**Reading Pointers for *The Convert:***

**Watch these video clips that feature Danai Gurira, explaining her general motivation as a playwright and also, the personal/family backstory for this play. Useful info for you: Gurira self-identifies as a Christian. And her own middle name is Jekesai. As one clip indicates, Gurira regards the play as advocating for, and concluding with, an African Christianity that is distinct from Western Christianity.**

**Clips:**

Danai Gurira, singing the hymn that Jekesai sings at the conclusion of *The Convert*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcM8skwmICE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3K9P9OKEzY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PUA9JXhgos&t=459s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgR-R6S3qA4>

**Colonial contexts. For colonial context, look again at the Cecil Rhodes speech of Week 1. Also, you might look at Lord Baden Powell’s book, *The Matabele Campaign* (1896), on British military action in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe during the period that *The Convert* takes place.**

See, for instance, chapters 2,3, 5, 7, 10, 18:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/47158/47158-h/47158-h.htm>

**Baden Powell was the founder of the Boy Scouts movement**

**Structure. As you read the play, be attentive to its structure. Notice its division into acts, and scenes, and consider what happens when; think about the arc of the work as a whole. Think about the staging: this includes noting the role of various props (furniture, etc); noting costume. It also includes looking at the use of Shona speech; in some ways, the written script (which contains translations into English) is at odds with the performance (in which the original language is spoken without translation).**

Medium. Think about the medium of drama, in comparison with the media of short stories and poems that you have read for this class. What, if anything, does a play do that a short story or poem cannot? What, if anything, do short stories and poems do that plays cannot do?

**Mode: look at the play’s use of humor. Who/what forms the object of humor? How would you describe the play as a whole? Comedy? Tragedy? Tragicomedy? Comi-tragedy? Do the comic and the tragic elements work in sync or do they go in different directions? How much might these differing emotional valences depend on the choices made by the director and the actors?**

1. **Gender. Be attentive to the way in which gender features in the play: consider the gendered division of labor, the social status of men and women, the ideologies through which gender roles and identities operate. Would you say that the play presents the beliefs and practices of Christianity as offering African women a more empowered life than the life associated with traditional, precolonial society?**
2. **Indigenous life. What stance does the play take towards indigenous Zimbabwean spirituality? What stance does it take towards indigenous cultural and social systems? Think about how Fanon characterizes the colonized people’s experience of cultural, social and psychological alienation from precolonial life. Think about how the Westernised and/or Christian characters in the play are represented. Do the characters reflect, contest, or complicate the analysis of Fanon regarding colonization’s effects?**
3. **Labor. Think about how the play represents African labor, both off stage, in mines, and on stage, in homes. How important are the operations of colonial economy, including wage labor, taxes, and commodity production, in this play?**
4. Violence. For Fanon, it was by violent confrontation that colonialism entered the modern world stage, and it is by violence that it must necessarily exit. Think about the role violence plays in this play. This could include studying the representation of explicit violence in the acts of Tamba/Uncle, Jekesai/Ester, or the absence or transfiguration of violence in the figures of Chilford, Prudence, or Chancellor. Are there are any ways that colonial violence is directed inward in the figure of the colonized African subject? Are there any other ways in which violence. manifests across the thoughts or behavior of characters?

**Discussion post (week 4) on The Convert**:

Watch the video of the tech rehearsal for Act I, Scene 3 of The Convert (link in Canvas syllabus). Write a 300-word discussion board post (with wordcount stated at the end), to your Small Group on Canvas, on what you think the performance adds to your understanding of the scene when read as text. You may also comment on what, if anything, detracts from your original textual reading.

OR:

Write a 300-word discussion board post (with wordcount stated at the end), to your Small Group on Canvas, on any of the above numbered items.