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## Africa's White Women

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### Abstract

The place of Africa's white woman is ambivalent. Often called the oppressed oppressor, she is not a protagonist in her own right. Yet history tells of her crucial contribution to Africa's freedom struggle. Frantz Fanon says black men believe being loved by her is to be loved "like a white man" and so *be* white. Doris Lessing's "poor white" man's bored wife wants sex with the houseboy. Nadine Gordimer portrays her as a pale, insipid counterpart to African women's vital beauty pictured in terms disturbingly similar to those characterizing noble savages. In J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* African men inflict "corrective rape" on her. Black African writers portray her more compassionately. Ngugi wa Thiong'o speaks of "the reduction of white women to nothing." In Peter Abrahams's works she joins Africa's freedom struggle yet becomes the victim of an African freedom fighter's ruthless exploitation. Mariama Ba depicts her as mercilessly exploited by her black African husband who proves his manhood through her even as he secretly appropriates her resources for his own purposes. South Africa's people's poet Mzwakhe Mbuli acknowledges her among the women who helped free Africa, and continue to make a contribution. Zanzibari writer Abdulrazak Gurnah returns her to Eastern Africa to discover her own roots, to listen to the stories told by those her ancestors once ruled. This paper explores the identity and place of white women as depicted in African literature.

Keywords: white women in Africa; Africa; African Literature; interracial relationships;

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## 1. Introduction

There is "subterraneously [...] a powerful willing of the total extinction of the white man. He aroused a terrible hatred." And there is also the hatred of Africans, "the African hair [...] the African nose" (Head, 1974). So says South African novelist Bessie Head, the daughter of a white woman and a black stable hand. Her life in many ways mirrors the white woman's African dilemma.

Bessie Head was the daughter of a white South African mother who had been confined to a mental asylum when she became pregnant by a Black stable hand. Here Bessie was born. And it was here that Bessie's mother died. In *A Question of Power* her main character Elizabeth tells her story. She grew up in foster homes where she was rejected each time they discovered she was a "Coloured" (in South Africa a person of mixed black-white racial heritage). Only her grandmother insisted on visiting her whenever the family came to the races in Durban. In the mission school to which she was sent all were on the watch for the insanity which had confined her mother to the insane asylum. In her novels Bessie's characters reflect the schizophrenia of her own existence as the non-human child of a white woman as they spiral into the madness of racial disconnect. The question here is how literary representations of Africa's white women reflect the psychology of their relationship to the continent and its people. The white woman in Africa. Who is she? Where does she belong?

## 2. Blood, Taint, Flaw, Degeneration

In early South African novels, the white woman lives in a world of unselfconscious stereotypes. Olive Schreiner's (1883) *The Story of an African Farm* presents a satiric portrayal of the communities of the Karoo and the general violence and brutality characterizing its inhabitants. Tante Sannie, the rather comical Boer woman, is more intent on finding a husband than on interacting with the native people of the region. In Schreiner's (1926) *From Man to Man* racial sensibilities have become more problematic. Rebekah is however, more concerned about her husband's infidelity than the fact that he has been unfaithful with a black woman. Although she adopts her husband's "Coloured" child, Rebekah's own children are embarrassed at being seen with their half-sister, who is called a "black nigger" by her own father and by the neighbors.

It is only with Sarah Gertrude Millin's (1924) *God's Stepchildren* that issues of blood resulting from inter-racial social relationships become a theme to be explored. Thus in "Blood, Taint, Flaw, Degeneration" (1988), his analysis of *God's Stepchildren*, J.M. Coetzee traces the scientific philosophy of blood which found one of its most brutal expressions in the Nazi Holocaust, back to the "respectable historic and scientific thought" (p.138) of the mid nineteenth century. It was blood which distinguished races from each other and which defined those biologically predestined to rule the world. In sexual intercourse the "quintessence of blood flows from man to woman" (p. 138). The "tainted" embryo's blood then flows between it and the mother, forever tainting her.

Thus, in South Africa white women were the guarantors of the purity of the white race. *Apartheid* laws governing sexual behavior were formulated around them. The *Immorality Act, No. 5 of 1927* forbade "illicit carnal intercourse" between "European" and "Native." Native was later changed to "non-European" in *The Immorality Amendment Act, No. 21 of 1950*. And *The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, No. 55 of 1949* made marriages between Europeans and all non-Europeans invalid. This meant that on the surface *all* sexual cohabitation between the white and the non-white races was forbidden. In practice however, the laws were less concerned with white men's forays into black women's lives. Schreiner's (1926) *From Man to Man* already shows that children who resulted from these escapades were after all not white, and so of no real concern to white society. Black men, who since colonialism's beginnings were emasculated "boys" and were treated as such, could not protect their women from white men's lusts. Yet white women remained taboo to these emasculated black men who were nevertheless seen as the greatest threat both to white women's sexual integrity and to the purity of the white race. The story of Bessie Head's mother illustrates that no white woman in her

right mind would venture across the color line. Furthermore, in this narrative the narrative of the black lover, a stable “boy,” fits well into the mythology of the animal-stud-like qualities attributed to black men.

The consequences of this mythology are apparent not only in South African literature, but to this day determine many legal but troubled relationship between couples from different racial groups in Africa. As Frantz Fanon (2008) points out in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in the dynamics of cross-racial sex the white woman is the one who the black man believes can fulfil his longing to be white: being loved by her is to be loved “like a white man” and so to *be* a white man (p.45). And so in Ngugi’s wa Thiongo’s (2006) *Wizard of the Crow* (p.179-180), when Tajirika realizes that all that can distinguish him from other rich black men is a white skin, he considers marrying a white woman and so becoming English.

### **3. Africa’s White Women**

It is in South Africa that the implications of this mythology appear most frequently. Even after the 1985 abolition of the laws forbidding sexual cohabitation between “European” and “non-European” races, South Africa, home to different nations and races, was not concerned with the racial intermingling of the country’s many races. At stake was the purity of the white race. The guarantor of that purity was the untouchable white woman who remained the possession of the white man, forever taboo to black men. While this philosophy was generally not as overtly formulated in other literature on the African continent, it to this day permeates not only South African literature, but is a central theme in the literature of other African countries. It continues to determine international representations of the African continent.

#### **3.1 White Women: Hollywood and the Fashion World**

Perhaps amongst the greatest enemies of Africa’s White women are Hollywood and the fashion world. Thus for example in Sydney Pollack’s block buster award-winning film *Out of Africa* (1985) Meryl Streep plays Karen Blixen - the woman who can shoot straight, love wildly, and ride unkempt into an all-male war camp, and not give credit to the Kenyan Africans who have walked all the way. Despite her challenge of a male-dominated colonial world, she nevertheless remains primarily the object of romantic love intrigues. While she is the one who heals sick Africans and brings education to them despite the objections of the Kikuyu chief, black people play no major role in Karen Blixen’s life except as servants and as trusted confidants who like the Muslim Faran live in close proximity to her yet nevertheless keep a chaste distance. Her place is in the arms of a white lover on a continent made for Western-style romance where the ultimate savior and her protector is a white man.

In Taylor Swift’s (2015) latest video *Wildest Dreams* white colonial romance is once more center stage as “she and director Joseph Kahn envision pith-helmet-and-khaki-clad men as civilizing heroes and the women who joined them roughing it in tents wearing lingerie” (Carotenuto, 2015). Fashion continues to package modern Africa as a romance where white male fantasy reigns supreme as fragile-looking white women make their way across the untamed African landscape carrying the latest Louis Vuitton fashion accessories.

#### **3.2 The Missionary**

The white woman missionary believes of herself that she is a civilizing force in Africa. Yet Bessie Head’s *Maru* (1971) and *A Question of Power* (1974) both present the picture of white female missionaries as abrasive and even cruel. They are insensitive to the cultural and personal needs of their protégés. Thus, in *Maru* Margaret Cadmore, a missionary’s wife adopts the child of a Masarwa

woman who dies in childbirth. Although she concedes that the deceased Masarwa mother, the member of a people considered lower than any other in the country, "looks like a Goddess", and she educates this child of "a low filthy nation," equal in status to animals in a game reserve, the baby she adopts is no more than an experiment to be trained to help "her" people one day. No real intimacy can be acknowledged between the two, and the child she adopts later says of her: "She was not good. She was rich".

In *A Question of Power* (1974) the white female missionary appears in two guises. The first reflects Bessie Head's own history when the school girl is subjected to a school principal, "a tall, thin, gaunt, incredibly cruel woman" who "had heard 'the call' from Jesus and come out to save the heathen" (p.16). This woman is convinced that the young "Coloured" child Elizabeth [Bessie] who has been placed in her care has inherited the insanity which resulted in her mother being "locked up" because "she was having a child by the stable boy, who was a native". The second embodiment of the colonial female missionary is Camilla who had come to Botswana "to help the natives" and who like the other Danes, "the specialists in sheep farming, dairy farming, crops and chickens," did so by humiliating them, showing them how inherently inferior and lazy they were, even when like Elizabeth they had an education. When one in this group suggests that Elizabeth tell Camilla she is a "racialist," Elizabeth responds that these people "know they are racialists" , yet cannot see that not the victim of their hatred is ugly, but they themselves.

### **3.3 The White Woman in the Novel: images of fertility and sterility**

#### **3.3.1 Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer**

Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer are both white female novelists and recipients of the Nobel Prize in Literature. White women have an important place in their novels, yet are anything but savory characters. Doris Lessing's white woman contrasts sharply with the ones portrayed in Nadine Gordimer's novels. In Lessing's (1950) *The Grass is Singing* the white woman is the bored lonely wife of a down and out "poor white" - i.e. lower class white - a Rhodesian farmer who, until his wife joins him feels comfortable in the company of his black African workers. His wife's arrival changes the dynamic: the white woman has to be kept separate from black society. During her husband's absence her only companion is the black "houseboy," the black servant she tempts sexually. The implication is clear: only lower class white women would have a relationship with black men - especially black servants. The only reason they do so is they are bored or neglected by their husbands.

Gordimer's white women by contrast are educated, participate in the struggle against *apartheid*, but are no more beautiful. Their sterility and ugliness is offset by the beauty and fertility of black African society. In an ironic twist they discover that their own men have become emasculated and are attracted to the black men society has castrated. Thus Elizabeth in *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966) who sees herself also as one of the "bathed and perfumed and depilated white ladies, in whose womb the sanctity of the white race is entombed", decides to use her senile grandmother's bank account to assist members of the banned Pan African Congress. In return she knows Luke, the black African go-between between her and the Pan African Congress, will come to her "with the smell of the smoke of braziers in his clothes" and perhaps even make love to her (p.94).

As is the case for Gordimer's later heroine's, Elizabeth's participation in the struggle is equated with sexual energy in the presence of the black freedom fighter. She, "the outsider," is asked to help channel funds to support violent revolution in South Africa. Her response grows "almost like sexual tumescence" (p.79;86). Hillela in *A Sport of Nature* (1987) and Hannah in *My Son's Story* (1990) both discover that "sexual happiness and political commitment [become] one" (1990:90). Hannah's black lovers combine political astuteness with physical courage and tremendous sexual energy which can never be matched by any of her white lovers. Committed to the freedom struggle and trusting in their

sexuality Hillela and Hannah become the lovers of black freedom fighters and live a life which allows them to survive the demise of white rule. Yet despite both their political and sexual commitment, Gordimer's white women are essentially ugly, beautiful only when like Hillela in *A Sport of Nature* they are dressed in traditional African clothing, which "makes her appear so" (1987:340). In *My Son's Story* Hannah's blonde features and blue eyes are compared to those of a pig. Yet Aila's "oriental beauty" and "her coiled river of shining black hair" are mentioned with awe (1900:7;19;93). In *Burger's Daughter* (1979) Rosa, the white daughter of an Afrikaner father who supports the struggle against the white government is overshadowed by Marisa Kgosana, who is "a queen of some prototype, extinct in Britain or Denmark where the office still exists." She is "the Ruritanian pan-Africa of triumphant splendor and royal beauty that is subject to no known boundaries of old custom or new warring political ideologies in black countries" (1979:134;139).

Gordimer's dehumanization of South Africa's white women is thus offset by her portrayal of black African society as being almost exclusively vibrant, its members disturbingly like noble savages who can do no wrong. Their society reflects unrealistic and nostalgic inner harmony and cohesion, whereas white society presents an unmitigated picture of sordid sterility. Whereas black men possess seemingly boundless sexual energy and easily procreate, white relationships remain childless. Steve Biko once commented that those liberal whites who had been the source of the problem in South Africa should not necessarily be expected to be a part of the solution as Africans freed themselves from *apartheid*. Many understood his words to mean that white women would have no home in the new South Africa. The novels of white apartheid-era South African writers, not only those of Nadine Gordimer, seem to bear out the truth of Biko's words.

### **3.3.2 J.M. Coetzee: *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) and *Disgrace* (1999)**

In white South Africa's post-apartheid novels white women continue to remain sterile unless violently impregnated. Thus, in Coetzee's (1977) *Heart of the Country*, written during the *apartheid* years, Magda lusts after Hendrik, the black servant whose wife her father has made his concubine. Although Hendrik rapes her and later repeatedly has sexual intercourse with her, Magda is unable to "be a woman" and remains sterile. Central to Coetzee's post-apartheid novel *Disgrace* (1999) is Lucy, a lesbian. The reversal of the sterility implied by her lesbianism occurs when she is gang raped by black men in an act of racial hatred that mirrors the "corrective rape" to which lesbian women of all races are subjected in the new South Africa, and she becomes pregnant. As a violently impregnated white woman who does not know who the father of her child is, she can only remain on the land that is hers if she gives it over to Petrus, the black man, the tribal elder of the community whose men committed the crime against her. Petrus does what is "culturally correct" and ostensibly marries her so as to protect the unborn child. He does nothing to right the wrong committed against a woman and against her unborn child. The attainment of racial justice had been the goal of the African National Congress and of Nelson Mandela. The justice by which Petrus and his community live, is that in return for protecting the child he lets the white woman continue to live on the land he takes from her without paying for it.

In Gordimer's (1998) post-*apartheid* novel *The House Gun* there is a similar dynamic. Natalie, an extremely disturbed young woman, realizes she is pregnant after she cheats on the man who loves her and has sex with his gay ex-lover. Here too the woman does not know who the father of the child is. The specter of dysfunctional white families, and especially of white women, thus continues into the post-apartheid era. Once they belonged to white men. Now they belong to black men. In *Disgrace* Lucy's father assists Beth, a white woman in charge of an animal shelter and responsible for euthanizing unwanted canines. She allows the old man who has been guilty of sexual philandering to come to her. But essentially their relationship is one in which she administers the *coup-de-grace*. He was unable to protect his daughter against rape. His grandchild, the result of that rape, will belong to

Petrus, a black man, who also takes over the land that once belonged to him. White South African society has ceased to exist.

### **3.4 The White Woman in Black (South African) Writing**

#### **3.4.1 Drum Magazine**

During the early *apartheid* years as the National Party worked towards cementing the ideology and policies of racial separation, the stories written by black South African journalists in *Drum* magazine challenged the system. Written in the style of investigative reporting, the narratives generally revolved around the systemic injustices evident on farms and in prisons. The 2004 film *Drum* tells the story of Can Themba, one of the journalists, who falls in love with a white woman from Britain. The story of their love, as told in the film, recounts only the sordid injustices of South Africa's *Immorality Act* which forbids cross-racial sexual encounters. There is no character development, no nuancing in the story which revolves around their discovery during a house raid by South Africa's brutal white security police. Whereas the man is jailed, and the *Drum* team has to bail him out, the woman is deported. Can Themba eventually leaves a South Africa in which he no longer feels at home. At no point does the story move beyond showing the woman willing to take a risk which for her as a British national is no risk at all. She speaks of the "romantic" element of breaking the law. Though called a "cunt" by the security officer, she is little more than embarrassed by the incident. The consequences of the "Immorality Act," which defines "immorality" solely in terms of cross-racial (black-white) sexual relationships are not explored in a film which likewise focusses solely on the sexual nature of these relationships and not on interpersonal interaction.

#### **3.4.2 Peter Abrahams**

In *A Wreath for Udomo* (1956) black South African novelist Peter Abrahams depicts the love between Udomo, an exiled African freedom fighter who falls in love with Lois, a white woman who joins the struggle, as consensual. It is furthermore, more than merely an account of a sexual encounter. While the novel touches on themes similar to those identified by white writers during the *apartheid* era Abrahams's portrayal of the white woman is a great deal more complex and compassionate than the depictions found in white South African writing. Lois is furthermore not depicted as being inferior to Maria, the black woman who loves Udomo's fellow freedom fighter Mhendi.

While Lois makes a conscious decision to join Udomo's struggle for his country's independence, supports him with her income and determines to join the man she loves when he returns to Africa, her identity is not determined by the political choices she makes. When she walks in on her friend's abortion and realizes Udomo has betrayed her, she tells him to leave. Paul Mabi, Udomo's friend, whom she tells of the betrayal, does not doubt Udomo has wronged the woman he loved. Unlike Nadine Gordimer who for example in *My Son's Story* ignores freedom fighters' every failing because of the nobility of the cause they espouse, Abrahams lets Paul Mabi acknowledge the wrong that the country's political savior has done. Gordimer's white heroines on the other hand do not really get hurt by the black people whose cause they embrace. And their black lovers remain untarnished no matter how unethical their behavior.

Mabi sees Lois as a person in her own right and knows how much she has contributed to the freedom struggle. Even though he knows how important Udomo is to their freedom struggle, he does not have recourse to Africa's perception of its own victimhood to excuse the wrong that has been done to her. He challenges the concept of the saintly revolutionary when he tells Lois: "I know the

wrong he did you and Mhendi. But I also know the good he did Afrika. Was he a good man? A great man? And is greatness beyond good and evil?" (p.309). As Paul tries to comfort her, "all the guilt of Africa" (p.121) is in his voice. Years later after Udomo has returned to his home country and has helped free it from colonial oppression, he is murdered by tribalists in his regime. Paul writes to Lois asking her to forgive the man who in freeing his country has yet betrayed so many, not only her. He ends his letter by asking whether "tomorrow's Africans will understand the price at which their freedom was bought, and the share of it non-Africans [like her] had to pay" (p.309). Her identity as a white and as a woman no longer seems central to their communication with one another. The freedom fighter who at the moment of death knew how much he loved her is in need of forgiveness. And she, like so many Africans, is asked to free herself from justified anger and disappointment. In this invitation, as he asks her to write to him, Paul Mabi offers her a home within the new Africa.

#### **4. Africa's White Women today**

Today Africa's White Women continue to be depicted in the Hollywood genre and subject to the images of the fashion world. They have however also become major protagonists in modern African writing. Their place in African society and in the African novel of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century remains ambiguous. Two novels - one by Senegalese writer Mariama Ba and the other by Zanzibari novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah - illustrate the divergence in attitudes.

##### **4.1 The White woman in Africa's Muslim world**

Senegalese writer Mariama Ba's (1986) novel *Scarlet Song* tells the story of a white woman's love for a Senegalese man. Here race becomes the framework which determines feminist themes in modern Africa. Mireille, the daughter of a French diplomat, falls in love with fellow student Ousmane Gueye. The novel focuses on the heartbreak a white woman faces when her love makes her go against her own society and she is also not accepted by her husband's family. Ousmane's marriage to Mireille is a practical illustration that confirms Fanon's contention that marriage to a white woman gives the black man the illusion that he has reached above himself, has become someone special. Ousmane admits: "What was I trying to prove? My manhood? My ability to attract someone so far above me? I was excited by the difficulty of the enterprise" (p.136). Calling her his "Blanche," his "Blonde," he is unable to move beyond his perception of her whiteness. When his mother sees Mireille's picture he tells her that it is that of a film star.

Ousmane admits to himself "that he had been drawn to her by the need to assert himself, to rise intellectually and socially" (p.123). But this attraction to the intellectual rapport he shares with Mireille suddenly seems of no account when he chooses to return to Ouleymatou, a black Senegalese woman with only the minimum of education. In their teenage years she had rejected him for being less than a man because he helped his mother (p.10). Ouleymatou now has no scruples in exploiting her sexuality to entice him back to her. Neither mention that he steals his white wife's money to lift her own family out of slum poverty.

His friend tells him that "when a black man marries a white woman he is lost to his country" (p.149), and his mother insists that Ousmane sees his return to the opportunistic Ouleymatou as part of his need to retain his "African soul," his "essence as an African" (p.100). His friends remind him that they chose to marry white women "during the colonial period, out of self-interest, laziness, weakness or opportunism" (p.122), but that this justification is no longer valid. Yet Ousmane continues to see himself as "the black woman's hope" after Senegalese independence (p.120). He finds "cultural justification" (p.139) in the second marriage he hides from his first wife Mireille and confuses "Ouleymatou with Africa." She becomes a "symbol of the black woman, whom he had to emancipate" (p.149). Ironically Ouleymatou ensnares him with the most crude traditions of un-emancipated black

womanhood: she becomes her future mother-in-law's slave and sees her prime responsibility in satisfying his sexual desires.

For her part Ouleymatou's success in seducing him, convinces her that she deserves the accolades bestowed on her. She is the "wife of an intellectual! 'The equal of a white woman in a man's heart!'" (p.134). Obioma Nnaemeka sees Ousmane's attempt to link his betrayal of Mireille, his plundering of her bank account and his marriage to Ouleymatou not as confusion but as "deceit wrapped up in naturalized, feminized, idealized and 'motherized' Africa" (in Onwuegbuche and Akun 2011:6). It is only when Mireille attacks him and he is in danger of being killed that he realizes what he and his society have done to her when he took "a beautiful young woman, intelligent, virtuous, hungry for affection and offering love in abundance" and betraying her (p.165)

Mariama Ba portrays Mireille as being "genuinely in love" (p.20). Devoted to Ousmane, Mireille chooses to study at a Senegalese university rather than return to France. When her parents discover her love she is forced to return to France. While there she actively participates in demonstrations demanding Senegalese independence. Yet her idealism and her participation in the struggle for independence triggers none of the hormonal responses portrayed in novels written by white South African writers. Mariama Ba goes to great lengths to show Mireille "was simply and naturally in love, like any healthy, normal girl of her age" (p.20). Despite her father's blatant racial prejudice Mireille believes in a society where tolerance reigns and people respect others' differences; where children of mixed marriages are "free to choose where they belong" (p.122). As the wife of a black man in Africa she realizes too late that despite all her overtures, her gifts, her attempts at integrating into Senegalese culture she will never be accepted. Ousmane uses the alibi of Muslim polygamy and loyalty to African culture to betray her. The child whose birth she welcomes remains nothing more than a "*Gnouloule Khessoule!*" It is a child that will never belong because it is "Not black! Not white!" She knows she cannot take her son back to France either and so she kills him (p.164).

#### **4.2 The East African novel: the White Woman comes home**

In Mariama Ba's *Scarlet Song* Mireille comes home to an Africa that cannot tolerate her marriage; that is interested only in plundering her savings; demands religious and cultural conformity from her yet is unwilling to accommodate her in the slightest. By contrast, in Abdulrazak Gurnah's (2005) *Desertion* the white woman comes home to Africa because she discovers blood ties.

Through Rashid, the Zanzibari man she loves, Barbara learns that her grandfather, Martin Pearce, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Orientalist and Africa explorer, loved Rehana an African woman of Swahili and Muslim-Indian descent. She discovers what he did not know: Rehana's grandchild Jamila is her cousin. And so - together with earlier generations of Persians from Shiraz, Arabs from Oman, Portuguese and British - she becomes part of Zanzibar's confluence of cultures. Related by blood to an African woman, she herself becomes an African on a continent about which she knows nothing. Rashid teaches her that her cousin is not merely the offspring of her grandfather's "native lover," but has a name - Jamila, the beautiful one. And so a blood relationship is established between the former colonizers and the formerly colonized. Barbara decides to accompany Rashid when he returns to Zanzibar. She wants to meet the cousin none in her family knew about. The story does not tell how she is received. When Rashid fell in love with and married a white woman his parents disapproved. There is no guarantee that the father's attitude has changed. Nor is there any indication that Barbara's willingness to conform to Muslim and traditional rules and not sleep in the same room as Rashid, as she would in the West, will eventually lead to her being accepted in the society where the cousin she does not know lives. But the willingness to learn, to accept are the prerequisites that may make it possible for her to find a home where her grandfather once found love.



In his portrayal of women Gurnah does not focus on their racial differences, but on the complexity of their characters and their responses to their situations. Even though Barbara has to learn that Jamila has a name and should not be referred to as the offspring of her grandfather's "native lover," she responds with curiosity and excitement to the new situation. She and Rashid's sister Farida are furthermore not seen as foils for one another. While the cross-cultural relationships Gurnah portrays are doomed, he yet suggests that "the notion of race is a construct of power, an artificial way of defining - and dividing - humanity" (Lalami 2005). And so the return and the welcome of the white woman in Africa becomes a possibility.

## 5. Conclusion

In her gender-switching adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (2011) Julie Taymor casts Hellen Mirren as Prospera, the wronged Duchess of Milan. Just as in the original Shakespearian version of *The Tempest* her daughter Miranda says of Caliban "'Tis a villain [...] I do not love to look on" (1:2:309). However, by addressing these words to her mother rather than as in the original to her father, different associations are elicited. The film's visual representation shows Prospera physically defending her daughter against Caliban's attempt on Miranda's virtue. This depiction of two women confronting the "savage" Caliban gives new meaning to his contention that Miranda "stroked" him and made much of him yet rejected his advances (1:2:333). As in the film *Out of Africa* the image evoked is that of the white woman whose physical closeness to the black man yet does not allow sexual intimacy.

This interpretation of Taymor's film further subverts the Shakespearean reference to Caliban, the colonized "native" being condemned to denuding his island of the wood bound for industrial Europe. Prospera says of Caliban: "But as 'tis we cannot miss him. He does make our fire; fetches in our wood and serves in offices that would profit us" (1:2:310-313). Here Lessing and Gordimer's references to the white woman who needs a black servant she pities and educates (1:2:353f.), and who is then the object of the colonized person's sexual attention re-occurs. It continues to be a theme in literature emanating from Africa. When in Taymor's film Caliban's wish that he had succeeded in raping Miranda, the forbidden white woman, and had thus "peopl'd [...] this isle with Calibans" (1:2:351) is directed at Prospera, and not at the original Shakespearean male character Prospero, Africa's white women finally come full circle. Caliban's words are reminiscent of the "corrective rape" inflicted on Lucy in *Disgrace*, her subsequent pregnancy, and the incorporation of her unborn child into the African society whose members had violated her. Like Prospero in the original version of the play, Prospera takes back the throne from the person who usurped it. By rights Miranda should have inherited the throne of Milan. Yet, the success of Prospera's plot that Miranda fall in love with and marry Ferdinand means her offspring will become the "Kings of Naples," but Miranda will not be its ruling queen.

As Prospera greets her shipwrecked countrymen she introduces Caliban as "this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (5:1:275). Her acknowledgement echoes Laurens van der Post's contention that the relationship between white and black Africans is that between the persona and the Jungian Collective Shadow (e.g.: *The Lost World of the Kalahari*:1958). Prospera is right! Caliban is her creation. In this understanding of the text the white woman should thus not be understood as being merely a passive victim of male dominance - either black or white. She is complicit in her own oppression. Karen Blixen in *Out of Africa*; Lois in *Wreath for Udomo*; Mireille in *Scarlet Song*; the heroines in Gordimer's novels(1966); Lucy in *Disgrace* all tacitly accept the role assigned them by dominant white society, and thus the concomitant troubled relationship with black African men. As she lures her daughter into marriage with her cousin in what Miranda understands as a "brave new world" of "godly creatures" (5:1:182-3), Prospera in Julie Taymor's film openly acknowledges the servant-mistress-sexual-desirability relationship with Caliban. She sets the spirit Ariel free. She is

however unable to set free Caliban whom she describes as being “as disproportion'd in his manners as in his shape” (1:5:290-291). This does not augur well for the future of white women in black Africa.

The reality of modern Africa is explored in the novels written during the last one hundred years. But - it is also evident in the reality of lived lives. There are the untold stories of white women who fought in the South African freedom struggle and taught in black schools. There were the white women who joined the Black Sash movement in South Africa at great risk to themselves and to their families, and who did so for no other reason than that it was right to do so. There were the white women who ventured even into areas reserved for men in Africa - farming, cattle husbandry. These women gave black society another view of what it means to be an African where all are equal and all are able to participate no matter their gender or race. These women often played a quiet role. But they were present, they participated, they changed the structure of African society. Interestingly thus, despite these very modern interpretations of white women's place on the African continent and in black African society, there are also voices which testify that white women have played a decisive role in the development and freeing of African societies and are thus integral to Africa's future evolution.

At the 2013 funeral of South Africa's first black president, South Africa's praise poet Mzwakhe Mbuli, in his tribute to the people who had supported Nelson Mandela, does not categorize the people he praises either in terms of gender or race. Similarly, in his song *Imbokodo* white women are mentioned in the same breath as black African women who struggled for South Africa's freedom. He sings: “Mama Uyimbokodo” - mother you are a rock - and thus refers to the cultural concept that all women are mothers. “Wathinta abafazi wathinta Imbokodo” - when you touch a woman you strike a rock. He acknowledges that the “women of this world are amazing.” They “fought fiercely and conquered” (2014 [0:41]). He knows that all those he names - amongst others Winnie Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, Adelaide Tambo, Helen Josephs, Helen Suzman, Bessie Head - are “women of great courage” who “firmly stood” [1:14]. He acknowledges all women, black and white, as the ancestors of Africa's freedom struggle and thus of Africa. He recognizes not only those who made a political contribution, but those who are in the fields growing food, taking care of children, working in menial occupations. To all women, both black and white, he sings his “Tina Siyabongo - Mama Siyabonga” - you we thank - Mother we thank you.

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