



The Disgrace Of Jm Coetzee: An Act Of Racial Complexity

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Citation: Hassan Md Jillun Noor, (2024). The Disgrace Of Jm Coetzee: An Act Of Racial Complexity, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(10) 676-679
Doi: 110.53555/kuey.v30i10.9354

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Literary works are creative works that transcend time and location. This is also true of John Maxwell Coetzee's 1999 book *Disgrace*. Despite being written in postcolonial South Africa, it nevertheless depicts racial segregation. The novel's narrative from Professor David Lurie's perspective. From the viewpoint of a white settler in South Africa, the events and key players are explained and analyzed. We become aware of the racial complexity as a result of David's limited vision for the Black community. Examining the main concerns around racial and social injustice is the author's goal. "... learned behavior and learned emotions on the part of people towards another group; whose physical characteristics are dissimilar to the former group;...as if doesn't belong to the human race" (Calvin, 175) is how Huton Calvin describes racism, a man-made phenomenon. Both white and non-white characters are represented by David in *Disgrace*, while Petrus, Melanie, and many more belong to the latter group. Even after colonial Africa, there is still an issue with the distance between the two. The racial complexity that exists in South Africa in the post-apartheid era should be examined in order to address this issue.

Keywords: Apartheid, racism, colonialism, shame, and segregation

The main character of the book *Disgrace* is David Lurie, a professor of English at a Cape Town technical university. He lives in South Africa and is white. He is seen losing everything in the beginning of the narrative, including his work, family, reputation, and achievement. His daughter Lucy resides close to Cape Town. Professor Lurie meets Melanie, a non-white student. He entices her, and the affair is revealed to the university committee, which meets to provide a decision. The issue is that he neither attempts to defend nor apologize for his actions, nor does he acknowledge that what he did was wrong. Why does he not respond? Why doesn't he offer an apology? Does he not underestimate the opposing group? Coetzee's works are well known for their depth in addressing complex racial, cultural, ethnic, and societal concerns. The current book, *Disgrace*, depicts the pre- and post-apartheid conditions in South Africa. Even after apartheid ended, these racial and socioeconomic issues still dominate society. Racial complexity concerns have surfaced as a result of interactions between whites and blacks. David's battle against his personal shortcomings and the social-cultural clashes between the dominated and the dominant have created a new issue in South Africa's post-colonial era. People of diverse origin in South Africa are intrinsically related to the race and dominance issues. "About the law that divided himself and others into racial categories that seemed to create further alienation." Racism, social discrimination, and the struggle for one's own space have created a gap that has made the next group the "other." Narendra Raj Subedi 94 Coetzee's fictionalized memoir *Boyhood Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997), July 2, No. 2, July 2021. Readers are forced to consider if *Disgrace* reveals racist attitudes that are still common in South Africa after apartheid because of Prof. David's seduction of Melanie and his beliefs about other characters including Soraya, Petrus, and three black lads. Why does the author continue to depict South Africa's post-apartheid discrimination? There are plenty of opportunities to bring up issues pertaining to race. It appears that Black people are the ones who violate societal norms when the three males approach Lucy's residence. This scene can be characterized as follows: "those boys inflicted upon her to their endeavoring to compensate for long lasting racial injustice, a discrepancy between White and Black their feeling of the need for vengeance for wrong done, especially by Europeans who trespassed on the property" (91). They are portrayed as savage, brutal, etc. One prominent example of how European scholar, intellectual, and gentleman David Lurie contributes to the strained relationships between white and black South Africans is his relationship with Melanie. David has a bad relationship with the populace. He sounds racist in the words and concepts he employs toward them. *Disgrace* has revealed the nuanced racial aspects of South Africa's apartheid and post-

apartheid periods. Coetzee is undoubtedly one of the most well-known authors. His writings are well known, widely interpreted, and brilliantly analytical. His novels explore the African situation and the effects of apartheid and the post-apartheid era, as he was born in South Africa. As a novel set in the past, *His Disgrace* (1999) depicts both colonial and post-colonial experiences. The main players for the shared experience in post-colonial South Africa are characters like retired professor David Lurie, his daughter Lucy, her owner, Petrus, Melanie, and three black boys. Even though it was written during the postcolonial era, the complex relationships between the people are a result of factors like dehumanization, distorted vision, dominant versus dominated, and white versus black. David Lurie is a retired professor who has been divorced twice. According to Coetzee (1), "for a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well." It implies that the "others" are victims of his presence and that he is abusing his position of authority. The women he most likely takes advantage of are Soraya, Melasie, and others. David, a white man, has taken advantage of non-white people in Africa. The question of whether *Disgrace* exposes racist beliefs that persist in South Africa after apartheid is raised. Why continues to depict the upheaval in South Africa after apartheid? Are Coetzee's depictions of modern native South Africans as sexually prone, looters, and hooligans, as well as his placement of white individuals who were compelled to give in to the policy reversal that disturbed the Black Diaspora, signs of prejudice against South Africa? Investigating the issues of racial complexity in the novel *Disgrace* is the goal of this research work. Coetzee frequently dehumanizes Black people by using disparaging language. One example in this context is the use of terms like "thugs" when discussing black boys. In order to determine why segregation persists, the current study attempts to investigate i. ii. How the author seems to the white community. iii. In what way does the author/writer distinguish between the black and white? The novel *Disgrace* serves as the main source for the author's understanding of racism in order to address the concerns raised above. Additionally, the author draws on historical colonial theories. The author thinks that this helps to solve the issues that were previously addressed. New conflicts between colonizers and colonized people have arisen since the seventeenth century, when colonialism began, particularly in Africa. White people from Europe were the colonizers, and native Black people were the colonized. Apart from class and culture, discrimination took a completely different form. They were denied all the privileges at their ancestral level and were subjected to discrimination, segregation, oppression, and dominance because they were born into Black communities. This is the case with J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, a well-known book about racial segregation that was written in South Africa in 1999 A.D. The presentation of any literary work is not limited to objective values. Subjective values ought to be used to evaluate this as well. Serious beliefs and ideals are reflected and spread by it. Coetzee's *Disgrace* also contains important principles and opinions. White colonists persecuted the Black population in Africa throughout the colonial era. They adopted the racial segregation regime known as apartheid in order to fortify their colony. White people were viewed as superior than Black people due to their ethnicity and color. This technique persisted even after apartheid, as the novel *Disgrace* thoroughly examines how white protagonist David Lurie, a retired college professor, handles non-white people. In their book *Racism* Pine, Malcolm Brown and R. Miles write: The implication that racism misrepresents people and human connections, particularly in terms of "race," is the issue with considering racism as an ideology. This weakens efforts to instill a "race" consciousness in those who are impacted by racism. 7). In the book *Disgrace*, racial presumptions are prevalent. David Lurie was a university professor before he retired. "She is small and thin, with close-cropped black hair, wide, almost Chinese cheekbones, large, dark eyes" (Coetzee, 11) and Windsor Mansions Soraya, a non-white woman, are his fiancée. It appears that the term "Chinese Cheekbone" is used disparagingly to describe black people. Because Europeans prefer European standards, Soraya's comparison appears to explain why her physique is less European. The racially oppressed society views Black people as inferior and white people as superior. Their assumptions are white-centric, and they criticize Black people based on their physical attributes. Due to the fact that "racism" is a man-made concept, there are now significant human differences between whites and blacks. As Henton Calvin puts it, Racism is defined as a group of people's learned behavior and feelings toward another group whose physical characteristics differ from the former group's behavior and feelings. This behavior and emotion force one group to treat the other group based solely on physical characteristics, as if it were not a member of the human race. Calvin, 175. There are numerous examples of physical appearance traits and accompanying feelings in the book *Disgrace* of John Maxwell Coetzee. 'Black' is a word that appears throughout the novel. When Melesie, a university student of David Lurie's, tells her guy friend about his affair, he knocks on the door of David's office, enters, and sits down without being invited. Being non-white, he is portrayed as

"He is tall and wiry; he has a thin goatee and an earring, he wears a black leather jacket and black leather trousers. He looks older than most students; he looks like trouble" (Coetzee, 30). People with black skin, black clothing, black caps, and a range of emotions are always portrayed negatively by white people. The book's author uses the physical evidence, their belongings, and the time to link their traits to grab the readers' attention. Joel Kovel writes, "First reduce the human self of his black slave to a body and then the body to a thing (Kovel, 18)" in his book *The Origin of Racism in the United States Against White People*. During the colonial era, South Africa's conquerors practiced widespread discrimination. Their observations and interactions with Africans remain biased even after the colonial era. Let's examine a few instances of discrimination in this context. "... hands in Pockets, with an air of cocky ease, is the boy in black, the boy friend" (Coetzee 31) introduces Melasie's guy friend. "Lucifer, the dark, angel, doesn't need to breathe" (32) is likewise similar. The word "black" is frequently used in a racist or disparaging way, whether it be in reference to skin,

clothing, or time. In *Racism, Sexism, and idea*, Colette Guillaumin discusses race: Some social scientists identify the relationships that create social groups and facilitate the development of the "race" idea. Following the formation of social categories, signifiers—in this case, skin tone—are ultimately acknowledged as selected. (Colette, 12) Clearly distinguishing between Soraya, Melasie, and Petrus, who embrace different philosophies, and David Lurie and Lucy, on the other hand. Even in the post-apartheid era, David's role and demeanor are perceived as completely biased, illogical, domineering, rude, and full of prejudices: "There are the dogs." Dogs still have meaning, and the more dogs there are, the more deferential they are (60). For their own safety, they keep dogs to keep the black away. when we discover the conversation about safety between David and Lurie. Lucy is told by David, "But you have a weapon." In response, Lucy says, "I have a rifle. Let me show you. I have it, but I've never used it. (60). "The African is indeed my brother, but my junior brother" (1191) is a quote from Albert Schweitzer that Chinua Achebe uses in his piece "Colonialist Criticism" to illustrate the colonialist presupposition. The mindset and presumptions of white people in "Africa" during and after the colonial era are consolidated. In the book *Disgrace*, Coetzee illustrates the western yearning. It appears worthwhile to quote Chinua Achebe in the material. In "The Image of Africa..," he writes. Simply put, it is the intention of western psychology to portray Africa as the opposite of Europe, a region of negations that is both distant and somewhat familiar, against which Europe's own spiritual grace will be evident. (Achebe 1784) The black characters in the book are portrayed as a cause of instability on multiple occasions. Reading the sentences concerning a black boy reveals Coetzee's hatred of black people. The boy strolls away and re-joins his friends. He wears piggish eyes and a flat, expressionless face. .."a high forehead, sculpted cheekbones, wide, flaring nostrils" (92). The author repeatedly dehumanizes Black people based on their physical characteristics, demonstrating that they have unconventional shapes. This is merely a racist notion.

Racist European presumptions about Africans include inferiority, savagery, subhumanity, speech impairment, and a host of other things. Lucy and her father are at her house one day. On the walk, "three men are approaching them, or two men and a boy to satisfy their evil desires." They lie to justify their visit. They rape Lucy, steal the car, assault David, confine him, damage the belongings, kill days at the house, and vanish. These black boys are all portrayed as encouraging violence. Despite his multilingualism, Professor David Lurie is unable to save himself. The author states about David that "he speaks French and Italian, but French and Italian will not save him here in the darkest Africa" (95). In this way, Coetzee portrays Black people as sexist, criminals, hooligans, loafers, thieves, and arsenic. David wants to notify the police when those boys do damage to everything. "I must telephone the police" (98). She responds to her father's question. "You can't the telephone is smashed" (99). David's description of the occurrence by Lucy's neighbor and owner, Petrus, as "You must have heard, we had a big robbery on Wednesday while you were away" further demonstrates that Black people are lawbreakers and naturally destructive. He responds, "Yes, I had heard" (114). implies that he is not taking the heist seriously.

In the novel *Disgrace*, Coetzee appears to demonstrate his promotion of violence through Petrus and his companions. In *Racism, Sexism, Power and Identity*, Colette Guillaumin states that "aggressively is often related with racism" (30). After Lucy's house was looted, David Lurie occasionally finds the youngster and vents his rage by saying, "You Swine! He yells and then hits him again. ..you dirty swine ! More astonished than injured . ..the boys tries to run. ...The dog immediately attacks him. ..This demonstrates racial arrogance once more. Show him where he belongs and teach him a lesson. This indicates that he is Black, African, and not a fully realized human being. This is the experience of becoming a sauce!" (206) When David Lurie comes over the black boy (Pollux) it is very pathetic scene of violence done by the white against the black. David kicks him not only that he says 'ugly' to Pollux and aggressively uses 'dark skin' (209) against him. These words chosen to talk about the boy who is from South Africa is nothing more than the racial segregation. In another chapter of *Disgrace* we find Lucy Change in a another environment when she says to her father "Wake up, David. This is the nation. This is Africa" (124). For her father it is hard to change the old mind set. For whites Africa is different, considered as the 'other'. When Lucy gradually begins to adjust in the African society but father is against it. He says, " Lucy, Lucy, I plead with you! You want to atone for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it " (133). David is against the idea of assimilation of the whites with the black. He clearly stands creating a line between the black and the white. He expresses his segregatory idea. *Disgrace* in this context is filled with the words which are used against the black. The words like 'intruder', 'thug', 'dryman', 'water-man', 'cary-man', three-chimpanzee, etc. to describe the black folk of Africa. Comparing the black with Chimpanzee and Jackal like, " A young thig A Jackal boy " (202). All those nouns and adjectives mentioned above present the black people's existence in the postcolonial Africa. They are dehumanized because white people think themselves superior and black people are inferior." If they had been white " (159) also makes it clear that there is racial discrimination in *Disgrace*. David finally gives importance to European. When he says, " . ..We are Europeans. . Additionally, when he addresses Lucy, "Lucy. Europe is safer than here." (204). From the evidences presented above shows *Disgrace* has contributed for widening the gap between the whites and blacks in South Africa even after the apartheid - by creating Africa not a safe place for whites and it is also presented as racists take as the 'other', 'dark', and 'remote'. both during and after colonialism.

The European dominance was felt in South Africa. Africans experienced dominance based on social inequality, race, and color. In his post-colonial novel *Disgrace*, John Maxwell Coetzee explores the intricacies of race. The work explicitly expresses racial division based on color and the twisted bodies of Black people. The protagonist of the book, David Lurie, narrates the events from his perspective. From the viewpoint of a white settler in

South Africa, the events and its principal players are explained and examined. As stated by Malcolm Brown and Robert Miles in their book *Racism*, "The difficulty, then, with conceiving of racism as an ideology is the inference that racism distortedly reflects human beings, and the social interactions between the human beings "portraying non-white people as "ugly," "looters," "savage," "dark," etc. Make reference to Black people and their traits. Africans fall short of the European standard, as seen by the black people's distortion. The white point of view has been used to depict the trios' arrival at Lucy's house. "the boy . . . has piggie eyes and a flat, expressionless face. . . elevated forehead. . . sculpted Cheekbones, wide flaring nostrils" (91). It is blatantly dehumanizing to compare Black people in Africa to animals. Black people are constantly seen as inferior by white protagonist David Lurie, who has a white eye. As David tells his daughter Lucy, "We Westerners "and talking about the Black boy," a dangerous child, they are viewed as thieves, rapists, robbers, dark, and physically different from whites and Europeans. Living in Africa, being born there, growing up there, and adhering to African customs are all viewed as being below the European standard. A kidnapper. A kid of a jackal (Disgrace, 202). Because of the way white people, like David Lurie, treat Black people in South Africa, how they are handled and portrayed from the white man's point of view, and how reality is skewed, the novel *Disgrace* is a work of racial complexity.

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