



Postcolonial Reflections on the Race/Reconciliation Crisis in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

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ABSTRACT

Disgrace is a famous novel written by the award-winning Nobel laureate J.M. Coetzee. The novel highlights the disturbing situation in post-apartheid era when South Africa witnessed the change of power shifting from the Whites to the blacks. It presents the suffering and hardship of the whites after losing their supremacy in post-apartheid period when the practice of racial segregation was abolished in the year 1994. In this troubled situation, there are attempts of reconciliation of races forwarded by some institutions like (TRC). However, these attempts of reconciliation failed because agitation and rage between whites and blacks and the process of accepting each other through certain compensations and paybacks like rape and brutality still exist. The whites still feel that they are supreme in all aspects of life; therefore. They find it difficult to coexist in society and reconcile with the Africans. This paper reflects vividly on the racial conflict and the crisis of reconciliation through a story of rape, sexuality, and violence.

Keywords: *Reconciliation, races, post-apartheid.*

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INTRODUCTION

Coetzee delves extensively into the struggle for racial harmony between whites and blacks, their anguish, and their misery in post-apartheid South Africa. In his famous novel *Disgrace* especially after the Black have restored their freedom, power and domination which deteriorated for centuries. The term "Post-apartheid" is used to describe the era in South Africa after the abolishment of the apartheid system. It was marked by the legal principle of atmosphere separation during Post-Apartheid period is intensively presented through the character of David Lurie and his daughter Lucy.

Reconciliation means fixing relationships that have been hurt by violence and oppression. It tries to improve both the horizontal interconnections between individuals and groups in society, and the vertical connections between individuals and institutions. People usually think of it in the context of formal settlements after times of trouble. Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was setup to establish a multiracial democracy in South Africa which worked through confession and remorse by white South-Africans [1]. In this respect peace and reconciliation of the white and the black is the aim of this commission. However, the act of this commission turns out to be a failure because the confession of the white South Africans are proved to be only empty words. In his *Disgrace*, Coetzee tries to present a real scenario of Post-apartheid South Africa, presenting an allegory of these failure attempts to reconcile between colonizers and colonized. He introduces "an individual resolution to the problem of post-apartheid contemporary South Africa in its entanglements with the legacies of the apartheid era" [1].

"Crisis of Reconciliation and Races in J.M Coetzee's *Disgrace*: A Post-Colonial Perspective"

"To the extent that I am taken as a political novelist, it may be because I take it as a given that people must be treated as fully responsible beings: psychology is no excuse. Politics, in its wise stupidity, is at one with religion here: one man, one soul: no half- measures. What saves me from a merely stupid stupidity, I would hope, is a measure of charity, which is, I suppose, the way in which grace allegorizes itself in the world"

J.M.Coetzee, "Interview"

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee presents characters and turns their world into a microcosm representing their ramifications; for whites is the loss of apartheid era, and for blacks beginning of post-apartheid era.

It is familiar that in all aspects of life the whites preserve structural advantage and educational advantage is one of the domineering aspect of life. During post-apartheid era, universities of South Africa" served according to political economic model because new capitalism demanded it for a docile order the current chaotic scenario" [2]. David Lurie, The white protagonist, and a university lecturer who teaches English Literature and Communication Skills in Cape Technical University, is a fantastic illustration of this idea. He Thinks highly of himself. His daughter Lucy, on the other hand, maintains an opposite character of her father. She is tolerable and self-reliant young girl.

The novel is dismantled through the narratives of Professor David Lurie, his daughter Lucy, and their "dog-man" Petrus. The reader is introduced to David Lurie who is completely in grip of "reservations of philosophical kind" [3]. He has been divorced twice and goes to a brothel to calm his uncontrollable lust. When he got divorced, he feels "he has solved the problem of sex rather well" (p.1). He drives to Windsore Mansion to meet the "honey-brown body" Soraya. The attitude of his authority is displayed when he prevented her from wearing vermilion lipstick and heavy eye shadow "Not liking the stickiness of the makeup, he asked her to wipe it off. She obeyed and never wore it since." (p.5). In order to please her client, Soraya obeyed Lurie. The situation reveals dominant supremacy of the white which Lurie is used to practice successfully. Afterwards, he seduced Melanie Isaacs, a South African woman and one of his students. Without her consent, he raped her by exercising power. "She does resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes" (p.25). It is a disgraceful that a professor like Lurie takes advantage of his helpless young student. Womanizer as he is, Melanie could not escape Lurie's grip. He thinks that he can settle the matter by making her under his control, but he failed. Melanie consequently lodged a file and fought back her abuser on the ground of sexual abuse. In the committee of inquiry, Lurie was asked to confess but he rejected defending himself by saying "I was not myself..... I became a servant Eros..... It was far from ungovernable" (p.52). This means that he cannot resist his emotion. His justification is that it was "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."(p.53). This extract shows Lurie's old notion of the superiority of the whites through his actions. "Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse." (p.58). Lurie didn't confess his crime; therefore he didn't think of repentance. His only defense before the committee that:

"Now we are truly splitting hairs. You charged me, and I pleaded guilty to the charges. That is all you need from me."
"Now we want more. Not a great deal more but more. I hope you can see your way clear to giving us that"
"Sorry I can't."(p.58)

As a process of reconciliation, this quotation by Lurie shows the pressure of the committee on him to confess his guilt and to repent for his dalliance. The university will offer him the same position and a clean chit for his disgrace if Lurie's confession of guilt seems contrite. In other words, mere words of confession will abolish his wrong doing. But definitely he refuses doing that or apologizing in public because confession means a long obligation to his victim [4]. Hence, Lurie's situation stands for the whole colonial process during the apartheid period. In this respect, Suresh Ravel mentions that "... the whole trajectory of Lurie's conduct and reflections reveals that the white middle class is unambiguously complicit in the triumph of exclusionary chauvinistic practices in South Africa" [1]. Eventually, Lurie resigns his job. He has been offered many opportunities to show his repentance so that he can restore his job, but he refuses. He prefers devastating himself than confessing his guilt and reconciling with the black. His sense of superiority renders him lose his job and his reputation. The action of raping Melanie becomes the reason of public outrage in the country. He was distrusted by his students, harassed by Melanie's boyfriend, and his car vandalized. To escape from this disgrace, Lurie left Cape Town and moved to his daughter, Lucy who lives in an isolated town in the Eastern Cape to live there. His life is getting worse than ever in every sphere. Professor Lurie's dilemma is that he can not reconcile himself with the new situation in which power has transferred to the black in post-apartheid period. He is still trapped in the hallucination of superiority and dominion of Whites in apartheid era.

It seems that all the sexual rapes in the novel are almost intra-racial. Through sexual assaults, on the other hand, the characters increase their conflict "producing a hybrid result for which nobody will feel guilty and remorse" [2]. Lucy, Lurie's daughter, emphasizes this by accepting her rape and pregnancy. She is a self-contained girl who lives in an isolated farm in the town of Salem in the Eastern Cape. She runs a small kennel, growing and selling flowers and vegetables. She is a sensible young lady with whom her father may find solace by sharing her ideas and emotions.

"Roz said the atmosphere was nasty.
I bought it on myself. I was offered a compromise, which I wouldn't accept.
What kind of compromise?
Re-education, Reformation of the character. The code-word was counseling
So you stood your ground and they stood theirs. Is that how it was?
More or less.
You shouldn't be unbending, David. It's not heroic to be unbending. Is there still time to reconsider?
No the sentence is final." (p.66)

Unlike her father, on the other hand, Lucy believes that it is unwise for her father to be resistant and unbending in the current situation, and suggests that her father reconsider but he impudently refuses, saying:" Every woman I have been close to has taught me something about myself. To what extent they have made me a better person." (p. 70). The company of Lucy spiritualized him for they have an inverse ideology of life. As for Lucy, she adopts scholar Dererk

Attridge's view of ethics which presents regard for the other, he believes to be ethical means "being responsible for the other and assuming the other's needs, affirming them, sustain them, being prepared to give up my own wants and satisfactions for the sake of the other" [4]. She settled in the countryside to lead a tranquil life. David starts to get used to the countryside, assisting his daughter on the farm. He developed a friendship with her black assistant neighbor, Petrus. Life was good and tranquil until this tranquility was disturbed when Lucy was raped in a brutal attack by three black men, and her father Lurie was severely wounded. In an attempt to console her, Lurie says: "It happens every day, every hour, every minute, he tells himself in every quarter of the country. Count yourself lucky to have escaped with your life" (p. 98). Leonard Thompson described the situation of post-colonial South Africa, stating that "South Africa was exceptionally violent society. Whereas in previous generations Whites had a near monopoly of firearms, by 1994 South Africans of all races owned modern weapons." [5]. So Lucy and Lurie are the victims of this violence. Undergoing terrible experience, Lucy was hurt and stunned by the hatred the black have towards Whites. 'It was done with such personal hatred.....But why did they hate me so? I have never set eyes on them" (p.156). The perpetrators devastated the house and stole Lurie's valuable things. Though she hides her outrage, Lucy reported to the police about the attack. She even prevented her father from revealing the oppression that happened to her and her neighboring people "While seeing as a victim of an injustice that decrees her to be a criminal incitement of herself, she still feels dirtied and humiliated' [6]. As a pragmatic girl she is to understand the chaotic South African legal system, Lucy does not anticipate any justice. However, Lurie fails to realize that the "place being South Africa, the police are not going to save them" (p. 112,100). Lurie feels that the situation "..... will be like to be an old man, tired to the bone, without hopes, without desires, indifferent to the future" (p.107). He feels that Lucy is taking the responsibility of expiating their ancestral crime and her decision to keep silent about the assault is nothing but some sort of salvation. He hopes that Lucy will heal soon. Thinking about her miserable situation, Lurie decides support his daughter and never leaving her alone. He reluctantly left his daughter and went to Cape Town pondering over Melanie again. He sensed Melanie's predicament and her parents when he observed the suffering of Lucy. Finally, Lurie apologized to unburden himself from the psychological warfare. "For which I am sorry for what I took your daughter through. You have a wonderful family. I apologize for the grief I have caused you and Mrs. Isaac. I ask for your pardon...." So, says Isaac, "at last you have apologized" (p. 171). "I am being punished for what happened between myself and your daughter. I am sunk into a state of disgrace from which it will not be easy to lift myself" (p.171). In this way Lurie got rid of his inner conflict and got salvation through apologizing.

The situation becomes more complicated when Lucy's pregnancy is revealed and one of the offenders' identity is known. it is Petrus and his relative who are proved to be the patronize of that culprit. Lucy, who was once the benefactor, is now the rival. The blacks now are tax collectors and debt collectors and Lucy in return should be paid. She established her living here and cleared her ancestral debts through surrendering her body. Abdul Karim Ruman states: "When power is inverted, it greatly affects the psychology of those who exercised or manipulated it before. On the other hand, those who achieved it newly at the cost of blood are willing to use it as a means of revenge for their life-long suppression" [7]. Lucy becomes an outsider in her own land and for this reason she decides to hand over all her property to Petrus. Powerlessness is absolutely the reason of Lucy's taciturnity. To live on the farm means she has to endure all the barbarity and humiliation. According to Koul: "In the new scenario the former oppressed races affirm their voice to the scope of silencing the whites. The country is passing through an immense reshuffling of social relations" [8]. In order to be protected and sheltered, Lucy accepts Petrus's proposal for marriage. In this way she is protected by Petrus in spite of the fact that she knows that this marriage is nothing but a trick to take away her land. This is a good example of power inversion. Petrus, the black man, is turned from a care-taker to a landowner. "Masculine on the whole, those who fashioned it, ruled it and still dominate it today are men" [9]. Actually, land transformation is one of the significant issues for power exercising for both blacks and whites during Post-apartheid era. Hence, Lucy sacrifices everything for security and shelter aspiring reconciliation in her own land. While Lurie triggers violence and seeks revenge on one of Lucy's rapists, Lucy is "prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice for the sake of peace" (p. 208), including marrying Petrus, the black man and one of the rapists. Lurie deplores that marriage, regarding it as an abject surrender to brutal violence and an acceptance of the disgrace the blacks brought to her. Lucy, however, refuses her father's explanation. She discourages her father's interpretation by stating: "it is some form of private salvation" she is looking for. Her marriage is a strategic alliance, "a deal" or a calculated exchange in which she Contribute to the land, in return for which I am allowed to creep in under his wing. Otherwise, he wants to remind me I am without protection, I am fair game" (p.203). Thus, unlike her father, Lucy aims at "pragmatic rapprochement" .Though reconciliation is achieved, it is done through violence, rape and disgrace.

CONCLUSION

Disgrace is a vivid depiction of the difficulty of whites and blacks to dwell harmoniously in post-apartheid South Africa. The blacks restored their lost freedom after the whites' power and domination had been disintegrated and transferred to the blacks. After the thriving hegemony, David Lurie and his daughter Lucy make a valiant effort to maintain their identity and root, but in the end, they surrender to the influence of the new changes. Besides, Coetzee presents a dark picture of reconciliation because it occurs through violence, rape and disgrace rather than respect, peace

and harmony between both races. Disgrace now has become a means of the colonizers and the colonized to accept each other. Coetzee, therefore, exhibits an ambivalent opinion about the process of reconciliation. He is "torn between a hyperbolic ethical vision of forgiveness, and the reality of a society at work in pragmatic process of reconciliation" [10].

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