

“Evil Women” and the Paradox of the “Mother Earth” in Lara Foot Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament*

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Abstract

Existing narratives in African literature have substantiated the precarious positions and positioning of female characters who, often times, are constructed as “evil,” monstrous, vindictive, etc. Whereas other artistic productions sympathetic to the conditions of women in African literature have tried to neutralise this despicable femininity through the configuration of effective, productive, urbane and positive social and political female agency, the notion of “evil women” still looms large. Black female characters in South African drama are burdened, in multiple ways, beyond the idea of race and ethnicity, as they are subjected to the whims and caprices of socio-cultural, political and economic disadvantageous orders. It is given the foregoing that this article seeks to interrogate the construction of “evil women” in Lara Foot Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament*. Using the attributes and manifestations that inhere in the symbolism of “mother earth” in Africa, which has been successively violated and remains divided against itself, the article argues that the commodification of a notable female character in *Tshepang: The Third Testament*, Margaret, has a negative impact that nurtures evil in her. Margaret is accused of starting the circle that eventually leads to the rape of Baby Siesie (Tshepang) by Alfred Sorrow, who was abused earlier by Margaret. Relying on the manifestations of ecocriticism as they relate to the interrelation between humans and the environment, the article submits that what obtains in most African societies is the reality of an “evil environment,” and by extension an “evil society,” as the proposition of an “evil woman” cannot stand, being that, just like the unpleasant reactions of “mother earth” to the people who degrade her, what the “evil woman” manifests is an aggregation of the treatment meted out to her. The article concludes that caution is required from all players to tame acts of evil in post-apartheid South African society.

Keywords: evil women; *houvrou*; evil society; ecocriticism; rape; mother earth; aggregation; post-apartheid South Africa



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Introduction

It is stating the obvious that contemporary African literature, in spite of the expectation of some scholars to see it absolutely excuse itself from the functional role it has played since its inception, has continued to relate with the socio-political, economic, emotional and psychological conditions of the people on the continent, both as individuals and as a collective. This seeming inextricability agrees with the opinion that “works of art, including literature reflect the social structures of the societies from which they emanate,” and that “literature and creative art in general thus helps us to define specific cultural and social heritages” (Makokha 2014, 1). It is instructive to observe, however, that the apprehension expressed about the functional application of African literature is unfounded, given the fact that whether imagined or feigned, the idea of verisimilitude still supports the reflective preponderance of African literature in relating to the experiences of Africans, both at “home” and in the diaspora. The role played in the externalisation of the deprivations in colonised South Africa and, by extension, the emancipation of the oppressed majority blacks, justifies the presence of literature as a veritable instrument of social engagement and engineering, most especially in racially charged and systematically skewed spaces such as Australia, the United States of America and South Africa.

Particularly drama, both scripted and acted, was used to document and popularise the despicable socio-political and economic subjugation that black South Africans were subjected to, even in their own ancestral “home.” The vociferous manner in which drama contested the apartheid socio-political order has, no doubt, waned in the post and even “post-post” apartheid era, where drama now relates to manifestations that are often seen as products of the appalling apartheid past. This is more so as some scholars such as Eldred D. Jones (2002, vii), Njabulo S. Ndebele (2007, 126) and Zoë Wicomb (2007, 176) implicitly opine that literature, including the genre of drama, would soon overstay its welcome in post-apartheid South Africa. This is because, according to them, the apartheid conditions that provided the substantial material for artistic production are no longer overtly in place. The foregoing position agrees with the opinion that the responsibility of commitment assigned to literature is redundant, even as it is enthused that “protest literature may have run its course in South Africa,” and that the “rules of irony” help the writer to relate with actual conditions effectively, since “irony is the literary manifestation of the principle of contradiction” (Ndebele 2007, 128). This is more so in “that everything involving human society is in a constant state of flux; that the dialectic between appearance and reality in the conduct of human affairs is always operative and constantly problematic, and that consequently, in the representation of human reality, nothing can be taken for granted” (Ndebele 2007, 128). The seeming contestations implied in both the apparent concentration on the historical experiences and conditions of the people as well as the ironic reconstructions done in drama notwithstanding, one arguable position is that socio-political and economic sensibilities of Africans, including post-apartheid South African societies, still provide the raw materials for artistic constructions. It is given this trend that this article looks at the

social-cultural conditioning of women in a violated setting, and how this disadvantageous construction and treatment connect with negative childhood development and the symbolic maltreatment or manhandling of the physical space.

African Literature and the Positioning of Women as “Evil”

African literature has been repeatedly accused of valourising patriarchal orientations and of stereotyping women as weak and of low economic capacity, even as they are prostituted and commoditised to suit the aspiration and socio-political and economic wellbeing of the male counterpart. Notwithstanding the propensity towards what she calls “a culture of compensation,” Sarah Nuttal (2009, 137) opines that the construction of “girls’ bodies ... as prized commodities” is part of the “overall history of men controlling women’s bodies.” This trend, considered to be unacceptable, has been problematised, igniting acute condemnation from feminist scholars and writers who are concerned with undoing male-privileging discourses. This patriarchal valourisation and narratives meant to inscribe the privileging placement of men are reflective of the notion that “women are taught to mother, while men are conditioned to dominate and control” (Strong-Leek 2001, 33). The various portrayals of women in the arts as weak, destitute, vulnerable and dependent are often woven around concrete socio-cultural, political and economic disempowerment that would cast women negatively in the perception of “others.” By so doing, the portrayal of “women ... as wicked, heartless, prostitute, mother, wife, sister, deceit, partner, and confidants” is reinforced (Adeyemi and Iyabode 2009, 108). Similarly, some writers have engaged with these negatively skewed artistic works of art by providing narratives that specifically counter these negative portrayals and shore up support for women on all fronts. Charles Fonchingong (2006) examines the unending, unbending gender narratives in Africa, even as he juxtaposes the bipolar opinions on women by writers. One basic idea expressed by Fonchingong (2006, 135) is that male writers “in their literary mass are accused of condoning patriarchy, are deeply entrenched in a macho conviviality and a one dimensional and minimalised presentation of women who are demoted and assume peripheral roles.”

Examining the idea of faction, that is the notion of fact and fiction in African literature, and while acknowledging that “the presentation of the female gender” in African narratives is “mostly sloppy and biased,” Fonchingong (2006, 136) argues that such a traducement has been given expression in some works of literature. For instance, according to Fonchingong (2006, 136), Cyprian Ekwensi pigeonholed women through “preconceived stereotypes—prostitution versus motherhood and wifehood,” while Léopold Sédar Senghor metaphysically and transcendently represents women as constituting “a life force that reflects the mythic cycle of birth and regeneration,” and “the mother thus becomes a symbol of Africa.” The foregoing is suggestive of the prevalence or dominance of male-oriented narratives which similarly inadequately canvass the privileged conditions of women, with the depictions and configurations of women in African literature disadvantaging traditional templates and prescriptions. It should be noted, however, that there was “complementarity between male and female

roles in pre-colonial African societies” which plummeted during and after colonisation (Fonchingong 2006, 135). Whereas the imaging of women is often contradictorily made in African literature to reflect both servitude and productive, reproductive, liberating and virtuous roles, the latter have been nuanced to reflect the image “in which Africa is compared to a nurturing mother and the African mother is given the proportion of the whole continent” (Fonchingong 2006, 145).

Concerns with the physical landscape or environment are not uncommon to African writers and critics who have “traditionally embraced nature writing, land issues and landscape themes that are pertinent to national and local cultural claims and that also function as pastoral reminiscences or even projections of a golden age when many of the environmental evils resulting from colonialism and the exploitation of indigenous resources have been remediated” (Slaymaker 2007, 683). No doubt, the opinion of Slaymaker above is merely a follow-up to the anti-colonial prognosis that included the personification of the struggle for economic and political independence, for the redemption of “mother Africa.” While the notion of “mother Africa” readily and automatically valorises the womenfolk in Africa, as opposed to primordial disadvantaging socio-cultural practices, the same exposition similarly inadvertently reinforces their vulnerability. The paradox inherent in the notion of the “mother earth” or “mother Africa” and the designation of “evil women” provides the *raison d’être* for this article.

Female characters in South African literature set during apartheid face two levels of jeopardy: the general public precarious position of blacks, and the peculiar private abandonment and silence faced by women at the home front, having been left behind by men who are forced to move away several kilometres in a racially contrived space, to fend for the family. The fractured families in apartheid South Africa created women who were not just denied the usefulness of cohabitation but were conscripted to solely shoulder the responsibilities that should have been borne by both parents. Women had to raise their children, who were denied the love and care of a father, on their own. The combination of these social responsibilities and the infectious sexually transmitted diseases brought home by the itinerant husbands worsened the vulnerability of the women. This socially, culturally and economically disadvantageous and negatively skewed space offered to women has found expression in South African literature, including drama. One such manifestation found in Lara Foot Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament* is the *houvrou*¹ system, which reduces the woman to an object that could be possessed and should be discarded at will. Therefore, apart from the precarious placement of blacks in apartheid South Africa, women, particularly black women, also had socio-cultural limiting albatrosses to deal with. It is also needful to note that the endangered place of women in South Africa has not shifted so dramatically, as it

¹ “A *houvrou* is a woman that you keep, but she’s not your wife,” and unlike your wife, she is one whom you can let go of (Newton 2005, 20).

constitutes one of the “unfinished businesses” of past inequality and denials that are being attended to. The overall implication of the perpetual surrogating of women enlivens the composition of units in a highly socially stratified society where there are constant contestations between the major dichotomies so formulated. Analogous to the thinking of Marxist criticism, the lower class of women so created would continually be in an oppositional relationship with the menfolk, and the larger society, because “stable societies develop sites of resistance: contradictions build into the social system that ultimately lead to social revolution and the development of a new society upon the old” (Marx quoted by Purdue Online Writing Lab n.d.). It goes to reason, therefore, that the tension, conflicts and contradictions arising from the complicated relationship between the “evil women” and the larger society would have found expression in the existentially inclined dramatic reflection presented in Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament*.

Amidst the fictional and historical narratives that are negatively deployed against women in Africa, nothing definite or comprehensive has been done to vitiate the traditional conceptualisation of the nurturing mother as espoused in the opinion of Fonchingong (2006, 145), cited above, or the almost global categorisation of earth as mother.² It is on this note that a correlation is drawn between the nurturing mother or earth mother (mother earth) and women. In discussing the corresponding relationship between women and the earth, either as nurturing mother or mother earth, the latter would be seen in this article, for the sake of convenience, as physical space, geographical environment, or ecology. The underlining element in these nomenclatures is the space, plane or base that provides the locus for human to human, human to animal, and human to other elements interactions. It must be pointed out, however, that the above classifications do not represent the same sense in terms of social, political and economic imperatives. Nonetheless, geographical environment and ecology would best help in the conceptualisation needed to frame the discussions relating to physical violation, degradation and disruptions. For instance, space has been described as “an open, heterogeneous, and indeterminate field” which is a void to “be filled, contested, and reconfigured through contingent and partially determined social relations, practices, and meanings” (Natter and Jones 1997, 149–50). Some of the implicit suggestions found in the above description of space are the following: substantial fallowness, contestations, manipulations and application for specific intentions—social, economic and political.

In a related manner, Marsolek (2001) opines that “ecology refers to the relationship between organisms and their external conditions and surroundings, the environment.” The foregoing is related to the opinion of Robinson (1999, 417) to the effect that ecology is “the relationship between living things and their surroundings ... the study of plants, animals, peoples and institutions, in relation to environment.” One basic constant

² *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (Robinson 1999, 413) describes this mother as “a woman whose body shape and apparent fertility seem to symbolize motherhood.”

element in the two positions is the presence of living elements/organisms and how they function within and impact the environment. The major signification of the interaction between the environment and the living organism found in it signals the receptive propensity of the environment, as well as the retaliatory consequence that might follow. When seen analogously in relation to the condition and state of the environment, as found in this conjecture, the nurturing of mother earth stands the risk of being either wittingly or unwittingly distorted, violated, degraded or exploited. The most immediate likely result would be hurt caused to other elements, organisms or plants that the earth plays host to. Another perspective to the discussion, according to Marsolek (2001), is the notion of ecospirituality, which, as an ancient healer argued, stresses that “the greater part of the soul lies outside of the body” (Marsolek 2001). This suggests that the relationship between man and the environment is both physical and spiritual. This spiritual connection between man and the environment, for instance, accounts for some traditional practices in Africa. Illustratively, some societies in Africa see the land/earth as providing a useful venture for agrarian activities, which help guarantee existence and, beyond this, as the custodian of the umbilical cords of the living and the bodies of the dead. For instance, in order to strike a contact or maintain a constant link with the dead, the living would pour libation on the earth, with the hope to secure the intervention of the dead in the affairs of the living. Marsolek (2001), looking further at what is called the “ecological interdependence” and spiritual connection between man and the environment, observed that “a landscape can be sad or mad not because something is projected onto it but because of its own connection to all things.”

The ecosystem and the human race have shared a jaundiced relationship, thanks to the activities of the latter, who has reduced what should have been a symbiotic dealing to vexatious retaliatory engagements. In an attempt to “conquer” the environment and assert the controlling influence that humans have over the physical space, humans have exploited and degraded the environment through industrialisation and urbanisation initiatives. Arising from the degradation that is fast reducing the natural elements that should have enhanced balance in the ecosystem and the defilement that takes place as a result of industrial waste, the environment has equally negatively responded with a more damning ferocity. The impact of this negative reaction has increasingly made human existence dodgy and precarious.

It is given the framing of the degrading activities of man in the ecological space under ecocriticism, particularly the pointed similarities in the characterisation of the ecosystem as an endangered species and the societal negative configuration of women in the play, underpinned by the notion of the nurturing mother (earth), that the article would rely on the concept as an instrument to interrogate the playtext. Ecocriticism has enjoyed expansive discussions as a result of its recent entry into literary scholarship, with varying designations accompanying writings about nature and man. For instance, Hannes Bergthaller opines that ecocriticism commonly concerns itself with “the assumption that the ideas and structures of desire which govern the interactions between humans and their natural environment ... are of central importance if we are to get a

handle on our ecological predicament.” Giving an evolutionary background, and describing ecocriticism as an “earth-centred approach,” Allen Brizee et al. (cited in Purdue Online Writing Lab n.d.) review the positions of some scholars, including Glotfelty, Buell, and Gerard, and aver that ecocriticism is simply “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Purdue Online Writing Lab n.d.). Brizee et al. further argue that there exist “complex intersections between environment and culture,” and that, quoting Glotfelty, “human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it.”³ In another vein, touching on the various “isms” that are connected to the main focus of ecocriticism, particularly Marxism which holds “that nature itself is always, already, a cultural construct tied to human political interests” (Caminero-Santangelo 2007, 699), Caminero-Santangelo writes that ecocriticism “aims to decenter humans, often by giving nature ‘back’ its subjectivity” (2007, 699). Whereas copious literary works of African extraction have directly reflected the relationship between humans and the environment, Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament* examines the scorched intrapersonal relationships between human elements in a society, which is a derivative of the violated physical space/environment.

Synopsis of Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament*

The play reflects the actual life story of a nine-month-old baby, Tshepang (Siesie), who was raped and who represents many other thousands. Gerhard Marx, in the designer’s note, claims that images were created to capture “events that were primarily impossible to imagine.” Such images are depicted through objects such as a bed, salt, a loaf of bread, and a broomstick. For instance, the bed symbolises the poverty and the desperate situation of two of the central characters, Ruth and Simon,⁴ while the loaf of bread and the broomstick stuck into it are symbolic of Baby Siesie and Alfred Sorrows, on the one hand, and reminiscent of the traumatised country and brutalised community, which started with the “exploitative practices” of “first settler-farmers in the Cape,”⁵ on the other. In the face of the inactivity of human characters in the play, nativity figures are used metaphorically. In essence, Adrienne Sichel (2005, xiii) acknowledges that this “imaginative realism” or the distilling of “factual essences into immutable revelations about the human condition” helps *Tshepang* to be a “part of the canon of conscientising drama” (2005, xv), or what Tony Hamburger, in the introduction, calls the presentation of “the darker side of human nature” (2005, 1).

The stories in the play are narrated and acted by Simon, through which a connection between the present and past of people in the community where the play is set is

³ See Purdue Online Writing Lab’s summary on “Ecocriticism (1960–Present)” at https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/literary_theory_and_schools_of_criticism/ecocriticism.html.

⁴ See the designer’s note written by Gerhard Marx (in Newton 2005, ix).

⁵ See the foreword written by Adrienne Sichel (2005, xiv).

contextualised. Simon is conceived as the only person in the community who is capable of sharing love and “the possibility of knowing,” as opposed to others who exhibit stringent passivity and frigidity, and through him several other things are brought into the open (Newton 2005, 11). Therefore, Simon, just like Newton, is committed to breaking the silences around social evils and personal pains (Newton 2005, 5). The story centres on the sexual violation of a nine-month-old baby, Siesie, later called Tshepang. This happening leaves her mother, Ruth, dumb and passive from the beginning of the play. Through a flashback narration of the events that precede her present state, we are made to know that the longing to have baby Tshepang back by her mother after she survives a brutal rape is responsible for Ruth’s existential state of waiting.

The small rural South African community where the play is set is presented as devoid of events and happenings, even in the face of human abuse, poverty, excessive drinking, unemployment, exploitation, and the furore that follows the rape of Baby Tshepang. Simon, the narrator, declares that “nothing ever happens here. Nothing. Niks” (Newton 2005, 19). The play talks about violations of various degrees. As a result of the pervasive unproductive trend in the community, young men and women fall into cyclic acts of “[w]ake, wipe, eat, drink, naai, sleep” (2005, 28). Sex is depicted in the play as a habitual activity as people as young as teens take a *houvrou*, who “is a woman that you keep, but she is not your wife ... you can’t get rid of a wife. A *houvrou* you can let go” (20). One such woman is Margaret, Alfred Sorrows’ father’s *houvrou*. Margaret physically abuses Alfred for wetting his pants during a bout of laughter. This breaks him physically and psychologically. As a result of this trauma, the play implies that Alfred, fired by other dysfunctional elements, grows up to be a violator. After six young men have been held culpable for the rape of Baby Tshepang, we are later informed that Alfred is the culprit.

Alfred chooses to rape the baby when his *houvrou*, Ruth, denies him sex because she prefers to go to the tavern to have some drinks. As part of the dangerous silences around despicable issues like rape, Sarah, Ruth’s friend who sees Alfred committing the act, decides not to stop the abuse but instead reports it to Ruth who gets into a row with her. The preponderance of rape and other violence against the female population in the fictitious village is recklessly rationalised based on women’s use of miniskirts and Mandela supposedly having stolen the purse of the Queen of England when on a visit. Other than the two reasons above, the small village is said to have been gang-raped, apparently talking metaphorically, at a time in the past. While the rape of Tshepang is paradoxically expected to generate a moment of anguish and sober reflection for everyone, only Ruth, the mother, is castigated for her negligence—the people even convert the moment of media hype and general excitement associated with the event into an opportunity to be projected to the outside world.

Textual Analysis: “Eviled” by the Society; “Evil” to the Society

Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament* presents a society where women are denigrated and commoditised, just like what has been done to the physical environment

and ecological space. This commoditisation, indicative of the self-centredness of men, sees a woman reduced to a *houvrou* that is meant to satisfy the immediate sexual satisfaction of the male counterpart who can “use” and drop her at will. The denigrating reduction of women to objects that can be possessed and discarded at one’s convenience is common to most African societies. Certain pre-colonial cultural prescriptions in some societies even reduced women to an “article” or “object” that defined the economic status of a man. The disadvantaged condition of women is further exemplified in the discourse and narrative of motherhood or mothering. It is asserted by Fonchingong (2006, 140), quoting Oriaku (1996), that “marriage both in real life and fiction, is perhaps, the most circumscribing factor in the life of an African woman.” The definition of “marriage” here is broad in scope and intention, and therefore does not isolate relationships that might not have been traditionally, customarily or conventionally approved. Either way we look at the placement of women in sexual relationships, it has been argued that “marriage is an avenue for violence and a plethora of injustice against women” or what Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (1985), in the words of Fonchingong (2006, 110), call “the intersection of multiple oppression.” This loss of the womenfolk’s dignity further earmarked them as children-producing machines, comparable to the acquisition of instruments by capitalists to enhance their economic base. This denigrating experience of women is analogous to the deployment of the natural environment for both agrarian and industrialised engagements to promote human comfort, thereby and thereafter leaving such physical space eroded, degraded and devalued. Such annexation characterised the South African space when the Dutch and British came at different times to exploit both human and natural resources, reducing both the land and the people to objects of conquest. This experience of South Africa is reflected in the play, when Simon, the existentialist-modelled sole narrator and actor in the play (Newton 2005, 40), declares to the cameraman who came to cover the rape of the infant, Siesie:

Where were you, where are you? What are you doing 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.

The physical space of the village referred to above is a metaphor for the geographical space of South Africa that suffered various colonial invasions. Rape here is also correlated with violent sexual engagement or connubial dealings that ordinarily produce an offspring. The violence imported to the act, and the repetition suggested by the idea of gang-raping, would have produced a heightened negative effect or response. The probability is therefore very high that the product of the suspicious relationship would be jaundiced. The three major female adult characters in the play are victims of violation and abuse: Margaret is the *houvrou* of Alfred Sorrow’s father who maltreats Alfred, who ends up sexually assaulting Baby Siesie; Ruth is Alfred Sorrow’s *houvrou* who denies him sex and goes to the tavern instead. Ruth becomes demented following the violent rape and dismemberment of her baby; Sarah is Ruth’s friend who witnesses the rape of Baby Siesie and does nothing but report it to her friend, Ruth.

Given the above, one could argue that, just as is the case with plants found in an altered or battered natural environment, the maltreatment of women designated as *houvrou* in the play would have produced in them the “evil” tendencies that, for instance, lead to the brutalisation of Alfred Sorrow by Margaret. No doubt, the concept and idea of the *houvrou* is a contraction, if not a contradiction, of mothering and motherhood in Africa. This is because Maqubela (2016, 7226), quoting Oyewumi, has observed that “African theorizations envisaged motherhood beyond just the context of caring, but also as embedded with notions of well-being and prosperity of the future generations.” Margaret is bereft of the characteristics of motherhood in this case, as she has been vitiated by the society and deprived of the values that would have promoted her to the level of a mother. As broached before, this altering and disruptive experience is similar to the interruptions and vitiations that human movements and activities exert on the environment.

Another aspect to be noted in the placement of Margaret, as a *houvrou*, is the loss of certain values, features and ingredients needed to fit into and function in the mould in which women are socially perceived and constructed or cast. This is because a woman, as a result of socio-cultural influences, is required to grow up to motherhood with the expectation of mothering, on the one hand, and the protection of the environment, on the other. The foregoing is true about Margaret, and by extension the environment, based on the fact that “motherhood also embodies the notion of ‘normative values and humanistic ideologies that embrace [the] notion of preservation of the past, present and future generations ... the promotion of equality, peace and justice’” (Maqubela 2016, 7226). Margaret’s loss of the “values” and “ideologies” needed to recall the past to protect the present and secure the future is central to the possible reasons that account for her negative treatment and violation of Alfred Sorrow. The same reading, when applied to the ecological degradation of the environment, would explain how an environment that is deprived of the substance of the past in the present would be endangering, both in the present and future. It is then safe to agree that the deprivation of Margaret and “mother earth” of motherhood is a bad omen, and is counter-productive; as Maqubela (2016, 7226) has submitted, “African motherhood is glorified on the basis that it is a source and perpetuation of life and/or humanity.”

Ruth’s (Siesie’s mother) dementia is reflective of a seared or scorched psyche, whose productive propensity has been vitiated just as found in the devastation received by “mother earth” when violently used or impacted. The retaliation by a devastated “mother earth” would also be unproductive and dangerous to all other elements it has reasons to relate with. The later warped desire of Alfred Sorrow to abuse, through rape, Baby Siesie, which is connected to his violation by Margaret through the use of the symbol of a broomstick stuck into a loaf of bread, is suggestive of the interdependent relationship between humans and the environment, and how the natural environment could shape the culture of the people. When conceived as a nurturing mother (earth), Margaret’s nurturing of Alfred Sorrow could only come from the aggregated socio-cultural possibilities she has been made to grow up with, in this case a subjugated and

exploited paradigm. Just as Marsolek (2001), cited before, believes that a landscape can be treacherous as a result of things it is connected to, the connection of Alfred Sorrow to a socially depraved woman like Margaret, his father's *houvrou*, produces in him a violent orientation that enhances his capacity to be violent. This is also a function of memorialisation, which makes the recall of past experiences possible in order to influence a new behaviour. Whereas the memory system permits the sorting that would dictate either wilful or non-wilful recall, the preponderance of depraved memory would automatically override the capacity conferred by sorting, leading to imperative discharge of the memory content. Given these intricacies, the negative and prejudiced memorialisation of the female characters in the text is an aggregation of the totality of deprivations and violations they have hitherto been exposed to. It is arguable, then, that they are not only the genetic products of their parents, but of their environment.

Therefore, the idea of constructing women as “evil” in African societies is not only misplaced, but a further step to disadvantage women as most socio-cultural and literary narratives are slanted to favour men and short-change women. Similarly, the positioning of Ruth, who is a consistently dispossessed character in the text, is indicative of how the environment is variously degraded. Ruth, being configured as a *houvrou* and a demented personality involved in the quest for the return of her battered “hope,” Baby Siesie, symbolically implies how the physical environment could be made to bear the brunt of human actions.

Sarah's culpability in looking away when she gets to the scene of the rape is reminiscent of the general dumbness in the village, particularly the loss of the female voice in a highly repressive and dehumanising environment. Beyond this, Sarah's unconcerned attitude or lack of action to halt the serious sexual violation of a minor could be seen as overfamiliarity with depraved attitudes that taint the decadent post-apartheid black populated society. Just like Margaret, it is obvious that Sarah's detachment from the collective good of the society she lives in might be a protestation against the ills done to her in the past as well as a natural loss of the will to act in the face of huge prevailing evils. In a nutshell, Sarah lacks the value needed for character moulding and societal regeneration, and by extension for mothering and motherhood. This development is also suggestive of postcolonial malady and the erosion of African value systems; this is attested by Maqubela (2016, 7228), quoting Magwaza (2003) and Aryee (2005), to the effect that “before democracy, African indigenous families enjoyed a collectivistic orientation of life, where mothers had a privilege to an extensive social support for childcare, referred to as ‘social networks of care,’ from one or a combination of, among others, neighbours, friends and the kinship system.” Therefore, if this pre-colonial order had existed in the society where the violation of Baby Siesie takes place, it could have been prevented as Margaret would not have psychologically violated Alfred Sorrow and Alfred would also have assumed a level of care and support to Baby Siesie, rather than convert her to an object of violation. In a similar vein, the nonchalant attitude of Sarah towards the brutalisation of Baby Siesie is analogous to the passive response people show when some others violate the environment in any way. The violation of the

environment in most postcolonial societies in developing nations is precipitated by reasons that include, but are not limited to, poverty, ignorance, and lack of care and wrong attitudes, both in local and city spaces. Therefore, in both the case of Baby Siesie and the environment, the abdication of collective and corporate responsibility would invariably lead to collective endangerment and jeopardy. To a very large extent, the pervasive note of nothingness, which propels the deployment of existentialism and the idea of the theatre of the absurd in the play, climaxes the estrangement and disruptions found in the environment, both within human interactions and natural disjunctions.

Conclusion

Whereas most literary works in Africa have engaged with reflections of the relationship between humans and nature, not very many of them have dwelt on the interconnection between human elements, on the one hand, and the environment, on the other, and how such a mutually influencing relationship could dictate a negative propensity that could vex human existence. Based on the reading of this text, it is obvious that rather than constructing an “evil” woman who is inherently evil, it is most probable that the “evil” woman is created by a particular socio-cultural order which manifests within the eclectic social structuration of a particular society. Therefore, just like the violated environment presents the possibility of exuding violent tendencies and characteristics, the supposed “evil woman” created in Newton’s *Tshepang: The Third Testament* is a product of an unfriendly society and has no template to relate to others than the annihilating one offered her by the society. A continuous inuring of women to evil in the different narratives would suggest either a somniferous or somnambulating society that lives in self-denial and deceit. The notion of “evil women,” to a large extent, therefore, becomes an instrument of traducers to prolong the conspiracy against and the despoliation of women, similar to what humans do to the “mother earth.” Such an insincere approach to realistic situations would create more complexities and complications. It is trite to continue to hunt for “evil women” when the focus should be on the “evil society” that is responsible for the not-so-pleasant strands in the society.

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