

‘Integrating the Story into the Grand Landscape of South Africa’: Contested Spaces of Sexualized Interracial Terror in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and its Film Adaptation

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Both J.M. Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace* (1999) and Steve Jacobs’s acclaimed though highly controversial 2008 film adaptation have already generated a substantial number of critical essays and popular reviews.¹ Some critics have looked at intertextuality or the interconnections of power and powerlessness, truth and reconciliation, or shame and redemption in *Disgrace* or have addressed the significance of resistance to certain pressures of politics, societies, codes of conduct, and ethics. Others have studied such particular issues as animal rights or dogs and music, or have elaborated on the interrelations of (South African) space, crime, injustice, race, gender, and sexuality.² Yet no one, to my knowledge, has yet sufficiently answered the question of why Coetzee chose to have his female white protagonist Lucy not only multiply raped by black teenagers in the countryside without even reporting the crime but also stay there and voluntarily keep the baby from that rape.³ Even more challenging is the reason why as a lesbian she decides to become the third wife of her former black servant Petrus, even assign her farmland to him while insisting on keeping her farmhouse, the site of the crime, for refuge. To me, the answer to this question – or part of it – is abjection as well as what I would call tactical spatial lesbian resilience in a South African scene. To demonstrate this, I shall consider some significant episodes from *Disgrace* in which space, interracial violence, and identity-construction are remarkably intertwined for the two protagonists, and become a linking element between the novel and its film adaptation, despite numerous variations and differences. I will be paying particular attention to the farm and to two of the most intimate spaces (Lucy’s toilet and David’s bathroom), examining how Lucy’s lesbian resilience and spatial understanding are staged against her father David Lurie’s experience of space and how all of this is related to the concepts of the abject and abjection as introduced by Julia Kristeva.

A comparison of the contested spaces of sexualized interracial terror in Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace* and the Australian filmmaker Jacobs’s screen adaptation is an appropriate yet challenging task. It is appropriate because Coetzee himself, in his only public statement about the screen adaptation of his novel, praised the movie’s achievement in “integrating the story into the grand landscape of South Africa” (Coetzee as quoted in Rapold, *New York Times* online). He thereby turns our attention to the narrative and visual potential of physical space in

Disgrace and the aesthetic transformation of the topography of South Africa into a fictitious realm.

The primary aim of both film and novel is, of course, not to illustrate and promote the scenic wonders and unique natural beauty of South Africa, as Coetzee's aforementioned statement might misleadingly suggest.⁴ Instead, from early on the theme of sexualized inter-racial violence takes centre stage. More specifically, as María J. López held, "two violent sexual and spatial penetrations constitute the main hinge-points in the narrative" (160). First, there is a white male professor's ruthless, illicit intrusion into the space, life, and body of one of his female, and assumedly "coloured," students at Cape Technical University. Second, there is the "subjugation" (*Disgrace* 159) of this professor's white daughter by three black men who multiply rape her and vandalize her farmhouse in the Eastern Cape countryside. While the black rapists get away with their most brutal physical and spatial penetrations, the "professor of communications" (3), David Lurie, loses his social status, his reputation, and his job in the urban space as a consequence of sexually abusing one of his students. What is more, according to the interpretation in the film adaptation, he is corporally punished as well when trapped and beaten in his daughter Lucy's farmhouse during the violent attack. In addition, he also faces chaos and destruction in his own house in Cape Town upon his return three months later as a result of burglary. In this context, we soon come to realize that the topography presented in *Disgrace* turns into a postcolonial topography of terror or into "territorial terrors," as Gerhard Stilz has productively conceptualized the contested spaces of colonial and postcolonial writing (1-24). As one might initially argue along the lines of Paula Martín-Salván, one of the effects of this process is that it seems to produce a spatially organized structure. Generally speaking, in this structure the cityscape, which, in *Disgrace*, is that of Cape Town, at first seems to be mostly related to law, whereas the landscape, which is that of the Eastern Cape in the novel and the Western Cape in the film adaptation,⁵ seems to be almost synonymous with lawlessness. Closer inspection, however, shows that the correlation between spatial and legal divisions becomes much more complicated in the course of *Disgrace*. One reason for this is that space and law are increasingly tied to a problematization of violence and morality as well as to challenging constructions of identity that do not correspond to what is conventionally believed to be proper and ethical.⁶ All this, in turn, can be linked to the more general postmodern and postcolonial "rejection of the centre/margin hierarchical opposition" (27) that Dominic Head has traced as an important aspect of Coetzee's literary oeuvre in general. Indeed, as the story progresses and "the cycles of brutality, judgement and confession" (Harvey 105) gather momentum, distinctions vanish between countryside and city in the sense of what Paula Martín-Salván has called the "opposition between uncharted and civilized spaces" (149) and Susan Smit-Marais and Marita Wenzel have posited as the conventional dualism of equating "the city with progress and the country with simplicity and tradition" (28). In this connection, I would extend Rita Barnard's claim that the erosion of the old pastoral

opposition of country and city is but one aspect of a general erasure of boundaries in the world of the novel (199-224).

Blurred, too, are the boundaries between the world of the novel and the world of the reader, owing to the fact that Coetzee has applied the technique of “selective ‘telling detail’” (Symonds 4). To varying degrees, this technique urges readers to get involved and use their imagination to supply the rest. In the novel, the plot is thus focalized through the consciousness of the male protagonist and “authorial” narrator David Lurie. He is a disillusioned, old-fashioned, self-righteous womanizer who sees prostitutes regularly and has countless sexual affairs. For him, the urban space of Cape Town is primarily a site of lust and Eros, hence inherently sexualized. In his words: “He has always been a man of the city, at home amid a flux of bodies where eros stalks and glances flash like arrows” (6). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that he never shows remorse for his new illicit affair with and sexual exploitation (tantamount to rape) of his student Melanie Isaac, either. Through the confrontation with David’s biased, ambiguous, and deviant moral viewpoint, the reader is encouraged to critically question the narrator’s perspective and to fill the blanks. In other words, the heterodiegetic narrator who is internally focalized on David Lurie functions as “the rhetorical signal to the active reader to counter-focalize” (22), as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak aptly summed it up.

A striking feature of the film adaptation is that it ignores this issue completely. The viewer is not meant to be an active participant. Part of this might be due to the filmmakers’ decision to do without ‘voice-over,’ which is a production technique where “words are spoken in a movie or television program by a person who is not seen,”⁷ and which could have functioned as a “post-production element” to recreate the effect of David Lurie’s focalized storytelling in the filmic visualization of *Disgrace* (Rijsdijk 12). Having to rely merely on the compelling images that the film offers instead, the audience is but a witness to what its director Steve Jacobs has described as “a surgical examination of a situation, not an argument for or against the situation” (quoted in Tait 18). In my view, this is where the transition to screen flattens the complexity of the original literary text considerably.

However, an area in which distinct echoes of the novel can be heard in the film with its “screenplay as a literary (and pre-production) text” (Rijsdijk 12) is the destabilization of the *plaasroman*, the traditional South African farm novel that Coetzee gestures at in *Disgrace*. In both film and novel, the expectation of a traditional South African family farm ruled by the white monogamous heterosexual patriarch with the help of black servants is subverted. For one thing, the white-owned farm becomes a space of disorder, violence, and chaos in the course of the crime committed by the blacks. Then, from early on the farm appears as a site of alternative social and sexual modes of living.

All this becomes obvious when one takes a closer look at the challenging and essentially rural life story of David’s grown-up lesbian daughter Lucy and how her identity-formation is staged to counterbalance David’s essentially urban and sexualized identity and

spatial experience. Lucy is introduced to us by David as “a solid country woman” (60) and “a frontier farmer of the new breed” (62) who focuses on dogs and daffodils instead of cattle and maize. Yet, as *Disgrace* goes to demonstrate, we are mistaken if we expect an idyllic pastoral life to unfold from this. Rather, as we learn, Lucy’s destiny has been full of setbacks, distress, and tragedy since she moved to the countryside six years earlier as a member of a commune of young people. The first thing one finds out is that this experiment in an alternative way of living failed. Furthermore, we come to know that Lucy’s succeeding effort to live a same-sex partnership and “farm properly” (60) with her lover Helen after the commune broke up was not meant to last either. She is soon abandoned by Helen, who returns to the cityscape, in this case to Johannesburg (60). Lucy, however, is not alone for long, because her father has already left the cityscape to take refuge at Lucy’s smallholding and to live in shared accommodation with her for a while. In other words, the lesbian partnership as an alternative mode of living is replaced by a more traditional one when David and Lucy enter a temporary father-daughter-farm-sharing nuclear community. David himself sees it as a “refuge on an infinite basis” (65) to escape the consequences of his sexual and professional transgression: i.e. being pilloried in Cape Town where “private life is public business ... [and] a spectacle” (66). This development is rather surprising, given David’s initially low opinion of the countryside and his daughter, both associated with cultural backwardness. This is made evident in the following passage where he alludes to Lucy in a very condescending way: “Curious that he and her mother, cityfolk, intellectuals, should have produced this throwback, this sturdy young settler” (61).

The aforementioned conventional spatial dualism between urban and rural space that is highly operative in this context is reiterated in the first conversation between David and Petrus: “‘I have just travelled up from Cape Town. There are times when I feel anxious about my daughter all alone here. It is very isolated.’ ‘Yes,’ says Petrus, ‘it is dangerous.’ He pauses. ‘Everything is dangerous today. But here it is all right, I think’” (64). Yet, it is already a qualified spatial dualism that we encounter here, given Petrus’s reluctance to associate danger merely with the rural space. This narrative move might be explained by Coetzee’s general “reluctance to deal in absolutes or to oversimplify” (158), which Sue Kossew has suggested is characteristic of Coetzee’s oeuvre. It is thus no coincidence that the more “Cape Town is receding into the past” (*Disgrace* 65) for David, the more he adjusts his perspective on Lucy. He begins to acknowledge her as “a solid woman, embedded in her new life”—hence, a daughter of whom “he does not have to be ashamed” (62).

While at this stage “being a father is [still] a rather abstract business” (63) for David, it soon becomes a concrete and even traumatic matter when three black teenage boys, one of them a relative of Petrus’s, raid Lucy’s farm, kill her dogs, and gang-rape her. David is forced to experience painfully his failure as a protective father and traditional patriarch, given his inability to protect Lucy from becoming a victim of an ugly sexualized form of inter-racial terror. Moreover, he is victimized

himself in a most intimate and abject space, the toilet to which he had been confined before he is seriously beaten, set alight, and rendered unconscious while the attackers are violating his daughter.

The space of the toilet, and the way in which it is represented as an intimate and abject space, functions as a fictional mirror of David's plight. This is signified in various distinct ways in the novel and the film, to which I shall return for illustration presently.

Generally speaking, as the sociologists Harvey Molotch and Laura Nóren have illustrated minutely in their pioneering interdisciplinary anthology, "the toilet" (10), according to its French connotation, means "to cover people's acts of intimate caring to keep themselves directly competent and without bodily offense" (10). It is supposed to be a space of solitude. For the user, however, this space can also become a place of the uncanny that unleashes "un-home-like[-ness]" (Childers and Hentzi 1), embarrassment, shame, disgust, baseness, and degradation. For David, the toilet functions as a site of the uncanny that is coupled with the notion of the abject. Therefore, it might best be summarized in a line from Milton's tragic closet drama *Samson Agonistes*: "To lowest pitch of abject fortune thou art fallen" (line 169). The intellectual David sinks to such a low and miserable condition in the toilet during the farm raid. He faces a real threat to his life, the uselessness of his professional knowledge, and the destruction of his identity as a shielding father—in sum, a general crisis of identity in the experience of violence and disgust. The following collocation of passages from the toilet scene is particularly instructive here:

He is in the lavatory, the lavatory of Lucy's house. Dizzily he gets to his feet. The door is locked, the key is gone. He sits down on the toilet seat and tries to recover. ... So it has come, the day of testing. Without warning, without fanfare, it is here, and he is in the middle of it. ... His child is in the hand of strangers. In a minute, in an hour, it will be too late; whatever is happening to her will be set in stone, will belong to the past. ... He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless. ... Footfalls along the passage and the door to the toilet swings open again. As he lies sprawled he is splashed from head to foot with liquid. ... He recognizes the smell: methylated spirits. ... The scrape of a match, and at once he is bathed in cool blue flame. ... A flame dances soundlessly on the back of his hand. He struggles to his knees and plunges the hand into the toilet bowl. ... He hangs over the toilet bowl, splashing water over his face, dousing his head. There is the nasty smell of singed hair. He stands up, beats out the last of the flames on his clothes. With wads of wet paper he bathes his face. His eyes are singing, one eyelid is already closing. He runs a hand over his head and his fingertips come away black with soot. Save for a patch over one ear, he seems to have no hair; his whole scalp is tender. Everything is tender, everything is burned. Burned, burnt. A vision comes to him of Lucy struggling with the two in the blue overalls, struggling against them. He writhes, trying to blank it out. (94–7)

Obviously, David's encounter with the abject echoes Winfried Menninghaus' notion of the abject as "an acute crisis of self-preservation" (1). Yet, to me, this scene should be further approached from a Kristevan perspective. In fact, I would go so far as to claim that, in *Disgrace*, Coetzee presents us with a radically modified and extended version of Kristeva's psychoanalytical notion of the abject and abjection. Generally put, for Kristeva, the abject manifests itself in the

ambiguous experience of horror and disgust that a human being experiences when faced with a threatened breakdown in meaning. The resulting collapse of the body's boundaries is signified by bodily liquids such as blood, vomit, and faeces that must be ejected to avoid decay and keep intact the border between inside and outside or between self and other. According to Kristeva, every later confrontation with the abject is evocative of the very first abjection every subject has to undergo—the separation from the maternal body and from the mother as such. This first abjection often means “a violent, clumsy breaking away with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling” (13). I suggest that in *Disgrace* Coetzee to some extent expands and revises Kristeva's concept of the abject and abjection in the sense that he endows it with a moral dimension; also, he no longer focuses on the mother-child but on the father-daughter relationship. Furthermore, the toilet functions as a space of abjection where the father, David, is “coded as ‘abject’” (Kristeva 64) and violently excluded from access to his daughter Lucy. The latter, in turn, must here, during the rape, first experience her own lack of agency and an even ‘fatal’ defeat (161). Then Coetzee eventually grants her a rebirth as a subjective self who has control over her body and her story. Moreover, she gains substantial power for the future by her unique decision to stay in the farmhouse, keep the rape “a purely private matter” (112), continue with the pregnancy and become a self-confident lesbian mother.

Two aspects in particular make this process of abjection in *Disgrace* so challenging. First of all, there is Lucy's break with her father and subsequent, rather provocative path towards emancipation and independence. This is inextricably associated with her victimization, the traumatic experience of the rape, and her father's helplessness. Through all this she is eventually able to undergo abjection of the paternal as well as the patriarchal and establish her own identity. The latter, however, implies a second abjection, this time Lucy's own. This is a twofold process. In the first place, as a homosexual and hence a member of a sexually marginalized group, she becomes the victim of “a body aesthetic that defines some groups as ugly or fearsome and produces aversive reactions in relation to members of those groups” (Young 145) – in other words, she finds herself in an abject state. But in the end she refrains from condemning her own cultural abjection as a repressive function of patriarchal authority. In a tactical move, she provocatively affirms her abject existence by choosing a morally perplexing and socially unaccommodating way of life as the third wife of Petrus and a lesbian mother-to-be of a mixed-race child conceived during the rape “for the sake of peace” (208). At the same time, she demonstrates (sexual) resilience by retaining her farmhouse as a kind of sanctuary where she can be a subject on and in her own terms. This implies an unmolested lesbian living and a focus on her ‘inappropriate’ though empowering new experimental role as (expectant) lesbian mother of a mixed-race child. Thus, she carves out an unmistakably charged privileged lesbian space in the narrative, as I argue along the lines of proponents of a theory of lesbian narrative space such as

Marilyn Farwell, Catharine R. Stimpson and Sherrie A. Inness. For Farwell (98) a lesbian narrative space emerges when women strive for alternative relationships to other women and to patriarchy that do not correspond to the standards or practices in force within the community and its heteropatriarchal structures. From this point of view, one can conclude that a lesbian existence is not restricted to a mere sexual identity or sexual practice. It is much broader in scope and could also signify a political position in the sense of what Catharine R. Stimpson has called “that invaluable way of being in, with, and against the world” (377). One might ask: How is the reader to acknowledge and possibly understand such a crucial scene within *Disgrace* as a possible lesbian narrative space? I argue with Marilyn Farwell that to become aware of Lucy’s lesbian subjectivity and her lesbian space requires a reading against the grain of the implied text with its prevailing heterosexual plot. In other words, to capture the narrative’s queer potential, entails being a resistant reader who refuses to accept the book’s apparent messages about society, cultural values, and gender. Sherrie A. Inness has put it succinctly as follows: “Lesbian perspective implies looking for meanings that lurk behind the text’s apparently heterosexual surface, knowing that lesbian experiences, whether in fiction or reality, are rarely overt” (83). I will get back to Lucy’s resilience and lesbian subjectivity as well as her emergent lesbian space in a moment.

First, I would like to return to the question of David’s situation and how the film captures his experience of being shut in the toilet as an abject space of shame, intimidation, and disgust, to which, for him, is added degradation, deadly terror, and even the threat of purgatory or hell. The latter is among others indicated by his being “bathed in cool flame” (96) and the fact that he briefly summarizes the occurrences as “the day of testing. ... How will they stand up to the testing, he and his heart?” (96)

In effect, the toilet is depicted in the film version as an abject, uncanny, and terrorizing space of degradation. There, however, the pivotal scene of the whole attack is given “about twice as much weight and space proportionality” (2011), as Ian Glenn has shown. In addition, it appears far more threatening thanks to the emphasis placed on David’s facial expression, his panic, and his desperate gestures as well as his submissive behaviour. The dramatic effect of the scene is heightened by the visual code employed. Particularly striking in this regard are the numerous close-ups with a full view of David’s terrified face as well as the medium and American shots of the upper half of his tormented and trembling body or of three quarters of his body in a crouched position.

In the film we also have an additional scene set in Cape Town just before David moves to Lucy’s farm in the countryside. This scene has a significant bearing on the interpretation of the later toilet scene. Shot from a low-level position with the camera looking up, in this earlier scene David appears rather powerful and hardly vulnerable while bathing in the freestanding centrally positioned bathtub of his tidy bathroom in his upper-middle-class apartment.⁸ Inevitably, this prompts the viewer at first to think of David’s efforts as a ritual cleansing. This is all the more so as the scene immediately follows the university hearing

where David, oblivious of the trouble he is in, stubbornly refuses to apologize to the authorities for the sexual harassment of his student Melanie, with the result that he loses his job as a university professor. In a way, this may itself be seen as an instance of Kristevan abjection, which, however, is then slightly enhanced with ethics, an aspect that originally Kristeva's notion of abjection does not consider. Precisely, the white South African intellectual David is coded as uncanny and 'soiled' here, hence as an abject who has compromised the personal identity of an assumedly coloured female student. He must be expelled if Melanie's emotional and sexual integrity is to be restored, along with her ability to construct her identity. With David later taking off in his car to Lucy's place, we move to his second abjection, this time concerning his lesbian daughter Lucy, which occurs, as outlined above, during the horrific attacks. Abjection, in this context, is much more complex in the film version, as it correlates more explicitly with issues of race and gender. Moreover, the cinematic editing conveys strikingly to the audience an ethical sense of David's entrapment in the consequences of his first abjection—unable to wash away his sins, he persists in his abject state, reinforced by the physical attack.

In the novel, David's final day in Cape Town before leaving for Lucy's place is restricted to the few following lines of transition at the opening of chapter seven: "Once he has made up his mind to leave, there is little to hold him back. He clears out the refrigerator, locks up the house, and at noon is on the freeway" (59). This probably explains why, in the film, the crime scene is not only perceivable as an act of interracial violence and collective post-apartheid revenge but ultimately also as punishment for David's transgressions: hence, on the individual level, as part of a tragic story of guilt and atonement.

On the social level in broader terms, I would concur here with Andrew van der Vlies: "Lurie is not only guilty of professional misconduct ... but, in the broader South African context, ... he is also guilty of perpetrating—and perpetuating—white-on-black exploitation" (25). The film, on the other hand, upholds the notion of a possible redemption on David's part and accordingly ends at the novel's penultimate scene, or rather the director's rather idealized interpretation of the novel's relevant passages. Here, David, whose moral compass seems more finely tuned now, eventually returns to the countryside to visit the heavily pregnant Lucy. Shortly thereafter, he seems to be reconciled with her before the final long-swooping aerial shot of a calm and rather picturesque rural South African landscape, where Lucy's and Petrus's farms appear to peacefully coexist, misleadingly suggesting the dawning of hope for a better future and a new beginning in South Africa. With this ending, the film completes a cyclical pattern of order, chaos, and restored order while at the same time airbrushing the ongoing discrimination of women and lesbians and the challenging and perhaps even improbable reversal of black-white power-relations. The former is expressed in Lucy's self-imposed, and at least temporary, subordination to the will and power of Petrus in public space; yet it is also challenged by her uncompromising determination to keep the story of the rape

private and retain her farmhouse as a place of refuge for her entire way of being a lesbian as well as an expectant mother.

In the novel, hardly any of the film's idyllically optimistic closing images are allowed to stand. Only for a brief moment in the novel's final scenes does Coetzee have the reader imagine the rural landscape around Lucy's farm as optimistically picturesque, pastoral, and peaceful. This is when "the city boy" (218) David approaches the farm and invokes the portrait painter John Singer Sargent and the Impressionist Pierre Bonnard when describing the scenery from a distance:

The wind drops. There is a moment of utter stillness which he would wish prolonged for ever: the gentle sun, the stillness of midafternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, *das ewig Weibliche*, lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat. A scene ready made from a Sargent or a Bonnard. (218)

Overall, however, pessimism seems to prevail and so David laments after his return to Lucy's place that "nothing has changed between Lucy and himself, nothing has healed" (200–1). Accordingly, the book ends with the abject, self-abased David in a terrible plight when, having consented to the putting-down of his beloved young stray dog Driepoot in an animal shelter, he states: "I'm giving him up" (220). As a symbolic gesture, this statement could be interpreted in a more general sense as David's unconditional surrender to the circumstances he finds himself in as well as his leaving South Africa and his daughter Lucy to their own devices. In the end, David becomes the dog-man, and Petrus, who used to be "the gardener and the dog-man" (64) for Lucy, becomes the proprietor of her smallholding. In general, one could say, as Pamela Cooper aptly sums it up, that David "is politically estranged because the status of white power is declining in South Africa, and sexually estranged, as the old language of white, patriarchal gender relations withers" (27–8).

Although the book closes with David, what really matters in the end is Lucy's destiny, her plight and marginalization. In fact, most critics of the novel have argued that it is Lucy's role to atone for the racial guilt of South Africa's white population. And yet, it seems also true that Lucy is not primarily a scapegoat; instead, her inner strength and unbroken will to go on in life against all odds make her a victim become a survivor. In a nutshell, she is what I would call a character that shows resilience in the face of traumatic crisis.

Generally speaking, the term 'resilience' describes a person's ability to recover from or adjust easily to horrific experiences, disastrous challenges, and misfortune, including such unimaginable and institutionalized conditions as apartheid and rape.⁹ Resilience, however, does not eliminate stress or erase life's horrors and difficulties. But it gives people the strength to tackle problems head-on, overcome adversity, and move on with their lives. Significant factors that promote resilience are belief in oneself and faith in something larger than oneself, as well as pragmatism. These factors are made evident in the character of Lucy, who doesn't "act in terms of abstraction" (112), nor is she willing to give up. Take, for example, the conversation between Lucy

and her father the day after the attack when she underlines her determination to return to the farm for good as follows:

[David:] 'What are our plans for today?'
[Lucy:] 'Our plans? To go back to the farm and clean up.'
'And then?'
'Then to go on as before.'
'On the farm?'
'Of course. On the farm.'
'Be sensible, Lucy. Things have changed. We can't just pick up where we left off.'
'Why not?'
'Because it's not a good idea. Because it's not safe.'
'It was never safe, and it's not an idea, good or bad. I'm not going back for the sake of an idea. I'm just going back.'
Sitting up in her borrowed nightdress, she confronts him, neck stiff, eyes glittering. Not her father's little girl, not any longer. (105)

This passage marks a turning point in the narrative: first, it foregrounds Lucy's resilience; second, it constructs David as an outsider. More precisely, with his daughter's declaration of independence from his tutelage, David suddenly realizes that their world is coming to an end and that he is unable to be a part of the newly emerging culture he is increasingly surrounded by in the countryside:

It is a burden he is not ready for: the farm, the garden, the kennels. Lucy's future, his future, the future of the land as a whole – it is all a matter of indifference, he wants to say; let it all go to the dogs, I do not care. ... The blood of life is leaving his body and despair is taking its place. (107)

Lucy, in turn, is resilient, which means that she stretches and stretches without breaking and holds her ground. She is not willing to leave her domestic space in the countryside, even though the black male intruders have damaged it and turned it into a contested space, as she contends in the context of a discussion with her father on the reasons for the attack and the rape:

'I think they *do* rape.'
'You think they will come back?'
'I think I am in their territory. They have marked me. They will come back for me.'
'Then you can't possibly stay.'
'Why not?'
'Because that would be an invitation to them to return.'
She broods a long while before she answers. 'But isn't there another way of looking at it, David? 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 something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying?' (158).

Obviously, Lucy's private space is gendered.¹⁰ As such, it does not just extend to the physical space of her farmhouse but also refers to the intimate, private space of her body and her sexuality. About this, however, little is known, as David "does not like to think of his daughter in the throes of passion with another woman" (86) and Lucy hardly talks about it. Yet, what we do know is that both spaces have been violated by

the rapists. The latter not only represent the aggressive black male invasion of a most intimate domestic space, the body of a white lesbian, but they also signify the continuous threat of intrusion of the political, historical, and public into Lucy's gendered space. The rape, however, is not accessible to the narrator, nor to the reader or the moviegoer. This is because Lucy refuses to speak about it, claiming it and the pain and trauma experienced as her own: "[w]hat happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business" (112). So is her decision to have the 'rape-baby' and thus her refusal to terminate the pregnancy. This, in fact, is also a resilient act as it appears to be a pragmatic, even ethical, decision of self-protection that Lucy makes as a woman who had experienced a former abortion that later turned out to be wrong. In a conversation with David she puts it as follows: "I am not having an abortion. That is something I am not prepared to go through with again This has nothing to do with beliefs. ... I am a woman, David. Do you think I hate children? Should I choose against the child because of who its father is?" (198).

Another aspect of crucial importance emerging here is the fact that Lucy continues to see the house as home and family space whereas her notion of homeland has shifted according to the new socio-historical and post-apartheid context, of which her baby is symbolic, and in which one thing at least is certain, as Dennis Walder pointedly observes: "Apartheid may be gone, but ... despite the proposed liberalization of the new constitution, African women remain marginalized 'minors'" (216).

As the public space does not allow Lucy to lay claim to it as a white single lesbian farmwoman and expectant sexual minority mother, she adopts a challenging position for her public role. This is, at least partly, defined by the gendered ideology of marriage and female mothering, and by Lucy's unprecedented submission to the changing power-relations in South Africa. All this becomes clear when Lucy finally accepts Petrus's deal of marriage and protection in return for becoming the proprietor of her smallholding, with the sole concession that she can keep the farmhouse. She asks her father to go to Petrus with the following proposal:

'Say I accept his protection. If he wants me to be known as his third wife, so be it. As his concubine, ditto. But then the child becomes his too. The child becomes part of his family. As for the land, say I will sign the land over to him as long as the house remains mine. I will become a tenant on his land. ... But the house remains mine. I repeat that. No one enters this house without my permission. Including him. And I keep the kennels.' (204)

Significantly, her lesbian motherhood to a yet-to-be-born mixed-race baby provides an alternative that lies beyond the white middle-class heterosexual domesticity of Lucy Lurie's own family background. Against the grain of both middle-class white and working-class black notions of family and home in the new post-apartheid days, Coetzee's novel seems to illustrate here what Susan Friedmann has suggested: that gendered identity comes into being at crossroads, in multiple spaces (46).

Evidently, in Lucy's case this gendered identity is embedded in a quite contradictory and problematic ideology that is never wholly definitive and exclusive, nor entirely lesbian or heterosexually female. Rather, it brings about a splitting of the subject that extends to a lesbian identity in the secluded private domestic sphere of the house and a pseudo-heterosexual female identity in the public space, which, however, for Lucy comes close to a non-identity. In a letter to her father she describes it as follows:

'I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life. All I know is that I cannot go away.

...

'Yes, the road I am following may be the wrong one. But if I leave the farm now I will leave defeated, and will taste that defeat for the rest of my life.

'I cannot be a child forever. You cannot be a father forever. I know you mean well, but you are not the guide that I need, not at this time.' (161)

In a significant scene almost at the end of *Disgrace*, Lucy repeats her declaration of independence from her father, who had returned for a visit to see her, with the following words: "'I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions'" (198).

For Lucy, the point at issue, we come to realize, is self-determination as an increasingly subjective authority. This implies, as mentioned above, the freedom to make radically different and ethically questionable decisions, such as accepting Petrus's offer to become his third wife. In doing so, she willingly subjects herself—at least temporarily—not so much to Petrus as to what she understands as an interracial intergenerational contract in post-apartheid South Africa. This seems to imply that the present white female generation pays for the sins of their forefathers, or, as David interprets it, "expiate[s] the crimes of the past by suffering in the present" (112).

Not surprisingly, to many readers and critics Lucy has thus become "an alien woman," to apply Ariella Azoulay's terminology (33-41). More fitting, however, is Camille Nurka's contention that Lucy is not only "symbolic of the selfless purity of the eternal feminine, which promises wholeness and completion," but her life story and especially her decision to stay and "take up the painful labor of everyday living with the effects of trauma" also reveals that "white femininity is the paradoxical boundary concept for racial contamination and reparation" (326). And indeed, the challenge presented to the reader and moviegoer is, as this essay has aimed at illustrating, to understand Lucy's resilient acts as means of self-determination and of spatial self-assertion. This has to come with a willingness to accept that the paradox herein lies in the fact that the enunciative asset of her concept of space causes—at least temporarily—a spatial splitting of her identity into a public one and a private one. As the latter is yet restricted to the secluded domestic gendered space of the farmhouse, it amounts to a self-chosen concealment of her true sexual identity, her lesbianism, from the public space of the South African countryside, at least for now.

Lucy's decision not to make the rape public by reporting it to the police, her multiple declarations of independence from her father, who is

coded as abject, her affirmative abjection as well as her insistence on keeping the farmhouse as her very own secluded gendered private space by marrying Petrus, who is not allowed to enter the farmhouse any longer, and her giving the land to him in exchange for protection—all this is clearly to be understood as a strategy of resilience and a mode of tactical retreat from authority and patriarchy. In this regard, Lucy's gendered tactics of self-determination can, in conclusion, be seen as an active reappropriation of space. Although this reappropriation is as yet restricted to the domestic space, it is rendered significant as it gives some agency to the violated and silenced white lesbian subjectivity and rehabilitates her status of alleged passive victim of sexualized inter-racial terror.

This also does not exclude the possibility that in the medium- and long-term Lucy, then a lesbian birth mother of a mixed-raced child, moves beyond these binary divisions, at least if we consider some additional insights from Judith Butler (2004) and Natasha Stiller (2011). According to Butler, the private cannot be completely removed from the public once and for all because the individual needs to be recognized by the social and vice versa (2, 29-30). This is especially significant once children are involved who ought to be granted full access to society and should not be forced, in Natasha Distiller's words, "to carry the burden of a difference that actually has very little to do with them, and everything to do with their society's definitions of who is fully human" (13). In this respect, for Lucy having a child might imply entering into the social and public in new and unexpected ways in the foreseeable future in a post-apartheid South Africa where a lot still needs to be improved despite the fact that its "constitution was the first in the world to protect people from discrimination because of their sexual orientation" (Fletcher 2016). In this respect, it may well be possible that a resilient Lucy will manage to open up one day the sites of prevailing power to a radical otherness in the public sphere, which eventually allows for a "third space" (Bhabha 7)¹¹ to emerge whereby an interracially conscious and gendered lesbian identity can flourish without harm and without the threat of heteronormativity.

Notes

1. For an insightful and first book-length critical collection on Coetzee's *Disgrace*, see McDonald, *Encountering Disgrace*; see, further, López, *Acts of Visitation*. Particularly recommendable are also the following special journal issues devoted to *Disgrace*: Leon de Kock's *Scrutiny 2: Issues in English Studies in South Africa* 7.1 (2002), "Symposium on *Disgrace*" and Derek Attridge's ed. *Interventions* 4.3 (2002), "J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." For a comparative analysis of the novel and the film with a particular focus on the depiction of South Africa, see Glenn 2011.

2. See here, for example, Smit–Marais and Wenzel 2006; Atwell 2002; Attridge 2000; Kossew 2003.

3. In “Beyond Empathy” Molly Abel Travis, for instance, claims that Lurie “fails to understand Lucy’s reasons for keeping the rape private, for deciding to bear the child conceived from that rape, and for negotiating with Petrus, even offering to serve as his concubine and sign over the land to him in order to keep her house” (239-240). Yet Travis refrains from providing any specification of Lucy’s reasons throughout her article. Other critics, including Pamela Cooper, Lucy Valerie Graham and Elizabeth Lowry, in the main perceive Lucy’s ultimate role and behavior pessimistically as a mere restoration of a patriarchal and heterosexual power axis, where women and lesbians are once again victimized, even made to atone for the sins of their forefathers and others. Cooper’s analysis first attests to the innovative potential of gender roles and sexual identity in *Disgrace* yet eventually concludes that “lesbianism as a potentially radical and resistant sexuality is erased” and Lucy’s fate “a moral act of endurance to bear the future – in the old fashion way” (31).

4. This is also pointed out by Rijdsdijk who provides an insightful critical account of the South African and Australian elements in (the production of) the film adaptation of *Disgrace* and a brief discussion of J.M. Coetzee’s perspective on “the filmic visualization of literature” in general and the filmic adaptations of his novels in particular (13). Also see on the later aspects Dovey and Dovey.

5. The filmmaker’s decision to move the action from the novel’s Eastern Cape setting to the more picturesque Western Cape and Cederberg landscape has been explained by economic reasons, especially the Cederberg’s geographical closeness to Cape Town and its film services, as well as the movie producers’ more universal and optimistic reconciliatory take on the story. For Rijdsdijk, for example, the film underlines the ambiguity of beauty and peril with “breathhtakingly clear skies and vast panoramic Western Cape countryside that form not only an aesthetic relief when the narrative going gets tough” but also allow for a more heroic and transcendent vision in the end (20). Also see in this respect Rapold; Wotzke; De Waal.

6. See, for example, Clarkson. On Coetzee’s depiction of ethics and desire in the novel *Disgrace*, see in particular van Heerden’s interdisciplinary article, “Disgrace, Desire and the Dark Side of the New South Africa.” There, van Heerden concludes, among others, that *Disgrace* speaks of “a confusion between the spheres of legality and spirituality/ religion; the absence of a good and intelligent morality in society and the emergence of a substitute (pseudo-)morality; sinister social control, and the renaissance of puritanical values” (49).

7. See the definition of the term ‘voice over’ in the *Merriam–Webster Dictionary*. Web. 18 Nov 2013 and the useful chapter on “Film and the Novel” in James Monaco’s book (51-57).

8. Cf. the DVD of the movie adaptation: Steve Jacobs, dir. *Disgrace* (perf. John Malkovich, Natalie Becker, Jessica Haines & Antoinette Engel; Image Entertainment, 2010; 119 min.): 23:50 min.–23:59 min.

9. For an interdisciplinary introduction to the term ‘resilience’, see Fröhlich–Gildhoff and Rönna–Böse.

10. For a discussion of the concept of gendered space, see Natascha Würzbach’s insightful entry “Raumdarstellung” (49–71) and Gillian Rose’s book *Feminism and Geography*.

11. For a brief overview of Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of the Third Space see Ika.

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