

Disintegration of White Supremacy in the Novel Disgrace by Coetzee after the End of Apartheid System in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper aims to show the disintegration of white supremacy in the novel Disgrace after the end of apartheid system in South Africa. Since the study entirely confined to a text, the research methodology employed in this study is textual analysis. 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. The author in Disgrace concentrates on resisting the entire black's system in the new South Africa. The novel tried to show whites life in South Africa after the end of Apartheid era.

Keywords: Disintegration; White supremacy; Novel disgrace; Apartheid; South Africa

Introduction

According to O'Neil racial problems of South Africa basically sprung from Apartheid system. By having this topic the novel Disgrace raised so many issues which related with South Africa and Post-Apartheid era [1].

Regardless of the historical reality of the racial problems during the Apartheid period (1948-1994), which had seriously hurt black South African, in relatively speaking, there is a significant change regarding the racial problem in post-apartheid South Africa. Thompson this, however, doesn't mean that there is no racial problem in the country these days. In connection with this some scholars contend that no matter how there is a considerable change of racial stratification which was once legally practiced throughout the country, there are still the mentality or the feeling of discrimination which quite often reflected through resistance by those who used to practice it officially [2].

The collapse of the apartheid state and the ushering of democratic rule in 1994 represented a new beginning for the new South Africa and the Southern African region. There were widespread expectations and hopes that the elaboration of democratic institutions would also inaugurate policies that would progressively alleviate poverty and inequality. Fourteen years into the momentous events that saw Nelson Mandela become the president of South Africa, critical questions are being asked about the country's transition, especially about its performance in meeting the targets laid down in its own macro-economic programs in terms of poverty and inequality, and the consequences of the fact that the expectations of South Africans have not been met.

It is true that much of the history of this country coincides with racial problems even during the time of post-Apartheid. And this paper tried to show the major difficulty whites face after Apartheid era in South Africa, disintegration of white supremacy in the novel

Disgrace. J. M. Coetzee's eighth novel, Disgrace, his first about his native South Africa after its transition to black-majority rule, constitutes a direct and rather ominous meditation on that fear. Disgrace won the Booker Prize in 1999, making Coetzee the only author to win twice [3].

Statement of the Problem

The researcher asked couples basic questions which related with South Africa history by focusing on the novel Disgrace. Because the novel highly concerned with racial, blacks and whites power conflict, as a major theme. What Coetzee is at pains in this novel is that there is no place for whites in the post colony. The post colony breeds nightmares for whites (i.e. violence, chaos and raping of white women) [4]. The researcher asked some questions how whites dominated by blacks after Apartheid for the sake of this paper.

- In what ways blacks superior over whites show in the novel Disgrace?
- How whites react for blacks domination during the post-Apartheid era?

Objective of the Study

General objective

The main aim of this paper is to show disintegration of white supremacy in the novel Disgrace after the end of Apartheid system in South Africa.

Specific objectives

This paper had some specific objectives which related with whites life during the time of post-Apartheid in South Africa. These are:

- To show the way how blacks become superior over minorities, whites, after Apartheid.

- To show whites reaction after Apartheid for those blacks domination

Methodology

In order to attain the objective of this paper's aim which is clearly stated above certain methodology that best suit the study has to be employed. Accordingly, as the study entirely confined to a text, the research methodology that considered in the study is textual analysis. Textual analysis is basically restricted to library consultation. The study, in other words, is exclusively performed on the basis of analysis.

Literature Review

Review of related studies

This part basically aims to introduce readers to some related works that were carried out on *Disgrace* because in the researcher assessment there has been hardly found any related works which conducted in the novel under the study in Addis Ababa University except Andualem's thesis; it's those literary studies which were conducted on *Disgrace* overseas that will be reviewed in this section. And also it aims to aware readers about Apartheid era, Post-Apartheid era and whites life in South Africa after the end of segregation in South Africa.

The first thesis which is available at AAU is Andualem Tolessa in 2012 by the title *Post-Apartheid Resistance in Coetzee's Disgrace: Racial complexity in focus*. As he mentioned on his work the novel attempted to claim that the whites are superior which in other words suggests that the blacks are inherently inferior. Thus, Coetzee in *Disgrace* raises a dispute which by implication declares that while the white are out there, it's impossible for the nation to be ruled by the black. For this reason, the racial misconception of the past, which is the basis for the whites to be resistant to black's authority, is evidently manifested in the novel. It's for the purpose of claiming this idea that in one way or the other blames the post-apartheid system of the country. The social, political and racial matters that in a very impressive literary techniques addressed in *Disgrace* on the basis of contrasting the whites with the blacks, is where the author through the characters presents his defiance to the new system that run by the black post-apartheid South Africans. Further, from the white post-apartheid South Africans perspective, the country is in general perceived almost dark and where there is no hope at all. But this paper attention shifts to white superiority to black superiority in the same novel, *Disgrace* and to show the ways how blacks were dominate whites.

The second one is a journal which read by the researcher was done by Mirela Karagic in 2013 by the title *A Postcolonial study of the Representation of the Natives in Relation to the colonizers in The Stranger and Disgrace* [5]. As the journal mentioned *Disgrace* takes place after independence; however, the portrayal of the natives does not differ much from Camus' portrayal, and is also in accordance with postcolonial theories. The females are eroticized and taken advantage of by the white man. The novel *Disgrace* is the sense of dichotomy between the Westerners and the natives – a “We against Them”-attitude where the characters perceive one another as different due to racial differences, where the Westerners see themselves as superior to the natives. However, there has evidently been a power shift in the decolonized society. The white male protagonist Lurie in post-independent South African novel *Disgrace* does have power in some aspects (for instance, he conquers and seduces non-Western females); nevertheless, he loses his position in society by ruining his career and,

hence, loses respect amongst his peers. Furthermore, his daughter is raped by several black males but decides to keep the child that is conceived as a result of this in order to maintain peace. She is somewhat of a hybrid that complies to and accepts the new order, where the white inhabitants are no longer superiors. The white superiority has, thus, lost its power. It is evident that a great deal of the prejudice against the other persists even in a novel written after the independence; however, the power balance has shifted in several aspects. The purpose of this paper is by focusing a single novel; unlike Karagic's work which focuses on two novels, *Disgrace* and to show the life of whites after Apartheid era in South Africa.

The last journal which done on the novel *Disgrace* is by Indu Koul by the title *Racial Complexity: A Dilemma in J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace* [6]. The journal states years of colonial and apartheid history in South Africa have exerted an immense strain on the writers and are the acid test of white liberal sensibility in South Africa. Realism has been preferentially chosen by writers to merge fiction and history. The dilemma before the white writer is whether he can represent the reality through the use of met fictional techniques, metonymy and colonial silence. Sex has been depicted as a metonymy for the exploitation of the blacks by Coetzee in the novel. Lurie, a white man seduces a non-white girl Melanie, though she remains passive throughout the act yet she does not resist. Coetzee remains silent about Melanie's passivity and non-resistance in the novel. Lurie is not given any punishment for seducing Melanie. Lucy suppresses her voice against the crime committed on her and decides to give birth to the child she is carrying as a result of rape. Coetzee again is silent to the manner in which Lucy being a white woman remains voiceless. Thus the novel reveals a quiet and devious voice suited to express the dilemma afflicting a white writer in post-apartheid South Africa. But on this paper the researcher focused on solely on the novel *Disgrace* however Koul tried to discuss by focusing on both the writer of the novel, Coetzee and his work, *Disgrace*. Generally this paper tired to identify the whites suffers in South Africa after Apartheid era in the novel *Disgrace*. And also at the same time the paper tried to express whites' reaction for those blacks domination in the book.

Apartheid system

From 1652 until the end of Apartheid era, 1990's, South Africa had been inhabited and controlled solely by Europeans who invaded the country. Europeans settled on the coast of South Africa on their Eastern journey to Asia. The first permanent settlers were the Dutch, who eventually transformed their settlement in to a colony. The Dutch developed a language stemming from the influence of various groups and called it Afrikaans. Due to the name of the language, the Dutch soon began referring to themselves as the Afrikaners or the Boers. When the Dutch colonized over most of the coast of South Africa, the British began to enter. The British realized the advantages of having a cape colony and soon gained power of it over the Dutch in 1806. In 1814, the coast became known as a British colony. The Dutch, unhappy with the British power and decisions made, began to revolt. Soon enough, a war broke out between the two groups known as the Boer War. Then the war ends by the defeat of Duchess.

After the war British started to establish their apartheid system in South Africa in 1948 gradually. Apartheid, an Afrikaans word meaning “apartness,” describes an ideology of racial segregation that served as the basis for 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 antithetical to the decolonization process begun 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 highly discriminated by whites by their own indigenous land. Repression and violence practiced by whites on those black societies. Through this Apartheid develops white supremacy.

White supremacy is the domination of minorities over the majority of blacks in South African context. It reflected by different ways during that time. For example White farmers had become dependent upon blacks for cheap labor, as were white manufacturers. South Africa had become urbanized. The movement of blacks in the urban areas had exacerbated race relations. Fifty percent of the black population became urban dwellers, living under white controlled city governments. They were working for white businesses and in white homes Blacks operating machinery had replaced the white master-craftsmen of previous generations. The labor of black people had become a mainstay of South Africa's economy, but with wage discrimination. A law had been passed creating what was called a Civilized Labor Policy, which protected the wage levels of white workers and left employers free to hire blacks at wages as low as possible. And there was the Bantu Act of 1953, which took schools away from missions and assured that whites would receive an education that was different from and superior to that of blacks.

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 takes its place.

Post-apartheid and whites life in South Africa

Post-Apartheid refers to the period in South Africa after the end of Apartheid, which was the policy of "separateness" or the legally enforced separation of the races. It dates from 1994 to the present. 1948-1990 is the Apartheid era and also 1991-1993 was the transitional period. (William W.)

The collapse of the Apartheid state and the ushering in of democratic rule in 1994 represented a new beginning for the new South Africa and the Southern African region. There were widespread expectations and hopes that the elaboration of democratic institutions would also inaugurate policies that would progressively alleviate poverty and inequality.

As Melakneh mentioned on his book, *Map of African Literature*, during the Apartheid era literature was largely preoccupied by the theme of violence against the blacks by the ruling white minority. This indicates white supremacy during that time. So, white Supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege. The white supremacy of the society is evident in the fact that whites maintain a structural advantage over people of color in nearly every aspect of life. White people maintain an educational advantage, an income advantage, a wealth advantage, and a political advantage.

South Africa is divided between blacks and whites. The blacks are the majority. During the rule of the whites, many black South African thought they were living in hell. From the perspective of the ordinary black South African, the end of Apartheid (the racial segregation that ended in 1994) means the beginning of a new life [7].

What is taking place in South Africa is such a deed - a deed resounding over the earth — a deed of peace. It brings hope to all South Africans.

F. W. DeKlerk, Nobel lecture, 1993

As it stated on the above after Apartheid all things were changed in South Africa. Probably unique in the history of colonialism, white settlers voluntarily gave up their monopoly of political power. And through the process they lost their land, respect, and confidence.

Analysis and Interpretation

Synopsis of the novel disgrace

David Lurie was once a professor of classics and modern languages at Cape Town Technical University, but, in the changing climate toward pragmatics and rationality in post-apartheid South Africa, he has been relegated to teaching "communications skills," which serves to strengthen his feelings of obsolescence in a rapidly changing culture. Lurie is further alienated from social relations by two divorces and his recent estrangement from his child, Lucy, who lives on the Eastern Cape. Lurie's social aloofness has led him to satisfy his sexual urges with a prostitute named Soraya, until he destroys the arrangement by attempting to contact her outside their normal meetings. Lurie soon attempts to fill the resulting void with a twenty-year-old student in his Romantic poetry class named Melanie Isaacs. Lurie successfully seduces Melanie after a couple of missteps, but she is reticent during the few sexual encounters they have; Lurie is conscious that at least one of these encounters is only barely consensual and is tantamount to rape. Melanie's attendance in Lurie's class becomes sporadic, and it is clear that Lurie is losing control of the situation; Melanie's boyfriend harasses him, and his car is vandalized. Lurie grows increasingly certain that his students know about his affair, and soon his fears are confirmed by a visit from Melanie's father. Lurie evades Mr. Isaacs, who has come to discuss the affair Lurie is having with his daughter; he is not, however, able to evade the sexual harassment case filed against him by the university. Lurie has no patience for the proceedings; he is given ample opportunity to express remorse, enter counseling, and save his job, but he steadfastly refuses. It seems to his colleagues as if he purposefully wishes to destroy himself. He succeeds; 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, raising and selling crops and running a small kennel. Lurie has difficulty adjusting to the life of the farm but soon occupies himself volunteering at a local animal shelter, as well as helping Lucy on the farm. The alien but peaceful routine of the farm lasts until Lurie and Lucy are attacked by three black men they invite inside to use the phone. The men quickly take Lucy into the house and lock the door, and Lurie is knocked unconscious while the men take Lucy to another room 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 were

her cooperator on her land. And her father Lurie starts work in animal's health care center.

Disintegration of white supremacy in the novel disgrace

Penance and reconciliation of whites: Lurie, a professor who taught English literature and Communication Skills in the Technical University of Cape Town is a man who considered himself as attractive and high position. He attracted his student Melanie, a black South African into having sex relationship with him. David at first an aggressive person since he is a white grown man and Melanie is just young and helpless prey for his manipulation. But on the story the unexpected happens to him. Melanie started fight back against her predator. And the university also asked him to report this whole incident but he cast out of the university.

The panel assigned to hear his case, which seems quite pointedly not to include any "white males," insists not only on an admission of guilt this Lurie readily gives but on "confession, repentance, and abasement." But Lurie cannot bring himself to renounce an affair that has engaged his passion and affections, and in any event he will not concede to his inquisitors the right to think his private thoughts:

...I appeared before an officially constituted tribunal, before a branch of the law. Before that secular tribunal I pleaded guilty, a secular plea... Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse...

This shows Lurie impotence to control this scandal and how he disgraced by the students and the staffs around him and he don't wants to tell his affair with her to those members; penance.

... "Now we are truly splitting hairs. You charged me, and I pleaded guilty to the charges. That all you need from me"

"No. we want more. Not a great deal more, but more. I hope you can see your way to clear to giving us that."

"Sorry, I can't."

"David I can't go on protecting you from yourself. I am tired of it, and so is the rest of the committee. Do you want time to rethink?"

"No"

"Very well. Then I can only say, you will be hearing from the Rector."

The above extract shows Lurie forced by his mates to penance his faults and reconcile it but he didn't accept. The impotence of David's to control the whole scandal and symbolized the power exchange between the whites and blacks also shows in the novel. Besides this the other character forced him to penance and reconciliation in front of other members. As Edward Said says in his book Cultural Imperialism, Domination and inequalities of power and wealth are perennial facts of human society [8]. 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 not longer submissive for those minor whites.

As Jane Poyner stated on his book J.M. Coetzee and the paradox of post-colonial Authorship, the other thing which shows in the novel is its major character David Lurie for his affair with one of his female students and his subsequent crises of authority, tacitly calls into question the processes of the much maligned Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) within the context of a nation in transition [9]. The novel asks a truth which should be revealing for the public. The disciplinary committee which established to see his case asks him to

confess his guilty for his affair with his student. The above conversation which done between David and Manas is shows how David was forced to repent his affair.

The other disintegration of whites in the novel shows during the major character Lucy forced the other character; David's to reconcile what he did.

In the novel Lurie tells his daughter, Lucy

"I was offered a compromise which I wouldn't accept,"

She counsels him that to compromise has its place.

"You shouldn't be so unbending, David. It is not heroic to be unbending. Is there time to reconsider?"

The above extract shows reconciliation is a code word for diminished truth. At least one party is in the contract of reconciliation will always be compromised. But as it stated on the above conversation yet compromise should always be regarded as transitory, he contends, enabling progression through an impasse.

Whites disrespect: During the Apartheid era whites were respect at every aspect. But the other power disintegration of whites' shows in the novel during the major character David Lurie met with Melanie's boyfriend at his office. The boy communication with Lurie shows how much he was disrespectful for her teacher.

"Who are you?" he says.

The visitor ignores his question. "You think you are smart," he continues. "A real ladies' man. You think you will still look so smart when your wife hears what you are up to?"

"That is enough. What do you want?"

"Don't you tell me what's enough." The words come faster now, in a pattern of menace.

As it mentioned on the above, the major character harasses by a boy at his office even though he is white.

Whites insecurity: On the novel Petrus asks Lucy to be with him because after she raped by gangs she lost her confidence and she losses her freedom. So, to be secure she accepts Petrus proposal as it put in the below 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?..."

As it put on the above quote, it is certain that she strongly believes in the powerlessness of the white. Besides, Coetzee in the portrayal of the fate of the white characters asserted as they lost almost everything which by inference confirms the powerfulness of the black characters. Consequently, he claims that the white characters lose everything under the black political system in the novel.

Displacement from land ownership: Ashcroft, Griffith stated a major feature of post-colonial literature is the concern with place and displacement [10]. 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. In one way or another way the major character, Lucy lost her land in the novel, Disgrace.

The other disintegration of white supremacy shows in the novel, after the major character David fled to his daughter, who lives country

side in South Africa. After he retreated to his daughter's house in the rural area of South Africa, he expected to have a quiet and peaceful life there. Unfortunately, his moving to in with Lucy was just the beginning of a serious disaster [11]. 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."

On the above 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 from the above extract [12].

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 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...

As it stated on the above the major character Lucy doesn't respected by her co-operator even though after he takes what she has [13]. 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 herself like finical supporter.

Conclusion

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 highly dominated and violated by blacks in South Africa even though the black system has its own problem. Hence, the author in Disgrace concentrates on resisting the entire black's system in the new South Africa.

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

Generally, the novel tried to shows whites life in South Africa after the end of Apartheid era.

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