



Disintegration of White Supremacy in South Africa: A Post-Colonial Study of *Disgrace*

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Abstract

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee deals with a South African professor named David Lurie who has been found guilty of sexually assaulting a student. He goes out to visit his daughter Lucy's farm. While he is there, a gang of two men and one boy rapes his daughter. When he later sees the boy at a party thrown by Lucy's neighbour Petrus, he demands justice. He is insulted. Lucy, knowing that white supremacy is no more reconciles with the hate.

Key words: apartheid, white, supremacy, colonial, displacement.

John Maxwell Coetzee (J.M. Coetzee) was born in South Africa on February 9th, 1940. Many found him a reclusive man. He did not journey to London to receive the Booker Prize in 1984 for his novel *The Life and Times of Michael K* and when he again won the honour for his novel *Disgrace* in 1999. In spite of Coetzee's solitude, his books have become worldwide bestsellers. Along with Peter Carey, Coetzee is one of only two writers who have won the Booker Prize twice. In 2003, Coetzee was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*. He was awarded a number of prizes. Although a white writer living in South Africa during apartheid, Coetzee grew to believe in and write with strong anti-imperialist feelings.

"Coetzee in *Disgrace* claims that due to the change in the political system in the post-apartheid South Africa, through which the blacks come to power on the basis of majority rule, the white minorities are subjected to sufferings" (Assefa DT1* and Chernet YA2). Power shifts from white superiority to black superiority and blacks were dominating whites.

Apartheid is an African word which means "apartness". It describes an ideology of racial segregation that led to white domination of the South African state from 1948 to 1994. Apartheid was the codification of the racial segregation that had been practiced in South Africa from the time of the Cape Colony's founding by the Dutch East India Company in 1652. Its emergence in 1948 was adverse to the decolonization process which began in sub-Saharan Africa after World War II. Widely perceived internationally as one of the most abhorrent human rights issues from the 1970s to the 1990s, apartheid conjured up images of white privilege and black marginalization implemented by a police state that strictly enforced black subordination.

During this apartheid period blacks were highly discriminated by whites on their own indigenous land. Repression and violence were practiced by whites on those black societies. Through this Apartheid develops white supremacy. Generally, during the Apartheid era whites dominate blacks in South Africa and also they took every advantage over blacks throughout the country. But

after the end of Apartheid everything was subverted.

After the end of Apartheid, Post-Apartheid period ushered in South Africa. The Apartheid state collapsed and democratic rule was established in 1994. It was the dawn of a new beginning for the new South Africa and the Southern African region. The world hoped that the elaboration of democratic institutions would also inaugurate policies that would surely alleviate poverty and inequality. After Apartheid wipe out, all things were changed in South Africa. White settlers voluntarily gave up their monopoly of political power, and through the process they lost their land, respect, and confidence.

David Lurie is a professor of classics and modern languages at Cape Town Technical University, but, the changing climate is being supplanted by pragmatics and rationality in post-apartheid South Africa, he has been relegated to teaching "communications skills". His feelings of loneliness and obsolescence are rising in a fast changing culture. He is further isolated from social relations by two divorces he undergoes and his recent estrangement from his child, Lucy, who lives on a farm on the Eastern Cape. Lurie's social aloofness has led him to satisfy his sexual urges with a prostitute named Soraya. The parleys were going on smoothly and without creating any problems. However, he destroys the arrangement by attempting to contact her outside their normal meetings. Lurie soon attempts to fill the void with a twenty-year-old student named Melanie Isaacs who is in his Romantic poetry class. Lurie successfully seduces Melanie after a couple of missteps, but she is reticent during the few sexual encounters they have. Melanie's attendance in Lurie's class becomes sporadic. Lurie is gradually losing control of the situation; Melanie's boyfriend harasses him, and his car is vandalized. Lurie's students come to know about the affair. Melanie's father comes to visit him. Lurie evades Mr. Isaacs, who has come to discuss the affair Lurie is having with his daughter; a case of the sexual harassment case is filed against him by the university. Lurie has no patience for the proceedings. He is asked to express regrets and save his job, but he steadfastly refuses; as if he purposefully wishes to destroy himself. Lurie resigns

and moves from Cape Town to his daughter's smallholding in the town of Salem on the Eastern Cape. Lucy lives alone on her small farm, cultivating, raising and selling crops and running a small kennel. Initially, Lurie has difficulty adjusting to the life of the farm but soon he occupies himself volunteering at a local animal shelter, as well as helping Lucy on the farm.

Lucy is attacked by three black men when they are invited inside to use the phone. The men quickly take Lucy into the house, lock the door, and rape her. Lurie awakes to find him being doused with a chemical and set afire; he loses his hair and suffers severe burns to his scalp. The men have killed all but one of the dogs in the kennel and stolen everything of value, leaving the house a shambles. Lucy reports the attack and the burglary but refuses to report their violence on her body. At the end of the story, she submitted herself to the concubines of Petrus who are her cooperator on her land. And her father Lurie starts work in animal's health care center.

There is shift of power. During the Apartheid time, Lurie was dominant and superior under the European power structure, but after 1992, Apartheid left power and the power of white left down. Blacks are no longer submissive for those minor whites. During the Apartheid era whites were respected at every aspect. But the power disintegration of whites' is seen in the novel when the major character David Lurie met with Melanie's boyfriend at his office. The boy's communication with Lurie shows how much he was disrespectful for the teacher. Petrus asks Lucy to be with him because after she is raped by gangs she lost her confidence and she loses her freedom. So, to be secure she accepts Petrus proposal as it put in the extract: "...I am a woman alone. I have no brothers. I have 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)

In the Post- Apartheid era, there is whites' disrespect. The major character harassed by a boy at his office even though he is white. Feeling of insecurity is noticed among Whites. Lucy strongly believes in the powerlessness of the white. Besides, Coetzee in the portrayal of the white characters

confirms the powerfulness of the black characters. Consequently, he claims that the white characters lose everything under the black political system in the novel.

Lucy was raped by the relative of Petrus, her co-operator on the farm, and got pregnant. It was a big crime, an act as a warning to both David and Lucy. As Lucy stated in the novel, "What if...what if that is the price one has to pay for staying on?... They see me as owning something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors..." (*Disgrace* 158). Lucy realized that the white is on the debit side of the ledger and will live in South Africa as intruder. And in order to continue life on that rural area, Lucy chose to be silent and made concessions to Petrus. She sold her land to Petrus to get protection for the land. (However, land ownership has always been the great political and strategic support of the European colonizers). This is one way and factor that shows white disintegration in the novel *Disgrace*. On the other hand Lucy not only sold the land to Petrus, but also she serves him as concubines. So she scarified herself and having baby again she pays as her property to live on that area. On the way of this, she becomes a dog woman who gave in everything for shelter and protection. "Lucy is our benefactor" says Petrus; and then to Lucy: "You are our benefactor.... A distasteful word, it seems to him, double edged, souring the moment..." (*Disgrace* 129). The major character Lucy is not respected by her co-operator even though after he takes what she has. During the Apartheid period a series of Land Acts set aside more than 80 percent of the country's land for the white minority, and "pass laws" required non-whites to carry documents authorizing their presence in restricted areas. So as a result he, Petrus looks like a financial supporter.

Coetzee in *Disgrace* claims that due to the change in the political system in the post-apartheid South Africa, through which the blacks come to power on the basis of majority rule, the white minorities are subjected to sufferings. Nevertheless, the author's principal objective in the novel is reflecting an idea that whites, once highly dominated are violated by blacks in South Africa even though the black system has its own problem.

Disgrace of the major characters, of Lurie and his daughter Lucy shows in the novel in different ways. Lurie is forced to reconciliation for his wrong deeds on the school girl at the university and also, her boyfriend disrespected him at his own office. On the other hand, the other character Lucy is raped by gangs, has lost security, and at the end, she loses her land and she becomes Petrus, her co-operator, concubines in the novel.

Displacement from land ownership is depicted in the novel. Ashcroft, Griffith stated a major feature of post-colonial literature is the concern with place and displacement. And also as they mentioned the dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by process of settlement, intervention or mixture of the two (qted in Assefa DT1* and Chernet YA2). In one way or another way, the major character, Lucy loses her land in the novel. The other disintegrations of white supremacy are shown in the novel, after the major character David flees to his daughter, who lives country.

All of Coetzee's writings are similar in that they often center on a solitary character. No direct moral is ever given; rather, situations are set up for the reader to consider. Coetzee's aim is not to provide solutions but to highlight problems and have the reader form their own conclusions.

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