

**The Politics of Race, Culture and Gender in
Three South African Novels: *The Grass is
Singing, The Lying Days and Disgrace***



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**The Politics of Race, Culture and Gender in
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Abstract

“The Politics of Race, Culture and Gender in Three South Asian Novels: The Grass is Singing, The Lying Days and Disgrace” is a study of the themes of ambivalence, displacement and identity crisis that take place in the three stages of enunciations, according to the theory demonstrated by Homi Bhabha. Under the light of this theory, the thesis focuses on the characters of Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*, Nadine Gordimer’s *The Lying Days* and J.M Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, who are striving for a sense of self after years of relegation, subjugation and oppression and how they are able to find a voice to for themselves through hybridity.

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Introduction

“Not so very long ago, the earth numbered two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men, and one thousand five hundred million natives.” Thus began Jean-Paul Sartre’s preface to the 1961 edition of Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

Although several ancient civilizations had practiced colonialism, the post-Renaissance practice of imperialism included several crucial factors within its constructions, which set it apart from all earlier forms. The complex, schematic stratification of the colonized world brought about certain changes whose lasting effects can still be traced. The hierarchical categorization of races, cultures and nations, their subjection to domination and subordination, mass migration of Europeans as settlers in the established colonies, set off a chain of events which culminated in impacting and incessantly altering identities for both the colonizer and the colonized, forcing them to experience a painful insecurity of dislocation, leading to a position of ambivalence concluding in hybridity. For women, either of the ruling class of the white imperialist/colonizer or the subaltern colonized/native group, colonization resulted in a double segregation – where patriarchy and imperialism can be seen as analogous forms of domination over those they deem subordinate.

This thesis intends to observe how three African authors, all descendants of white settlers, influenced by their own first hand experiences of a society structured by the colonial system, depicted within their narratives, a series of conflicts their protagonists and other main characters undergo. These conflicts were a result of the enforcement of a rigidly conservative, schematically segregated system that subjected people to biased treatment, based on their race, culture and gender – thereby upsetting their orderly, known world into one of violence and chaos, making them undergo psychological complications and making it difficult to make meaning out of a disorderly world. The three novels portray the struggle of both the colonizer

and the colonized in carving out an identity for themselves and freeing themselves from the ills of colonialism. Through a detailed reading of *The Grass is Singing* (1950) by Doris Lessing, *The Lying Days* (1953) by Nadine Gordimer and *Disgrace* (1999), by J.M. Coetzee the thesis aims to shed light on how both the white master and the slave struggled to create a strong foothold in a rapidly changing world to establish an identity and how, a shared history of violence and hatred, brought forth a painful decolonizing process, which shifted the power dynamics based on race and culture. At the same time, the essay will analyze the different effects of colonial dominance on men and women (of both white and coloured races) and its effects on their psychology and life. In order to justify my arguments, I intend to use Homi K. Bhabha's theory of The Third Space of Enunciation.

Since the European post-Renaissance colonial expansion took place simultaneously with the burgeoning of a modern capitalist system of economic exchange, the colonies were primarily established to provide raw materials for the developing economies of the colonial powers. It was the era when the world witnessed for the first time, the advent of settler colonies, whereby several natives and/or indigenous peoples were relocated and enslaved. This initiated a relation between the colonizer and colonized which was rigidly locked into a hierarchy of difference, aggressively resistant to fair and equitable exchanges, whether economic, cultural or social, giving rise to a Manichaeian world. According to Fanon, this world was one of binaries, where the colonizer, proclaiming himself as the master/Self, placed himself in the centre while pushing the colonized or the slave/Other to the margin. Abdul R. JanMohamed incisively depicts this strategy as:

Motivated by his desire to conquer and dominate, the imperialist configures the colonial realm as a confrontation based on differences in race, language, social customs, cultural values, and modes of production.

(JanMohamed 1985: 64).

The Western imperative to view the world in terms of binary oppositions establishes a relation of dominance. Binary oppositions are structurally related to one another and in colonial discourse, the one underlying binary of colonizer/colonized are rearticulated in various ways, for example black/white, civilized/primitive, human/bestial, good/evil, teacher/pupil etc.

Colonialism witnessed an influx of migrators: from free settlers to the experience of enslavement, transportation or voluntary removal for indentured labour; giving rise to a dominant feature of postcolonial literatures – place and displacement – the point where the postcolonial identity crisis is created i.e. the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. Through ‘dislocation’ via migration (forced or voluntary) a valid and active sense of self may have disintegrated or it may have been dismantled through cultural denigration which is the conscious and unconscious oppression of indigenous people and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. This feature can most prominently be identified in the construction of ‘place’: an interstice is formed between the experience of place and the language available to describe it. This vacuum develops for those whose language is inadequate to describe a new place as well those whose language has been systematically destroyed by enslavement, and for those whose language has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power. Until the colonizing language has been replaced or appropriated as ‘english’, in each of the cases a condition of alienation is inevitable. (Ashcroft et al 2002: 10). This is also true for those whose English is unquestionably ‘native’ (in the sense of being possessed from birth) yet feel a strong sense of isolation within its practice once its vocabulary, categories and codes seem inadequate or inappropriate to describe the fauna, the physical and geographical conditions or the cultural practices they have developed in a new land. These adversaries illustrate the urgent need these native speakers share with those

colonized peoples who were directly oppressed to escape from the inadequacies and imperial constraints of English as a social practice. It demonstrates that although the English language is not inherently incapable of accounting for post-colonial experience, it needs to develop an 'appropriate' usage in order to do so by metamorphosing into a distinct and unique form of English - which will enable the new settlers, in their experience of a new place, to express their sense of 'Otherness'. Therefore, it can be seen that the striking feature of this displacement is its ability to interrogate and subvert imperial cultural formations.

These characteristics are deeply ingrained in colonial discourse, which later paved the way for postcolonial literature. In an attempt to deconstruct and/or reconstruct, recover, recreate identities, a sense of belonging, writers of postcolonial literature strive to depict the irreparable damage caused by colonialism – during and after its practice came to an end. These writers create characters that speak of alterity, ambivalence, hybridity, mimicry, and dislocation amongst several others, shedding light on how despite years of oppression, subjugation and abuse, the colonized find a voice in the language of the colonizers. Postcolonial literatures portray the struggle of both natives and white settlers, as they adopt and adapt to the new cultural identities brought into motion through colonialism. The white settlers, belonging mostly to the middle class, arrived in the colonies with their ambitions of quick accession to wealth, property and power. By migrating from the Centre to the Margin, they lost their status in the hierarchical position from the earlier rank, in which they cohabited with their fellow citizens. In the colonies, they formed the status of the master/Self: the oppressor and thus proved themselves superior to the natives/Other, demarcating themselves to the Centre. They soon were reduced to a group caught in between the culture and societal norms of their country of origin; which would take time to adapt to a completely new environment, thus giving advent to a compromised culture which no longer remained in its pristine Eurocentric state. This brings us to a point in which both the master/Self and the

slave/ Other remodel each other to adapt to a new culture, a new setting emerging out of situations beyond their control. There were clear signs of alienation even within the first generation of free settlers and displayed a tendency to seek an alternative, differentiated identity. Their descendants felt the identity crisis more vividly than their forefathers who settled in alien regions to reap the benefits of colonialism.

No longer in direct contact with the customs and traditions of their inherited European culture, the free settlers' sense of alienation rose, and since, their experiences from exposure to new geographical locations and culture isolated them from their European counterparts, a void developed where they were able to identify their struggle along side the natives. In an attempt to express their 'Otherness', postcolonial literature engaged in discourses which shifted its stance away from the Centre and shifted the dynamics to the margin. That is, they needed to escape from the implicit body of assumptions to which English was attached, its aesthetic and social values, the formal and historically limited constraints of genre, and the oppressive political and cultural assertion of metropolitan dominance of centre over margin (Ngugi 1986).

Imbued deep within the practice of colonialism was race itself, coterminous with racism and racial prejudice - largely a product of the same post-Renaissance period, which aided in justifying the treatment of enslaved/subjugated peoples. In *Race and Racism*, Tzveton Todorov distinguishes between racism and racialism as 'Racism is an ancient form of behavior that is probably found worldwide; racialism is a movement of ideas born in Western Europe whose period of influence extends from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth.' (Todorov 1993: 213) Todorov elaborates on how the form of racism that is rooted in racialism produces particularly catastrophic results and cites the case of Nazism as an example.

At a time, when European doctrines prescribed the non-Europeans as intrinsically inferior, not just outside history and civilization, but genetically pre-determined to inferiority, Darwin's claim of the 'evolution of mankind' and the survival of the fittest race' revitalized the spirit of colonialism and legitimized their authority over the other races. The misrepresentation of 'race' – the hierarchical categorization of humans based on the color and shade of their skin allowed the imperialists the liberty to assign certain characteristics – the white Europeans were at the top while the black negro or African at the bottom due to his primitiveness associated with that of his skin color. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin mention:

Perhaps one of the most catastrophic binary systems perpetuated by the imperialism is the invention of the concept of race. The reduction of complex physical and cultural differences within and between colonized societies to the simple opposition of black/brown/yellow/white is in fact a strategy to establish a binarism of white/non-white, which asserts a relation of dominance. By thus occluding the vast continuum of ethnic variation, relegating the whole region of ethnicity, racial mixture and cultural specificity to one of taboo and otherness, imperialism draws the concept of race into a simple binary which reflects its own logic of power.

(Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2004: 26)

To ensure their unquestioned authority over the natives, the colonizers ensured they established their empire as one of superiority and grandeur while admonishing the natives: their customs, practices and culture. Relegating the natives proved advantageous to the imperial masters as, apart from confirming their supremacy and thus their rightful claim of authority over the colonized, this also verified the natives desire to look up to the master and covet his status, position and power. The colonizer instructs and disciplines the native in his language – urging them to adopt his ideals, culture and customs.

Prevented from practicing their own culture, the native enters a morbid phase of both desire and repulsion and a dilemma ensues. However, what the colonizers failed to foresee was the influence of their own actions over themselves, particularly on the white settlers, i.e. in forcing the colonized natives to abandon their own culture and customs and imitate the ones of their European lords, the slave rose up in status to that of the colonizer/master. At the same time, albeit unconsciously, the master adjusts himself with the culture and habitation of the slave. This adaptation of cultures of both the colonizer and the colonized created more confusion, as they both strove to let go of their former beliefs and customs while adjusting to new cultures, ideas and customs. This resulted in a microcosmic world of identity crises pertaining to culture, race and gender.

These settlers were also faced with the task of coexisting with natives they have long categorized as barbaric and savage. The settlers, therefore, lost no time in disciplining and showing the natives their actual faces and position in the hierarchy of society. Thus, as white settlers lived in flourishing metropolises, natives were forced into cramped villages, with minor provisions.

In his greatly acclaimed work, *'The Wretched of the Earth'*, Frantz Fanon clearly elaborates how this dividing line was to create a lasting effect in the minds of the colonized – an element we will find prominently in all three of our texts. Fanon distinguishes between the world of the settler and the native. While the settler's town is one of order and discipline, marked with recognition for honesty and dedicated service, the native's town is "a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute." (Fanon: 30). Fanon illustrates how, deprived of basic rights, the native's economic condition is reduced to poverty and the settler town full of luxury is looked at with envy and "lust". Fanon claims that the settler is aware of this fact and therefore is "always on the defensive 'They want to take our place'." (Fanon 30). This very thought is echoed in the minds of Charlie Slatter, Mrs. Shaw and David Lurie – they

cannot tolerate the natives (or other races) occupying the same level of principles, status as themselves. The white man's desire to educate and civilize the black man/natives is, therefore, not in order to alleviate the native's status with that of his own. The ulterior motive was to maintain hegemonic control over the native whereby the native submitted willfully to the authority of the whites and the Centre. . The master taught his own language, culture and customs to the slave by relegating the slave's customs, traditions and cultures, and highlighting the sovereignty of his own.

Fanon, a psychotherapist, exposed the connection between colonial war and mental disease and highlighted the lasting effects it had on the colonized. Years later, Homi K. Bhabha elaborated Fanon's work and demonstrated how the colonial world, which Fanon had rightfully claimed to be a Manichaeian world, influenced the colonizers' mind just as much as it had shaped the colonized/natives'. In *The Location of Culture*, a collection of his essays, Bhabha would speak of mimicry, which ultimately gave way to hybridity - how the colonizer/colonized relations stress their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. In the introduction to his book Bhabha somberly states:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

(Bhabha 1994: 2)

_____ Acknowledging the contributions of Edward Said and Gayatri C. Spivak to the field of post-colonialism, Bhabha opines that in order to make progress we must move away from the binarism of polarities and contemplate, instead, on making meaning out of the flotsam

after-effects of colonialism. In *The Commitment to Theory*, he asks, 'Must we always polarize in order to polemicize? Are we trapped in a politics of struggle where the representation of social antagonisms and historical contradictions can take no other form than a binarism of theory vs. politics? Can the aim of freedom of knowledge be the simple inversion of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, centre and periphery, negative image and positive image?' (Bhabha 1994: 28) Bhabha elaborates why, rather than focusing on cultural diversity, we must engage in the speculation of cultural difference. Bhabha claims, 'The concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation.' (Bhabha 1994: 51). Bhabha sheds light on how all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the 'Third Space of enunciation'. Bhabha explains how, after having been forced to forego or alter their own culture for the 'superior' one of their masters, the natives are left with an alien or hybrid culture – a mixture of their own and the ones they have adopted – leaving them at first, confused, in a form of identity crisis, which later gives way to a better understanding and/or acceptance for what they have embraced and have learned to call their own.

Therefore colonialism gave rise to a compromised form of culture for both the colonizer and colonized – one, which Homi K. Bhabha entitled as *hybridity* - the culmination of various identities. Bhabha claimed that while the colonized armed themselves to oppose and protest by adapting to the master's customs, culture and language, it eradicated the basic difference between master and slave. Meanwhile the master also unconsciously replicates or '*mimics*' various ideals of the colonized, which invalidate his claims of superiority, rejects his hierarchical status in terms of culture, education etc. Thus the master and slave embark on a new status, which can be termed as hybrid or one of mixed identity where neither is the Self or Other – a point in which both the parties accommodate new ideals and principles in

exchange of their former ones. So while it is difficult for both the parties to let go of their former beliefs and customs, it is even more difficult to adjust to new ideas, practices, thus leading to stress and anxiety, creating a vacuum or gap – named by Bhabha as the ‘Third Space of Enunciation’ or the ‘in-between’.

Thus by adopting and adapting to the master’s culture, customs and language, the colonized gradually empower themselves, enabling these subaltern subjects to disrupt the hierarchical colonial scheme, not in the form of direct protests but by acquiring the means and tools from copying the master. Simultaneously, the colonizer unconsciously follows various ideals of the colonized. This is what Bhabha terms as mimicry – the intentional or unintentional imitation of certain rituals and habits between colonial subjects. The result of mimicry is never a perfect copy but a crude, customized version of the original. Mimicry disrupts the colonizers’ claim to be different: superior and pristine. Mimicry leads to ambivalence and hybridity.

In the initial stages of hybridity which Bhabha rubrics as the first space, the subjects lose their sense of belonging, wholeness of identity and cultural purity, leading to an identity crisis. In the second space the subjects cannot articulate their individuality, as it is a place governed by the rules, regulations and strictures imposed on them by the colonial system. This lack of identity and instability gives way to frustration, fear and consternation. To bring some order to this chaos, they create an interstitial space, termed as ‘The Third Space of Enunciation’ or ‘in-betweenness’. It is a psychological phase, in which the most significant process of identity construction takes place. This is kind of a pathway that prepares the post-colonial subjects to ascend from one role/identity to another. According to Bhabha, ‘all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or “purity” of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that

demonstrate their hybridity.(Bhabha 1994:55). Bill Ashcroft claims ‘a Third Space of enunciation between the poles of cultural identity, a space within which cultural identities themselves are transformed’ (120).

What Bhabha attempts to foreground is that cultural identity is never fixed and complete, rather it is constructed in a continual process with constant slippage and shift. Identity, for the most part, is ambivalent and is newly articulated in this Third Space. It can be said that cultural identity always emerges in this - contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation; clearly indicating - inherent originality or purity ‘of cultures are untenable (Ashcroft et al. 2000: 37). Thus it can be concluded that the mutual construction of the subjectivities of the colonizer and the colonized occurs in the third space highlighting the interdependent relationship between them. Therefore Bhabha proclaims due to mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity, the role of ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ is never fixed in the colonial context but subject to continuous change and reconstruction. The roles are interchangeable and can shift at any given time; thus empowering the black native and disempowering the white imperialist.

The role of colonialism with interest to gender will also be discussed in the thesis. Gender is the basic difference between the biological sex, which is male and female. However, in literature, the meaning of gender encompasses more than this mere difference, focusing more on how society perceives both the sexes and speculates on the domination of women by men to their advantage. Female subordination therefore does not originate from biological difference as such but from the patriarchal and hierarchical division of labour in which women are confined to domestic duties. Mariam Lowe and Ruth Heubbard quoting Jean Smith confirm, “Women’s subordination, while not biological in Origin, should be located in hierarchical division of labour that was anchored in the organization of housework

and child bearing and rearing” (89). So the relegation of women to the background cannot be attributed to biological difference. It should rather be blamed on societal discourses. Bill Ashcroft et al quoting Spivak note that “ women in many societies have been relegated to the position of other, marginalized and, in a metaphorical sense, colonized, forced to pursue guerrilla warfare against imperial domination from positions deeply imbedded in, yet fundamentally alienated from that imperium” (174). Margaret Mead has stated: Gender is a social construct specifying the socially and culturally prescribed roles that men and women are to follow¹. Therefore the feminist theory to be employed in this paper has to do with the deconstruction of gender hierarchy.

Feminism has been of crucial interest to post-colonial discourse due to two major reasons. First, both patriarchy and imperialism can be seen as symmetrical forms of domination over those they render subordinate. Thus the experiences of women in patriarchy and those of colonized subjects can be homogenized in a number of respects, and both feminism and post-colonial politics oppose such dominance. Secondly, arguments in colonial societies debate whether gender or colonial oppression is the more important political factor in women’s lives. Kirsten Holst Peterson trenchantly depicted the issue in her essay *First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature* (1984) where she states, ‘One obvious and very important area of difference is this: whereas Western feminists discuss the relative importance of feminist versus class emancipation, the African discussion is between feminist emancipation versus the fight against neo-colonialism, particularly in its cultural aspect.’ This has even, at times, caused a rift between Western feminists and political activists from impoverished and oppressed countries, which Gayatri C. Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty [and Trinh T. Minha](#) explain in detail in their works. [Spivak does this in a series of articles including *Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism* \(1985\) and](#)

¹<http://www.trinity.edu/mkearl/gender.html>

[Mohanty and Minha in *Under Western Eyes* \(1984\)](#) and *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (1989) respectively. Mohanty, for example criticizes, ‘the assumption that all of us of the same gender, across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogenous group identified prior to the process of analysis... Thus, the discursively consensual homogeneity of ‘women’ as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women.’ (Mohanty 1984: 338).

As the two are interdependent the condition of colonial dominance affects in material ways, the position of women within their societies. This characteristic has demanded a greater consideration of the construction and employment of gender in the practices of imperialism and colonialism. Both these discourses are concerned with the ways and the extent to which representation and language are crucial to identity formation to the construction of subjectivity. The texts under the rubrics of both this categories agree on the various aspects of the theory of identity, ‘of difference and of the interpellation of the subject by a dominant discourse, as well as offering to each other various strategies of resistance to such controls’. (Ashcroft et al: 102). The 1980s claim by a faction of feminists who argued against the assumption of Western feminists that gender overrode cultural differences ‘to create a universal category of the womanly or the feminine’ and stated these universal categorization of the ‘womanly or the feminine’ was operating from hidden, universalist assumptions with a middle class, Euro-centric bias (Carby 1982; Mohanty 1984; Suleri 1992). Feminism was therefore accused with failing to account for or deal adequately with the experiences of Third World Women. In this respect, the issues concerning gender can be paralleled to that of class. Therefore it can be said:

the overlap between patriarchal, economic and racial oppression has always been difficult to negotiate, and the differences between the political priorities of First and

Third World women have persisted to the present.

(Ashcroft et al 2004: 103)

Speaking against racist First World feminism, Minhahproposes, ‘to understand how pervasively dominance operates via the concept of hegemony or of absent totality in plurality is to understand that the work of decolonization will have to continue within the women’s movements...’(Minha 1989: 104). In recent times, feminism has argued that categories like gender may sometimes be ignored within the larger context of the colonial, and that post-colonial theory has omitted gender differences in constructing a single category of the colonized. Critics argue that colonialism administered very differently for women and for men, and the ‘double colonization’ which resulted when women were ‘subject both to general discrimination as colonial subjects and specific discrimination as women needs to be taken into account in any analysis of colonial oppression’ (Spivak 1985 and 1986; Mohanty 1985; Suleri 1992). Referring to the abolition of the Hindu rite of *sati* in colonial India by the British, Spivak states, ‘white men are saving brown women from brown men.’ (Spivak 1993: 93) and admits that the female has no acknowledged voice, ‘the subaltern cannot speak, [and that] the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow [as she is doubly oppressed: by the colonizers and the colonized male]’ (Spivak 28).

These biases can also be traced even in post independence practices of anti-colonial nationalism, and constructions of the traditional or pre-colonial are often heavily impregnated by a contemporary masculinist bias that falsely represents ‘native’ women as quietist and subordinate. Lastly it must be mentioned that although women’s bodies were not directly constructed as part of a transgressive sexuality, in settler colonies, their bodies were recurrently signified as the site of a power discourse of a different variety. Critics like Gillian Whitlock (*The Intimate Empire*) have argued, they were discerned as crudely not as sexual

but as reproductive subjects, as literal ‘wombs of empire’ whose role was demarcated to the population of the new colonies with white settlers (Whitlock2000: 169). All the above-mentioned post-colonial phenomenon is prominent in the three African novels this [thesis](#) will analyze.

The thesis has been divided into three chapters in which each of the novels will be discussed in relation to the post-colonial elements I have mentioned. In the first chapter I will be discussing Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* (1950). Her first novel, which also shares insight into some of her own personal accounts, is set in South Africa and Rhodesia and revolves around the life of Mary Turner, an independent white woman who falls prey to the evil customs of a colonial society. The novel delves into the psyche of Mary, illustrating how, despite an impoverished and abusive childhood, Mary maneuvers her way out of patriarchal clutches and etches out a successful life for herself. She does not seem to need a man in her life. But soon she gives in to the expectations of society and enters into an unhappy marriage. Lessing unravels how the society pushes Mary into the brink of insanity through this troubled marriage; shedding light on her conjugal life – her relationship with her husband Dick, the native workers at her farm and household and later her relationship with Moses, the house boy. The plot reveals how an authoritative and abusive Mary gives in and submits to Moses resulting in a relationship deemed questionable by the then society. Mary loathes living in the farm and yet continually tries to adjust to it, in her quest to conform to the standards of a suffocating patrilineal colonial system. Her longing for her earlier independence and active life is apparent, yet she adjusts to the expectation of the society, living up to the image of an ideal, devoted wife. At the same time, she diverts her anguish towards her subordinates – the native workers. Lessing explores the complex society of South Africa and its effect on its inhabitants – both settlers and natives and reveals the complex outcome it has on their psychology.

In the second chapter, I will discuss Nadine Gordimer's novel *The Lying Days* (1953), again a first novel. Gordimer's detailed and in depth portrayal of the South African society depicts the complications stemming from a social system, which is not only malicious but also suffocating. The novel traces the growth of Helen from a little girl to that of a woman throughout which, the readers become acquainted with the South African society via the observations of Helen. Helen is sharp witted and she is quick to pick the cues of how segregated her multi-cultural society is. She realizes that despite living in the mining suburbs of Johannesburg, it is a city dissected into several regions and albeit all her neighbors and friends seem to be highly educated, most of them are opposed to progressive thinking. She notices the difference in the treatment of natives, Jews and Indians and reproaches herself and the system for not being able to change it. In this semi-autobiographical novel, Gordimer evaluates this encroaching, unkind society. Helen's home is turned into a metaphor of the oppressive apartheid society, where Helen feels dislocated and abhors the authority of her parents over her life. Through the thought process of Helen Shaw and her experiences in a colonial system, the identity crisis of both the white settler and natives become prominent. The multi-cultural society shows how colonialism gave rise to the intermingling of several races and their cultures and tradition.

After the analysis of the rigid, suffocating apartheid era in the first two chapters, the third chapter will take a detailed look at the effects of colonialism in the tumultuous period of post apartheid in J.M Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999). Through the thoughts and actions of David Lurie, the protagonist, and his interactions with his daughter Lucy, Coetzee etches a society streaked in violence. David, who leaves the secure life of Cape Town to stay for a short while with his daughter at Salem – part of what was considered 'black' South Africa where the Bantustans were established – will encounter for the first time the violence that resulted due to years of systematic oppression on the native Africans under apartheid. During his stay,

David undertakes a journey, which will evoke several mixed emotions, upset his thought pattern, his security and identity. Along with strong underlying racial implications, the novel reflects some key features of gender theory – the treatment of women in a patriarchal colonial system. In the analysis, I will endeavor to shed light on the treatment of rape – the violation of the female body – and, although both Melanie and Lucy decide to keep quiet about it, how Coetzee foregrounds the difference between the two rapes through the mind of Lurie.

In the final chapter, I will conclude how years of systematic oppression, segregation and tyranny politicized race, culture and gender and bifurcated identities, giving rise to ambivalence, dislocation and mimicry culminating in hybridity and the formation of new identities.

Chapter 1

The first novel of the Nobel laureate author Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* (1950) has not received as much critical attention as her later novels. Out of the many explanations for this, Eileen Manion, suggests: “Perhaps it is because Doris Lessing's portrayal of colonialism in her early stories and novels is so realistic, as well as so vivid and convincing, that careful analysis of it has never seemed necessary” (434). Lessing's novel narrates the life events of Mary Turner shaped by colonial experience, in the Rhodesian veld (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa, and questions the entire values of the Rhodesian white colonial society. Lessing spins an intricate tapestry, interweaving Mary's life and struggle in a colonial world. In vivid details, Lessing describes the effects of a society under colonization – a culture infested by the rigid infrastructure of patriarchy – giving rise to gender and race discriminations. The author traces Mary's psychological growth during the numerous phases of her life – from an impoverished, unhappy childhood to her unnatural death at the hand of her native houseboy and in the process politically exposes the futility and fragility of a patriarchal colonial system. Lessing accurately portrays the havoc wreaked in a society under imperialism - hierarchy, racism and oppression.

Lessing begins the novel with the murder of Mary Turner. Sketching the reactions of the British members of the society living in the district, Lessing offers an in-depth view of the flawed society Mary belonged to. The feeling of hatred and repulsion towards the natives is clear from the onset, when the white settlers refuse to speak of the murder lest it gain unwanted publicity. The Turner's lifestyle and habitation is spoken of with disapproval. Their humble ‘little box of a house’, which to the people ‘was forgivable as a temporary dwelling’ but not as a permanent abode since “some natives (though not many, thanks heavens) had houses as good; and it would give them a bad impression to see white people living in such a way.” (11)

Lessing also brings to the readers notice the class system infused in 'race division'. The phrase 'poor whites' caused much discomfort and the inhabitants of Mary's society refused to identify any of themselves with that title. "Poor whites' were Afrikaners, never British." (11) However, the hypocrisy of the British settlers is revealed when "the person who said the Turners were poor whites stuck to it defiantly...It was the way one lived, a question of standards." And though the economical position of the Turners was apparent, "people would still not think of them as poor whites. To do that would be *letting the side down*. The Turners *were British, after all.*" (My emphasis) Lessing makes it clear that *esprit de corps* "is the first rule of South African society."

These excerpts at the beginning of the novel suffice to reveal the deceptive, multi structured imperialist microcosm that was Rhodesia. The society was not only infested amidst the polar binary oppositions of self/other, white/black, settler/native, master/slave dichotomies, but were also segregated within themselves: British/Afrikaner, white men/white women etc. It can be claimed that the society Lessing depicts is one of what Abdul R. JanMohamed would call a Manichean allegory- an allegory that functions (however unintentionally in this case) to reinscribe the power and dominance of the white colonial ruling class – in this case the British settlers.

Lessing, who is well known for her active support and participation in women's movements, imbues in the novel, a harsh criticism of the patriarchal colonial system (and later the apartheid), which immobilized women, denying them an agency – their right to economic independence and a construction of their own identity. Through the character of Mary Turner, the protagonist, Lessing depicts the conservative society of Rhodesia – the elements of racial and gender prejudices that constricted the spirit of Mary, suffocating her and leading her to her death. This chapter will attempt to foreground how Mary's class, gender, customs and practices of the society she dwelt in (that is the imperialist culture)

prohibit her advances towards emancipation: her own identity and economic freedom leading to a sense of dislocation, ambivalence and hybridity.

Imperialism and colonization were built on the skeletal frameworks of the patriarchal familial system – where the father held supreme authority and no other members questioned that sovereignty. Lessing portrays this very patriarchal colonial experience within the microcosm of South Africa and Rhodesia – a society steeped into the conventional practice of the patriarchal family. Culture plays a dominant role in the novel and lays out clear cut rules for both male and female; and thus the protagonist's desperate attempts to fit herself into the expected role of the woman is apparent quite early on in the novel. Mary is deeply influenced by the men in her life, ranging from her oppressive father who wasted his money and time on alcohol while his family remained impoverished and in deep misery, to her husband Dick, who despite being a kind-hearted man, wants Mary to accustom herself to his meager household and do as is expected of her. The exposure to the unhealthy relationship between her parents distorts Mary's perception of a loving conjugal relationship. From early on, her mother begins to confide in Mary, while Mary comforts her. Her mother, "a tall scrawny woman with angry unhealthy brilliant eyes" who "made a confidante of Mary early...and used to cry over her sewing, while Mary comforted her miserably", is her first model of the gender role ascribed to women: a passive and helpless woman, dominated by the overwhelming masculine patterns, nonetheless the complying victim of poverty. (Lessing 39) By seeing her mother as a feminine victim of a miserable marriage, she sketches a negative image of femininity in the form of sexual repression, inheriting her mother's arid feminism. This in future will prove fatal for Mary, as she will repeat the course of her mother, staying in an unhappy marriage, submissive towards the iron fisted colonial culture that expects her to take the protection of a husband instead of providing for herself.

Mary gets her taste of freedom, after the death of her mother, at the age of sixteen when she moves to the city and starts working as a secretary. Although this phase is not permanent, it is evidently the happiest time of her life – a time where she enjoyed her financial freedom “living in much the same way as the daughters of the wealthiest in South Africa,” (41). She seems “in some way to be avenging her mother’s sufferings” and to cut herself from her past. (41) Her last relief comes after her father’s death when nothing remains to connect her with the past. She relives her lost childhood by remaining a girl, choosing to live in a girls club, wearing her hair in a little-girl fashion. She does not “care for men”, and has “a profound distaste for sex”. Her men friends treat her “just like a good pal, with none of this silly sex business” (47) because whenever she thinks of home, she remembers “a wooden box shaken by passing trains”; whenever she thinks of marriage and children, she remembers “her father coming home red-eyed and fuddled... or her mother’s face at her children’s funeral”. (46) In a futile tryst to forget her past, she evades performing the normative gender role constructed for her by ignoring her need for a protecting husband. Mary’s sense of displacement and dislocation is more acute than Mary’s sense of self – her own profound identity where she can feel comfort. Mary feels an alien in her own house within her own family and yearns to move out of the unhappy place. She is euphoric when she is sent away for her education and blissful during her days of work at the South African town. But very soon, Mary is brought face to face with “that impalpable but steel-strong pressure to get married” which her culture imposes on all women. (47) Therefore, despite being able to provide for herself in a much better way than her father could provide for his family, Mary is forced to feel the need of a husband in order to be accepted as normal by her society, even if that meant giving up her financial security and marrying a poor farmer like Dick Turner.

Mary, who could not find peace and a sense of belonging in her home with her parents, had found solace and a sense of self after coming to work at the South African town,

only to be put back in misery again. After overhearing the conversation of her friends discussing her in a tone of mockery and insult, Mary's "idea of herself was destroyed and she was not fitted to recreate herself." (52). Mary's dilemma and her inability to deal with the fiasco results in panic when:

She felt as she had never done before; she was hollow inside, empty, and into this emptiness would sweep from nowhere a vast panic, as if there was nothing in the world she could grasp hold of. (52)

Albeit Mary's projection as a successful woman, Mary is submissive towards the expectations of the society. The narrator mentions how "at the age of thirty, this woman who had had a 'good' State education, a thoroughly comfortable life enjoying herself in a civilized way, and access to all knowledge of her time...knew so little about herself that she was completely off her balance because some gossiping women had said she ought to get married." (52) There is an inner conflict as Mary tries to suppress the desire of not being emotionally and economically dependent on a man. Sadly, Mary's fate is tied with the cultural norms of the society and since it was unusual for a white woman to remain single to her thirties, irrespective of her successful career and economic status, Mary becomes concerned with fear and wishes to get married not because she is ready for it or because she has found the right partner but to live up to the expectations of the society: in order to preserve the hegemonic authority of the male dominated culture – where women like Mary, irrespective of their success and happiness, has no place.

When Mary accepts Dick's proposal of marriage, it is not out of love or understanding. It is based on mutual exploitation and as Dick mentions: self-delusion (57). Mary uses Dick to prove that she is not "a ridiculous creature whom no one wanted" (58) and Dick uses her as a way to escape from his loneliness. Highlighting her desperate need to

acquiesce to societal norms, the narrator insists: “It might have been anybody.” (52) The proposal spells disaster. Dick’s ambitions and taste are in sharp contrast to Mary’s. He “disliked” the town and “loathed” the cinema (52, 54). While Mary was “always profoundly relieved to get back to hot and cold water in taps and the streets and the office,” city life prompted in Dick “claustrophobia”. Dick is a man of the earth – the nourisher, cultivator – and as such, cannot offer anything to Mary, other than the archetypal designation of wife. “He was lonely, he wanted a wife, and above all, children;” (56) Dick’s idea of life, is therefore, adherent to the patriarchal structure of family – he simply needed to put it into action. When he had first seen her in the cinema, under the superficial lighting of the theatre, an aura had been created, where “a shaft of light fall from somewhere above” which seems to him as “the curve of a cheek and a sheaf of a fairish glinting hair. “The face...yearning upwards, ruddily gold in the queer greenish light.” (55) To the old conventional Dick, when he takes Mary out for the first time, Mary’s choice of trousers does not seem feminine and he is “angry with himself for his self-delusion”, (57), for conjuring a completely different image of the woman she clearly was not in reality. And yet he decides he likes her because “it was essential for him to love somebody.” (57) The marriage, as the narrator implies, was ill matched even before it took place and the readers are left with a sense of foreboding.

As soon as Mary steps into Dick’s household, she is aware of the impending doom the marriage will soon culminate into. “She said to her with determination to face it,” (61) Marriage is still an illusion to Mary, she delights at the thought of owning a home, playing the mistress. Mary – in her gendered subjectivity – fails to escape from her class. As she enters the bedroom, she is filled with a sense of “foreboding: this tiny stuffy room, the bare brick floor, the greasy lamp, were not what she had imagined.” (64) Mary is suddenly gripped with the thought “that her father, from his grave, had sent out his will and forced her back into the kind of life he had made her mother lead.” (66). As Simone De Beauvoir states:

“Economic evolution in woman’s situation is in process of upsetting the institution of marriage” (1997: 445) – Mary, who has experienced the freedom and luxury of self-dependence – has a harder time fitting into the paradigm of marriage. Through the invocation of the memory of her father, Lessing reminds the readers of the ever-present imminent clutch of patriarchy over the female – albeit her temporary departure, Mary has been lured back into the patriarchal system under the pretext of marriage.

Mary is distant in her love making with Dick – she deftly represses her sexuality: “Women have an extraordinary ability to withdraw from the sexual relationship, to immunize themselves against it, in such a way that their men can be left feeling let down and insulted without having anything tangible to complain of,”(66). The artificiality of their conjugal relationship is therefore, evident from the nuptial night. Throughout the rest of the novel, both Dick and Mary try to adapt themselves to a notion of marriage – while Mary tends the housework, Dick struggles hard at the farm, trying to make ends meet.

With the inception of her marriage, Mary is all set to repeat the monotonous, tragic life of her mother – bound in poverty, trapped under the hegemonic cult of patriarchy. During the first few days at the farm, with her own saved money, Mary buys materials to redecorate the house. She also keeps herself busy with needlework and when she tires of that, decides to whitewash the home. Mary, who had never assumed she would be doing housekeeping, finds no genuine interest in it. And yet, for a woman who had accustomed herself to years of corporate work – the ill equipped farm has not much to offer. Soon she runs out of activities and is filled with a strange restlessness, “she did not know what to do with herself.” (75) Exasperated, she realizes the poverty that had destroyed her in her childhood, had followed her into her marriage.

Mary’s efficiency puts Dick at an unease. He is alarmingly worried thinking, “What

was she going to do with all this energy and efficiency? It undermined his own self-assurance even further, seeing her like this, for he knew, deep down, that this quality was one he lacked.” Dick is intimidated – he does not know how to handle the once independent, successful woman, who surpasses his own diligence – and suddenly is left unsure of himself. Mary’s perception of Dick resonates with Dick’s thoughts about himself. Dick, who is entitled “Jonah” by the other farmers for his failure at farming, is clearly despised by Mary. To Mary, Dick appears a loser, a dreamer – in his inept handling of the farm and money – which pushes them further down the line of poverty, Mary feels helpless and trapped. When they quarrel over money concerns, Mary senses a reenactment – a repetition of a scene she had witnessed over and over again during childhood, a new voice which she has “taken directly from her mother,” (95) - “not the voice of Mary, the individual...but the voice of the suffering female,”(96). Mary realizes, “Women who marry men like Dick learn sooner or later that there are two things they can do: they can drive themselves mad, tear themselves to pieces in storms of futile anger and rebellion, or they can hold themselves tight and go bitter.” (110) Driven to the verge of insanity by the heat (because Dick cannot afford to put up a ceiling), she finds no environment in the farm for herself and a future for them both, and decides to leave Dick – hoping to pick up the pieces of her life in the town.

However, she is met with a truth much harsher than the heat of the farm upon her return to town. As she sits in front of her previous employer, Mary is suddenly aware of her hands, which were “crinkled and brown.” Her socio-economic standing is projected on her shoes, “which were still red with dust because she had forgotten to wipe them.” (123). It dawns on Mary, that her poverty has the overpowering authority for dismissing her abilities; without money she cannot afford the finesse needed to impress potential employers and thus her fate is sealed – she cannot leave Dick and the obstacles he brings with him into their relation. Mary, therefore, restarts life on the farm as an embittered woman and gradually

turns mad.

Mary is faced with a crucial setback after her marriage in the farm – the daunting task of interacting with the native. Race, as already mentioned, plays a dominant theme in the novel. The long years of colonialism had already set into motion, the process of apartheid – the supremacy of the whites were taken for granted while the natives were dehumanized, commonly viewed as savages. In the opening chapter, the narrator hints at the feelings of resentment and embitterment, which the people of the district possess towards the Turners, mainly due to their isolated lifestyle, their socio-economic status – Dick’s failure at farming and extreme poverty which forced them to live in conditions similar to the natives. This embarrassed and irritated the other whites as the mere thought of the natives’ awareness of whites living in comparable conditions as them was repulsive. As mentioned earlier *esprit de corps* “is the first rule of South African society.” (11) In a critical analysis of the novel, Jean Pickering touches on the dominant recurrent issues of race, class and gender present in the plot. She opines: “Although the white settlers grew up in a class society...the class attitudes of the collective have simplified into consideration of us, the Whites, and them, the Blacks. But there is another value system that complicates the issue. In white settler society men outrank women even more than they do at “home” in middle-class England.” (19) The Turner’s poverty, which denotes them as inferior to the economical level of fellow denizens, poses a dire threat to the entire white community. As already discussed in the introduction, colonialism was established by a so-called indomitable spirit of adventure and enterprise which led men to settle in other ‘uncivilised’ areas of the earth, where they harvested the resources through the enforcement of imperial authority over the people of those lands. Through the enslavement peoples in these ‘other’ lands white imperialists installed their own positions as masters/self in the centre and the natives as slaves/other in the margin.

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The politicization of race-gender relations of the novel shed light on several important aspects of colonialism. By placing the white settler woman on a pedestal, the colonizers bequeath on the white woman an aura of the sacred - unattainable property of white men to which the black man – violent and savage - always pose a threat. This strategy aided the white settlers in spreading the hysteria of the black peril to vanquish the natives and demarcating them into the outskirts of civilization, while doubly colonizing the white woman – first by refusing her an agency to construct her own identity and second, by deeming them as feminine, weak and vulnerable, in constant need of the protection of the white men. By successfully instigating this fear and potency of the black man, the patriarchal force convinces the women of their powerless state, manipulating them into hegemonic submission. Mary's continual attempts at adjusting to her life with the expected norms of the patriarchy against her wishes is proof of the powerlessness and unquestioned submission of the female mind and body.

Through Mary - her interchanges with the natives, her thoughts, actions and behaviour towards them that the narrator conveys to the readers the oppressive demeanor of the Rhodesian society towards the subjection, subjugation of the natives. Mary's has never

had to deal with natives before. During her childhood, she had been “forbidden” to talk to her mother’s servants; she had formed an image from the complaints of women about their servants at tea parties. Mary is of course, afraid of them since, “Every woman in South Africa is brought up to be.” In order to fit into the paradigm of the white hegemony, the Turners and Mary’s parents are required to recruit black servants at home.

Mary’s repressed sexuality emerges as a ruthless barbarity in her treatment of the native houseboys and labourers. She abuses her servants, taking advantage of white privilege, conjuring in her mind, a dehumanized picture of the native. Her behaviour towards them stems from the colonial gaze: if they were not disciplined, they would steal, rape or murder. Dick’s describes Mary’s attitude towards the natives as one of the “virago” (83) Her sadistic treatment of the appointed servants makes them resign from their work within a short span. During Dick’s illness, when she takes over his duties of the farm, she unleashes severe cruelty over the labourers, a direct imitation of the colonial practice, “the sensation of being boss over perhaps eighty black workers gave her new confidence; it was a good feeling, keeping them under her will, making them do as she wanted”. (138)

Mary unleashes her resentments, her failures in life, over her black labourers – the only people over whom she can exercise her power. She consciously regards them as the “Other”. Mary’s belief that black people inherently lack work ethics prompts her to deduct money from their pay while reducing their break time. By imposing a tyrannical authority over the servants Mary attempts to reverse her own colonized state in the patriarchal culture. Her intense repulsion of the natives drives her to whip one of the workers who speak in English to ask for water, “He spoke in English, and suddenly smiled and opened his mouth and pointed his finger down his throat.” She hears the other natives laugh at the scene which drives her mad with anger, but above that “most white people think it is “cheek” if a native speaks English” (146) The whites find it “cheeky” since it the use of the master’s language

puts them at par with the master. So it is better to keep this distance by not allowing the “other” to speak the language of the “self”. In order to maintain this distance, black men were disciplined not to look directly at white women, thus taking away the privilege of “gaze” from them.

Mary is intimidated by the large number of black servants and repulsed by their very existence. She condemns the native servants and considers them to be “filthy savages” (135) or “black animals” (120) and hates them for their smell that for her is “a hot, sour animal smell”. (142) When it came to the question of the native woman, her detestation spiraled innumerably:

If she disliked native men, she loathed the women. She hated the exposed fleshiness of them, their soft brown bodies and soft bashful faces that were also insolent and inquisitive, and their chattering voices that held a brazen fleshy undertone. She could not bear to see them sitting there on the grass, their legs tucked under them in that traditional timeless pose, as peaceful and uncaring... Above all, she hated the way they suckled their babies, with their breasts hanging down for everyone to see; there was something in their calm maternity that made her blood boil. Their babies hanging on them like leeches... She thought with horror of suckling child. The idea of a child’s lips on her breasts made her feel quite sick. (115-6)

The sight of the native women suckling their child leaves Mary feeling disgraced, in a state of abhorrence. The image reminds her of her own impoverished childhood, of her dead siblings – a trauma she fails to analyze since she does not recognize it. Mary does not possess the maternal instinct, the need to nurture a child, a result of her sexual repression.

Mary’s continual mistreatment of the houseboys establishes a reputation for her for which none of the natives volunteer to work at their home. As Dick had prophesied long

back, “If you go on like this, you’ll never get any servants. They soon learn the women who don’t know how to treat their boys.” (96) Unable to find any boys for the housework, Dick recruits Moses as the new houseboy. Moses is the same labourer whom she had struck with a whip, arouses the fear of being attacked or revenged in Mary. She is therefore, “unable to treat this boy as she had treated all the others, for always, at the back of her mind, was that moment of fear she had known just after she had hit him and thought he would attack her. She felt uneasy in his presence.” (174), a fact which drives her to the verge on despair and vulnerability. Mary is in constant mortal fear of Moses – his domineering powerful, broad-built body that also emanates an attraction in Mary.

When Mary accidentally walks in on Moses during his bath, watching, “the powerful back stooping” (177) Moses stops and stands upright with his body, “expressing resentment of her presence there” (176), waiting for her to go away. The assumption “that perhaps he believed she was there on purpose; this thought, of course, was not conscious; it would be too much presumption, such unspeakable cheek for him to imagine such a thing...” (176), makes her realize that “the formal patterns of black-and-white, mistress-and-servant had been broken by the personal relation” (177-8). Moses has the power to unsettle Mary, put in her a feeling of unease she cannot rectify. She asks Dick to dismiss Moses and seek another boy, Dick warns Mary with a voice “ugly with hostility: I can’t stand any more changing of the servants. I’ve had enough. I’m warning you, Mary.” (181) When Dick demands her assent, “like a superior to a subordinate”, Mary replies in the affirmative “with great difficulty”. (181) This incident marks the point from which Mary’s mental state rapidly collapses.

Moses serves as a threat to her sexual and cultural identity. Her feelings for Moses are ambiguous – full of ambivalence - “once of strong and irrational fear, a deep uneasiness, and even- though this she did not know, would have died rather than acknowledge- of some dark

attraction”. (190)

Mary’s compulsion – her duty and devotion towards the imperialist project – debars her from befriending Moses. She refrains from perceiving Moses, along with all the other natives, as humans. And yet her “dark attraction” troubles her soul – stripped off her own agency, Mary is dispossessed of the power to overcome the barriers which bind her in chains, disallowing her a sense of self, her liberty to live a life of her own choosing. When Moses declares his intention to quit, she breaks down and sobs uncontrollably in front of him, begging him to stay. He treats her hysterical behavior with calm authority, “like a father commanding her”. (187) Moses fumbles before touching her, “[reluctantly] loath to touch her, the sacrosanct white woman,”(186). He makes her drink water and lie down. Mary winces when he touches “she had never, not once in her whole life, touched the flesh of a native.” (186)

What ensues, from that moment on, is a change in their relation, a shift in the power dynamics, in which they both enter a state of ambivalence; a state in which they both are attracted and repulsed by the other. To Mary, Moses embodies the sexually masculine – his naked body is repetitively on her mind – in sharp contrast to Dick whose “lean hands, coffee-burned by the sun” seems to her trembling and weak. She fears even to look at Moses, “watching him covertly, not like a mistress watching a servant work, but with a fearful curiosity” (192); on the other hand, she is attracted by his strength, energy and grace. Moses demonstrates his feelings of warmth towards Mary, attempting to please her, in various acts of kindness and caring, for example, bringing her breakfast tray with “a handleless cup with flowers in it.” (190)

In this process, unbeknownst to them both, they violate the codes of immorality, where a closeness of a black man with a white woman is considered a criminal offense. Soon,

their relationship will end in tragic and violence, the incident that is triggered off by Charlie Slatter's visit during which he witnesses a scene which makes him "the dictates of the first law of white South Africa, which is: 'Thou shalt not let your fellow white sink lower than a certain point; because if you do, the nigger will see he is as good as you are.'" (221) Charlie is vexed by Mary's appearance and the broken down furniture in the Turner's house. But what shocks him the most is Mary's coquettishness: her flirtatious manner of speaking to him and later to Moses at dinner time, "it was the tone of Mary's voice when she spoke to the native that jarred him: she was speaking to him exactly the same flirtatious coyness which she has spoken to himself." (219)

Before the Turners could cause further disgrace to the white settler community, Slatter offers to buy the farm and employ Dick as the manager. But first they must go away for a holiday. Slatter's attempt to get Mary off the farm by giving a good amount of money to the Turners is not for love or even pity for Dick, nor his care for Mary. In his eagerness to get Dick and Mary out of town, Slatter is restoring the polarities of colonialism that Mary has unsettled.

Slatter hires Tony Marston to look after the farm during Dick's absence and from the time he sets foot in the farm, it is apparent that Mary and Dick's marriage has completely disintegrated. Although Dick is not aware of the ambivalent relationship between Mary and Moses, Tony clearly sees the attraction and repulsion between the two. He is particularly shocked when, by chance, he witnesses Moses helping Mary to dress, buttoning her and watching her brush her hair in an attitude of "an indulgent uxoriousness". (230) Tony is greatly disturbed by this intimacy between a white woman and her black houseboy and despite being new to the country, he cannot comprehend this white woman's evasion of the "sexual aspect of the colour bar" (230) and justifies it in his own mind by thinking that Mary

is mad and undergoing a “a complete nervous breakdown”. (228) When Mary realizes the presence of Tony there, a white man who has seen her in an intimate position with a native, she is scared, seeming cut off from his concern. “She said suddenly: ‘They said I was not like that, not like that, not like that.’ It was like a gramophone that had got stuck at one point...not like that. The phrase was furtive, sly, yet triumphant.” (232) At that moment, Mary reacts negatively towards Moses and dismisses him in reaction to the presence of another white man. Tony realizes that Mary is asserting herself and using his presence “as a shield in a fight to get back a command she had lost”:

“Madam want me to go?” said the boy quietly.

“Yes, go away.”

“Madam want me to go because of this boss?”

“Get out” Tony said, half-choked with anger. “Get out before I kick you out.”

(233)

The moment Moses leaves, Mary knows that he will return to take his revenge. She realizes that she can only achieve an agency, a sense of self through death. She does not seek help from her husband who is “a torturing reminder of what she has to forget in order to remain herself”. (191) Mary’s death signifies the horror of the iron fisted colonial culture in the mind of the white woman – the results of its suffocating and overpowering control that denied women to construct an identity of their own, their own economic progress and freedom. Mary’s death is silenced and misrepresented, fabricated immensely by Charlie Slatter – the embodiment of colonial authority - Under the influence of Charlie Slatter and the Sergeant from the police station, the whites hide the truth by accusing Moses for stealing and rape.

Mary's constant struggle to fit in and live up to the cultural norms of her society is poignantly evident throughout the novel. Under the hegemonic customs that Mary is forced to adopt, she goes through the tumultuous phase of dislocation, displacement and ambivalence culminating in hybridity, which allows her to transition from the "Other" to "Self". Her constant anxiety at trying to reconcile and failing to adjust to her circumstances portray the stages of enunciations in which she desperately attempts to find a sense of self – an identity sans the influence of the colonial culture. Mary breaks through the barriers of imperialist culture through her inevitable death – which sets her free from all terms and conditions that existed in her society - Mary's awareness of her looming death and her eagerness to be done with it, "what was the use of sitting there, just waiting, waiting for the door to open and death to enter?" (243) show how desperately she wants to escape the suffocating society. Mary finds semblance and fluidity in lunacy. She begins to understand her state of double colonization and the toll it has taken on her psychologically after she loses her sanity, and a certain grudge can be detected in her when she refers to Tony as the "Englishman" in her mind; the "young Englishman" who supposedly will save her but instead puts the last nail in her coffin by ordering Moses to get out. Mary confides how she has "always been ill" in her heart to have let the politics of race, culture and gender influence her life. Mary's profound guilt of the imperial practice is finally revealed when she faces death in the form of Moses and "at the sight of him, her emotions unexpectedly shifted, to create in her an extraordinary feeling of guilt; but towards him, to whom she had been disloyal, and at the *bidding of the Englishman.*" (253) (My emphasis)

The term Englishman can be seen as a metonym for the whole imperialist project, including, but not limited to, its politicizing of culture, race and gender. In lunacy and death, Mary realizes what had been submerged in her unconscious – how the imperialist politicizes race, culture and gender for their own advantage. Mary had been the victim of a rigid,

suffocating, cruel regime, in which despite being a member of the Centre, she is displaced to the margin as the voiceless subaltern – a place in which there were, if any, little differences between Moses and her – they were both mimicries of the colonial project, in search of a sense of self which the imperialist culture cold heartedly denies them.

Chapter 2

Nadine Gordimer's *The Lying Days* (1953) is a semi autobiographical novel, which unravels the first twenty-four years of Helen Shaw – in the first person narrative – imparting her observations of the South African society; a melting pot of various cultures - where people of different races, religions and ethnicities live together in a striking regime enforced upon them through the enactment of apartheid laws. In a bildungsroman divided into three sections titled “The Mine”, “The Sea” and “The City”, Gordimer traces the thought processes of the protagonist, Helen from a little girl to adolescence and finally to adulthood. Helen's speculations probe deeply into the structure of the policy of apartheid, enabling her to distinguish the disparate worlds co-existing in her orbit – causing utter discomfort. Helen's continual struggle to adjust to the juxtaposing circumstances – her efforts to erase the lines between whites and blacks – and her failure in achieving it prompt her to go through several stages of enunciations in which she rediscovers herself in a new light - constructs new identities. At the end, however, her sense of displacement and ambivalence is so strong – her constant efforts to find a sense of belonging meets with failure - she becomes an exile, and moves to England, a place she feels will help her lighten her burden.

In a *New York Times* review of the book, James Stern, while comparing the novel with Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* commented: “Of the two books, if comparisons must be made, "The Lying Days" is the longer, the richer, intellectually the more exciting.”² Gordimer's elaborate commentaries on the mechanisms of South Africa trenchantly depict to the readers the circumstances of the country and the feelings of the people, which were the results of apartheid. As a young girl, Helen grows up in the customary traditions of the white settlers, mimicking what has been handed down through generations, of British white settlers, and yet feels alienated within her own family and home.

² The New York Times: “The Lying Days”.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1953/10/04/books/gordimer-lying.html>

The sharp-witted heroine quickly picks up the cues of racial prejudice prevalent in her city from early childhood. She deftly notices the altered treatment of the ruling British whites towards members of other races – in particular towards the natives and other people of colour. Projecting her own experiences through the character of Helen, Gordimer depicts her own struggle in South Africa where she endlessly attempted to enter the world of black experience while remaining a member of the dominant white minority. Unfortunately for Helen and her friends who shared the same sentiments, South Africa is not at all accommodating of people from different backgrounds, be it that of race or class.

Helen cannot associate herself with the storybooks she reads: “To me, brought up into the life of a South African mine, stories of children living the ordinary domestic adventures of the upper-middle-class English family – which was the only one that existed for children’s books published in England in the thirties – were weird and exotic enough.” (11) Helen mentions “I had never read a book in which I myself was recognizable; in which there was a ‘girl’ like Anna who did the housework and the cooking and called the mother and father Missus and Baas”. Racial and class discriminations, therefore, make an early and prominent appearance in *The Lying Days*.

One afternoon, after a disconcerting act of rebellion in which her parents leave her home alone to play a game of tennis at the Recreation Hall, Helen ventures out of home by herself for the first time. In the ensuing adventure, Helen discovers a world within the same premises of her own – a world that immediately draws her fascination as the exotic, magical realm – a region in sharp contrast to her own orderly system; a world she terms as “real” due to its “ugliness” and absence in the literature she reads:

Yet now as I stood in this unfamiliar part of my own world knowing and flatly accepting it as the real world because it was ugly and did not exist in books (if this was the beginning of disillusion, it was also the beginning of Colonialism: the

identification of the unattainable distant with the beautiful, the substitution of “overseas” for fairyland) I felt for the first time something of the tingling fascination of the gingerbread house before Hansel and Gretel, anonymous, nobody’s children, in the woods.”(11)

This act of rebellion allows Helen to a first hand experience of the native’s land where she had never set foot before – also an event that will metamorphose her outlook of her own community and its people for the remaining years of her life. As soon as she rejoins her parents and their friends at the Recreation Hall, Helen instantly detects their artificiality: “I saw them suddenly as a picture”, (15) – a portrayal of a figment class, morality and ethics imprinted on her mind. As she becomes acquainted with the close circle of friends her parents socialized with, Helen soon blends in with this group, feeling she was “quite one of them”, not because she felt she had a plenty in common with them, but because she had become accustomed to their codes of conduct.

As a matter of fact, as the narrator soon divulges to the reader, little Helen’s acute awareness of the social disparity rampant in the mining town of Atherton, is one of innocent implications – whereas the two later sections of the novels will directly convey Helen’s utter dislike and contempt of the segregation and subjugation of other races (and therefore can be taken as a direct criticism of apartheid). In the first section, Helen can be seen as a naïve adolescent, simply imparting her observations of her surroundings sans any judgments. Throughout the first section, Helen mingles with the people of her community and although she notices several discriminations, these are narrated merely as incidents from which readers can gather a clear picture of the environment she is growing up in. Helen’s early awareness of the disparity between the races allows her to look at the South African situation from the perspective of the outsider - thus enabling her to sympathize with the oppressed.

Helen's community is archetypically Eurocentric and imperialist. The town she grows up in is— a quintessential town barring entrance to black Africans with the exception of the domestic helpers. The fear of the natives, in particular the men, is evoked at the very beginning of the novel. Echoing Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* where the white child is afraid of the negro's presence, Helen states the reason why her parents are afraid to leave her home by herself – native boys – “an unwritten law so sternly upheld and generally accepted that it would occur to no child to ask why: a little girl must never be left alone because there were native boys about.” (4) Drawing allusions to Simone de Beauvoir's work, this vehemently depicts the sacredness of the white woman, the placing of her on a pedestal as an honour of her chastity. In sharp contrast, Helen articulates the hegemonic stance of the whites against black women, where they are envisioned as promiscuous, and therefore accused (by the whites) of having “half-a-dozen-husbands;” (159) revealing the blatant hypocrisy of the Euro-centric gaze.

Gordimer highlights the rigid hierarchical scheme founded by the colonizers which was later improvised and instigated by the National Party that formed the foundation of the South African political system and had a great influence on its society. The country that Martin Luther King Jr., while drawing parallels with the struggles of the African Americans, termed as the “world's worst racism”, was evidently hostile in their treatment of other races, in particular the black Africans, who work in small, limited numbers at the Mine office, at the lowest administration levels, chiefly as “clerk and errand boys”. (24) Their chief occupation in Atherton is that of labourers – working deep down under the earth's crust. There were not many white people who had to work underground and Gordimer emphasizes how little the lives of these people mattered to the white supremacists by referring to accidental deaths in the mine. “When a white man was killed, the papers recorded the tragedy, giving his name, occupation and details of the family he left. If no white man was affected, there was an item

headed: 'FATAL FALL OF HANGING. There was a fall of hanging at the East Shaft...yesterday. Two natives were killed, and three escaped with minor injuries.'" (22)

(Emphasis in the original)

In chapter 2, Gordimer tangentially touches upon a sensitive issue – the unethical promotional structure adopted by the whites in the administration of their office, where a black native would pass his entire life simply as a messenger or clerk. Paul an old “boy” – the common term used to refer to black workers – who works every weekend on the Shaw’s garden, had started off as a messenger at the secretary’s office at the same time Helen’s father had joined as a junior clerk. By the time Helen begins her narration, Paul is still a messenger while Mr. Shaw has reached the designation of Assistant Secretary. Mrs. Shaw is quite fond of Paul, and Helen is surprised to see her mother talking to the old gardener “just as if he were a friend.” Helen is more accustomed to other women who “gave orders to their gardeners” in contrast to her mother. Yet, despite being aware that this kind of behaviour is projected as despicable and disgraceful, Helen herself “was fond of Paul”. (23)

Paul and Anna, “their” native girl, are the only two native Africans with whom Helen is allowed to have direct contact during childhood. Paul takes on a fatherly figure in Helen’s life – always greeting her “as if he were welcoming me back from a long absence; a lingering kind of salute, a big smile watching after me as I passed.” (25) Although she maintains her reserve with them both, her affection towards them is distinct from the onset of the novel and the fact that she is able to view them for their humane capacities is apparent – which is completely void in others.

Soon, Helen witnesses, for the first time in her life, a strike in the mine. As the mine hooter blows out unexpectedly on a Sunday morning, Helen ventures out with her father to find out what had caused it to blow on a weekend. As they walked closer to the Compound Manager’s house, they realized the usually manicured garden of the manager was now

occupied by two hundred mine boys who were sitting quietly in order. Helen overhears her father's snide remarks on the matter, claiming that a change in the labourers diet always leads to trouble – "If you'd been giving them boiled rag for years and you change it back to chicken suddenly, they'd be up in arms asking for the rag back again." When Helen hears her father term the incident as a strike, on their way back, she is curious. She is quick to draw allusions with the incident to the 1922 strike of white miners when, "there were shots in the streets of Atherton, and my grandmother, his mother, had stayed shut up in her little house for days, until the commando of burghers came riding in to restore order." (30) and is, therefore, shocked at the peaceful demonstration of the strike. Mr. Shaw informs her that although they did not refuse to work, they "wouldn't eat; that's a strike, too." Sadly for Helen, to whom the word strike conveyed "visions of excitement and danger", concludes she had been born too late for that adventure.(30)By comparing the two incidents Gordimer wants to highlight the difference between the two strikes and the treatment they receives from the white community. Despite the violence involved in the 1922 strikes of the white miners, Mr. Shaw and his friends refer to it with civility, whereas the peaceful hunger strike of the native labourers offend the white South Africans –who use derogatory remarks to insult and humiliate the black labourers.

The novel clarifies that racial prejudice was not simply limited to the native Africans only but also to other races, including the inferior Afrikaner whites. Mr. Cronje, the elderly Afrikaans assistant to Mr. Bond at the grocery store, which all the mining inhabitants frequented, is heard complaining to Mrs. Shaw, "you know how it is, if you not you own boss..." while out in the street, little Afrikaans boys as old or younger than Helen, sold newspapers(22) During her college years, when Helen befriends a Jewish boy called Joel Aaron, she realizes with clarity, how wide spread the roots of racism were and how Jews, irrespective of their intelligence, efficiency and hard work, were also subject to bigotry. At a

family dinner Helen attends with the Aaron's family, she overhears an argument Joel has with his brother in law, in which Joel lies bare the hideous truth his sister's husband refuses to accept:

“They couldn't do without us here, and they know it. Think Malan doesn't know it?”

“Nothing's indispensable in South Africa but the Chamber of Mines and native labour.” Joel smiled.

They ignored him. “Look at medicine, law – even the farmers. The whole economy would collapse.”

“But that's what they say, Max, that's what they say. The Jews in everything, they don't want it.”

(152)

Helen's stance over the predominant racial, class and genderprejudice gets a political edge after a visit to Durban, in which she befriends Ludi, who sums up life at the Mine as “the narrowest, most mechanical, unrewarding existence you could think of in any nightmare.” It's during her visit to Natal that she first realizes how artificial life in Atherton, in particular her house, which serves as a direct metonym of the codified apartheid in Helen's life. When she tries to write a letter back home to her mother, she can hardly think of what to write – both the house and her mother appear to be intimidating figures to which she cannot relate her inner most desires and thus remain an outsider – “What could I write to the Mine, to the house with the lights on, the red haze of hair bending over the letter...But it was not enough to create the existence of the Mine, to make it possible at the other end of a space of which *this* was at one end.” (Emphasis in the original) (46)

When she returns home, Helen is “newly arisen”, feeling even more distant at home “in the bed, in the room that claimed me as their own”. (79)

At this moment, another event takes place in Helen's life, one which embarks her upon a journey of selfhood, culminating in her exile to Britain: The University. At first a bit apprehensive, Helen joins the university later than her peers, but is immediately drawn into the different atmosphere. It is through the university that Helen reconnects with Joel Aaron, a school friend, whom she barely remembers, but who seems to remember every single detail about her. Joel soon turns into Helen's closest friend and confidante. Growing up in Atherton, in families that do not understand their behaviour and growing empathy towards the oppressed, they share a kindred spirit - which enables them both to understand each other well. Joel introduces Helen to a number of young people who share similar sentiments and through their conversations Gordimer reveals the political situation in the region: the growing political power of the National Party and the growing discrepancies between the races. It is also at the university that Helen meets Mary Seswaso, a black African woman, whose presence will have a strong impact in Helen's life; giving rise to several crucial incidents, which further alienate Helen from her family and adds to her lack of fulfillment. During her commute to Johannesburg to the university, Helen describes the Atherton Rail Station, a dark and polluted painting, reeking of poverty – rich with the rotten imagery of the fearsome, savage native: “the evil smell of it was like the smell of a swamp, and the dark figures with their strong body-smell,” sketches the grotesque picture in vivid hues, revealing the horrid living conditions of the people who had no homes to live in.

One day, when Helen and a friend drop Mary off to her home, Helen gets the chance to take an elaborate look at the native township, which leaves both of them feeling aghast. They are filled with repulsion and remorse as they leave the poorly equipped, dilapidated, ghost town behind – unable to believe that this town existed within their vicinity and yet what a striking difference there was between the two. Gradually Helen's exposure to the real world – rampant with discriminations of the privileged white – creates a discord so troublesome,

that she moves in an apartment with her friends in Johannesburg, with the false impression that she maybe able to “come out free at last; free of the staleness and hypocrisy of a narrow, stiflingly conventional life.” (196)

From the onset of the novel, Helen’s relationship with her parents prove difficult, in particular, with her mother. The mother-daughter relationship misses the warmth and connectedness it usually possess, and the only time Helen seems close to her mother is during her adolescence – a time when Helen was going through the customary training to become a social lady. Mrs. Shaw expects her daughter to have a career, unlike her, and therefore, when Mr. Shaw suggests Helen should get a teacher’s degree so that “she needn’t necessarily use it afterward”, Mrs. Shaw is quick to respond: “What’s the sense of wasting four years becoming a teacher if you don’t teach?” and “Helen must take up something that’ll fit her for the world.” (81-82) Despite proving her practicality, holding the best intentions at heart for her daughter when it came to her education, Mrs. Shaw reveals quite another when the topic is shifted to Helen’s marriage. Mrs. Shaw is quite judgmental of Helen’s male friends and does not care in the least to hide her feelings from Helen. That Helen spends such an enormous amount of her time with Joel, a Jew, displeases her. Both her parents are enthralled when she dates Charles Bessemer, who studies medicine, at the possibility of their daughter marrying a doctor and are left dismayed when the courtship ends. When Helen asks her mother if Mary can stay with them for a few days during the exam week, both her parents are flummoxed. Her mother refuses, stating she could do as she wanted when she got a “home of her own.” But the situation quickly escalates to a heated argument when Mrs. Shaw mentions her relation with Joel, which they think is a romantic one, and how she would not consider befriending any of the young men from the Mine. “No, you like to roll in the mud. Anything so long as it’s not what any other reasonable person likes. You’d rather be seen running about with the son of a Jew from the native stores...than anyone decently brought up by people of

our standing.” (192)

Helen is, thus, prompted to leave her parental home and create a home of her own. This step is a remarkable one, one that sets her free, albeit for a short while, but also that forms one of the stages of enunciations she encounters towards a sense of self. Helen’s rejection of her parental home is a rejection of the colonial hold of the patriarchal culture over the spirit of the woman, one that expects her to act according to its customs. Helen, echoes Andre Lorde, and refuses to use the master’s tools any longer and therefore dismantles the master’s house:

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.

(2)

By leaving home, Helen emancipates herself from conforming her ideas, her wants and desires to the expectations of her parents and the society they inhabited. However, Helen soon discovers the feeling of elation is short lived. Soon Helen falls in love with Paul Clark and moves to his apartment. A few days later, in order to be able to support herself, she drops out of university and takes up a job. Her parents, especially her mother, are not happy with her dropping out of college but are happy to meet [Paul since](#)— “Paul’s father was a Justice of Peace and that ‘Natal’ was in itself a guarantee of pure English blood and allegiance to England, the distinction of a Colonialism they desired above all else.” (247) But Helen does

not mention to her conservative parents the fact they are living together. And when she finally does, all hell breaks loose. Irrespective of the fact that her parents think well of Paul and their relationship, her mother is mortified at the mere thought of her daughter, living out of wedlock, with a man. Calling her a “filthy beast” she asks Helen to leave, never to return.

Although she feels lighter after having let go of the burden, Helen soon begins to feel discomfort – that sense of dislocation and ambivalence returns – and now with the National Party in power and apartheid in motion, Helen and her friends cannot help but feel miserable.

The apartheid in motion has devastating effects on Helen. Paul loses his job as welfare officer in the Native Affairs Department due to his empathy towards the African natives. Helen also resigns from work. After a chance witness of the violence of the May Day Strike (in which eighteen people are shot dead by the police) where a black native was shot in front of her, Helen is left shattered – for she realizes that even in the midst of a brutal reality, “I was not involved, I remained lost, attached to the string of a vanished idea” – the incident left her “untouched”. (335) Soon, Helen tires of her life in South Africa amidst the violence. Her relationship with Paul loses its former zeal and again that feeling of alienation sinks in. She realizes that she neither belongs to the white ruling class nor to the black opposition – she no longer feels connected to the country of her birth. This prompts Helen to leave South Africa for Britain.

Throughout the novel, Helen’s ardent attempts at adjusting to the multicultural society are prominent. Helen’s awareness of the race and class discrimination prompts a split in her self – a part of her mingles amiably amidst the whites whereas the other empathizes with the natives. Helen is the “Other” – the white woman cursed with the power to observe her surroundings without the bias of the white supremacist – she is able to see Africans as human beings and not as savages who need to be civilized. As a female member of the white community, Helen is expected to perform according to the gender roles her culture prescribes

for women, and therefore there is an immense pressure on her, especially by her mother who comments on every aspect of her life: from what she should study to her friends to the men she dates; Helen feels constricted by her parents' expectations and thus never quite feels at home. However, readers observe Helen herself imitate her mother when she befriends Mary Seswaso, the native student at her university. In her attempts to treat her as an equal, Helen intimidates her by trying to initiate a friendship that is awkward. Her old conventional parents immediately object to this friendship, causing a rift between them. Soon, Mary herself questions Helen for her unorthodox behaviour. Mary claims, "There are so few of me. We're still exceptions, not a class. To your mother and Anna, I belong with Anna." (203) Mary trenchantly depicts the theme that Chandra Talpade Mohanty elaborates in her essay "Under Western Eyes." (1984) In what Mohanty cites as methodological universalism, Helen also views Mary in [a](#) similar light. Helen feels that she understands Mary's plight, her struggle in a dominant white society, only to be proven wrong on the day that she is questioned by Mary. In that conversation, Helen realizes how many details she had missed ; how irrespective of her calm, detailed observation of the black people in her immediate proximity she had failed to understand their feelings due to her own vanity. Helen inherits this characteristic from her arrogant colonizer ancestors, who felt they knew everything about the natives of Africa and dismissed their opinions as irrelevant and considered them as a people with no history or culture.

However, Helen's continual struggle to snap away from her past – her shared identity with that of oppressing colonizers and imperialists – is notable from the onset of the novel. From her adolescence, Helen had felt a strong sense of displacement in her home at Atherton. Her home, symbolic of the colonial structure, leaves her suffocated and yearning for freedom, in which she can live without the cultural imposition of the Eurocentric society she dwells in.

Gordimer reveals the politics of race, culture and gender in a country on the verge of and during apartheid with the deft hands of a connoisseur. Her portrayal of a society divided between people of different races and religions, the inhuman and unethical treatment of the dominant white minority over Black and other South Africans is haunting. Through her protagonist Helen, Gordimer depicts her own experience in South Africa: as a member of the dominant white minority, she attempts to enter the black experience (Robert Green, 545) and is therefore in a “state of suspension”, from where there is no progress neither regress. Helen, therefore voluntarily decides to go into exile, another attempt to shift from the “Other” to the “Self”, by moving to the Centre – Britain. Perhaps, in England, Helen will successfully empower herself with her own tools to completely dismantle the master’s house.

Chapter 3

The earlier two novels that we discussed in the two previous chapters dealt with the apartheid era of South Africa, the policy developed by the Nationalist Government after 1948, a 'policy of separate development'. Ashcroft et al describes apartheid, as: an Afrikaans term meaning 'separation' had been preceded by the Land Acts in 1913 and 1936, which restricted the amount of land available to black farmers to 13 per cent. The Apartheid laws included the Population Registration Act which registered all people by racial group as well as the Mixed Amenities Act, which codified racial segregation in public facilities; the Group Areas Act, which segregated suburbs; the Immorality Act, which illegalized white-black marriages; and the establishment of the Bantustans, or native home-lands, to which a large proportion of the black population was restricted. Since the white minority retained for themselves the bulk of the land, and virtually all of the economically viable territory, including the agriculturally rich areas and the areas with mining potential, it was, in practice, a means of institutionalizing and preserving white supremacy. Since the economy required a large body of non-white workers to live in close proximity to white areas as they provided cheap labour, the Group Areas Act led to the development of specific racially segregated townships, using low-cost housing. People of African, Cape Coloured or Indian descent were forcibly removed from urban areas where they had lived for generation under the same Act.

The policy of segregation was so extreme that it extended to every aspect of society, with separate sections in public transport, public seats, beaches, and several other facilities. The use of Pass Laws required non-whites to carry a pass that identified them, which had to be stamped with a work permit to give them access to white areas. The government conducted frequent redesignations of races in which individuals were reclassified as Black, Coloured, Indian or White. Most of these reclassifications were predictably downwards

within the white-imposed hierarchy of race and suggested that these racial divisions were either fixed or absolute. (Ashcroft et al, 2004: 17)

“Martin Luther King believed South Africa was home to ‘the world’s worst racism’ and drew parallels between struggles against apartheid in South Africa and struggles against “local and state governments committed to ‘white supremacy’” in the southern United States.”³ By the time apartheid reached its cataclysmic end in 1994, the non-white races, in particular the blacks, had endured so much brutality that it would be a utopian paradox to assume an immediate harmony amongst the “rainbow people”. Decolonization, as Frantz Fanon stated, “is always a violent phenomenon.” (Fanon, 2001: 27) As several of the old conformist whites attempted to adjust to the renewed convention of equal status with the blacks, several of the blacks were filled with a vengeance to avenge centuries of barbarity and inequality inflicted on them by the imperialists. The decolonization of South Africa, as with other countries, as Fanon mentioned, was a painful process. Violence arose in various forms with the disintegration of the apartheid policies, there was a shift in the “self” and the “other”, as identities dissolved with the collapse of the centre, both blacks and whites suffered from a crisis – a sudden anxiety drove them to the verge of hysteria – as they accustomed themselves to the idea of a country no longer adherent to the hierarchical segregation of races; making them go through the stages of enunciation in which they fought to construct a new identity; acquaint themselves to a new culture and assimilate in a rainbow nation without any categorizations of race.

In the novel *Disgrace*, J.M Coetzee portrays the complex aftermath of apartheid once the regime has been uplifted. Published in 1999, Coetzee represents the conflicts in South Africa, five years post-apartheid – the crises that was the direct result of the disintegration of

³The Martin Luther King, Jr Research and Education Institute: “Apartheid”. http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_apartheid_1948_1994/. Acesso em 13 Nov 2012

the colonial hegemonic polarities, wherein the dichotomies of master/slave, colonizer/colonized undergoes complete reversal. *Disgrace* illustrates how the protagonist, a fifty-two years old professor, David Lurie, along with his daughter Lucy, goes through several enunciations to assimilate themselves in the post apartheid South Africa. In particular, Lurie, belonging to the older conventions of white privilege, has significant complications in renouncing his antiquated beliefs – and faces great distress acclimatizing to the new beliefs, which his daughter, in sharp contrast, embraces without much difficulty.

Disgrace begins with the disgrace of its protagonist David Lurie, who is terminated from his post of a professor after he sexually assaults a student: Melanie Isaacs. Lurie, who belongs to the dominating white minority, represents the older social order notorious for its rampant misconduct of white privilege, racial discrimination and oppression. To Lurie, what takes place between Melanie and him is, “not rape, not quite that,” (25) a clear indication of lack of guilt, which stems from the authority endowed upon him by white privilege - a violation of the university’s code of conduct. Lurie’s self-assurance during the hearing, in which he “does not feel nervous”, and claims to have “slept well”, projects a strong conviction that he did nothing wrong.

Lurie exudes a strong sense of ownership over his women and this is clearly discerned from his treatment of both Soraya and Melanie Isaacs. He chooses Soraya as his escort for the exoticism her name emanates – a similar pattern can be seen in his choice of Melanie – the dark one. A characteristic trait prevalent among the colonizers - seeker of exotic territories and domain, Lurie symbolizes the colonizer who is charged with the uncontrollable desire conquest. When Lurie forces himself on Melanie, he is “usurping upon” her (21) as he explains in his lecture of Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, “to take over entirely.” (21) Lurie’s urgent drive to take possession of the female body is evident in his stalking of Soraya, his unwillingness to respect the boundaries between them and later, his abuse of Melanie. Lurie’s

obsession with the female body mirrors the patriarchal urge to delineate it as the feminine – drawing it within the perimeters of femininity, the male gaze of the patriarch that exploits the woman in order to achieve their desire’s end. Lurie’s affection for Soraya stems from her submissiveness – “a ready learner, compliant, pliant.” (5) When Lurie attempts to seduce Melanie it is because “a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone...She has a duty to share it.” (16). Melanie is merely reduced to a “fairest creature”, and “beauty’s rose”, implying she does not own herself, thus refusing to let her act on her own agency. Lurie’s claim that Melanie does not own herself portrays the subjective stance of the male gaze on the woman – the woman of beauty is to be treated as an artefact – and not permitted to act on her own agency nor to construct an identity independent of the male gaze. Lurie fails to distance himself from this archetypal chauvinism – a trait most discernable in his description of his daughter Lucy, who also falls victim of his male gaze: “she has put on weight. Her hips and breasts are now (he searches for the word) ample. Comfortably barefoot, she comes to greet him...”, (59) and again, “Lucy opens the door wearing a shapeless smock that might as well be a nightdress. Her old air of brisk good health is gone. Her complexion is pasty, she has not washed her hair.” (197) Lurie is also critical of Lucy’s lesbian partner, Helen, whom he terms as a “large, sad-looking woman with a deep voice and a bad skin, older than Lucy”. (60) Lurie’s ineptitude to rid of his old conventions portray how rigidly locked he is in his position of the unaccommodating white master.

Much later in the narrative, Lurie’s acceptance of Bev Shaw, a woman he had earlier dismissed for not making an “effort to be attractive.” (72), prove his metamorphosis – the Lurie at the end of *Disgrace* is a changed man, who accepts the change in South Africa, albeit dejectedly.

After Lurie is terminated from the university, he decides to visit Salem in the Eastern Cape, where his daughter Lucy lives and owns a farm – his shift from the “Centre” to the

“Margin”. Lucy’s decision to live in the rural landscape puts Lurie in a state of bewilderment, since both his wife and he were “cityfolk” and “intellectuals”. But as he himself explains: “perhaps it was not they who produced her: perhaps history had a larger share.” (61) Lurie refers to the brutal history of colonization that later culminated into apartheid, in which the natives were forced to live in ill-equipped, under developed rural areas or Bantustans, and were forced to do much of the labour work. By claiming history had a role to play in Lucy’s becoming a farmer, he alludes to the coming of the full circle of life – the phase of the violent apartheid that inspired several new generation white South African youths to sympathize and fight for the oppressed natives.

Unfortunately it is Lucy, the postmodern Iphigenia, the female sacrifice, who must be violated in order to restore peace. Lucy’s rape, serves as a foil to compare and contrast the one Melanie, referring to the horrific timeline of the past – when native women could be violated and no justice sought; The striking role reversal of the perpetrators enable the reader to detect the mechanisms of patriarchy working behind both the colonizer and the colonized – refusing an agency to the female – the body of the woman had to remain under subjugation even after the disintegration of the colour bar. During the apartheid, black peril played a crucial role in the instigation of the Immorality Acts – spreading the false notion about promiscuous black men who posed a threat to the honour of the white woman, although eluding the rapes of black women by white men. After the apartheid was disintegrated, there was a reversal of roles: wherein the number of white women to be raped by natives alarmingly increased, as an act of vengeance. Lucy Valerie Graham states:

“‘black peril’ refers to the period of social hysteria prevalent in South Africa from 1890 to 1914, deployment of analogous fear has been a recurring strategy in South African politics and in the media. It is not surprising to find these anxieties replayed in the transition period of the 1990s.” (Graham, 2003: 435)

The abolishment of apartheid, albeit succeeding in dismantling the iron-fisted grip of the white supremacists, does not cleanse itself off the rigid stance of patriarchy, rather it displaces white patriarchy with black patriarchy. The woman, both of colour and white, remains subservient even when at the introduction of a new alpha male – which in *Disgrace* is symbolized through Petrus. As the novel nears the end, Petrus, who had introduced himself as the “gardener” and the “dog-man” to Lurie, has risen in disproportionate levels in terms of power and authority.

The rape of Lucy in *Disgrace* is significant for a number of reasons. First and foremost, Lucy’s rape acts as a form of repentance for Lurie. Earlier in the novel, when he harasses Melanie, he treats the entire course of action disdainfully. Lucy’s rape allows him to experience rape from the other side – an act that finally makes him aware of his crime and induces him to apologize to Melanie’s parents. Through the use of myths, literature and other literary forms, Lurie conceals the urgent need of his sexual gratification, one he achieves through undesirable means from Melanie. By confessing he “became a servant of Eros”, (52) at the hearing, Lurie attempts to grandiose his lust for Melanie under the guise of mythical elements. Lurie’s infatuation with Byron – in particular with the time of his exile, which according to Lurie, “He went to Italy to escape a scandal, and settled there.” (15), acts as a prophecy – Lurie’s obsession with Byron is no co-incidence. Coetzee imbues Lurie’s character with traits from his favourite poet, and after Lurie’s scandal with Melanie, he too will be prompted to go into exile. Pamela Cooper, in her essay, *Metamorphosis and Sexuality: Reading the Strange Passions of "Disgrace"* describes this trenchantly:

“As the ransacking of his Cape Town house and his eviction from his campus office imply, Lurie becomes an exile in his own land. He is politically estranged, for the status of white power is declining in South Africa, and sexually estranged, as the old language of white, patriarchal gender relations withers.”(2005: 27-8)

When Lucy is raped, Lurie suffers an immediate existential crisis, one in which he goes through several stages of enunciations, and emerges as the symbol of the sterilized white man – one who has reciprocated to the change and accepted his degraded status with that of the rising native. Lurie is haunted by a painting he once saw as a young boy: *The Rape of the Sabine Women* – the only illusion of rape which summons in his mind, and yet he cannot relate that image with what Lucy must have endured – even in his definition of rape, the image he conjures in his mind is an Eurocentric one. He imagines Lucy’s rape as a near death experience, streaked with violence, the predominant fear of death, of her “throat being slit,” (160) lurking in the vicinity in sharp contrast to its European counterpart, where “the man lying on top of the woman,” simply pushes himself into her. (160)

In an archetypal depiction of women, Lucy becomes the embodiment of earth – symbolizing fertility, cultivation and harvest –reduced, merely to property that needs a man’s protection – a placeholder: “in old Kaffraria”, “Lucy’s farm, Lucy’s patch of earth.” (122, 197), usurped by Petrus. Lucy, then, can be envisioned as a quick pathway to inheritance – which Petrus uses to his advantage to gain her property. Again, a quotation from Graham, that sheds light on this development:

“The farm space is a violently contested boundary in post-apartheid South Africa and, as J. M. Coetzee demonstrates in *White Writing*, the South African pastoral, which presents a vision of the 'husband-farmer' as a custodian of the feminine earth, has been discursively implicated in the colonial appropriation of territory. In *Disgrace*, however, the anti-pastoral mode breaks with colonial mappings of the female body and land, depicting instead feudal systems of claiming and reclaiming where there is contempt for women as owners of property and land.” (438-9)

Enraged by the assault, Lurie wants to seek immediate justice. He is puzzled when

Lucy does not mention the rape to the police when she files a complaint and persuades her to do so. Lurie believes by not reporting the crime, Lucy is humbling herself “before history”. (160) He suggests Lucy should relocate, even if temporarily as the road she wants to follow “will strip [you] of all honour;” (160) Lucy, who had always sympathized with the native’s struggle, echoing with the “modern” voice of South Africa, refuses to play a part in oppression, since she believes that will affirm the white minority’s accusations of the black peril and may instigate further violence. Disagreeing to the proposition, she replies:

“In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this time, in this place, it is not. It is my business, mine alone.”

“This place being what?”

“This place being South Africa.”

(112)

Lucy’s rape also draws the reader’s attention to the socio-economic politics of black patriarchy – wherein Lucy, a lesbian, is brought back into the familial system – where she must adapt to the conventional role of women, Lucy has been “put in her place” and shown “what a woman was for”(115) –housekeeping and child rearing. Lucy is aware that they want her for “subjection” and “subjugation.” (159) As a symbol of the male patriarchal figure that replaces the older form, Petrus accommodates Lucy’s rape by harbouring her perpetrators, taking advantage of Lucy’s vulnerability, as a foreboding threat of further violations should Lucy refuse to acquiesce. Being a lesbian, without the presence of the patriarchal “father-husband” figure to offer her protection, Lucy is “marked” as a candidate for rape. The allusion of rape being used as an instrument of war against the whites in order to terrorize becomes lucid when Lucy confides, “I think they *do* rape...I am in their territory. They have

marked me.” (158) (Emphasis in the original). Lucy experiences a white postcolonial guilt, what J. Wang describes as: “[the] historical portrayal of white female desire for the black man as an abject and indirect form of apology is entrenched within landmark texts such as E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), Paul Scott's depiction of Daphne Manners in *The Raj Quartet* (1966-73) and J. M. Coetzee's character Lucy in *Disgrace* (1999). In all three texts, white women are raped by dark men, yet refuse to incriminate their rapists out of a mysterious sense of colonial guilt and responsibility.” (Wang, 2009: 38) The empathy that stems out of this guilt enables Lucy to conclude that rape is the price she has to pay as a reparation, “They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors,” (158). Left with either of two options, to leave Salem or to stay back as Bev remarks “under his [Petrus’s] wing.” (140) Lucy, is therefore, according to Cooper (2005: 11), uprooted from her own story and forced to adjust herself into Petrus’s narrative.

The treatment of rape in *Disgrace* is of great significance, in particular, to understand the plight of both the victims in the novel – Melanie and Lucy. The tradition to silence rape has had a dominant presence in European literature for decades. Graham writes: “In canonical literary narratives of the West, rape is often depicted as 'unspeakable', as severed from articulation, and literary references to hidden rape stories cannot but bring into relief the complex relationship between literary silences and the aftermath of actual violation.” (2003: 439) She refers to the rape of Philomela in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, where her tongue is cut off so she cannot relate the incident to anyone and Shakespeare’s Lucrece – who, although, is able to name her violators, cannot save herself from the disgrace and must face death in order to restore the honour she has lost. Graham claims the incidents Melanie and Lucy go through has strong resonance with the two mentioned above, “highlighting Western artistic traditions in which rape has had a fraught relationship with articulation or representation.” (2003: 439) Both Lucy and Melanie’s rapes are silenced – Melanie is absent at the hearing and therefore, her

account of the case remains unavailable to the reader. The experience of Lucy is not mentioned – a mere abstraction the readers are left to figure out – until she mentions the pregnancy (197). The silence with which Lucy’s rape is treated is heavily impregnated with the imagery of violence – one that culminates in Lurie’s imagining of the scene - the only concrete visualization of the encounter. In the process, Lurie feels his position is interchangeable with the three men. Like a ghost, he claims he can “be the men, inhabit them,” (160), and suddenly, he can sincerely understand, the trauma of the woman for he is unsure if he has “it in him to be the woman?” (160)

However, Lucy’s stance to remain in the farm, even if that meant giving up her dreams, her humiliating acceptance of Petrus’s marriage proposal and living under his wing for the rest of her life, is one of hope and progress – the symbolic youth of the new “South Africa”, who has successfully mastered the art of co-existence. Lucy’s victory lies in her refusal to accept defeat: “if I leave the farm now I will leave defeated, and will taste that defeat for the rest of my life.” (161) Lucy portrays the ideal spirit of post-apartheid South Africans, the one who succeeds in accommodating the past as well as surviving the tumultuous present.

Through the narrative, Lurie’s degradation from scholar to dog handler is of substantial importance since it sheds light on his spiritual growth – the necessary pain of labour he must endure for a re-birth: “This is how his days are spent on the farm. He helps Petrus clean up the irrigation system. He keeps the garden from going to ruin. He packs produce for the market. He helps Bev Shaw at the clinic. He sweeps the floors, cooks the meal, does all the things that Lucy no longer does. He is busy from dawn to dusk.” (120) When Lurie initiates a romance with Bev Shaw, a woman he considers beneath him (“Never did he dream he would sleep with a Bev.” 149), readers catch a glimpse of a Lurie who has adjusted himself to the changing times. Lurie, as can be assessed, has shed his stance of the

privileged white dominating male and embraces Bev as man bereft of his earlier beliefs.

Lurie thus decides to stop calling Bev “poor”. “If she is poor, he is bankrupt.” (150) Thus Lurie “gives up” Driepoot to be euthanized at the denouement, signifying that Lurie’s painful enunciations are complete. Lurie can now attempt a firm footing in the quickly changing atmosphere of post-apartheid South Africa – which, as he has experienced – no longer remained the same.

Perhaps the most notable shift in the novel is that of Petrus. The man who introduces himself to Lurie at the beginning of the novel as gardener and dog-man emerges, with the improvement of the socio-economic scenario, as the invincible landowner. Endowed with the power to unsettle the equilibrium, Petrus now stands, as a menace, possessing the capacity to subsume Lucy – and thereby, disorienting Lurie. Petrus’s fast growing authority intimidates Lurie, so much so that he never accuses him directly of being involved in the crime. Lurie controls his frustration, although all he would like to do at that moment was “to take Petrus by the throat.” (119) Instead, he and Petrus complete their day’s chores, “In silence, side by side.” (120)

Lurie is afraid that Petrus’s ascent to power poses a threat of potential danger to Lucy: “Against this new Petrus what chance does Lucy stand? Petrus arrived as the dig-man, the carry-man, the water-man. Now he is too busy for that kind of thing. Where is Lucy going to find someone to dig, to carry, to water? Were this a game of chess, he would say that Lucy has been outplayed on all fronts.” (151)

Lurie is shocked at Petrus’s audacity, when the very next day of the party, in which Lurie spots and confronts one of the perpetrators, Petrus asks for his assistance in the fitting of the regulator. Lurie feels offended when he realizes the actual reason for his need – “to be his *handlanger*, in fact.” (136) (Emphasis in the original) Lurie terms Petrus as a “dominating personality.”

Later, when Lurie mentions to Petrus, a mere possibility of Lucy's leaving the farm in his charge, Petrus is ecstatic at the prospect of his becoming the farm manager. "He pronounces the words as if he has never heard of them before, as if they have popped up before him like a rabbit out of a hat." Petrus's glee resonates his lust to mimic the colonial masters – to become the "manager" from the "dog-man".

Through the character of Petrus, Coetzee depicts the archetypal patriarchal black male – the one conjured at the hands of the white Occident - manipulative, shrewd and chauvinistic. Petrus's definition of Lucy as a "forward-looking lady not backward looking," (136) is a hint of his already being aware of the fact that Lucy would succumb to his pressure and submit herself to his plans. With the lingering threat of rape and further attacks looming in the oblivion, Lucy is successfully manipulated to accept Petrus's offer of protection. When Petrus offers to marry Lucy and thereby take her in as "family" Petrus mentions "Then it is over, all this badness." (202) A guarantee of Lucy's safety and protection is given in return of Lucy's property that he can legally claim under the pretext of marriage. He confirms Lurie's fears of lurking danger and speaks his mind: "But here, it is dangerous, too dangerous. A woman must marry." By stating the importance of marriage in lieu of a woman's safety, Petrus draws attention to his objectification of Lucy.

Through the narrative of *Disgrace*, the struggles of Lurie, Lucy and Petrus to re-assign themselves in the re-mapped socio-political structure of South Africa become translucent. Coetzee depicts the inner struggle of each of the characters with clarity and striking accuracy of the context they originate in – post apartheid. While Lurie attempts to create a new sense of belonging at a time when his white privilege has been deemed defunct, Lucy, having been uprooted from her own story, must resettle and readjust in Petrus's. Petrus, on the other hand, in rising from his position of hired labourer to landowner, although putting the white man's privilege to disadvantage, re-instills the patriarchal domain of

subjugating women and claims ownership of Lucy through violence – raping and threatening her into subjugation. Lurie is hesitant to accept change – and later through the tumultuous journey he partakes with his daughter – conforms himself, albeit reluctantly and stressfully – to the post apartheid society.

As is apparent in the case of Lucy, the post apartheid era proved more difficult and highly inconveniencing in terms of women, since they were not only subjected to bodily violation – but also forcibly made to embrace the archetypal roles – that of the nurturing wife and mother. Lucy’s sexual orientation served as a possible cause for the attack, which conveyed a threat to the patriarchal familial structure. The need to disgrace her therefore was of substantial importance and she is coerced to mimic the codes of her gender deemed accurate by the culture of her society.

The shift in Petrus’s power can only be assumed in the part he plays to control both Lurie and Lucy. Whereas earlier, he merely announces himself as the “dog man”, he is now both capable of destroying and sheltering Lucy. By enacting the rape and providing protection to the assaulters Petrus’s desire to take over Lucy’s land (and thereby Lucy) is well articulated. Petrus’s marriage proposal to Lucy – to take her under his wing – in exchange of her land not only sets a paradox to the Immorality and Land Acts during apartheid, but also emphasizes how the power dynamics have reversed – the black native is now authorized to break and make the rules while the whites are at the end of their mercy.

Coetzee’s brilliant representation of the South African society depicts, with sharp accuracy, the shifting polarities of a nation – where culture, race and gender undergo massive reformations through a painful process in its attempt to accommodate the past and survive the present.

Conclusion

The three novels shed light on how the patriarchal familial structure was adopted by colonization and politicized race, culture and gender to achieve their desired effects. By relegating the race, culture and women of South Africa, the colonizer effectively refused them an agency – a voice through which they could articulate their identities and a sense of self – an exploitation that deemed them weak and easy prey to subjugation.

All three of the writers, Lessing, Gordimer and Coetzee reveal the mechanism at play under the surface. While the characters of Mary, Helen and Lucy seem voiceless in their feelings of ambivalence, sense of displacement and identity – the true rendition of Spivak's subaltern – they are each able to find hope – for Mary it is her inevitable death at the hands of Moses, whereas for Helen it is in self-exile; finally for Lucy – hope is nurtured deep within her womb – her baby, the true “heir” to the new South Africa, one that has finally dismantled the master's house and rises out of the debris.

Under the light of Bhabha's theory of enunciation, the characters rise, like a phoenix out of its own ashes, basking in the glory of self-rejuvenation, no longer the subaltern who cannot speak, but the “Other” who has merged with the “Self”, the “Margin” engulfing the “Centre” thus forming the new, diverse, multicultural rainbow nation.

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