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**Study of the Self and Other: The white women's struggle of
positionality in the heart of South Africa.**



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August 2016

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positionality in the heart of South Africa.*

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"There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect".

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask*.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation will primarily focus on how colonialism created the binaries of the colonizer (Self) and the colonized (Other). The dichotomy, not only did it divide the geographical locations of East and West, or separated racial identities into black or white, but also separates gender into *Self* and *Other*. The socially constructed nature of women, their treatment and social roles are at the core of their otherness where they are colonized, both by imperial ideologies and patriarchal domination.

My dissertation will focus on the three novels that are concerned with South Africa: Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950), Nadine Gordimer's *Julys People* (1981) and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999).

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of colonialism began a vast exploration of lands by the. As a result, Europeans traveled to the far East, attracted by its flora and fauna, via land routes and across the Mediterranean ocean towards the Atlantic. Gradually, Europe discovered overseas lands in search of gold, ivory, slaves and many agricultural resources and established themselves in those lands, through trade and commerce. This resulted in a rise in European power and domination thus giving birth to two indivisible factions: the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizers were the ones who usurped other territories and claimed rights over these colonies. They practiced control and primacy asserting racial and cultural superiority on the native's who now came under this new rule. According to Memmi in his paper *The Colonizer and The Colonized*, "Three factors typify the colonizer: profit, privilege, and usurpation" (Memmi, 1965). On the other hand, the population over whom this supremacy was practiced were the colonized, who were considered the inferior. They were detached from their own culture and tradition and forced to follow the new ways of life introduced by the settlers. Post colonialism critique such as Edward Said in his study of the 'Occident' and 'Orient' in his work "Orientalism" distinguished these binaries of the colonizer and the colonized as the 'Self' and 'Other', where the 'Self' claims its position firmly in the centre, having access to certain privileges. On the other hand, the 'Others' were marginalized and stereotyped by the oppressors to be easily accessible, undisrupted, defenseless but at the same time they where uncultured, boorish, unsophisticated and mysterious. Therefore they were a site of fear as well as desire. Moreover, Otherness was defined in contrasr to one's native culture, ethnicity, race, religion, geographical origins, social conditions and even sexual identity. Thus the other is always separate, dissimilar or distinct from the self and the

projected European norms. Their dissimilarities are mainly depicted through their bodies, by means of complexion, attire, eye shape, hair texture, dialect, tone of voice, and even gender.

However, the complex structure of colonial ruling had brought along massive changes which are still apparent today. Not only did it bring about changes geographically but also psychologically. For this reason both the colonizers and the colonized experienced dislocation of their own identities which lead them to an ambivalent state. Unfortunately in the case of women, whether she belonged to the ruling class or the subaltern class she was doubly marginalized, firstly, by the colonial hegemonic structure and secondly, because of the patriarchal structure that made women inferior.

This dissertation therefore looks at three twentieth century African novels, *The Grass Is Singing* (1950) by Doris Lessing, *July's People* (1981) by Nadine Gordimer and *Disgrace* (1999) by John Maxwell Coetzee, in which all three novelists give us a concrete image of the binaries of the Self and Other through the master-slave relationship, set in the racially segregated South Africa. The novels will be analysed in chronological order, as there is a development of the governing system in South Africa starting from the apartheid era to a post-apartheid regime. Through a close reading of the novels, I hope to show how both the apartheid and post-apartheid regimes created power dynamics within the characters through experiences of racial and cultural casualties. Using the history of South Africa as a setting, all three novels investigate the psyche of the oppressor and the oppressed. Most importantly, they show the helplessness, flexibility and the vulnerable state of the colonial self or identity by shifting the position of the colonizer and the colonized. This is further elaborated by Terry Goldie:

“Because there is no real line between self and the other, an imaginary line must be drawn; and so that the illusion of an absolute difference between self and other is never

troubled, this line is as dynamic in its ability to alter itself as is the self. This can be observed in the shifting relationship of antithetical stereotypes that parallel the existence of, 'bad' and 'good' representations of self and Other. .. We can move from fearing to glorifying the Other. We can move from loving to hating." (Goldie 235)

Although the three novels are seen through the perspectives of white novelists, they deconstruct the traditional stereotype of the master-slave relationship through different perspectives. This is mainly done by deconstructing the novels from a post-colonial view which portrays the struggles of both the white settlers and the natives as they try to adapt to the new cultural norms introduced by colonialism. The disintegration of the white middle class protagonists is brought to surface as they migrate from the centre to the periphery in search for power, wealth and material goods. In this process, there is a loss of their former hierarchal status as they cannot adapt to the new setting of the native's cultural and societal norms.

On the other hand, the colonized native shifts to the centre by "mimicking" the colonizer. According to Bhabha, these oppressors may subvert power by using the tools provided to them by the colonizers. This process of mimicry is performed by adapting the master's language, tradition and culture. His analysis is chiefly based on the Lacanian concept of mimicry as the disguise focuses on colonial ambivalence. The notion of ambiguity is introduced within the binaries, and it is shown that "the colonized is always in motion, sliding ambivalently between the polarities of similarity and difference" (McLeod 53). Therefore there is no static or concrete position of the binaries. As a result, this leads to ambiguity and a state of hybridity within the characters as sometimes they totally change the power dynamics of the colonial enterprise which might lead to the shift of roles between the colonized and the colonizer. In fact,

both parties are condensed into a group caught in between the customs and communal norms of their country of origin.

Rutherford states that Bhabha defines liminality as a “productive space of the construction of culture as difference, in the spirit of alterity or otherness” (Rutherford, 1990, p. 209). The liminal space therefore, becomes a space for in-betweenness where hybridity or ‘Otherness’ emerge from.

Bhabha writes that,

“The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy”. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5)

This thesis will therefore be using Homi Bhabha’s idea of this state of “in-betweenness” which he refers to as the “Liminal Space” or the “Third Space of Enunciation” as a theoretic approach to see how the characters struggle in forming a position of their own.

As the colonizers ransacked the native’s ethnic traditions and way of life through physical force, they also forcibly altered the minds of the native’s by imposing their Eurocentric knowledge and ideas on them. According to Lois Tyson;

“colonialist ideology ... was based on the colonizer’s assumption of their own superiority, which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native (indigenous) peoples, the original inhabitants of the lands they invaded” (Tyson 419).

As the West saw the East as uncivilized, crude and vulgar, they needed to make them civilized. This was done by sending Christian missionaries to the East to reform the native's barbaric religion and standards of life. They firmly believed that the culture of their ancestors were extremely civilized in contrast to the underdeveloped, savage natives. Therefore, they thought that they had set themselves up as perfect examples to the colonized people, so the colonized people "were considered 'other', different, and therefore inferior to the point of being less than fully human" (Tyson 420). This brought about the divisions, 'us' and 'them'.

Africa was one of the countries that fascinated the Europeans. It was known as the "Dark Continent"; first termed by H.M. Stanley in one of his accounts *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), and another, *In Darkest Africa* (1890); as little was known about this mystifying land and so the Europeans dominated nearly all parts of Africa in order to exploit them of their wealth and natural resources. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said criticizes this exploitation carried out by Europe:

"In Europe itself at the end of the nineteenth century scarcely a corner of life was untouched by the facts of empire. The economies were hungry for overseas markets, raw materials, cheap labour and profitable land. Defense and foreign policy establishments were more committed to the maintenance of vast tracts of distant territory and large numbers of subjugated peoples." (Said 8)

Europe had seen Africans as barbaric and wild beasts which were highlighted in the Polish-British novelist Joseph Conrad's novel, *Heart of Darkness* written in 1899. Here the protagonist Marlow calls Africa "one of the dark places of the earth". (pg 3)

In his 1975 public lecture "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness", the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe described Conrad's novella as "an offensive and deplorable book" that had de-humanized Africans. As a matter of fact, Africa having its own history and tradition was seen not seen as it was supposed to be but rather through the discriminated lens of the West. Brannigan indicates that "Africa is merely the fictional projection of a European fantasy in which Europe is the only truth" (Brannigan 144). As a result, this misinterpretation of race prevented Africa to be seen from an insider's perspective. For Fanon, race is not a biological trait but, rather, a historically constructed phenomenon and culturally intervened artifact.

"For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man...his inferiority comes into being through the other" (Fanon 110).

In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1994), Frantz Fanon visibly states how this dividing line of black and white, was to create a long lasting effect in the colonized people's minds and according to Bhabha,

"all cultural statements and systems are constructed" in "the Third Space of Enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process" (Bhabha 37).

Because of Africa's vast diversity of culture, landscape and farming, I've chosen to work on South African novels where the nature and the behaviour of the native people were disrupted with the intrusion of white people. Equally, the white minorities living in South Africa experienced the disintegration of positionality. Once the Europeans had settled on this land, they had to co-exist with the community they had long categorized as savages. They exercised discipline and authority showing the natives their position in the hierarchy of society. Thus, as

white settlers lived in thriving cities, natives were forced into secluded villages, with negligible supplies of food and other necessities. Deprived from their own culture and norms they get infused into a vague dilemma of desire and repugnance. The aftermath of this was imitating the white oppressor's lifestyle. In this way there was an upheaval in the master-servant relation where the servant took the role of the master without the master being cognizant of the fact. Again, the master unconsciously tries to fit himself in relation to his slave. This new adaption of the master and slave create a sort of bewilderment as both try to adjust to the new changes of ideals and customs leading to crisis in identity in terms of race, culture and gender. Bhabha argues that due to mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity, the role of the 'Self' and 'Other' is never fixed in a colonial onset. It is subjected to continuous change and reconstruction where cultural identity is never fixed and complete; rather it is constructed in a continual process with constant shift causing the roles to become interchangeable.

Apart from race and culture, this dissertation will also look at gender where both the sexes male and female are set to act according to the societal norms. The famous line mentioned by Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1953) where she says, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes, a woman" emphasizes that subordination does not originate from biological difference but from the ideals set by the society where both male and female have to undergo a constant process of negotiation. Judith Butler further elaborates this in her writing of *Gender Trouble* (1990) where she claims that

"Gender is not just a process, but it is a particular type of process, "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame". (Butler,1990)

Margaret Mead also stated that gender is a social construct specifying the socially and culturally prescribed roles that men and women are to follow. For this reason, female subordination arises from the patriarchal and hierarchical division where women are confined to domestic household duties which included cooking, cleaning and taking care of her husband and children. Jean Smith mentioned that,

“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” (Smith 89)

Women were therefore inferior and subaltern who did not have access to certain things their male counterparts had access to. Gayatri Spivak elaborates how the woman becomes a victim of double colonization “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). As Homi Bhaba explores the relationship between the colonizing subject and the colonized object, he does not give reference to how the notion of gender could further complicate his theory. On the other hand, critics such as Carole Boyce Davies raises questions to the male-centered bias of postcolonial critique often asking “where are the women in the theorizing of postcoloniality?” (Davies 80) Post-colonial discourses are largely male-centric and control women by placing them in traditional stereotypes. Thus Western feminists, through their representations of the colonized women, have also contributed in the oppression of the colonized females body and identity. Kirsten Holst Peterson 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.”(Peterson,1984)

Hence, all three of my novels will show the development of the white female protagonists: Mary, Maureen and Lucy through a post-colonial lens, highlighting the intricate structure of their identity formation. As the female protagonists undergo a drastic change, they get caught up in “The Third Space of Enunciation” in order to rediscover their own selfhood and sense of belonging.

My first chapter will be looking at Doris Lessing’s 1950 novel, *The Grass Is Singing* (henceforth TGIS). Set during the apartheid era, this novel weaves an intricate relation between the Self and Other investigating the idea of colonialism and white supremacy, and its effect on the white woman. Lessing’s disapproval of sexual and political prejudices and colonialism in the South African setting can be reflected through the life of Mary Turner, a white landowner’s wife, and her critical relationship with their black servant. However, the relationship between Mary and Moses portrays on a small scale several forms of power associations where on the political level, it duplicates the imbalance between the oppressive white minority and the black majority in South Africa. Mary struggles to accept the blacks as human beings, not even as equals, but merely as humans. At first Mary is shown as an individual who has her own agency, “For she was living the comfortable carefree existence of a single woman in South Africa” (TGIS 34) with no husband and no household to look after. She is not able to keep this agency for too long as limitations and enforcements of gender roles are reflected within the society that forces a woman to marry. A woman is meant to be a carrier of culture and marriage is the only

means meant to preserve it. Her marriage thus becomes a marriage carried out of necessity. Whereas, for Dick, her husband, it was a means to escape from his loneliness as it was “essential for him to love somebody.” (TGIS 48) This marriage leads to their destruction as Mary cannot find peace. Her marriage to Dick reflects her economic status within the white minority living in South Africa as the “poor whites”. To relieve herself from her disrupted psychological state of mind she begins to exert power and authority over the natives in her farm. She cannot practice power for too long as the patriarchal society interferes leading to the death of Mary in the hands of her servant, Moses. Hence, *The Grass Is Singing* portrays the fluidity of identity by overturning the dichotomous master-slave relationship.

My second chapter will be discussing Nadine Gordimer’s 1981 novel, *July’s People* (henceforth JP). Like *The Grass Is Singing*, this novel is also set in apartheid South Africa. It brings to light the struggles of a white bourgeois family Bamford and Maureen Smales along with their three children who flee that breaks out between the white settlers and the black majority. Here we see how the different power structures of apartheid bring forth cultural and racial discriminations. In *Race, Class and the Apartheid State* (1988), Harold Wolpe states,

“the institutions, laws and practices of apartheid are basically extra-economic devices to secure the processes of capital accumulation through the maintenance of the black majority as an easily exploitable source of cheap labour power” (Wolpe 30).

The Smales are thus seen to be living a life of extravagance by exploiting their black servant, July through cultural and racial discrimination erected by apartheid. But it is not for too long as the blacks start to revolt against the white minorities living in South Africa. According to Clingman:

“By the 1980’s South African fiction began to be preoccupied with thoughts of revolution in South Africa; Gordimer’s eighth novel, *July’s People* (1981) was set at a future moment of revolution itself. There were perhaps good reasons for this overall concern. By this time South Africa’s neighbouring countries, Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe had won their independence. Inside the country the Soweto Revolt had been quelled, but it had initiated a longer-term period of political upswing. By the 1980s an independent black trade-union movement was gathering in numbers and strength” (Clingman 121)

However, the novel’s fictional war reflects the blacks strong urge to outlaw the whites ruling over them, mainly due to their long lasting desire for freedom. So the whites have to be displaced from the centre to the margin giving up their wealth and status. In a lecture, Gordimer urges white South Africans to give up sole possession of South Africa’s economic wealth and institutions:

“In the eyes of the black majority which will rule, whites of former South Africa will have to redefine themselves in a new collective life within new structures. From the all-white Parliament to the all-white country club and the separate ‘white’ television channels, it is not a matter of blacks taking over white institutions, it is one of conceiving of institutions—from nursery schools to government departments—that reflect a societal structure vastly different from that built to the specifications of white power and privilege. (264–65)

In the same way, Bam and Maureen have to give up their material goods and possessions in order to adjust to the new social and cultural way of life in July’s village. July once servant

becomes the “savior” of his former “master” by providing them refuge and shelter. The Smales become solely dependent on him thus creating a disruption in the ruling structure. A binary-opposition can be found in all relations: black and white, male and female, parent and child, husband and wife, placing the characters in a state of ambivalence as power shifts from the margin to the centre. Through this journey, Maureen struggles to cope up to her surroundings leading her to a mental state of war within herself just like Mary Turner. At last she loses her selfhood trying to escape from the new settings.

My third and last chapter will be looking at the novel *Disgrace* (1999) written by John Maxwell Coetzee. After years of racial segregation and static power division, apartheid finally comes to an end. This paper will show how history affects the once colonized country even after apartheid has ended. The novel becomes a world full of revenge for the blacks against the whites. It relates to the blacks revolt on the whites which Gordimer has predicted in *July's People*. The shift leads to chaos, violence and lawlessness as the blacks finally take up the role of the colonizers in which the protagonist Lurie and his daughter become victims of. Lurie's act of disgrace, that is, his sexual encounter with his brown student, Melanie causes his disintegration. Similar to Melanie, Lucy being the white female encounters a disgraceful event in her life that is related to the violation of her body. However, her rapists are three black men. Lucy's degradation is familiar to both Mary's and Maureen's where they undergo a psychological phase, in which the most significant process of identity construction takes place. This paper will also explore how rape becomes one of the tools in which colonial and patriarchal society practice in order to suppress their females. According to Horrell, Lucy functions as a site for,

"the transfer of ownership and the inscriptions of pain on white flesh that must, eventually, bring restitution". (Horell 31)

The burden of shame and guilt is incorporated with Lucy's flesh through rape, where her child becomes the embodiment of this inscription.

The novel is written in the third person with the narrator focusing mainly on Lurie's life. We don't know what any of the other characters are thinking, feeling, or even doing most of the time. Everything comes from David's perspective, even if he's not the one actually telling the story. For that reason, the characters do not have any individuality but rather portrayed through the eyes of Lurie. This immediately reflects how the 'othering' is being done in the novel. Lurie can be seen as the colonizer and the other characters can be seen as the colonized. Altogether, *Disgrace* is essentially a post-colonial novel where we see how colonialism leaves behind a legacy of sin and violence. The present tense of the novel implies the post colonial essence of South Africa being free from colonialism

CHAPTER 1

THE GRASS IS SINGING (1950) – DORIS LESSING

Doris Lessing was born in Iran in 1919 but spent most of her childhood on a farm in Southern Rhodesia which is now known as Zimbabwe. Her childhood was spent in the southern African region, and she moved to Britain in 1950, where she arrived with the manuscript of *The Grass is Singing*. Her personal experience of discrimination against Africans on the basis of colour forms the main theme of the novel, which reflects the issue of discrimination in terms of race, but also of class and gender. The novel is set in South Africa during the time of apartheid, where the white minorities are seen to economically, socially and politically dominate the black majority. Issues of racism are therefore a central part to the development of subordination and domination of the characters in the novel. Thus, Lessing explores the possibility of transgressive relationships among Southern African settlers and Africans. In other words, she establishes junctions where very dissimilar places and people meet (who are otherwise unlikely to interact). In doing so, Lessing challenges, as Ann Stoler puts it, “the myth of a white bourgeois hegemony in Southern Rhodesia”. (Stoler 116) Lessing describes the effects of a society under colonization; a culture infested by the rigid infrastructure of patriarchy, giving rise to gender and racial discriminations where Mary struggles to live in a colonial world. The novel hence opens with the murder of the protagonist Mary Turner which creates an imbalance of power relationships that hinder the colonial structure set in apartheid South Africa. Mary’s internal conflict between acceptance and negation between old and new ideas result in a continual agitation, passivity and fretfulness where “She was restless, so restless she did not know what to

do with herself". (TGIS 75) She became more confused with her own existence as "She was not thinking, only afraid, and of what she did not know" (TGIS 187). "She was held, helpless", and "she was held in balance, not knowing what this new tension was that she could not break down (TGIS 191). "She had lost all sense of time" and "her mind wandered incoherently . . ." (TGIS 195) "She was fighting against something she did not understand" (206)

Because of this crisis in identity where she becomes entrapped, she becomes the "accidental rebel" (Fishburn 4), marked by Katherine Fishburn as she involuntarily dissolves the boundary between "Self" and "Other" and exposes the horror of colonial ruling which victimizes both the colonizer and the colonized alike. This ambivalent state as according to Bhabha forces the beginning of its own destruction since ambivalence upsets the authority of colonial supremacy and unsettles colonial dominance. By eliminating difference it disproves the colonizer's claim of superiority and unmasks the underlying sameness of the colonized and the colonizer. Thus, ambivalence creates a fracture in the identities which was constructed on the basis of difference.

Lessing stresses on the landscape of South Africa throughout her novel with images of farming. This may be because in order to farm, land is required and land is a part of the natural world which is also a concept commonly tied to cultural notions of femininity as women like nature procreate and gave life to a new generation. This association of the natural and the feminine, andocentric imposition, has been acknowledged by many women writers. According to Beauvoir *The Second Sex* (1953),

“Nature is one of the realms (women writers) have most lovingly explored. For the young girl, for the woman who has not fully abdicated, nature represents what woman herself represents for man: herself and her negation, a kingdom and a place of exile; the whole in the guise of the other. It is when she speaks of moors and gardens that the woman novelist will reveal her experience and her dreams to us most intimately”. (Beauvoir)

Consequently, Western dualistic thinking categorizes woman and femininity with nature and opposed to her counterpart: Man- ‘masculinity’, ‘mind’, ‘rationality’, ‘civilization’, all of which are placed as superior. Hence, In *The Grass Is Singing*, the land of South Africa becomes a metaphor of a woman who is to be ploughed and possessed by a male explorer and conqueror. In the same way Lessing’s female protagonist Mary, lives under patriarchal domination where her life is controlled by all the men in her life starting from her father, her husband, Dick and the African servant, Moses .

Mary’s identity is constantly being formulated and negotiated by certain societal codes and expectations. In the first instance her racial position is that of a white female colonizer and secondly, her role as a woman also sees her as colonized or dominated in a patriarchal setting. Because of the duality of her positioning, we see how Mary’s identity disintegrates. She is placed within the division of Self and Other making her position in the society distorted and ambivalent. In other words, the novel encapsulates Mary's breakdown of individuation in the confrontation with her psychological and cultural components, created by the colonial experience.

The early sketches of Mary’s character starts with her traumatizing childhood shaped by despair and poverty, with an oppressive father who was a minor railway official, who, for the most part of his life was inebriated, where “He drank himself into the state of brutality” (TGIS

24). He was a male chauvinist and was negligent and irresponsible about his family requirements. On the other hand, Mary had a resentful mother who cared little about her family as she was always fighting with her husband. A child's psychology is developed from the home surroundings. This includes the two main figures that include a father and mother. Unfortunately, Mary's parents lacked the ability to give her the security within the domain of their household and so she was badly affected by the environment of her family. In fact, it was only her parents passing away that brought her peace and serenity which had to an extent erased her childhood memories. "There was nothing left to connect her with the sordid little house on slits, the screaming of trains, the dust, and strife between her parents. Nothing at all! She was free". (TGIS 27)

However, Mary at the age of thirty had established herself; becoming the personal secretary of her employer. She seems to create an agency of her own where "Being alone in the world had no terrors for her at all, she liked it." (TGIS 26) However, Lessing shows us that Mary was never given any kind of agency since every time it was given to her it was immediately snatched away through her loneliness, through her marriage and lastly through her illicit relationship with a black man. Society always puts woman in a position without her consent. In her book: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft identifies the societal expectations of women.

"Women are, therefore, to be considered either as moral beings, or so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men.Rousseau declares that a woman should never, for a moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to men, whenever he chooses to

relax himself.with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be impressed with unrelenting rigor.” (Wollstonecraft, 175)

At times Mary may feel that she is independent but then there is a sudden turnover in her way of life. This is when the societal ideologies come in her way, stereotyping her as a woman. The racial identity of a white women living in South Africa may put her on the highest pedestal making her superior to the black community but her gender identity on the other hand diminishes her position. It stereotypes her as inferior or the weakest sex or as Simone de Beauvoir would say, “the second sex” where she is controlled by the societal gaze mainly that of men’s Patriarchy places the male body as the subject, with the female body perceived as the object. This is not how the individuals portray themselves but rather how society portrays them. Roberta Rubenstein rightly observes that *The Grass is Singing* includes “concerns about social, economic and political structures, with being female in a conventional man’s world” (Rubenstein17). Moreover, Bhabha abolishes the possibility of even questioning if there is a palpable thread between race and sexuality. He makes it clear that these two entities are in fact inseparable

“Otherness is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity ... The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of the colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference- racial and sexual”. (Bhabha 96)

Despite living in South Africa from childhood, Mary had never confronted the native people of Africa. She had only vague ideas about them. This is because Africans had been homogenized and slotted into a completely different category of people. Due to their race,

culture and social values they were demeaned both individually and racially. In contrast their counterpart, the white man was glorified and dignified. They claimed the titles of “*boss*”, “*missus*”, “*sir*”, “*officer*” and this places their position at the centre. On the other hand, Africans are labeled as “*niggers*”, “*slaves*”, “*swines*”, “*dogs*”, “*mongrels*”, “*and filthy savages*” and hence pushed towards the periphery. Colonialism had shaped Mary from childhood in the values disseminated by conservative English settlers in South Africa and “She was afraid of them, of course. Every white woman in South Africa was brought up to be” (TGIS 60). She had no idea how to confront them but rather knew how to stay away from them. Closeness between white colonizers and African natives was completely taboo, and even walking alone outside the domains of the house was forbidden to white women. These vague ideas about the natives are stereotyped images that were created by the West in creating the image of the East. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin state that,

“Individual colonizing subjects are not often consciously aware of the duplicity of their position, for colonial discourse constructs the colonizing subject as much as the colonized” (38).

Mary was born and bred into the white discourse of Southern Rhodesia and therefore she has never been in a circumstance which had required her to consider and evaluate segregation. Her lack of knowledge about the natives causes her to behave inadequately when it comes to dealing with black people, so far into the novel exclusively houseboys, “develops her distaste for Africans into open hatred” (Rubenstein 20).

In terms of the master-servant relationship, Mary's deep problem was in her way of handling her houseboys and farm workers. Her first ever black encounter was with Samson, Dick's servant with whom he had a perfect understanding whereas in Mary's case it was quite the opposite "This was clearly the first thing she had to learn: she was unable to make Samson understand her" (TGIS 51). She treats all the natives roughly because to her they were not human beings. One after another she torments all their servants. She lets Samson go without his share of groceries. She made the next houseboy scrub the bathroom for hours without giving him time to eat at intervals. At the farm she would rarely give a minute's break to the workers to either wipe off their sweat or drink water. She carried a long thong of leather loop round her waist which "gave a feeling of authority". It is in this master-servant relationship that she follows the traits of the colonizer, the Self. Being a white person, she is placed in a position above the black man. Somehow she finds arrogance in it, "the sensation of being boss over perhaps eighty black workers gave her new confidence." (TGIS 103) However, Lessing shows that this confidence is just temporary because of her inability to be a fit and proper colonizer who upholds the colonizer's supremacy.

Both Dick and Mary were disliked by the other white farmers in the region, as they did not seem to be exercising enough authority over their workers. This is revealed at the beginning of the novel when the following is said about the relationship between the Turners and the other farmers: "Long before the murder marked them out, people spoke of the Turners in the hard careless voices reserved for misfits, outlaws and the self-exiled" (TGIS 2). According to social norms, the Turners were deviant as they were too close to the black population in terms of living standards. But since they were British, they were still placed at the centre in comparison to the blacks but were categorized as the "poor whites" (TGIS 2). The basic reason for their disdain by

other whites, according to Antony Beck is that the white population in Southern Rhodesia had an “inability to countenance loss of status and prestige vis-à-vis the blacks” (69).

In contrast to the Turners, Charlie Slatter is a good example of a successful colonizer. He shows how a white colonialist should improve his land and life. By building a home to shelter his family, enlarging his farm and by educating his sons to pass on the values of white supremacy, Slatter is the white model that everyone is supposed to aspire to. Apart from all these the Slatter family is always involved in keeping their customs intact by engaging in tea parties or by playing tennis. Keeping a connection to one's heritage was of great importance to colonizers and their descendents. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, this connection was maintained by the British settlers in order to distance themselves from the black inhabitants.

Dick is a failure as a farmer and failure is not a white man's label but rather connected with the black man. He is illogical, unsuccessful in every step of his life thus named “*Jonah*” who “was pursued by bad luck” (TGIS 58). He strives to hold his position by shifting his work from time to time. From farming he shifts to beekeeping then to creating a pigsty for raising pigs. Then again he obsesses about raising rabbits and lastly builds a kaffir store. Because of his failure his marriage turns to a failure. It is because of his inability to succeed in his plans in farming that Mary struggles to be with him. He could not even build a roof in order to provide shelter for himself and his wife from the deadly heat of the sun. However a husband being a man is considered the person in authority and control in a society as well as in his family. In a marriage, “he incarnates transcendence” (Beauvoir 419) as he is the bread winner. On the other hand, Mary incarnates immanence where she is to look after her household and has to rely socially and economically on her husband. Soon after her marriage with Dick, she turns the house into a home which had lacked the touch of a woman's hand. “With her own saved money

Mary bought flowered materials, and covered cushions and made curtains; bought a little linen, crockery, and some dress lengths. The house gradually lost its air of bleak poverty, and put on an inexpensive prettiness, with bright hangings and some pictures" (TGIS 52).

Mary tries to find meaning in her life by sewing, stitching and mending as if "fine embroidery would save her life" (TGIS 65). Society believed that women belonged in the home where they could exercise moral influence, maintain social order, and preserve national virtue. According to Paula Baker, "Woman was selfless and sentimental, nurturing and pious. She was the perfect counterpart to materialistic and competitive man, whose strength and rationality suited him for the rough and violent public world" (Baker 620)

Society plays an important role in shaping the notion of women. Although Mary was a well educated and working woman during her single days, she is unable to fit into the cultural standards set by society. In a patriarchal culture, men describe the world in which women live and so a single woman was looked down upon by the people. Her friends sneered at her spinsterhood as a woman since a woman at the age of thirty needs to get married and "she was not playing her part, for she did not get married" (TGIS 45). After her false images that she had been living with for years had been destroyed because of the gossips, she "had lost her poise" (TGIS 40). She feels unable to "recreate herself" (TGIS 42). She starts to search for refuge from her confusion at the theater, going to see films that had once made her happy, but "there seemed no connection between the distorted mirror of the screen and her own life; it was impossible to fit together what she wanted for herself, and what she was offered" (TGIS 42 - 43). Her ideas of reality and imagination become ambiguous because she has no control or authority over herself. Marriage for her had become the only solution to suppress her mental breakdown which might give her a stable ground to place her foot on. Traditionally, marriage is considered to be

the final destiny for women “the sole justification of her a woman’s existence” (Beauvoir 446), where marriage reflects the status of a woman in relation to her husband. After marriage Mary had no freedom. She becomes entrapped in a cycle of situations where she struggles to create a position befitting her. Every new occurrence in Mary’s empty life becomes the catalyst for her growing fretfulness and alienation: the heat, the primitive bathing facilities, the neighbours, Dick’s consecutive failures as a farmer. This gradually leads to Mary’s mental and social disintegration which becomes more apparent with the entry of Moses into her life.

The native Moses, stands as a representative of the blacks as well as a symbol of the patriarchal society that creates both horror and fascination in the feminine consciousness. He calls Mary “madame” instead of the usual “missus”, but “although he was never disrespectful, he forced her, now to treat him as a human being” (TGIS 192). He is probably the only native in the novel who touches her daringly.

“He put out his hand reluctantly, loathes touching her, the sacrosanct white woman, and pushed her by the shoulder; she felt her gently propelled across the room towards the bedroom. It was like a nightmare where one is powerless against horror: the touch of this black man’s hand on her shoulder filled her with nausea; she had never, not once in her whole life, touched the flesh of a native” (TGIS 186)

Being a man, Moses radiates a sexual power that Mary seems to seek involuntarily; but as a black native, he must be dominated, controlled and subordinated to her will. He is unfriendly and this very impersonality of his is just a reflection of Mary’s own personality which infuriates her. In addition, Moses becomes the personification of her self-hatred. The more intensely she

realizes she is losing power over him, the more she asserts whatever power she still has, through her culturally defined superiority, by making unreasonable demands on him.

Mary's sexual perception of Moses' body is far more ambivalent than her perception of African women's bodies. Moses's "powerful, broad-built body fascinated her" (TGIS 175). This attraction that starts building up, encourages her to break the colonial and sexual prohibitions of the white communal order, as she is stepping out of her marital and social boundary for a black man.

As a matter of fact, Mary involuntarily dissolves the boundaries between the Self and the Other exposing the horrors of colonial rule which victimizes both the colonizer and the colonized. She becomes the "accidental rebel" (4) as Katherine Fishburn remarks. Her attraction for Moses was because of her approved feminine desires that were unfulfilled by her husband. Mary suffers from what Homi Bhabha calls "the insatiable fear and desire for the Negro" (114). She was a woman of the 'superior' race who becomes a victim because of her deprived feminine desires. The opportunities of oppressing any human feelings towards the 'others' were almost viciously erased through strongly reinforcing a large amount of racial, social and religious prejudices. Woman's desire has always been a totally taboo subject. It has been carefully established as a taboo for ages. As Lynne Pearce has stated

"Woman's desires, and by extension feminine sexuality, cannot be treated as fully public; something dangerous might happen, secrets might be let out, if they were open to view ... so a woman keeps gyrating in the dark forest of her own subjugated fears, desires and redemption." (Pearce 58)

Mary is aware that it is wrong of her to desire a black native since that would be degrading her in the white community, so she suffers from paranoia. But then again her concealed desires cannot stop her. This is when she struggles to assert her positionality which has shifted and disintegrated. Her demise was probably necessary as she had gone against these societal norms. It may be that her death was marked as a warning to other white women living in Rhodesia who may be put into the same situation as Mary had to.

With the news of the murder of Mary Turnerspread across the entire population, her dead body is more and more noticeable, in the eyes of the district, by her racial and sexual transgression. There are two readings of her body which require deliberation: her degenerating body and her despised body. As she descends, both economically and socially, her body disintegrates, becomes less of a colonizer; Mary's body becomes "dried and brown". (TGIS 123) Richard Dyer, in *White*, discusses the "instability of white as a skin colour". Variations of skin colour, he explains indicate gender and class differences: white women are supposed to be lighter than white men, and upper class people lighter than working class or poor people. (57) Thus the difference in Mary's skin colour from Moses may make her dominant but it is her gender that defines her position in relation to power positions. According to Aghazadeh,

"The natural relationship between a dominant man and a subordinate woman in a patriarchal system becomes problematic just because the man is black and the woman, white. This disturbs the *spirit de corps*, causing a tension in colonial culture by blurring the line between us and them". (116)

Slatter is the one in the novel to revolt at this violation of the first law of white South Africa, which is: 'Thou shalt not let your fellow whites sink lower than a certain point; because if you do, the nigger will see he is as good as you are' (TGIS 210)

Mary's death is a result a black man's revenge on the white man and Moses chooses Mary not only because she is white, but also because she is female, supposedly the feeble sex who is vulnerable and an easy prey. She is racially dominant, but psychologically and sexually subordinate to Moses. Moses embodies Mary's unfulfilled desire. "She felt helpless in his power. Yet there was no reason why she should" (190).

Akin to *Grass Is Singing*, the next chapter is also set in South African apartheid era which will distinctly show how different power structures affect people's identity construction.

CHAPTER 2

JULY'S PEOPLE (1981) - NADINE GORDIMER

Nobel Laureate, Nadine Gordimer has been a spokesperson against the apartheid system which was set up in South Africa in 1948. For this reason, many of her writings were banned in South Africa as they directly provoked open criticisms of the politics of the South African apartheid regime. According to Gordimer, she does “not write about apartheid,” but about “people who happen to live under that system” (Brighton J. Uledi-Kamanga xvi). One of her novels that had brought about a lot of criticism was *July's People* which had been banned by the apartheid government. *July's People* not only brings to life the struggles of race and gender as a whole, but it also scrutinizes the cultural relationships and power struggles between the two classes of people (black and white) in the core of South Africa. However, this novel being written during the apartheid epoch predicts the collapse of this system which in reality happened thirteen years after the writing of the novel, in 1994. Thus the work of fiction shows the approach of black insurgence which had not yet been carried out. According to Brighton J. Uledi-Kamanga, “*July's People* is the first novel in which Gordimer depicts the decline of white supremacy in South Africa” (119) The story is based on a fictional civil war where the time frame is not quite clear to us but may be assumed to be somewhere between the 80's or 90's (Nicholls 1). The rise of the war urges a white liberal family, the Smales to flee from the devastating clutches of black Soweto that had rebelled against the government and white minority through taking over television stations, radio and setting fire to white residences. As the

war struck the suburban area of Johannesburg where the Smales lived, they were bound to flee. They seek refuge in a remote village under the shelter and protection of their servant for fifteen years, named "July". This is where they embark on a new journey that would leave them clueless of the drastic alterations they face in July's village. This shortly will turn into a state of ambivalence between the old and new regimes where the societal values and norms become difficult to understand. In this chapter, I will show how race plays an important role in dividing people into superior and inferior groups and amidst this we see how the power structure shifts from the former structure to a fragmented structure and how the characters adapt to the changing situations.

Gordimer starts the novel with an epigraph which she quotes from *The Prison Notebooks* written by Antonio Gramsci;

"The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there rises a great diversity of morbid symptoms" (Antonio Gramsci).

Her choice of epigraph echoes the theme of the novel where the collapse of the previous ruling system in South Africa brings about turmoil and chaos in the country and the protagonists find themselves displaced. This is where the loss of identities becomes apparent and in which a sense of being in-between is established.

The first page of the novel draws a curtain between the Smales family and July in which master- servant relationship can be seen. This is seen in the lines, when "July bent at the doorway and began that day for them as his kind has always done for their kind." (JP 1) This statement at once divides people into factions where one has to serve the other for a living. The passage then goes on with July entering the Smales room to serve tea in bed, "No knock, but

July, their servant, their host bringing two pink glass cups of tea and a small tin of condensed milk, jaggedly-opened, specially for them, with a spoon in it”.(JP 1) Here, Gordimer clearly gives us concrete images of the master-servant relationship where the Smales are whites and privileged, the “Self” whereas on the other hand July being the black native who brings “tea-tray with black hands smelling of lifebuoy soap.”(JP 1) is marginalized as the “Other”. The cause of this division is clearly a matter of race. Apart from race, it is the theme of materialism and possession that becomes directly associated with the power of the Smales in the white society. At the beginning of the black revolution, ownership and economic prosperity were seen to be the basis of white authority. Whites lived a luxurious life. The Smales thus went on hunting trips and could afford to entertain their friends by throwing lavish parties. They owned “A seven-roomed house and a swimming-pool” (JP 25) and a bakkie. The bakkie reflected their upper class status as it was bought not out of necessity but for Bam’s personal contentment on his fortieth birthday where the narrator comments “the vehicle was bought for pleasure, as some women are said to be made for pleasure” (JP 6). Moreover Gordimer makes it quite evident that the Smales are happy in spending money and “they had no interest in feeding rabbits” (JP 6) The happiness comes from their privilege in the society that gives them the power to rule over others and once this privilege is torn apart they become greatly shocked at the adverse situation where they have lost their powerful position as colonizers, and are trying to adjust with this inversion of the power-play. According to Dominic Head,

“the situation of the Smales’ new dependence on their former servant creates a simple reversal of the power relationship, but it also produces a complex analysis of the network of forces that has created these individuals and the matrix in which they interact” (Head 125).

It is here that the merging of the whites and blacks reflect a huge gap in the social structure. The whites are stereotyped by the villagers in July's village as they are constantly referred to as the "whites". For them whites correspond to being superior, powerful but nonetheless suspicious creatures. The creation of suspicion is probably because of the native's lack of contact with the white people. It is apparent when Gordimer explains July's mother's feeling when she comes in contact with white skinned people for the first time.

The labeling of the whites as colonizers stereotype them as deceiving, cunning and harmful to the native blacks and for this reason July's mother fears that they are no longer safe with the whites in their midst; "What will the white people do to us now, God must save us ... White people. They are very powerful, my son. They are very clever. You will never come to the end of the things they can do" (JP 20-21)

The communication gap is present in almost all matters of importance such as education, economic, and culture but most importantly through language. Not only are the blacks unable to understand the whites but the same occurs to the Smales who fail to acquire the native African language thus failing to understand. However, July's and the Smales terms of communication were mostly "based on orders and responses, not the exchange of ideas and feelings" (p. 67) thus implying that language proved to be functional and kept both races at a distance from one another.

July's village creates a sense of awe in the Smales. They cannot relate their luxurious city life to this new rural setting. In this natural atmosphere, there is a constant presence of foul filth, muddy huts, dung floors, dirty water where "rivers carried the risk of bilharzias infection". (JP 9)

This conveys the impression that such a setting is integral and intrinsic to black life. But for the whites it becomes a huge change that they cannot adapt to.

Bam Smales and his wife Maureen Smales, despite trying to establish a firm ground in this African land, and presumably with the people as well, somehow turn out to be victims of the society since neither of them are committed to the societal values and what the society expects of them. As a result, they remain outsiders and alienated subjects. In their relocation, Gordimer tries to underscore the difficulties and adversities that white families encounter in the interregnum: "they might find they had lived out their whole lives as they were, born white pariah dogs in a black continent" (JP 8) According to Homi Bhabha "this process is relocation of home to another territory where the occupants cross to another culture" (Bhabha 13) and hence the Smales are no longer living their former Euro-centric life instead they have to adjust to the native ethnic and cultural values. As a consequence, disintegration in their characteristics starts.

On the other hand, it is their children who seem to adapt to the new structure quite easily. They start playing like the native children; here Gina befriends a native boy named Nyiko whom she becomes closely attached to. Victor and Royce, the sons get involved in games the locals play. They "were playing with skeletal carts, home-made of twisted wire by the black children, they had exchanged for the model cars from Victor's racing track"(JP 39) and Gina "was eating mealie-meal with her fingers"(JP 39) Maureen has no longer to be bothered about her children for "they knew how to look after themselves, like the black children"(JP 125). Besides she thought that all her children had acquired immunity against diseases just like the native children and probably they had. Stephen Clingman states,

"both Maureen and her husband Bam, having fled for safety with their servant July to his rural home while revolution shakes the rest of South Africa, are in a way too old for any immediate transformations..., but it is mainly in their children that the novel's cultural hopes are invested"(17).

So it may be the children who will show a positive outcome in the whole story.

Furthermore, Gordimer's choice of title of the novel is quite an ambiguous one since we are left asking ourselves who are July's people. It could be his native people who he is culturally, socially associated to, but on the other hand, it could be the Smales family where he has spent fifteen years serving them. The progression of the novel slowly shows how Gordimer places July as the leader of the Smales family thus setting them under his control. Initially, July becomes an object of the upper middle class gaze. Ahmed refers to Fanon's explanation of how the body is "made black by becoming the object of the hostile white gaze" (Ahmed 153). Hence the white gaze, the gaze from the perspective of a person who is white, objectifies the "Other" body. This objectification of the "Other" disregards their experience of the world, inflicting one gaze over the other. Fanon implies that the process of this "Othering" is done through race. Therefore the white family is unaware of July's true identity despite living together for so many years. Moreover, they have eradicated July's real name Mwawate where July was "a name for the whites to use" and for "fifteen years they had not been told what the chief's subject really was called" (JP 120). July's native name preserves his ethnic identity thus giving him an Afro-centered identity. It is only when the whites are in his territory that there is a reversal in roles; that of master-servant, colonizer-colonized relationship. Initially, he "appears to be their servant [and] their host.... He remains the white family's saviour, but as time goes on they become his people"(JP 3). Thus he takes on the role of the colonizer where there is a visible "transformation

from servant to protector to commander"(Heywood 4). He stops being submissive, timid and respectful to the Smales. He takes possession of the bakkie from the Smales and learns to drive in a few days. Consequently, the Smales become his subjects and have to abide by his way of living. Such a perspective is seen in Mongane Wally Serote's statement that "blacks must lead and whites must follow, blacks must talk and whites must listen." (Yelin 134-135).

Even after leaving their residence and fleeing to the village with their servant, Bam continues to exercise his power through his material tools. These possessions are his radio, bakkie and gun. The bakkie was to help him escape the warzone and reflected his superior status over the villagers who had seen nothing like it before. Nevertheless the bakkie that was "bought for fun turned out to be the vehicle: that which bore them away" (JP 9). It is scrupulously readjusted by July as the only means of storing their groceries from the distant Indian store. It also was a place where he could satisfy his sexual urges with Maureen. On the other hand, the gun as JanMohamed identifies, is the "only means of self-protection and the emblem of mastership" (JanMohamed 142). With this Bam provides food for his family by hunting wart-hogs and therefore proving his masculinity and selfhood. This is identified by Nicholls where he mentions, "Bam's masculinity, meanwhile, is being expressed in his role as hunter and provider"(Nicholls 12). So, he according to Simone de Beauvoir occupies "the Self" or the subject where he is essential, absolute and transcendental. With the gun going missing, Bam's situation upturned as "the theft of the gun is a devastating blow to Bam's power and pride both in societal and psychological terms"(JP 15). For him it immediately becomes an ultimate transformation as he can no longer exercise his power. Bam is a consistent performer of patriarchal norms with his desperate attempt to continue this role as a provider for the family and

the community. He builds a water tank in the village for everyone to use with his architectural skills but despite his effort the dignity of his profession had been ruptured when he loses his tools of power; "And here; what was he here, an architect lying on a bed in a mud hut, a man without a vehicle" (JP 98). The strength of his patriarchal authority and the headship of his family are displaced to a strange place in the end, he becomes a resigned, reserved and failed man, unable to fit in where he loses his selfhood

Maureen, being the daughter of the shift boss for the Western area Gold Mines: her class status allowed her to have her own agency where at a very young age she could dream of becoming a ballerina. This dream barely comes true as she has to accept the structures set by the society in which there are different sets of structures for masculinity and femininity. Men and women were assigned different roles by the society. A woman needed to be dependent on her father and husband. According to Andre Brink, "In the South African context designated by the narrative, in the black community as emphatically as in the white, both these [gender] roles have been sanctioned, institutionalised and circumscribed by the "system" (Brink 161). Although she was white and had more power than a black woman she could not escape the patriarchal system where "Marriage is the only destiny traditionally offered to women by society" (Beauvoir 415). It is only after her marriage that she struggles with defining herself apart from her wealth and social status. She becomes enrolled as a wife and mother whose tasks are involved in everyday household regimes. Her feminine role also includes supervising the servants for household tasks. On their journey to July's village, while Bam takes his gun and radio, Maureen takes household necessities and medicines for her family. This shows her role as the traditional Western woman.

In the village all women are assigned to daily menial tasks which have to be performed. July explains that “women have their work. They must do it. This is their place, we are always living here and they are doing all things, all things how it must be” (JP 97). Thus all women become a homogenized entity within the patriarchal order. André Brink notes that black women affirm their identity and realize self-fulfillment even from “a position of subservience performing menial tasks, “working in the fields, fetching and carrying, washing and cooking and cleaning (both for their own families and for the whites in their midst)”. (p. 168) But Maureen finds it hard for the black woman to provide food for her family. This may be due to “the extra sense of whiteness, of having always been different, always favored always shielded from the vulnerability of poverty and powerlessness” (Gordimer, 2010, p. 426). She cannot easily trust the black women. As a result, Maureen tells July that she does not want the other women to find food for her family saying “I must do it myself” (JP 96). This determination of hers is manifested when she rolls up her jeans and works with black women in the field; “they worked along a donga like a team, unspokenly together, now side by side, now passing and repassing each other, closely”(JP 92).

Maureen imagined herself to be an enlightened and liberal white South African, treating her servants well and refusing to call them “boy,” but the experience of being at the mercy of July in his village had made her confront her unaccepted prejudices and sense of entitlement. Trapped between the roles of a woman and a colonizer, Maureen has to sacrifice her own desire and selfhood. Her superior racial identity makes her “Self” but her inferior gender status marks her as the gendered “Other”. The male-governed South Africa allowed men keep “in their hands all concrete powers; since the earliest days of the patriarchate they have thought best to keep woman

in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her; and thus she has been definitely established as the Other”(Beauvoir 171)

Although the black huts are the only safe haven away from the flames that had struck Johannesburg, Maureen’s response to July’s mother’s hut on the first day is disgust at the conditions even though this is the only shelter and refuge for her and her family. She sees it as

“a stiff rolled-up cowhide, a hoe on a nail, a small pile of rags and a part of a broken Primus stove, left against the wall. The hen and chickens were moving there; but the slight sound she heard did not come from them. There would be mice and rats. Flies wandered the air and found the eyes and mouths of her children, probably still smelling of vomit, dirty, sleeping, safe.” (JP 4).

Living in such conditions, her body slowly becomes a part of this filth where for the first time she notices that she starts smelling bad between her legs. As she is mimicking the lives of the natives for a living, her overall appearance is no longer distinct from the native’s. Maureen and her husband’s poor and needy conditions are even more disgraceful than the natives: “In clean, un-ironed clothes they were shabbier than July and Daniel.” (JP 103) This is why other people find it difficult to believe that she was once a rich white woman as she does not meet July’s wife’s, Martha’s perception of a “white woman”. July’s wife Martha cannot digest the fact that Maureen is collecting leaves and doing agrarian work because she cannot believe that white supremacy can ever disintegrate.

Maureen is wholly dependent on July as he has helped her family escape, providing them with food and refuge. Carolyn K. Plummer (1990) suggests that Gordimer is “simply taking an ironic view of the reversal of fortunes for white South Africans who find themselves at the mercy of

their black house-hold servants” (JP 71) Being dependent on July does not make her give up her previous attitude as being his “Madam”. She cannot totally accept the new settings and rules of July’s village. She stills acts as if July is her servant as her egoistic voice takes control. She accuses him of thievery, asks him to return the bakkie keys, orders him to go and find Bam’s lost gun and bring it back. Moreover she threatens to reveal July’s relationship with other women back in the city to his wife. Such a behavior angers July who has forever been loyal to her. With his new power to act, he tells her that she should “tell everybody you trust your good boy. You are good madam, you got good boy.”(JP 70) July is neither completely opposed to the Smales authority, nor does he completely act in accordance with it. July perceives the fact that he has been discriminated and mistreated by Maureen. He no longer feels the need to serve anyone as he has power now. This abrupt shift of power leaves Maureen confused, fractured, ambivalent and fearful. “She had never been afraid of a man. Now comes fear . . . from this one, from him. It spread from him” (JP 98)

The final line, when “she runs” towards the unknown helicopter without concerning herself about anyone or anything perhaps leaves it up to the reader to decide exactly where Maureen is going, what future she is running to, and away from what past. As Bailey points out,

“What Maureen runs to is a return to the illusion of identity created by a world of privilege and possession. What she runs from is her failure to find any creative source for re-birth.” (Bailey 222)

Her ambivalent position places her in a state where she understands that she has finally lost her individuality and selfhood thus making the “discovery that she has no substance and no self” (Bailey 215) For her “The running takes her beyond all domestic, motherly, daughterly or wifely

roles". (Brink 175) She is desperate to flee from the societal structure as she no longer understands her position within it. Gordimer explains her run "like a solitary animal at the season when animals neither seek a mate nor take care of young, existing only for their lone survival, the enemy of all that would make claims of responsibility." (JP 160).

Gordimer probably tries to end the novel in such a way that it gives us hope of a utopian future which according to Erritoumi *July's People*

"exposes the impasse to which apartheid condemned interracial relations" and "equally envisions a utopian future in which South Africans try to overcome their intractable social and economic problems" (Erritoumi 74)

In my next chapter, I will show how the overturning of position of both the colonizer and the colonized finally surfaces in post-apartheid South Africa.

CHAPTER - 3

DISGRACE (1999) - J.M. COETZEE

Born in South Africa, John Maxwell Coetzee was the first novelist to win the Booker Prize twice; firstly, for writing *Life & Times of Michael K*, which was written in 1983 and secondly for *Disgrace*, which was written in 1999. Additionally, in 2003 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Most of his novels are characterized by meandering associations of political, intellectual, aesthetic and idealistic issues. However, *Disgrace* is written at the edge of the “new” South Africa, five years after the closing stages of the apartheid regime that had segregated the black population and denied them all basic rights. Thus the novel deals with binaries such as black and white, powerful and powerless, immigrants and natives. All together the shift of power relations is highlighted within these binaries. Unlike *The Grass is Singing* and *July's People*, which happens during the colonial regime, we see in *Disgrace* the aftermath of what the colonial heritage has left behind leading to an upheaval of the society, in which the Self and the Other become distorted . It can be read, as pointed out by Charles Sarvan,

“as a political text, a post-apartheid work that deals with the difficulties confronting the white community in South Africa and with some of the choices available to them.” (Charles, 2004).

Hence, the novel reflects how the people deal with the shift in the social order in post-apartheid South Africa where the whites no longer hold any significant authority. Rather the position of the black natives in the society is shown to ascend gradually. The novel also describes the sexual exploitation of white women as reparation for colonialism where rape had been a tool for

colonial subjugation. This rape becomes “a war of dispossession... a male war” (Nixon 77) where women had always been “ordinarily institutionalized as male property” (Nixon 77).

The novel is exclusively stylistic because even though it is written by a third person narrator, the protagonist, David Lurie’s point of view seems to dominate the entire story. The reader is thus lead through the novel through his perspective. For this reason, the characters do not seem to have their own opinions or views but rather what Lurie creates for the readers. Lurie’s status as a professor of Communications at Cape Town University shows him to be a scholar and hence a powerful man which places him at the centre. The reason for his sense of control is due to the core of his social values in which he had grown up in; one which was set up by the patriarchal society. As Stratton asserts, Lurie has occupied for most of his life a position of centrality, “a world of white patriarchal distinctions, rules and logic” (Stratton 83). This placed men above women and, in a post-apartheid era; women became a new ‘other’.

The first example of the binary of the Self and Other is created via the image of the Muslim prostitute Soraya. She is side-lined as Coetzee brings the essence of the Oriental through her background. Lurie translates her name as ‘the dark one’ (Disgrace 18), which straight away adds a layer of biased political views and discriminatory social ideals to his ‘affair’. Coming from the East makes her desirable and “exotic” and “entirely satisfactorily” (Disgrace 1). During the colonial period the East was seen to signify a mysterious land that had to be explored by Western settlers. In the same way, the Eastern woman or the woman of colour became an object of desire that had to be conquered. This “Otherness” is formed through culture, politics and history as according to Homi Bhaba,

“There is always a boundary between these two binaries as it is not possible to locate oneself without locating the other: Therefore, otherness is a historically, politically

and culturally constructed category. The unequal power relationship reinforces prejudice, stereotypes and inferiority on the part of the other and projects a false representation of their reality.”

This colonial history interferes with the characters day to day lives which lead to the ‘private lives’ of the citizens being invaded by the ‘public domain’. The ramifications of apartheid era caused violence to penetrate private spaces. From the offset of the novel the reader is very aware of David’s ‘conventional patriarchal and colonial prerogative’ towards women as Boehmer writes (Boehmer 344). Eventually, this attitude brings about his disgrace where he can no longer cling to the centre. In contrast to his centrality, every time he encounters his female partners in sexual relations, they are shown as quiet and docile. In fact this is how he marginalizes them since patriarchal society sees women as inferior to men. His first physical association with a woman is shown to be with an Indian prostitute named Soraya. Although we are not given much information about her identity, “her honey-brown body”, “long black hair” and “dark liquid eyes” homogenized her as a “Third World Woman” (Mohanty) where coloured women such as her are driven to prostitution as a profession to make a living. According to Sheila Jeffrey prostitution is a “commercial sexual violence” (Jeffrey 259) in which sex involves woman as a whole and when she sells sex, she is selling herself and therefore defining herself, or is being defined, as a social subordinate. Kathleen Barry for example, writes:

“When the human being is reduced to a body, objectified to sexually service another, whether or not there is consent, violation of the human being has taken place. [...] In the fullness of human experience, when women are reduced to their bodies, and in the

case of sexual exploitation to sexed bodies, they are treated as lesser, as other, and thereby subordinated.”(Barry 23-24)

Lurie can easily exploit his female counterparts as he radiates a strong sense of possession over his women. Coetzee suggests that Lurie’s sexuality is linked to a sense of authority and entitlement but when he gets involved in a sexual relationship with his student Melanie, he was accused of sexual harassment causing this sense of authority to become a matter of disgrace. Although his status as a professor had given him a platform to reflect his higher social position in society, it became diminished the moment he crossed the boundaries set within the social order; by being sexually involved with his student. When his shameful deeds get revealed in he decides to resign from his profession in order to avoid further public humiliation. He becomes “no longer marketable” since the scandal will always “follow” him and “stick” to him (Disgrace 88). The only way to hide from his misdeeds was to move away from the centre, away towards the periphery, that is, from the town to the countryside (Cape Town to Salem). Lurie undertakes a journey through which his dominant status eventually disintegrates since the novel explores both white dominance and the overcoming of white dominance (Boehmer 344).

According to Miloslawa Stepień, the title of the novel “could refer to three actions in the story: David being accused of sexual molestation, Lucy’s rape, and the disgrace of the dying dogs, the ones David helps put to sleep” (219). Because of these occurring instances of disgrace, Coetzee shows how the binaries get caught up in a vague notion in which the people in power seem to collapse and are weakened. However, despite this alteration from the old to the new, the inhabitants of South Africa seem not to have forgotten what they had experienced in the past.

This becomes quite evident through the characters. One such occurrence is when one of the commission members claims Lurie's sexual harassment of Melanie to be racially motivated.

“We are again going round in circles, Mr. Chair. Yes, he says, he is guilty; but when we try to get specificity, all of a sudden it is not abuse of a young woman he is confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist, with no mention of the pain he has caused, no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is part.”(Disgrace 53)

Lurie thrusts himself upon Melanie as she “averts herself” (Disgrace 25) resembling the colonizers thrust on the lands which they had brought under their command. Through the process of Orientalization, as stated by Edward Said, the East was inevitably portrayed and identified as “the Other” a subordinate counterpart of the omniscient West. In *Disgrace*, Coetzee not only tries to make the point of ‘otherness’ in the case of rape, but through this ‘otherness’ he is metaphorically picturing the rape of South Africa by the imperialistic Empire, through the black resistances and also as a female other.

Regardless of Melanie being a woman of colour, or in other words an inferior being, she is able to cause the downfall of Lurie as her rape is revealed in public and steps are taken seriously by the University authority. Melanie may have remained quiet when Lurie had usurped her body but she does not remain silent for long but chooses to speak for herself as she brings a charge of “harassment of students by teachers” (Disgrace 39) against Lurie. Lurie however imagines that she did so under the influence of her father and cousin Pauline. So he refuses to read her statement in which she clearly specifies the charges she has brought against him. In this

way Lurie asserts his domination by keeping her silent and passive or as Gayatri Spivak would say keeping Melanie as “the silent subaltern”

Despite Melanie’s subordinate position her rape goes viral whereas on the other hand, Lurie’s daughter Lucy’s rape by black men becomes a matter of secrecy. The role reversals of the perpetrators being black, permit the readers to perceive the method of patriarchy working in both the colonizer and the colonized, both refusing agency to the female.

Lucy is introduced as an independent woman: “a solid countrywoman, a boervrou” (Disgrace 60) where she owns a farmhouse and makes a living by herself. She is a subsistence farmer who sells her produce in a market stall nearby Grahamstown and runs a kennel on the side, in an implicit recoil from her father’s way of life and his values. However, she is shown to break the certain norms that the patriarchal society was constructed of. This is apparent through her relationship with another female partner Helen. Her homosexuality in 20th century South Africa could have resulted in her being considered ‘hunnable’ (Disgrace 105), which Graham believes ‘may have provoked her attackers’. (Graham 439) The narrative speaks through David as it stresses “raping a lesbian is worse than raping a virgin” (Disgrace 105). Even though Lucy is an heir of the colonial enterprise, her gender does not allow her access to its dominant discourse. As colonialism and patriarchy go hand in hand, Lucy steps off the pedestal: from the centre of power to the periphery of the powerless. As a white person, she may enjoy certain privileges, but being a woman she suffers from the general agony of domination and confinement a woman has to endure, where at the end of the day, she is required to remain subordinate to her opposing gender, that is, man. Lucy’s rape becomes an exercise of power by the new power breakers in South Africa. However, sexual exploitation of white women by black men is used as a repair for colonialism which somehow resonates to the biblical law, “an eye for

an eye". This is why Lucy's rape becomes a violation in the eyes of Lurie whereas in the case of Melanie he does not frame himself as a rapist where he describes 'not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core.'(Disgrace 25).

Even though Lucy is a native of South Africa, her social, racial and linguistic aspects place her above her other counterpart, the black native; for which she can be directly related to the position of a colonizer. As she is the owner of a farm, she asserts power of being at the core, being the "Self" and thus indirectly she asserts power on those subordinate to her. In this case, this subordinate character is Petrus, a black man who claims to be "the gardener and the dog-man" (Disgrace 64). Petrus is thus at the beginning shown as any other black native who makes a living by serving the white man. Here, Coetzee reflects the binary of the master-slave relationship thus giving a solid picture of the colonizer and the colonized. However, this binary no longer remains sturdy when we see the roles getting reversed in this post-Apartheid time. As Frantz Fanon has mentioned in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*;

"This is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thoughts, the equal value of their intellect."(Fanon 13)

This is done through the process of mimicry. For Bhabha, mimicry is a strategy of colonial knowledge for an acceptable, revised "Other" to assist colonial domination. Firstly, the colonized has to modify his behavior to resemble his master, believing that this will give him a platform to exercise power that is equivalent to the whites. In doing so, he has to forget his own identity while knowing that he will just be an imitator. After all, "the black man wants to be like the

white man. For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white". (Fanon 14) The black natives in the novel use the same colonial strategies. One major reason of this behavioral pattern is the long term sufferings brought about by the long history of colonization which did not end with white disempowerment, So, in Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, we find the blacks mimicry of the Westerners does not stop with merely adopting the English language and farming skills, instead they are mimicking whites rape, too. This is quite evident in the words uttered by one of Lucy's rapists; Pollux who shouts at both Lurie and Lucy, "We will kill you all!" (*Disgrace* 207)

As a result, Lucy's rape is a consequence of the black man's revenge on the white man and she becomes an easy target because of the fact that she belongs to the weakest sex in the same manner that leads to Mary Turner's death in *The Grass is Singing*. Lucy's rape plays an important role in creating the 'third space' or 'liminal space' described by Bhaba that creates ambivalence in the characters. The rape not only displaces her from her former position but also brings about other shifts in power relations. Firstly, the father-daughter relation was rapidly deteriorating to the point that the 'two of them are like strangers in the same house.' (*Disgrace* 246) and Lucy tells Lurie that he can never understand what she has been going through, making him feel powerless and humiliated since he was not able to protect his daughter. Secondly, despite her being a homosexual, she is forced to succumb to a relationship with a man to the extent that she has to marry him. Thirdly, the master-slave relationship of her and Petrus becomes insignificant when he claims an upper hand. To him, "Lucy is still chickenfeed: an amateur, an enthusiast of the farming life rather than a farmer. Petrus would like to take over Lucy's land" (*Disgrace* 117) Coetzee also mentions that "Petrus has a vision of the future in which people like Lucy have no place" (*Disgrace* 118). These lines show how Petrus shifts from the periphery to the centre highlighting the ambiguity of the two positions.

Unlike Melanie, who has made her rape a public issue, Lucy on the other hand is determined to keep her rape highly personal making it a very private matter. She is quite reluctant to protest because she believes that it was history repeating itself and she could not show her face because of the humiliation that rape had brought upon her body.

“She does not reply. She would rather hide her face, and he knows why. Because of the disgrace. Because of the shame. That is what their visitors have achieved; that is what they have done to this confident, modern young woman. Like a stain the story is spreading across the district. Not her story to spread but theirs: they are its owners. How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for.”(*Disgrace* 115)

The rapists have succeeded in correcting Lucy's homosexuality since she eventually adapts to the role of a conventional woman by deciding to marry Petrus as she is aware of the power relations in contemporary South Africa which have gradually shifted over time. The outcome of the rape had made her pregnant thus she becomes placed in a position where she has no other option but to marry Petrus for the surety of her and her baby's protection. “Objectively I am a woman alone. I have no brothers, I have a father, but he is far away and anyhow powerless in the terms that matter here. To whom can I turn for protection, for patronage?” (*Disgrace* 204) Being a woman she has to rely on a man to fulfill the gender norms assigned to her. She can no longer be the independent woman since her role places her within the household where the man is the breadwinner and where the woman is assigned to take care of the household and looking after the children.

Lucy is compared to the “*Sabine women*”, who were willing to sacrifice themselves by bringing peace between the different racial groups in South Africa. As rape has long been a metaphor for colonization, it is the woman who feels that she has to sacrifice herself for peace thus accepting her ambivalent condition.

Being aware of this ambivalent shift in her positionality she tells Lurie that the violence that had been acted upon her was a matter of “not slavery”, but of “subjection, subjugation” (*Disgrace* 159). The novel therefore foregrounds the occurrence of sexual assault and its relation to the power relations of patriarchy that is contextualized within a colonial history of female oppression. Throughout the novel Lucy’s desires are kept suppressed.

Since Lucy’s fears and desires circulate around the established notions of both the colonial endeavor and the patriarchal concept, she does not give the reader a complete picture of the rape being carried out. The reader pictures the rape through the descriptions of Lurie who is not fully present during the incident. So Lucy’s rape is something only women can understand as Bev Shaw in a conversation with Lurie says, “Not your business, she seems to be saying. Menstruation, childbirth, violation and its aftermath: blood matters; a woman’s burden, a woman’s preserve”(Disgrace 104). This is probably why Lucy decides to deal with her situation by choosing not to leave the farm as leaving the farm will make her feel defeated and “will taste that defeat for the rest of my life”(Disgrace 161). Lucy describes men as evil individuals who abuse the laws of nature by forcing themselves upon women.

“Hatred... When it comes to me and sex, David nothing surprises me anymore. Maybe for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know.

When you have sex with someone strange—when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her—isn't it a bit like killing? (*Disgrace* 158)

Hence, her sexual encounter resembles murder. Her life had been taken away from her the moment her rapists intrude her body.

On the contrary, her rapists get away with the crime without any punishment. Out of the three rapists, Pollux being juvenile shows how the new generation is learning to avenge for the former crimes committed by the whites. Alongside, Petrus gains the position of the landowner and also the one who gains power over the white woman Lucy consequently reversing the master-slave relation.

In conclusion, Coetzee attempts to show the subject and the object, the colonizer and the colonized, the Self and the Other, and to prove that both colonialism and male dominance suppress women.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction, this dissertation probes into three African novels from a post-colonial perspective bringing out problems of race, culture, and gender. This post-colonial dissection of the novels is brought to life by the colonial impact on the lives of both the colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha mentions how a postcolonial critique emerges from colonial experiences.

“Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of “minorities” within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic “normality” to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities, peoples.” (Bhabha 171)

All the characters undergo displacement of identity and selfhood in the South African settings that Lessing, Gordimer and Coetzee bring to life. This is due to an imbalance in the power structure as both the colonizer and the colonized come face to face with each other. As the whites and the blacks co-exist, there is an intermingling of culture, language and norms. The blacks are stripped of their own culture and language as they have to communicate with their masters. Fanon pointed out that when the black man speaks the language of the white man, the black man assumes the culture and the civilization of his oppressor as he wants to put on the white man's mask. Bhabha looks at this from the point where “The Negro is enslaved by his inferiority, the white man is enslaved by his superiority”. However, this thesis shows how the binaries of Self -

Other, suppresser – suppressed and master – servant are formed, but this dividing line does not remain concrete for too long as it is prone to internal and external changes carving the path to fluidity and instability. This tangibility is evaluated through Bhabha's "Third Space of Enunciation" where the character's identities get constructed and deconstructed. The first phase is through hybridity where the colonizer and colonized merge together causing the subjects to lose their sense of belonging creating a crisis in their identity. The second phase leads to a lack of former identities causing dissatisfaction, fear and frustration within one's self. In other words, it brings about ambivalence of one's positionality within the social structure. This finally leads to the third phase where there is a sense of "in-betweenness" where the power relationships no longer remain steady but are blurred. As a matter of fact, this causes the reversal of binaries where the whites lose their former power and the blacks gain a new power, shifting from the margin to the centre.

I have also tried to explore the white woman's position in a male-dominated society in all three novels. Despite being part of the ruling class, they never become a part of the dominant discourse as they suffer from male subordination, repression and intolerance. They can be seen as upholders of white supremacy as they become a medium through whom culture gets transmitted. All three woman protagonists; Mary, Maureen and Lucy become victims of this male dominance as they have to give up their own desires and agencies in order to live in the society. Although they try to cope within South African society and its people, they eventually fail. This is mainly due to the lack of patriarchal power. This causes violations of the female body both psychologically and physically leading to sexual denial, loneliness, rape and even leading to their death.

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