



Displaced

By Arlene McKanic/

Greenwich Village Gazette – July 14, 2001

Sometimes just contemplating the enormity of injustices done to women on this planet -- everything from female genital mutilation to the murderous oppression of the Taliban regime, to child prostitution in Southeast Asia, to rape crises in South Africa, to rape camps in the former Yugoslavia, to war whose main victims are women and children, to garden variety disrespect, abuse and exploitation -- is nearly enough to make one go postal. Often the best thing one can do, especially if one is an artist, is bear witness to some of it. *Displaced*, the fierce, moving play by Stephanie Barton-Farcas, Natily Blair, Julie Campbell, Gina Daniels and Jo Yang does that.

Displaced, whose subtitle is “you don’t have to cross a border to become a refugee,” tells the story of several women who are displaced in one way or the other, either from their country due to war, or from their integrity or innocence due to brutal practice. The women are a Thai girl prostitute, an Aung San Suu Kyi-like Burmese political dissident under house arrest, (Jo Yang) a Chechen woman who’s lost one leg to a land mine planted during the insane conflict between Russia and Chechnya and a Zapatista struggling for the rights of indigenous people in Mexico (Natily Blair), an African child soldier and a brash American photojournalist facing breast cancer (Gina Daniels), a long-suffering Rwandan girl caught up in the bizarre horror of the 1994 massacre, and a Mozambique healer trying to teach her people about AIDS (Akimi Biggs), an Afghani girl on the verge of marriage and a Balkan woman, a former teacher who was forced to watch the rape and murder of her daughter and who now swabs the floors of American airports for a living (Julie Campbell). Though separated by continents and oceans, the women still interact -- the photojournalist meets the Balkan cleaning woman in the airport and through a fortunate mix-up ends up in the home of the Burmese dissident. Sometimes they even appear in each other’s dreams. The Thai Girl appears in the nightmares of Gina Daniels’ tortured child soldier after she’s sexually exploited by the leader of her platoon. The roles, not surprisingly, are emotionally, if not physically grueling -- Blair, as the crippled Chechen woman, must maneuver the stage on a crutch with one leg tied up behind her back -- and directed with discipline and energy by Barton-Farcas, with Sarah Covington as the dance/movement consultant. David Morris’ scenic design consists of a sliding walls of corrugated metal riddled with bullet holes, and Juliet Chia’s lighting is compelling.

Mary Holmstrom's costumes range from the sherbet colored draperies of the Thai prostitute, to the jewel blue, body effacing boorkha of the Afghani girl, to the

tattered and singed dress of the Rwandan woman -- the viewer at first thought Biggs' unhappy character was Bangladeshi because of that country's ghastly practice of bride burning -- and the preposterous army fatigues of Daniels' soldier.

The play, to its credit, does have its light moments; the women engage in exuberant child's play, or dance to Tom Jones' "She's A Lady." Biggs is also funny as the Mozambiquan healer who keeps a condom tucked in her turban and at the play's end the soldier's childhood seems to be restored to her, as far as such a thing is possible. The original music, by Richard Brookens, Tom DeRenzo, and Damon Law is powerful, thanks largely to Radu Bass' sound design and the contribution of live music consultant Claire Munday.

Displaced is presented by Nicu's Spoon -- Nicu is the name of the little Romanian orphan adopted by the artistic director who was fascinated by the light bouncing off his spoon -- and leaves the viewer not only angry but amazed and humbled by the women's resilience, and grateful for the comfortable American life she has been blessed to lead. It will run through July 28th at Altered Stages, 212 West 29th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues.