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After Apartheid: Violence, Spatial Boundaries, and the Reconciliation Process in Three Post-Apartheid South African Novels

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B.A., Emory University, 2009

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An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Emory University
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Abstract

After Apartheid: Violence, Spatial Boundaries, and the Reconciliation Process
in Three Post-Apartheid South African Novels
by Erin Crews

Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee, and Achmat Dangor – three of South Africa's most distinguished writers, all with definite anti-apartheid commitment – have written major novels set completely in post-apartheid South Africa: Gordimer's *The House Gun* (1998), Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), and Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001). Each novel, in its preoccupation with violence and varying notions of the expiation of guilt, justice, reconciliation and the implications of the transfer of power for both blacks and whites, injects itself into the ongoing dialogue on the transformation process in the new South Africa. While there has been a deep anxiety to acknowledge the culture of violence in post-apartheid South Africa as part of the enduring legacy of apartheid, this struggle to come to terms with the nation's past has produced no consensus about the appropriate ethical response to the historical guilt of apartheid.

Fittingly, these novels offer fragmentary explorations of the limitations of the possibilities for justice during the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which reveal the inability to assume consensual knowledge and highlight the criticisms of and ambivalence toward the TRC among nearly all segments of South African society. Through complex representations of violence, landscape and space, and scenes of interrogation, each novel's portrayal of personal and collective trauma disrupts the rhetoric and appearance of reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa and attempts to foreground the enduring ramifications of apartheid.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

As three of South Africa's most distinguished and internationally successful authors, Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee, and Achmat Dangor have garnered a great deal of popular and critical attention for their first post-apartheid novels. Gordimer's *The House Gun*, Coetzee's *Disgrace*, and Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* each raise questions about ongoing racial strife, the prevalence of violent crime, and the nature of the reconciliation process meant to usher in the "new South Africa" as a healed nation.[1] In the section that follows, I will discuss the content and reception of these three novels before evaluating the ways in which the authors utilize textual gaps, unreliable protagonists, and indeterminate spaces to destabilize the notion of a singular, overarching narrative of apartheid history.

In order to make my examination of the new directions taken in major South African writers' post-apartheid work more manageable, I examine only novels written during a specific timeframe. This thesis endeavors to evaluate only the *first* works of fiction published by these authors set *fully* in post-apartheid South Africa, thereby signaling the commencement of a presumably new literary direction for each novelist.[2] Because this thesis will examine the ways in which South African authors engage with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of the 1990s, I pay particular attention to the process of the construction of a narrative of national history in each novel, alongside the texts' treatment of increasing levels of violent crime and spatial boundaries divided along lines of race and gender.

These limitations brought me immediately to J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*. *Disgrace* is arguably the single most important post-apartheid South African novel today, not only for its artistic merit, but also in terms of its literary influence, its popularity, and its proven capacity to provoke important cultural and political debates within South Africa. Gordimer has been widely referred to as "South Africa's conscience" and is often considered *the* representative voice of South Africa.[3] For this reason, her work has inevitably influenced the trajectory of post-apartheid literature, and so *The House Gun*, as her first novel set entirely in the post-apartheid state, was an easy choice. The third novel, Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, was a somewhat less obvious one. However, after being shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2004, *Bitter Fruit* has garnered considerable international attention and positioned Dangor as a major force in South African literature. The novel also addresses all of the issues that I intend to analyze in *The House Gun* and *Disgrace* – the increasing levels of violent crime in contemporary South Africa, the persistence of gendered divisions of space, and the ways in which a narrative of national history is constructed. *Bitter Fruit* also engages with the TRC more extensively than any novel I have yet read.[4]

The temporal restrictions and the limited focus of this study do, of course, result in founding exclusions of important works in post-apartheid literature. I have not included novels by black South African writers, and thus none of the authors in this thesis speak for the majority of South Africans, and none of them shared in the most extreme and widespread forms of persecution under apartheid. Zakes Mda's first post-apartheid novel, *Ways of Dying*, was under consideration for inclusion in this thesis for

some time; however, as it was published in 1995 and set in the transitional period (between 1990 and 1994), the text does not reflect on the process of the TRC, which commenced later that year. The most glaring omission of my work is perhaps Zoë Wicomb's 2002 novel *David's Story*, which I did not include for several reasons, the most important of which is the fact that it is not set fully in post-apartheid South Africa. Nevertheless, *David's Story* is a major novel in post-apartheid South Africa, speaks to many of the issues that preoccupy transitional literature, and may have re-shaped this thesis in fruitful ways. For these reasons, I would like to emphasize that my project is not meant to be an account of *the* post-apartheid South African novel, but is instead a preliminary examination of the directions taken by several internationally acclaimed South African authors in their first post-apartheid novels.

While Coetzee, Gordimer and Dangor have achieved critical acclaim and impressive sales figures abroad, their work at the turn of the century and its engagement with the TRC have been the subjects of considerable controversy and critical skepticism in South Africa. Of the three, J.M. Coetzee lies at the center of the most intense critical and political debates in his home country. Often seen as a veritable "state of the nation" address about post-apartheid South Africa (Brouillette 130), *Disgrace* has met with commercial success, high international praise, and heated controversy since its publication in 1999. The novel has been condemned by many prominent South Africans as presenting a damaging image of the country and as a powerful example of white racist stereotyping, even as it received glowing reviews in international newspapers (most notably, the *New York Times*) and won Coetzee the Booker Prize for the second time. Reactions to the book were so strong in some quarters that *Interventions*, a journal

of postcolonial studies, felt it necessary to devote an entire issue to a defense of *Disgrace* against accusations of racism and sexism.[5]

The novel follows David Lurie, a divorced and aging professor in Cape Town, as he is forced to resign for sexually harassing a student and leaves town for the Eastern Cape, where his daughter Lucy owns a small farm. Soon thereafter, three black men break into Lucy's house, rape her, and assault David. Coetzee's bleak depiction of the new South Africa and his choice to include a gang rape scene that draws upon "black peril" hysteria was criticized by several members of the African National Congress. At the Human Rights Commission hearings in 2000, the ANC claimed that in *Disgrace*, Coetzee represented "as brutally as he [could] the white people's perception of the post-apartheid black man," by implying that, in post-apartheid South Africa, whites would "lose their property, their rights, their dignity," and that "the white women will have to sleep with the barbaric black men" (Donadio 1).

In his article "Disgrace Effects," Peter McDonald translates one of the most significant criticisms of *Disgrace*, written by Jakes Gerwel, who praises Coetzee as a compelling chronicler of "the dislocation [*onbehusheid*] of the white-in-Africa" but expresses dismay at the novel's portrayal of the "barbaric post-colonial claims of black Africans," its representation of "mixed-race [*bruin*] characters" as "whores, seducers, complainers, conceited accusers" and its "exclusion of the possibility of civilized reconciliation" (Gerwel in McDonald 325). Even fellow writers have criticized the political implications of Coetzee's work; in his review of *Disgrace*, Salman Rushdie wrote that the novel "merely become[s] a part of the darkness it describes" ("Light on Coetzee"), and in 2006, Gordimer said, "if that's the only truth he could find in the

post-apartheid South Africa, I regretted this very much for him" (Donadio 1).

But Gordimer has attracted her share of criticism for "the subtextual survival and prevalence of cultural and ethnic stereotypes in her novels," (Wagner vi), and particularly in *The House Gun*. Despite her ever-increasing international acclaim, Gordimer's work has been relatively unpopular within South Africa, and she has struggled to attract a readership at home (and particularly among black South Africans).[6] Furthermore, academic response within South Africa has, on the whole, expressed critical dissatisfaction with a number of aspects of her work, but most notably with what is perceived as a lack of attention to social class and issues of gender in favor of single-minded treatment of race.

As Gordimer's first novel set fully in post-apartheid South Africa, *The House Gun* features shifting spatial and social boundaries and key power reversals, specifically in the role of Hamilton Motsamai, a successful black lawyer. Harald and Claudia Lindgard, a middle-aged couple implicitly representative of white South African liberalism, find themselves dependent on Motsamai after he is appointed as their son Duncan's defense lawyer. As Gordimer wrote of the novel,

> [I]t came to me as the personal tragedy of a mother and father whose son, in a crime of passion, murders their human values along with the man he kills. The parallel theme, placing their lives in the context of their country, the new South Africa, was that they – white people who in the past regime of racial discrimination had always had black people dependent on *them* – would find themselves dependent upon a distinguished black lawyer to defend their son. That was going to be the double thesis of my novel. (*Living* 89)

But the *New York Times* review of the novel claims that Gordimer "tries to shoehorn into her narrative political and social observations that ultimately have little to do with the story at hand" and that *The House Gun* is ultimately "a slight if sometimes gripping thriller with pretensions, a novel that wants to be more than it is" (Kakutani). Other critics have suggested that the novel is shaped by colonialist paradigms and that Gordimer's body of work reveals "a consciousness of necessity permeated, shaped, and bounded by precisely those extraordinary and irresolvable tensions and contradictions characteristic of South Africa under apartheid which the narrative stance of the fiction implicitly claims to have transcended" (Wagner 5).

Achmat Dangor, on the other hand, has received relatively little critical attention for *Bitter Fruit*, published in 2001 but becoming the subject of media coverage and academic criticism after it was unexpectedly shortlisted for the Booker in 2004. A writer of Indian descent, Dangor's fiction – unlike that of Coetzee and Gordimer – focuses on the Cape's coloured community in ways that reveal the ambiguities of the apartheid system of racial classification. *Bitter Fruit*, set in post-apartheid Johannesburg, is divided into three sections – Memory, Confession, and Retribution – that map a narrative arc that witnesses the disintegration of a coloured family at the end of the Mandela presidency.[7] Lydia Ali is raped in the 1980s by Francois du Boise, a white policeman, as punishment for her husband Silas' activities with the MK, an armed wing of the ANC. The novel opens with a confrontation, twenty years later, between Silas and the officer at a supermarket, which quickly dissipates but which triggers a chain of events that finally shatters the fragile relationship between Lydia and Silas and reveals to Mikey, their son, that he is a child of rape. Mikey goes on to become involved

with Silas' estranged Muslim family and with PAGAD, an Islamic militant group known for their involvement in bombings in Cape Town in the late 1990s.[8] He fatally shoots Du Boise and another man, then flees South Africa.

Unsurprisingly, several critics have found the novel's conclusion problematic. Shomit Dutta writes that "Dangor tried to do a little too much with the character of Mikey," who "resembles certain literary types" and "seems a little forced" ("An insurrection of the loin"). Helene Strauss expresses more serious concerns:

> The violent form which Mikey's engagement with these men takes suggests that the repercussions of apartheid brutality will be felt for generations to come and speaks to the urgency of exploring new and honest ways of thinking about the past and about race in a South African context. By giving Mikey the agency to reject his "unwanted, imposed" beginnings (276), Dangor challenges apartheid constructions of blood-bonds, yet the text does nonetheless, and perhaps inevitably, at times remain trapped within a received grammar of racial embodiment and pigmentation… one wonders about the literary and cultural efficacy of these types. ("Intrusive Pasts, Intrusive Bodies," page numbers unavailable)

This type of suspicion is common to responses to each of these novels – that is, that they might best be understood as works produced by writers trapped within the historical situation their vision seeks to transcend. Each author offers only a fragmentary narrative, often juxtaposing conflicting accounts of events and leaving crucial histories untold; this, in turn, presents problems of language, identity and representation.

What does it mean, then, that each novel leaves something unsaid, and that certain histories – particularly that of rape – cannot be spoken? Why does *Disgrace*, the only novel of the three to use a single, representative voice to provide an account of the events of the text, still fail to produce a complete narrative, and what does this say about the attempt to construct a whole self in post-apartheid South Africa? To what end do these novels employ third-person narration and free indirect discourse, and why are women of color – or, in the case of *Disgrace*, women in general – either silenced or obscured? For whom does David Lurie speak, and why do Gordimer and Dangor resist traditional protagonists that are textually accessible to the reader? What are the modes of representation that govern the characterization of these novels' various protagonists along racial and gendered lines? What strategies do these novels mobilize in their engagement with the politics of a South Africa in transition, the apartheid past, and the narrative of national unity prevalent at their time of publication? And what, according to these writers, are the possibilities for justice and reconciliation in the new South Africa?

CHAPTER 1

NARRATIVE STRATEGY IN *DISGRACE, THE HOUSE GUN,* AND *BITTER FRUIT*

> *"He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless, an Aunt Sally, a figure from a cartoon, a missionary in cassock and topi waiting with clasped hands and upcast eyes while the savages jaw away in their own lingo preparatory to plunging him into their boiling cauldron. Mission work: what has it left behind, that huge enterprise of upliftment? Nothing that he can see."*
>
> – J.M. Coetzee*, Disgrace*

In Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Gordimer's *The House Gun*, and Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, the narrator does not provide external moral commentary, and the authors make use of free indirect discourse. This narrative style combines some of the aspects of third-person narration with first-person direct speech, effectively blurring the subject's first-person experiences and thoughts with a grammatically third-person perspective. In each of these novels, the use of free indirect discourse creates an indeterminate distance between the author, the narrator, and the character through which the narration is focalized. The resulting ambiguity regarding the identity of the speaker inhibits the reader's ability to draw a unified conclusion about the effects of apartheid-era trauma in post-apartheid South Africa as represented by these authors.[1]

In each of these texts, the author's narrative strategy is such that the novel's vision of the new South Africa is focalized through unreliable protagonists, leading crucial pieces of each story to be left untold. The novels' juxtaposition of conflicting perspectives enables an imaginative representation of the unique subjective experiences and responses of multiple characters as they struggle with the historical and social

processes that violently shape their lives.

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee is unyielding in keeping the focalization confined to David, the novel's white, middle-aged and decidedly washed-up academic protagonist. Lucy, his daughter, is relentlessly denied focalization – a narrative pattern repeated in Gordimer's denial of focalization through Duncan and Dangor's deferred and often obscured focalization through Lydia.[2] While the credibility of David's narrative of events is subtly questioned during the first half of the novel, most pointedly during an interrogatory committee hearing regarding his sexual harassment of a student, his unreliability is rendered explicit during and after Lucy's rape, which I will address later in this chapter.

Like Coetzee, Gordimer has continued to focalize her narratives through white, upper-middle class liberals in her post-apartheid work, a strategy that allows the authors to reveal subtle racial prejudices and the white liberal's illusion that he or she can exist beyond the pale of the historical process. Gordimer has also increasingly turned away from realism, opting instead for modernist techniques that produce textual gaps and explore the inner psyche of her protagonists. In focalizing the narrative through multiple characters – Harald, Claudia, and occasionally Motsamai – whose lives revolve around an absent protagonist (Duncan), Gordimer reveals the fluctuating distance between their interpretations and responses to events and explores the relationship between the self and society. The prolonged absence of the novel's central actor produces a text that forms around a void and moves toward a collapse of the private/public, personal/political binary that preoccupies the vast majority of Gordimer's literary work.

In *Bitter Fruit*, the story of the Ali family is told through third-person omniscient

narration focalized through an array of characters. The shifting narrative voices cut across times and generations, producing a narrative that intersects with competing versions of the same story. The novel is most often rendered through Silas' voice, while Mikey drifts in and out of the text, and focalization through Lydia is delayed and often obscured or mediated by the men that surround her. The conflicting accounts of events – augmented by brief moments of focalization through minor characters – and missing stories suggest the existence of countless unspoken or invisible traumas that are left unaddressed by a single, overarching narrative.

The fragmentary narratives resulting from the textual gaps and competing histories in these three novels create an ambiguity and instability that, as Kathy Mezei writes of free indirect discourse in general, "puts the onus onto the reader" (72). Perforated with absences and information withheld, *Disgrace*, *The House Gun*, and *Bitter Fruit* are structured by gaps, missing subjects, and indeterminate spaces, all of which must be filled by the reader and set up a variety of interpretational difficulties.

I. J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

The interpretational difficulties created by narratives that employ free indirect discourse are particularly salient in the reception of Coetzee's post-apartheid work. The response of many of Coetzee's literary colleagues was less than sympathetic; in an interview in 2006, Gordimer said that "there is not one black person who is a real human being" in *Disgrace*, further stating, "I find it difficult to believe, indeed more

than difficult, having lived here all my life and being part of everything that has happened here, that the black family protects the rapist because he's one of them" (qtd. in Donadio). However, numerous academic critics have publicly defended Coetzee against such claims. Homi Bhabha, for example, has claimed that *Disgrace*'s power lies in its "ability to unsettle" and that the novel is a work of "open seams" rather than "suturing." In a moment of "real social, historical, psychic crisis," *Disgrace* "allows people to project onto it some of their own most heartfelt but violent feelings," without resolving them "in the way in which we as progressive liberals would want [Coetzee] to do" (qtd. in Donadio). *Disgrace* unquestionably projects a vision of South Africa that many South Africans would reject; the more interesting subject of exploration is how the novel embodies and problematizes that vision.

The critique of colonialism that emerges from *Disgrace* is hardly conventional in that Coetzee does not "deliver the usual moral condemnation of greed and hypocrisy, something which is all too familiar in the average colonial novel" (Watson 15). The "typical Coetzean preoccupations" are all present: "the analysis of the colonizing psyche, the emphasis on textual structures; the challenge to novelistic conventions; and the self-critique" (Head 3). This "analysis of the colonizing psyche" emerges as one of the most consuming preoccupations of *Disgrace*, and to a large extent, the uproar over the novel stems from this analysis and an ambiguity about the distance (or possible lack thereof) between the author, narrator, and protagonist. In an essay that pre-dates the publication of *Disgrace*, Stephen Watson notes that "all Coetzee's major protagonists are colonizers who wish to elude at almost any cost their historical role as colonizers" and that if "there is a dominant moral impulse at work in Coetzee's novels, it is to be

found in the insatiable hunger of all his protagonists for ways of escaping from a role which condemns them" (23); it would seem that David Lurie is no exception.

However, Coetzee employs irony to consistently undermine David's narrative, particularly in the aftermath of Lucy's rape. When David is unable to come to terms with Lucy's decision not to report her rape, as Gayatri Spivak writes,

> the reader is provoked, for he or she does not want to share in Lurie-the-chief-focalizer's inability to "read" Lucy as patient and agent. No reader is content with acting out the failure of reading. This is the rhetorical signal to the active reader, to counterfocalize…. This provocation into counterfocalization is the "political" in political fiction – the transformation of a tendency into a crisis. (22)

The broadest and most blatant signal to counterfocalize is that the two central incidents of *Disgrace* are *parallel* acts of sexual violation: that of Melanie by David, and that of Lucy by three black strangers. Coetzee's implicit comparison of these two events subverts the "black peril" narrative because he simultaneously depicts "white peril" in the figure of David, who participates in the historical (and continuing) sexual exploitation of black women by white men. In this way, Coetzee actively challenges Lurie's perspective.

In scripting a scene in which a white family is assaulted and robbed, and a young white woman is raped by three black men, Coetzee appears to be drawing on the tradition of black peril narratives penned by white South African writers predominantly during the first half of the twentieth century. Alluding to Coetzee's 1980 novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Meg Samuelson asks of *Disgrace*, "What does it mean for Coetzee

to actualize this frontier fear on the erstwhile Eastern Cape frontier? Is it a statement that the barbarians have indeed arrived?" (144) In answering this question, it is important to note that in this novel and in his other published works, Coetzee is more concerned with "narrative and its relation to other discourses than he is with representation per se" (Attwell 13). As Andre Brink writes,

> If stories are re-told and re-imagined, the re- is of decisive importance: each new invention happens in the margins of the already-written, or against the background of the already-written. This excludes a reading of the new narrative as fortuitous invention, as 'mere fiction,' because it engages with the world – the world itself being conceived of as a story. (22)

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee uses a scene reminiscent of black peril hysteria to dismantle the binaries of colonial discourse and to write against (already-written) colonial South African literary modes that he identifies in *White Writing*, like the black peril narrative, the South African pastoral, and the miscegenation melodrama. For if Lucy's rapists appear in the text as the quintessential barbarians, then the novel exposes David as equally barbarian.

In *Disgrace*'s most controversial scene, three black men break into Lucy's farmhouse, gang-raping her and assaulting David. During much of the action, David is locked in the bathroom, and the narration of his stream of thought as his daughter is raped is one of the more obvious instances of Coetzee's strategy of undermining David's perspective:

> He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless, an Aunt Sally, a figure from a cartoon, a

> missionary in cassock and topi waiting with clasped hands and upcast eyes while the savages jaw away in their own lingo preparatory to plunging him into their boiling cauldron. Mission work: what has it left behind, that huge enterprise of upliftment? Nothing that he can see. (*Disgrace* 95)

Although, like the rest of the novel, this scene is rendered through omniscient third-person narration, the thoughts and opinions are clearly David's, and the "images of black violence against whites invoked by Lurie are, crucially, images drawn from a white, colonial vision of Africa" (Longmuir 120), particularly his reference to Africa as a "dark continent." Indeed, David's understanding of black South Africans appears to be entirely informed by colonial representations, from mission work seen as a "huge enterprise of upliftment" (instead of a tool of colonization) to his allusion to the cannibalistic savagery that was a staple of nineteenth-century European depictions of Africans.[3]

But perhaps more important to this passage, as Anne Longmuir and other critics have asserted, is that David compares himself to an "Aunt Sally" figure. Initially, this may seem to be an unremarkable characterization on David's part; the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an "Aunt Sally" as "an object of unreasonable or prejudiced attack." However, the original phrase was used to describe a fairground game in which "the figure of a woman's head with a pipe in its mouth is set up, and the player, throwing sticks from a certain distance, aims at breaking the pipe" (*OED Online*). Many of the surviving depictions of this game, such as the 1911 sketch from *Whiteley's General Catalogue*, feature *black* women as the Aunt Sally figure. "Aunt Sally," is, then, a racialized symbol that was characteristic of "the very male, white hegemony" of

colonial and apartheid-era South Africa (Longmuir 121). That David, in characterizing himself as a victim of the new South Africa, draws on the figure of an older black woman publicly abused and humiliated by white men presents a deep irony – particularly given his general attitude toward women – that serves to undercut his narrative credibility.

While recognizing the violence performed on Lucy's body as rape, David does not identify the similarities between his actions and those of Lucy's rapists and is, at least initially, unable to categorize himself as a rapist. David's concern for Lucy in the aftermath of her rape – he wants her to get HIV and pregnancy tests – can be contrasted to his lack of concern for the women he sexually exploits: Melanie Isaacs, his student, and Soraya, a prostitute. While David believes that Lucy's rapists represent a "history of wrong" (*Disgrace* 156), he is blind to the history of his own actions; during his disciplinary hearing following his harassment of Melanie, one committee member declares that he does not recognize "the long history of exploitation of which this is a part" when David continues to claim that he simply "became a servant of Eros" (52-3). Despite the fact that Melanie averts herself and that for her, sex with David is "undesired to the core," he claims that it was "not rape, not quite that" (25) and repeatedly suggests that the act was the result of an overwhelming external force outside his control – "he is in the grip of something" (18) – rather than a self-initiated assault for which he is personally responsible.

However, while David elides and displaces his acts of sexual exploitation, Coetzee's language and carefully placed silences alert the reader to the parallels between the sexual violations that take place in each half of the novel. Melanie and Lucy experience

their assaults in remarkably similar terms. During David's "not quite" rape of Melanie, he notes that it was "[a]s though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away" (*Disgrace* 25). David's predatory position in this scene is likened to that of a fox hunting a rabbit; later, in remembering the event, David describes Melanie as "[s]tepping out in the forest where the wild wolf prowls" (168). Similarly, David calls Lucy's youngest rapist a "jackal boy" (202), and Lucy says, "I am a dead person" (161). In constructing these parallels between Melanie's rape and Lucy's rape, Coetzee "scratch[es] beneath the surface of David's free indirect speech" (Samuelson 144) to reveal the profound double standard on which black peril hysteria operated by exposing the far more prevalent yet largely unspoken white peril that dominated colonial life in the Cape.[4]

As the events of the novel unfold, furthermore, David's own conception of the clear boundaries of identity between himself and the men who rape Lucy dissolve. In one scene, David's identity and that of Lucy's rapists collapse into one another as David imagines his daughter's rape:

> While the men, for their part, drank up her fear, reveled in it, did all they could to hurt her, to menace her, to heighten her terror…. *You don't understand, you weren't there*, says Bev Shaw. Well, she is mistaken. Lucy's intuition is right after all: he does understand, he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. (160)

David can "be there, be the men" who "drank up her fear" in the same way that he "thrusts himself upon [Melanie]" and "takes her" while "her limbs crumple" (24). By

scripting David as a character who casts himself as a victim in the new political order but can also imagine himself in the position of Lucy's rapists, Coetzee undermines David's view of the new South Africa and draws attention to the ways in which colonial rape myths continue to structure post-apartheid social and political discourse. Embedded in Lucy's silence and beneath the plot of *Disgrace* is the novel's inscription of racialized rape as something that cannot be spoken publicly in the available discourse, and the active reader's attention to the unspoken allows such historical narratives and subtexts to emerge.

II. Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*

In *The House Gun,* Gordimer continues her turn away from the realist mode, opting instead for modernist techniques that produce textual gaps and explore the relationship between the self and society. In the prolonged absence of the novel's central actor – much like the unremitting silence of Lucy in *Disgrace* and Lydia in *Bitter Fruit – The House Gun* forms around a void and moves toward a collapse of the private/public, personal/political binary. This strategy also allows Gordimer to penetrate the inner psyche of Harald and Claudia, revealing subtle racial prejudices and the white liberal's illusion that he or she can exist outside the historical process.

The relationship between the Lindgards and Motsamai in *The House Gun* is, of course, emblematic of shifting power relations between blacks and whites in post-apartheid South Africa. However, Gordimer documents in detail the private reflections

of the Lindgards in regard to their defense council and in so doing, reveals lingering racial prejudices that would remain unspoken in realist texts, which tend to rely more heavily on spoken dialogue. Upon discovering that a black lawyer has been appointed to defend their son, the Lindgards think:

> They had heard it at once, in the shock of the name; the choice of a black man. She's not one of those doctors who touch black skin indiscriminately along with white, in their work, but retain liberal prejudices against the intellectual capacities of blacks. Yet she *is* questioning, and he is; in the muck in which they are stewing now, where murder is done, old prejudices writhe to the surface. (*HG* 33).

Aside from Harald and Claudia's more explicit but self-conscious racial biases, such as their initial reaction to Motsamai's appointment, their specific impressions of Motsamai and his family are similarly dubious and equally revealing. Claudia focuses on his accent and appearance during their first meeting, saying that "the whites of his eyes" were "strikingly clear-cut in his small mahogany face as the glass eyes set in ancient statues" (*HG* 40) and that his chin "asserted a traditional African style" (39), characterizations that amount to little more than a caricature of questionable accuracy. She regards him as "full of himself. Somehow arrogant" (43) after he lays out a strategy of defense. Before having met Motsamai's family, Harald claims, "He has the idea that women, somewhere in the background, are more accessible than men… it obviously comes from the way things are in his own house…. It's their style" (95). The Lindgards clearly retain racialized conceptions of Motsamai's identity; Gordimer's distance from the narrative voice of these portions of the novel remains unclear.

In focalizing the narrative through multiple characters – Harald, Claudia, and occasionally Motsamai - whose lives revolve around an absent protagonist, Gordimer "investigates such broad modernist preoccupations as an inability to assume consensual knowledge – the failure of the 'consensual entente', in Lilian R. Furst's words, which lies at the heart of realist fiction – or to conceive in 'totalizing' terms of the relationship between self and society" (Medalie 635). Gordimer's modernist exploration of the inner psyche of Harald and Claudia reveals the fluctuating distance between their interpretations and responses to the events that affect their family – Harald tends to search for answers in literature and religious faith; Claudia in secular humanism – and questions the possibility of "consensual knowledge." In one scene, Harald's and Claudia's divergent worldviews clash as they discuss the absent Duncan's criminal motivations, as Claudia tells Harald, "Go on. Adultery, blasphemy, you believe in sin. I don't think I do. I just believe in damage; don't damage. That's what he was taught, that's what he knows – knew. So now – is to take life the only sin recognized by people like me? Unbelievers. Not like you" (*HG* 103). The Lindgards' struggle to come to terms with their son's actions and to sustain a meaningful dialogue with one another suggests the concerns that some critics of the TRC expressed regarding the epic effort to piece together individual traumas into a single, institutionalized narrative.

Furthermore, Duncan's prolonged absence in the text forces the reader to constantly defer and revise judgment, and speaks to the many moral indeterminacies that surrounded the treatment of the victims and perpetrators of apartheid during South Africa's transition. Both Duncan and Motsamai remain textually closed to the reader, as Gordimer denies access to the consciousness of either for most of the duration of the

novel; indeed, the narrator asks explicitly, halfway through the novel, "Why is Duncan not in the story? He is a vortex from which, flung away, around, are all: Harald, Claudia, Motsamai, Khulu, the girl, and the dead man. His act had made him a vacuum…" (*HG* 151). Duncan remains an enigmatic figure throughout the novel, and it is impossible to account definitively for his motivations or the circumstances in which he shoots Carl Jesperson. He resists the reader's search for a conventional protagonist, and the moral slipperiness of his character subverts binary oppositions (good vs. evil, right vs. wrong, etc.); these destabilizations of traditional narrative concepts of "self" put the onus on the reader to create meaning, just as Coetzee's implicit prompts to counterfocalize against David's narrative do.

Duncan's private reflections are not made available until the novel's closing pages, and the rendering of his parents' subjectivity does not lessen his inscrutability. What the rendering of Claudia's and Harald's inner life and struggle to come to terms with their son's violent crime does reveal is that attempts to separate their private lives from the political process are futile, and that their spatially-protected privacy is a false illusion of refuge. The seemingly private nature of Duncan's crime has led some critics to claim that Gordimer sees the personal and the political as potentially separate realms:

> In her first two 'post-apartheid' novels – *None to Accompany Me* (1994) and *The House Gun* (1998) – Gordimer remained preoccupied with the South African scene, albeit in a more variegated way. Along with other critics, I have noted Gordimer's post-1990 engagement with the concept of the civil imaginary and her new concern with private life as not being inextricably linked to the public domain (for example, Dimitriu 2000 and 2001). These new tendencies

> can be seen, in retrospect, to signal a kind of liberation from the burden of excessive social responsibility within large historical events. (Dimitriu 159)

However, *The House Gun* features the "private life" of a couple invaded by the "public domain" as the ramifications of apartheid-era state violence penetrate every private space in post-apartheid South Africa: "There is a labyrinth of violence not counter to the city but a form of communication within the city itself," and "Duncan is contained in that labyrinth" (*HG* 141). The Lindgards were "no longer unaware of it, behind security gates. It claimed them" (*HG* 141). The labyrinthine spatial conception that Gordimer conjures here exposes the impossibility of clear-cut divisions of "private" and "public" space and the inescapability of South Africa's political history.

In *Disgrace*, the private space of Lucy's home is invaded by the public, political ramifications of apartheid as well; violence is similarly depicted as commonplace, uncontrollable, an everyday occurrence. However, interestingly, David – the best stand-in for the Lindgards, as the middle-aged, white focalizer of the novel – insists on making Lucy's rape a public issue, while Lucy maintains that it is a "purely private matter" (*Disgrace* 112). While this seems to be a notable reversal in that the Lindgards resist engagement with the public domain, it is crucial that David's impulse to make Lucy's rape a public matter does not extend to his own sexual exploits, which he sees as undeserving of (public) trial and disconnected from the exploits of Lucy's rapists. While the actions of David and the Lindgards are hardly comparable, their struggles to divide their personal lives from political context and public violence are similar.

The Lindgards initially resist Gordimer's labyrinthine conception of space and violence ("Other people! Other people! These awful things happen to other people"

[*HG* 78]), as do their fellow white South Africans, in a tone of Coetzeean irony: "And in this particular circumstance the reversal is curiously marked: no-one is casting opprobrium at Mr Lindgard for his son's criminal act; what they are expressing is a mixture of pity and a whine against the injustice that such things should be allowed to happen to a nice high-up gentleman like him" (*HG* 85). However, Harald later muses that the

> truth of all this was that he and his wife belonged, now, to the other side of privilege. Neither whiteness, nor observance of the teachings of the Father and Son, nor the pious respectability of liberalism, nor money, that had kept them in safety – that other form of segregation – could change their status. In its way, that status was definitive as the forced removals of the old regime; no chance of remaining where they had been, surviving in themselves *as they were*. (*HG* 127)

Although his spatial metaphor of placelessness is perhaps problematic in that the narrator – as focalized through Harald – compares their changed social status to the "forced removals of the old regime," the metaphor significantly links his racial and financial privileges in post-apartheid South Africa to apartheid-era segregation.[5] This recognition draws attention to the ways in which white South Africans, even those who considered themselves liberal (as the Lindgards do), benefitted from the apartheid system and allowed for a spatial separation between the "genteel white suburbs" (*HG* 12) and the "cruelty enacted in the name of the State they had lived in" (126), "its beatings and interrogations, maimings and assassinations" (142), of which the Lindgards claim, "none of it had anything to do with them" (126).

The events of *The House Gun* force the Lindgards to acknowledge the common

humanity between themselves and those from whom they have sought to maintain distance and trouble the boundary between their public and private lives:

> For [Harald], the photograph of a child clinging to the body of its dead mother and the report of a night of mortar fire sending nameless people randomly to the shelter of broken walls and collapsing cellars was suddenly part of his own life no longer outside but within the parameters of disaster…. For [Claudia], these events were removed, even farther than they had been by distance, further than they had been in relevance to her life, by the message that had interrupted them: private disaster means to drop out of the rest of the world. (*HG* 28)

Gordimer here delineates two distinctly opposed trajectories: the Lindgards can either, as David Medalie notes, "use what has happened to extend their understanding of and responses to suffering, thereby enlarging the context of the discrete catastrophe," or they can "allow it to sever every other context or connection, producing an insularity so extreme that it is like 'drop[ping] out of the rest of the world'" (637). Medalie goes on to argue that between these two "choices," "the tendency to withdraw hermetically into their grief is the one that tends to prevail" (637). However, while it is true that the Lindgards grieve privately, there are more than a few moments in the text in which Harald and Claudia emerge from their absorption in their own sorrow and are compelled to recognize that they now have something in common with people whose situation had previously seemed wholly dissimilar to theirs. For example, Claudia experiences her work in the downtown clinic in an entirely different light: "Claudia is not the only woman with a son in prison. Since this afternoon she has understood that. She is no longer the one who doles out comfort or its placebos for others' disasters,

herself safe, untouchable, in another class" (*HG* 17). Harald's realization that they can no longer live "in themselves *as they were*" (*HG* 127) marks the collapse of the private/public binary, for the phrase "in themselves" emphasizes the internal or personal quality of a life that cannot exist outside of political systems that afford it privileges like the luxury of privacy and the control of public space.

Gordimer's subversion of the personal/political binary, her destabilization of conventional notions of narrative self, and her use of multiple focalizers produces a fragmented narrative that questions the possibility of a definitive, singular truth. Duncan's extended silence and seemingly impenetrable character echo Lucy's refusal to speak about her rape; however, Gordimer crucially proposes to give voice to both men and women, black and white – whereas Coetzee, while encouraging his audience to read against and in between the silences of *Disgrace*, offers a narrative controlled entirely by a white man. This is not the novel's failure, however; while Gordimer uses the psychological penetration of multiple focalizers to draw attention to the ways in which the white liberal continues to rely on race- and class-based privilege in a post-transition state, Coetzee does not presume to give voice to either Petrus or Lucy, instead recognizing the limits of his authorial power while tracing the ways in which social and political discourse in the new South Africa remain largely in control of apartheid-era power structures, as represented by his protagonist.

III. Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*

In *Bitter Fruit*, Dangor's third-person omniscient narration and array of focalizers exposes the "inability to assume consensual knowledge," much like Gordimer's modernist techniques do. The story of the Ali family is told through shifting narrative voices, which cut across times and generations, producing a narrative that intersects with competing versions of the same story. The conflicting accounts of events and missing stories suggest the existence of countless unspoken or invisible traumas that are left unaddressed by a single, overarching narrative, as conceived of by the TRC. The uncertainties of both history and identity are foregrounded through Dangor's probing of racial constructs, sexual transgression, and transformation.

Dangor utilizes shifting narrative voices because, as he claims,

> A single narrator, or a more direct and linear approach would have forced me to sacrifice the exploration of the many layers of reality that exists [sic] in what can only be described as schizophrenic societies. The South Africa I was trying to portray is certainly not a simple one. Not all the heroes were Black, not all the villains white. Of course, the militarily dominant white society did have greater access to the levers of villainy, and used these ruthlessly. But it would have been false to create "representational" voices – this traps writers of fiction into what I call cultural sculpturing. (boldtype interview)

In avoiding "cultural sculpting" – a term for the creation of singular, "representational" voices and a charge that is aimed at the TRC but also, arguably, at novels like *Disgrace*

– Dangor's narrative floats back and forth between present and past, speech and silence, public and private in exploring the fragmentary or inconsistent nature of histories written by a "schizophrenic" society. *Bitter Fruit* is structured in three parts – Memory, Confession, and Retribution – which Dangor "counterposes against the three steps laid out by the TRC – speak, grieve, and heal" (Frenkel 159). In its functioning as an alternative narrative, *Bitter Fruit* excavates the silences of the TRC, its three major characters – Silas, Lydia, and Mikey – representative of different ways of coming to terms with the past while expressing its continuing impact on the present.

The novel opens with Silas as focalizer: "It was inevitable. One day Silas would run into someone from the past, someone who had been in a position of power and had abused it. Someone who had affected his life, not in the vague, rather grand way in which everybody had been affected, as people said… but directly and brutally" (*BF* 3). From the very outset, then, Dangor offers the reader two distinct types of historical experience: the "vague, rather grand way in which everybody had been affected," and the more particular, personal traumas of those who had been affected "directly and brutally." Silas, despite his role in the crafting of the TRC's report, admits here that the collective narratives are too "vague" and "grand" too apply to his own personal – and brutal – experience of apartheid.

However, Silas is more comfortable with these vague and grand accounts of the past and is unable to face the trauma that has affected his life "directly and brutally," delineating the conflict between these two types of memory. Regarding the possibility of discussing Lydia's rape, the narrator as focalized through Silas says,

He was not capable of such an ordeal, he acknowledged. It would require an

> immersion in words he was not familiar with, words that did not seek to blur memory, to lessen the pain, but to sharpen all of these things. He was trained to find consensus, even if it meant not acknowledging the 'truth' in all its unflattering nakedness. (*BF* 63)

In setting up an oppositional relationship between the words of personal trauma and those involved in his consensus-finding work, Dangor implies that the process of the TRC "blur[s] memory" and does not acknowledge "unflattering" truths. Silas embodies these contradictions and is representative of "the political shaping of national memory, the compromise on which the new South Africa is based, and the slippery nature of truth" (Miller 149) in that he works as a negotiator between the conflicting versions of "truth" posited by the "TRC commissioners, the old security people and our own fellers [the ANC]" (*BF* 257).

Despite the fact that Dangor makes Lydia's rape central to the events of *Bitter Fruit*, he defers focalization through Lydia for several chapters, creating a void in the early parts of the narrative similar to that created by Duncan's absence in *The House Gun*. Even when Lydia is granted focalization, it is often obscured or mediated through her husband or her son. For example, Lydia expresses her innermost thoughts and addresses the intimate details of her rape most directly through her diary; however, it is *Mikey* who reads her diary – through which he discovers that he is a child of that rape – and who controls which portions of it are revealed to the reader. In filtering Lydia's perspective through the men in her life, Dangor seems to question the idea that "the end of apartheid necessarily provides an opening in which previously silenced female voices can be heard" (Samuelson 120).

Lydia's diary is in itself an ambivalent form of articulation, as it is written but not spoken, producing what Ronit Frenkel refers to as a "type of silent articulation" (160). Lydia begins writing after the night she is raped, in 1978, and continues until 1994, when the TRC commences. Her entries cut across time and space, often focusing on her rape and its effect on her life:

> They dropped us off at the edge of the township, Silas and I walked down the quiet, peaceful street, both of us silent. He had stopped moaning, but did not know how to reach out and touch me. Perhaps if he had, my mind might have been made up: I would have aborted the child the moment the pregnancy was confirmed. Perhaps his touch would have drawn me closer to him and to his struggle…. But his fear, that icy, unspoken revulsion, hung in the air like a mist. It would enable me to give life to Mikey, my son. At that moment, in Smith Street, Noordgesig, I crossed over into a zone of silence. (*BF* 129)

Lydia enters a "zone of silence" as a result of her rape and Silas' response to it; her trauma is thus verbally unspeakable, but can still be articulated in written form. Dangor here blurs the boundary between speech and silence in a text-within-a-text that highlights the ambiguities of history and memory.

The differences between Silas' and Lydia's perceptions in this passage are crucial to Dangor's project as well. Disparities between their interpretations of events arise again and again in the text; for example, Silas sees Lydia's reaction to discovering his extramarital affair with another member of the MK as largely revolving around his sexual infidelity: "She told him to stop using the struggle as an excuse for 'fucking around,' there were many decent people who were 'involved' but did not go about

screwing each other like dogs in heat. Then, too, her anger had hardened into something impenetrable, an invisible crust that made her skin impervious to touch and her mind deaf to even his most heartfelt pleading" (*BF* 13). However, the text later reveals that Lydia's reaction – finally focalized through Lydia herself – concerned Silas' underground activities: "She realized, later on, that she had been exposed, she and her child, to potential assassins, rapists, men who would do anything to intimidate people working actively against them, all because Silas hadn't confided in her" (111). The information revealed in this interpretive discrepancy highlights Silas' tendency to project himself, with his "most heartfelt pleading," as a victim – indeed, in much the same style that David does so in *Disgrace* – and implicitly questions his narrative reliability. Furthermore, this gap in interpretation, exposed by Dangor through the use of multiple character-focalizers, pervades the novel and underscores the problems inherent in a singular, dominant version of truth.

Just as Lydia is granted focalization in the latter portions of the novel, Mikey's psyche gradually disappears from the text. As Mikey becomes more involved in PAGAD, his consciousness is essentially written out of the novel, and his plots to kill a friend's abusive father as well as his own biological father, Du Boise, are not revealed until the acts are committed. Dangor offers the reader only this glimpse into Mikey's thought process: "My heritage, he says in a whisper, unwanted, imposed, my history, my beginnings. Michael fires – twice – directly into Du Boise's face…." (*BF* 276). Just as Duncan's prolonged absence in *The House Gun* forces the reader to constantly defer and revise judgment, making it impossible to account definitively for his murderous motivations, Mikey remains textually closed to the reader in the final chapters of *The*

House Gun. The inaccessibility of both Duncan and Mikey create gaps and moral indeterminacies in the text that engage with the controversy and ethical ambiguity surrounding the state's treatment of the victims and architects of apartheid-era violence.

The kaleidoscopic text that is produced by these gaps and ambiguities mirrors the fragmented lives of coloured South Africans, who in Dangor's fiction "inhabit…in-between spaces" (Kruger 114) in marginalized communities often left out of the grander struggle. Dangor goes to great lengths to emphasize the fragmentary nature of coloured identity in South Africa: "Here we are, in our twilight zone between black and white, trying to be both and ending up as neither" (82). Mikey is described as having "no colour of his own, as if his complexion was created by absorbing light from elements around him" (71). Lydia tells Silas, "You have no culture of your own…no belief that is yours, just yours alone. All you stand for and believe in was picked up along the way. Well ideals are not formed that way, a little idea found here and a little idea found there. These fancy friends of yours go home to their families, their religions, their damn traditions. And you, where do you belong?" (59) The seemingly futile quest for belonging in *Bitter Fruit* underscores the ambiguous nature of race and challenges readers to think beyond the binary black/white opposition that has structured apartheid, as well as anti-apartheid, discourse.

Dangor's own history exemplifies the ways in which a single, dominant (in this case, National Party-authored) narrative elides the facts of the lives of coloured South Africans as they are lived on a day-to-day basis. Although he was "(mis)represented as an 'Indian poet' by the authors of a 'contemporary profile' of 'Indian South Africans,' Dangor and his family were expelled from the mixed neighborhoods of Fordsburg in the

1950s for being 'Malay' in an 'Indian group area,' even though Cape Muslims has historically shared the neighborhood with Indian Muslims and others" (Kruger 114). The arbitrary and confusing apartheid system of racial classification here is key to understanding race as both imagined – in terms of its artificial construction – and real, as it affects the lives of South Africans in concrete ways. The syncretic South African identities embodied by Dangor and the subjects of his literary work are both marked and masked by the term "coloured," which the apartheid state's taxonomy attempted to define as a discrete race.

Silas eventually comes to understand the idea of a "totalizing colouredness" (Wicomb 105) as fabricated: "That's what we did not know or want to know, he thought: that we were not necessarily the same, just because we were both coloured; that we were not necessarily compatible, just because we both came from some kind of bastard strain. We were different" (*BF* 107). Despite its melancholy tone, this passage exemplifies Dangor's attempt in *Bitter Fruit* to foreground personal, individual experience and its ramifications *over* race. This strategy supports Wicomb's notion of "multiple belongings" as an alternative way of viewing a culture "where participation in a number of micro-communities whose interests conflict and overlap could become a rehearsal of cultural life in the larger South African community where we learn to perform the same kind of negotiation in terms of identity within a lived culture characterized by difference" (105).

In *Bitter Fruit*, the Alis' performance of ambiguous identities situates them "within and against the demands of affiliation with a range of communities in South Africa, more complex than binary oppositions between black and white…." (Kruger

116). They "pass" into hitherto white spaces – particularly Silas, who works for the government – and challenge the treatment of failed performances of identity featured in the historically prevalent genre that relies on this trope: the miscegenation melodrama. While some critics have claimed that *Bitter Fruit* "remain[s] trapped within a received grammar of racial embodiment and pigmentation" (Strauss), Dangor merely utilizes the grammar of racial embodiment in order to set up the *reversal* of, and thus to write *against*, the narrative of the miscegenation melodrama. This mid-twentieth century genre was typically written by whites and articulated the anxieties of white minority culture about so-called "play-whites" (Kruger 115). *Bitter Fruit*, instead of expressing the white fear of black peril and racial contamination, depicts figures of white peril (Du Boise) and characters that embody multiple racial identities with varying success.

Dangor does not offer any neat solutions, but does trace the trajectory of a variety of ways of dealing with the apartheid past. *Bitter Fruit*, like each of these novels, offers merely one piece of a fragmentary past and suggests that the construction of a unified narrative of South African history is problematic. Dangor's claim that a "single narrator… would have forced me to sacrifice the exploration of the many layers of reality" delineates a major difference in the narrative strategies of these three authors. In *Disgrace*, Coetzee utilizes the single, representative voice that Dangor condemns; however, as I have argued, David's unreliable narrative draws attention to the ways in which he silences the "many layers of reality," and thus the very silences of the text become points at which suppressed histories enter the plot of the novel. Gordimer and Dangor use multiple focalizers to construct more explicitly fragmentary narratives. By representing trauma and violence through penetrative insight into the inner

consciousness of multiple characters, *The House Gun* and *Bitter Fruit* suggest the existence of unspoken and invisible histories that exist outside of institutional and collective accounts of the past. Coetzee and Dangor each allude to, write against, and ironically reverse historical genres that were used to support the ideals of the apartheid regime, such as the black peril narrative and the miscegenation melodrama. These narratives, punctured by missing pieces and absent subjects, mirror the "holes gouged in the hearts of South African cities in the name of apartheid and the gaps in South African history" (Kruger 114) left by dominant apartheid (and anti-apartheid) narratives.

Together, these novels present problems of language, representation, and identity that undermine the narrative of national unity prevalent at the time of these novels' publication, following the hearings and report of the TRC. Coetzee, Gordimer, and Dangor narrate complex alternatives to a bifurcated logic where South Africa is characterized by black and white, good and bad, past and present. As Ronit Frenkel writes regarding Dangor's work, these narratives highlight "the intermixture and ambiguity of cultural formation" in contemporary South Africa and exist "alongside postapartheid freedoms within a larger context of global resurgences of ethnic identification and increasingly recognized transnational connectivity" (149). The newly democratized South Africa, as depicted in these novels, remains dependent on the old economic, social, and epistemological structures of apartheid; thus, different groups created by decades of apartheid do not participate equally in what Zoë Wicomb calls "the category of postcoloniality" (94), or the idea of the Rainbow Nation.

CHAPTER 2

REPRESENTATIONS OF RAPE, VIOLENCE, AND SPATIAL BOUNDARIES IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

"There are certain things people do not forget, or forgive. Rape is one of them. In ancient times, conquerors destroyed the will of those whom they conquered by impregnating the women. It is an ancient form of genocide….The Romans and the Sabine women, the Nazis and Jewish women in the concentration camps, the Soviets in Poland, Israeli soldiers and Palestinian refugees, white South African policemen and black women.

You conquer a nation by bastardizing its children."

– Achmat Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*

In these novels, Gordimer, Coetzee and Dangor probe the relationship between the implementation of spatial boundaries and racialized conceptions of violence in the new South Africa as an approach to addressing the prevalence of violent crime and skyrocketing rape rates in the post-apartheid state. In *The House Gun*, Gordimer explores shifting boundaries in urban spaces and the ways these shape the lives of both black and white South Africans in an environment of seemingly uncontainable violence. Dangor works with similar urban spatial economies but focuses on coloured communities, where the artificial nature of racial classification and race-based divisions of space is particularly salient. *Bitter Fruit* also seeks, through Lydia's experience of rape, to reveal the link between apartheid-era hierarchies of race and gendered notions of space, a link that Dangor depicts as crucial to the creation of sociopolitical conditions in which the mass rape of "native" women is both authorized and erased. Dangor and

Coetzee both explore the ways in which language, specifically Afrikaans, engages with notions of proprietorship over South African land and functions in conjunction with the colonial conflation of images of the female body with those of the South African landscape. Explorers and colonizers rendered the Cape through a gendered and sexualized reading that saw the land as open to European penetration; the rural space of the Cape is in this way appropriated by a patriarchal, imperial narrative that heightens the threat of sexual assault for women "trespassing" in this space and marks women as male territory. *Disgrace* is vital in discussing issues of space and landscape in the new South Africa: in placing Lucy's assault in a rural farm space in a country where agriculture is tainted by centuries of oppression, where the colonial appropriation of "virgin land" is implicated, Coetzee contextualizes the actions of his characters in ways that reveal them not as signs of a newly anarchic post-apartheid South Africa, but as products of a history of aggressive domination.

I. Race, Space, and Post-Apartheid Violence in *The House Gun* and *Bitter Fruit*

Gordimer and Dangor situate their novels, for the most part, in urban spaces in which shifting boundaries between former black townships and affluent white neighborhoods and the constant construction of physical barriers shape their characters' lives. The treatment of space in *The House Gun* and *Bitter Fruit* should be approached with a working knowledge of the space economy of the apartheid system, which was predicated on the establishment and control of spatial zones; the Reconstruction and

Development Programme (RDP) has noted that "[a]partheid South Africa enjoyed a long history of attempting to organize the spatial system as a tool for social engineering and the management of urbanization" (Rogerson 187). The National Party (NP) sought to safeguard its authority by deepening ethnic divisions and fostering multiple ethnic nationalisms, passing legislation that relegated black South Africans to quasi-independent *Bantustans* or homelands.[1] Over several decades, blacks endured many of the brutalities that comprise ethnic cleansing: collective expulsion, forced migration, bulldozing and seizure of homes, and infamous pass laws, among other hardships. People deemed to be "illegal squatters," "surplus," "idle," "alien," or "unassimilable," (Nixon 74) were corralled into rural, and later urban, ghettos.

The House Gun, as Gordimer's first novel set fully in post-apartheid South Africa, features shifting spatial boundaries and key power reversals, particularly in the role of Hamilton Motsamai, a successful black lawyer. Harald and Claudia Lindgard, a middle-aged couple meant to be loosely representative of white South African liberalism, find themselves dependent on Motsamai after he is appointed as their son Duncan's defense lawyer. Motsamai is symbolic of the new South Africa's transitional period in that he has access to social, political, and financial capital that was previously reserved exclusively for whites; Gordimer delineates this emerging phenomenon through Motsamai's ability to transgress apartheid-era divisions of space. Motsamai lives in a "suburb that had been built in the Thirties and Forties by white businessmen" who processed maize that "the million of blacks who had lost the land they grew their food on couldn't subsist without" (*HG* 166). His sizable house was meant to "express the distinction of old money" and the "prestige and substance [of] the plantation-house

pillars of the Deep South" (*HG* 166).

While some critics interpret Motsamai's residence in a formerly white suburb as a delicious bit of irony and see Motsamai himself as the heroic figure of the Rainbow Nation, Gordimer's own position appears to be more ambiguous.[2] The omniscient narrator of *The House Gun* notes that Motsamai's neighborhood was "saved by the unpredicted solution of desegregation" and counts Motsamai among the "new generation of still newer money that arrived," although

> these were no immigrants from another country. They were those who had always belonged, but only looked on the pillars and balconies from the hovels and township yards they were confined to… it provided a comfortable space for a successful man and his family and was now supplied with current standard equipment, electrically-controlled gates for their security against those who remained in township yards and city squatter camps. (*HG* 167)

Of course, the compartmentalization of space in this passage – from the apartheid-era "hovels" and "township yards" that "confined" blacks to the post-apartheid "electrically-controlled gates" that create a barrier between the (black) "city squatter camps" and affluent suburban neighborhoods – is anything but successful desegregation. Motsamai seems to have adopted the *noveau riche* lifestyle of his Boer predecessors with ease, abandoning his activist background and embracing the material powers of the beneficiaries of the apartheid regime.

In *Bitter Fruit*, the Ali family similarly transgresses apartheid-era divisions of space and seems to embrace the lifestyle of the upper crust of the white minority in South Africa. Dangor frequently contrasts the Alis' current living arrangement with

their former township neighborhood, where Lydia's parents still live on principle: "'It's because you children want to move to the suburbs,' [Lydia's mother] said, as if expressing a thought that had been preoccupying her for a long time, 'the township's not good enough any more'" (*BF* 50). Silas and Lydia retain relics from their previous township homes, which outline their spatial trajectory and which Dangor utilizes to trace different stages of apartheid.

For example, Silas saves "the old easy chair that he had salvaged from his mother's house in Doornfontein, when the place was declared 'white' and the family was evicted. That had been his mother's last nomadic stop in her journey from suburb to suburb, singled out for pursuit, she believed, by the grey-suited men who implemented the apartheid laws" (*BF* 11). Later, this reminds Silas of the "time of the great removals" when he was Mikey's age, when the "GGs came late at night to load people onto trucks, the remnants of families who had refused to move to Soweto, or who had simply not found the energy to gather their belongings and relocate into the unknown" (*BF* 174). Lydia's family was subject to these forced removals as well: "Back in Durban, when their relocation to Johannesburg, to mythical, frightening Soweto, had been confirmed ('They refuse to recognize my coloured identity card,' Jackson announced in a monotone), Lydia wandered along the forbidden stretch of Butcher Road, just off the new freeway, watching prostitutes ply their trade…" (*BF* 118). In these passages, Dangor points toward the ways in which the ambiguity of racial classifications under the apartheid system (through the arbitrary recognition or dismissal of state-issued identity cards), class politics (particularly in the note that "prostitutes ply their trade" in "forbidden" areas), and spatial engineering intersect to violently shape

the lives of South Africans under National Party rule. Mikey suggests this intersection of race, poverty, and space as he is exploring the Muslim neighborhoods in which Silas' estranged family lives:

> Yes, he can write his history and the history of a whole country, simply by tracing his family's nomadic movements from one ruined neighborhood to the next, searching through photographs, deeds of sale, engineering reports (this area is predominantly Indian or coloured or African, it is filled with noise, loud music, people congregate in the street, it is squalid, it is a slum and therefore qualified for clearance under the Slums Clearance Act), social workers' assessments (the children beam at you with dirty faces unaware of their suffering). (*BF* 186)

But Dangor's descriptions of the Alis' new neighborhood, with its pruned gardens and "fragile suburban quiet" (*BF* 66), contrast sharply with those of the poverty-stricken townships. Silas and Lydia now invite friends "over to their house for dinner, drinks, Sunday tea even, sitting in the back garden like those geriatric white couples in Durban's posh areas where Mam Agnes had worked as a cook" (*BF* 57). Their newly acquired socioeconomic status is evident in their "passing" into spaces once reserved exclusively for whites, of which Dangor subtly reminds us through a reference to Mam Agnes' labor as a cook in a "posh" white neighborhood – for which she would have, of course, needed a pass.[3] In a description that echoes that of Motsamai's house, which was "meant to express the distinction of old money," the Alis' home was "designed to look like an apartment building in Europe," with its "high ceilings made of pressed steel," "ornate glass pane[s]" and "a balcony that extended all around the upper part of

the house" (*BF* 76-7). They now live far from their old haunt, which "had been invaded by squatters and now had a derelict air about it" (*BF* 98). Clearly, Dangor situates this text in a post-apartheid spatial economy.

However, while Motsamai appears to abandon his activist background and embrace the material powers of the beneficiaries of the apartheid regime with ease in *The House Gun*, Silas struggles to do so in *Bitter Fruit*, often expressing nostalgia for the "simpler, more wholesome life" (*BF* 97) of apartheid South Africa:

> It made him think of the "grand" days in the old townships, where people slept with wide-open windows, nights balmy, the breeze cool, life going by softly, shadows gliding along the street. The term "grand" had nothing to do with grandeur, but with goodness and simplicity. The ability of people to understand each other and empathize – even when someone was doing things they disagreed with. Back then everyone recognized the need to survive was paramount, so that breaking the law, dealing in stolen goods, running fah-fee or owning a shebeen were all acts of survival, and every occupation had its dignity. (*BF* 85)

Silas thinks that the "happier times, epochs of greater clarity" during which "every occupation had its dignity" are somehow disconnected from his current class and occupation, where he must "make decisions that accord not with [his] own wishes but with the 'needs of the country,' mak[ing] demands on [his] personal principles" (*BF* 165). Silas' discomfort with the new system and his own place within it stems partly from the suspicion that he is merely taking the place of the politicians of the NP within a social framework that has changed little since the transition, a suspicion which he justifies by claiming that working "in government is different from fighting for

freedom. Things have to be managed now" (*BF* 171). In his depiction of the Alis' transgression of spatial boundaries that nevertheless remain in place for the vast majority of coloured and black South Africans, Dangor suggests that apartheid has left an enduring legacy that continues to exert its influence and that apartheid-era geographical and racial power divisions remain in place – even if some middle-class black and coloured people have moved into the suburbs and government offices.

As Fatima Mernissi argues in her article, "The Meaning of Spatial Boundaries," society does not form divisions purely for the pleasure of breaking the social universe into compartments: "The institutionalized boundaries dividing the parts of society express the recognition of power in one part at the expense of the other. Any transgression of the boundaries is a danger to the social order because it is an attack on the acknowledged allocation of power" (489). Space is created through social relations and should be conceptualized as a locus of power, a site of contesting sociopolitical forces that often run along lines of race and gender. Sarah Mills explains that "colonial cities were designed to emphasize the distinction between ruler and ruled. In contrast to what were seen as the sprawling accretions of the crowded 'native' town, the civil lines were generally planned with mathematical precision on a grid-plan" (706). However, as Dangor reminds us in his brief descriptions of Mam Agnes' domestic work in white neighborhoods in apartheid South Africa, it is important to note that these colonial divisions of space exist only at an ideal level, that "town planning was an idealized embodiment of colonial relations" and that there was "a great deal of crossing over of these clear-cut boundaries" (Mills 707). Nevertheless, these artificial spatial boundaries continue to impact South African lives after apartheid; although Mills describes a

contrast between "native" and white spaces in *colonial* society, Gordimer and Dangor use similar language to describe the difference between the "sprawling" and "crowded" urban squatter camps and the grid-like "mathematical precision" of the largely white, suburban, fenced neighborhoods. Gordimer, in her descriptions of Motsamai's living arrangements, and Dangor, in his depiction of the Alis' new neighborhood, both suggest that the systems of power that created spatial boundaries during apartheid, while perhaps no longer exclusively based on racial divisions, remain in place.

Indeed, like many white South Africans who undertook the construction of fences and installment of expensive alarm systems in the 1990s, ostensibly due to rampant black violence, Julian – Silas' friend and colleague in *Bitter Fruit* – lives in a "secure area, with only one entrance manned by a private security company" (*BF* 255).[4] On their way to a party thrown by Julian for Silas, "guests had to drive up to a boom, where the names of the drivers and the registration numbers of their cars were recorded" (255). The narrator suggests that this is because "[h]ere, after dark, every black male was a suspect, a potential robber or carjackers, and rape was seen as the horrific accompaniment to 'economic' crimes" (255). The spatial and social barriers in this scene are eerily reminiscent of an era in which blacks were required to present passes to enter white spaces, and, unsurprisingly, Dangor links the implementation of spatial boundaries to racialized conceptions of violence in the post-apartheid state.

Likewise, in *The House Gun*, the Lindgards increase the number of physical barriers that divide their living space after the ANC takes control of the government. Harald and Claudia "made the decision to give up the house and move into this townhouse complex with grounds maintained and security-monitored entrance," and the

novel opens with the couple watching "whatever were the disasters of that time" on television with their "after-dinner coffee cups beside them" (*HG* 3). Their "intercom buzzes" to announce the presence of a visitor (*HG* 3), and their new home comes with a "small garden allotted, walled and maintained, within the landscaping of the townhouse complex" (*HG* 28). If anything, the Lindgards' racial and class-based privilege has become more overtly manifest in terms of physical space after the dissolution of the apartheid regime.

However, if Harald and Claudia's guarded townhouse complex and Motsamai's mansion with its technologically advanced security equipment represent the institutionalized boundaries dividing the parts of society according to an acknowledged allocation of power, then Duncan's house appears to be relatively lacking in physical and social divisions. Duncan's "garden cottage" (*HG* 3) enacts, on a microcosmic level, the society which the new South African constitution theoretically makes possible: one in which there is no discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or sexual preference. The group of young people that take up residence in the cottage is mostly male, but with one woman; mostly gay, but including a heterosexual couple; mostly white, but with one black man; mostly South African, but including one foreigner. The house literally sits outside of the bounds of Pretoria's compartmentalized space, "beyond the ordinary humdrum" where "freedom claims go beyond all the old trappings" (*HG* 120).

But if the house is representative of the newly minted Rainbow Nation, is this a viable entity? Duncan's crime and the subsequent investigation suggest that it is not, for during the trial it surfaces that a "man, a plumber's assistant, Petrus Ntuli, who occupied an outhouse on the property in exchange for work in the garden, was

questioned and said that he had seen Lindgard come out on the verandah of the house and drop something as he crossed the garden to the cottage" (*HG* 15). As it turns out, not everyone has access to this utopic microcosm of the new South Africa, as envisioned by the nation's progressive new constitution. Later in the novel, one of Motsamai's guests expresses frustration with this phenomenon: "That's how whites see it. Live anywhere you like but not next door to me…. We don't have capital. What is this 'collateral' but capital? For generations we've never had a chance to create capital…. Collateral is property, a good position, not just a job. We couldn't have it – not our grandfathers, not our fathers…" (*HG* 171). While Duncan and his housemates partially resist the divisions of space seen elsewhere in the novel, the walls of the house still serve to exclude some South Africans – on the basis of class and likely of race – from negotiating new social frameworks.

Aside from persisting forms of labor characteristic of segregated societies like apartheid South Africa and the American South (i.e., working "on the property in exchange for accommodation in an outhouse"), David Medalie notes that "the new house has a gun in it; the violence has accompanied them" (638) and that the reductiveness of representing the house gun as "a symbol of the shared interchangeable relations" (*HG* 254) is devastating. The narrator explains that if the house gun "hadn't been there how could you defend yourself, in this city, against losing your hi-fi equipment, your television set and computer, your watch and rings, against being gagged, raped, knifed" (*HG* 157). Like the gates and security systems of the Lindgards' and Motsamai's homes, Duncan's house gun was originally an attempt to create boundaries between the threat of violence in the outside world and the private refuge of

a secluded home.

The "city squatter camps" that Gordimer and Dangor refer to and from which Motsamai, the Lindgards (perhaps even Duncan), and the Alis attempt to distance themselves via physical boundaries were viewed as hotbeds of "black-on-black" violence in media coverage of South Africa during the 1990s. Many reports claimed that increasing levels of violence – between 1986 and 1993, more South Africans died in conflict than in any other comparable period in the past century – were the inevitable result of ancient "tribal" animosities between various African ethnicities.[5] However, Rob Nixon argues that such a "reactive retreat into ethnicity" must be viewed alongside the effects of chaotic urbanization, epidemic unemployment, economic recession, and the legacy of migrant labor in South Africa, asserting that if the issue of violence in South Africa is seen as the result of "'natural' hostilities between innately different ethnic nations, this strengthens the hand of those who maintain that ethnic fault lines are 'natural' divides that ought to play a leading role in the reorganization of the South African state" (72). This line of thinking would ultimately "retard efforts to redress apartheid's central legacy, the racial imbalances in access to resources and institutional power" (Nixon 72).

In *The House Gun*, Gordimer endorses Nixon's argument in casting South Africa's high crime rate not as part of a newly anarchic post-apartheid society but as an expected legacy of apartheid. In a portion of the narrative focalized through Claudia, who works as a doctor in a private practice and volunteers each week at a clinic, Gordimer writes:

Few of the doctor's patients connected her with one of the cases of violence they

> might have read about. There were so many; in a region of the country where the political ambition of a leader had led to killings that had become vendettas, fomented by him, a daily tally of deaths was routine as a weather report; elsewhere, taxi drivers shot one another in rivalry over who would choose to ride with them, quarrels in discotheques were settled by the final curse-word of guns. State violence under the old, past regime had habituated its victims to it. People had forgotten there was any other way. (50)

Significantly, Gordimer lists Duncan's crime alongside street crimes that have often been portrayed as ethnic violence and foregrounds the role that decades of state violence continues to play in the new South Africa. The leader whose "political ambition" led to "killings that had become vendettas" refers to Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party and self-professed Chieftain of the Zulu nation. Buthelezi set up a paramilitary wing of Inkatha, which was responsible for a great deal of violence surrounding the squatter camps outside of major cities, as part of his efforts to establish KwaZulu/Natal as an embryonic state (Nixon 73). However, while Buthelezi projected the Inkatha movement – which enjoyed the support of only a minority of Zulus – as a continuation of the legacy of Shaka Zulu, KwaZulu came into existence as a *Bantustan* in the 1970s, and his proposal to divide South Africa into an "Afrikaner homeland" and other "potential states" is an extension of the NP's *Bantustan* policies (Nixon 73). In 1991, a scandal now known as "Inkathagate" revealed that Buthelezi was receiving financial and logistical support from the government and military.[6] Far from being the work of rogue wild men, the violence was meticulously orchestrated from within the ranks of the NP through hit-squad assassinations,

disinformation against the ANC, the secret training of the Inkatha police, and the bankrolling of Inkatha rallies.

Thus, although Harald and Claudia initially see the brutal violence in post-apartheid South Africa as confined to specific segments of society and containable via spatial barriers, Gordimer consistently portrays violence as uncontrollably pervasive in nature. In a 1990 essay, "How Shall We Look at Each Other Then?", she explicitly states this view in a discussion of the probable aftermath of apartheid:

> Just as there are people physically maimed by the struggle between white power and black liberation, there is psychological, behavioral damage that all of us in South Africa have been subject to in some degree, whether we know it or not, whether we are white who have shut eyes and electronically-controlled gates on what was happening to blacks, or whether we are blacks who have been transported and dumped where the government wished, tear-gassed and shot, detained, forced into exile, or have left to join the liberation army which came into being when no other choice remained. Violence has become the South African way of life. (*Living* 140)

In the narrative treatment of Harald and Claudia in *The House Gun*, Gordimer is similarly critical of white liberals "who have shut eyes and electronically-controlled gates on what was happening to blacks" and implicates the whole of South African society as partially responsible for and damaged by the nation's levels of violence.

In *Bitter Fruit*, Dangor's subversion of racial binaries and his narrative's focalization through coloured South Africans that explicitly *perform* racial roles, as discussed in the previous chapter, supports Nixon's arguments against "those who

maintain that ethnic fault lines are 'natural' divides" and claim that the issue of violence in contemporary South Africa is the result of "'natural' hostilities between innately different ethnic nations" (Nixon 72). Like Gordimer, Dangor also traces the current violence in the country to apartheid origins; for example, regarding the gradual increase in violence in Berea, Alec says,

> they knew – those men in their grey suits – they knew when they sold us this cheap dream, a house, a garden, a dog, a place you can call your own, that we'd build on it. Additional rooms, second storeys, swimming pools… they knew that we'd make this slum livable. And now we can't sell, we can't get out of here. Ja, they call us apartheid's astronauts, trapped in this damn twilight world. Let Mr Mandela come and live here, and then tell me about his miracle. (82)

Here Alec links post-apartheid violence to apartheid-era, institutionalized divisions of space and suggests that apartheid has left an enduring legacy that continues to exert its influence in terms of geographical and racial power divisions, even if some middle-class black and coloured people (like the Alis) have moved beyond areas designated as black. Alec is cynical about the new South African government as well: "Law and order, it's the joke that whites sold us. Gave us the government, kept the money. Now we police ourselves. Look at the high walls and the barbed wire…. No wonder the crime rate's going through the roof" (85). Violent crime is again tied to the implementation of spatial barriers ("high walls" and "barbed wire"), and the new government is evidently unable to address the massive inequalities that apartheid has bequeathed to post-apartheid South Africa. Alec sees South Africa's "transformation" as a "joke" because the changes that have taken place under Mandela, in *Bitter Fruit*,

remain on the surface. Dangor and Gordimer both disrupt this surface in their novels by exposing the ways in which white privilege and black destitution (for the majority) remain entrenched and suggesting that this phenomenon is largely responsible for the upsurge in violence in post-apartheid South Africa.

II. Representations of Rape in *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit*

The upsurge in violent crime in post-apartheid South Africa includes media documentation of extremely high levels of sexual violence.[7] Rape has immense historical significance in colonial South Africa; the first encounters between Dutch settlers and Khoi women "in which relatively powerful male foreigners, with ships, guns, and horses" took indigenous women in random violence as well as in formal exchanges "helped structure later forms of gendered and racial discourse" (Scully, "Malintzin"). In *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, Ann Stoler writes that the sexual exploitation of indigenous women by European men was a central component of colonization and gave rise to "the unspoken norm that students of colonialism have documented so well: European men should 'take on' native women not only to perform domestic work but to service their sexual needs, psychic well-being, and physical care" (2). At the same time, black peril narratives cast native men as sexually aggressive barbarians, uncontrollably prone to raping white women: "The gender-specific requirements for colonial living… were constructed on heavily racist evaluations that pivoted on the heightened sexuality of colonized men…. European women needed

protection because men of color had 'primitive' sexual urges and uncontrollable lust, aroused by the sight of white women" (Stoler, "Making Empire" 352). *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit*, in their various representations of rape, draw attention to both the ways in which colonialism and apartheid created conditions that authorized the pervasive rape of black women by white men and propagated myths concerning white women as victims of black rapists.

In the twentieth century, sensationalized reports of white women raped by black men were symptoms of the black peril hysteria that contributed to oppressive legislative measures by the National Party. "Black peril" referred throughout Africa and the British empire to the alleged dangers of sexual assault on white women by black men; it was a racialized assessment of danger during a time in which the development of the Afrikaner identity was of upmost importance to the NP; "[c]reating and securing the European community's borders took on special significance when cultural, political, and sexual contagions were conjured everywhere – where European and native sensibilities and desires brushed against one another as they were borrowed and blurred" (*Carnal Knowledge* 6). A prominent and effective strategy for securing these ethnic "borders" was the construction of black peril; as Stoler explains,

> Racist ideology, fear of the Other, preoccupation with white prestige, and obsession with protecting European women from sexual assault by Asian and black males were not simply justifications for continued European rule and white supremacy. They were part of a critical, class-based logic; not only statements about indigenous subversives, but directives aimed at dissenting European underlings; and parts of the apparatus that kept potentially recalcitrant

white colonials in line. (*Carnal Knowledge* 25)

The extent to which control over sexuality and reproduction was at the core of defining colonial privilege is striking. In the case of South Africa, Afrikaner control and profits depended on a continual readjustment (through shifting classifications of race to be used for identity cards and pass books as well as other means) of European membership, limiting who had access to property, wealth, and privilege, and who did not. Crucially, women are often assigned symbolic roles as reproducers of the nation and upholders of national values in "nationalist quests for airtight, invariant identities" (Nixon 77). Furthermore, women, although bearers of the nation and markers of "the borders between ethnicities" are also "ordinarily institutionalized as male property" (Nixon 77). Ethnic "biology," ethnic culture, and racial territory converge in the figure of the colonizing woman. Thus, as many scholars have noted, allusions to political and sexual subversion went hand in hand.[8] The term "black peril" referred to sexual threats but also suggested the fear of political insurgence and denial of colonial control.

Furthermore, studies have shown that accusations of sexual assault frequently follow heightened sociopolitical tensions within European communities and renewed efforts to find consensus within them; post-1994 South Africa, in the time of the TRC and the emergence of the idea of the new South Africa, certainly constitutes a time of heightened tensions for the white South African community.[9] Election campaigns have quite recently utilized these black peril-type representations to play on white paranoia, though unsuccessfully.[10] Of course, the rape of black women by white men was a far more prevalent but less public crime under apartheid, and media reports continue to document extremely high levels of sexual violence in South Africa.[11]

Disgrace, as discussed in the previous chapter, subverts the black peril narrative that Coetzee submits to the reader in Lucy's rape scene by simultaneously depicting white peril in the figure of David. *Disgrace* opens with a discussion of David's rather aggressive sexual behavior and reveals his history of desiring "exotic" women (in fact, he selects Soraya, a prostitute, because she is labeled as "exotic" in a catalogue). David is immediately characterized as a man who assumes that he has the right to possess (or purchase) women's bodies without responsibility toward them or respect for their lives, as Lucy Graham has noted. Later, while David admits that he must "detain" (19) the unwilling, unresponsive Melanie in order to "thrust himself upon" her (24) because sex with him is "undesired to the core" (25) of her being, he continues to insist that it was "not rape, not quite that" (25). Indeed, he claims that his having (forced) sexual intercourse with her does not constitute rape because "[s]he does not own herself" (16), giving voice the aforementioned colonial social and legal structures, identified by Nixon, in which women were "ordinarily institutionalized as male property" (77). During David's disciplinary hearing, one committee member begins to point to the connections between David's behavior and the colonial conditions that once authorized it, saying "when we try to get specificity, all of a sudden it is not abuse of a young woman he is confessing to, 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 a part" (53).

David's inability to think of his assault on Melanie as "rape" and his utter incomprehension of the reasons behind the corrective measures against his behavior (albeit incredibly lenient and extralegal ones) harkens back to an era of South African

history in which "sexual abuse of black women was not classified as rape and therefore was not legally actionable, nor did rapes committed by white men lead to prosecution" (Stoler, "Making Empire" 353). (Although Melanie's race is not explicitly identified, it is implied that she is coloured, and David translates her name as "the dark one" [18], while Lucy's name has associations with light.) In the sharp contrast between the way that Melanie's rape is treated in David's narrative and his reaction to Lucy's rape, Coetzee seems to suggest that the racialized conceptions of rape in colonial and apartheid South Africa continue to structure the discourse surrounding rape and its legal treatment in the post-apartheid state.

In many colonial societies, including Cape Dutch settler society, "women's honor referred as much to the men of the family as to the women themselves. Notions of honor and status crucially determined rape cases, influencing whether the rape was reported, how it was evaluated, and the degree of punishment dealt to the rapist" (Scully, "Rape, Race, and Colonial Culture" 343). When ideas of racial purity and territory are mapped onto women's bodies, as was the case in colonial and apartheid South Africa, the rape is typically coded by law as a crime not just against a women's person, but also against male property. Coetzee deliberately brings these colonial dynamics to the forefront of his postcolonial novel. Just after the robbery and assault on Lucy's farm, David ponders Lucy's rape as a piece of "a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in this country: in its schematic aspect. Otherwise one could go mad. Cars, shoes; women too" (98). David sees Lucy's rape as a political and social problem, closely tied to history, racially charged. His claim that her rape is "Lucy's secret; his disgrace" (109) and his

listing women alongside shoes and cars as objects that can be taken or stolen suggests that the rape of a white woman is in some way an attack on white men as well.

Tension arises between Lucy and David when Lucy refuses to report her rape to the police. David sees her silence as a capitulation: "[s]he would rather hide her face, and he knows why. Because of the disgrace. Because of the shame. That is what their visitors have achieved; that is what they have done to this confident young woman" (115). In this version of events, the three perpetrators become the owners of the story of Lucy's rape, which in turn becomes the story of "[h]ow they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for" (115). However, Lucy's speechlessness in *Disgrace* appears to be a strategy of resisting the categorization of her rape as a public or political issue, and her silence becomes a metaphor for "that portentous silence signifying what cannot be spoken" (Parry 45). She insists that her rape is "a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not" (112). Lucy's decision to not report her rape to the police attempts to disentangle her rape from the black peril narrative into which David frames it. Lucy's claim that her experience belongs in the private sphere prevents its public appropriation as a crime that can be projected onto an entire black community, characterized by white officials as monolithic for political ends. Her preemptive decision later proves warranted; Grahamstown's white police officers arrest the wrong men for the theft of David's car, having "caught" the first group of black men that the unit came across. In this chain of events, white South African officials view black men as a mass, individually interchangeable.

The sexual violation of Lucy "highlights a history tainted by racial injustice, by

possession and dispossession where… white women have been 'signs' of that which was not exchanged between men in different racial groups" (Graham 437). David's attitude toward Lucy and her rape articulates a politics of colonial masculinity in which the figure of the woman is at the heart of racial privilege. As Mrinalini Sinha writes, "…the white woman was a special object of reverence for white men. Any real or imagined threat to white women was perceived as a threat to the prestige of the entire…race" (439). Indeed, in the post-apartheid state, David feels "emasculated" and "more out of place than ever" (9), suggesting that the legal erosion of white supremacy in South Africa displaces powerful men – as *men*.

In *Bitter Fruit*, Lydia's rape by Du Boise is similarly seen as an attack on Silas' "honor" and masculinity. That Silas is chained and forced to listen to Lydia's rape suggests that her violation is also directed at him, and while the perpetrators claim that she is being punished for being a "terrorist" (*BF* 128), it is Silas who is secretly involved in the underground resistance movement. The motivations of Lydia's rapist and the political context of Lydia's rape – i.e., that her husband was involved in the underground struggle while she herself had no consensual connection to any political movement – illustrate that in colonial societies, a "woman's *political* relation to the nation" was "submerged as a *social* relation to a man through marriage" and that for women, "citizenship in the nation was mediated by the marriage relation within the family" (McClintock 91). Her rape is "a racially and politically located act of sexual violence that is a specific act perpetrated as part of the apartheid system's endemic use of violence as a tool of terror and control" (Miller 150). Lydia, early in the novel, tells Silas that he does not "know about the pain" of her rape because it is merely "a memory

to you, a wound to your ego, a theory," (13-14) and that he cannot see the crime for what it is – a violation of her person – because he is concerned solely with his "affronted manhood" (129). Silas' response to Lydia's rape precipitates the disintegration of their relationship, as seen in the opening scenes of the novel in which the two argue over its significance:

> "Ja, I suppose imagined pain isn't the real thing. But I've lived with it for so long, it's become real. Nearly twenty years. The pain of your screams, his laugh, his fucken cold eyes when he brought you back to the van."
>
> "What else to do you remember?"
>
> "That Sergeant Seun's face, our black brother, the black, brutal shame in his face."
>
> "You don't remember my face, my tears…." (*BF* 14)

While David also sees Lucy's rape as an attack on *him* in *Disgrace*, rape is more blatantly utilized as a tool of colonial repression, or what Nixon deems "a war of dispossession… a male war" (77) in *Bitter Fruit* – and effectively so. In the crossfire of such a war, Nixon claims, "women find themselves unenviably cast as first-class icons but second-class citizens. They are denied the arms to defend themselves while weighed down with symbolic responsibilities as guarantors of homeland, ethnos, and lineage" (77). Rape in such circumstances is used not only to torture women, but is also aimed at men and the collapse of the familial structures of the "enemy."

Lydia identifies these dynamics surrounding her rape in a somewhat ironic tone, telling Silas, "If you were a real man, you would have killed him on the spot… He took your woman, he fucked your wife, made you listen to him doing it. I became his

property, even my screams were his instrument. Now, you're a man, you believe in honour and all that kind of kak…." (17). That Lydia describes herself as having become an object of "his property" through her rape is crucial here, as she situates her story on the treacherous ground of "a patriarchal society that names 'woman' as the fundamental unit of exchange or foundational gift, that is polarized along racial lines, and that is decidedly rape-prone" (Samuelson 148). Although Silas does not see Lydia's rape as an attack on the "prestige" of his race in the way that David does regarding Lucy's rape, it remains a racially-motivated attack, and both men experience the rape of a woman as *their* disgrace – an experience that predetermines the woman's role as that of an object of exchange among men.

Bitter Fruit also explores the enduring influence of colonial and apartheid discourses of race and miscegenation on contemporary South Africa. The narrative, as focalized through multiple coloured characters, probes some of the psychological effects of having mixed racial and religious origins in a society in which "[m]iscegenation, the origins of which lie within a discourse of 'race,' concupiscence, and degeneracy, continues to be bound up with shame, a pervasive shame exploited in apartheid's strategy of the naming of a Coloured race" (Wicomb 92). Miscegenation and "bastardization" emerge as recurrent themes in the text: "Millions of us, bastardized, hybrid, but still cut according to a pattern. The son of a slave-owner takes as his bride a captive slave child, they produced a bastard child, this bastard marries yet another child of master and meid, miesies and boy, and so forth, ad infinitum, basic piel-en-poes history" (*BF* 101). In the novel, coloured people – and particularly Mikey – bear "the marked pigmentation of miscegenation" (93), and Dangor traces this

attention to "blood lines" to the (rather arbitrary) constructions of race in colonial South Africa and to mass rape in other colonial settings the world over.

Nixon, like others, identifies this mass rape as, among other things, "organized insemination, men's way of interfering with the lineage of the enemy…. Any ensuing children will be vulnerable to rejection as the living embodiments of personal and national violations" (78). In *Bitter Fruit*, Lydia perceives Mikey as the physical manifestation of these personal and national violations, saying that while she can recover "from the physical act of rape," she also knows that "[i]nside of me is a rapist's seed" (126), and later tells Silas in anger, "[i]s it not enough that I have to deal with the thought of his seed in Mikey, his genes, his blood, his cold and murderous eyes?" (123) Mikey struggles immensely with his racial identity as well, a struggle that precipitates his withdrawal from the novel's narrative as he becomes increasingly involved with PAGAD. After reading Lydia's diary and discovering that his father is not Silas, but in fact Du Boise, Mikey thinks,

> I am the child of some murderous white man…a boer, someone who worked for the old system, *was* the old system, in fact. For the first time, the alien nature of this thought strikes him. Why think of the man as a white, as a boer, there were many black men who worked for that old system, and they too raped women, sowed their venomous seed in the wombs of their enemies? Being fathered by a traitorous black man, that would be different, poetic almost, some sort of salvation in ambiguity. (131)

Here Mikey, while initially focused exclusively on race, recognizes that the "old system" utilized intersections of racial, class-based, and gendered structures in ways

that sometimes revealed the artificial nature of race constructs; when one examines the methods used by the apartheid regime to implement oppressive measures, the binaries upon which apartheid was contingent – black vs. white, man vs. woman, good vs. evil – break down. Although Mikey first constructs his birth as a result of a system that pitted "Boers" against "Africans," he then complicates the category of "enemy" by emphasizing the moral "ambiguity" involved in the lives of South Africans as they are truly lived under apartheid – all while foregrounding the use of rape and general violence against women as a weapon of such regimes.

As noted above, Nixon alludes to the "ensuing children" of mass rape as "vulnerable to rejection" (78), and while Mikey is certainly not rejected by Lydia or Silas (although Silas does suspect that Mikey is not his biological son), by his own account he has failed to find a place of belonging – both racially and religiously – in the new South Africa. He is described as having "no colour of his own, as if his complexion was created by absorbing light from elements around him" (71). As discussed in the previous chapter, Dangor goes to great lengths to emphasize the fragmentary nature of coloured identity in South Africa, most often through the psychological trauma that Mikey endures in his search for identity in the "twilight zone between black and white, trying to be both and ending up as neither" (82) – a search that is, of course, complicated after his discovery that he is the product of Lydia's rape by Du Boise. Just before fatally shooting Du Boise, Mikey says to himself: "My heritage… unwanted, imposed, my history, my beginnings" (276). While clearly troubling, this utterance, his murder of Du Boise, and his subsequent escape from South Africa constitute Mikey's refusal to negotiate the classification structures that persist in post-apartheid South

Africa or to engage with Wicomb's notion of "multiple belongings." Dangor's own position appears to be ambivalent, as he denies the reader access to Mikey's consciousness in the latter portions *Bitter Fruit*'s narrative, and Mikey's inner psyche remains textually closed leading up his final, violent acts.

Wicomb's essay, "The case of the coloured in South Africa," offers an alternative to Mikey's unsettling chosen "ending" in *Bitter Fruit*:

> Instead of denying history and fabricating a totalizing colouredness, 'multiple belongings' could be seen as an alternative way of viewing a culture where participation in a number of coloured micro-communities whose interests conflict and overlap could become a rehearsal of cultural life in the larger South African community where we learn to perform the same kind of negotiation in terms of identity within a lived culture characterized by difference. (105)

However, while Wicomb and Dangor both seek to highlight race as a *performance* of identity in a society in which "coloured micro-communities" hold interests that "conflict and overlap," Dangor's project in this novel is less interested in offering solutions to those "within a lived culture characterized by difference," instead problematizing established discourses on rape and linking colonial histories through the prevalence racialized sexual violence in multiple settings.

When Mikey seeks out Silas' Muslim family, he learns through Imam Moulana Ismail that Silas' aunt Hajera was raped in India by a British colonial lieutenant: "In the middle of all this historical ennui – how else can I describe it? – a British officer, a lieutenant, rapes Ali Ali's sister. She is sixteen years old…. Of course, no action is taken against the soldier! He is English, white, and a commissioned officer!

Untouchable! No one believes Hajera" (*BF* 200). Ismail's narrative gives voice to Stoler's analysis of colonial conditions that allowed for the invisible but pervasive rape of women of color by European men in societies where sexual abuse of "native" women "was not classified as rape and therefore was not legally actionable, nor did rapes committed by white men lead to prosecution" ("Making Empire" 353). Ismail continues: "When Hajera is found to be pregnant, he accuses her and her family of trying to disgrace him, says she is a whore who gives herself to untouchables and passing beggars…. Why would a white officer, engaged to an Englishwoman, soil himself with the body of a 'coolie' girl?" (200) Hajera is then sent away to have the baby in the hope of lessening her family's shame of having "a soldier's whore" for a daughter; the infant might "have the tell-tale blond hair and blue eyes" – the unwanted genes and appearance of the colonizer that "mark" Mikey as the child of systematic rape under another repressive regime. Ismail concludes:

> There are certain things people do not forget, or forgive. Rape is one of them. In ancient times, conquerors destroyed the will of those whom they conquered by impregnating the women. It is an ancient form of genocide…. The Romans and the Sabine women, the Nazis and the Jewish women in the concentration camps, the Soviets in Poland, Israeli soldiers and Palestinian refugees, white South African policemen and black women.
>
> You conquer a nation by bastardizing its children. (204)

Although Mikey remains skeptical about Ismail's declaration, he does concede that racialized conceptions of rape are in some way intrinsic to sexual and political control in colonial societies. Dangor draws these parallels across space and time, suggesting

that governments predicated on racial division and subjugation share a crucial reliance on gendered forms of sexual control and, inevitably, sexual violence.

Through differing rape narratives, Coetzee and Dangor both draw attention to the ways in which apartheid created political and social conditions that authorized the rape of women of color by white men while simultaneously fabricating black peril myths. *Disgrace* subverts traditional black peril narrative by constructing parallel rape scenes that David treats in sharply contrasting ways, highlighting the enduring influence of apartheid-era, heavily racialized rape narratives on the present-day social and legal treatment of rape in South Africa. Dangor also offers parallel rape narratives that reveal mass rape as endemic to oppressive colonial regimes founded on constructions of racial difference. In David's and Silas' feelings of "affronted manhood" following Lucy's and Lydia's rapes, coupled with David's "emasculation" in the post-apartheid state, Coetzee and Dangor both suggest that the maintenance of white supremacy under the NP intersects with divisions of power predicated on notions of masculinity and gender binaries, as well as geographical control, among other instruments – *and* that these systems remain largely in place under ANC rule.

III. Language, Landscape, and the South African (Anti-)Pastoral

In his critical work, Coetzee has examined the use of Afrikaans in South African writing and the way in which the language functions as an embodiment of Afrikaner national identity and engages with notions of proprietorship over South African land.

The language and the idea of the "Afrikaner" became "an ideological tool, moving from an anti-British political agenda in the 1880s, to an anti-black nationalism in the later years of apartheid" (Head 7). Afrikaans has come to be a target of violent antipathy in South Africa in a way that English has not, and Coetzee – as an Afrikaner who speaks Afrikaans to his extended family – addresses this issue more directly in his fiction than do many other prominent white South African writers (like Gordimer), who are largely of British descent. Dangor approaches problems of language from a slightly different angle, including dialogue in "Kaaps," a local and racialized variety of Afrikaans often spoken in Cape Town and particularly in coloured South African communities. While Gordimer touches just briefly on language and translation as an issue in contemporary South African society, an examination of the uses of English, Afrikaans, and Kaaps in *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit* – and the significance of language in relationship to the depiction of South African landscape and available discourses on rape – is in order.[12]

In her essay "'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race, and Nationalism," Anne McClintock undertakes an historical analysis of the Afrikaans language as the centerpiece of the invention of the Afrikaner race. Following the Second Anglo-Boer War in the first decade of the twentieth century, the battered remnants of Boer communities had to create a cultural and ethnic identity if they were to survive in the emergent capitalist state. The "Boer generals and the British capitalists swore blood brotherhood in the Union of 1910" and "the ragtag legion of 'poor whites' with few or no prospects, the modest clerks and shopkeepers, and the small farmers and poor teachers… all precarious in the new state, began to identify themselves as the vanguard of a new Afrikanerdom, the chosen emissaries of the national *Volk*" (McClintock 100).

However, Afrikaners had no common historic purpose, no singular identity, and no unifying language. They "therefore had, quite literally, to invent themselves," a project requiring the conscious creation of a "single print-language, a popular press, and a literate populace" (McClintock 100). The language movement of the early twentieth century provided just such an invention, fashioning many vernaculars into a single, identifiable language; Afrikaans achieved legal recognition as a language in 1918. The "mythical importance attached to the development of the Afrikaans language" and its position as an embodiment of the Afrikaner nationalistic identity and a tool systematically used as an instrument of oppression (Gallagher 39) gives its literary use symbolic import on a variety of levels.

In *Bitter Fruit*, transitions between languages that depend on social and political context, as well as careful attention to the ways in language is used as a tool of division, exclusion, and even violence, are strategically important to Dangor's project of destabilizing constructs of racial identity. For example, Gracie claims,

> When you lose your language, you lose your soul. But English isn't your language, he would retort, Zulu is. Gracie was tired of explaining to Alec… that the name "Oliphant," sadly, was Scots in origin and not an Anglicization of "Ndhlovu," the isiZulu word for "elephant" and a common African surname. If it had been, perhaps we would belong! (82)

In first referencing the importance of language to identity and representation and then revealing the confusing complications that arise from the tenuous link between language and race (i.e., the assumption that Gracie, as a coloured woman, would speak Zulu and not English as her first language), Dangor again underscores the arbitrary

nature of the apartheid racial classification structure and the ambiguity surrounding the interconnected constructions of race, ethnicity, and identity in post-apartheid South Africa – and suggests that these structures may be particularly difficult to navigate for coloured South Africans.

One way in which Silas attempts to navigate this search for (racial) identity is his use of Kaaps in private settings (as opposed to public discourse connected to his political persona), which Wicomb identifies as a "literary language" that "came to assert a discursive space for oppositional colouredness that aligned itself with the black liberation struggle" (97). Silas ironically refers to himself as a "Bushie" throughout the novel; in reference to other texts, Wicomb writes that the use of this derogatory term (from "Bushman") by a black or coloured man, particularly in the context of the struggle, indicates the "man's lack of belonging as opposed to the term 'comrade'… [t]hus the narrative of assimilation" is replaced by the "representation of an ambiguous coloured exclusion and self-exclusion from national liberation politics" (98). While Silas' politics are clearly, in a general sense, aligned with the liberation struggle during apartheid and with the ANC after apartheid, his linguistic habits mirror his ambivalence toward the political order in the new South Africa and his surprising and frequent nostalgia for the apartheid past. His use of Kaaps, if constituting an "ambiguous coloured exclusion and self-exclusion," speaks to what Loren Kruger identifies as the marginalization of coloured communities in the grander narrative of the anti-apartheid struggle.[13]

McClintock points to a clear gender component at the heart of the invention of Afrikaner tradition that proves fruitful in examining the use of Afrikaans and Kaaps in

Dangor's novel:

> In 1918, a small, clandestine clique of Afrikaans men launched a secret society with the express mission of capturing the loyalties of dispirited Afrikaners and fostering white male business power. The tiny, white brotherhood swiftly burgeoned into a secret countrywide Mafia that came to exert enormous power over all aspects of Nationalist policy. The gender bias of the society, as of Afrikanerdom as a whole, is neatly summed up in its name: the Broederbond (the Brotherhood). Henceforth, Afrikaner nationalism would be synonymous with white male interests, white male aspirations and white male politics. (McClintock 100-101)

If Afrikaner nationalism is synonymous with white male interests, and the Afrikaans language was the central component in the development of the Afrikaner identity, then Afrikaans contained implicit gendered power dynamics upon its conception. In *Bitter Fruit*, the use of Afrikaans by both white and coloured men – importantly, never by women – is confined to contexts in which men exert power over women, either physically or mentally. For example, Silas uses Afrikaans when speaking to his male friends and colleagues:

> Margerite had a wiry body and the kind of hawk's face that Silas said could only be loved "as jy daaryan hou om kraaie te naai" – if you liked fucking crows. Although the Afrikaans meaning was lost on her, Kate saw the disparaging intent in Silas' bearing, his sudden, twisted smile, in Julian's complicit laughter. This kind of comment always earned Silas the approving smiles of black men in particular. How unkind we South Africans are, when we are on our own turf and

not in need of refuge and bodily comfort…. (*BF* 47)

In this scene and in others, Silas transitions from English to Afrikaans when making denigrating comments about women and uses language as a method of social exclusion. Alec uses Afrikaans in a similar fashion:

"Ag tog, Gracie, kry nou rus," Alec said.

She absorbed Alec's Afrikaans and resentfully translated it into English.

"Oh please Gracie, settle down." (82)

This type of linguistic abuse is shared by white (Julian), coloured (Silas and Alec), and black men, and reminds the reader of the ways in which hierarchies of race and gender oppression intersect and reinforce one another. Language as a tool of subjugation becomes particularly salient in *Bitter Fruit* in the descriptions of Lydia's rape; she tells Silas that during her rape, Du Boise called her "a nice wild half-kaffir cunt, a lekker wilde Boesman poes" (17). It is clear here that Du Boise's derogatory language is meant to intensify the physical act of rape, defining Lydia exclusively by her sex as an object "there to be raped" (Miller 151). His assault on her thus constitutes both a physical and linguistic violation of Lydia's selfhood.

Coetzee and McClintock link this connection between Afrikaans as a tool of racialized sexual violence and its role in the development of an Afrikaner historiography in which "the history of the *Volk* is organized around a male national narrative figured as an imperial journey into empty lands" (McClintock 101). This narrative drew upon an ideological feminization of entire indigenous societies by European colonizers and the conflation of images of the female body with those of the South African land; both were seen as "amorphous, wild, seductive, dark, open to

possession" (Boehmer, "Transfiguring" 2). Explorers and colonizers rendered the Cape through a gendered and sexualized reading that saw the land as "open to the embrace and penetration of Europe" (Scully, "Malintzin"). The myth of empty land and of the "virgin" land effects a double erasure in that the empty land was, of course, peopled, requiring the invention of "open" and penetrable space.

Coetzee detects another trend in the rendering of the South African landscape; that is, an impulse in the South African pastoral mode to "find evidence of a 'natural' bond between *volk* and *land*, that is to say, to naturalized the *volk*'s possession of the land" (*WW* 61). He claims that historically, the Afrikaans language – and, more specifically, the Afrikaans novel – has presented an "official" view of South Africa as

> a settled land, a land whose soil belongs to its farmers and title-holders, a land that is someone's property. The profound feel for the land which the *aardsheid* [earthiness] of the Afrikaans language equips the Afrikaans novels goes hand in hand with a proprietorial attitude towards the earth; and this proprietorial attitude has made the black man a temporary sojourner, a displaced person, not only in the white man's laws but in the white man's imaginative life. (*WW* 79)

Although Coetzee himself does not legitimize the connections between landscape and the narrative of the white nation, David exhibits this impulse in *Disgrace*. When he first visits his daughter on her farm, David calls Lucy "a solid countrywoman, a *boervrou* (60) – literally, "farmer's wife" – tying her to the land of the Eastern Cape and, by labeling her in Afrikaans, linking her with a history of Dutch colonization, at the center of which "stands the contradictory figure of the *Volsmoeder*, the mother of the nation" (McClintock 101). Later, David declares that Lucy "is here because she loves the land

and the old, *ländliche* way of life" (113).[14] Given that Lucy makes it abundantly clear that she does not subscribe to the view that South Africa is a "settled land" that "belongs to its farmers and title-holders," David must rely on the "proprietorial attitude towards the earth" that Coetzee sees as inherent in the Afrikaans language. Aside from describing his and Lucy's place in relation to the South African landscape, David also uses Afrikaans in labeling the work done by Petrus: "Petrus is in fact the one who does the work, while he sits and warms his hand. Just like the old days: *baas en Klaas*" (116).[15] This nomenclature prefigures Petrus both as a source of labor for a white "boss" and as subordinate to David in terms of race and class, resonating with Coetzee's argument that Afrikaans paints the black man as "a temporary sojourner" and a "displaced person" in law and in "the white man's imaginative life."

Coetzee also notes that the project of landscape-writing in English

> comes to be dominated by a concern to make the landscape speak, to give a voice to the landscape, to interpret it…. Toward the middle decades of the twentieth century the confrontation between poet and landscape becomes more and more antagonistic, the poet wrestling with the silence of the landscape that 'absorbs imagination/Reflecting nothing' (Wright) or struggling to interpret its cryptic signs…. But what is felt with the greatest urgency by these poets is that silence, the silence of Africa, cannot be allowed to prevail: space presents itself, it must be filled. (*WW* 176-7)

We see the reflection of this type of anxiety in the character of David, who wonders, "Is it his earth too? It does not feel like his earth. Despite the time he has spent here, it feels like a foreign land" (197). Behind such questions "lies a historical insecurity regarding

the place of the artist of European heritage in the African landscape…an insecurity not without cause" (*WW* 62). The increasing inadequacy of the English language is frequently suggested in *Disgrace* as well in that academic English departments have been replaced by Communications, and David, symbolic of an aging and irrelevant generation of Afrikaner men, absorbs himself in obscure English-language operatic and poetic pursuits. Even so, David himself remarks, "[m]ore and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa" (117).

The relationship between language, landscape, and the process of colonization emerges as a major force in the second half of *Disgrace*, which takes place on farmland upon which another major political issue surfaces: that of black land reclamation. As discussed, under apartheid rule, black South Africans were relegated to *Bantustans* that comprised 13 percent of the nation's land, reserving the remaining 87 percent for whites. With the demise of the NP's apartheid regime, the ANC spearheaded the effort to reincorporate the *Bantustan* territories into the Republic of South Africa. Many of these *Bantustans* were located on the Eastern Cape, where Lucy buys a small farm holding in *Disgrace*. It is there that she and her father are attacked by three black men, where she is raped and impregnated. The attack is depicted by the narrator-as-focalized-through-David as part of a larger spate of crimes against whites that the authorities are unable to prevent.

Coetzee's choice of the rural Eastern Cape as a setting for this assault "emphasize[s] complex historical relationships between issues of race, gender and land" (Graham 439). The farm space is a violently contested boundary in post-apartheid South Africa, and the South African pastoral mode, which presents the "husband-farmer" as custodian

of the feminine earth, has been implicated in the colonial appropriation of territory (*WW*). *Disgrace*, however, "breaks with colonial mappings of the female body and land, depicting instead feudal systems of claiming and reclaiming where there is contempt for women as owners of property and land" (Graham 439), and thus works in the anti-pastoral mode.

The farm space in the Eastern Cape becomes, in effect, what Sara Mills calls "the contact zone":

> Innumerable novels and short stories represent the contact zone as a space where there is mystery, barbarism, mutual incomprehension, conflict; the most prominent form of contact which underlies many other relations is sexual contact or the threat of sexual attack. Whilst the sexual contact was often between white males and indigenous females/males, this sexual contact was figured at an idealized/stereotypical level as between white women and indigenous males. (Mills 708)

In Coetzee's work and in critical responses to it emerges this concept that the majority of cases of sexual attack in the "contact zone" were between white males and "native" females but that in recent political history, the threat of white women sexually assaulted by indigenous males received vastly more attention and figured more prominently in national discourse. In *Disgrace*, the narrator suggests that the threat of sexual attack is prominent for Lucy on her farm, and as her black neighbor and former employee Petrus says, "here it is dangerous, too dangerous. A woman must be marry" (202). Lucy's response to this situation is to abandon her land and marry into Petrus' family. As she explains, "He is offering me an alliance, a deal. I contribute 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" (203).

Though clearly troubling, Lucy's response draws a causal relationship between rape and perceived transgressions of political and social space. She explains, "I think I am in their territory. They have marked me. They will come back for me" (158). Located in the Cape's agricultural landscape – traditionally a male and/or working class space, Lucy is "fair game" because she is "trespassing" and "upsetting the male's order and his peace of mind" (Mernissi 494). In this respect, the dynamics of land and space in *Disgrace* echo Mernissi's claim that "[w]omen in male spaces are considered both provocative and offensive…. She is actually committing an act of aggression against him merely by being present where she should not be" (493-4). (Dangor links sexual violence to notions of "trespassing" as well; in describing Hajera's rape, Ismail says that "[n]o one believes Hajera" when she claims that a British officer raped her because she "is known to go wandering about by herself" [*BF* 200].) During the twentieth century, spatial boundaries arose for reasons of morality and white prestige as well; in Kenya and elsewhere, European women "were dissuaded from staying alone in their homesteads and discouraged by rumors of rape from taking up farming on their own" (Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge* 60) as a defense of community. White male power was solidified by increasing control over spatial boundaries that reaffirmed the vulnerability of white women and the sexual threat posed by native men, creating new sanctions to limit the liberties of both.

But Lucy is not only "trespassing" on the rural farm space, she is doing so as a single, lesbian woman. Stoler's observations regarding the protection of female honor

and white prestige in Deli become applicable to the Eastern Cape in this situation as well: “In towns and on plantations, it was more difficult even than in Europe to live outside marriage and motherhood” (*Carnal Knowledge* 34). Coetzee discusses the notion of the single woman as endangered in rural spaces in his essay, “The Harms of Pornography,” writing that colonialism “fractured the social and customary basis of legality, yet allowed some of the worst features of patriarchalism to survive, including the treatment of unattached (unowned) women as fair game, huntable creatures” (81-82). There is even the suggestion that Lucy’s sexuality may have provoked her attackers: “Raping a lesbian worse than raping a virgin: more of a blow. Did they know what they were up to, those men? Had the word got around?” (Coetzee 105) In this context, where women are regarded as protected and their presence as legitimate only to the extent that they belong to men, the patriarchal structures of colonialism and apartheid are deeply implicated in the contemporary escalation of sexual violence.

Together, Gordimer, Dangor, and Coetzee disrupt the concept of a unified, post-apartheid Rainbow Nation by exposing how white privilege remains entrenched amid general poverty and destitution, as reflected through the persistence of apartheid-era geographical divisions of power. Gordimer depicts the increasing compartmentalization of space in white South African communities while revealing that these attempts to newly segregate post-apartheid society will prove futile and implying that contemporary violence, as the product of apartheid, will continue to damage all segments of South African society. In their treatment of space, Gordimer and Dangor both suggest that this phenomenon is largely responsible for the upsurge in urban violence in the post-apartheid state. Dangor and Coetzee undermine traditional South African rape

narratives by tracing the ways in which apartheid created political and social conditions that authorized the rape of "native" women by European men while propagating myths of black peril. Thematic "emasculation" in *Bitter Fruit* and *Disgrace* indicate that the maintenance of repressive regimes based on racial segregation is predicated on gendered divisions of power and spatial boundaries, and that in post-apartheid South Africa, these power structures have yet to be dismantled. The connections that Dangor and Coetzee make between language, space, and racialized rape indicate that despite national investment in the idea of popular unity, nations, particularly those with colonial histories, have historically sanctioned institutionalized racial and gender difference. Given these intersections and their influence on the available discourses surrounding rape in post-apartheid South Africa, we may be able to re-read Lucy's and Lydia's silences regarding their experiences of rape, which I will address in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

WRITING SOUTH AFRICA IN THE TIME OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

"When you have been given a disaster which seems to exceed all measure, must it not be recited, spoken?"

– Nadine Gordimer, *The House Gun*

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was established in 1995 as an official Commission of Inquiry into public violence in South Africa between 1960 and 1994. The TRC aimed to facilitate national reconciliation and individual catharsis, and was mandated to analyze and describe the "causes, nature and extent" of gross human rights violations under apartheid.[1] The parameters established for the Commission were part of the negotiated settlements for a democratic South Africa, the most significant of which was that its function was to be one of restorative rather than retributive justice; accordingly, the TRC was to recommend courses of action that would begin to restore the dignity of victims and to grant amnesty to perpetrators of political violence. Its hearings dominated South African popular culture for several years, as the testimonies of both the victims and the perpetrators of apartheid became public.

The Commission proceeded in three phases: first, victims testified in public hearings held throughout the country and broadcast on South African television and radio; these testimonies were to establish as complete a picture as possible of the human

rights violations carried out in apartheid South Africa and open public discourse as a means of giving victims an official and historical place for their stories. Speaking trauma was intended to serve as a catharsis-inducing act, for, as Archbishop Tutu famously claimed, "there can be no healing without truth" (*TRC Report,* 1.1 par. 16). Second, the Commission held amnesty hearings in which perpetrators testified and were cross-examined in order to receive amnesty. The TRC could grant amnesty, on a case-by-case basis, to any person making a full disclosure of their crimes, providing that the crimes were perpetrated to meet a political objective and that the manner in which the offenses were carried out was "proportional" to that political objective (Edelstein 35). Amnesty was not made conditional on repentance. Finally, there were specific sectoral hearings on the judiciary, business, and the media (Ignatieff 16). The victims' hearings were held through 1998, and the entire TRC process concluded in 2001; during the time between these two dates, *The House Gun*, *Disgrace*, and *Bitter Fruit* were published.

In these novels, Gordimer, Coetzee, and Dangor respond to both the significant successes and important shortcomings of the TRC and thrust themselves into the debate surrounding its procedural limitations and compromises and its controversial, founding assumptions and objectives. On the one hand, Commissioner Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela argues that, contrary to "protestations against revisiting the past, there is an urgency to talk about the past among many of those who have suffered violations of human rights" (27). Drawing on her academic work with trauma theory, she claims that sometimes "retelling a story over and over again provides a way of returning to the original pain and hence a reconnection with the lost loved one. Evoking the pain in the presence of a listening audience means taking a step backwards in order to move

forwards. The question is not whether victims will tell their stories, but whether there is an appropriate forum to express their pain" (27). South Africa's repressed voices, its traumas, have been uncovered in many ways by the TRC, and in this process the discussion of facts, truth, memory, evidence, and the production of history has been brought into the public domain in an unprecedented manner.[2]

In the hearings and the public debate that they sparked, "[h]istory, it seems, [was] being made, written, spoken, and used to build a new nation" (Lalu 24). The impact of this history is undeniable; since its report came out in 1998, the TRC has become a model for other societies seeking to rebuild their political and moral order and come to terms with the past. Michael Ignatieff writes that an "academic field – 'transitional justice' – has arisen to contrast the different ways societies seek healing and justice after periods of war or tyranny," of which there are many varieties: "the de-Nazification of West Germany after 1945 followed by the de-Stasification of East Germany after 1989, the Chilean, Salvadorean and Argentinian truth commissions, the international tribunals in The Hague and Arusha, the indictment of Pinochet" (15). In each of these historical processes, the central issue is how to balance the demand for both peace and justice, forgetting and forgiving, healing and punishment – truth and reconciliation. Ignatieff – and he is not alone in this – claims, "Of all the attempts to balance these competing claims, pride of place always goes to South Africa. It remains the template, the most ambitious and far-reaching of the attempts at catharsis and justice" (15).

However, there have also been many serious and devastating criticisms of the TRC. "Nothing proved more controversial," Ignatieff writes, "than the amnesty

provisions of the South African model" (17). The TRC's decision to put truth and reconciliation before justice was justified by the belief that finding the truth was "an overriding priority" in establishing a common understanding of the past and using this understanding to forge a new national identity" (Edelstein 35). A number of critics believe that the Commission gave up justice for reconciliation and left victims without legal recourse, while most perpetrators remained unpunished.[3] Amnesty stripped victims and their families of the right to pursue justice through the courts, and a number of survivors – such as Steve Biko's family – attempted to block a perpetrator's application for amnesty. In these instances, the reconciliation that follows from such amnesty can only be limited and reluctant at best.

The amnesty provisions of the TRC, along with other necessary legal compromises and financial limitations, also allowed ordinary white South Africans to "shirk their complicity with the mechanisms of apartheid" (Frenkel 157) and did little to address its own contention that "the redistribution of resources," including "material reconstruction, dealing with big socioeconomic inequalities," and "restitution to victims as well as macro-level social engineering in the form of structural and institutional transformation" (Du Toit 162) were essential to the process of reconciliation. Gobodo-Madikizela notes that while victims spoke out at last, and while perpetrators publicly faced their shame, many beneficiaries of apartheid privilege responded to the call to public accountability with silence (31). Furthermore, the TRC simply did not have the means to undertake the material reconstruction – which many victims specifically requested as recompense for giving testimony – that it deemed necessary in addressing the continuing socioeconomic effects of apartheid, particularly rising violent crime rates

in former black townships and rural areas and the widespread poverty and destitution among South Africa's black and coloured populations.[4]

The charge that the TRC was an extralegal process that exchanged justice for reconciliation, and that perhaps severely restricted the possibilities for justice in the new South Africa as a whole, emerges as a central concern in *The House Gun* and in *Disgrace*. *The House Gun* takes place largely inside a courtroom and features a series of interrogations, a process that would presumably produce both truth and justice. However, Gordimer repeatedly emphasizes the performative nature of justice, particularly in her characterization of Motsamai as a skilled actor, and skeptically questions whether true justice is possible after apartheid. *Disgrace* is also structured by a number of interrogations, most notably that of David by the university's faculty committee following his harassment of Melanie. In this scene, Coetzee repeatedly alludes to the amnesty hearings of the TRC, as the university attempts to grant David what it essentially amnesty – a short suspension – in exchange for full disclosure of his misdeeds and an apology for them. David, however, refuses to publicly recount his actions, claiming to "accept the charges" without issuing either debate or emotion, at which point the committee dismisses him from the university. While it is important to note that the TRC did not require any form of repentance on the part of the perpetrators, Coetzee seems to suggest in his treatment of David's hearing that processes like the TRC are "an exercise in kitsch, in sentimentality, in theatre, in hollow pretence" (Ignatieff 20) and that the Commission overstepped its legal bounds.

While *Bitter Fruit* expresses these concerns regarding the extent to which justice is merely performative as well, Dangor focuses more heavily on another critique of the

TRC: that is, that the act of testifying on the part of the victims may not be inherently cathartic, but instead painful, wounding and even re-traumatizing. During the Commission, "[n]o one who was there was entirely sure that such a bitter catharsis was always a good thing for the country or the individuals to go through. There is an African proverb: Truth is good, but not all truth is good to say" (Ignatieff 16). In Lydia's refusal to testify at the TRC regarding her rape, and in Du Boise's application for amnesty for raping her (among other things), *Bitter Fruit* draws attention to the sometimes problematic ways that the TRC framed the relationship between speaking trauma and achieving reconciliation, and specifically the forum(s) and the discourse that the Commission provided surrounding rape and sexual violence. Lydia points out – as a number of testimonies recorded by Antjie Krog do – that on a very basic level, being positioned as a "victim" may be in an of itself harmful to witnesses, who are called upon to offer their personal traumas up for the nation's political, conciliatory demands; in effect, to sacrifice personal healing for the nation's.[5] Rebecca Saunders asks, "might not the fact of having bared the innermost parts of one's viscera, sometimes in excruciating and humiliating ways, feel like a violation if it is not followed by some form of rectification and the social or economic circumstances exposed?" (104)

Although Dangor's novel engages more explicitly with the TRC's conceptions of testimony, personal healing, and political reconciliation, Lydia and *Disgrace*'s Lucy both consistently refuse to allow their experiences of rape to be subsumed into institutional frameworks or to be appropriated for political ends. Lucy's response to her rape in Coetzee's novel is undeniably troubling (as is David's) and has been read frequently as a meek acceptance of violence and victimization;[6] however, given the

inadequacy of the available vocabulary for rape, as discussed in the previous chapter, we may re-read Lydia's and Lucy's silence as an actively resistant refusal to allow their rapes to be utilized to propagate either divisive black peril myths or new images of unification and reconciliation.

These new images, like Archbishop's ideal of a Rainbow Nation and the banner hanging over some of the hearings reading "Truth: The Road to Reconciliation," were meant to facilitate the Commission's overarching aim to construct an all-encompassing narrative of the history and effects of apartheid in South Africa. The techniques that Gordimer, Coetzee, and Dangor use to craft their novels' fragmentary narratives undermine the legitimacy of just such a singular narrative of "truth," as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. While the TRC's report emphasizes its provisionary nature and cautions readers that it should not be taken as a complete, authoritative truth, the historical record that the Commission produced has played an exceedingly important role in the nation's self-representation in the aftermath of apartheid. However careful the commissioners have been to cast their report as an *initial* step toward a reconstruction and understanding of the past, it seems destined, as Mahmood Mamdani predicts, of becoming "the founding myth of the new South Africa" (177).

To its credit, the TRC acknowledged the complex and nuanced nature of the idea of objective truth and thus recognized four kinds of truth: factual truth, or empirically verifiable events; personal and narrative truth, as articulated in the subjective accounts and recollections of an individual about an event; social truth, or the "motives and perspectives" of the participants in an event; and finally, restorative truth, meaning the public acknowledgement of the events relevant to the depositions of

individual contributors (*TRC Report,* 1.5). Of course, these types of truth are not entirely distinct and frequently seeped into one another; additionally, the factual truths that were uncovered were produced in a "selective, partial, and methodologically suspect manner" (Du Toit 163). For example, both the perpetrators of the apartheid government and members of the ANC took the TRC to court in attempts to block the publication of its indictment of specific murders, disappearances, and torture, and many senior-level figures in the National Party refused to comply with the Commission. We still do not know "the full extent of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's involvement in the gross violation of human rights; we still know almost nothing about P.W. Botha's involvement in such matters, nor do we have the full picture on the line of command between MK and the SDUs" (DuToit 163). The TRC's construction of truth was hindered by a lack of material resources and excluded, for instance, the institution of apartheid laws, much of the history of Boer nationalism and Afrikanerdom, the role of international business in maintaining apartheid, institutionally produced poverty, legally authorized forms of violence, and the "many cases in which the harm has no name as a crime – the harm of lost time, dreams shattered, the suffering that comes from endless waiting, the humiliation of asking for the help of someone else" (Mertus 150).

Furthermore, the complex problems arising from the fallibility of memory complicated the personal, narrative truths uncovered by the Commission: "Memory renders the account of traumatic events unreliable, so the argument goes…. This argument has led many to question victims' stories, and to claim that what is remembered amounts to fragments of truth, a *re*construction of past events that fails to rise to the level of truth" (Gobodo-Madikizela 26). But, at the same time, this argument

ignores the crucial understanding that factual accounts simply tell us very little about how victims continue to live with the memory of horrific events.

The gaps and indeterminate spaces that populate *The House Gun*, *Disgrace*, and *Bitter Fruit* mirror the missing pieces in the narrative of the apartheid past constructed by the TRC, and Gordimer, Coetzee, and Dangor underscore the role that the political climate of the late 1990s, as well as the intersecting dynamics of class and gender, play in the production of cultural history. From the depiction of interrogatory scenes as part of the construction of truth and memory-making in *The House Gun* and *Disgrace*; to the tension between silence, articulation, and representation in *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit*; to the exposure of the unreliability of singular narratives and the fragmentary truth that emerges from attempted excavations of the past in each of these texts, all three of these novels disrupt the rhetoric of reconciliation prevalent in South Africa at the time of their publication.

I. Scenes of Interrogation in *The House Gun* and *Disgrace*

The House Gun, a novel concerned with issues of guilt, punishment, confession, and violence, plays out in a post-apartheid courtroom. The text is "emblematic of a society trying in vain to protect itself from the violence within, a violence that has penetrated the razor wire fences and the armed response unit home protection systems" (Kossew, page numbers unavailable) and holds up a mirror to a society trying to understand and to come to terms with its past. The action takes place in a post-apartheid community in

which, as Gordimer herself comments on the novel, "the climate of violence seems to seep through, like some kind of stain, so that it forms the connection of their lives" (Boston Phoenix interview). The connection that Gordimer makes here between an individual act of violence and a general *climate* of violence, between personal trauma and collective experience ("it forms the connection of their lives") is crucial to this text. For while Gordimer writes about a very particular and contextualized crime in *The House Gun*, the unspoken but ever-present backdrop to the murder and subsequent trial is the process by which society as a whole is on trial: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Of the three novels, Gordimer's is perhaps the most generous toward the mandate of the TRC and of the notion that the process of speaking trauma is cathartic in nature; early in *The House Gun*, she writes, "When you have been given a disaster which seems to exceed all measure, must it not be recited, spoken?" (71) Elsewhere, Gordimer has explicitly expressed support for the TRC. In a 1998 interview, she said,

> Every day the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Amnesty Commission have the most extraordinary things come out of them, so that the complexity of human beings, the complexity of their reactions to different pressures on their personal lives and their political and working lives, and the constant shift in their morality is exposed…. My own feeling is that the TRC is really remarkable because the victims do seem to get something out of it. Some feel that they don't, but I've been to a couple of hearings, and you can see the kind of catharsis that occurs, especially for people whose names didn't get into the paper… Nobody ever listened to them before, when they lost sons, daughters, husbands. Now you've got a whole

> group of prominent people who are listening to you, and it provides catharsis. (Boston Phoenix interview)

However, despite Gordimer's supportive inclination toward the TRC and its mandate, in *The House Gun*, Duncan's absence and the pervasive silences of the text complicate any attempt to construct a complete account of past events or to account for the underlying causes of violent crime in the new South Africa. The failure of the trial to completely reveal Duncan's motivations in committing an act of violence, coupled with Gordimer's characterization of Motsamai as, essentially, a skilled *actor* during his interrogations in court, highlights some of the more problematic elements of the TRC's vision of justice in the post-apartheid state.

When Harald first meets Motsamai, he "sat in Motsamai's chambers, looking round the shelves of law books with their paper slips marking relevant pages that might decide – not justice – he was not able to think of justice as he used to – but a way out" (58). Gordimer's immediate substitution of "a way out" for "justice" here signals considerable doubt as to the possibilities for and accessibility of justice after apartheid and alludes to the ways in which the TRC redefined the notion of justice for many South Africans ("he was not able to think of justice as he used to"), specifically through the amnesty hearings in which perpetrators were offered "a way out" while the victims were left without "justice." Later, Motsamai reveals his carefully crafted defense of Duncan to the Lindgards prior to his appearance in court, complete with his trump card obtained through interviews with witnesses: Natalie's pregnancy, expected to be particularly damaging for the prosecution's case. As Motsamai delivers the defense, Harald thinks, "The word *performance* keeps rising. He sees he wrote down…what he

has described as Hamilton's self-promoting 'performance'; and then Khulu Dladla's quote from the girl – that Duncan wanted her to be 'performing her life' for him" (240). More devastatingly, while watching Motsamai interact with the prosecuting attorney, Harald concludes, "So it was all a performance, for them, for the judge, the assessors, the Prosecutor, even Motsamai. Justice is a performance" (237). Harald's dubious attitude toward the trial process and its outcome speaks to criticisms of the TRC as an exercise in false sentiment, a drama of artifice serving only to appease politicians and "the popular imagination" (Miller 154) without seriously addressing persisting inequities.

Duncan's surprisingly lenient sentence – seven years in prison – is announced in the wake of the Constitutional Court's decision to abolish to death penalty in South Africa and is cast as a form of amnesty, echoing the TRC's treatment of NP officials. Gordimer writes, "In the air of the country, they are calling for a referendum; they, not the Constitutional Court will have the Last Judgment on murderers like Duncan. And referendum or not, Harald hears and knows, his son… shall have this will to his death surrounding him as long as he lives. The malediction is upon him even if the law does not exact it" (241). Gordimer's position toward this amnesty of sorts remains ambivalent; while this passage is perhaps largely supportive of the TRC's amnesty provisions in that the "malediction" and the "will to his death" that surrounds the murderer counterbalances the fact that "the law does not exact" justice through proportional punishment, the fact that Motsamai accurately predicts Duncan's sentence well ahead of time hints that the legal process is one in which the actors simply go through the motions of pursuing justice, that justice is merely staged.

Claudia's reaction to the trial, on the other hand, takes place mostly outside of the courtroom and interrogates the images of unity, reconciliation, and healing that the TRC propagated in the late 1990s. Archbishop Tutu's claim that "there can be no healing without truth" was bolstered by the TRC's description of the process of reconciliation in "a mixture of medical and quasi-religious metaphors" (Du Toit 161). Fiona Ross discusses how the TRC's depiction "as a healing intervention" drew on a model of language in which South Africa and South Africans were likened to "wounded bodies," and truth-telling was posited as a way of cleansing the unhealed wounds of human rights violations and the system of apartheid (12). Tutu describes the excavation and recovery enacted by the proceedings of the Commission in these terms: "However painful the experience, the wounds of the past must not be allowed to fester. They must be opened. They must be cleansed. And balm must be poured on them so they can heal…" (*TRC Report,* 1.1 par. 27). Gordimer manipulates this medical imagery through the figure of Claudia, who works as a doctor in a private practice but feels helplessly unable to heal the black patients that she treats at a free clinic once a week. Indeed, after finding out about the murder charges against her son, Claudia claims that she "doles out…placebos for others' disasters" (17). In the end, "Claudia sees that her whole life was moving towards this moment. All the ambitions she has so naively decided she was going to fulfill, when she was a girl, all the intentions of dedication to healing she had had in her adulthood – they were to come to this. The end is unimaginable; if we knew it from the start we would never set out" (259). That Claudia sees her role as a doctor and the healing process as a whole to be futile in the new South Africa, even after what is, by all accounts, a successful trial for the Lindgards, undermines the TRC's claim that

bearing witness in a public forum leads to healing and suggests that the medical imagery that Tutu employs as part of a rhetoric of reconciliation is misleading at best.

But despite Harald's and Claudia's apparent skepticism toward the possibilities for justice and reconciliation in the post-apartheid state, Gordimer frames Duncan's trial in the same terms in which Tutu frames the TRC's mandate and appears to endorse the Commission's work at the novel's conclusion. Just as TRC acted as a re-conception of the nation and ushered in the era of the new South Africa, for the Lindgards, "[t]here is a need to re-conceive, re-gestate the son" (*HG* 63) through the trial process. In the concluding chapter of Antjie Krog's personal account of the TRC, *Country of My Skull*, she writes, "For all its failures, [the TRC] carries a flame of hope that makes me proud to be from here, of here" (364). After Duncan's trial and the revelation that Natalie is pregnant with his child, Gordimer describes the future of the South African people in similar terms, writing, "Out of something terrible something new, to be lived with in a different way, surely than life was before? This is the country for themselves, here, now" (279). Although Gordimer seems to harbor some misgivings toward the TRC and the possibilities for *justice* in the new South Africa that are revealed through the novel's focalizers, that South Africa "is the country for themselves" – black and white alike – speaks to Gordimer's optimism toward the *reconciliation* process, as she participates in the rhetorical construction of South Africa's rebirth.

Coetzee, on the other hand, expresses far less confidence in the TRC's foundational assumptions and objectives in *Disgrace*. The novel's plot is structured around a series of rather disturbing interrogations: the university's investigation into and hearing regarding David's harassment of Melanie, David's interrogation of Lucy

following the assault on the farm and her rape, David's suspicions and questioning of Petrus regarding his relationship with Lucy's rapists. These scenes of interrogation engage with a number of political problems and ethical issues brought into the public sphere by the TRC, and Coetzee consistently expresses doubt as to the moral efficacy of the measures taken by the Commission in the aftermath of apartheid.

The most significant scene of interrogation, which sets the rest of the plot in motion, is David's sexual harassment hearing. During his hearing, David refuses to debate with the committee, to present evidence, to make a case for his defense, or to issue a statement of apology. The faculty committee struggles with and objects to David's "accepting of charges" without remorse and attempts to more explicitly link his transgression and their hearing to its larger political context; that is, the TRC. One committee member declares, "Yes, he says, he is guilty; but when we try to get specificity, all of a sudden it is not abuse of a young woman he is confessing to, 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" (53). David counters, "I have said the words for you, now you want more, you want me to demonstrate their sincerity. That is preposterous. That is beyond the scope of the law. I have had enough…. I plead guilty. That is as far as I am prepared to go" (55). This exchange illustrates a number of the ethical and juridical quandaries confronted by the TRC. David's response does not meet the committee's demands of ethical responsibility because it does not "provide the spectacle of deliberation that warrants the production of reasonable truth" (Saunders 100); in this sense, the faculty committee requires a display of remorse that extends beyond the formal demands of the TRC's amnesty hearings. Nevertheless, the TRC

anticipated and hoped for a visceral performance by the perpetrators who testified in exchange for amnesty (as evidenced by the many calls for NP officials to publicly face the "shame" of their actions), as did the victims and survivors present for the testimonies.[7] Like the TRC, the faculty committee "asks both for a suitable performance and for a visceral transformation," and both judicial bodies "hope that the former will function as assurance of the latter" (Saunders 101). Even as the TRC emphasized its justice as restorative rather than retributive, and despite its attention to victims' narratives, the Committee largely settled debts by disgracing apartheid's perpetrators instead of providing reparation for victims.

While Coetzee's position remains characteristically ambiguous regarding the committee's demands and David's response to them, David's argument is plainly not without merit: sincerity is, indeed, beyond the scope of the law. After his hearing, he thinks, "Confessions, apologies: why this thirst for abasement? A hush falls. They circle around him like hunters who have cornered a strange beast and do not know how to finish it off" (56). Of course, the faculty committee's and the TRC's aims were far more than a simple "thirst for abasement," but the question remains: does confession, punishment, and disgrace produce the kind of transformation that the TRC envisioned? That David's performance does not fulfill the expectation that remorse and transformation will accompany a public acknowledgement of transgression calls into question the working premise of the TRC: that by establishing a public record of the gross violations of human rights that have taken place in the country's past, the Committee will also have produced a justice and a truth that is individually restorative and socially transformative.

Of course, David's position toward the relationship between emotional "spectacle," social transformation, and political justice is inconsistent throughout *Disgrace*. While he refuses to communicate a sense of personal guilt for his behavior during his hearing because it has no place in his rather economic conception of justice, which functions by "a calculable adequation" of "indemnity and exchange" (Saunders 100), he is later appalled by Lucy's and Petrus' similarly economic conceptions of justice as based on material exchange and insists that Petrus conform to the emotionally transformative sense of justice that the TRC promotes. After the attack on the farm, Petrus points out that the insurance company will pay for a new car, that his promise of future protection for Lucy will compensate for the break-in, that his offer of marriage to Lucy will function as "reparation" for her rape – all indemnifications that conform to David's previously-held belief in the exchange structure of justice, and all of which outrage him when proposed by Petrus. David now insists, "It was not simply theft, Petrus…. They did not come just to steal…. After what they did, you cannot expect Lucy calmly to go on with her life as before. I am Lucy's father…. Am I wrong? Am I wrong to want justice?" (119) David is similarly frustrated when Lucy asks, "what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps…[t]hey see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying?" (158) Petrus' and Lucy's rationalizations here are deliberately provocative and troubling, to be sure; but perhaps equally troubling is David's quick dismissal of the material conception of justice he once espoused: "there is a principle involved. We can't leave it to insurance companies to deliver justice. That is not their business" (137). In striking contrast to his earlier position at his sexual

harassment hearing, David rejects such "payment schemes" (Saunders 100) both because they are not governed by courts of law and because they leave his demands for "principled" justice, displays of guilt, and emotional catharsis (for Lucy and for himself) unsatisfied.

The House Gun and *Disgrace* both utilize scenes of interrogation to highlight the constraints entailed in the institutional production of truth undertaken by the TRC. In each novel, the spectacle of deliberation fails to produce a comprehensible truth; the reader is no closer to understanding the circumstances and motivations that prompted Duncan's violent crime in *The House Gun*, and in *Disgrace* David denies both the faculty committee and Coetzee's audience an account of his relationship with Melanie – indeed, many critics continue to hesitate in naming her rape by David as such – and Lucy's experience of her rape is likewise obscured despite her interrogation by David. That public trial and the offer of amnesty (to both David and, in the form of an incredibly lenient sentence, to Duncan) cannot construct a unified truth in these novels undermines the truth-finding, history-constructing project of the TRC during this time. If "there can be no healing without truth," then these novels' inability to produce a complete, wholly realized truth in narrative form is devastating for the TRC's conciliatory endeavors.

Still, key differences emerge between Gordimer's and Coetzee's engagement with the TRC's conception of justice and reconciliation. In *The House Gun*, Gordimer is largely supportive of the TRC's objectives and concludes her novel with a rather uplifting view toward the possibilities for the new South Africa as a socially unified nation. That Duncan is able to speak only in the last pages of the text, after his trial and

sentence, and that when he does so he expresses emotional relief and release, indicates Gordimer's support of the TRC's assumption of a causal relationship between public confession or bearing witness and catharsis, a relationship that is presumed to provide the basis for reconciliation. Coetzee, however, expresses no such hope for the new South Africa or confidence in the TRC's methods. In *Disgrace*, interrogation repeatedly fails to function as a form of punishment, and material and psychological forms of recovery remain conspicuously absent. The novel suggests that the TRC's attention to reforming perpetrators and its inability to compensate victims critically undermine its viability. Whereas the project of the TRC intended to unify the nation "in an almost forced recognition of its fragmentation" (Buikema 195), Coetzee's novel implies that the performative nature of this brand of reconciliation risks becoming an empty mantra, and that the Commission's energies should be spent not on reforming the nation's soul, but on ameliorating the structural inequalities and basic material needs that are products of apartheid and have remained insufficiently addressed in its aftermath. In order to do this, however, Coetzee suggests that South Africans, particularly white South Africans, must relearn or reinvent the basics: "To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing" (*Disgrace* 205). This call for a return to a new beginning becomes clearer in Coetzee's treatment of Lucy's silence regarding her rape, which I will discuss in the following section.

II. The Meaning of Silence in *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit*

In *Disgrace* and in *Bitter Fruit*, Lucy and Lydia repeatedly refuse to discuss or to report their rapes – in Lucy's case, to the police; in Lydia's, to the TRC. Frustrated with Lucy's unwillingness to speak her rape in *Disgrace*, David thinks, "over the body of the woman silence is being drawn like a blanket" (110). The stifling of rape narrative is a feature of *Bitter Fruit* as well, as Lydia rejects the TRC's invitation to speak at a closed-door session designed specifically for victims of rape. Although the central incidents in both novels are acts of sexual violation, in each case, the experience of the woman is absent or obscured. Lucy's response to her rape is particularly unsettling, and has been read as passive acceptance of violence. However, given the available discourses surrounding rape in South Africa, historically speaking and during the time of the TRC, we may re-read Lucy's and Lydia's silence as an actively resistant refusal to allow their rapes to be utilized to perpetuate divisive black peril myths or to propagate new images of unification and reconciliation. Their silence thus acts as a reappropriation of their experiences and prevents their rapes from being subsumed into institutional frameworks for political ends.

In his essay "Interrogating silence," Andre Brink explains that there are "specific silences imposed by certain historical conjunctions. If any word involves a grappling with silence, the word uttered in the kind of repressive context exemplified by apartheid evokes an awareness of particular territories forbidden to language" (15). He then identifies two main silences of South African history: "that created by the

marginalization of women, and that effected by a (white-dominated) master-narrative of history" (24). Brink's claim points toward these novelists' concerns that the creation of a *new* "master-narrative of history," albeit no longer "white-dominated," does not necessarily provide an opening in which previously marginalized female voices can be heard.

During South Africa's transition, the national discourse of rape and sexual violence was shaped by the TRC; however, as complex issues arose from the TRC's engagement with the victims and perpetrators of rape and the exceedingly high levels of sexual violence in post-apartheid South Africa, the Commission itself admitted that rape remains one of the "silences" in the story of the past that it produced.[8] However, attempts to counter this silence with speech – most notably in the "special section" on women found in the fourth volume of the TRC's report, the purpose of which is to draw attention to the issues that affect women in an effort to prevent "the experiences of men [from] becom[ing] the yardstick by which judgments are made" (*TRC Report,* 4.10 par. 3) – raise other concerns. As the TRC "became increasingly anxious about its failure to capture the story of women and the story of sexual violence, it began to conflate the two: 'woman's story' was reduced to one of sexual violence, and sexual violence was identified as a defining female experience" (Samuelson 121).

Ross points toward a number of these concerns regarding the construction and reception of women's testimonies, and the possibly repressive nature of traditional narrative form itself, in her analysis of Yvonne Khutwane's testimony before the TRC and its portrayal in the media. Khutwane "told of being threatened, hit, beaten with the butt of a gun, strangled, suffocated, squashed. She described arson and her child's

death, and her feelings of alienation from her political community. In so doing, she located [her] sexual violation as one harmful incident among many…" (89). However, Ross traces the ways in which Commissioner Gobodo-Madikizela questioned, directed, and sculpted Khutwane's testimony in order to shape it within the confines of a traditional, linear narrative; in so doing, Gobodo-Madikizela "returned on several occasions to the event of sexual harm. Indeed, as I sat in the audience at the hearing, it seemed this violation was presumed to be *the* traumatic event and the *primary* violation" (89). Although, according to her written statement and in later interviews, Khutwane did not intend to discuss her sexual violation during her hearing, her testimony was later represented in the media "in a manner that suggests that it pre-existed the Commission's intervention, as if there was a coherent narrative, 'a testimony,' intact in form, awaiting an opportunity to be spoken in public" (91). The material that Ross presents, particularly regarding Khutwane's experience with the TRC, raises questions about the wider efficacy of linking voice with self, dignity, and healing. The frequent interventions on the Commission's part and the individual's lack of control over their testimonies in a number of cases may be experienced as alienation and appropriation.

From a slightly different angle, Antjie Krog discusses the way in which sexual violence was produced as an experience peculiar to women: "Men don't use the word 'rape' when they testify. They talk about being sodomized, or about iron rods being inserted into them. In so doing they make rape a women's issue. By denying their own sexual subjugation to male brutality, they form a brotherhood with rapists which conspires against their own wives, mothers and daughters, say some of those who

testify" (182). That the TRC's efforts to give voice to sexual violence genders rape as something that happens only to women sheds light on the discursive constraints surrounding the subject of rape.

In fact, as Nancy Paxton notes, the problems of speaking rape are evident even in the "etymologically compromised" term itself: the early usage of the word "rape" referred to "the theft of goods or the abduction of a woman" and "was generally conceptualized as theft of male property" (8). When rape is spoken within the confines of this discourse and within the prevailing discourse of gender and nation during the political transition in South Africa, women are produced as "vulnerable victims in need of male protection, as objects of property and exchange, as reproducers of the future, and as markers of national boundaries" (Samuelson 121-2). Lucy's and Lydia's silences are thus active refusals to give voice to their experiences within such a discourse or to cast themselves as passive objects, rather than meek acceptance of sexual violence.

The etymological history of "rape" as concerned with objects of theft, specifically of male property, is particularly illuminating in the case of Lucy's silence in *Disgrace*. As discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, David ponders Lucy's rape as part of "a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in this country: in its schematic aspect. Otherwise one could go mad. Cars, shoes; women too" (98). David's listing women alongside stolen objects speaks to conceptions of rape as theft of male property and falls in line with a "patriarchal society that names 'woman' as the fundamental unit of exchange or foundational gift, that is polarized along racial lines, and that is decidedly rape-prone" (Samuelson 148). Lucy's police report, however, avoids all reference to rape and race: "There were three men,

she recites, or two men and a boy. They tricked their way into the house, took (she lists the items) money, clothes, a television set, a CD player, a rifle with ammunition" (108). In this scene, by detailing only the theft of items of property and by deliberately excluding her rape from the report, Lucy separates her body from objects of male exchange and subverts the discourse that conceives of rape as the "theft of goods." While David is mildly outraged by her refusal to tell "the whole story" (110), Lucy here avoids inscription as "a white woman within a racialized patriarchy" (Samuelson 148) and rejects the discursive constraints that would produce her as an object of male property.

Furthermore, this deliberate elision in Lucy's narrative and her insistence that her rape is a "purely private matter" expresses concerns with "the ways in which the rhetoric of sexual violence informs and structures our perspectives on real rape, and with how 'rape myths' and rape as a social fact have become inseparably intertwined" (Sielke 10). Lucy's response to her rape is informed by an awareness of the rhetorical construction of racialized rape, and her silence refuses the construction of her body as property to be defended through the narrative of black peril that casts black men as rapists, white men as protectors, and white women as fragile and threatened bearers of racial purity. Lucy attempts to explain to David that in "another time, in another place [her rape] might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not." When pushed to elaborate, she responds, "This place being South Africa" (112). Her refusal to press charges is, then, clearly informed by the political climate in which her rape takes place and draws attention to the ways in which rape is framed by continuing racial privilege and read within the constraints of racialized discourse. Her silence thus

refers not only to the unspeakability of rape itself, but constitutes a refusal to contribute to the myth of black peril.

Dangor expresses similar concerns in *Bitter Fruit*, in which Lydia refuses to testify at the TRC regarding her rape by Du Boise. The novel shows "how rape, when spoken by women, may be appropriated by a hegemonic discourse of male dishonour, or figured as a metaphor of male conquest" (Samuelson 121). Lydia mocks this discourse early in the text, telling Silas, "If you were a real man, you would have killed him on the spot… He took your woman, he fucked your wife, made you listen to him doing it. I became his property, even my screams were his instrument" (17). Like Lucy, Lydia feels unable to speak her rape because she believes her trauma will be appropriated and incorporated into a script in which she becomes an object of exchange among men, a script which further silences rape victims. Lydia sees the TRC as a forum which merely confirms the production of women as victims of rape, rather than a restorative venue for individual healing and social transformation.

But *Bitter Fruit* focuses more heavily on the psychological trauma that rape inflicts and depicts the line between speech and silence as more ambiguous than does *Disgrace*. Lydia does "speak" her rape in writing and uses her private diary to articulate the reasons behind her decision to remain silent about her rape: "I cannot speak to Silas, he makes my pain his tragedy. In any case, I know that he doesn't want to speak about my being raped, he wants to suffer silently, wants me to be his accomplice in this act of denial" (127). She feels that her family demands of her "a forgetful silence" and that the TRC promotes "saying the unsayable, and then holding your peace for ever after" (127). Lydia here rejects the idea that publicly giving voice to trauma is in and of itself a

therapeutic act and points to a number of problems with the TRC's proceedings; namely, that the TRC does not address or ameliorate the material conditions that continue to contribute to widespread rape in contemporary South Africa, and the risk of suppressing the complexities of personal experience through public testimony within a specific framework. Dangor appears dubious regarding the TRC's framework as well, organizing his novel into chapters in which "Memory" and "Confession" lead to "Retribution," not reconciliation, as the TRC would have it.

Lydia's concern that her trauma may be reappropriated for other ends that obscure its complexities is perhaps not ill-founded. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the TRC did not always report rape cases in full and that this was in part due to the agenda of nation-building that was permitted to reshape certain testimonies. For example,

> during a televised broadcast of a woman's account of… how she had to identify her sister's sexually mutilated body, the SABC [South African Broadcasting Commission] interrupted her evidence with "a commissioner's call for a minute of silence"… in this way the sister's "traumatic memory of the mutilation of… [a] tortured body" was mis-appropriated into the heroic narrative of a nation in formation. (Daymond 25)

This incident reveals the ways in which the TRC's agenda as an entity formed to foster reconciliation, to expose the traumas of the past in order to construct a boundary between the horrors of apartheid and South Africa's future, affects the delivery of testimony, particularly regarding cases of rape. When Lydia is invited to appear before the Commission at a closed hearing that is offered as "an opportunity to bring the issue

out into the open, to lance the festering wound, to say something profoundly personal," Lydia rejects the idea, claiming, "nothing in any of their lives would change because of a public confession of pain suffered. Because nothing could be undone, you could not withdraw a rape, it was an irrevocable act, like murder" (156). Unsurprisingly, Lydia is horrified upon discovering the Du Boise has applied for amnesty and intends to testify regarding her rape. Silas breaks the news:

> "Du Boise has applied for amnesty, he and three, four others, for rape, assault, on women mostly. He has named you as one of the cases he is asking amnesty for."
>
> She remained silent.
>
> He leaned forward. "I saw the brief, someone involved in the TRC's investigation recognized your name. The hearings will be in public, some time next year."
>
> "Stop them, Silas."
>
> "I can't, not even the President.…" (160-61)

Lydia's pleas to Silas to "stop them" speak to the fact that both giving and bearing witness to testimony regarding violence, particularly sexual violence, can often be a fraught and traumatic process in itself. In this passage, Lydia expresses concerns that were articulated during the time of the Commission regarding the possibility that public circulation of personal trauma may inaugurate "a *re-experiencing of the event itself*" (Laub 67). Through Lydia's refusal to testify, Dangor simultaneously highlights the silences of the TRC and inserts a narrative of rape and trauma in which the relationship between past and present is not marked by a complete rupture, but by what Dangor

terms “a greater continuity in our history than we want to recognize” (in Frenkel 161) in terms of the construction of a narrative of the apartheid past.

Given the often painful and invasive nature of public testimony in cases of sexual violation and the inadequacy of the available discourse on rape during the time of the TRC, Lucy’s and Lydia’s silences should be read as protests against the discursive restrictions imposed on rape victims. Lucy’s refusal to inscribe herself within a framework in which white women are produced as vulnerable victims in need of (white) male protection and in which black men are marked as violent and sexually rapacious problematizes the TRC’s founding assumptions regarding the healing powers of speaking trauma and uncovering truth. Her silence resonates with Lydia’s rejection of the TRC’s position that the movement from silence to voice is necessarily a liberating one. *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit* both raise questions regarding the efficacy of the call to offer up one’s personal and traumatic experience to the political demands of the nation and suggest that victims’ testimony may be manipulated in harmful ways. Together, these texts indicate that the available discourse is inadequate in expressing the experiences of those subject to rape and suggest that “the historical subtexts that continue to haunt the scene of rape in transitional South Africa” (Samuelson 124) prevent the restorative process of individual and social healing that the TRC seeks to facilitate.

III. The Construction of History and the Nature of Truth in the New South Africa

The missing pieces and indeterminate spaces that populate the narratives of *The House Gun*, *Disgrace*, and *Bitter Fruit* discussed in the first chapter of this thesis mirror the gaps in the narrative of apartheid's history produced by the TRC. The fragmentary narrative that each author offers the reader implies the existence of countless unspoken traumas and "truths" left out of the TRC's grander narrative of the nation's past and alludes to the fact that, as Andre Brink explains, "'[h]istory is not a series of events but a *narrated* (and manipulated) series of events; and at any moment in the series a mixture of orientations towards representation and invention is evident" (21). In this sense, any synthesis of individual trauma into a singular, representative voice or narrative – such as that scripted by the process of the TRC – can only be misleading and result in the further silencing of marginalized voices.

In this section, I would like to focus on Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, as it engages most directly with the ways in which the TRC attempted to construct a unified story of South African history. By employing multiple focalizers in *Bitter Fruit*, each with competing and conflicting narratives and claims upon factual events, Dangor illustrates the ambiguity inherent in the various ways that individuals and societies synthesize the past. Silas' focalization, in particular, reveals the role of political power-plays in the TRC's proceedings and undermines the legitimacy of the "truth" uncovered by the Commission's report.

Lydia describes Silas as being good at his job working on the TRC's report because

of his "forgetfulness," his capacity for helping the nation "to forget and therefore to forgive, a convenient kind of amnesia" (*BF* 110). In reference to a frank discussion of Lydia's rape, Silas himself acknowledges that "[h]e was not capable of such an ordeal" because it "would require an immersion in words he was not familiar with, words that did not seek to blur memory, to lessen the pain, but to sharpen all of these things. He was trained to find consensus, even if it meant not acknowledging the 'truth' in all its unflattering nakedness" (63). Dangor here constructs "consensus" as a mechanism that "blur[s] memory" and that stands in opposition to the discovery and articulation of painful truths – a construction that condemns the TRC's mission, which includes the uncovering of truth and the facilitation of unity (or consensus) as entirely unviable.

Like Gordimer in *The House Gun*, Dangor reveals the performative nature of truth as it is produced by the TRC by exposing the back-door political dealings and the development of public relations campaigns surrounding the Commission that Silas is charged with managing. During one crisis, Dangor writes, "Silas would have to find the right words – when they went public – to extricate his Minister from the web of his own ambiguity. The best thing would be to spin even more elaborate webs, words and meanings that turned in on themselves, full of 'nuance and context,' keep the media occupied with trying to figure out what we're up to" (109). In this passage and elsewhere, Dangor characterizes Silas – and, by extension, the Commission as a whole – as concerned with "words and meanings that turned in on themselves" and become empty mantras rather than with an earnest search for truth or seriously addressing the continuing effects of apartheid-era abuses on post-apartheid society. But Silas' efforts to navigate the treacherous political climate in which the Commission takes place also

allude to the very real financial and political limitations that restricted the scope of the TRC and hindered its truth-finding project.

Although the TRC recognized four distinct kinds of truth, Silas remains partial to "factual" or "objective" truth in *Bitter Fruit* and explicitly expresses distaste for the "turmoil of memories" associated with Lydia's rape. His uneasiness with narrative forms of truth was shared by a number of critics of the TRC's methods of compiling historical records. The fallibility of memory, particularly traumatic memory, gave rise to complex problems during the TRC's hearings; as Gobodo-Madikizela writes,

> When we are confronted with unimaginable and unbelievable human brutality the effect is to rupture our senses. When the rupture of one's senses is a daily occurrence – as was the case in South Africa's violent political past – old memories fuse with new ones and the accounts given by victims and survivors are not simply about facts. They are primarily about the *impact* of facts on their lives and the continuing trauma in their lives created by past violence. The experience of traumatic memory becomes a touchstone of reality, to borrow a phrase from Maurice Friedman, and tells us more about how people who have survived try to live their normal lives than it does about facts. (26)

The argument that memory renders the account of traumatic events unreliable and that it thus constitutes merely fragments of a larger truth is critical in evaluating the possibilities of a project like that of the TRC; however, this argument also ignores the crucial understanding that factual accounts simply tell us very little about how victims continue to live with the memory of horrific events. In *Bitter Fruit*, Silas and Lydia have distinctly different memories regarding the way her rape transpired and the

traumatic effect that it had on both of their lives – indeed, this discrepancy is cause for a major argument between the two of them, as I have discussed – but Dangor makes no attempt to reconcile the two narratives. That he allows the conflicting, fragmentary versions of the past to exist separately implies, among other things, that efforts to synthesize competing claims on history will compromise the integrity of each, an implication that can be easily inferred from his statements elsewhere regarding the tendency of singular narratives to silence the many layers of meaning that deserve individual, contextualized examination. *Bitter Fruit* problematizes oversimplified, politicized notions of healing and reconciliation and emphasizes the importance of the context in which trauma is spoken and heard, and what conclusions are drawn from it for what reasons, in determining the cathartic power of testimony.

Gordimer, Coetzee and Dangor each explore the questionable processes through which histories are constructed, and each author produces only fragments of a presumably larger truth. The reasons behind their refusal to offer a whole, unified narrative are various and complex, but all suggest the problematic nature of the TRC's founding assumptions regarding the therapeutic powers of testimony, the meaning of the silence that seems to stifle discussions of rape, and the viability of efforts to excavate the past. *The House Gun* is perhaps the most optimistic regarding the TRC's mission in that Duncan, alongside the backdrop of the whole of South African society, does experience his trial as transformative, while Gordimer uses his unborn child as a metaphor for the possibility of the nation's rebirth. Yet the lack of a complete account of the events of the novel – largely due to Duncan's textual absence – is striking in *The House Gun*, as it is in *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit*. This central lack, the pervasive silence

in these texts, powerfully interrogates the way that the TRC framed the uncovering of truth as a prerequisite for healing.

Coetzee and Dangor write against the prevalent discourses on rape during the time of the Commission, using Lucy's and Lydia's silences to highlight and subvert the discursive restrictions imposed by colonial rape myths and by the political agenda of the TRC. While Coetzee underscores the inadequacy of the available discourses on rape by revealing how women who speak rape are scripted as objects within a male structure of exchange, or as markers of racial purity in the myth of black peril. Lucy's silence signals her refusal to comply with this ideological agenda, while Lydia's silence in *Bitter Fruit* rejects the appropriation of her rape for very different political objectives and exposes the often wounding effects of giving voice to past experiences of trauma. Together, these novels' engagement with the issues surrounding the construction of truth and justice disrupt the rhetoric of reconciliation that dominated South Africa's popular imagination during the time of the TRC.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have argued that in their first post-apartheid novels, Gordimer, Coetzee, and Dangor disrupt the rhetoric of reconciliation prevalent during the South African transition. I have focused on the fragmentary nature of these authors' narratives; their representations of violence and rape in a post-apartheid spatial economy; and their engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was ongoing at the time of the novels' publication. Although the scope of my project has been limited by a number of restrictions and important omissions, both in terms of my selection of texts and my evaluation of the three included in this thesis, I have attempted to show that *The House Gun*, *Disgrace*, and *Bitter Fruit* subvert to the narrative of national unity and reconciliation in varying degrees and in a number of different ways.

Together, these texts carefully trace the increasing violence in post-apartheid South Africa to systematic apartheid-era abuses and privilege a discourse of reparation, or literally *repairing* the nation, over one of reconciliation. Meg Samuelson draws upon a weaving metaphor to describe such a discourse and notes that in its claim that racism is "part of the warp and woof of South African society" (*TRC Report,* 1.1 par. 65), the TRC suggestively draws upon this figure as well and implicitly describes South African society as a fabric (240). Notably, the TRC also claims to "have tried, in whatever way we could, to weave into this truth about our past some essential lessons for the future of the people of this country" (*TRC Report*, 1.1 par. 19). However, while the TRC

proposes to weave "some essential lessons" into an already existent historic fabric that represents the "truth about our past," these three novels call for a fundamental reworking of this fabric that has been woven in and through institutionalized racism. This process involves "learning to live with and acknowledge the past's continuing presence in the present, while simultaneously altering and reworking it into a radically different shape and texture and putting it to new uses" (Samuelson 240).

In *The House Gun*, Gordimer "acknowledges the past's continuing presence" in post-apartheid South Africa by implicating apartheid-era racial oppression and divisions of space in Duncan's seemingly private crime. In doing so, she reveals the ways in which spatial boundaries in contemporary South Africa continue to break down along lines of race, with particular attention to the Lindgards' high-walled, electrically-monitored townhome complex that is symptomatic of an increasingly compartmentalized and segregated South African society in certain quarters. However, Gordimer alters and reworks this old pattern by writing the invasion of this private refuge of white privilege by violent crime and by the political sphere, revealing that apartheid affects every sector of society and that no individual exists beyond the pale of the historical process. Unlike Coetzee and Dangor, however, Gordimer embraces the notion of forgiveness and rebirth that the TRC promotes. While the failure of *The House Gun* to provide a complete account of Duncan's story undermines the truth-finding mission of the Commission, Gordimer's novel is the most optimistic regarding the possibilities for reconciliation in the new South Africa.

Coetzee also consistently traces the pervasive violence in post-apartheid South Africa to the apartheid past in *Disgrace*. If we read *against* David's focalization, the

novel puts old patterns to "new uses" in generative ways; by structuring the novel's plot around two parallel incidents of racialized rape and invoking colonial and apartheid rape myths, Coetzee explores the historical subtexts informing both rape and women's silence in response to rape. His subversion of black peril narrative through his attention to David as a figure of "white peril" acknowledges the past's continuing influence on the present in that David is able to confidently declare his sexual violation of Melanie "not rape." At the same time, Coetzee uses these historical subtexts to probe the ways in which rape *continues* to be read and heard, for if Lucy speaks her rape, she will become an object in a racialized system of exchange, requiring male protection, rather than asserting her bodily integrity and autonomy. In exploring the unspeakability of rape, Coetzee simultaneously contextualizes contemporary violence, grounding it in South Africa's history of aggressive domination, and calls for a new discourse on rape and sexual violence in the new South Africa.

Similarly, Dangor uses the silence surrounding Lydia's rape to reveal the inadequacy of the available discourse on rape in South Africa, focusing particularly on the discursive restraints of the TRC's hearings. *Bitter Fruit* testifies to the ambiguities of memory and to the existence of countless unspoken traumas that are left unaddressed by the overarching narrative of apartheid, problematizing the TRC's efforts to construct a definitive history of the nation and to uncover an all-encompassing truth as the gateway to reconciliation. But if Dangor looks to the future for a new space in which historically marginalized voices may be heard, he also roots his novel in the apartheid past: like Gordimer, Dangor implicates apartheid's arbitrary racial classification system and racialized conceptions of space – *not* "tribal" or "ethnic" animosity – in post-

apartheid South Africa's alarming levels of violence.

Together, then, these novels emphasize the need to "acknowledge the past's continuing presence in the present, while simultaneously reworking it into a radically different shape and texture and putting it to new uses." By charting the historical subtexts of their plots and unspoken trauma, the texts interrogate prevailing rape scripts and the narrative of reconciliation; encourage us to think critically about the voices of women and how they have been, are, and could be produced and performed; and forgo a discourse of closure. While Njabulo Ndebele writes that "the TRC seems poised to result in…the restoration of narrative," that the South African people are "reinventing themselves through narrative" and that South Africa has "succeeded in becoming metaphor, in becoming a true subject of philosophy" (91), these authors seek to deconstruct this narrative precisely to prevent South Africa from becoming a mere abstraction. These novels remind us of the provisional and fragile nature of reconstruction and complicate and restore complexity to the notions of national identity in circulation in South Africa. Gordimer, Coetzee, and Dangor undertake these endeavors in a host of ways in their post-apartheid fiction, amidst efforts to rebuild a society in which many underlying social and political relations remain substantially unchanged.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] The phrase "the new South Africa" was minted by F.W. de Klerk in his speech on February 2, 1990, in which he proclaimed the end of apartheid, announced Nelson Mandela's release from prison, and promised the repeal of apartheid laws. However, "its conception should not be misrecognized as immaculate: 'the new South Africa' would become de Klerk's best-known coinage and an indisputable asset in the astute marketing of his regime as converts to decency and penitence, in a campaign that has seen an instinct for political survival pass off as a species of righteousness" (Attridge and Jolly 4).

[2] I mark the end of apartheid not in 1990, when President F.W. de Klerk announced the repeal of much of the legislation that supported apartheid, but in 1994, when the ANC took power.

[3] For example, in "Gordimer – South Africa's Conscience," Julian Symons writes that after winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991, Gordimer should be regarded as "*the* interpreter of the South African experience to the outside world" and that, given her opposition to white supremacist politics, as "South Africa's conscience." For a brief discussion of Gordimer's reception within South Africa, see Wagner.

[4] Here I am classifying Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* as a memoir rather than a novel.

[5] See *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 4.3 (Nov. 2002). In his introduction to the issue, Derek Attridge writes, "Stating the opposition baldly, Coetzee is either praised (implicitly or explicitly) for unblinkingly depicting the lack of progress South Africa has made towards its declared goal of a non-racial, non-sexist democracy (and Lurie's attitudes towards his lesbian daughter's sexuality may be taken to typify a failure in dealing with homophobia as well) or condemned for painting a one-sidedly negative picture of post-apartheid South Africa, representing blacks as rapists and thieves, and implying that whites have no option but to submit to their assaults" (317).

[6] Even after Gordimer won her Nobel Prize, her publisher in South Africa, Longman-Penguin S.A., recorded sales of only about one thousand units per year across ten available titles. The company claims to distribute Gordimer's works in South Africa mainly in "academic" bookshops as a "duty" to the South African public, rather than for profit. See Wagner.

[7] I use the term "coloured" with an awareness of the contested history of racial labeling within which it has come into signification in South Africa. The classification was originally imposed on a heterogeneous group of slaves in the Cape, originating from areas as diverse as India, Madagascar, East Africa, West Africa, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Slaves "mixed" with the indigenous population of the Cape and European colonists, and the term came to denote a population whose sole common feature was initially mixed-race parentage. As Ronit Frenkel notes in an article concerning Dangor's

depiction of coloured communities, "Apartheid policy later reified this population into a rigid category, in an attempt to construct colored as a race" (151). The term "coloured" as a social and political identity has been both contested and embraced across class, religion, and culture.

[8] People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) claims to fight violence but has been implicated in several criminal and terrorist acts since it was formed in 1996. See "Pagad: vigilantes or terrorists?"

Chapter 1

[1] For a rather lengthy discussion of free indirect discourse and its literary functions, see Rimmon-Kenan. In specific fictional texts free indirect discourse can have a variety of thematic functions, but here I am concerned with the unstable and indeterminate distance between author, narrator, and protagonist that the use of free indirect discourse creates. As Brian McHale argues, "[e]ven when different segments can ultimately be attributed to identifiable speakers and more so when they cannot, FID enhances the bivocality or polyvocality of the text by bringing into play a plurality of speakers and attitudes" (Rimmon-Kenan 113-4). Regarding the attempt to reconstruct the author's attitude toward the character(s) involved, the presence of a narrator as distinct from the character may create an ironic distancing, as I argue is the case with *Disgrace*. However, on the other hand, the "tinting of the narrator's speech" with the character's language or mode of experience may promote an empathetic identification with the character on the part of the reader (114). The most interesting cases are perhaps those in which the reader has little or no basis on which to choose between the ironic and the empathetic attitude. See also Banfield.

[2] For a more general evaluation of focalization, see Rimmon-Kenan, who writes that focalization occurs when "[t]he story is presented in the text through the mediation of some 'prism,' 'perspective,' 'angle of vision,' verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his" (73). The term "focalization" dispels some of the confusion between perspective and narration when terms like "point of view" are used because "focalization" more explicitly broadens visual sense to include "cognitive, emotive, and ideological orientation" (73). When the narrative is focalized through a character, the character becomes a vehicle of focalization, or a "focalizer," but not necessarily a narrator (74).

[3] See Brantlinger. Europeans "tended to see Africa as a center of evil, a part of the world possessed by a demonic 'darkness' or barbarism, represented above all by slavery and cannibalism, which it was their duty to exorcise" (175). For a thorough discussion of nineteenth-century European depictions of South Africans, see Crais.

[4] For a discussion of this double standard and for the coining of the term "white peril," see Plaatje.

[5] It has been calculated that the total number of South Africans removed from their homes against their will between 1960 and 1983 stood at 3.5 million. See Du Toit.

Chapter 2

[1] Under apartheid rule, blacks were relegated to *Bantustans* or homelands that comprised 13% of the land of South Africa, reserving 87% of the land for whites. In his essay, "The Mote and the Beam: An Epic on Sex-Relationship 'twixt White and Black in British South Africa," Sol Plaatje notes that the British Colonial Secretary justified the Native Lands Act as a defensive measure against "black peril" cases (243).

[2] For example, see Temple-Thurston: "It is Motsamai who represents the hope and the new direction for South Africa, his hybrid blend of cultures and his goodwill promising a positive future" (148).

[3] The Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 deemed urban areas in South Africa "white" and forced all black African men in cities to carry passes at all times. In 1952, the Pass Laws Act forced all South Africans over the age of 16 to carry a pass book at all times, which stipulated when and how long a person could remain in a designated area. Resistance to pass laws resulted in thousands of arrests and culminated in the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960. See Unterhalter.

[4] This phenomenon has received more attention in works of literature than in media coverage, perhaps for its visual and symbolic qualities. In *Country of My Skull*, Antjie Krog writes of a conversation she overheard at the TRC hearings, when someone said, "What makes me angry is that whites are privatizing their feelings… they hide in their suburbs, they hide behind their own court interdicts and legal representatives. The pain of blacks is being dumped into the country more or less like a commodity article…" (160).

[5] For a discussion of atavistic interpretations of South African violence, see Taylor.

[6] In a *New York Times* article, Christopher S. Wren noted that the "admission, following disclosures in a weekly newspaper, was one of the strongest confirmations of repeated charges leveled by the [African National Congress] and others that the white-dominated Government of South Africa has been using its resources to bolster the congress's principal black opponent…. By one estimate, 10,000 people, virtually all of them black, have been killed in the political violence since 1986."

[7] For several years during the past decade, South Africa has had the highest per capita rate of documented rape in the world. See *The Eighth United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (2001-2002)*.

[8] See, for example, McClintock or Kandiyoti.

[9] See Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*.

[10] Lucy Graham points to "a poster for the New National Party before the 1999 elections" that "states that women are raped daily, that the party is 'deeply shocked' at the ANC's 'unfeeling' attitude, and that the new Nationalist [sic] Party plans to institute capital punishment for rapists" (435). See Bakker (FP), election advertisement for *The New National Party*, 1999 elections.

[11] Ann Stoler expands upon this by claiming, "the rhetoric of sexual assault and the

measures used to prevent it had virtually no correlation with the incidence of rape of European women by men of color. Just the contrary: there was often no evidence, ex post facto or at the time, that rapes were committed or that rape attempts were made. This is not to suggest that sexual assaults never occurred, but that their incidence had little to do with the fluctuations in anxiety about them" (353). See "Making Empire Respectable."

[12] Gordimer's lone reference to problems of language and its sociopolitical role in the new South Africa in *The House Gun* comes roughly halfway through the novel, when she observes, "the functionaries give one another chummy orders in a mixture of English and Afrikaans… so at this level of the civil service (and of warders who stand at either side of the prisoner in the visitors' room) it is still the preserve of these white men and women, the once chosen people… belonging to the last generation whose employment by the State when they left school was a sinecure of whiteness" (133). Gordimer depicts the continuing influence of Afrikaans as a symbol of white privilege, but also notes its gradual erosion as a sign of power in the new South Africa.

[13] See "Black Atlantics, White Indians, and Jews: Locations, Locutions, and Syncretic Identities in the Fiction of Achmat Dangor and Others."

[14] *ländliche*: "rural"

[15] *baas en Klaas*: "boss and worker"

Chapter 3

[1] See *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*.

[2] For a more thorough discussion of this function of the Commission, see Lalu and Harris.

[3] For example, Rebecca Saunders writes, "In the case of the TRC, the uncertain meaning of 'accepting charges' – of the implicit demand for visceral transformation to accompany the calculation of justice – presented itself most glaringly in the guise of perpetrators who stonily, even insouciantly, recounted acts of unfathomable barbarity, counting on this 'truth' to pay their debt, purchase amnesty, and settle the demands of responsibility. Indeed it was the spectacle of perpetrators eviscerated of remorse and shame, if not humanity itself, that led some South Africans to regard the TRC's 'truth for amnesty' deal as essentially exchanging justice for truth, or as merely canceling debts rather than exacting payment for them. While the TRC articulated its justice, under Desmond Tutu's influence, as 'restorative' rather than retributive, its amnesty branch nonetheless operated on the principle of reasonable exchange and measured its judgments in terms of adequation and proportionality… Thus while the TRC was a forum that allowed for greater visceral expression than does an ordinary courtroom… it maintained its purchase on the reasonable by measuring ends and means and by bartering amnesty for truth" (101).

[4] For example, Eunice Nombulelo Ngubo came forward to give evidence about the death of her brother, who had been accused of being a police informer. At the end of her

testimony, she said, “The reason why I came before the Commission is because we do not have a home. We stay in shacks. If the Commission could build us a house, please.” See Edelstein 88.

[5] See Krog.

[6] See McDonald.

[7] For example, Ignatieff writes, “It is sometimes essential that former regimes are shamed into unalterable moral disgrace: that their inner moral essence is named and defined for all time by an objective process of fact-finding” (20). See also Gobodo-Madikizela, who says that during the TRC, “Perpetrators faced their shame in public” (31).

[8] See *TRC Report, vol. 4, Ch. 10*, which includes a sub-section entitled, “Silences about Sexual Abuse.” The report reads, “One of the particularly difficult areas of silence is sexual abuse. The Commission saw its provision of the opportunity ‘to relate their own accounts’ as a way of restoring ‘the human and civil dignity’ of victims. For many women, relating the story of their sexual abuse would in no way serve this purpose” (296).

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