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The Shifting of Power----the Post-Apartheid South Africa in “Disgrace”

South Africa, a country which had been reigned by the authorities of Europe for over three hundred years, had experienced a drastic change after Nelson Mandela shook hands with F.W. de Klerk in 1992 for the transition of policies and government. J. M. Coetzee used this as the background of his novel “Disgrace” to describe the shifting power between the Blacks and Whites and their dilemma of identities (Bonnici 87).

J.M. Coetzee basically uses two incidents to point out the situation in the post-apartheid South Africa----the sexual harassment case posed against David Lurie and the tragic gang rape of Lucy, David’s daughter. David Lurie, a professor who taught English literature and communication skills in the Technical University in Cape Town is a man who considered himself as attractive and of high position. He allured his student Melanie, a black South African into having sex relationship with him. David, at first thought that he was the predator since he is a white grown man and Melanie is just a young,

innocent and helpless prey under his manipulation; however, things got soured. The victim started to fight back. Melanie posed a sexual harassment case against him and David was cast out of the university. This incident revealed the impotence of David to control the whole scandal and symbolized the power exchange between the Whites and the Blacks. As Edward Said says in his book *Cultural Imperialism*, "Domination and inequalities of power and wealth are perennial facts of human society." During the apartheid time, David's position as a white male was dominant and superior under the European power structure. However, after the apartheid policy was lifted in 1992, the power of the Whites had been worn down. The Blacks are no longer silent; instead, they will take actions to any unjust affairs.

After David 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 in with Lucy was just the beginning of a series of disasters. Lucy was gang raped by the relatives of Petrus, her co-operator on the farm, and got pregnant. It was a premeditated crime----an act as a warning to both David and Lucy. As Lucy put in the novel, "What if ... what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? ... They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors" (Coetzee 158). In this part, Lucy realized that

the Whites is on the debit side of the ledger and will live in South Africa as intruders. And in order to continue living and surviving on this land, Lucy chose to be silent and made concessions to Petrus. She sold her land to Petrus---an offering to plead for the right to staying on the land and protection. Land ownership has always been the great political and strategic support of the European colonizers. Thus, the changeover of the land ownership can be seen in a metafictional interpretation of the novel---the black South Africans became hegemonic (Bonnici 90).

Lucy sacrificed not only her property but also her body. She decided to have the baby and agreed to become one of Petrus' concubines. Thus, Lucy became a dog woman who gave in everything for shelter and protection. "To start at ground level...With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity...Like a dog" (Coetzee 205). She was willing to make sacrifices and paid the "tax" in order to live on the land of South Africa. Lucy let the people who raped her utilized her----for pleasure, for revenge, and for profit (Mcinturff 16). Lucy submitted herself under the oppression of the black South Africans. She herself became the sacrificial offering to the uprising power of the ex-oppressed. Lucy regarded her actions as a collective apology or a way of reconciliation (Bonnici 91). In some way, maybe Lucy thought the only

solution was to forget the colonial past. She adopted a complex form of living on that does not simply preserve belated and dysfunctional practices, but potentialities for producing and reproducing a life that lies athwart of modernity (Lloyd 219).

In a nutshell, under the post-apartheid society in South Africa, the Whites became the minorities due to the shifting of power. As Edward Said stated in his essay *Two visions of Heart of Darkness*, “A new...appalling tribalism is fracturing societies, separating peoples, promoting greed, bloody conflict, and uninteresting assertions of minor ethnic or group particularity.” The ex-colonialist ----white South Africans were the minor ones who needed to be protected. They had learned the bitter lessons of their behaviors in the past. A new methodology was invented and the whites can no longer measure things through the classics or Western paradigm.

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