her husband because of her family-centeredness, but also because her African culture binds her to endure him whatever he does. In her soliloquy, in scene six, she blames her culture which has caused all this ferocity and abuse for her as well as for her counterparts:

I am married to Mlitshe, what is it that I get from him? Constant abuse...harassment, insults and beatings... But why?... Am I doing something wrong?...What?... Nothing!... It is not because he drinks too much, otherwise he would be fighting other men as well!...But just because I am a woman and I am his wife... But why is it that most women suffer one way or another?... He stopped me from working and he gives me pittance, what is R100 a month?...He calls me all sorts of names... I know no happiness, even my business is secret... Will this curse over women ever end?... Maybe I should pack my bags and leave this man. And then he will go to harass my mother demanding his lobola back. (107)

Tsoarelo's words reflect how some African cultures promote male aggression against women. Her culture does not allow a woman to get divorced easily and lead an independent life. The shackles and restraints of her culture oblige her to live with this oppressive husband who always wounds her ego and considers her as an item of his property. Here, Tsoarelo speaks for of all South African women who are oppressed because of their culture. She emphasizes the *lobola* that obliges many African women to live with their husbands unwillingly. Tsoarelo grumbles about these traditions that help men humiliate women and degrade them. Her words underscore how a woman is regarded as an animal or property in some African cultures. Hence, Danielle Hoffmeister & Jodi Williams argue that "There is an urgent need for us to dismantle systems and beliefs that uphold and perpetuate patriarchal violence, and to establish a collective consciousness characterised by accountability, justice and full realisation of another's humanity" (22). The laws of Tsoarelo's society restrict the freedom of women, deprive them of many of their rights and lead their husbands to enslave them. As an African man, Mlitshe is fully aware of these traditions; hence, he demeans and subjugates his wife because he is sure that she cannot defy their well-rooted traditions.

Not only does the *lobola* oblige African women to endure their dysfunctional marriages and stay at their houses with their abusive and domineering husbands, but it also restricts the freedom of these husbands as well. Although Mlitshe is attracted to other women whom he regards as more beautiful than his wife, he is unable to divorce her because of the *lobola* he paid. Divorce is regarded as a taboo in many African cultures; hence, if he divorces her, he will not get his *lobola* back. Moreover, according to some African traditions, if a husband decides to divorce his wife, he must leave the house for his spouse who has the right to stay in it with her children. If he wants to marry again, he has to gain money (Rangoajane 293-294). Obviously, a lazy man like Mlitshe cannot collect money easily to marry. Consequently, he is obliged to stay with his wife even if he hates her. This justifies

why he regards Tsoarelo as a burden or a stumbling block that hinders his way and deprives him of happiness and freedom.

According to some African cultures, treating the wife well and being affectionate to her would spoil her. Hence, a woman has to be afraid of her husband and feel threatened all the time. She must be beaten, humiliated and treated violently. This explains why many African women have scars over their bodies (Rangoajane 289-290). Thulani Mtshali dramatizes these monstrous and atrocious acts which many African men commit against their women in this play. Mlitshe is one of these savage husbands who always cause offenses to their wives. He thinks that he can be a powerful man by beating his wife, preventing her from work, calling her names and awakening her at a very late hour to prepare food for him. He pitilessly asserts, "guys are right, if you don't beat up a woman she takes you for granted, she takes you cheap... It's worse once she starts having more money and you earn nothing... She thinks she is a king... A man is a man, is a man, is a man, is a man!" (110). Mlitshe believes that to become a real man, he must humiliate his wife and downgrade her. He keeps repeating, " A man is a man, is a man , is a man, is a man" all the time as if he wants to convince himself of this issue, since he realizes deep inside that he lacks the true qualities of a real man.

However, the injustices of her customs and social conventions do not lead Tsoarelo to rebel against her culture. Although she is not satisfied with some of her traditions, she remains authentic to her culture. In Africana womanism, authenticity is defined as one's ability to be "culturally connected" (Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves 69). Hudson- Weems believes that the Africana womanist as "an authentic being, her standards, her acts, and her ideals directly reflect those dictated by her own culture. Hence, her true essence compliments her culture, thereby denying any room for an inauthentic self" (Africana Womanism and Race and Gender 68). Hence; Tsoarelo does not rebel against her culture though she criticizes it. Besides the restrictions of her social conventions and customs as well as her family-centeredness, Tsoarelo's subordination to the control of her husband has also been the result of her reverence for her elders.

Reverence for elders is one of the distinctive qualities of the African womanist in *Weemen*. Old people have a great position in the African communities and they are given great respect. Hudson-Weems asserts that "The true African womanist respects and appreciates elders ...for African elders have served as role models and have paved the way for future generations. This respect and appreciation for elders is another continuum of African culture, which African women still demonstrate and insist upon in their everyday lives. They protect their elders and seek their advice, as the wisdom of elders is indisputable" (69). Tsoarelo married the man that her parents chose for her and exerted every effort to make this marriage succeed. The great respect for elders is one of the features of African cultures which is not similarly recognized in Western societies. Although Tsoarelo's husband always hurts her self-respect and ruins the happiness of the entire family, she is obliged to stay with him because of the great respect she renders for her parents who will be disgraced everywhere when they return the *lobola* to her husband if she asks for divorce.

Further, in most African cultures, the man is supposed to be the breadwinner and the woman must be a housewife. The financial support that he gives to his family gives him power and authority. Hence, many African husbands believe that their wives must be financially insecure in order to remain at their mercy and be obliged to endure them even if they demean and subjugate them. In *Violence Against Women in South Africa*, Nonhlanhla Sibanda-Moyo, Eleanor Khonje and Maame Brobbey maintain that "The lack of access to financial resources and support is a central barrier to leaving abusive relationships or even reporting incidences of abuse" (7). Therefore, most African men prevent their women from working in order to be reliant on them. Mlitshe is one of these men. He obliges Tsoarelo to be just a housewife in order to be dependent on him which, in turn, gives him a feeling of superiority over her. Mlitshe is afraid that if Tsoarelo earns money, she may be a domineering wife, "You see once women start having control of money, they want to control we men as well...Never, over my dead body!...Not me, not Mlitshe!...The stone that never breaks" (110). He is afraid that if she gets her financial

independence, she might think herself the leader of the family and, as a consequence, his manhood will be threatened. For that reason, Tsoarelo does not tell her husband about her *spaza* shop for fear that he might beat and degrade her, " ...I have my secret, small and private business-otherwise my children would starve in the rural areas ,...But he must not know, and will never know...He is fully content with me depending on him" (105). Mlitshe does not also allow Tsoarelo to work for another reason. He believes that women who work have extra-marital relationships. He gives her an example of those women who work with him and whom he believes that they work in order to betray their husbands:

MLITSHE: No wife of mine is going to work, because one;
I support

you, two: next time you will be having a lot of friends and
many lunch boyfriends.

TSOARELO: How could you not trust me? I am your wife...

MLITSHE : Listen here, I know you women. Don't forget
that we are

working with women, we see what they do... how they flirt
around

behind their husbands, so don't pretend to be better, you
women are all bitches man! (104-105)

This conversation underscores the worst kind of verbal abuse that the husband exerts against his wife. Mlitshe does not trust all women in general and regards them as unchaste creatures that always have illicit affairs. Ironically, Mlitshe is a philanderer who dates other women and has many extra-marital relationships. This accounts for his distrust in women. When his wife brings new elegant dresses to please him, he blames and humiliates her because he is afraid she might attract other men. It is, also, ironic that when Tsoarelo weeps due to his humiliating words, he accuses her that she plays the role of the battered wife and that her tears are "salty water" (105). James Ptacek argues that "A primary facet of battering is the abuser's restriction of his partner's liberty—controlling how she spends her time, whom she

sees, where she goes” (25). Mlitshe's aggressive attitude towards his wife is due to his feeling of insecurity. He is always troubled with the idea that Tsoarelo's work might lead her to betray him as he does.

The Repercussions of Colonialism as Presented in *Weemen*

A. Poverty.

One of the repercussions of colonialism underscored in *Weemen* is the abject poverty in which the characters live. The play takes place in a shack in a black suburban area. As the dramatist stated in the stage directions, the characters belong to "the lower African class except MRS JOHNSON who is white". The setting highlights their poverty and their harsh economic conditions. He describes their flat, "A shack made of zinc, one room which is kitchen cum bedroom. A bed on one side, a rail to hang clothes; A cupboard with some cups, plates, etc. A table on the side cum cupboard, always covered with a plastic cloth, wherein there's popcorn" (104). The dramatist dispensed with luxurious furniture, classy and costly costumes as well as all the other requirements of the mainstream theatre to present a realistic portrayal of the lives of poor people in South Africa. Tsoarelo has learnt how to adapt herself to harsh conditions. Adaptability is one of the important principles of Africana womanism which is emphasized in *Weemen*. Throughout her history, the African woman has always adapted herself to diverse environments and also to the shortage of luxuries that white women enjoy. Because of the excruciating circumstances she has undergone under white colonization, the African woman has sacrificed many of her demands and learned to be adaptable (Alexander-Floyd & Simien 80–89). Tsoarelo is an ingenious woman who could adapt herself to any unfavorable conditions. Her family lives below the poverty line and suffers from severe financial problems. She is trying to make the best use of their limited financial resources since her irresponsible husband always proves himself unfit to face crises. To supplement the family income and save her poverty-stricken family from danger, she works secretly. Unlike these white feminists who are financially secure, African

women are struggling to bring up their children on very low incomes and are obliged to work to improve the financial situations of their families. Hudson- Weems maintains, "The true Africana womanist demands no separate space for nourishing her individual needs and goals, while in the twentieth- century feminist movement, there is the White feminist's insistence upon personal space" (*Africana Womanism and Race and Gender* 69-70). She asserts that poverty and the lack of financial resources hinder the African woman to have her personal space as the White feminist does. African women, who live on extremely low incomes and always run into many economic crises, do not have the luxury to enjoy their personal lives as those European women do.

The Africana womanist realizes her triple quandary; i.e. racism, classism and sexism and comprehends that she has to cooperate with her male partner in order to fight and put an end to these evils. Unlike mainstream feminists who are mainly preoccupied with the emancipation and empowerment of women and do not regard the woman's familial duties as priorities, Africana womanists give precedence to their participation in the family's liabilities. In *Weemen*, the protagonist is a true Africana womanist that strongly demonstrates the traits of mothering and nurturing. Hudson- Weems asserts:

...the Africana womanist is committed to the art of mothering and nurturing,

her own children in particular and humankind in general. This collective role is supreme in Africana culture, for the Africana woman comes from a legacy of fulfilling the role of supreme Mother Nature— nurturer, provider, and protector. There is a historical emphasis on the importance of motherhood in Africa, since the structure of the family in many countries was polygamous. Historically, the role of mother was more important than the role of wife, for example. The Africana woman operates from within these constructs. (*Africana Womanism and Race and Gender* 71)

The African woman has always used to play the collective role of the mother, nurturer, provider and protector. Tsoarelo works inside and outside her home. Although she became a self-sufficient woman that has her own business, she does not abandon her traditional roles as a mother and a wife. She prepares the food, cleans the house and gives her children her undivided attention. Moreover, unlike her negligent husband who does not have any sense of duty, Tsoarelo works hard to generate an income for her children and save the family from running into more financial crises. In a word, she is a dedicated mother and wife who does her best inside and outside the house for the survival of the family.

Flexible role-playing is one of the most important principles of Africana womanism since it emphasizes how African women have always been agents of social change and stood on equal footing with their men. This principle highlights the fact that the African woman has never been subordinate. On the contrary, she has always been an active and flexible role player. Hudson-Weems maintains that since the days of American slavery, "Africana woman has never been restricted to the home and household chores, and her male counterpart has more often than not shared the role as homemaker". She also emphasizes that Africana women "have not had the long-standing role as 'only' homemaker, a traditional role from which White women look forward to retiring" (Africana Womanism and Race and Gender 63). She refers to those great African women who played indispensable roles in their societies such as Nefertiti – Queen of Ancient Kemet, Egypt (129- 122BC), Makeda Queen of Shebba (960 BC), Empress Candace from Ethiopia (332 BC), Queen Amina from Nigeria (15th century) and others. From the beginning of the play, we realize how Tsoarelo plays the leading role in the family. She always supports her family passionately and is always ready to risk her life for the sake of her children. Since her desire to work was always met with a strong opposition from her husband, she decided to work secretly to save her children from wretchedness and poverty and to offer them complete protection. Tsoarelo has always had an important role to play in her family and community.

B. The Hegemony of the White and the Subservience of the Black.

.Another outcome of colonialism as emphasized in *Weemen* is the hegemony of the white and the subservience of the black. Thulani Mtshali emphasized that although imperialism came to an end in South Africa, the power is still in the hands of white people. Mlitshe has a white manager that always reproaches him for his recklessness and thoughtlessness. Although Mrs Johnson, Mlitshe's European manager, is not mistaken at all to rebuke him all the time because of his absenteeism and addiction to alcohol, the dramatist accentuated, here, that although South Africa got its independence, the white people still have ascendancy on everything in South Africa which still suffers from the Western imperial power. Further, making a white woman the manager of the African man is important to emphasize the difference between the privileged strong white woman and the disadvantaged oppressed black one. Mrs Johnson, the European manager, censures Mlitshe, her African employee, saying:

You're a blatant liar Mlitshe, I'm tired of your lies, of your lateness and ever absenteeism... I have been counting for you all this time; you come to work on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. On Saturdays and Mondays you don't come to work! ...What do you think you are?...A shareholder I suppose...My boy I want production...My child is sick... my wife is sick, my father's sister is dead and yet you are always drunk.....(He is crying real tears.) Here is your money, pack your things and go, I don't want to see your face anymore... Out! (106)

Ironically, he justifies his absenteeism by manipulating the woman he neglects and treats harshly; i.e. his wife. He tells his employer that he does not go to work regularly because he has a sick wife to whom he must attend. Mlitshe is portrayed as a fragile and submissive man in front of Mrs Johnson, his female European manager, who always

blames him for being late and telling lies. Here, he acts in a completely different way since he does not have any authority over Mrs Johnson, the white manager, who has the upper hand in this scene.

In this play, Thulani Mtshali shatters the misconceptions that some Western critics spread about black women. Although Tsoarelo is oppressed by her patriarchal society and does not enjoy the privileges of white women as, for example, Mrs Jonson does, she is not a weak woman at all. Strength is one of the tenets of Africana womanism which is accentuated in *Weemen*. The unquestioning obedience Tsoarelo renders to her husband does not mean that she is a weak or helpless woman; on the contrary, she is a very strong wife and mother. What she does is always impelled by her desire to maintain her family. Her children are the tower of strength to her. Her yearning to preserve her family always strengthens her resolve to endure the trials and tribulations she faces. Hudson-Weems emphasizes that "The Africana womanist comes from a long tradition of psychological as well as physical strength. She has persevered centuries of struggling for herself and her family. The ultimate example of her strength is how she has both endured and survived slavery, suffering the unimaginably cruel enforced separation from her family" (*Africana Womanism and Race and Gender* 65). The Africana womanist is psychologically and physically strong. Throughout the different periods of history, specifically during the days of slavery, she has been struggling to defend herself and her family. From the very beginning of the play, we realize that Tsoarelo is not a fragile woman. On the contrary, she is a very powerful wife who has faced different kinds of violence and tried to use diverse strategies to maintain her family. In addition, Tsoarelo managed to create her identity in accordance with her cultural reality without neglecting her familial duties. Not only does her private business help her to save the family from grinding poverty, but it also helps her to become an independent woman. Nikol Alexander-Floyd and Evelyn M. Simien believe that the woman must give her family the greatest priority in her life without neglecting her career (70-75). Though the Africana womanist

must be committed to her family and aspire for its success, she must establish her own individuality at the same time. Tsoarelo's work helps her to have an identity and develop her individualism. The Africana womanist is also ambitious and responsible. Hudson-Weems asserts that "Ambition and responsibility are highly important in the life of the Africana womanist, for her family, too, depends on these qualities in her. From early on, the Africana woman is taught the importance of self-reliance and resourcefulness, and hence, she makes a way out of no way, creating ways to realize her goals and objectives in life" (Africana Womanism and Race and Gender 70). Tsoarelo has been very decisive and courageous from the very beginning of the play. Mlitshe's authoritarian character does not hinder her to create a distinctive identity and preserve her family at the same time.

C. Ignorance.

Ignorance is a third remarkable aftermath of colonialism that Mtshali emphasized in this play. In order to stress the ignorance in which South African people lived in the post-apartheid era, Mtshali portrayed them as superstitious people who believe in magic and fortune-tellers. When Mlitshe was dismissed from his work, he did not think of the reasons that led to his dismissal or try to find a solution for his problem, instead, he resorted to a fortune-teller to help him. One of the habits of people in some African communities is consulting a fortune-teller or *Sangoma* that can suggest solutions for their problems. Even the very poor African ones go to *Sangoma* and pay the consultation fees so that she can help them solve their problems (Rangoajane 294). Although Mlitshe suffers from severe financial problems, he agrees to pay R250 to *Sangoma*. Francis L. Rangoajane maintains that, in *Weemen*, the dramatist dissipates the mystery that some Africans attribute to *Sangoma*. Many African people admire *Sangoma's* great abilities to know the facts that they did not confess to her. Normally, any person who depends on his intuition can predict these facts. For example, when *Sangoma* asks Mlitshe to stop drinking alcohol, he wonders how she knows this fact although it can be easily known from Mlitshe's facial appearance that he drinks alcohol heavily.

His employer, Mrs Johnson, noticed this clearly and told him that his absenteeism is due to his alcohol addiction. Moreover, he gets amazed when she asks him to stop abusing his wife while it is common in African communities that the majority of drunkards treat their wives brutally. Furthermore, she tells him that if he continues to abuse his wife, the ancestors will be angry with him. Most Africans pay a great respect for their ancestors and feel petrified if they make them angry for fear that they might not protect or bless them (294-295). Africans believe that their ancestors have great abilities to reward the honorable people and punish the corrupt ones. *Sangoma* tells him, "The bones say you drink to your brains and not to your belly. I see your wife's heart is bleeding from inside...Your ancestors will turn against you for that" (106). The dramatist shattered the mystery that some Africans attribute to *Sangoma* and stressed the ignorance in which South Africans lived in the post-apartheid era. Mlitshe could have saved his job and the money he paid to *Sangoma* if he listened to his wife's pieces of advice, but he is similar to those narrow-minded men who accept others' suggestions and solutions and ignore those of their wives. However, when Mlitshe goes to his wife, he does not tell her that he changed because he consulted *Sangoma*, but because he is a "born-again" Christian. Here, the dramatist underscored how some African men abuse religion to deceive their women. To win the sympathy of his wife after his dismissal from work, Mlitshe held the Bible around and began to preach the gospel:

MLITSHE: But now I am...Guess what? I am...born again! Glory to Jesus.

TS'OARELO: You born again...come on!

MLITSHE: He needs all of us, the rich, the poor, the happy, the sad, sinners, the do good, the ugly, the beautiful, the educated, the illiterates...All of us...Hallelujah! (108)

Mlitshe exploits religion to justify his evil deeds and get what he wants. He assumes that he is a "born- again" Christian because he is

afraid that his wife might deal brutally with him as he used to do with her when she was financially dependent on him. Therefore, he did not rebuke her when he knew about her secret business after his dismissal from work. Astoundingly, he offered to help her in the *spaza* shop she runs. Mlitshe knows that Tsoarelo will forgive him when he mentions religion and the Bible because of the great respect she pays to religion.

D. The Infatuation of the Colonial Culture.

In *Weemen*, Thulani Mtshali emphasizes a fourth outcome of colonial oppression; i.e. that people -who were once colonized – sometimes glorify the colonial culture and admire everything relevant to it. Mlitshe always delights in degrading his wife and telling her that she is black and ugly. Moreover, he always tells her that he has many beautiful girlfriends whose skins are so fair that can be “mistaken for white” (105). The dramatist here deals with the beauty stereotype where many black people associate beauty with whiteness. Mlitshe always tries to belittle his wife and make her feel inferior, not only to himself, but even to other women, especially white ones, " Oho! you're not crying blood but just salty water... I don't know what I saw in you... you are so ugly...Mina I have beautiful girlfriends, so beautiful you could mistake them for white women... and they all love me, and you I don't know what I saw in you really, all you want is my money (105). Mlitshe's words show how he regrets that he married her and emphasize how African people link beauty with whiteness.

In spite of Mlitshe's narrow-mindedness, egoism, recklessness, barbarity and all his acts of violence against her, Tsoarelo always hopes to have a positive relationship with him. The Africana womanist's search for a male companionship is one of the tenets that Hudson-Weems stresses in her theory and which is emphasized in *Weemen*. Hudson-Weems maintains:

The Africana womanist desires positive male companion-ship, a relationship in which each individual is mutually supportive, an important part of a positive Africana family

... In the **Africana** community, neither women nor men can afford to conclude that the other gender was irredeemable **and** therefore, undesirable. **Such** a stance of totally disregarding or dismissing the other gender could resort in racial suicide for Africana people. (Africana Womanism and Race and Gender 66-67)

Tsoarelo's longing to establish a positive relationship with her husband is depicted in the play through her uncompromising struggle to maintain and improve the bonds with Mlitshe under any circumstances. Unsurprisingly, when he was dismissed from his work, he did not dare to go to any of his girlfriends who are “mistaken for white” (105), but he resorts to his wife assuming that he learnt from his mistakes and that he will turn a new leaf with her. Expectedly, Tsoarelo does not disappoint him, but she supports him greatly as she always does. This shows how Africana womanists are completely devoted to their husbands even if these husbands are self-centered, aggressive and unfaithful to them. It also shows how these Africana womanists realize the value and importance of male companionship and resolve to preserve it. The Africana womanist tries to get a mutually beneficial relationship with her spouse, a relationship in which each one of them is mutually helpful, obliging and active in the positive Africana family (Blackmon 3-5). In this regard, Africana womanism is different from most black movements which assert that for women to be male compatible, they must be submissive. As an Africana womanist, Tsoarelo seeks to have a robust companionship with her husband because she realizes that having mutual love and respect with her spouse is very important for constructing a strong family. Hudson-Weems maintains, “[t]he Africana womanist... perceives herself as the companion to the Africana man and works diligently toward continuing their established union” (Africana Womanist Literary Theory 29). Further, an African woman has to seek completeness, autonomy and self-assurance in order to be able to maintain her family. In Africana womanism, wholeness is defined as

“completeness” (Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* 69). Unlike the other female-centered theories that do not care about the importance of male companionship for wholeness, Africana womanists stress the significance of this positive comradeship with the spouse. Tsoarelo wants her husband to complement her and make her a whole. She wants him to be a real companion, to love and protect her, to treat her as a partner not as a follower. However, unlike Tsoarelo that searches for wholeness and real companionship with her partner, Mlitshe is a time-server and an opportunist. He only deals with his wife kindly when he needs her. When he was in need of money after his dismissal from his work, he was very gentle and cooperative with her. Expectedly, when he manages to get another job, he returns to his old tough domineering personality. As stated by Tsoarelo “So, it’s back to square one?” (109). He humiliates his wife and treats her severely again because he restored his self-confidence and realized that he does not need her financial support anymore. However, Tsoarelo always desires to take refuge in his love and care and has so much consideration for his feelings. Although her husband has never come up to her expectations, she always dreams of having a positive companionship with him. Although he is not capable of making any sacrifices to his family and is not fit to bring up the children, she does not leave him.

Respect for one's self and recognition are two of the tenets of Africana womanism which are underscored in *Weemen*. The Africana womanist seeks respect for herself in order to get real self-confidence and self-worth, which help her to have positive relationships with all people. Recognition means that she has to recognize her humanness, competence and power as an African woman. This recognition helps her to have a communal peace and supports her in her struggle for equality. Hudson-Weems states that “The Africana woman must insist upon both respect of her person and recognition of her humanness so that she may more effectively fulfill her role as a positive and responsible co-partner in the overall Africana struggle. The Africana man, too, must do his part, beginning with total respect for his female” (*Africana Womanism and Race and Gender* 67). As an Africana

womanist, Tsoarelo has been struggling fiercely for recognition. She does not want her husband to degrade her or violate her rights, but she wants him to treat her with respect. She wants to be recognized and appreciated. When she has been denied the respect and recognition she searches for throughout her marital life, she was about to turn into a criminal and kill her husband. Anna Motz argues that women's "subjective experience of humiliation, degradation, isolation and terror imposed on them by their partners" (58) can result in killing the abusive partners. Tsoarelo only made the decision of killing her husband after she had got worn-out and desperate of the ongoing humiliation she has suffered at his hands. She thought of leaving the house but she retreated because of her children. She also thought of committing suicide but she also changed her mind quickly for the sake of her children. Instead, she decided to adopt a defense mechanism and kill him in order to put an end to her wretchedness. Tsoarelo even believes that God will forgive her because she has endured much suffering, "Kill the bastard once and for all and live in peace! ... Even God will forgive me" (107). It is as if Thulani Mtshali was warning those ruthless men who treat their women mercilessly that violence can turn a victim into a victimizer. Tsoarelo, who has always lived as a victim, thought of killing her husband to get rid of her distress and torture. This shows how violence can beget violence and lead a person to behave in an unexpected inhumane way. Expectedly, her desire to maintain her family as well as her kind nature inhibited her to kill him. Instead, she burst into tears and carried him on her shoulders to bed. Through the stage directions, the dramatist makes us feel the great suffering of the wife and her struggle to resist and preserve her family, "On realizing he is asleep she slowly takes the axe into her hands, looks at him snoring... Slowly raises the axe to chop him... But she cannot do it... She breaks down into tears... She packs her clothes to leave the place... After some thought she decides not to...and then goes and lifts him up on her shoulders and drags him to bed, takes off his shoes, socks and shirt, and joins him" (105). This emphasizes how far Tsoarelo is a true Africana womanist that is ready to endure all the hardships for the sake of her children and her family. The next day,

she resumes her house chores while her husband is still sleeping and snoring. Her respect for the marriage institution has led her to sacrifice a lot.

The Africana Womanist as a Victorious Heroine

Strength, as one of the tenets of Africana womanism, is re-emphasized at the end of the play. In the final scene, Tsoarelo arrives home to find everything in her house turned upside down. Moreover, she finds that her money and dresses are missing. The stage directions help us realize how a scoundrel Mlitshe is, "He walks on the bed to hers, rips it open and there it is, two rows of ten- and twenty-rand notes, R450, he gives a sly smile, goes to the wardrobe and takes the dress, and rushes to the doorway, victory written on his face, leaving the room upside down" (110). The phrase "victory written on his face", in the stage directions, denotes how coward and malicious he is. Moreover, "leaving the room upside down" indicates that he intends to remain violent to her. What made matters worse is that Mlitshe returned home late drunk with his friend, Willie, and began to wake her up by force in order to prepare food for them. Yet, his attitude this time provokes an angry response on the part of his wife who could not endure to be treated unfairly and cruelly anymore. She realizes that, throughout her conjugal life, she has always been treated with contempt by her husband while she does deserve to be treated with respect and appreciation. Hence, she rose up against this oppressive husband and they had a violent quarrel. Her reaction, this time, was completely different, "...he pulls the blankets off her trying to beat her, but she pulls the blankets and he falls and she jumps on him, beating him with fists". When he decides to defend himself, she "beats him harder and sits on him". When the guest tries to defend his friend, she "takes the axe and turns to him" and hits him. Mlitshe stands outside the house crying and begging her to let him in. This time, she became stronger and told him firmly that she will not allow him to destroy her life again. She goes to sleep and leaves him crying alone outside the house. When he asks her to kill him if he abuses her again, she replies, "You are dead already! I have stomached so much pain

from you...hoping you will change...thinking of our marriage, our children..." (111). Her words show that she is not a fragile wife, on the contrary, she is a very strong woman that has endured all this maltreatment and violence for the sake of her family. Though this man, who always treats her ferociously and puts the future of the whole family in danger, does not deserve leniency, she forgives him and decides to give him a new chance to maintain her family as she always does. Thus, Tsoarelo's victory is achieved as Mlitshe "kneels down clinging on to her dress crying tears of happiness" (112). He regrets his doings and promises her that he will not abuse her any more and that they will turn a new leaf together.

The ending of the play gives the chance for men's transformation. It emphasizes how Africana womanism promotes peaceful and happy relationships inside the African family. Unlike the other female-centered movements that regard men as women's enemies, an African man has a vital role to play according to this movement. He has to support, protect and defend his family. Moreover, he should not degrade a woman or regard her as an inferior creature, but he must deal with her as a partner that has great abilities and equal rights. The ending of the play is very optimistic. Tsoarelo is reconciled to her husband who realizes her importance in his life. He blames himself for all his wrongdoings towards his wife and children and asks her for forgiveness. He begins to help her in her work and they decide to start a new life built on mutual aid and respect. By this ending, the writer wanted to urge those selfish and violent men to change and support their women in order to have a new country built on collaboration and understanding.

Further, the principle of role- flexibility is another tenet of Africana womanism which is re-accentuated at the end of the play. The ending of *Weemen* gives the heroine the opportunity to work within a flexible and relaxed role milieu, which is shown when Tsoarelo and Mlitshe decide to work together and help each other inside and outside the house. Male and female joint participation is underscored in the end and they decide to get rid of the traditional gender roles originally brought about by the dominant culture.

Tsoarelo seeks cultural authenticity, as signified in her journey-both realizing her demands as a woman and behaving according to the decrees of her own culture concerning her role as woman. She seeks wholeness in both herself and in her marital life and succeeds to find it at the end of the play.

Conclusion

Thulani Mtshali's *Weemen* shows how post-apartheid South African playwrights have striven to eliminate the apartheid's legacy and put an end to male abuse of women. Though the play was written by a male dramatist, he successfully portrayed the anguish and tribulations that women encounter in his society. As Barbara Ozieblo and Noelia Hernando-Real maintain in *Performing Gender Violence*, theatre "has been a useful tool in awakening awareness of violence" (16). Thus, Mtshali managed to use theatre as a vehicle by which he can urge people towards social change. Further, in this play, Mtshali emphasized some of the repercussions of colonialism in South Africa in the post-apartheid period such as ignorance, superstition, poverty, the supremacy of the white and subservience of the black as well as the infatuation of the dominant culture. He stressed how South African women, especially poor ones, consistently face the challenge of domestic abuse because of the restrictions imposed on them by their culture as well as the harsh economic conditions brought about by colonialism. However, the dramatist presented a different example of a poor South African woman who managed to resist this abuse, preserve her family and develop her individualism at the same time. Mtshali presented his heroine as a role-model to be followed by many oppressed women in South Africa. Elements of Africana womanism are very obvious in *Weemen*. The play presents a strong Africana womanist that struggles to preserve her relationship with her husband and maintain her family. In spite of all the obstacles that hindered her way, she remains the powerful, affectionate and dedicated wife and mother. Contrary to the perspective of the majority of Western feminists, the heroine of the play does not stand against the concept of marriage or family life, but she wants to have a family

life in which she is appreciated and respected. She wants her husband to treat her as a partner not as a follower. Despite all the trials and tribulations she has undergone, she respects the positive male companionship and remains committed to her husband and her family as well as to her culture. She realizes that she can only be made *a whole* with her family, her job and her self-worth. Thus, the dramatist succeeded in presenting a true image of the Africana womanist in this play.

In brief, this paper underscores how South African dramatists, in the post-apartheid period, wrote plays in which women are presented as the central characters as well as the agents of social change. Thulani Mtshali resisted the hegemonic misrepresentation of women of color in Western discourse and introduced a powerful woman who could fight to maintain her family and get self-assertion. Thus, he shattered the misconceptions about South African women and presented them, instead, as active role-players. The Africana womanist achieves victory in the end, relinquishing neither her family, culture, nor her identity. She rejects the supremacy of patriarchy and continues to work to overcome the poverty and ignorance that colonialism brought about. In her journey from a subjugated woman to a self-fulfilled one, Tsoarelo came across many obstacles, but she learnt how to overcome them. At the end of the play, she agrees to return to her husband who showed his willingness to change and his desire to share all the responsibilities with her. Such plays - that focus on women's issues - try to raise people's awareness of the dilemma of marginalized women in their patriarchal societies and encourage women to be self-empowered. They, also, show how theatre can be used as a medium of social change that can stir people to action.

End Notes

- i Hudson-Weems is a professor of English at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She is the author of *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (1993), *Emmett Till: The Sacrificial Lamb of the Civil Rights Movement* (1994) and *Africana Womanist Literary Theory* (2004). She is also the co-author, with Wilfred Samuels, of *Toni Morrison* (1990).
- 2 Although men took part with women in the feminist movement, some fanatical feminists regard men as their opponents. White feminists believe that the antagonistic outlook of men to them is shown in the white men supremacy and the consequent downgrading of white women to low-grade and subsidiary positions in their own societies.
- 3 In this story, she described her heroine as “A ‘womanist’ ... a feminist, only more common” (100). Then, in an essay entitled “Womanist”, in her collection *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, she defined womanism as:
the black folk expression of mothers to female children, ‘You acting womanish,’
i. e. like a woman ... usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered ‘good’ for one [A womanist is also] a woman who loves other women sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture ... and women’s strength ... committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist ... Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. (19)

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