



HÖGSKOLAN FÖR LÄRANDE
OCH KOMMUNIKATION
HÖGSKOLAN I JÖNKÖPING

Representation of the Other

A Postcolonial Study of the Representation of the Natives in Relation to the Colonizers in *The Stranger* and *Disgrace*

Mirela Karagic

C-uppsats 15 hp
Engelska språket och litteraturen 61-90 hp

Läroarbilden
HT 2013

Handledare
Zlatan Filipovic

Examinator
Anette Svensson

ABSTRACT

Mirela Karagic

Representation of the Other

A Postcolonial Study of the Representation of the Natives in Relation to the Colonizers in *The Stranger* and *Disgrace*

Number of pages: 31

According to postcolonial theory, postcolonial literature tends to depict non-Westerners – the native Other – as a homogenous mass, portrayed as carrying all the dark human traits. The Other is often represented as, for instance, being exotic, violent, hostile and mysterious, and either stands in opposition to, or is portrayed as being completely different from the Westerner.

With postcolonial theory as a background, this study is a close-reading analysis and comparison of Albert Camus' *The Stranger* (1942), which takes place in a colonial Algeria, and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), which is set in postcolonial South Africa. The novels have been analysed in terms of representation of the Other, as well as the power relations and hierarchy between Westerners and natives, in order to see if these aspects are portrayed differently due to the fact that one novel is written pre-independence and the other post-independence.

The results show that the representation of the Other is in accordance with postcolonial theory, in both novels. The natives are exoticised, portrayed as violent and mysterious in a hostile manner, and the plot is viewed from the perspective of the Western, white male protagonist. However, the power relations differ; in *The Stranger*, the Westerners are definitely superior, whereas in *Disgrace*, some of the characters still consider themselves to be superior, but their power has declined – the natives strike back, leaving the white population with a choice: to comply to the new order, or to find themselves in a state of disgrace.

Keywords: *The Stranger*, *Disgrace*, Albert Camus, J.M. Coetzee, postcolonial theory, comparative literature,

Postadress	Gatuadress	Telefon	Fax
Högskolan för lärande och kommunikation (HLK) Box 1026 551 11 JÖNKÖPING	Gjuterigatan 5	036–101000	036162585

Table of contents

Introduction	1
Postcolonial Representations: The Imperial Gaze	4
<i>The Stranger, Albert Camus</i>	9
The Representation of the Other	9
The Relationship between Colonizer and Colonized	12
<i>Disgrace, J.M. Coetzee</i>	17
The Representation of the Other	18
The Relationship between Colonizer and Colonized	23
Conclusion	28
Works Cited	30

Introduction

Cultural representation, or the representation of the colonizers in relation to the colonized, also referred to as the Other, is one of the main aspects in the field of post-colonial theory (Said 1). By looking at literature from the perspective of postcolonial theory, one can try to explain and understand the effects of colonialism in post-colonial environments. One of the most influential theorists in the field is Edward Said. In one of his most significant works, *Orientalism*, he argues that, in Western literature, the East is exoticised, mystified, and represented as savage and seductive, carrying all the dark traits of humanity, such as decadence, cruelty and sexual desire, as opposed to the West being portrayed as civilized, rational and reasonable (Barry 192; Said 1-4). According to Said, there are no individual aspects taken into consideration; the non-Western cultures are represented as a homogenous mass, merely due to their belonging to a particular culture or race (4). Postcolonial literature includes all literature that is in some way affected by colonialism, either written during the time of imperialism, or in the aftermaths of it, and which somehow portrays the experiences of colonialism or postcolonialism (Ashcroft 2). This essay will focus on Albert Camus' *The Stranger* (original title: *L'Étranger*), written in 1942, and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, from 1999. The novels both portray stories in countries where colonialism has impacted the society, and it is of interest to analyze how colonialism has influenced the representation of the Other, the relationship between colonizer and colonized and the plot itself.

Camus' *The Stranger* takes place in an Algeria, which during this time, was still colonized by France, whereas Coetzee's *Disgrace* is written in a post-independent

South Africa, after being colonized by Great Britain. The novels are thus set in different times and different countries; however, they both take place on the African continent, in countries affected by colonialism. Both Camus' main protagonist Mersault and Coetzee's David Lurie have the roles of white males, placed in non-Western environments: one during the time of French colonialism in Algeria, and the other in a postcolonial South Africa. These novels are modern classics, and both writers have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature; the novels, thus, have a great impact due to the fact that they reach many readers in different parts of the world and play a great role concerning further representations in literature. As Barris puts it:

A novel is a form of mass communication, particularly one written by a world literary figure. As such, the novel inserts itself into a historicised discourse of race that lies in the local and global public domains. (62)

Due to these aspects, these respective novels are highly relevant when exploring and comparing how the representation of the colonized, in relation to the colonizer, is portrayed.

Amongst the different models of studying postcolonial matters in literature are comparative models, which "seek to account for particular linguistic, historical, and cultural features across two or more post-colonial literatures" (Ashcroft 15). Another approach is the study of the tension between colonizers and colonized (32). In the essay, the term colonizer(s) will be used interchangeably with the terms Westerner(s) and, in some cases, white(s), and the colonized will, respectively, be interchangeably referred to as native(s), the Other and Arab(s) (in *The Stranger*) and, in some cases, black population (in *Disgrace*). Even though the people in post-

independence South Africa are no longer colonizers and colonized, they will be referred to as this due to their colonial background and, moreover, to make the comparison with *The Stranger* easier to follow.

This essay is a study of how the native population is portrayed in the respective novels, and, furthermore, how the relationship between them and the Western inhabitants is represented, with postcolonial theory as a tool. This is obtained by a close reading analysis and comparison of Camus' *The Stranger* and Coetzee's *Disgrace*, by looking at the descriptions of the colonized people, the terms used when referring to them, the plot itself, potential stylistic features which expresses images or attitudes in this regard, as well as the interaction and relation between colonizer and colonized. My theory is that the native population in both novels is portrayed in accordance with postcolonial notions of representation of the Other being depicted as, amongst other aspects, exotic and savage, and that the relation between colonizer and colonized is still unequal with the colonizers being higher up in hierarchy; however, I believe that there has been a shift in power in the post-independence society, due to the fact that the natives now have equal rights and freedom as the Westerners – a situation that forces the white population to comply to a new condition where they no longer hold the strongest power.

These aspects will be analyzed with the help of the following research questions. In what ways do the novels reflect an exoticising Western view of the native culture and its representatives, the way Said suggests? How do the novels differ or resemble one another in terms of representation of the colonized people, and in the relation between the Westerners and the natives? Is there any difference between

how the female Other is represented compared to the male, and if so – in what way is it manifested? How does it affect the representation that *The Stranger* is written before the independence from colonialism, and *Disgrace* is written after? What changes might have occurred, what persists, and how is this portrayed in the novels? These questions represent many of the matters brought forth by postcolonial studies and, likewise, the main focus of this analysis.

The following section attempts to describe postcolonial theory and some typical postcolonial representations in literature, in order to give a background to the theoretical approach and explain how it can be reflected in literature. This will then be put in relation to the two novels in focus in the sections after in order to see where they stand in this regard.

Postcolonial Representations: The Imperial Gaze

Said argues that Western literature has long taken for granted the superiority of what is Western, and undermined everything that is not (7), which has been noted as a “false notion of ‘the universal’” (Ashcroft 11). Furthermore, it is a cultural hegemony where the Western perspective has been seen as the norm (6). The previously mentioned dark human traits, such as decadence and cruelty, are projected from the Westerners themselves, on to the Non-Westerners (Barry 192); they are thus derived from “the archive of ‘the self’” of the Westerners (Ashcroft 103), and have, hence, “helped to define Europe” by defining what it is *not* considered Western (Said 1). In relation to this, Ashcroft suggests that, in order to keep authority over the colonized,

the Other needs to be described as fundamentally different from the self (103). There are no individual aspects taken into consideration when describing the Other; they are portrayed as if they are a homogenous mass, driven by emotions which are determined by race rather than by personality, individuality and intentional decision-making (Barry 186). In the early representations of imperialism, Western values are often contrasted against the hostile environments in the colonies (Ashcroft 19). This can be seen as an “encounter between the civilized and the wild” (Marrouchi 29), something that Sartre calls “racist humanism, since the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters” (quoted in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said 237)¹.

Judging by the aspects stated above, it is via the imperial gaze that the Other is defined. Language is one of the aspects that has been looked upon in postcolonial studies, because “[l]anguage becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated” due to imperial oppression (Ashcroft 7). The ones, who have the dominating language (that is, the colonizer’s language), hold the power, which leads to a sort of silence of the Other, since “the word leads to knowledge, which provokes questioning, which generates change” (85). This is something the power-holders do not want, and the natives’ voices are, hence, not represented. The colonized woman is also used as a medium through which something else is portrayed: for instance, representations of the Other, with, for example, hysteria, seduction and desire (Young 214). Young suggests that the colonized woman continuously is represented as an object, which everyone else speaks for, rather than her speaking

¹ In the cases where *Culture and Imperialism* is referred to, it is marked this way with the title in the reference; all other cases where Said is mentioned, refer to *Orientalism*.

for herself as a subject (206). This is also identified by Said, when he states that the colonized woman “never spoke of herself, [...] never represented her emotions, presence, or history. [The wealthy, white male] spoke for and represented her” (6). She is often denoted with the “non-choice” and is often not even represented as a named individual (Young 207). The Other has been marginalized and silenced, due to the fact that the colonizers are in the “privileged centre” (Ashcroft 104). The colonizers are, furthermore, described as narcissistic in their view of the world (161). Thus, because they hold the power, it is the Westerners’ voices that tell the story; because of this, the Other is “condemned to immobility and silence”, and hence, colonialism has dehumanized the natives (Young 159). Said asserts that in cases where the Other does get enough attention, “it is as a negative value” (286). This can be related to Sartre’s claim that racial prejudice is a “racism that minimizes what it hates” (quoted in Young 163). However, Ashcroft argues, postcolonial literature that tends to reconstruct the hierarchies does not put the marginalized people in the centre, but rather embraces this marginality (104). How are these aspects portrayed in *The Stranger* and in *Disgrace*? Do the natives have their own voice, or are they marginalized and represented via the imperial gaze?

Even if Ashcroft argues that some postcolonial literature embraces the marginalization, he also states that other postcolonial studies show that cultural change within a society can lead the dominated to move to a position of dominating, as a reflection of these changes (32). This can be compared with Young who explains Foucault’s critique of the “sovereign model of power”, with the idea that power has a single source, which can easily be reversed (36-7). The only way to reverse the power

hierarchies is, according to Young, to become the same, or equal to the power-holders (37). Said suggests that today, post-imperialism has created a “cultural discourse of suspicion on the part of formerly colonized peoples” towards the settlers (*Culture and Imperialism* 234). Young suggests that, even if the imperial situation has been reversed in postcolonial countries, the power structures still remain the same (218). This is something that the Nigerian writer Festus Iyayi also implies, when she almost sarcastically asks, “What is this ‘post-colonialism’? In Africa we still have neo-colonialism” (quoted in Marrouchi 38). In the case of South Africa, the colonial powers are still in control of the communication in the country; this indicates that it is a state that is still between two phases, since the colonial powers still dominate the state, even if South Africa is independent (Young 83). How, then, is this issue of power and hierarchy reflected in *Disgrace*, after the independence? Has there been a shift in domination after the independence, or does the colonial hierarchy persist?

The settlers, or colonizers, feel displaced and dislocated in the postcolonial world. They develop a sort of crisis of identity, and the landscapes of the “new world” are distinguished from their Western homes (Young 11), which leads to alienation, according to Ashcroft (9). Furthermore, it generates a conflict in postcolonial literature, because the “backward-looking impotence of exile and the forward-looking impetus to indigeneity collide” (136). Even if he describes this as a nostalgic longing for what is lost, Walder is not as harsh in his description of this nostalgia; he does not see it as reluctance to facing the future, but rather as a recognition of the importance of the past, as it contributes to the settlers’ identity (939). Marrouchi argues that decolonized environments, in literature, are described as infernal, dark and

as having lost the sunshine from former colonized days (49). The question is whether this sense of nostalgia for the colonial past and dislocation of the settlers' identity is also reflected in *The Stranger* and *Disgrace*?

On the opposite side of the settlers, Walder describes the experience and remembrance of the past of the formerly colonized as consisting of difficult memories of evil (938). He suggests that these memories sometimes do not make the formerly colonized wish to forget, but rather to seek revenge, and redress justice rather than seek reconciliation, something Marrouchi describes as the native, the victim, the savage, who is now "looking back, returning a stare" (50). This is also perceived as a "moment of boomerang", as a result of decolonization, where the colonial violence hits back (Davis 235). If and how this sense of revenge may be manifested in post-colonial South Africa in the case of *Disgrace*, will likewise be considered.

In conclusion, this section has pinpointed and explained some of the matters concerning representation of the Other, with the natives being portrayed as a complete contrast to the colonizers, carrying the darker traits of humanity, and are furthermore, dehumanized and silenced. The relation between colonizer and colonized has also been described in terms of hierarchy and power, amongst other aspects. The colonizers are higher up in hierarchy and, hence, have more power; however, some scholars argue that, as a result of decolonization, the natives now strike back. The following sections will analyse these matters in *The Stranger* and *Disgrace*.

The Stranger, Albert Camus

This section will look upon if and how the postcolonial representations might be portrayed in Camus' colonial Algeria. Are the natives described as savages in contrast to the civilized Westerner? Azar suggests that, in the French colonies, the exotification of the East described by postcolonial theory, flourished with, for instance, the ideas of the noble savage, human primitivism, untouched nature and unrestrained sexuality (45). Salhi argues that the notion that Africa was completely savage and chaotic before the arrival of the French and other European forces "still lies like a shadow in the background", even nowadays (10). In this chapter, the first section focuses on the portrayal of the natives in the novel, and the section after focuses on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

The Representation of the Other

Throughout the novel, the male native Algerians are collectivised, and are often described as "a group of Arabs" (Camus 40). Furthermore, it is only the non-Westerners that are presented with their ethnicity. This can be interpreted as the idea of the West being the norm, and only that which deviates from the norm needs to be characterised. The native characters in the novel are de-individualized by constantly being referred to as "Arab" instead of using their names or individual aspects; not even during the trial does the reader find out the murdered Arab's name. This has a dehumanising function, and only in a few cases, the murdered native is considered a human victim, for example when he is called "a man" (96). In all other instances, he is

either “the Arab” (88) or “a body” (68). According to Azar, the notion of the Arab in *The Stranger* is that of a stranger of whom the reader is presupposed to already know everything about (4). Camus depicts Algeria as a “hostile landscape” where “Arabs appear as forces of nature and silent collectivities” (Davis 230). The natives do not seem interesting or relevant as individuals for Mersault, whereas the white people in the novel, particularly the males, are presented with both names and personal traits. In terms of gender differences, one can see that not all white women are presented with names; however, they are portrayed with individual features, and are not collectivised like the natives.

The native women are, on the other hand, in all cases but one, not called “Arab”, but “Moorish”: “When [Raymond] told me the woman’s name I realized she was Moorish” (Camus 32). However, not even here where he mentions a name, does Mersault present it to the reader; the only thing that seems to be of interest to him is that she is “Moorish”. Why then use the term “Moorish” rather than “Arab” for the native women? It could be interpreted as a way of exoticising the Orient woman to suit the sensual stereotype. The native women in *The Stranger* are not described as hostile like the native males, but rather more exotic, with features like “brightly colored scar[ves] on [their] head[s]” (6) and as mistresses to the colonizers rather than hostile provocateurs. This difference in describing native males and females can be related to Davis’s suggestion that “the exotic is appealing while the foreign seems resistant and menacing” (228); the native woman poses no threat in the novel, whereas the native male does, and they are, thus, portrayed accordingly.

All that is ever found out about the natives is what Mersault describes about them, and via his gaze, all that is seen is their glances, the sense of threat they place on the Westerners in the novel, their indifference, and especially their silence: "I saw a group of Arabs [...] They were staring at us in silence, but in that way of theirs", the narrator writes (Camus 48). The silence of the natives is exotic and mystifying, but also oppressive from the side of the narrator. The Arabs never speak for themselves; not a word is uttered by any of the natives in *The Stranger*. All that is known about the murdered Arab is that he is "the brother of [Raymond's] former mistress" (40). When the natives are not represented with silence, it is with mysterious and threatening body language and sounds such as murmuring, laughter, the melody made by blowing through a reed, and by the drawing of knives. This mystification is evident when Mersault is in prison, and witnesses the native prisoners' conversations with their families:

Most of the Arab prisoners and their families had squatted down facing each other. They weren't shouting [like the others did]. Despite the commotion, they [...] made themselves heard by talking in very low voices. Their subdued murmuring, coming from lower down. (74)

Mersault's observation of the natives in this situation is that they communicate obscurely, with a mysterious and secretive atmosphere around them.

This secretive atmosphere is also portrayed as hostile, especially when it comes to the encounter with the natives on the beach: "Maybe it was the shadows on his face, but it looked like he was laughing", Mersault writes about the Arab whom he, moments later, murders (58). The reader is never presented with information

about the Arabs' motives and intentions for their actions, because their voices are never heard. All the reader ever finds out is what Mersault chooses to represent; from a postcolonial perspective, the representation of the natives is depicted via the white man's gaze. The Western eye "determines and structures the objects of its gaze" (Salhi 12). The Arab population is, hence, dehumanised and collectivised, in line with postcolonial theory. Azar's theory of this is that the Arabs are dehumanized in the colonial society; however, the fact that Mersault kills an Arab makes the Arab an "almost-human" (my translation) - hence, not only an Arab, but someone who poses a threat to the prescribed situation in the society (134). Because Mersault has killed an Arab, the latter becomes a victim and, hence, not only a native, and this act could symbolize the oppression of the colonizers and victimization of the colonized. This act is also a threat to the power holders because they need to punish a white man for the murder of an Arab, and this could possibly threaten the hierarchy in society by giving the Arabs justice in court. In what way, then, will Mersault be sentenced for killing an Arab? How is an Arab's life valued? This question will be further assessed in the following section, and the analysis of contact and of power relation between the colonizers and the colonized.

The Relationship between Colonizer and Colonized

From beginning to end, Mersault only associates himself with other Westerners, and supports them in their interests. He writes a letter for Raymond to his Moorish mistress; he testifies for his account in the court; he fights side by side with Raymond

and Masson against the Arabs without resistance; and, finally, he murders "Raymond's man" - the brother of the mistress - and shoots additionally four shots at his dead body (Camus 57). He never seems to find any reason *not* to do these services for Raymond, and that is his only motive for his actions: "I tried my best to please Raymond because I didn't have any reason not to", he writes (32). Azar interprets this as Mersault being loyal to the French colonial society and its structure (142). In relation to this, Riggs suggests that Raymond is a symbol of the "French colonialism's violence and cruelty" (184). By writing a letter for him, Mersault becomes entangled in (t)his conflict that "evokes colonial Algeria" (184). Through the act of writing the letter, with the pen as "an instrument of power", he, thus, becomes Raymond's ally, and, furthermore, an ally to the colonial powers (185). Via this seemingly indifferent act he involves himself in the "violent separation of Algeria into Arab and French poles" and positions himself with the French (185). After he has done this first service for Raymond, the latter says, "Now you're a pal" and gives him a "firm handshake" (Camus 33); Mersault was his "friend and his accomplice" (95), and symbolically becomes a friend and accomplice of the French side in the conflict.

There is evidently a conflict between the French and the Arabs, judging by the plot; however, the battle is not wielded on equal grounds. The former always seem to be in a position of higher power, and this is symbolized by the fact that, in the fights, the Arabs are armed with knives - a much more primitive weapon than the gun that Mersault and his friends have. The inequality is also symbolized by the fact that, when they are to fight each other, the Arabs seem to be lying on the ground, on most occasions. The colonizers, on the other hand, are the ones standing up: "without get-

ting up, the Arab drew his knife and held it up to me in the sun." (59). The stylistic features represented here with the different symbols for power - knives for the natives and a gun for the colonizers, the natives lying down, and the colonizers standing - can be seen as a metaphor for the colonizers being in a privileged position.

The Arabs maintain being nameless stereotypes for the Westerners in the novel and to the reader, throughout the story. An Arab is murdered and disappears from the protagonist's thoughts, indeed, from the novel itself; he is not even the main focus in the judicial proceedings in the courtroom, despite the fact that the Arabs are a majority in the country, and in the prison where Mersault finds himself. In *The Stranger*, the Mediterranean ideal, with Mersault's flaneur personality - his being a *piéd noir* - encounters the French colonial ideology (Azar 131). The reader meets the French justice, and the French colonizers in the novel stand against an indefinable and mysterious people - the natives. This can be further understood as a sort of marginalization of the Arabs; according to Azar, the Arabs are merely a sort of background, or set piece, of the existential matters in the novel (149). He interprets this as the colonial problems in the society being marginalized on behalf of the portrayal of the existential matters - hence, the clash between the natives and the colonizers are omitted (149). Lyons sees this in relation to the colonial situation in Algeria, an "Apartheid-like climate that excluded" the Arabs from taking part in the civilized society (577). This is, consequently, the reason why "the effect of calamity on the Arab is hardly mentioned" in Camus' stories (592). Similarly, Davis writes that the colonial society marginalizes the natives, in a "practice of exclusion", due to racial differences - a "cultural othering rooted in notions of civilizational difference" (230).

This marginalization and exclusion can, thus, be the reason to why Mersault does not socialize with the natives, and furthermore, why there are no Arabs mentioned in the courtroom during the trial.

Is Mersault, however, completely oblivious of the situation in the country, or do his actions speak for him? He seems to believe the case is simple – he has killed someone, and should be judged accordingly; however, this does not seem to be the case: "I said I thought my case was pretty simple. He smiled and said: 'That's your opinion. But the law is the law'" (Camus 63). During the trial, Mersault seems to question the interrogation that seems to focus mainly on his personality, and his feelings towards his mother – especially the fact that he did not cry on his mother's funeral. Constantly throughout the trial, he receives questions about the mother's funeral, and he "pointed out that none of this had anything to do with [his] case, but all [they] said was that it was obvious that [he] had never had any dealings with the law" (65). He feels like "one of the family" because everybody in the court treats him pleasantly (70), and the first time he "realize[s] that [he is] guilty" is when they speak about his actions during his mother's funeral, and everyone in the courtroom is upset by it – that is, not when they speak about the murder (90). There is constantly "a lot said about [Mersault], maybe more about [him] than about [his] crime" (95), and they speak about his mother and his feelings regarding her funeral for "much longer than when [they are] talking about [his] crime" (101). Mersault is not blind to these facts. Ultimately, Mersault is accused of "burying his mother with crime in his heart" (96), and he is "morally guilty of killing his mother" (101-02). The murdered Arab seems to be forgotten. Azar suggests that the court cannot judge a white man for murdering

an Arab, because it risks threatening the European's privileged position in the society. According to Azar, this is only possible in a society where the Arabs are not valued equally as the French (146-47). Therefore, Mersault is convicted for his feelings and actions towards his mother rather than for the murder itself.

The reason regarding why the natives are placed as a passive background for the European's existential matters could be interpreted as Camus' way of showing the inhuman order which colonialism had imposed in Algeria. Thus, *The Stranger* embodies and portrays the power positions and the hierarchy of the society, with the colonizers in the centre, and the natives in the peripheral background. The novel, furthermore, places the Westerner in contraposition to the native Arab; Azar sees this as significant in the interpretation of the underlying meaning as the political and the historical context create a parallel plot in the story - a subplot with violent dynamics (134-36). Judging by this, Mersault cannot be separated from the social context, and his actions cannot be interpreted without regard to the conflicts in it. It is, hence, the social context - Algeria being a colony with inner conflicts - that makes the fact that the murdered person is an Arab a significant aspect. The social, political and historical context reveal the reasons why Mersault is sentenced to death; ultimately, it is not because he has killed an Arab, but because he did not cry on his mother's funeral.

These sections have shown that the representations of the Other and the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized are in accordance with the post-colonial notions of representation in Camus' *The Stranger*. Is this, however, due to the fact that it is written during the time of colonialism, and Camus could be seen a "child of his time", or is this type of portrayal still common in more modern litera-

ture? In the following section, Coetzee's *Disgrace* is analysed in the same manner. By comparing and contrasting the representations of the Other and the relationship between the natives and the colonizers, a conclusion can be drawn regarding the question of decolonization, whether it has changed the portrayal of these aspects, or whether they still persist.

***Disgrace*, J.M. Coetzee**

Before independence in South Africa, the Western perception of the native population was that they were largely ruled by emotions. There was a "schema of descending value, in which the European [was] at the top, and [the] African several steps below" (de Kock 396). In the early 20th century, the natives were swept into a separate, homogeneous category of "problemacy" (395). The situation led to apartheid, which did not end until the early 1990's - a time of "rainbow possibility years" with Nelson Mandela as a symbol for freedom (Chapman 62). However, as mentioned in earlier sections, the situation in South Africa is far from resolved as the colonizers have a greater deal of power, occupying higher social positions compared to the natives. But is this true for the population as a whole? Do the colonizers still think of themselves as higher up in hierarchy, or has there been a power shift? Chapman states that the general picture of a postcolonial society is diverse because it is heterogeneous in culture, language and religion, and it is characterised by large economic and educational disparities (64). He depicts postcolonial societies as "susceptible to disease and

crime” where a large part of the population often is “at rough edge of service delivery” (64).

These aspects serve as a short background to the situation in South Africa. The following section presents the representation of the non-white population in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, whereas the last section explores the power relations and the post-colonial situation after independence of South Africa in the novel.

The Representation of the Other

Similar to the narration in *The Stranger*, the reader of *Disgrace* also experiences the world and characters from the perspective of a Western male protagonist – the university professor and divorced man, David Lurie. The first non-white character that is introduced is the part-time prostitute with the fictive name Soraya – a Muslim woman Lurie has found under the category “Exotic” in the escort company’s register (Coetzee 7). His most fatal concubine, however, is his student Melanie Isaacs, a native. Lurie’s descriptions of her are also exoticising; he describes her as “small and thin, with close-cropped black hair, wide, almost Chinese cheekbones, large, dark eyes.” (11). As if to make her even more exotic for himself, he contemplates about her name: “Melanie [...] Not a good name for her. Shift the accent. Meláni: the dark one.” (18). Lurie can be interpreted as a sort of conqueror of these exotic females, as a colonizer of the colonized women whom he exploits for his own benefit. The impression of this is projected in one of the sex-scenes with Melanie, where he describes it as “Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core” (25).

Furthermore, their relation is regarded as “[a]buse” (original emphasis) by others, and as “unequal” by himself (53).

Lurie’s attitude towards natives is also reflected in his opinion and view of native African males. As a matter of fact, the first words Lurie utters to the black man Petrus, who shares a farm with Lurie’s daughter Lucy, is “You look after the dogs” (64). Lurie continues to have this stereotypical and condescending image of him throughout the plot, and finds him suspicious: “A plotter and a schemer and no doubt a liar, too, like peasants everywhere” (117). According to Wang and Tang, Lurie’s sexuality reflects his sense of superiority in the role of a Westerner; his attitude towards the natives is stereotypical and in line with colonial ideological views that whites are superior to the natives (52). When Petrus is nowhere to be found during the time of the rape and robbery, that makes him even more suspicious in Lurie’s eyes, and the latter says, “Petrus is *with* them” (Camus 133, original emphasis). His thoughts about this are supported by the Western farmer Ettinger, whose racist opinions shine through in remarks like “Not one of them you can trust”, or when he uses the slave-term “boy” when referring to natives as help (109). Lurie also makes racist remarks; one of them is manifested in his sarcastic question when he finds out the youngest rapist’s name is Pollux: “Not Mncedisi? Not Nqabayakhe? Nothing unpronounceable, just Pollux?” (200). He seems to perceive the world in black and white, because his world is inevitably defined and constituted by racial difference; he constantly appears to have a need to present characters as either black or white. For instance, when he tells Melanie Isaac’s father about Petrus, he says “Petrus. An African.” (171). As a reader, one asks why this is even relevant, if not to separate the situ-

ation in the society into “We against Them”, as a built-in notion of the two parts not having the same origin, even though they are both African now. This is also represented when he and Lucy go to Petrus’s party, and Lurie immediately has to inform the reader that “They are the only whites [present]” (128). The dichotomy between Western and native is portrayed in several more scenes, such as when Petrus suggests that Lucy marry him for protection and Lurie says: “This is not how we do things”, and he is on the verge of saying “[w]e Westerners” (202, original emphasis). Furthermore, Lurie perceives Lucy’s life on the farm with the natives as wild and uncivilised, and thinks she should “return to civilization” (151). Moreover, he seems to believe that only Westerners master technology. Wang and Tang suggest that when the natives actually do use it, Lurie does not see it as inherently native (52). For instance, when Petrus is ploughing with the tractor, Lurie thinks it’s “all very unlike Africa” (Coetzee 151).

The most evident stereotypical imagery of the natives in the novel is found in the rape and robbery scene, and is further exemplified in the representation of the three perpetrators. The descriptions of them are “[b]estial” according to Wang and Tang (52), which is in line with postcolonial notion that native males are often portrayed as monstrous and hostile. When the three black men are introduced in the novel, they are referred to as strangers, making threatening and vague gestures (Coetzee 91-2). Their appearance is both bestial – in the description of the youngest having a “flat, expressionless face and piggish eyes”, as well as exotically beautiful with “[t]he tallest of them [being] handsome, strikingly handsome” (92). They are a “dangerous trio” and Lurie’s “child is in the hands of strangers”, whom he later re-

fers to as "savages" (94-5). Similarly to *The Stranger*, the threatening atmosphere in *Disgrace* is also portrayed with silence and hostile laughter: when the rape takes place, there is only silence from the house, and when Lurie cries for mercy and help, "[t]here is a burst of laughter" (95). The reader only follows Lurie's descriptions of what the rapists say because they never speak directly to the reader in any way.

Chapman states that the rape scene has been accused of "Afro-pessimism" due to its portraying the negative sides of the South African society (62). Some, however, argue that it has realistic content and aims towards political truth (62). The image of black men raping white women is a colonial image, which has fuelled "black-peril hysteria" due to the fact that it stems from colonial propaganda about black men being savages who might rape white women; therefore, the scene has triggered an outraged response by the readers who find it racist (Barris 56). Barris argues that, even though the rapists are depicted without explicit reference to their race, the rape itself is racialised (56). There is no uncertainty that they are natives, and that they are described as aggressive and dangerous. Even though it is not explicitly stated that the rape takes place because of race, the "agent and victim are divided by race" (57). The context itself, with South Africa having a "racialised history", leads the reader to this conclusion (57). Chapman shares a similar point of view: he states that it is problematic to decontextualize the plot of a society in which "colonialism, apartheid and currently, violent crime have brutalized the human body, systematically consigned the other to dung the heaps of daily life" (64). Barris suggests that Lurie's act of having sex with a non-Western prostitute and abusing a native student are "more muted in effect" than the transgression of black man/white woman, which is portrayed as more severe (58).

These aspects in the novel have led to *Disgrace* being criticised for underrepresenting and undervaluing the native population. Attwell states that, where they are represented, it is as “faceless subjects like barbarians” and the natives’ lives are portrayed as “strange and [...] monstrous” (68-70). He argues that Africa is often depicted as “potent, mysterious and obscure” in Coetzee’s novels, and that he uses this occulted picture in order to achieve certain aesthetic effects, which, nonetheless, “reprise prevailing historical discourses” (67). The effects are, hence, “charged and ethically disturbed” (71). By using this effect of occulting the natives, the colonial images remain, and these obsolete representations become charged by the history of colonialism and apartheid in the society (82). Wang and Tang suggest that the colonizers in *Disgrace* form their identity in relation to the Other, by portraying the natives with negative traits (50). In order to maintain and justify their superiority, the Westerners stereotype the natives into being unchanging and “always in a state of disorder and anarchy” (50). Why, then, does not Coetzee give the natives their own voice, in his novels? According to Attwell, Coetzee is said to have withdrawn from direct representation of the natives, because that would only confirm his own “position of privilege”, hence, suggesting that the Other cannot be authored for (68). In relation to earlier works, Coetzee has said that he does not give the natives their own voice because their “kind must have the power of expression and must use it if they are to participate in the shaping of African history”(quoted in Wang and Tang 51). This suggests that it is not up to him to give them a voice and he implies that it is not his right or his place to do so.

Whatever the reason might be for Coetzee's representations of the natives, they are, nevertheless, stereotypical. Having shown that the females are exoticised and conquered by the white male, and the native males represented as violent, hostile and mysterious, the question whether this stereotypical portrayal also reflects the power relations in the novel still remains. How is hierarchy portrayed and who holds the power in this postcolonial South Africa? This will be analysed in the following section.

The Relationship between Colonizer and Colonized

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator tells us that Lurie's "temperament is not going to change, he is too old for that. His temperament is fixed, set." (Coetzee 2). He continues to live his life as before and sticks to his old habits. He persists in only focusing on Western literature in his teachings, which even influences his choices in life, by excusing his questionable sexual relations with literary passages from Lord Byron and Walt Whitman. Wang and Tang see him as a typical white South African who accepts the status quo on the surface, but is nostalgic of the pre-independence days (49). For instance, he claims to have been slave under Eros and Aphrodite during his relations with his student (Coetzee 52); nevertheless, he has used his coercive power – that is, his position of authority as her teacher – to seduce and to harass her, something he is not oblivious to - he knows the relation is unequal, and that she is "just a child" (20).

Despite these aspects mentioned above, Lurie's power is decreasing, and he is aware of it. He knows that he "makes no impression on his students" who seem to "look through him" (4), and he excuses his going to a prostitute with his womanizing days being over: "Without warning his powers fled [...] Overnight he became a ghost" (7). When everyone finds out about his relation with Melanie, the words "YOUR DAYS ARE OVER, CASANOVA" are written on a wall at the university where he works (43). Wang and Tang argue that *Disgrace* discloses the dishonour for the white population in the new South Africa, after the fall of the apartheid system (49). Hence, it portrays a society where the whites have lost their power. They suggest that it can be read as a "political text, a post-apartheid work that deals with the difficulties confronting the white community in South Africa and with some of the choices available to them" (49). Thus, Lurie himself could be seen as a metaphor for the white man's fall from power in the postcolonial society. Lurie's situation can be interpreted as a type of castration because he has lost authority in almost every part of his life: he is no longer a Casanova, he has no impact on his students, he ruins his career, his position as a father is non-authoritarian and power-less, and his skills in Western languages fail him - they do not "save him in the darkest Africa. He is helpless" and he does not succeed in saving his child (Coetzee 95). The Westerners have to adapt to the new situation in the country that otherwise leads to disgrace similar to Lurie's, because he cannot fully comprehend that it is a new South Africa he lives in, and his privileges as a white male are gone. Wang and Tang argue that the world of the white South Africans turned upside-down after the collapse of apartheid; now, the native South Africans have become empowered and the white South Africans are, respectively, disempowered (50). Towards the end of the novel, Lurie realizes

this as well, and apologizes to Melanie's father, stating that he is in a state of disgrace. To this, Mr Isaacs responds, "how the mighty have fallen!" (Coetzee 167). Lurie goes from being a professor at a university to becoming "a dog-man" (146). It is the "end of roaming [...] without hope, without prospect" (175).

Lurie's daughter Lucy belongs to a different generation and differs a great deal from her father. She wishes to live peacefully with her native neighbours and maintains her open-mindedness, even after the three black men rape her. Furthermore, she does not report to the police about the rape, which resulted in a pregnancy. Her justification for her staying at the farm is that she is "prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace" (208) – even accept that Pollux lives with Petrus – and consequently, Petrus calls her "forward-looking" (136). Lurie, however, registers the rape as vengeance, and believes she chooses this life because she "wants to make up for the wrongs of the past", as a way of expiating the crimes by "suffering in the present" (133). He does not understand her and thinks she is "[d]efeated" (151), whereas Lucy considers herself as defeated if she should leave the farm (161). During a walk with Lurie, she contemplates on why the rape felt personal:

What if... what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it: perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing them something [...] Why should I be allowed to live there without paying? (158).

Before she says this, Lurie suggests that the rape was "history speaking through them [...] A history of wrong. [...] It came down from the ancestors", as a way of revenge (156). Lucy is willing to accept the situation, but Lurie is not: he is "too old to change. Lucy may be able to bend to the tempest; he cannot, not without honour"

(209). He realizes that between “Lucy’s generation and [his] a curtain seems to have fallen [and he] didn’t even notice when it fell” (210). He understands that the historical context has helped to shape her, and that her perspective and view of society differs a great deal from his own. The white population is no longer considered to be higher up in hierarchy than the native, something that Lurie’s generation still seems to consider, whereas Lucy’s generation realizes that society has changed to be more equal. Wang and Tang see her willingness to forgive and to compromise as an understanding of the native population’s past and their sufferings “under the iron hand of the whites” (49).

It is a new South Africa Lurie and Lucy live in now - a South Africa where the black man no longer works for the superior white man. The native man Petrus is Lucy’s neighbour, who shares the dam with her. Lucy states that she cannot “order Petrus about. He is his own master” (Coetzee 114). He arrived as “the dig-man, the carry-man, the water-man. Now he is too busy for that kind of thing”, the narrator writes (151); he is a landowner, in a country where he used to be excluded from this right (Attwell 403). After the rape and robbery, Petrus offers Lucy to marry him, as “an alliance, a deal [...] Otherwise, [Lucy] is without protection, [she] is fair game” (Coetzee 203). Lurie renders it humiliating and thinks Lucy will live “like a dog” (205); she, however, believes it is necessary to accept the situation and to start at ground level without any rights or dignity (205). According to a study conducted by Leonard, working white women in South Africa are often hybrid in their identity, and tend to “negotiate their working lives whilst modifying notions of belonging” (82), something that can be said of Lucy as well. She continually refuses to define her

relationship with Petrus in terms of hierarchical positions and this, together with the passivity in reacting against the rapists, can be interpreted as her refusal to “perpetuate the cycle of domination and counter-domination of which colonial history erects itself” (Barris 59). Barris has analysed the rape as a retribution for the racial crimes of apartheid, where Coetzee portrays a world that falls under the new powers – the previously colonized: the Other (59-60). The novel, hence, portrays a world where the only way for the white population not to fall into disgrace as Lurie does, is to accept their new position in the postcolonial society. As previously mentioned, Lurie’s Western language skills do not save him, and this is because he fails both to hear and to speak the language of the Africans. Attwell asks himself why this is the case, when the languages of the people in the country Lurie lives in could have helped him in overcoming the alienation from the natives and their landscape, and would have made it less mysterious and hostile (69-70). This could be further interpreted as Lurie failing to listen and to communicate with the entire native population and their situation, whereas Lucy, on the other hand, is able to and complies with it. She plays by the new rules; she listens to and speaks the new South African language.

Evidently, there has been a power shift in the post-independent, postcolonial South Africa. The natives are no longer subjugated and obliged to comply with the white man’s rules, because now they have freedom and rights. Instead, it is the white population that needs to accommodate to the new situation, where the natives strike back. Nevertheless, the new hierarchical order does not suit everyone; characters like the protagonist Lurie, and the rigidly racist Ettinger, continue to see the world divid-

ed in black and white, and nostalgically remember the “good old days” when they themselves were superior (Coetzee 18).

Conclusion

Both *The Stranger* and *Disgrace* have representations of the Other that are typically portrayed from a Western point of view, in line with both Said’s and other postcolonial notions where the natives are most often depicted as, for instance, exotic, strange, hostile and mysterious. *The Stranger*, taking place before independence in Algeria, places the natives in the background, marginalizing them as a collective, in order to create a threatening, violent atmosphere, whilst the Westerners are in the center, and the reader’s only encounter with the natives is via the white man’s perspective and representation. The native women are exotic and the native men are hostile and violent. The Arabs are not even given a voice; not once in the novel does a native utter even one single word. They are merely a means to an end: to portray the white man, Mersault, and his existential problems.

Disgrace takes place after independence; however, the portrayal of the natives does not differ much from Camus’ portrayal, and is also in accordance with postcolonial theories. The females are exoticised and taken advantage of by the white man. A common feature in both novels is the sense of dichotomy between the Westerners and the natives – a “We against Them”-attitude where the characters perceive one another as different due to racial differences, where the Westerners see themselves as superior to the natives. However, there has evidently been a power shift in

the decolonized society. The white male protagonist Lurie in post-independent South African novel *Disgrace* does have power in some aspects (for instance, he conquers and seduces non-Western females); nevertheless, he loses his position in society by ruining his career and, hence, loses respect amongst his peers. Furthermore, his daughter is raped by several black males but decides to keep the child that is conceived as a result of this in order to maintain peace. She is somewhat of a hybrid that complies to and accepts the new order, where the white inhabitants are no longer superiors. The white superiority has, thus, lost its power. It is evident that a great deal of the prejudice against the Other persists even in a novel written after the independence; however, the power balance has shifted in several aspects.

The results from this study show that the stereotypical postcolonial representations, described by Said and other theorists, are present in both *The Stranger* and *Disgrace*. However, this does not mean that these results can be generalized to encompass all postcolonial literature, and it only serves to show how these particular novels might reflect their society. To gain a more generalizable result from similar literature one could, for example, compare two novels set in the same country, or compare two works that are pre-independence and/or two that are post-independence in order to see if the results vary and to what extent they do so. Further studies could be carried out to either gain more generalized results, or to receive more examples of typical postcolonial representations, or even to find cases of literature that has more a nuanced portrayal of the Other.

Works Cited

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, et al. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Oxford: Routledge, 1989. Print.
- Attwell, David. "J.M. Coetzee and the Idea of Africa". *Journal of Literary Studies*, Vol.25(4), 2009: p.67-83. Print.
- Azár, Michael. *Frihet, jämlikhet, brodermord : revolution och kolonialism hos Albert Camus och Frantz Fanon*. Höör: Brutus Östlings bokförlag Symposion, 2001. Print.
- Barris, Ken. "Miscegenation, Desire and Rape: The Shifting Ground of Disgrace". *Journal of Literary Studies*, Vol.26 (3), 2010: p.50-64. Print.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory, Third Edition*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009. Print.
- Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. Trans. Mathew Ward. New York: Vintage International, 1942. Print.
- Chapman, Michael. "Postcolonial Problematics: A South African Case Study". *Research in African Literatures*, Winter, 2011: Vol.42(4), p.60(12). Print.
- Coetzee, J.M. *Disgrace*. London: Vintage, 1999. Print.
- Davis, Muriam Haleh. "'A new world rising': Albert Camus and the absurdity of neo-liberalism". *Social Identities*, Vol.17(2), 2011: p.225-238. Print.
- de Kock, Leon. "Sitting for the Civilization Test: The Making(s) of a Civil Imaginary in Colonial South Africa". *Poetics Today*, Vol. 22(2), 2008: p.391. Print.
- Leonard, Pauline. "Making Whiteness Work in South Africa: A Translabour Approach". *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol.36, 2013: pp.75-83. Print.
- Lyons, Thomas. "The Ethnographic Novel and Ethnography in Colonial Algeria". *Modern Philology*, Vol.100(4), 2003: p.576-595. Print.
- Marrouchi, Mustapha. "Fear of the Other, Loathing the Similar". *College Literature*, Vol.26(3), 1999: p.17. Print.
- Riggs, Larry W.. "Clerking for the Fathers: Infra-Narrative, Individuation, And Terminal Exile in Kafka and Camus". *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, Vol.50(3), 1996: p.177-189. Print.
- Said, W. Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1998. Print.

Said, W. Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Classics, 2003 (first published 1978). Print.

Salhi, Kamal. "Rethinking Francophone Culture: Africa and the Caribbean between History and Theory". *Research in African Literatures*, Vol.35(1), 2004: pp.9-29. Print.

Walder, Dennis. "Writing, Representation, and Postcolonial Nostalgia". *Textual Practice*, Vol.23(6), 2009: p.935-946. Oxford: Routledge. Print.

Wang, Min, and Tang, Xiaoyan. "Disgrace of Stereotypical ambivalence: a Postcolonial Perspective on J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*". *Studies in Literature and Language*, Dec 31, 2012, Vol.5(3), 2012: p.49(6). Print.

Young, J.C. Robert. *White Mythologies*. Oxford: Routledge, 2004. Print.