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Anthropological Machine, Bare Life, and State of Exception in

J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

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**Anthropological Machine, Bare Life, and  
State of Exception in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace***

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## 摘要

《屈辱》是南非作家和諾貝爾獎得主柯慈於1999年出版的一本具爭議性的小說。特殊的背景與文中白人老教授所不斷表示被認為是整體白人對於不同種族的態度是造成其爭議性的主因。《屈辱》設定於南非種族隔離政策與民主之間的斷層，由於這樣的背景，使得小說中描述的氾濫犯罪與無能警力格外生動寫實。除此之外，魯芮不斷表達的種族言論的確確引起了猜疑。一方面，學者們爭論說魯芮的種族言論實際上是作者本身的看法。另一方面，學者們指出小說中所描述的景象太過於悲觀。事實上，小說中特殊的背景與對生活在其下的人們之描述再再指出了現代哲學思考中一個重要的原素—生命。生命政治的議題近年內備受關注。其中，義大利政治哲學家阿岡本（Giorgio Agamben）所提出的裸命理論與小說中描繪的極端狀況相應。因此，本論文的目的在於以阿岡本的理论脈絡從小說中的特殊背景、其所可能帶來的後果與種族的言論中觀察生命政治的面向。希冀藉由這樣的角度能為這本廣為閱讀的小說帶來一種新的詮釋之道。

**關鍵詞：**《屈辱》，生命政治，阿岡本，柯慈，南非，南非種族隔離政策，人類學機器，裸命，例外狀態。

## Abstract

*Disgrace*, published in 1999, is a controversial novel written by South African Nobel Laureate J. M. Coetzee. What render the work controversial are its peculiar setting and racial attitude expressed by an old white male deemed as the representative of white. Setting in a caesura marked by the collapse of apartheid regime and the dawn of democracy, *Disgrace* vividly and realistically depicts the rampant crimes and inefficient police force during an extreme period. In addition, the racial discourses expressed time and again by David Lurie invite skepticism. Continental scholars argue that, on the one hand, the racial attitude expressed by the character is in fact the author's attitude toward people with different ethnicity. On the other hand, scholars argue that the situation depicted in the novel tends to be pessimistic. In fact, the peculiar setting and the depiction of the people within it designate a crucial element in contemporary philosophy: life. The issues of biopolitics have gradually received attention in recent years. Among the various perspectives toward the issue, Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben's theory of the production of bare life corresponds to the extreme situation in the novel. Therefore, bearing the major discussion of the novel in mind, I aim to observe the biopolitical dimension of the novel. I attempt to discuss the peculiar setting, the consequence the peculiar setting may bring, and the racial attitude in the light of Agambenian biopolitical notions in an effort to provide a new perspective toward a novel which has been widely discussed and appreciated in a global scale.

**Key words:** *Disgrace*, biopolitics, Agamben, Coetzee, South Africa, apartheid, anthropological machine, bare life, state of exception

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## Introduction

### I.

Recently, biopolitics has gradually earned attention among scholarly circles. Continental philosophers begin to reconsider the formulation left by French philosopher Michel Foucault. Thomas Lemke, in his *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*, provides a widely accepted definition of the notion:

Biopolitics is not the expression of a sovereign will but aims at the administration and regulation of life processes on the level of populations. It focuses on living beings rather than on legal subjects—or, to be more precise, it deals with legal subjects that are at the same time living beings. (4)

Since it is “a politics that deals with life,” various views upon the notion occur (Lemke 2).

Among the constellation of biopolitical scholars, Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben stands out as an emerging “intellectual star” (Lemke 53). With the publication of the English version of his *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* in 1998, Agamben’s formulation of a space of exception in which the production of bare life is inevitable elicits international interest.

Such provocative formulation is second to none in interpreting *Disgrace*, a novel written by South African Nobel laureate J. M. Coetzee. Coetzee is a prolific writer who has published twelve fictions and many volumes of essays. In addition, his allusive narrative, along with his oblique writing strategy, forms a unique writing style among scholarly circles, and it is from this writing style which the biopolitical dimension is implanted. Published in 1999, *Disgrace* is regarded as one of Coetzee’s finest novels. Via this novel, Coetzee not only accurately illustrates the arbitrary violence under the extreme situation, but dismantles one of the crucial issues in contemporary philosophy: life. Yet, these biopolitical insights are built upon the peculiar setting of the novel, and it is due to this peculiar setting that separates this novel from his previous novels.

Set in the post-apartheid South Africa, *Disgrace*, a novel which contains a caesura marked by the collapse of apartheid regime and the dawn of democracy, is a story about a 52-year-old professor named David Lurie and the people around him. Through this Booker prize-winning and Nobel prize-crowning novel, Coetzee delineates not only the supposed dominant whites situated in a territory of black during a politically sensitive time, but reveals life status under such an extreme situation. Readers are hinted that the story of *Disgrace* begins in 1997, three years after apartheid. The apartheid regime ended after Nelson Mandela became the first South African president elected in a fully representative democratic election in 1994. The system is therefore down, but there is still the aftermath. As Leonard Thompson suggested in his *A History of South Africa*, “South African society was still in many instances...brutal and brutish in the extreme” (289). The racial hatred survives in the new South Africa, and this indicates that the categorization of people with different ethnicities into hierarchical identities is still alive.

The categorization, namely, the apartheid system, deployed by apartheid regime and its aftermath portrayed in the novel reveals what Dominic Head once said that Coetzee’s novels written after the apartheid regime contain something more than an evasive representation of colonialism (*The Cambridge Introduction* 10). This “something,” suggested by Head, is what I try to grip through the reading of *Disgrace*. In *Disgrace*, Lurie once pondered that the attack on Lucy’s smallholding is something about anthropology (118). Furthermore, in *Summertime*, Coetzee’s fictional autobiography, one of the characters comments on the author’s “rather anthropological attitude” (qtd in Coleman 597) toward black South Africa. That is to say, the notion of anthropology inseparably interweaves with the novel’s peculiar setting. When it comes to the novel’s peculiar setting, it is necessary to examine how anthropological attitude toward people with different ethnicity constitutes the post-apartheid South Africa. Judged from these assertions, to put Head’s saying in other words, the combination of the peculiar setting and the anthropological interest makes the



novel more than a work dealing with colonialism. Furthermore, Coetzee's vivid depiction of Lurie's life status after the assault in Lucy's smallholding is worth noticing. This detailed delineation resonates with what the notion of biopolitics concerns most: life. The exceptional combination of political situation and biopolitical philosophy in *Disgrace*, in a way, corresponds to important notions of Agamben's theories. Therefore, Agambenian concepts of anthropological machine, bare life, and state of exception would be my pivotal applications in approaching this something suggested by Head, something that tends to emphasize more on the framework of biopolitics.

For a considerable time, the primary critical contribution to the novel is colonial reading. These critical essays dealing with colonialism (which we will encounter in the following section) serve as the forerunners to establish a concrete foundation for the further academic discussion of the novel. *Disgrace* is a novel which contains the trait that will make an immediate impact on readers without the slightest hints to interpret that impact. That is to say, *Disgrace* is a novel with fertile issues, which brings about the difficulty for readers to pin down Coetzee's position. Many critics have positioned Coetzee as postcolonial-writer in their mind, and it is not the only position I would take to discuss *Disgrace*. Instead, the focal point of my thesis would be more on the ethical and philosophical dimensions, and emphasizes especially on the issue of biopolitics in a context of post-apartheid South Africa through Agambenian light.

## II.

*Disgrace* is usually considered as one of the Coetzee's finest works due to its peculiar setting and biopolitical issues. Yet, we cannot ignore the foundation of the biopolitical reading of the novel, namely, the colonial reading of the novel. Anne Longmuir (2007), in her essay, probes into Coetzee's bleak representation of the new South Africa by examining crucial passages in the novel. After the assault by three unknown black assailants, Lurie is locked up in the lavatory. In it, Lurie muses that he is like a female cartoon figure waiting to

be put into the boiling cauldron by the savages. From this excerpt, Longmuir argues that “the novel’s vision of the new South Africa is really the vision of its protagonist, the white middle-aged academic David Lurie” (119). Lurie’s deliberate depiction of himself as a victim is “entirely mediated by colonial representations” (120). She concludes that, through the novel, Coetzee tries to remind the readers of the legacy of apartheid.

Derek Attridge shares the same attitude with Longmuir toward the novel in his essays. Attridge (2004), in his “Age of Bronze, State of Grace: *Disgrace*,” examines the difficult situations in *Disgrace*. He briefly summarizes the situation after apartheid is a time of “rampant crime, inefficient police services, middle classes barricaded into their fortress-homes” (163). He regards the novel as “one of the most widely disseminated and forceful representations of post-apartheid South Africa” (164). Then, he claims that it is a novel dealing with “relations between racially defined groups set in immediately post-apartheid South Africa” (164). On the other hand, Dominic Head (2009) directly claims that *Disgrace* is “an explicit engagement with post-apartheid South Africa” (77). According to Head, the novel has a more immediate and depressing political dimension than Coetzee’s previous novels (78).

Ludmila Ommundsen (2002) offers a similar perspective on the novel’s setting. She says that *Disgrace* is a disturbing novel illustrating the difficulty of erasing a culture of violence. This culture of violence in post-apartheid South Africa, she suggests, has gone through a radical change. The nature of this violence, namely, the apartheid, is no longer held by the state against its citizens but by the citizens against one another (330). She further elaborates the violence by pointing out that Lurie undergoes such violence. Lurie is a figure who intermittently alludes to the old days, and he seems to be more comfortable in those days. Consequently, due to his yearning for the old days, he is destined to undergo the cultural violence.

Deirdre Coleman who traces the novel’s anthropological interest (2009). Coleman finds

the novel's anthropological interest in its deliberate delineation of the human categorization. The "building blocks of human culture," e.g., the concept of family and the relation of blood, are depicted in an analytic way (599). For her, this anthropological interest allows the readers to glance at the racial struggle implicit in the novel, and it is Lurie who embodies this struggle. According to Coleman, the racial struggle rooted inside Lurie is an anthropological one, which has been that accumulated by his yearning for the old days and the context of post-apartheid South Africa. That is to say, due to his self-righteous sense of White supremacy, Lurie, as a consequence, constantly engages in black-against-white racial struggles after moving to his daughter's smallholding. Yet, the situation of post-apartheid South Africa, with the rise of black consciousness, cannot tolerate his ideology. Therefore, Lurie's anthropological outlook and his yearning ironically exile him into an "increasing marginalization" (606). Lurie "becomes a thing, a monster, for a monster is what a dog-man is" in this increasing marginalization (612).

Reading the novel through the lens of colonial issue continues to flourish in Adriaan Van Heerden's (2010) critical essay. In it, Former Archbishop Desmond Tutu's<sup>1</sup> term *ubuntu* (brotherhood)<sup>2</sup> penetrates Van Heerden's entire essay. Since the new South Africa is a country in which various cultures coexist, *ubuntu*, for Tutu, is necessary. People with *ubuntu*, according to Tutu, are "generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have" (qtd. in Heerden 45). The specialty of *ubuntu* enables people from different ethnicity to converse in a meaningful way. Moreover, this specialty makes human become truly human (45). However, the new South Africa is a country where, under the depiction of Coetzee, "the great moral vision of *ubuntu* has been lost" (55).

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<sup>1</sup> Tutu was the head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission after apartheid regime. TRC aimed to reveal the violence and injustice during apartheid. The transgressors came forward and revealed their transgressions during apartheid. Once TRC approved of their pleading, the transgressors are granted amnesties.

<sup>2</sup> *Ubuntu* is an ethical concept of southern African origin. "People with *ubuntu*," writes Van Heerden quoting Tutu, "are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have" (Tutu qtd. in 45).

It seems like the mainstream of reading *Disgrace* is through the light of colonial issues. However, this tendency starts to wither. Scholars in studying Coetzee gradually begin to explore the other multiplex issues hidden in the novel. Head (2009), in his insightful monograph, points out that it is because the richness of controversial issues in *Disgrace* makes Coetzee not merely a postcolonial writer (81). Furthermore, David Attwell (2002) directly engages with the social consensus given to the novel. He retorts on ANC's<sup>3</sup> reference of the novel's racism and submission to human rights. The main argument is that ANC's reading of the novel "is *racialized* (emphasis in the original) beyond a level that is warranted in the text of the novel" (333). He suggests that ANC's real intention is not to directly accuse Coetzee of racism but to use him as a celebrity who witnesses the prevalence of White, an intention overtly irrelevant to literature (334). Indeed, *Disgrace* contains racial implications, but readers should not solely discuss the novel via the lens of racial issues. Attwell concludes that the racial issues should be read together with the larger "historical and ethical interpretation" (340).

Unwilling to remain out of the limelight, Attridge (2002), like Head and Attwell, expresses the need to view the novel not merely as a post-colonial work. To begin with, he gives readers a general picture of the novel's reception. Without reservation, he points out that Coetzee undoubtedly "portrays a society in which crime is rampant, the police service is inadequate, and the middle classes are barricaded into their fortress-homes" (315). Consequently, for many, the novel is a negative portrayal of the new South Africa. Yet, the novel continues to receive honors and awards. It is because of these diverse receptions that the novel can be read many times "without losing its capacity to engross page by page, sentence by sentence" (316). He concludes that colonial issue in the novel is only one of its efficacies (320).

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<sup>3</sup> It is an abbreviation for African National Congress. It was the party which took over South Africa after apartheid regime. Nelson Mandela was also one of the members.

The most powerful and persuasive appeal comes from Anton Leist and Peter Singer (2010). They conceive that the time is ripe for a more philosophical reading of Coetzee's writing, and they list three layers of characteristics which make Coetzee's oeuvre philosophical. The characteristics are "reflectivity, paradoxical truth seeking, and ethics of social relationships" (6-8). Reflectivity, according to Leist and Singer, opens up an additional complexity hidden behind the sentences, and that is why readers are hard to grip the important meaning in the text. Moreover, the paradoxical truth seeking renders readers puzzled. In the paradoxical truth seeking, there is always a counterargument to an argument. Not only reflectivity and paradoxical truth-seeking, but ethics of social relationships form a unique philosophical style of writing in Coetzee's world. This characteristic means that "Coetzee observes people under the most socially extreme circumstances of racism and civil war" (8). The three characteristics designate that ethics lies at the bottom of most Coetzee's writing.

With the scholars in studying Coetzee urge a more multi-dimensional reading of the novel, a constellation of continental philosophers is formed through reading the novel in different light. Indeed, the issues included in *Disgrace* seem to be inexhaustible in supply. To begin with, the readers are aware of sexual issues depicted in the novel. This issue certainly cannot escape the scrutiny of Pamela Cooper. Being a feminist scholar, Cooper concerns the novel's portrayal of sexuality (2005). She observes that the term desire has always been ambiguous in Coetzee's fictional world, and under this observation, she argues that Coetzee's reading of sexuality informs his portrayal of contemporary South Africa. Moreover, this reading opens up the possibility to transform beyond human (24). The transformation, in a way, is closely related to the rape incident in the novel. Actually, she situates the reading of the rape as the pivotal part of her essay. From the rape incident, Cooper finds a possibility to transform beyond human. Through the rape incident, she compares Lucy with Leda in the myth. Subsequently, she then boldly asserts that female characters in the novel are the

incarnation of myth goddess. The incarnation, according to Cooper, reveals Coetzee's formulation of juxtaposing post-apartheid South Africa. Just like the situation in new South Africa that the old is still hanging and the new is hard to be born, the human and the animal are held "in a frozen exchange within the aura of the divine" in the novel (Cooper 36).

The notion of power also plays an important part in the novel. One of the scholars who examines how power comes into play is Sue Kossew. Kossew (2003) brings in the notion of power to approach the novel. She tries to link the sexuality performed by the fifty-two-year-old protagonist to his authority/power as a professor. It is because of the loss of authority that links Lurie to his sense of being out of place (157). Furthermore, she observes that, in the novel, the notion of an easy redemption or apology "is made complicated" (160). In order to solve this complication, she suggests that we have to take dogs into consideration. By helping Bev out with dogs, Lurie finds a way to share his disgrace with the dogs (160). One thing to be noted is that Kossew also points out that the setting of novel is South Africa under a turmoil context in which the identities of individuals are "caught between stasis and change" (155).

Cooper and Kossew both mention the peculiar setting of the novel. Noticing this ambivalent setting, Laura Wright proposes an idea of "interregnum" (7) in reading Coetzee's writing dealing with new South Africa. According to Wright (2009), interregnum is the period during which the old and new coexist. This period emerges especially when the ruling class is "no longer leading but only dominant, exercising coercive force alone" (7). During the period, the masses become detached from their original identity. However, the possibility of establishing an entirely new culture underlies in such a circumstance.

In addition, how moral understanding is shaped under this peculiar setting also brings attention to the scholarly circles. Alice Crary (2010) argues that the novel's narrative structure unfolds to an extent that eliminates the "authorial standpoint" and invites readers to imaginatively participate in major characters' experience (255). Through this literary feature,

she suggests, the novel seems to imply that certain “emotional responsiveness” is required before reaching a moral understanding (255). That is to say, by reading the novel, the critic is suggesting a possibility of going beyond reason by experiencing the novel with its narrative strategy.

The approaches mentioned above unfold the fertility of the novel. Yet, the fact that the term “dog-man” is mentioned by Petrus and Lurie again and again cannot be ignored (64, 88, and 129). Could this be the hint that the notion of animality and humanity may take its cue and come into play? The answer to this question is positive, for what continental scholars discover is precisely the implicit relationship between humanity and animality. This relationship, which I will demonstrate in my chapter one, can be scrutinized through Agambenian notion of the anthropological machine.

Ludmila Ommundsen (2002) notices the abundant animal comparisons in the novel. It is because of the various animal comparisons that she discovers the important role played by animal in the novel. She states that Lurie sometimes is propelled by his animal instincts, and this makes Lurie moves “nearer animal life, the primeval state of life” (334). Kerstin Meier (2006) is also conscious of animal comparisons in the novel. She boldly claims that the animals in the novel serve as metaphors. She states that, through the comparison of characters with animals, the “sufferings of human and nonhuman animals are compared” through metaphors (5).

Unlike Ommundsen and Meier, Paul Patton (2004) provides a different dimension to cut into the animality and humanity in *Disgrace*. He first illustrates Deleuzian concept<sup>4</sup> of life by quoting Agamben’s interpretation that life is “a principle of virtual indetermination, in which the vegetative and the animal, the inside and the outside and even the organic and the inorganic . . . cannot be told apart” (Agamben 233). For Deleuze, the idea of

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<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987. Print.

becoming-animal cannot be separated from the concept of life. Becoming-animal is not a matter of imitating animal. On the contrary, the key element in becoming-animal is always a matter of forming “inter-individual assemblage with the real or imagined powers of animal” (106). In other words, the individual has to enter a “zone of proximity” with the animal. Like Deleuzian idea of life, the process of becoming-animal is an immanent process. Patton then proposes a Deleuzian reading of *Disgrace* and argues that Lurie embarks on a transformation of becoming-animal. He suggests that the central protagonist is caught in-between human and animal.

Dianne George regards the dog as a vital trope in the novel. George (2009) discovers a political connection between dogs and humans, and the connection is reinforced by the fear of one another. The connection implies “a political place of privilege or of oppression” (70). According to George, the connection can be applied to various binary relationships, such as sexual politics, racial politics, and species politics. The key concept to connect these politics is fear, and she examines this particular emotion through a close reading of a specific passage about the killing spree held by the three unknown assailants. From the perspective of the three assailants, the dogs are seen as fangs. The dogs exist “to brutalize, to terrorize, to dehumanize, to remind the African of his or her place” (72). The action of killing dogs symbolizes the conquest of fear and the embodiment of upside-down political situation.

The critical essays above nearly grab every essence of the novel. Yet, there are still few questions to solve, particularly in the realm of biopolitics and its relation to post-apartheid South Africa. In his essay, Patton suggests that Lurie is neither animal nor human. However, what Patton fails to recognize is precisely this equivocal figure. If Lurie is in a process of becoming-animal, what exactly is the life status of Lurie in this process? Not only Patton’s argument needs to be taken into consideration, but Ommundsen’s idea of animality and humanity in the novel. She doesn’t probe further into this issue, and her analysis seems to stop abruptly at the surface level. The space left by these critics can be complemented by the



notion of biopolitics. Yet, not many critics observe the biopolitical implication in this groundbreaking novel. In fact, these doubts and questions are best explained through biopolitical notions especially Agambenian theories, for his formulation concerns not only the differentiation between humanity and animality, but life status in extreme situations. A reading of *Disgrace* through Agambenian light provides an alternative interpretation in terms of biopolitical dimension.

### III.

Is it possible that the anthropological machine was at work in post-apartheid South Africa? With the research question in mind, I first examine the context of post-apartheid South Africa and the aftermath of apartheid regime. After apartheid regime collapsed, unfortunately, the racial hatred and oppression are still alive in not only rural areas but also the cities. Julian Kunnie points out insightfully in his monograph that the effect of apartheid system is hard to dissolve especially when the blacks are labeled as savages for almost half a century (ix). The label branded by apartheid regime, in a way, resonates with Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben's concept of anthropological machine in *The Open: Man and Animal*. Anthropological machine, according to Agamben, is a system invented by the Western science and philosophy. The machine constantly differentiates the real human from those figures with the shape of human beings. That is to say, the core idea of this system is an arbitrary one; it excludes the figures without the humanity defined by scientists and philosophers. Through the operation of anthropological machine, the savages are categorized as animals in human shape. Therefore, by applying Agamben's theory of anthropological machine, I aim to argue that, in *Disgrace*, Lurie's racial discourses are deeply affected by the mechanism which decides arbitrarily what man is. How Agamben's theory constitutes the situation of post-apartheid South Africa and how the situation constitutes Lurie's recognition are the pivotal parts of this thesis.

In addition, an Agambenian reading of the novel may shed light on questions which are

left unsolved in critical essays examined above. In fact, what these critical essays propose resonates with Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben's formulation. The concept of "interregnum," in a way, resonates with Agamben's theory of a "zone of indistinction" or a "threshold". The three terms all indicate a status of being held in ambiguity, and it is through this ambiguity that Agamben constructs his theories of anthropological machine, bare life, and state of exception. With these three notions, I wish to suggest that, through the scrutiny of the incidents illustrated in the novel, the concept of state of exception is at work in the polity of post-apartheid South Africa. It is due to the extreme situation produced by state of exception in which law is suspended under certain circumstances that, in new South Africa, violence becomes a normalcy. Under such a circumstance, Lurie, as an old white male, is exposed to arbitrary violence and irreversible abandonment. Therefore, different from those previous critical concerns, my main approach in reading *Disgrace* is that the reference to anthropological machine and the production of bare life are generated by the encroachment of state of exception in a country of uncertainty.

In Chapter One I will start to investigate the racial segregation era before the apartheid regime in South Africa. It is necessary to dive into the segregation era because the policies established during apartheid era are essentially the custom left by the preceding segregation era. After its gaining of power in 1948, the apartheid regime step by step "eliminated every vestige of black participation in the central political system" (Thompson 187). Then, the apartheid government established the central ideas of the system of apartheid that the population of South Africa is consisted of four racial groups - "White, Coloured, Indian, and African" with the White as the *civilized* race (Thompson 190). The policy discloses the most alien otherness opposite to the humanity when the form of life is categorized into a hierarchical categorization. Its monstrous nature, as a result, is closely associated with the mechanism of the anthropological machine, showing that the mechanism created by Western philosophy and science is at work in a context of racial controversies. Racial controversies,

according to Van Der Vlies, are especially obvious in the setting for much of *Disgrace*. The apartheid regime forced the indigenous Xhosa<sup>5</sup> people to move out from their land, and then distributed their dispossessed land to white settlers and farmers. The laceration caused by apartheid system is too deep to be healed within such a short interval. Hence, as Coetzee places a white male who still intermittently alludes to the old days into a context still intimidated by the apartheid system, he places Lurie into a complicity generated by his ethnicity. As a consequence, Lurie continues to produce racial discourses in which the mechanism of anthropological machine is at work.

In Chapter Two, following the logic of Agamben's bare life, the life status of Lurie is examined under the context of post-apartheid South Africa. In the previous chapter, I argue that Lurie constantly refers to the mechanism of anthropological machine. This reference, together with the extreme situation of post-apartheid South Africa, eventually forces Lurie to enter into a state of bare life that is completely exposed to power and politics. According to Agamben, bare life is "life's subjection to a power over death and life's irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment" (1998: 83). Agamben's investigation leads to my argument that Lurie carries a bare life in post-apartheid South Africa. In the novel, Lurie undergoes a series of abandonments. In the first half of the novel, Lurie is cast out of his university for his aberrant sexual relationship with his student. Next, when he reaches Eastern Cape, he confides to an abandoned bulldog named Katy that he feels like "abandoned" (78). Near the end of the novel, Lucy expresses her need to be immersed in peace. However, Lurie is the person who brings turmoil around her. In this episode, it is implicit that Lurie is "part of what" Lucy is prepared to get rid of (208). Still, what remains to be elaborated is the power and politics that Lurie is irreparably exposed to. They are, in fact, caused by the aftermath of apartheid system, just as Agamben discusses the example of how the impact of politics affects his used term bare life. Although the term bare life in Greek originally represents the

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<sup>5</sup> People are speakers of Bantu languages living in south-east South Africa

“simple fact of living common to all living beings,” yet the nature in this term is transformed to a certain kind of life that is completely interwoven with politics (Agamben 1998: 1). In other words, the life of bare life is politicized (Agamben 1998:4). Lurie’s life serves as the embodiment of the trait of politicized bare life.

In the previous chapter, the life status of Lurie is examined. The road we have traversed thus far points out that Lurie’s life is in the midst of this dangerous country. However, the power and politics that Lurie is irreparably exposed to haven’t been explicitly delved into yet. Therefore, the focal point of Chapter Three will be the investigation of the anomic situation where politics and powers are directly tangled up in the very biological lives of South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa. Why does a nation in transition such as post-apartheid South Africa form such an anomic situation? This question is best explained through Agambenian concept of state of exception. In this ambiguous period, the encroachment of state of exception upon the core of the nation is inevitable. The notion of state of exception is concretized in Agamben’s monograph which bears the notion’s namesake. This notion circumscribes a space in which the law is suspended under certain circumstances. Due to the suspension of law, everything that is done in the space can no longer be differentiated. At this point, violence becomes mere fact, which cannot be judged because law is no longer in its position. The situation in post-apartheid South Africa depicted in the novel will be explicitly explicated through the prism of Agambenian notion of exception.

With the biopolitical reading of the novel through Agambenian light, the situation of post-apartheid South Africa unfolds before our eyes. It is due to the encroachment of state of exception that the reference to the mechanism of anthropological machine and the production of bare life are able to function in the new South Africa. In fact, as we will see, the tendency that the “law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension” does not exclusively occur in the new South Africa (Agamben 2005: 3). This tendency is performed,

as Agamben suggests, worldwide. From this perspective, the biopolitical order in *Disgrace* can be seen as the demonstration of what is happening in the world: the atrocious fact that it is possible to “los[e] every legal identity” in this new biopolical epoch (Agamben 2005: 4).

## Chapter One

### Post-Apartheid South Africa, Anthropological Machine, and *Disgrace*

One of the pervasive and morbid phenomena related to the racial hatred in the post-apartheid South Africa is the arbitrary categorization of the blacks. The ideology which labels the blacks as savages and uncivilized creatures still lodges in majority white populations. To further explicate the racial categorization, the anthropological machine is a catalyst which facilitates the understanding of the system. Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in *The Open: Man and Animal*, offers his philosophical exploration of the mechanism. The anthropological machine is not a machine in its literalness. Instead, it is a concept which is “at work in our culture” (37).

The situation in post-apartheid South Africa and Lurie’s attitude presented in *Disgrace* are the accelerators that trigger my intention to read the novel through Agambenian light. In the following analysis of Lurie’s attitude toward blacks in post-apartheid South Africa, I will discuss first the politics of segregation, apartheid, and the situation of post-apartheid South Africa. It is necessary to comprehend the history of segregation and apartheid because, according to Julian Kunnie, South Africa after apartheid system is “still a nightmare of colonial oppression and structural violence that is not anywhere near surrendering power to veritable democratic Black rule” (ix). Next, the concept of anthropological machine<sup>1</sup> will be explicitly illustrated for the further exploration of the novel in the third section. Through the blending of the context of post-apartheid South Africa depicted in the novel and the mechanism, Lurie gradually reveals his Eurocentric attitude. By illustrating a white male still possesses the yearning for the old time, Coetzee further embeds the complex racial issue in the make-up of

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<sup>1</sup> Since biopolitics deals with life, it inevitably, to some extent, converges with colonial issues. Consequently, it touches with racial issue, too. Therefore, my analysis in chapter one certainly contains some element of racial discrimination. Yet, I further look into the essence of this discrimination. By analyzing the mechanism lurking underneath the racial discrimination, the linkage between the critique of racial discrimination and Agamben’s notion of anthropological machine is maintained.

the novel. Lurie is thus established through such ambivalent racial strife. With a white male “deemed representative of whites’ attitudes to race in the new South Africa,” *Disgrace* inevitably invites the interpretation of racism to come into play (Poyner “Positioning the Writer” 1). Therefore, bearing the colonial reading of the novel in mind, how does the political legacy affect the ideology of Lurie will be demonstrated following Agamben’s logic.

### I. South Africa: A Historical Survey from Segregation to Post-apartheid

In order to suggest that the mechanism anthropological machine is at work in the central character David Lurie, the comprehension of the atrocious situation in post-apartheid South Africa and its precedent segregation is required. As Coetzee reflects in his *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*:

If there is an orthodoxy among historians of apartheid today, it is that apartheid was not different in nature from the policies and practices of segregation that preceded it; furthermore, that apartheid legislation was a by no means irrational response to social developments which threatened the expectations of Afrikaners and the privilege of white South Africans in general. (163)

To distill the main idea of Coetzee’s reflection, we can turn to the briefer description in *A History of South Africa* by Leonard Thompson. The monograph, arranged in a chronological order, offers similar perspectives to those of Coetzee’s. According to Thompson, the legislation of apartheid “coordinated and extended the racial laws of the segregation era and tightened up the administration of those laws” (189).

Thompson’s monograph provides a panoramic understanding throughout present South Africa. To begin with, the segregation era, from about 1910 to 1948, sketches the contour for the apartheid system (Thompson 154). In this period, due to the economical stability, the descents of Dutch conquerors gradually free themselves from the status of poverty, and consequently, are able to rival with English-speaking whites. The competition between two

white camps inevitably suppresses the indigenous black people. On the one hand, the two camps monopolize the economy. On the other hand, ironically, this total monopoly is built upon the black labor forces. The whites can sit in their living rooms comfortably, while the blacks have to sweat and labor. It is under this context that the impression which blacks are inferior to whites is established.

For the whites, it is not enough to simply tame the blacks. The government subsequently establishes various discriminative and arbitrary laws to regulate the blacks. One of the most influential laws is the act which “[prohibits] Africans from purchasing or leasing land outside the reserves from people who were not Africans” called “The Native Land Act” (163). Soil is the most important factor in terms of agriculture, and the deprivation of the land means to deprive the economical income of African peasants. After the inauguration of The Native Land Act, the situation only becomes worse. The government realizes that the stimulation of economic growth needs as much land as possible. Hence, the organization headed by whites named “South African Native Trust” is formed (163). The purpose of this organization is to purchase land from Africans using the “funds provided by Parliament” legally (163). These laws cut down land which is originally owned by Africans, and force the landless Africans to change their residences. Africans are forced to move into the land reserved for them called the “Homelands” (164). After being dumped into Homelands, Africans can rely on nobody but themselves. For the government, the residents in Homelands are invisible. It does not even construct the infrastructure such as roads for Africans (164). On the contrary, it conceives strategies to help whites gain more land from Africans and provides massive assistance in raising the level of white farming industry.

As a matter of consequence, black peasantry gradually falls apart. It leads to the phenomenon that “almost every African man with a home in a reserve [goes] out to work on a white farm or in a white town at some stage in his life” (164). What is more segregate is that the government’s restriction to limit Africans flood into white cities. Africans have to acquire



“passes” in order to stay in white cities and earn livings provided by whites (165).

Furthermore, if the Africans are hired by white farmers and they wish to leave, they have to obtain “Document of Identification” from their masters as well (166). In fact, the restrictive laws established during segregation era are all concerned about the interest of whites. Take the prosperous mining industry which also contributes to the boost of economy in South Africa for example, the white miners are protected by “Mines and Works Act” (167). Only white miners can occupy managing positions, while the African workers are exposed under severe working environments.

From the situation in mining industry, we can have a glimpse of the core of legislation in segregation era. The government at that time devotes itself in establishing “the racial structure of industry” (169). The rivalry between Afrikaners<sup>2</sup> and English speaking whites in economy marginalizes Africans. Through their competitions, the two camps become wealthier and wealthier. Yet, Africans inevitably become poorer and poorer. In fact, the economical condition of Africans only becomes worse and worse. Following the Mines and Works Act, the government passes “The Apprenticeship Act” (169). The positions of white-collar white workers are further solidified via this act. The act regulates a heredity-like system in which the skills required in managing positions are exclusively circulated within whites. In this sense, the door for Africans to become equal with whites is completely closed. Without the required skills for various occupations, the sole choice left for Africans is labor. The government does not even pay attention to African labors. It inaugurates “The Industrial Conciliation Act” which “excludes the African from the definition of employees” (169). In this way, only the skilled white workers match the quality of being called employees. This act deprives Africans of their rights to negotiate or even strike for a better remuneration, for the laws which aim to protect the rights of hired labors cannot be applied to these non-employees.

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<sup>2</sup> “During the Dutch period,” writes Thompson, “Dutch-speakers themselves had begun to use the word *Afrikaner* . . . We shall employ the word *Afrikaner*, which gradually gained in popularity and became the universally recognized label in the twentieth century” (56).

Furthermore, since the Africans are excluded from the criterion of employees, the conversation between the labor and the management is the conversation between white employees and white employers. That is to say, Africans are voiceless. It is whites who have the authority to decide the fate of Africans.

As Afrikaners and English-speaking whites continue to rival with each other, the burst of the World War II marks the turning point of this competition. When the crucial moment for South Africa to decide whether to stand with Britain or not comes, it is the Afrikaners who think differently with most of the English-speaking whites (183). More than half of the army of South Africa consists of Afrikaners, and this gesture foreshadows the rise of “Afrikaner Nationalism” (177). Through the decisive incident, the Afrikaners around the country are united. On the one hand, the Afrikaner political party stresses the importance of ethnicity. On the other hand, it renounces the current government by stating that “the preservation of the pure race tradition must be protected at all costs in all possible ways as a holy pledge entrusted to us by our ancestors as part of God’s plan with our People” (184). This claim more or less sketches the contour for the forthcoming apartheid system. Afrikaners deem that the present racial segregation is not sufficient. Indeed, the current laws related to racial segregation emphasize more on the economical benefits of whites. Afrikaners recognize that the primary objective is to “maintain white supremacy and the ‘purity’ of the white race.” (185) This appeal successfully wins the hearts of majority whites, for the opponent party proposes the abolishment of population control of Africans in cities (186). Under such circumstance, it is hard for Afrikaners to lose the election in 1948. Without a doubt, the Afrikaners officially take over the parliament and set about the contentious apartheid<sup>3</sup> system.

From 1948 to 1994, apartheid system establishes arbitrary laws which include black

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<sup>3</sup> It is a “coined word that Afrikaner intellectuals had begun to use in the 1930s”, and its literal meaning is “apartness” (186).

population into the sphere of state jurisdiction yet simultaneously exclude them from obtaining equal status with white population. Thompson rightly illustrates the theoretical framework of apartheid system by pointing out that

At the heart of the apartheid system were four ideas. First, the population of South Africa comprised four "racial groups"—White, Coloured, Indian, and African—each with its own inherent culture. Second, Whites, as the civilized race, were entitled to have absolute control over the state. Third, white interests should prevail over black interests; the state was not obliged to provide equal facilities for the subordinate races. Fourth, the white racial group formed a single nation, with Afrikaans- and English-speaking components, while Africans belonged to several (eventually ten) distinct nations or potential nations—a formula that made the white nation the largest in the country. (190)

With these central ideas, it goes without saying that the apartheid system embarks on racial separateness far more full-scale than its predecessor. Since the whites are the only civilized ethnic group, the managing occupations are all reserved for whites, especially for Afrikaners. The government “Afrikanerize[s] every state institution, appointing Afrikaners to senior as well as junior positions in the civil service, army, police, and state corporations” (188).

Apartheid regime continues to establish racial laws. Among the numerous restrictive racial laws, “The Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Act” and the “Immorality Act” stand out as the most influential laws (190). The meaning of the first act can be easily apprehended by its name. It proclaims in writing that the marriages between whites and blacks are prohibited. As to the second act, it is about the sexual relationship between different ethnic groups. Since the marriages between whites and blacks are prohibited, the sexual relationships certainly cannot be allowed. Thus, the second act classifies that the sexual behaviors between different ethnicities are illegal (190). As the two acts set off, the racial gap between whites and blacks is further consolidated. Without marriages and sexual behaviors, the mixed blood offspring

will never be born. In this way, the boundary between whites and blacks will not be blurred by the mixed blood children.

Using these two acts as the foundation stones, the tentacles of apartheid system extend to every aspect of Africans' daily lives. The mass media are controlled by the government to block the information from leaking out to Africans in different regions (200). The apartheid government disallows the risk of black resistances, and the best solution to prevent resistances from brewing is to seal the information of how their black siblings are being treated. Without the fear of disturbance in the rear, the system intensifies its effort to subordinate Africans. One typical case is the "health of the different sections of the South African population" (202). The medical treatment received by blacks is way below the standard. Africans can only register at the local hospitals, and it is normal for them to wait in line nearly half a day for the shabby hospitals can only afford one doctor. On the contrary, the general hospitals are exclusively for white patients. They enjoy the medical treatment with the finest quality, and they are tended carefully by white doctors (203).

Although the apartheid regime continues to establish racial legislation, the foundation of this system begins to shake "by 1978" (221). From 1978 onward, the apartheid system not only has to deal with the external affairs but also the internal strife. On the external aspect, the boycotts and sanctions inaugurated by nations against apartheid system prove to be effective (234). On the internal aspect, the inflation begins to lash South Africa. It is difficult to imagine the enormous expenditure which caused by maintaining the apartheid system (221). The apartheid government is now treading on thin ice, for the system gradually reveals its potential threat to the whites, that is, the rapid increase of the black population (221). From the very beginning, the amount of indigenous Africans surpasses the Dutch and the European. Since the colonizers are from the outside, the colonized certainly has its advantage in terms of population. Furthermore, as long as they possess the advantage of population, Africans' birthrates surpass whites' as well. The chemistry of this tendency starts to emerge in

the mid-1970s. With the superiority of population over whites, violent resistances attempt to subverting apartheid regime emerge from every corner of the country (228). By 1986, it was estimated that

The number of recorded insurgency attacks rose to 136, the recorded death toll in political violence to 879. There were also 390 strikes involving 240,000 workers... By that time, the formal machinery of local government had broken down in parts of the black townships. Fearing for their lives, many black councillors had resigned and informal groups had assumed control. (229)

Facing the external and the internal crises, it is time for the apartheid regime to come up with some possible solutions. The most direct and workable solution is to get in touch with the black iconic figure—Nelson Mandela.<sup>4</sup>

At first, members from the two camps do not favor the negotiation. On the one hand, the Africans are afraid of the possibility of conspiracy. They fear that Mandela may sacrifice the benefits of Africans in order to have a common consensus with apartheid government (247). On the other hand, although the whites are not worry about their government, they refuse to relinquish their power easily. In the apartheid society, the whites are people with vested interests. Protected by racial laws, they enjoy the resources provided by apartheid government. Besides, how can the whites imagine a state which is governed by Africans, the uncivilized creatures that have to be separated from them? Due to the uncomfortableness of the two camps, violent resistances and bloody suppressions take turns to put on the stage. Finally, the leaders of the two camps both recognize that South Africa will disintegrate and decompose if the bloody conflicts continue to explode. The apartheid regime and the black leader come to an agreement that an “interim constitution” will be written until the election in 1994 (252).

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<sup>4</sup> For more details about Mandela, please refer to Cottrell, Robert C. *South Africa: A State of Apartheid*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2005. Print.

The outcome of the election in 1994 is predictable. The apartheid regime proves to be bankrupt in both international aspects and domestic aspects. Mandela's elective team successfully invites the "Americans who had assisted Bill Clinton in his 1992 presidential campaign in the United States" as the counselors (263). This reinforcement from America collaterally signals that it is Mandela's side which gains the support from America, not the apartheid regime. As to the domestic aspect, the bloody conflicts between anti-apartheid parties and apartheid regime erode the core of apartheid system. The government can no longer hold the tide of democracy, and it risks South Africa on the verge of anarchy (254). Under such extreme circumstance, a small number of whites who originally support the apartheid government begin to shift their grounds. Due to these factors, ANC<sup>5</sup> wins a sweeping victory. According to Thompson, the ANC wins "62.65 percent of the votes and 252 seats in the National Assembly" (264). With such a dominant presence in the congress, Mandela becomes the first South Africa president (264).

Mandela's priorities are, obviously, the reconstruction of this devastated country and the reconciliation between the whites and the blacks. To reconcile the ethnic groups in the new South Africa, he recognizes that it is necessary to confront the violent conflicts in the past. In this regard, he urges the parliament to establish "Truth and Reconciliation Commission"<sup>6</sup> with "Archbishop Desmond Tutu" as the leader (275). With the newly elected president, South Africa ought to immerse in a delighted atmosphere. However, the hatred between the whites and the blacks is too deep to be healed. Mandela himself acknowledges the difficulty of healing by stating that "the wounds of the period of repression and resistance are too deep to have been healed by the TRC alone" (Mandela qtd. in Cottrell 118). In fact,

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<sup>5</sup> It is an abbreviation for African National Congress. It was the party which took over South Africa after apartheid regime. Nelson Mandela was also one of the members (Thompson 156).

<sup>6</sup> The ultimate function of the commission is the grant of "amnesty" (Thompson 275). "Its mandate was," writes Thompson, "to deal with gross human rights violations. . . Unlike some of the foreign precedents, the TRC was to meet in public and was empowered to subpoena witnesses and to grant individual amnesties on the above conditions" (275).

the new South Africa is a violent society in which the racial hatred and social oppression still exist.

The situation in post-apartheid South Africa is by no means a “rainbow nation” claimed by Mandela (Mandela qtd. in Meskell 176). As the dominant group for nearly one century, the whites dominate the entire country. When the new government takes over the country, this tendency continues to pervade South Africa. The whites are well-educated and they hold significant positions in every social domain. The whites control “the judiciary, bureaucracy, army, police force, and municipal administrations” (Thompson 265). Furthermore, the majority whites still yearn for the apartheid system. After all, who would not miss the system which protects and guarantees their living conditions? On the contrary, the majority Africans live in shabby houses without electricity and water supply. The biggest difference between the whites and the blacks is education (266). On the one hand, the whites are elites in the society. They receive the finest education conducted by white professors. On the other hand, the blacks can only attend local schools. In the apartheid society, the blacks are always inferior to whites. Hence, they do not need education. The sole education they need is to be educated as the loyal servants of whites. To further dismantle the disparity between the whites and the blacks, here is a record of a census conducted in 1996:

According to the 1996 census, 46 percent of the African population, more than fourteen million people, were under twenty years old. Many of these young people were raised in families with high rates of divorce, teenage pregnancy, and children born outside of marriage. With that background, millions of youths were socialized in lawless gangs, which contributed to the rampant crime that was a hallmark of the society. (266-67)

The census not only dismantles the condition of Africans but also reveals one of the crucial and cruel facts of the new South Africa, that is, the rampant crime. Africans murder whites in isolated farms and “rural areas, which [are] essentially untouched by the symbolic changes of

the post-apartheid dispensation” (Kunnie 46). In return, the whites continue to despise Africans “throughout the Mandela presidency and beyond” (Thompson 273). The material condition of Africans is also without significant improvement. The new government cannot meet the demands of majority Africans since the substantial power is still in the hands of whites. In the post-apartheid society, the whites and the blacks continue to engage in serious conflicts. Near the end of his monograph, Thompson undisguisedly points out that “racism survives in the new South Africa” (287). Such ironic remark suitably notes the setting and the context of *Disgrace*.

## II. Anthropological Machine

The concept of the anthropological machine occurs in Agamben’s monograph *The Open: Man and Animal*. In exploring the idea, he first examines ancient miniatures in a Hebrew Bible which is preserved in a library in Milan (1). In those paintings, the painters seem to suggest the inevitable combination of human and animal through depicting figures with human bodies and animal heads (2). Seeing these bizarre figures, he boldly hypothesizes that “the artist of the manuscript in the Ambrosian intended to suggest that on the last day, the relations between animals and men will take on a new form, and that man himself will be reconciled with his animal nature” (3). From this hypothesis, he not only designates his purpose in this brief monograph but also the subjects which he is going to deal with: in the pages that follow, he is going to investigate the ideas of humanity and animality, not the relationship between human beings and animals in its literariness.

To further probe into the idea of humanity and animality, he returns to Alexandre Kojève’s essays about “the problem of man’s becoming animal” (9). For Kojève, if the becoming takes place, men would

construct their edifices and works of arts as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and



cicadas, would play as young animals play, and would indulge in love like adult beasts... One would have to say that post-historical animals of the species *Homo sapiens* will be *content* as a result of their artistic, erotic, and playful behavior, inasmuch as, by definition, they will be contented with it. (Kojève qtd. in Agamben 9)

This passage is worth reflecting upon, for it dismantles several “theoretical implications” (11). Kojève’s idea reveals that there is a “fringe” between humanity and animality (12). The fringe is, to Agamben, “a field of dialectical tensions” in which the animality and humanity of man are separated time and again (12). Moreover, this fringe underscores a crucial fact that serves for his further development of the central idea of the anthropological machine in this work. In the quoted passage above, although the behaviors of the animal-becoming men are illustrated, Kojève implies that those animal-like behaviors are still performed by man. This “man’s remaining human” indicates that the animality within human is still preserved by the animal-becoming men, and the animality serves as the foundation stone for the animal-becoming men to inaugurate animal-like behaviors (12).

It is the preservation of the animality that triggers the philosopher to conceive the exact relationship between humanity and animality. How does animality and humanity within human body interact with each other in this biopolitical epoch deduced by Michel Foucault? Seeing this unresolved question, he embarks on a philosophical, historical, and scientific research of the correlation. Philosophically, he invokes Aristotle’s idea of living to suggest a labeling system lurking inside the correlation.

Now this term “to live” has more than one sense, and provided any one alone of these is found in a thing we say that the thing is living—viz. thinking, sensation, local movement and rest, or movement in the sense of nutrition, decay and growth. Hence we think of all species of plants also as living, for they are observed to possess in themselves a principle and potentiality through which

they grow and decay in opposite directions... Thus, it is through this principle that life belongs to living things... (Aristotle qtd. in Agamben 13)

In the sense of living, Aristotle attributes the plants as living beings to their nutritive functions. The decisive implication lies underneath Aristotle's formula is that, by erecting a formula related to the categorical mechanism, the formulation "consists in reformulating every question concerning 'what something is' as a question concerning 'through what something belongs to another thing'" (14). In other words, the essential quality of something is labeled by the thing which can attribute its specific and essential quality to this something. Take Aristotle's plants for example, we regard plants as living things due to its nutritive functions. Yet, through his formula, what we think of plants does not possess significance anymore. What is at stake here is the fact that plants are equipped with the nutritive functions which are capable of being recruited into the domain of living things. That is to say, to assert something is living, a basis is needed. In this regard, the nutritive function serves as "the foundation by which living belongs to this being" (14).

The principle conceived by Aristotle can be applied to the life of man. It is Marie François Xavier Bichat who adopts Aristotelian principle in differentiating "animal life" and "organic life" (14). According to Bichat, these two lives, as the nutritive functions of the plants, are the essential qualities of man. On the one hand, the organic life mainly refers to the biological functions of the body. On the other hand, the animal life refers to, contrary to the organic life which indicates the biological functions within the body, body's relation to the outside, to the environment it is in (14-15). Here, the same formula which isolates the nutritive function of the plants is at work in Bichat's conception. Both lives are "separated and divided" as the essential conditions which serve as the foundation to reach the standard of living (14). In other words, just like the nutritive function of the plants, it is through these two lives that, under this principle, man is bestowed the trait of living. Hence, the philosopher concludes that

The division of life into vegetal and relational, organic and animal, animal and human, therefore passes first of all as a mobile border within living man, and without this intimate caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible. It is possible to oppose man to other living things, and at the same time to recognize the complex—and not always edifying—economy of relations between men and animals, only because something like an animal life has been separated within man, only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closet and most intimate place. (15-16)

In the traditional Aristotelian principle, the essential quality of something is distilled as the elemental necessary condition. Through this particular element, the original something can be entitled a brand-new identity according to the trait of the separated element. In Bichat's case, the body of man is divided into the organic life and the animal life, and the two lives are the essential conditions for man to be described as living. To this extent, it is as if man, as the philosopher reflects, is “always the place—and, at the same time, the result—of ceaseless divisions and caesurae” (16). Within this caesura a threshold-like boundary continues to oscillate through the redefinition of the intrinsic quality of human from the intrinsic quality of animal. Moreover, this caesura seems to suggest that “‘man’ can be decided upon and produced.” (21)

In the research of the relationship between animality and humanity, Agamben embarks on a philosophical, scientific, and historical investigation. The philosophical dimension of the issue has been discussed in the previous paragraphs. In the domain of scientific research, he invokes the Swedish zoologist Carl Linnaeus's difficulty when trying to distinguish the difference between apes and man in his groundbreaking writing *Man's Cousins* (23). It seems that the only difference, from the point of view of a naturalist, is the apes have “an empty space between their canines and their other teeth” (Linnaeus qtd. in Agamben 24). Linnaeus

is not the only intellect who undergoes the difficulty of differentiating the physical difference between human and primate. Nicolas Tulp, Peter Artedi, and John Locke share his difficulty (24). These thinkers, whether they are philosophers or scientists, all tries to distinguish the various forms of life and especially to determine what exactly constitutes the life of human. However, in 1699, the British physician Edward Tyson issued a treatise titled *The Anatomy of a Pygmie* (25). One thing to be noted in the treatise is that the term Pygmie. This name, for Tyson, represents an “intermediate animal” between man and ape (25). The contribution of Tyson’s treatise is that it provides a chance to glance at the predicament that “the boundaries of the human were still threatened not only by real animals but also by creatures from mythology” (25). For Tyson, the Pygmie is “the Cynocephali, the Satyrs, and Sphinges of the Ancients” (25). The three terms all refer to mythological figures.

Linnaeus not only expresses his difficulty in *Man’s Cousins*, but also in placing “man among the primates” with the generic name *Homo* (25). This naming is uncommon in the taxonomy, and it constitutes an ironic and abnormal categorization. Normally, he always records the other species with specific characteristics next to the generic names. However, in the naming of man, he merely adds the word *sapiens* as the identifying characteristic (25). The definition of the word *sapiens* is, according to Agamben, an “old philosophical adage: *nosce te ipsum* [know yourself]” (25). Why does Linnaeus assign a characteristic which does not represent a specific trait to man? Noticing this, Agamben arouses the need to reflect upon this “taxonomic anomaly” (25). He then quotes Linnaeus’s maxim that “man has no specific identity other than the ability to recognize himself...*man is the animal that must recognize itself as human to be human* [sic]” (26). This maxim is the best medium to grasp the reason Linnaeus assigns the epithet *sapiens* to the species *Homo*. Linnaeus’s gesture of adding a term without particular specialty in describing man signifies that man has no significant characteristic in terms of biological traits comparing to animal. Therefore, the term “*Homo sapiens*, then, is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance” (26). Rather, it is an empty

phrase which implies that man recognizes himself as man only in confronting other animals. To put it in Agamben's words, the term is "a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human" (26). In the process of recognition, the ability of seeing is the essential requirement. Consequently, this device is also an "optical" machine in which man, using his sole "*ability to recognize himself,*" isolates figures that he deems without the resembling features from the territory of man after seeing them (26-27). Here, the same principle which governs the status of plants and Bichat's two lives within man gradually emerges. The animal differentiated by man, through the process of the differentiation, is transformed into the essential condition of becoming man. If we follow the Aristotelian formula, and the whole equation will look like this: it is through the differentiation and psychological divided animal that the species *Homo sapiens* belongs to the domain of man. The animal is served as the building block for man to construct the ivory tower which confines the animal, and the animal recognized different from man is labeled as "non-man" (27). The profound meaning of the epithet *sapiens* assigned by Linnaeus is at once dismantled: man is the species, as Nathan Van Camp rightly suggests, that "has no defining characteristic except for the fact that he *knows* that he is human" (4). Having come this far, the connection between the scientific investigation and the philosophical exploration is connected.

As to the historical domain of the investigation, he turns to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Ernst Haeckel (29, 33). For Pico, the optical machine is a device which suspends *Homo* between "a celestial and a terrestrial nature, between animal and human—and, thus, his being always less and more than himself" (29). *Homo* is stuck in a zone between human and animal inside the device, and he can choose either to degenerate into the lower things or regenerate into higher things (29-30). Pico's idea illustrates the same ironic machine in Linnaeus's formulation. With the term *Homo sapiens*, Linnaeus deliberately embeds the idea that man is a featureless creature that can be cultivated in this naming gesture. This concept can be observed from his writing that man, from infancy to adulthood,

has to learn how to sustain his biological needs (26). To put their notion in a more vernacular way, man is like a white sheet which blends with colors (e.g. everything he needs to know in order to fulfill his biological needs) ceaselessly. What Pico and Linnaeus discover is the uncertainty of man, an uncertainty that will irremediably put man into a difficulty of drawing the line between humanity and animality.

Both Pico and Linnaeus recognize that the ability of man is acquired. However, Haeckel's hypothesis appears to leave the necessity of acquirement out of consideration. His hypothesis in his *Anthropogenie* that there exist a peculiar being without the ability of speaking, which he calls "ape-man" in the development from "the anthropoid apes (or man-apes) to man," elicits Agamben's interest (34). What Haeckel fails to perceive is exactly that, in this hypothesis, his subtraction of language as the trait of ape-man is problematic. It is a problem which places language as the innate ability of human instead of a "historical production" (36). The implicit problem and also a contradiction in Haeckel's formulation, to be more precise, is that, by presuming a figure without speech, he already creates a speaking man who is already presupposed there waiting to be differentiated from ape-man and man-ape (36). Again, the Aristotelian principle seems to lurk underneath Haeckel's hypothesis. This time, the "ape-man" and the "anthropoid apes" are transformed into the essential conditions for the species *Homo sapiens* to be entitled the name man. The "ape-man" and "anthropoid apes" are isolated as two foundational elements, and their sole function is to serve as the optical prisms, the prisms which, when *Homo sapiens* confronting them, only reflect the idea that he is different from them. To put it into Aristotelian formula, it is through "ape-man" and "anthropoid apes" that *Homo sapiens* is able to recognize himself as man. Through the scrutiny of the archetypal principle, Haeckel's hypothesis reveals how our concept of the human depends on our understanding of anthropoid animal.

Up to the present, the investigations in terms of the domains of philosophy, science, and history inaugurated by the philosopher are explicated. These investigations all point to

the same suggestion, namely, the essence of man “*cannot be defined, yet, precisely for this reason, must be ceaselessly articulated and divided*” (13). Man thus finds himself stuck in this ceaseless update. He is “capable of mastering and, eventually, destroying his own animality” (14). This gesture of mastering animality may lead to his being entitled the name man. Or, on the contrary, his animality may emerge from within, and this will eventually lead to his being labeled as animal. Yet, the questions remain unsolved. What is the mechanical essence of this optical machine? Furthermore, who or what is in control of the right to decide what should be separated and divided? According to Agamben, the mechanical essence of this “anthropological machine” (since the machine is related to the evolutionary history of man) has “two variants” (37).

On the one hand, we have the anthropological machine of the moderns. As we have seen, it functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human... The machine of earlier times works in an exactly symmetrical way. If, in the machine of the moderns, the outside is produced by animalizing the human, here the inside is obtained through the inclusion of an outside, and the non-man is produced by the humanization of an animal. (37)

The machine is like a monstrous two-way mechanism which simultaneously excludes and includes both ape-man and man-ape. On the one way, the machine devours ape-man and man-ape. On the other way, the machine throws up what it has already devoured. The rationale of this machine, in fact, is an endless cycle in which the animalization of man and the humanization of animal simultaneously take place (37).

Several exemplary figures are provided to serve as the representatives that are categorized by the mechanism. Agamben indicates that “the slave, the barbarian, and the foreigner” are the products of the earlier machine (37). As to the products of the modern machine, he mentions the “ape-man, the Jew, and the overcomatose person” (37). On the one

hand, the mechanism excludes the “ape-man, the Jew and the overcomatose person” with the similar appearance of human but without the humanity defined by philosophy, science, and history. On the other hand, it includes figures which are considered intrinsically inferior to human, namely, “the slave, the barbarian, and the foreigner” with the traits of animality, and seeks ways to elevate the animality within them to the criterion of humanity. These figures are all recognized as the animals “in human form” (37). In other words, it is through these figures that man can identify himself as man. Once again, we are reminded of the principle originated in Aristotle’s idea of living. What at work here is the same principle in the philosophical, scientific, and historical investigations. These products are differentiated as the essential elements for the featureless *Homo sapiens* to recognize himself as man. Looking at these figures, man self-righteously recognizes that they are of different species from him. For example, the Jew, who is described as “the non-man produced within the man” by Agamben, is differentiated by Nazi Germany (37). Under this differentiation, the Jew is excluded from the domain of human, and the exclusion justifies the cruel treatment imposed on them. Through the differentiation, not only the massacre is justified, but the recognition of majority German as man is complete.

How does this anthropological machine operate has been explicated. Nevertheless, who or what authorize this operation is still puzzled. Since the archetypal principle can be dated back to the Aristotelian tradition and its successors from various fields, we may boldly assume that what manipulate the operation is the accumulation of philosophy, science, and history. We may even go beyond this assumption by claiming that it is purely the decision of man that propels this operation. Indeed, what Agamben tries to do is to suggest that this operation has something to do with politics. After delineating the mechanism of the machine, he adds that in the midst of the machine a vacant space exists (38). This vacant space



incorporates a “zone of indifference”,<sup>7</sup> and it is the switch for this machine to turn on (37). The zone of indifference is a foundation-like zone in the machine, and it is a threshold in which the true human dwells (38). Furthermore, it is the birthplace of “the articulation between human and animal, man and non-man, speaking being and living being” (38). However, this zone is constantly vacant. It is always empty because the genuine human who should be there is only a ceaseless renewal decision decided by man (38). This seemingly conclusive statement seems to suggest that the concept is a political issue. In the second half of the monograph, he provides another seemingly conclusive statement which reveals his intention to pinpoint the notion as the political issue. He says that “the decisive political conflict... is that between the animality and the humanity of man” (80). He is aware of the human beings’ capacity to speak, for he recognizes the problem in the hypothesis that language as an innate ability raised by Haeckel (34). Human has the capacity to speak and is, therefore, capable of drawing the boundary between human and animal under various circumstances. He can articulate the definition of animality and humanity through his ability of speech as he wishes. As Pico eloquently orates that

[man] may shape [himself] into whatever form [he prefers]. [He] can degenerate into the lower things, which are brutes; [he] can regenerate, in accordance with [his] soul’s decision, into the higher things, which are divine. (Pico qtd. in Agamben 29-30)

It is necessary to recognize that the boundary between human and animal is articulated through political attempts time and again (13). Finally, the veils of the machine’s mechanical essence and its origin have been dismantled. Originated in Aristotle’s idea of life, the definition of humanity and animality is defined and redefined through the will of man. It is

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<sup>7</sup> As we will see, this notion in fact serves as the pivot in the Agambenian theories mentioned in this thesis. To make a long story short, the central idea of this zone is indeterminacy. As long as the indeterminacy functions, the differentiation of man and non-man will be ceaselessly updated. Through the interplay of science, politics, and history, the anthropological machine creates a space in which the concept of indeterminacy prevails.

man himself draws the line between these two characteristics. The line he draws will never stop redrawing, for the decision of what is animal and what is man will shift as the macro-circumstance changes. He self-righteously isolates things that lack the traits of humanity, which is also defined by man himself, and gives those things the name animal. Through these isolated elements, he can proudly claim that his name is man. All in all, the authority to define the question what is man or what is animal belongs to the species *Homo sapiens*, the species without significant characteristics except the fact that he can either break or establish the boundary between humanity and animality.

### III. Looking Back: Lurie's Anthropological Interest in *Disgrace*

Lurie once suspects that the real truth about the assault in Lucy's smallholding tends to be "anthropological" (118). Although, as a scholar specializes in Romantic poetry, he deems the suspicion has to take months of patience to interpret it, the concept of the anthropological machine may provide a useful interpretation. Built under the suggestion that it is a political notion and that it encompasses a "zone of indifference" in which the identity is constantly updated and produced, the mechanism is second to none in exploring Lurie's suspicion. In this section, I aim to suggest that what makes Lurie come up with the word "anthropological" is the legacy of apartheid system. Three years after the apartheid regime collapses, the racial strife still puzzles the new South Africa. Being an old white male, the white supremacy is still rooted deeply inside him. He constantly alludes to the old days, and he never stops producing his racial discourses throughout the novel. This tendency, I propose, has to be explicated with the racial categorization and discrimination in the Agambenian machine.

The novel, as David Attwell suggests, invites "suspicions of racism," especially in its setting of post-apartheid South Africa and its portrayal of atrocious invasion (2002: 332). By illustrating the malicious incident, the novel directly engages with post-apartheid South Africa (Head *The Cambridge Introduction* 77). Furthermore, these portrayals provide the

ideal framework to justify racially oppressive and discriminatory social tensions still exist in a state of “violence and racial discrimination” (Van Der Vlies 7). The idea of discrimination emerges particularly under the production of identities, that is, the operation of anthropological machine (Benjamin 82). Discrimination is an accompanied malice when identifying human, not necessarily from different ethnic groups, as animal without human essence. In discriminating human, the link of “individuation” and determination is connected (Benjamin 82). For example, the apartheid system determines to mark the black population as intrinsically inferior to whites. This mark constructs the distinction between “the marked and the unmarked,” namely, the blacks and the whites (Benjamin 82). It is because the apartheid regime considers the black populations as uncivilized ethnic groups that the idea of discrimination inevitably comes into play. The idea of discrimination serves as the intermediate material for the apartheid regime to construct a bridge which inaugurates the transportation from determination to individuation. Via discrimination, the regime can righteously determine the individualities of blacks as inferiority. Besides, to maintain the black-and-white distinction, the idea of discrimination has to be firmly rooted in the self-constructed leading groups while simultaneously remain mobile. The mobility here signifies that there will be new productions under different circumstances. Furthermore, mobility alludes to the possibility that the idea of discrimination could be carried within individual who belongs to the same dominant groups. It is an ideology cultivated and imprinted within the members of leading community.

Being educated and brought up under apartheid ideology, Lurie, a fifty-two-year-old “old-fashioned professor,” as his daughter Lucy put it, is deeply entangled with the apartheid ideology (91). He was born in 1945, and this indicates that for the most part of his life, since the apartheid regime came to power in 1948, his thinking and “temperament is fixed” by apartheid (2). Moreover, as the anonymous narrator in the novel suggests, he is too old for change (2). As a professor, he earns his living in “Cape Technical University, formerly Cape

Town University College” (3). From the contour given by the narrator about his role as an academic, we may recognize that Lurie is not used to the change in the new South Africa:

Once a professor of modern languages, he has been, since Classics and Modern Languages were closed down as part of the great rationalization, adjunct professor of communications...He has never been much of a teacher; in this transformed and, to his mind, emasculated institution of learning he is more out of place than ever. But then so are other of his colleagues from the old days, burdened with upbringings inappropriate to the tasks they are set to perform; clerks in a post-religious age. (3-4)

The change of the name of the university delineates a “global phenomenon of the end of the twentieth century,” (Attridge *Age of Bronze* 166) a global phenomenon which encompasses a continuing global “devaluation of the Arts” (Poyner “Truth and Reconciliation in *Disgrace*” 152). It signifies that, once a professor specialized in modern languages, Lurie is forced to offer practical courses such as “Communication Skills” and “Advanced Communication Skills” in order to reluctantly follow this global phenomenon (3). In this aspect, the democratic system and the apartheid regime are without any significant differences (*Age of Bronze* 166). The change of ideology indeed makes Lurie an uncomfortable misfit, as he confesses to his daughter that he is “no great shakes as a teacher” and that he is having less and less intimate relationships with his students (63).

Lurie is “out of touch, out of date” (13). This tendency is mentioned by the anonymous narrator and Lurie himself time and again throughout the entire novel. At the very beginning of the novel, we are told that “his temperament is not going to change, he is too old for that. His temperament is fixed, set” (2). Lurie expresses this firm resolution after being asked to help Bev by his daughter. “All right, I’ll do it,” says Lurie. “But only as long as I don’t have to become a better person,” he continues. “I am not prepared to be reformed. I want to go on being myself,” asserts Lurie (77). Near the end of the novel, we are once reminded by the

anonymous narrator that Lurie is too old to change. “Well, he is too old to heed, too old to change. Lucy may be able to bend to the tempest; he cannot, not with honour,” says the narrator (209).

This trait of stubbornness leads to his persistent pursuit of Melanie. He pursues his student boldly and stubbornly. He goes to the department office and copies the girl’s personal information. He savors her name: “Melanie...Not a good name for her. Shift the accent. Meláni: the dark one” (18). The renaming, once again, reminds the readers to connect it to a historical legacy which continues to occur in the new South Africa. His renaming, as Jane Poyner suggests, alludes to “the obsessive categorization of race under apartheid that lamentably continues to structure South African society today” (149). After that, he even behaves like a stalker and goes to the rehearsal of her play without noticing her in advance. There are only two audiences, and they are a janitor and him. While the janitor takes his leave, he reflects that “all of them were once upon a time children of God” (24). Here, the reflection may allude to the era of apartheid. Long before Afrikaner nationalism came to power, “handful of Calvinist ministers appointed by the government” circuit South Africa to deliver their sermons (Thompson 51). As a matter of consequence, the people of South Africa are mainly Christians. Lurie’s retrospection invites the image of apartheid to come into play. When the apartheid system was still in power, the dominant whites are the center of South Africa. However, the new South Africa is “a nation in transition” in which the new is hard to be born, and therefore, the old is still breathing (Poyner “Truth and Reconciliation in *Disgrace*” 149). The old here refers to, as Wright clearly points out, “the vestiges of a history of racial oppression still occupy the major part of the narrative frame” of Lurie (5). Lurie’s mind has become “a refuge for old thoughts, idle, indigent, with nowhere else to go. He ought to chase them out, sweep the premises clean. But he does not care to do so, or does not care enough” (*Disgrace* 72).

As his seduction of his student breaks out, he is required to attend a hearing formed

under the university's code of conduct 3.I: "victimization or harassment of students by teachers" (39). The committee members, chaired by the Professor of Religious Studies named Manas Mathabane, are suggested by Attwell the possibility of being black. According to Attwell, the names of Mathabane's crew all tend to be black names:

It is possible to conclude that all the principal members of Mathabane's panel are black, if we allow that Desmond Swarts, the Dean of Engineering, could be coloured, as the name suggests – certainly, Hakim and Farodia Rassool are black in the inclusive sense. None of these characters act out racial stereotypes, however, and the only hint of racial discourse comes from Rassool, who draws the committee's attention to the 'overtones' of the case, meaning the 'wider community's' interest in seeing Lurie make a public apology, given 'the long history of exploitation' of which his treatment of Melanie is a part. (2002: 335)

In this sense, the hearing seems to resonate with the function of TRC headed by Tutu. Lurie, a white male, is asked to present his sincere apology "from his heart" (*Disgrace* 54).

However, Lurie does not yield. He is "standing up for a principle," a principle which is "too abstruse" for his audience (188). It is a principle which has something to do with the ideology of apartheid, an ideology which deems the blacks are inferior to whites and the blacks do not reach the domain of human. The farthest he would go is to plead guilty in this "secular tribunal". He even claims that "repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse" (58). Lurie does not understand why those blacks keep forcing him to offer a sincere repentance, even if it is "dark" to them (58). Lurie seems to regard the committee members different from him, from a white. Mathabane certainly senses Lurie's overtones underneath his claim, and he, as "members of what [Lurie calls] a secular tribunal if not as fellow human beings," irritatingly asks Lurie to announce a statement (58). It is as if the notion of anthropological machine is lurking inside Lurie's ideology. As a "hangover from the past," (40) Lurie expresses a "discontent with the passing of apartheid and its benefits to

the likes of him” (*Age of Bronze* 172). In the old days, a white like Lurie, would not have to undergo such disgrace facing these non-mans. In the old days, the whites were the producers of these non-mans. Yet, here he is, an old-fashioned male who “prefer[s] simply to be put against a wall and shot,” questioned by a black man (66).

Lurie’s racial discrimination begins to “deepen when [he] reaches the Eastern Cape, as both he and the reader begin to understand the scale of his gesture of opposition” (*Age of Bronze* 169). At the beginning of his arrival, Lucy suggests that he could give Petrus a hand establishing his land. Lurie sarcastically replies that he likes “the historical piquancy” (77). In the old days, “that is to say ten years ago, it would have taken [Petrus] days with hand-plough” to establish his land (151). Now, Lurie, a member of whites once dominates the state, is being asked to offer Petrus a hand. Lurie produces more and more “excursion into racial discourse” after the rape event (Attwell 2002: 336). He regards the assailant as demon with “the face like a hawk” (121). Moreover, Lurie uses the word “kaffir,” a racist appellation for black South African, to describe Petrus (140). The appellation is “inflammatory and highly offensive,” and it says “a great deal more about Lurie’s own discomfort with the changes in post-apartheid South Africa” (Van Der Vlies 47). In the old days when the blacks were still categorized by the mechanism of the anthropological machine pejoratively and dismissively, Lurie hopes, “one could have had it out with Petrus” (*Disgrace* 116). Petrus is not the only black who Lurie detests. Pollux also shares Lurie’s racial categorization. Being one of the three assailants, Pollux is describes as “the running dog, a jackal boy, and a *filthy swine*” by Lurie (131, 202, and 206). He confirms with Lucy when he first hears Pollux’s name by asking that “not Mncedisi? Not Nqabayakhe? Nothing unpronounceable, just Pollux” (200)? By posing this question, as Attridge suggests, Lurie continues to produce his “white racist thinking” rooted firmly in apartheid ideology (*Introduction* 317). The words used by Lurie seem to “signal a return to the old racial hierarchy of apartheid, reinforcing the stereotypical racial categorization of the colonial era” (Tran 1). That is to say, it is a

stereotypical and racial categorization which associates with the mechanism of the anthropological machine by labeling blacks as “savage” arbitrarily (*Disgrace* 206).

The novel represents what Jeff Radebe, currently South Africa's Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, says “the white people’s perception of the post-apartheid black man” (Radebe qtd. in Attwell 2002: 334). Coetzee seems to suggest that

[Three years] after liberation white South African society continues to believe in a particular stereotype of the African which defines the latter as immoral and amoral, a savage, violent, disrespectful of private property, incapable of refinement through education and driven by . . . dark satanic impulses. (Radebe qtd in Attwell 2002: 334)

Indeed, in the entire racial discourse articulated by Lurie, the readers are constantly reminded that Lurie is of a different kind with the black characters presented in the novel. Ryan, Melanie’s boyfriend, warns Lurie to stay with his own kind (*Disgrace* 194). On the other hand, when he questions Petrus about Pollux, Petrus challengingly argues back that he is only protecting “*his people*”. While Petrus looks after “*his people*,” it is Lurie who should look after Lucy because she is “*his people*” (201). Furthermore, Lurie cannot believe his ears when hearing the proposal offered by Petrus to marry Lucy. “This is not how we do things,” says Lurie, and he is on the verge to say that this is not how “*We Westerners*” do things (202). By establishing a clear boundary between savage and civilization, that is, the blacks and whites, Lurie embodies the mechanism of the anthropological machine. He, following the ideology of apartheid regime, continues to deem blacks as “deficient” figures which fail to ascend to the sphere of genuine human beings (208).

Surely, we cannot ignore the fact that Lurie seems to embark on a spiritual transformation after seeing Bev Shaw comforting animals. “Do I have to change,” thinks Lurie (126). As he pays a visit to the Isaacs, he expresses his need to say what is on his heart (165). This gesture, according to Poyner, signals that “Lurie is learning to speak from the



heart” (“Truth and Reconciliation in *Disgrace*” 162). However, being a figure “too old to heed, too old to change,” he is not sure to what extent should this transformation be performed (*Disgrace* 209). When he is about to leave the Isaacs, he “gets to his knees and touches his forehead to the floor,” and wondering whether this is enough or not (173). Lurie’s uncertain is carried throughout the end of the novel. By helping Bev clean up the euthanized dogs, Lurie finds “a young male with a withered left hindquarter which it drags behind it” particularly loving (215). An invisible bond quietly develops between the old man and the dog. Soon, it is the dog’s turn to be euthanized. To Bev’s surprise, Lurie bears the dog “in his arms like a lamb,” and states that he is “giving him up” (220). While his idea that animal is of different kind with man is still can be heard in our ears, this decision further solidifies his ideology (74). The animal (in this sense, the black) is what he is willing to sacrifice due to the firmly rooted ideology received from apartheid system. It reveals that, deep inside Lurie’s heart, he is still not sure how to say sorry sincerely. Hence, his journey of “self-discovery and personal atonement” is ultimately dismantled as a failure (Poyner “Truth and Reconciliation in *Disgrace*” 165).

In the end, Lurie still cannot discard the ideology of apartheid system. The novel repeatedly hints that, being an old man grown up under apartheid, Lurie is too late and too stubborn to change. The ideology of apartheid which categorizes the blacks as non-man proves to be tenacious and mobile. Indeed, “it is not finished. On the contrary, it will go on long after [Lurie is] dead and [Petrus is] dead” (*Disgrace* 202). Through the white male protagonist David Lurie, Coetzee illustrates “a vast circulatory system” in which the human is rhetorically produced (98). This system, came all the way down from the ancestors, continues to produce the human-nonhuman distinctions ceaselessly. As Lurie once remarks that “the more things change the more they remain the same,” the concept of the anthropological machine is still working in the new South Africa, and, to the people from the older generations such as Lurie, something will never change (62).



## Chapter Two

### How Bare His Life Is: Lurie's Life in the New South Africa

In the previous chapter, the mechanism of the anthropological machine and how Lurie alludes to this mechanism have been explicated. Yet, in the end of the chapter which bears the same name of the mechanism, Agamben leaves an enigmatic observation of the ultimate consequence once the mechanism begins to operate. "What would thus be obtained, however," writes Agamben, "is neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself—only a *bare life*" (*The Open* 38). What is this peculiar life status? Judging from the literal meaning, it seems that this bizarre life status is the consequence of the operation of the anthropological machine. What, then, is a bare life, a life with nothing in it? Other than the peculiar meaning of the term, what is the relationship between the term and the new South Africa? If the situation in the new South Africa indeed interweaves with bare life, it is possible to boldly postulate that the situation in post-apartheid South Africa directly leads to the production of bare life. Nevertheless, the situation of the new South Africa depicted in the novel is not a bright one. Atrocious crimes and insufficient police force are vividly illustrated in the novel. Does this contour suggest that, in order to produce bare life, the arbitrary violence is needed?

Situating Lurie, an old-fashioned white male, in this turbulent context, *Disgrace* is perhaps the best text to examine how Agambenian concept interweaves with the political situation in the new South Africa. The contention in this chapter is that Lurie's life in the post-apartheid South Africa is a bare life. To begin with, the origin and the meaning of bare life will be carefully illustrated in order to serve as the theoretical framework. Questions such as how this concept comes to light and what the extended meaning of this concept is will be tackled. Next, bearing the theoretical framework in mind, I attempt to begin the second section of this chapter with a foray into how violence has become normality in post-apartheid South Africa, especially in the territory of Eastern Cape where the tenacious racial hatred is

still vividly alive. In addition, the failure of the recourse to his spiritual mentors will be illustrated as well. This failure resonates with another crucial trait of *homo sacer*, namely, the rejection of sacrifice. With the dangerous situation and the failed dedication, Lurie's life inevitably converges on the particular form of bare life in Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

### I. Bare Life

In his *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben investigates the original meaning and the ambiguity of the equivocal figure named *homo sacer*. He directly points out that "the protagonist of this book is bare life, that is, the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man)" (8). This bizarre figure can be traced back to ancient Roman law in which its social function is vaguely depicted. In order to have a clearer idea of the peculiar figure, Agamben first invokes Pompeius Festus's treatise which provides a contour for it:

The sacred man is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide; in the first tribunitian law, in fact, it is noted that "if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide." This is why it is customary for a bad or impure man to be called sacred. (Festus qtd. in Agamben 71)

The immediate contradiction in the quoted passage above is the simultaneous existence of two traits. Why do the capability of being killed and the incapability of being sacrificed co-exist within it? In addition, how can this figure be sacred if the ceremony of consecration is forbidden? In the first place, in order to be eligible for the status as *homo sacer*, the transgression of the man is required. Second, once the man becomes *homo sacer*, it is licit to kill the man. So far, this logic is comprehensible, for a man to be *homo sacer*, he must transgress crimes which are "so horrible that death was insufficient to punish the guilty"

(Shaw 1). If this is the case, the death of the sacred man certainly does not constitute a capital crime. Yet, what remains as a puzzle is the fact that this figure is simultaneously regarded as a sacred man. How can a man become sacred if he commits a crime which cannot be compensated by death? This peculiar figure which is seemingly rejected by “both human and divine law,” Agamben suggests, bears “an originary *political* structure” (73-74) within this contradiction.

To dismantle the hidden political structure within *homo sacer*, it is necessary to hark back to the time when its ambiguity is first written into words. The earliest record of this ambiguity, according to Agamben, is in the monograph named “*Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*” by William Robertson Smith (75). However, the fact that this book is the earliest work dealing with “the theory of the ambivalence of the sacred” is not the main factor for it to stand out as exemplariness (75). It deserves scrutiny because of the two taboos it discusses (76). On the one hand, the first taboo concerns with the divine aspects of the untouchables. It regulates “the inviolability” of several iconic figures shines with the splendor of “holiness” (qtd. in Agamben 76). These figures are protected by the taboo, and they can be violated by none. On the other hand, the second taboo deals with the filthy things which are untouchable as well. In this regard, the dividing line between the two taboos seems to disappear. If holiness and filthiness can both be attributed to the untouchable taboo, then, what is the difference between holiness and filthiness? Indeed, the two contradictory concepts “often touch” with each other (qtd. in Agamben 76).

This ambiguity resonates with *homo sacer*'s iconic traits. The most contentious traits of *homo sacer* are, without a doubt, the “unpunishability of killing and the exclusion from sacrifice” (81). This trait, to Agamben, constitutes a “double exclusion” (82). *Homo sacer* is excluded by both divine and juridical spheres. Similarly to the untouchable items regulated by taboos, the traits of *homo sacer* constitute a peculiar ambiguity in which contradictory concepts coexist. The ambiguity implicit within this trait is not only the contradictory epithet

sacred, but also the direct challenge against laws related to murder (81). Normally, the behavior of killing is not acceptable. Even the archaic Ten Commandments regulate the behavior of killing by stating the famous discipline “thou shalt not kill”.<sup>1</sup> In every aspect of legislation, killing human beings is strictly forbidden. Yet, *homo sacer* appears as a special case within the sphere of legislation. Hence, the pivotal question gradually emerges: why does not the killing of *homo sacer* constitute a murder crime? It seems that this equivocal figure becomes more and more abstruse.

Another figure which shares the similar ambiguity is “the *devotus*<sup>2</sup> who consecrates his own life to the gods of the underworld in order to save the city from a grave danger,” a figure shares the spreading discussion among scholarly circle (96). The record raised by Agamben illustrates how the sacrifice is done on a battlefield with lucidity. It depicts a commander, facing the defeat of his army and the crisis of siege, determines to sacrifice his life for the favor of god (96). Through his sacrifice, the commander believes that the god will bring doom to his enemy. However, it is not the courage or the loyalty of the general that elicits the attention of scholars. What the scholars are interested in is the situation of the *devotus* after the ritual:

If the man who has been consecrated dies, it is deemed that all is well; but if he does not die, then an image [*signum*] of him must be buried seven feet or more under the ground and a victim must be immolated in expiation. And no Roman magistrate may walk over the ground in which the image has been buried. But if he has consecrated himself, [as the commander does], and if he does not die, he cannot perform any rite, either public or private. (qtd. in Agamben 97)

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<sup>1</sup> "The Ten Commandments Listed." *Ten Commandments*. Web. 21 May 2012. <<http://godstenlaws.com/ten-commandments/index.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> *Devotus* is a Latin word, and it can either be a verb or an adjective. If it is a verb, it has the following meanings: “devote, consecrate, vow, curse, and bewitch.” If it is an adjective, it has the following meanings: “devoted, attached, faithful, bowed, accursed, and devout.” “JM Latin English Dictionary | Free Latin Dictionary.” *Latin Dictionary | Latin Terms Definitions*. Web. 18 Feb. 2012.

In this light, judging from the document, the *devotus* has to die after the sacrificial ritual. If he survives, a ritual has to be performed in order to indicate that he does not violate his dedication to god. In this way, the ancient Romans believe, the entire community is “able to be spared the wrath of the gods” (qtd. in Agamben 97). This saying seems to imply that, once the sacrifice is done, the *devotus* has to carry out his commitment one way or another. Indeed, a cruel expression which shares a wide-spreading popularity among ancient Romans further points out the bizarre situation the surviving *devotus* is in. They deem the surviving *devotus* is “unfaithful to this oath,” and they hope “all his descendants and all his goods, be liquefied and disappear” (qtd. in Agamben 98). Why does the hero who sacrifices his life to save his community end up like this? If the *devotus* does not perish in his oath, he seems to become a figure that is rejected by both secular and divine domain. Not only his fellowmen wish him to vanish from their sights, but also his participation in the ritual is forbidden.

After delineating the peculiar condition of living *devotus*, a feeling of déjà vu is overwhelming. A figure that is capable to “be killed but not sacrificed” dwells in the same blurred zone with the surviving *devotus* (99). On the one hand, the surviving *devotus* finds himself completely excluded from the religious sphere. Yet, somehow he is forced to continue his oath. On the other hand, *homo sacer* finds himself completely exposed to the possibility of being killed. Yet, what authorizes his killing is at the same time the force of law. From this perspective, the two figures both fall onto a place where the black-and-white boundary is no longer recognizable. In *devotus*'s case, he first firmly believes that his sacrifice will bring the grace of god to his people. In other words, he is included within the sphere of the divine, for he can dedicate himself to his lord only if he is a subject of god in the first place. However, if he survives, he is immediately cast out of the divine domain.

Through the juxtaposition of the life status of surviving *devotus*, the life status of *homo sacer* unfolds before us. It is a life with nothing in it. This form of life is so naked that it is completely exposed to the possibility of being killed. Moreover, his decease will not stir even

the slightest rippling among the juridical system, for he dwells in a blurred zone where the word chaotic serves as the best descriptive epithet to explain what happens inside the zone. Up to the present, the nature and the ambiguity of the peculiar figure have been dealt with. A feeble light seems to be visible through the veil of the equivocal figure. Its ambiguity has been explicated through the juxtaposition of the *devotus*. Yet, in order to fully emancipate the light from the veil and, subsequently, be able to expose the hidden political structure of this figure, it is necessary to probe further into the action that causes the ambiguity and the consequences it may bring.

Before we plunge into the action that causes the ambiguity and its consequences, *homo sacer's* ancient ancestor has to be delineated. For this ancestor, like his successors, undergoes an action that constitutes the ambiguity of the peculiar figure. According to Agamben, the origin of *homo sacer* can be found in the lives of ancient Germanic criminals (104). The law of ancient Germanic community has to be mentioned in order to show the approximation between the archetype and its posterity:

...Ancient Germanic law was founded on the concept of peace (*Fried*) and the corresponding exclusion from the community of the wrongdoer, who therefore became *friedlos*, without peace, and whom anyone was permitted to kill without committing homicide. (104)

The concurrent trait, namely, the unpunishability of killing, juxtaposes the life of ancient Germanic criminal to the form of life in ancient Roman documents. This analogous trait is crucial, for it presents a similar form of life to that of *homo sacer's*. In this light, the lives of ancient Germanic criminals are analogous to that of *homo sacer*. They both undergo the pain of being banned. They are cast out of their communities and, henceforth, exposed to the possibility of being killed. Here, the decision of ban is a crucial element. If someone is banned, this means that he no longer belongs to his original community.

After delineating the peculiar figures, Agamben asserts that the enlightenment the



peculiar figures may bring “is therefore not the originary ambivalence of the sacredness that is assumed to belong to him, but rather both the particular character of the double exclusion into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed” (82). The violence and the exclusion that *homo sacer* suffers through are, in fact, the consequences of ban. The action of ban is, as Agamben suggests, “the originary juridico-political relation” (109). To ban someone means to deprive him of every secular and divine connection, and this deprivation ultimately will lead to his “utter destruction” (qtd. in Agamben 76). Once the process of banishment is completed, “not only of the persons involved, but of their property” will become untouchable (qtd. in Agamben 76). It is recorded that those who contact the banned will suffer the same treatment, namely, the treatment of ban (77). Here, the fact that two contradictory concepts coexist occurs. According to Agamben, the ban, originally, is a “form of devotion to the deity, and so the verb ‘to ban’ is sometimes rendered ‘consecrate’ or ‘devote’” (qtd. in Agamben 76). Yet, when it comes to ancient Germanic criminals, the meaning of ban tends to express an irredeemable penalty. From this perspective, the concept of sacredness and the notion of filthiness, as the ambiguity in the taboo which I have mentioned above, “touch” each other (qtd. in Agamben 76). To this extent, it is obvious that the same mechanism of ambiguity is at work within the contradictory nature of the banned. Thus, Agamben provides a conclusive passage:

The analysis of the ban—which is assimilated to the taboo—determines from the very beginning the genesis of the doctrine of the ambiguity of the sacred: the ambiguity of the ban, which excludes in including, implies the ambiguity of the sacred. (77)

The similarity between the taboo and the ban is that, by allowing the existence of a binary opposition, they both establish a gray area in which two contradictory concepts seem to merge. This is why Agamben juxtaposes the idea of ban with the concept of sacred life. The most well-known trait of the sacred life (*homo sacer*, bare life, etc) is its capacity to be killed

without transgressing homicide. In other words, his life becomes killable after becoming *homo sacer*.

What then, will become of *homo sacer* once he is banned? The fact that he can be violated by any members in the community after the ban forms a unique phenomenon. In this sense, the community members are always superior in confronting him (84). Through the process of ban, “life’s subjection to a power over death and life’s irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment” is dismantled (83). That is to say, once being condemned as *homo sacer*, the guilty man immediately enters a status of being left alone. He is deprived of his identity as a member of the community and his right of being protected by the law. He is forced to completely submit his life to the decision of his community members. On the contrary, his fellow compatriots gain the power and the protection from the law to execute him without committing murder. His death will not elicit any single attention from the juridical system, for the system is the mastermind that authorizes his killing. Under such a context, the life of *homo sacer* is stripped of not only the privilege as one of the members among the community, but also the most fundamental security of life. The only thing remains in him is the purest, the simplest, and the rawest life. This particular form of life, according to Agamben, has a specific denomination—“bare life” (85). One thing to be noted is that, contradictorily, what is being stripped is simultaneously what is being included. It is widely agreed that the life of *homo sacer* is excluded from the sphere of law. Yet, the force of law does not simply fade away. Instead, it is the force of law that leads to life’s “being exposed to an unconditional capacity to be killed” (85). In excluding bare life from its community, the force of law simultaneously legalizes the killing of bare life. In this light, bare life is still “included in the political order” because the notion that it can be killed is implicit in the law as well (85). Hence, the life of *homo sacer* is both situated within and beyond the sphere of law.

Nevertheless, how can a figure simultaneously be inside and outside the juridical

system? Does that suggest the possibility of a place where the black-and-white boundary starts to shatter? The fact that anyone can snuff out the flame of life in the bizarre figure without being punished is the key to the two questions. Two essential conditions have to be established before the unlimited killing of bare life becomes a fact. In the first place, the juridical system has to judge the guilty man as *homo sacer*. From this perspective, the juridical system embarks on a process of subsumption. In order to label the guilty man, a precondition is that the man is in the system. Afterwards, once the man is categorized as *homo sacer*, the second essential condition immediately emerges. If the first essential condition incorporates an action of inclusion, the second essential condition bears an entirely opposite action to that of the first one. To transform the life of the guilty man into bare life, not only the action of inclusion is required, but also the action of exclusion. Sentencing the guilty man to the status of *homo sacer* simultaneously means to exclude him from “the application of the law on homicide” (81). The killing of his life no longer constitutes the crime of murder. From this perspective, his life becomes officially excludable. It is due to the exclusion from the protection of law that his life is subjected to the possibility of being excluded from mundaneness. Above all, the two actions cannot be separated. In this light, *homo sacer* “dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither” (105). A blurred zone is thus established through the operation of the simultaneous “exclusion and inclusion” (105). It is “a double exclusion and a double capture,” for it excludes *homo sacer* both from the sphere of law and the sphere of sacrifice; and, simultaneously, it includes him both into “the community in the form of being able to be killed” and the sanction of the law that his life is killable (82). He is simultaneously included in and excluded from the sphere of law. It is a tricky formula which the included are simultaneously the excluded, and vice versa. Thus, the formula “inclusive exclusion” is refined from the peculiar trait of *homo sacer* (85).

It is under this “inclusive exclusion” that bare life can be placed into a territory which is simultaneously within and beyond the sphere of law (85). The place where bare life dwells

does exist, and this place is a “zone of indistinction” (90). It is created through the “inclusion of bare life in the juridico-political order (90). Only in including the life of *homo sacer* into the system from the very beginning is the system able to discard his life arbitrarily. As to the unnatural naming, it is named as indistinction because of the concurrent inclusion and exclusion. The order within this zone is completely indistinguishable. It is as if the black-and-white boundary can no longer be recognizable. What happens inside this place always accompanies a double and opposite meaning. Just as the action of inclusion is confirmed, the action of exclusion immediately intervenes, and vice versa. This gesture indicates that, within this zone, “what is captured is at the same time excluded” (90). What the zone captures and excludes is, without a doubt, the life of *homo sacer*, namely, bare life.

The hidden political structure lies within this formulation. The supremacy’s absolute power to “do anything to anyone” is justified through this formula (106). Through this formula, subjects are immediately transformed into chessmen which are manipulated arbitrarily by sovereignty. In this light, subjects become the “originary political element[s]” in the structure of the state, and they are subjected to the unlimited “sovereign violence” (107, 109). Such subjects, according to Agamben, are the typical representatives of bare life. Therefore, bare life is the life that is completely deprived of every legal protection. Hence, it is a life that is completely exposed to the arbitrary violence.

Having come this far, the concept of bare life and how does this form of life occur have been explicated. The focal point in the following section is the life status of Lurie, particularly his life status when he refuges in his daughter’s smallholding. Lurie’s life status, I propose, resonates with the life status which can be killed yet not be sacrificed. I aim to outline this trait by dividing the discussion into two dimensions. The first dimension consists of the violent incidents around Lurie, especially the assault in Eastern Cape. The assault incident in Eastern Cape completely reveals Lurie’s life status. As a stubborn and old “hangover” from the past, his staying in a territory which used to be a homeland for the

apartheid regime to separate the uncivilized species proves to be “out of touch” (*Disgrace* 13, 40). Eastern Cape is no territory for the old white male like Lurie, rather, it is a place where “the hostility between white and black” continues to “the present day” (*Stranger Shores* 337). Coetzee’s deliberate placement of an old white male into this conflicting land reaffirms his acknowledgement of the turbulence in new South Africa. It also reaffirms Mandela’s oration that “the wounds of the period of repression and resistance are too deep” (Mandela qtd. in Cottrell 118). From this perspective, his entry into this chaotic place puts himself in a perilous position. The second dimension concerns Lurie’s spiritual mentors and his reference to “Eros” (*Disgrace* 52). Lurie’s recourse to his spiritual masters, I propose, proves to be futile. This futility is, on the one hand, implicit in his “erring” usage of Wordsworth and Byron (32). On the other hand, his dedication to Eros is a complete failure as well. This dedication only leads to his bewilderment. The perilous life status and the failed spiritual dedication are precisely the peculiar traits of the figure in ancient Roman law.

## II. Lurie’s Life in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Post-apartheid South Africa, as Grant Farred rightly suggests, is a country where violence becomes ordinary routine due to the tenacious racial hatred. In his “The Mundanacity of Violence: Living in a State of Disgrace,” he proposes such violence can be comprehended through the idea of “mundanacity” (352). This concept

is defined here as the process by which the unrelenting-ness of post-apartheid violence renders attacks on the individual body and the national psyche as nothing more than a mundane, ordinary experience. Mundanacity is post-apartheid violence normalized, incorporated into the South African psyche as an everyday, routine possibility because it takes place with such great frequency and speed. It is a concept that derives from the tenacity – the intensity and the tenseness – of the encounter between black and white, between men and

women, and between the past and the present (in the cause of an as-yet-undefined future). (354)

Indeed, the statistic recorded in Thompson's monograph provides a convincing endorsement for Farred's argument. It is recorded that, after the apartheid regime collapses, "at least 278 crime syndicates" are in action (267). Setting *Disgrace* under such circumstance, Coetzee deliberately depicts an old white professor exposed to the violence that "happens every day, every hour, every minute... in every quarter of the country" (*Disgrace* 98). How Lurie finds himself located in the radius of violence can be seen from the violent incidents in the novel. These incidents sear the word "bare" onto his very biological existence (25).

The first violent incident occurs right after Melanie's boyfriend warns Lurie. After this rendezvous, he finds that his car is "vandalized" (31). Through this incident, we may have a glimpse of the violent status in post-apartheid South Africa. His property is, supposedly, destroyed by Melanie's angry and jealous boyfriend (although the readers are left unsure about who does it). However, Lurie's sole response is to have a locksmith and change the lock (31). His not reporting the case to the police is a crucial fact in the new South Africa. This incident perfectly demonstrates Thompson's investigation that the new South Africa is a place where "property [is] also in jeopardy... and the police [do] nothing about it" (267). In this light, we can boldly assume that his effort to take further action, if he does, will be futile. Yet, we cannot ignore the fountainhead of this violent incident, that is, the disgraceful relationship with Melanie. This relationship violates the code of the university and the standards of being a teacher. Therefore, Lurie is in an indefensible position and he feels apprehensive because he is not on solid ground. As we will see, the violent situation in post-apartheid South Africa together with the disgraceful relationship renders Lurie's life the target of violence.

It all starts with Lurie's disgraceful relationship with Melanie. Since the misconduct spreads out, the train of consequences comes straightforward to Lurie in a violent

acceleration. Lurie suddenly becomes the target of public criticism. He is humiliated in public by Mr. Isaacs and, as he is about to run away, Mr. Isaacs bellows at him that he has “not heard the last of it” (*Disgrace* 38). Not long after Mr. Isaacs takes his leave, he is charged with “victimization or harassment of students” (39). Due to this accusation, he is required to attend a hearing formed by the committee members from the university. After that, the situation becomes worse. His chairman despises his behavior and she thinks that it is better to clear him away (40). Before the hearing, he meets his ex-wife in a restaurant. Rosalind expresses her deepest distaste by stating that “don’t expect sympathy from me, David, and don’t expect sympathy from anyone else either. No sympathy, no mercy...Everyone’s hand will be against you” (44). It is as if the transgression has “*cut [him] off*” from his community (34). It never rains but pours, not only students refuse to attend his courses, but the “Rape Awareness Week” is being carried out like a raging fire (43). The circular with handwriting in capital words “YOUR DAYS ARE OVER, CASANOVA” is “slipped under his door” (43). As the scandal spreads out, he cannot but accept “disgrace as [his] state of being” (172). This status, in a way, opens up a space for the violation against him becomes justifiable. He knows this very well by acting like a “tongue-tied” “thing of wood” when facing the accusation of Mr. Isaacs (38). It is due to his transgression in advance that he has to accept whatever comes to him as “retribution” (74). This violation of the “Code of Conduct” transforms his already alienated status into a status beyond redemption (38). His already-alienated relationship with students further develops into an overwhelming boycott after the scandal circulates within his community. His students have “*lost respect [sic]*” for him, and, suddenly, he is left alone (37). It is as if, after the leak of the scandal, his capacity to be censured is unlimited. His violation becomes the foundation to violate him. In other words, he becomes the subject to be violated by his community members. He is forced to step on the same path with his spiritual mentor Byron and become “a *thing*, that is, a monster” which has to endure the condemnation of “solitude” (34). Here, an equivocal figure recorded in ancient Roman documents is trying to

remind us of its existence in modern South Africa after the apartheid regime collapses. One of the preconditions for life to become bare life is to be “judged on account of a crime” (Festus qtd. in Agamben 1998: 71). The status of bare life begins to converge on Lurie’s condition after the spreading of the scandal. Lurie’s violation of regulation renders his standpoint vulnerable. Those who have heard the scandal are entitled the right to censure and condemn his guilt. His sole response to consequences is to accept them unconditionally. Consequently, he becomes a “marginalized” figure completely exposed to those consequences (Farred 358). The difference between Lurie’s life and bare life, if anything, is that, at this point, Lurie’s life is still not killable. Yet, this difference will soon be erased after he reaches the “darkest Africa” (*Disgrace* 95).

Now, there is one thing left before he can leave everything behind and meet his daughter, namely, the hearing in the Vice-Rector’s office which incorporates a “zone of indistinction” proposed by Agamben (1998: 90). Rebecca Saunders compares the hearing with the interrogation conducted by Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and she argues that what the committee members ask Lurie to present is exactly what TRC commissioners want from those who come forward for amnesty (Saunders 100). She points out that both committee members want the criminal to repent sincerely from a “visceral” dimension (Saunders 99). The term, for Saunders, signifies “not only with the body, but with emotions and instinct and, because of these figural meanings, can also signify the inverse of reason: the irrational” (99). In other words, they want something from outside of the juridical sphere. This demand certainly does not match Lurie’s expectation. As he puts it, this demand is “preposterous” and “beyond the scope of law” (*Disgrace* 55). After hearing Lurie’s pleading of guilty, Farodia Rassool objects his proposal by stating that

Professor Lurie says he accepts the charges. Yet when we try to pin him down on what it is that he actually accepts, all we get is subtle mockery... Professor Lurie pleads guilty, but I ask myself, does he accept his guilt or is he simply going



through the motions in the hope that the case will be buried under paper and forgotten? (50-51)

With the intonation in “a pitch of anger,” she goes on to insist that Lurie should provide a confession to the board:

Yes, he says, he is guilty; but when we try to get specificity, all of a sudden it is not abuse of a young woman he is confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist, with no mention of the pain he has caused, no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is part. (53)

Not only Farodia Rassool urges Lurie to provide a sincere apology, but the entire committee regards the “statement” is required to dispose this case (53). Both Desmond Swarts from the department of Engineering and Aram Hakim the Vice-Rector are trying to persuade Lurie to provide a “public statement” with his sincere “admission that [he is] wrong” (54). Manas Mathabane, the chair of the committee, telephones Lurie after the hearing asking him to “issue a statement” (58). Here, these demands blur the transparency of law. While the TRC commissioners are capable of deciding the grant of amnesty, the committee members of the hearing are empowered to “make recommendations” (47). They are given the right to recommend the Rector whether to discharge him from the university or not (41). In every dimension, it is the committee members who hold the power to decide the fate of the criminals. The process of the interrogation constitutes a gray area where the efficacy of law seems to become blurred, for “the law has no reliable means for measuring it, no matter how crucial a constituent of truth it may be considered to be” (Saunders 101). The committee members are capable of deciding the judgment solely on their feelings. “We will see what attitude your express” and, says Farodia Rassool, “we will see whether you express contrition” (*Disgrace* 54). In this light, the commissioners are able to “elicit less procedurally constrained testimony, incorporate expressions of memory, perception and emotion regularly expunged by the rationality of the law” (Saunders 104). Thus, in determining the sentences of

criminals, the law stands before committee members as fabrication. They do not have to refer to the law in weighing their feelings, for the law does not incorporate the criterion in judging criminals' sincerity. From this perspective, it is as if the entire hearing is situated in what Agamben calls as a "zone of indistinction" (1998: 90). The criminal seems to be simultaneously included into the sphere of law and excluded from it. He is required to attend the hearing by the force of law. However, as he fulfills his obligation, his fate is, ironically, decided by a factor which is entirely irrelevant to the law. In this regard, the efficacy of law is completely indistinguishable in the hearing. Perceiving this ambiguity, Lurie refuses to yield by stating coolly that he can't (*Disgrace* 58). In return, Mathabane frostily responds that he "will be hearing from the Rector" (58). The board certainly will not accept his pleading, for his refusal to conform immediately makes him "an anachronistic symbol of white, apartheid ideology and an ironic representative of anti-apartheid loss" to the committee members (Farred 356). As a consequence, he is "asked to resign" (*Disgrace* 63). Ironically, Lurie's standing up for a principle can only lead to his being casted out of the community to an "other, unfamiliar world," a world where his life is reduced to a simple, plain, and residual form of life.

After the hearing, Lurie takes, as Lucy names it, "refuge" in her smallholding located in Eastern Cape (65). Upon reaching the soil of Eastern Cape, he at once senses that it is an "exhausted" place with "poor land" and "poor soil" (64). What he does not sense is the forthcoming fatal knockout blow which snuffs out the sparkle in his life. The smallholding is sacked by "three unknown assailants" (115). Lucy is being "gang-raped by three men on her smallholding" and his father's being lightened up by fire (Graham L. 433). The place where they come from is crucial. It is a place without "electricity" and "telephone" (*Disgrace* 93). Furthermore, it is located deep "inside the forestry concession" (92-93). The situation and location of the place at once remind the readers of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It seems to be a dark place where values inside this territory are completely chaotic and

indistinguishable. On the other hand, the situation of Eastern Cape is no better than “Erasmuskraal” (92). Indeed, Eastern Cape depicted in the novel seems to resonate with the inland depicted in Conrad’s masterpiece. From the contour given in the novel, Eastern Cape equals to “wilderness” (91), a wilderness “serves more particularly as a frontier zone: it is [the] darkest Africa” (Van der Vlies 53).

Violence in this dark territory, as Farred rightly argues, has become “all too ordinary” and “all too unexceptional” (354). “Violence has ceased to be a cause of consternation, outrage, or moral approbation,” writes Farred, “its greatest triumph is the normalcy, the unremarkableness, an act such as rape has achieved” (354). One of the episodes to demonstrate this suggestion occurs after Lurie’s futility of retrieving his stolen car. On their home, both in a low mood, Lurie and his daughter engage in a conversation which reveals the normalcy of violence in this country. Lucy confides to his father that the three assailants are recidivists. ““I think they have done it before. . . At least the two older ones have . . . . I think they *do* rape,”” says Lucy (*Disgrace* 158). Lucy’s saying proves that violence does “go into circulation” in this country, a circulation within “this place” and “this time” (98, 74).

Perhaps the best exemplary episode to demonstrate how violence becomes normalcy is the attack incident in Lucy’s smallholding. This particular place with “complex historical relationships between issues of race...and land” where he dwells, in a way, resonates with the ambiguous and paradox zone where bare life lives (Graham L. 438). Facing the unrestrained violence demonstrated by the three unknown intruders, his life is exposed to the unlimited possibility to be killed. In other words, as a white male, his life “in this place, at this time” is valueless (*Disgrace* 112). Sensing his daughter is in danger, Lurie at once follows the strangers into the smallholding. To one’s expectation, since this is a place where law has basically lost its efficacy, he is hit “on the crown of the head,” and he immediately loses his consciousness (93). By the time he is back to his consciousness, he realizes that he is dragged to the lavatory. Not before long, the door is opened, and one of the invaders emerges

demanding the key (94). Here, the argument that violence has transformed to ordinary business in this land is proven by the narration given by the anonymous narrator. The intruder's "face is placid...without trace of anger," says the narrator, "it is merely a job he is doing" (94). As the narrator points out, the invader "will hit him, hit him as many times as is necessary, if necessary break the bottle too" (94). The act of violence is like breathing, so natural, so normal. While he is still fantasizing that there is a slight chance maybe he and his daughter will be spared, what happens next immediately drags him back to the reality:

As he lies sprawled he is splashed from head to foot with liquid. His eyes burn, he tries to wipe them. He recognizes the smell: methylated spirits. Struggling to get up, he is pushed back into the lavatory. The scrape of a match, and at once he is bathed in cool blue flame. (96)

In post-apartheid Eastern Cape, there is no hope but "despair" (108).

The invaders, after lighting up Lurie, lock the door of lavatory without surge or downcast of emotion. Once again, the normalization of violence in this land is demonstrated. Lurie, on the other hand, for the first time realizes that "he can burn, he can die" (96). In this case, as Farred insightfully observes, "the privileged white male (the main beneficiary of apartheid) comes to represent...the loss of resistance" (356). His life, situated in this malicious context, is completely subjected to the violence that pervades the country. Ultimately, his original intention to take refuge in his daughter's smallholding only further dismantles his perilous situation. That is to say, he "finds himself unexpectedly, randomly, confronted with the brutal workings of male violence" (Farred 359). Such violence is founded on the particular context he is in, and it is in this context that his life's becoming bare is complete.

Christine Sylvester, in her "Bare Life as a Development/Postcolonial Problematic," focuses on the violence created by postcolonial state especially the antagonism between two racial groups in Rwanda (66). She raises several vividly factual events in depicting the life status of citizens under such turmoil context. However, it is not my intention here to reiterate

the historical events in her essay. What I wish to extract from her observation is the concept that it is due to the uncertainty of the political situation that the production of bare life is inevitably one of the iconic phenomena in polity in turmoil. Before apartheid regime collapses, South Africa is ruled “on the basis of ‘rules’ about what was appropriate for one’s race, class, and/or gender” (Sylvester 68). Although the ANC wins a sweeping victory in the democratic election in 1994, the void between apartheid and democracy gradually seizes upon the country. Sylvester clearly points out this tendency by writing that “in an era of so-called democratic transitions, development can look away from cases that frustrate expectations” (69). The development in real post-apartheid South Africa and the condition in *Disgrace* are both frustrating. On the one hand, post-apartheid South Africa is a society in which

women’s legs bowed out under the weight of water pots on their heads, flies hovering around children’s faces undeterred by the listless hosts, men drinking themselves into oblivion at 10 am. Roadsides hold the remains of rusted technologies of development. Hospitals can be places no one should be allowed to enter. Death can arrive swiftly and early – through AIDS, civil violence, or something as relatively curable as diarrhoea. (Sylvester 70)

On the other hand, the delineation of the new South Africa in the novel is no better than the real situation. What comes to our eyes is a society of, as Attridge observes, “rampant crime, inefficient police services, middle classes barricaded into their fortress-homes” (“Age of Bronze” 163). Sadly, caught in this territory of hostility, Lurie’s life is exposed barely to the unlimited violence. Perhaps Coetzee himself provides the best illustration in depicting the bareness of Lurie’s life:

The events...have shocked him to the depths. The trembling, the weakness are only the first and most superficial signs of that shock...For the first time he has a taste of what it will be like to be an old man, tired to the bone, without hopes,

without desires, indifferent to the future...he feels his interest in the world draining from him drop by drop...When that is finished, he will be like a fly casing in a spiderweb, brittle to the touch, lighter than rice-chaff, ready to float away...His pleasure in living has been snuffed out. (*Disgrace* 107)

After the attack incident, Lurie realizes that his life in this territory of violence is fragile and vulnerable. As a white male and a “hangover” from the apartheid system, his advantageous position is completely reversed in the new South Africa (40). The new epoch he lives in is a government and society ruled by majority black, and the place he dwells is a contradictory territory where the tenacious racial hatred still exists. Besides, the residents in this territory are mostly indigenous Africans, especially Xhosa. As a consequence, Lurie’s life inevitably faces “a wave of violence by the dominant ethnic” (Sylvester 75).

Up to the present, the violent incidents around Lurie and the Agambenian concepts implicit in these incidents have been explicated. It is time to turn to Lurie’s failure of recourse to his spiritual mentors. Lurie’s reference to the divine figures can be seen from the very beginning of the novel. According to the anonymous narrator, he has published three critical works:

In the course of a career stretching back a quarter of a century he has published three books . . . the first on opera (*Boito and the Faust Legend: The Genesis of Mefistofele*), the second of vision as eros (*The Vision of Richard of St Victor*), the third on Wordsworth and history (*Wordsworth and the Burden of the Past*). (*Disgrace* 4)

These works are exactly related to his spiritual mentors. In his reluctantly provided confession during the hearing, Lurie states that he is “a servant of Eros”, and it is due to the entrance of Eros that he is “not [himself]” (52). Upon hearing this confession, the commission members doubt the sincerity within his statement. Rassool objects this confession by stating that all she can see in this confession is “an impulse [Lurie] could not

resist” (53). As a consequence, he leaves the university to “gather himself, gather his forces” (121). In Eastern Cape, facing Lucy’s question, he raises this topic again. “My case rests on the rights of desire. . . .On the god who makes even the small birds quiver” says Lurie (89). However, deep inside him, what Lurie truly wants to say is that “[*he*] was a servant of Eros” and “*it was a god who acted through [him]*” (89). Yet, this dedication only leads to his “losing himself day by day” (121). The cruel truth is that, in post-apartheid South Africa, his divine figure “will not save him in darkest Africa” (95). To further demonstrate this failure, I shall invoke a particular passage in the novel in which a series of images emerge:

In a sudden and soundless eruption, as if he has fallen into waking dream, a dream of images pour down, images of women he has known on two continents, some from so far away in time that he barely recognizes them. Like leaves blown on the wind, pell-mell, they pass before him. A fair field full of folk: hundreds of lives all tangled with his. He holds his breath, willing the vision to continue.

(192)

After these images of the past debaucheries, Lurie is confused. “If he is being led,” thinks Lurie, “then what god is doing the leading” (192)? As he tries to meditate on the question, “something raps him lightly on the head, calling him back to the world” (193). It is Melanie’s boyfriend who, spotting his existence, does the mischief. The question posed by Lurie implies that his dedication to Eros begins to shatter. In the past, he “existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity. He had affairs with the wives of colleagues; he picked up tourists in bars on the waterfront or at the Club Italia; he slept with whores” (7). All these debaucheries, in a sense, are the outcome of following the guidance of Eros. What, thinks Lurie, “has it left behind, that huge enterprise of upliftment” (95)? The answer is cruel, yet pertinent: “nothing that he can see” (95). As Pamela Cooper insightfully points out, “Lurie finds his assumptions about sex . . . challenged (23).

Lurie can no longer find the “harmonies” in Romantic poems which he used to devote

his passion (13). In “Lessons from the Dead Masters: Wordsworth and Byron in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” Margot Beard pertinently demonstrates this tendency. Beard emphasizes Lurie’s failure at the very beginning of his essay by pointing out that “Lurie frequently misuses [Wordsworth and Byron]” (62). At the beginning of the novel, the anonymous narrator reveals Lurie’s idea of creating a musical opera in which the central plot is “*Byron in Italy*, a meditation on love between the sexes” (*Disgrace* 4). This indication foreshadows that Lurie, unlike his spiritual mentors, will proceed in opposite directions. While his mentors dig into the beauty of poetry, Lurie immerses in the rhythm of music scores. Yet, as Beard suggests, Lurie “has little understanding of either harmonies or the lyric” (64). He confesses this lack to Lucy by saying that he will “borrow the music, for the most part. [He has] no qualms about borrowing” (*Disgrace* 63). After the attack incident in Lucy’s smallholding, Lurie spends more time on his Byron project. Consequently, he refers to Byron time and again. However, as the story moves on, Lurie gradually senses that the “characters in the story, who for more than a year have been his ghostly companions, are beginning to fade away” (141). He feels that his original intention to center Byron and his mistress in the opera “has failed to engage the core of him” (181). This feeling, I suggest, results from his growing further apart from his spiritual master. Before the attack incident in Eastern Cape, “Lurie’s concern with passion, both his awareness of the waning possibilities of sexual passion or the more aesthetic ‘literary passions’ that he quizzes Melanie about,” writes Beard, “is a deeply Byronic concern” (62). Yet, after the incident in Lucy’s smallholding, he gradually adopts an attitude “without hopes, without desires, indifferent to the future” (*Disgrace* 107). The opera is never finished throughout the novel. Yet, Lurie’s final solution is depicted. Instead of the grandeur of love and passion, he chooses to let the idea of an aging mistress lamenting for her lover creep in (181). The shifting of theme signifies that the disciple, once a “creature of passion,” now senses that his passion “*has dried up, the source of everything*” (13, 183). Lurie’s former project of creating a passionate



opera with grand piano accompaniment transforms into a monotonous aria in which Lucy's "odd little seven-stringed banjo" serves as the major musical instrument (184). Beard rightly suggests that this transformation is "comparable with his empathetic identification" (73). It is an identification with his finding that "*life . . . is another story*" and that "he has had enough of life . . . he would rather be back where he belongs, on death's other shore, sunk in his old sleep" (*Disgrace* 185, 186). The passion the disciple follows is not his master's "creative" passion; rather, it is a "destructive" sentiment (Beard 73-74). In the end, the sole audience of his unfinished opera is a dog waiting to be euthanized. This illustration reveals that Lurie's discipleship is "bankrupt" (*Disgrace* 150). On the one hand, he fails to follow his master who creates masterpieces with creative passion. On the other hand, this discipleship, in the end, only further estranges him from his master.

To this extent, the fact that Lurie's life converges on that of *homo sacer's* has been discussed. Lurie's life is indeed a life which bears the unlimited "capability to be killed and yet not sacrificed" (Agamben 1998: 73). Through the juxtaposition of Lurie's life and *homo sacer's* life, we find that Lurie's life coincides with the peculiar traits of *homo sacer*. This killable yet not sacrificable life, in a way, is, like the dog waiting to be euthanized, an expendable life. The dog bearing "in his arms like a lamb" is not a relic ready to be sacrificed (*Disgrace* 220). Rather, it is merely a superfluous dog which cannot escape his death. Unfortunately, not only the dog cannot escape his fate, but its path to the terminal is being shortened. In the first instance, the euthanasia of the dog could be postponed. To Bev's surprise, refusing to keep the dog until next time, Lurie is "giving him up" (220). Lurie's life status is, ironically, analogous to his favorite partner in the animal clinic. They "do not own themselves, do not own their lives" (123). It is a life that is excluded simultaneously from the domain of law and the territory of sacrifice.

## Chapter Three

### In the Heart of the Country: State of Exception

Thompson pinpoints the difficult situation in post-apartheid South Africa by defining the nation as a “country [which is] racked by the cumulative effects of colonialism, apartheid, and urbanization” (265). Post-apartheid South Africa is a place where values are replaced by chaos. The legislation established by the previous government is gradually replaced by new policies which concern the seemingly racial harmony. In envisaging a country where whites and blacks interact harmoniously, the new government inaugurates various measures including the establishment of TRC. The new Mandela government preaches the idea of reconciliation restlessly. However, the government’s effort proves to be futile. On the surface, the country celebrates the dawn of democracy. Yet, what lurks behind the façade of the seemingly democracy is the absence of law under certain circumstances and the arbitrary violence imposed by the new government, nationals, and non-nationals. In the pages that follow, the theory of the state of exception and how the situation in post-apartheid South Africa depicted in *Disgrace* resonates with this theory will be explicitly engaged. In his “Disgrace Effects,” Peter D. McDonald suggests that “more radical ways of reading” of the novel “are necessary” (2002: 329). Such suggestion is not difficult to comprehend, for the novel refers to “the Nazis’ final solution – the word *Lösung*” twice (McDonald 2002: 329). Therefore, bearing McDonald’s suggestion in mind, I attempt to demonstrate how the idea of the state of exception dwells in the heart of the nation. I argue that a nation such as post-apartheid South Africa where the clash between the new and the old takes place is the ideal context for the production of a “no-man’s land between public law and political act, and between the juridical order and life” (Agamben 2005: 1).

#### I. State of Exception

Following his logic in the *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben

provides his philosophical exploration and historical investigation of the concept in the monograph which bears the same name with the concept. Interviewed by Ulrich Raulff in 2004, Agamben states the purpose of this monograph named *State of Exception* from the very beginning of the interview that the main theme can be divided into two concerns:

The first is a historical matter: the state of exception or state of emergency has become a paradigm of government today. Originally understood as something extraordinary, an exception, which should have validity only for a limited period of time, but a historical transformation has made it the normal form of governance. I wanted to show the consequence of this change for the state of the democracies in which we live. The second is of a philosophical nature and deals with the strange relationship of law and lawlessness, law and anomy. The state of exception establishes a hidden but fundamental relationship between law and the absence of law. It is a void, a blank and this empty space is constitutive of the legal system. (609)

Regarding the first concern, Agamben raises ample examples of how the Western countries inscribe the idea of exception in their constitutions (which I will not dive further into them since they are merely historical events). The second concern of the monograph given by its author suggests a particular “void” in which the distinction between “law” and “the absence of law” seems to collapse (609). The essence of this zone-like void is what we have to clarify in the first place, for it may shed light on our comprehension of his theoretical thinking. Furthermore, this zone can be recognized as the origin of his theoretical framework in the monographs mentioned in this thesis, that is, *The Open*, *Homo Sacer*, and *State of Exception*. In the same interview, he goes on to assert that the “state of exception” belongs to the concept of “zones of indecidability or indifference,” the concept which is repeatedly used by Agamben in the three monographs mentioned above (612). That is to say, this concept serves as the pivot in his theoretical system.

In order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the particular void, as Penelope Deutscher suggests, an “analytic of exceptionality would be required” (60). To do so, the most proper analysis would be the recourse to the monograph. From the very beginning, Agamben provides a general definition of the state of exception which is widely accepted among scholarly circle:

Indeed, according to a widely held opinion, the state of exception constitutes a ‘point of imbalance between public law and political fact’ that is situated—like civil war, insurrection and resistance—in an ‘ambiguous, uncertain, borderline fringe, at the intersection of the legal and the political’. (qtd. in Agamben 1)

The definition quoted above seems to suggest that a void will occur at the point when the law is no longer able to correspond to the environment. According to Agamben, it is a “no-man’s land between public law and political fact, and between the juridical order and life” (1). What, then, will happen inside this ambiguous void without the appearance of law? In addition, all evidence suggests that the state of exception is closely connected with the conflicts and unrest. It is due to these conflicts which are deemed as potential threat which may endanger the country that the state of exception can be proclaimed. If our hypothesis is correct, a turmoil context is one of the essential conditions for the proclamation of the state of exception. To prove our hypothesis is correct, it is essential to trace the origin of the state of exception which harks back to ancient Roman law following Agamben’s mode of thinking.

In exploring the peculiar void created by the state of exception, Agamben, as he does in *Homo Sacer*, inaugurates his exploration from the documents of ancient Roman laws. This time, Agamben invokes a peculiar situation named “*iustitium*” which can be recognized as the “archetype” of the state of exception (41). According to Agamben, ancient Roman Senate, once the Republic is under threat, would announce

a *senatus consultum ultimum* [final decree of the Senate] by which it called upon the consuls (or those in Rome who acted in their stead: *interrex* or proconsuls)

and, in some cases, the praetor and the tribunes of the people, and even, in extreme cases, all citizens, to take whatever measures they considered necessary for the salvation of the state. . . . At the base of this *senatus consultum* was a decree declaring a *tumultus* (that is, an emergency situation in Rome resulting from a foreign war, insurrection, or civil war), which usually led to the proclamation of a *iustitium*. (41)

The particular situation in ancient Rome under threat reveals a deciding fact which, for Agamben, constitutes an exemplary status for the concept of state of exception. In urging the citizens of Rome to protect the Republic, the law seems to regress to a status of “standstill” (41). The fact that citizens may “take whatever measures they considered necessary for the salvation of the state” once the *iustitium* is declared seems to suggest that whatever measures they take, be it positive or negative, if the measures they take may presumably save the Republic, they will not be intervened by the law (41). In other words, the *iustitium* constitutes a peculiar situation in which the law is suspended for the good of the Republic. This “suspension of the law” seems to create a “juridical void” in which law seems to merge with the fact, for whatever measures the citizens take, as long as the measures concern the preservation of the Republic, it is licit (41-42). From this perspective, the law is being synchronized with the factual measures taken by citizens.

Set aside this bizarre void, what is more enigmatic is the fact that the proclamation of the *iustitium* is based upon a declaration of “a *tumultus*” (41). Agamben directly points out the definition of *tumultus*:

[*Tumultus*] does not mean . . . a special or stronger form of war; instead, at the very moment of affirming a connection between war and tumult, it places an irreducible difference between them . . . the term technically designates the state of disorder and unrest that arises in Rome as a result of that event. (42)

This clarification certainly sweeps part of the enigma. The *iustitium* may be issued once the

country is facing the turbulence caused by an “event” (42). This incident (not *tumultus*, but something that causes the declaration of *tumultus*), Agamben suggests, is strongly associated with war, especially civil war, for the civil war belongs to the category of “sudden war that brings great alarm to the city on account of the magnitude of the danger and nearness of the enemy” (qtd. in Agamben 42). To be more specific, the citizens and officials may sense the closeness and the suddenness of the enemy in the context of civil war. In this light, the distinction between war and *tumultus* is dismantled. On the one hand, war is one of the factors which will bring the turbulence to the country. On the other hand, *tumultus* is the aftereffect of that particular incident which brings turbulence to the country. Hence, the connection from the declaration of *tumultus* to the proclamation of *iustitium* is revealed. The declaration of *tumultus* is in fact the direct cause for the proclamation of *iustitium* in which the citizens may take necessary methods to protect their country. If we reverse this formula, *tumultus* reveals itself as “the caesura by means of which, from the point of view of public law, exceptional measures may be taken” (qtd. in Agamben 42). To this extent, viewing from the record in ancient Rome, at least two questions occur. The two questions are: (a) what is the status inside the void; and (b) to what extent does the *iustitium* resonate with modern state of exception. In order to approach these two questions, it is necessary to delve into the more accurate and precise definition of the term. Thus, we might be able to understand the unlimited possibilities hidden within the void, and perhaps, be able to formulate a comprehensive analogy of how state of exception embodies the ancient Roman proclamation.

After describing the precondition of the *iustitium*, Agamben can now concentrate solely on the peculiar proclamation. To Agamben, the *iustitium* is a unique phenomenon in the constitution. It is

a matter of, under exceptional conditions, putting aside the restrictions that the law imposes on the action of the magistrates. *Stillstand des Rechtes*, ‘standstill and suspension of the law,’ is the formula that, according to Nissen, both defines

the term *iustitium* and translates it to the letter. The *iustitium* ‘suspends the law and, in this way, all legal prescriptions are put out of operation. No Roman citizen, whether a magistrate or a private citizen, now has legal powers or duties’.  
(qtd. in Agamben 45)

If we view from this dimension, it is not difficult to realize that why Agamben considers the *iustitium* as the emptiness of juridical order. It is as if the law has to step back and make way for the encroaching crisis which may subvert the country. What is more puzzling is that it is as if the law, in this context, is “abandoned in favor of expediency, and just as in situations of necessity the magistrates [are] released from the restrictions of the law by a *senatus consultum*, so in the most extreme situation the law [is] set aside” (qtd. in Agamben 46).

From this perspective, a concept of necessity occurs. Lying before this necessity, law seems to become an obstacle which must be cleared away at all cost. It is even possible to make a bold speculation that the purpose of this clearance of law is de facto a temporary expedient:

When the law [is] no longer able to perform its highest task—to guarantee the public welfare—the law [is] abandoned in favor of expediency. . . Instead of transgressing it, when it [becomes] harmful it [is] cleared away; it [is] suspended through a *iustitium*. (qtd. in Agamben 45-46)

Once a deemed emergent situation which may endanger the existence of the country occurs, the law *must* undergo a process of, borrowing a word from Agamben, “neutralization,” a neutralization in which the law will eventually regress to a status of “emptiness” (45 and 48). This emptiness of law all begins with the detection of a deemed threat which elicits “tumult” and consequently, due to that tumultuous environment, the state is under the danger of subversion (42). Under this emergency, the protection of the state has to be accomplished without the company of law. Once the law is no longer in the position of regulation, what happens inside this juridical void is of a different story. The normal values are no longer applicable in interpreting what happens inside this void, for it is impossible to judge “the

nature of acts committed” within this void since the recourse to the law is completely vanished (49). Indeed, the measures taken in the void falls into a completely “impossibility of clearly defining the legal consequences of those acts” (49). The key concept here is indetermination. It is due to this indetermination hanging in the air within the void created by the suspension of law that various actions can be taken, for whatever action taken inside the void, the punishability of it remains indeterminate as long as the status quo persists (50). The actions taken inside the void become “mere facts,” writes Agamben, facts that “neither [execute] nor [transgress] a law, and even less [do they] create law” (50). Without trouble back at home, whoever equipped with the power to act under this circumstance becomes a free spirit. Everything he does resorts to his will, and he is “entirely free to act as he sees fit, or even not to act at all” (50). Under this premise, as long as the act is done under the umbrella of saving the country, every act is acceptable. In this regard, the acts committed inside the void can either ascend to the domain of “divine” or degenerate into the sphere of “bestial,” or, even, the acts can stick to the values that are still recognizable by “human” beings (50). With a space in which choices and decisions are completely delivered to personal will, it is not difficult to envisage that inside the void an unlimited possibility exists. Sadly, it is not a possibility of positive acts; rather, it is a possibility of negative acts which usually turn out to be so negative that Agamben regards acts committed inside the void as “anomie” (as we will see in the following) (67). Thus far, not only our hypothesis in terms of the “tight connection between *tumultus* and *iustitium*” is proved, but the fact that there is a space contains immense possibility for “exceptional measures” after the inauguration of the state of exception is confirmed (47 and qtd. in Agamben 46). Furthermore, the fact that the ancient Roman *iustitium* belongs to “a form of the state of exception” is dismantled as well (48). Since the archetype of state of exception is *iustitium* has been confirmed, the time for a close inspection of the nature of state of exception is ripe.

After clarifying the terms from ancient Roman law, Agamben is able to illustrate an



analogous approximation of the *iustitium* and the state of exception. The state of exception “is not defined as a fullness of powers, a pleromatic state of law, as in the dictatorial model, but as a kenomatic state, an emptiness and standstill of the law” (48). This trait is not difficult to deduce from the situation in the *iustitium*. In the ancient Roman proclamation, the governor does not maximize his power. Rather, the governor neither relinquishes nor intensifies his power. Under this extreme situation, the validity of law simply disappears. This validity is substituted by a vague and abstruse formula: “Let them defend the state, and see to it that no harm come to the state” (41). From this perspective, in this extreme situation, the governor is “reduced to the state of private citizens” (qtd. in Agamben 49). In addition, the acts committed under extreme situation automatically gain the accessibility to dwell within a domain where judgment cannot lay its hand onto them. Those acts are “absolutely undecidable, and the definition of [those actions’] nature . . . will lie beyond the sphere of law” (50). Thus, in this context, it is not the governor’s power has reached its peak; rather, it is the suspension of law that whoever acts or whatever acts, as long as he acts and his acts concerning and are related to the safeguard of the country, nothing is unworkable. To this extent, it is necessary to concentrate on the consequence of this indetermination. Since the acts committed in the juridical void “escape all legal definition,” what will happen when the law regresses to null (51)?

It has been expounded that the juridical void created by the state of exception is a zone in which various exceptional actions can be taken. To further dig into the contingency within this void, Leland de la Durantaye’s *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* is second to none in approaching the issue. Durantaye’s monograph is by far the most ambitious analysis of Agambenian concepts. Durantaye attempts to provide a complete guidance which covers Agambenian works from the earliest works to *State of Exception* for Agambenian scholars. In the very beginning of the chapter dealing with the essence of the void, Durantaye rightly points out that in the state of exception, “the state’s habitual nature and culture are

suspended” (335). Furthermore, it is in this “suspension of the rule of law” that “the establishment of those camps” is made possible (336). With this insight, Durantaye goes on to add an adverb before the noun exception. The term state of exception is, for Durantaye, not enough to sketch the contour of the inhuman deeds done in that space; rather, the term should be “the state of deadly exception” (336). In this light, together with the examples<sup>1</sup> raised by Agamben, what the juridical void produces is solely the unlimited violence. Indeed, the violence which can be done within the void seems to be boundless that Agamben equates the void to an “anomic space” (2005: 48).

Since the validity of law in this void is no longer recognizable, the dominant group within this void can now implant its extremest exceptional measures against the disadvantage minority. Surely, we cannot ignore the fact that without the recourse to the law, every individual with the ability to act may act as long as the goal of his act is to assure the protection of the state. Yet, in the final chapter of the monograph, Agamben brings a concept named the “power that grants legitimacy” into play (qtd. in Agamben 78). It is a power situated in a position of indistinction, for Agamben defines the power as the “power that suspends or reactivates law, but is not formally in force as law” (79). In addition, one of the most significant characteristics of this power is that it is an innate authority which belongs to the supremacy (82-84). From this perspective, in this void, the force of law is automatically transferred to the supremacy as an invisible and hidden power that does not require the endorsement of law. Without the intervention of law, the dominant group can direct “wartime powers into the civil sphere” even though the internal and/or external threats does not constitute a threat to the preservation of the country; or, rather, the threat does not even exist at all (5). The supremacy can now arbitrarily exercise its power to make live and let die as

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<sup>1</sup> To what extent does exceptional measure can be taken in this void? In answering this question, Agamben raises the example of the Holocaust. According to Agamben, it is precisely in this void that life is “allow[ed] for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system” (2005: 2).

long as he disguises his action as an excuse for protecting the state. To this extent, actions happen inside the void created by the state of exception is “no longer the miracle . . . but the catastrophe,” a catastrophe which consists of the pure violence that forces directly upon the very biological bodies of victims without any buffer (56). This is why Agamben adds a note to the void by asserting that the void is “a zone of absolute indeterminacy between anomie and law, in which the sphere of creatures and the juridical order are caught up in a single catastrophe” (57). The most significant horror of the void lies within this note. What makes a theorization of the state of exception so difficult is not the unlimited violence it hastens, but the “indeterminacy” it creates (57). Once the distinctions which differentiate facts and law, law and violence, and violence and facts dissolve, violence takes up the vacant spaces left by the disappearance of those distinctions. As violence becomes the rule, the space it dwells becomes “a zone of anomie, in which a violence without any juridical form acts” (59). When violence can no longer be scrutinized by the law due to its merging with the fact and the law after the suspension of law, it becomes a normalcy.

Having come this far, perhaps it's time for retrospection. Although the state of exception contains an enormous mechanism, it is possible to concentrate on the main points from the journey we have travelled so far. First and foremost, one of the essential conditions for the establishment of the state of exception is a deemed turbulence, an authentic or fictitious turbulence that may endanger the existence of the country. Under such extreme circumstances, the

social institutions and rules seems suddenly to dissolve. Just as, during periods of anomie and crisis, normal social structures can collapse and social functions and roles break down to the point where culturally conditioned behaviors and customs are completely overturned. . . [Such circumstances] are usually characterized by a suspension and alteration of all social relations. (65)

In the meantime, the second trait of the state of exception occurs. This potential threat

directly renders the law inoperative for regulating what should be punished and what should not. Yet, one thing to be borne in mind is that the law does not vanish; rather, it simply regresses to the status of “standstill” (41). It is at this point that the line which separates violence and protection becomes blurred. Without the recourse to the law, it is impossible to pin down the actions taken inside the void. These actions are no longer recognizable, be them massacres or saving the nation. Last but not least, when the actions taken inside the void become no longer identifiable, when the acts committed during the state of exception “are bound and blurred together. . . the juridico-political system transforms itself into a killing machine” (86). The living beings within the void are completely exposed and subjected to an irreparable and unredeemable possibility of being violated. They cannot but receive whatever imposes upon their very biological existence. All in all, it is in this particular void which the phenomenon that “law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension” becomes thinkable and workable (3).

## II. *Disgrace*: A Novel Concerning a Void

From the textual evidence given, it is not difficult to pin down the particular time frame of the novel. From the very beginning, we are told that Lurie is “fifty-two” (1). As the plot moves on, we receive another piece of jigsaw for the completion of the entire puzzle. This time, the date of birth of the 52-year-old male is given. He was born in “1945,” three years before the apartheid regime came to throne (46). The present time in the novel is revealed at once: the setting of the novel is South Africa in 1997, three years after the apartheid regime collapses. It is a time, as Rosemary Jolly and Attridge rightly suggest, for “the process of attempting to come to terms with the past in order to build a new future for itself” (3). However, it is not a process full of hope and optimism. Rather, it is a process which fills with arbitrary violence and social disorder. The social disorder of the nation can be glimpsed from the very beginning of the novel. The novel begins with the intercourse of Lurie and a

prostitute with “honey-brown body” (1). However, as I have mentioned before, “Immorality Act” established in 1950 prohibits the sexual relationship between whites and non-whites (Thompson 190). In this sense, the sexual behavior depicted in the opening of the novel implies that the restriction planted by the previous regime has been broken. The present South Africa is a place where “all things are possible” (*Disgrace* 3). Yet, the concept that everything is possible suggested by the anonymous narrator does not designate a promising and positive transitional period. On the contrary, it is, according to the comment given by Lurie’s new department secretary, an “anarchy” in which “people just pick and choose which laws they want to obey” (9). Being in a context in which the new is hard to be born and the old proves to be tenacious, the novel frames a peculiar space named interregnum which is first suggested by Coetzee’s compatriot Nadine Gordimer. In her “Living in the Interregnum,” Gordimer insightfully points out that, under this context, the rise of “a great diversity of morbid symptoms” is inevitable (qtd. in Gordimer 1). What Gordimer proposes in her essay resonates with the perspective of Jolly and Attridge. For them, this situation constitutes an “indeterminate space between the old and the new” (Jolly and Attridge 13). It is in this concept of indeterminacy that Agamben formulates his theory of the state of exception. In addition, the interregnum is the perfect context for the concept of the state of exception to encroach on the core of the country. Near the end of his monograph, Agamben regards the “suspension of the juridical order” as the pivotal trait during the “*interregnum*” (79). This suspension of the law can be seen from the hearing process after Lurie’s scandal breaks out. The function of the hearing can be analogous to that of the TRC’s.<sup>2</sup> During the hearing process, the law is, basically, suspended. In pondering Lurie’s pleading, the “Code of Conduct” means nothing to the commission members (38). The sole factor which may affect their decision is the sincerity of the transgressor. What the members “recommend” to the Rector serves as the sole factor which will decide his fate (51). They do not need the recourse

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<sup>2</sup> See Saunders, Rebecca. “Disgrace in the Time of a Truth Commission.” *Parallax* 11.3 (2005): 99-106. Print.

to the law, for they are authorities who have the power to decide. From this perspective, the force of law becomes blurred. Their considerations regarding Lurie's expulsion become mere facts that coincide with the violence imposed upon the victim. That is to say, once the sincerity expressed by the transgressor does not reach their criterion, even though the transgressor has expressed his sincerest confession, what the transgressor will receive, in the end, is the "severest penalty" (51). To this extent, the transgressor becomes the victim. What the transgressor receives is not the impartial and transparent judgment of law. Rather, what he receives is the pure violence and bias after the law is stripped of its validity. The deeds done by the transgressor in the past is out of the concern for the members. What matters now is the subjective perspective of the committee members. In other words, the very body of the transgressor will suffer the consequence of their decision, not the *thing* he has done. After realizing that Lurie refuses to play their games (that is, to submit a sincere apology from his heart), one of the members<sup>3</sup> even claims that he stands "to lose [his] job. That's no joke in these days" (51). The implication in this semi-threat has two layers of meaning: (a) you will lose your job if you do not follow our demand; and (b) it is us who are equipped with the authority in this caesura of law, and it is up to us to decide whatever we feel right. Through the close analysis of the hearing, the law in post-apartheid South Africa does include a "threshold of indeterminacy" in which the law is frozen and the fact converges with violence (Agamben 2005: 3). It is under this context that the authority can embark his arbitrary violence without distraction.

The freeze of law under certain circumstances dismantled in the previous paragraph in fact can be seen as a tendency of the new South Africa. The lacuna left by the apartheid regime is too deep to fill up within three years. Therefore, it is impossible for Mandela

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<sup>3</sup> I have mentioned that, according to Attwell, the committee members may be blacks in chapter one. Besides, one of the members (Lurie's chairman) "regards him as the hangover from the past, the sooner cleared away the better" (*Disgrace* 40). In this light, Agambenian concept can now take its cue. It is possible to postulate that the expulsion of Lurie is for the good of the community. To claim that to do something is for the good of the whole is one of the traits of the state of exception.

government to come to terms with every corner of the country. Bernt Pölling-Vocke precisely draws the contour of South Africa after apartheid regime. He pinpoints the two major devastated issues, that is, the “HIV epidemic” and the extremely high rate of “crime” (28-29). These two ravages are vividly demonstrated in the novel. After the rape incident, Lurie nervously and constantly confirms with Lucy whether she goes to a gynecologist-obstetrician or not. “Have you seen a doctor?” and whether the “eventualities” be taken care of, asks Lurie (*Disgrace* 105). Failing to receive a positive answer from Lucy, he confides his anxiety to Bev: ““there’s the risk of pregnancy,’ he presses on. ‘There’s the risk of venereal infection. There’s the risk of HIV. Shouldn’t she see a gynaecologist as well?’” (106) Lurie knows perfectly well that post-apartheid South Africa is a country with “more than 10% of its population infected with the deadly virus” (Pölling-Vocke 28). Lurie’s concern with the possibility of acquiring HIV tends to be sociological. Yet, we cannot ignore the fact that “a darker reading” of Lurie’s concern is possible (*Disgrace* 76). As the story moves on, Lurie’s worry comes true. Near the end of the novel, Lucy tells her father that she is “pregnant” (197). Hearing this news, Lurie cannot help but hide “his face in his hands . . . and finally cries” (199). He ponders:

What kind of child can seed like that give life to, seed driven into the woman not in love but in hatred, mixed chaotically, meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog’s urine? A father without the sense to have a son: is this how it is all going to end, is this how his line is going to run out, like water dribbling into the earth?  
(199)

Lurie’s concern is understandable, if we look it through Agambenian prism. Being an old white male who constantly expresses his yearning for the past, Lurie is anxious for the purity of whiteness. Once the child is born, the whiteness is tainted. “So it will go on, a line of existences in which his share, his gift, will grow inexorably less and less,” meditates Lurie, “till it may as well be forgotten” (217).

As to the dimension of crime, the novel provides an even more lucid delineation. It has been observed that “crimes are . . . common occurrence” in the novel (Pölling-Vocke 29). Coetzee deliberately arranges at least one crime incident whenever Lurie enters a different location. In the first half of the novel, Lurie’s seduction of his student in Cape Town is “[equal] to crime,” for it violates the norm of the university (*Disgrace* 33). Moreover, when Lucy questions why he does not defend himself, he replies by asking his daughter: ““Is that what you think I have done? . . . Run away from the scene of the crime?”” (89) As he reaches the territory of Eastern Cape, the assault incident taking place in Lucy’s smallholding is without a doubt a crime. When Lucy’s bedroom comes into his sight, he at once regards it as “*the scene of the crime*” (109). The rape incident is another of Coetzee’s deliberate portrayals of the dangerous and extreme condition in post-apartheid South Africa. This portrayal can be seen as the epitome of the pervading violation in the new nation. According to the statistics provided by Pölling-Vocke, it is estimated that “between 1988 and 1996 the number of reported rape cases increased by more than 160%” (29). Upon returning to his house in Cape Town, he immediately senses that his house has been visited by “a raiding party” (*Disgrace* 176). Besides, it has been merely “less than three months” since he leaves Cape Town (175). Seeing this intrusion, as Pölling-Vocke suggests, Lurie does not even bother to contact the police:

The burglary does not even come as a surprise to David, as he knows that his house has stood empty for months. From this, the reader can assume that one cannot expect to leave one’s house for a prolonged time without provoking a burglary in the process. David describes the break-in as “another incident in the great campaign of redistribution” (176), no surprise in a country where unemployment is rising and close to 40% and the wealth gap between Whites and the vast majority of Blacks is still painfully wide. (29)

The rampant crimes further dismantle a decisive trait in this country under extreme and



emergent situation: the ineffective police force. In the case of rape incident, when the two policemen first show up, Lurie senses that they regard Lucy as “a creature polluted and her pollution could leap across to them, soil them” (*Disgrace* 108). As they enter the lavatory where the assailants light Lurie up, “two spent matchsticks” are left unnoticed (109). Few days later, to Lurie’s surprise, a police informs him by telephone that his stolen car has been retrieved and that two suspects are arrested. However, by the time he arrives the police station, suspects are “out on bail” (154). Moreover, it turns out that the stolen car is not his car. Facing the questions of Lurie, the police can only silently scratch his head. After hearing the misconduct of the police, Lucy pertinently articulates that the criminals cannot be arrested “with the police in the state they are in” (155). In addition, the depiction of the appearance of the police station shows the dangerous situation of the country. It is illustrated as “a flat, fortress-like police station surrounded by a two-metre fence topped with razor wire” (153). Why does a police station have to be armored in this exceptional fashion? When does one armor himself? One armors himself under two preconditions: (a) he senses the impending threat; and (b) he dwells in a turbulent and dangerous environment. From this perspective, the condition in new South Africa is indeed a nation under “*tumultus*” (Agamben 2005: 42). These frequently occurring crimes and inefficiencies again and again remind us of “what a dangerous country South Africa is” (Pölling-Vocke 29).

Post-apartheid South Africa has to deal with not only the internal turbulence, but also the external crisis such as immigrant issue. Although he does not dig too deep into this emerging issue due to the dawn of democracy, Coetzee nevertheless is aware of this issue which palpably reveals the exceptional measures taken by the democratic government. It is the new secretary named “Dawn” who introduces us to the emerging problem of the new South Africa (*Disgrace* 9). Dawn confides her plan to Lurie while they have lunch together. “For the past three years she and her husband have had their name on a list at the New Zealand consulate,” narrates the narrator, “to emigrate” (8). Why do the secretary and her

husband crave for emigration? Thompson's investigation may shed some light:

South Africa had an inordinate number of marginalized people. Illegal immigrants swarmed into the country . . . Although the previous government had returned thousands of "illegal aliens" to their countries of origin—88,575 in 1992—vast numbers remained, and the influx continued. Police estimated that in 1993 there were more than one million illegal immigrants in South Africa, but the number was probably more than three million. (266)

As a consequence, numerous immigrants who are not familiar with the system of democracy gradually erode the national security. Thompson rightly points out that “most of the illegal immigrants . . . had no preparation for civilian life” (266). In addition, it is estimated that “46 percent of the African population, more than fourteen million people, [are] under twenty years old” (267-67). These youths grow up in broken families, and they barely receive educations. Therefore, without surprise, the sole place they belong is marginal ghettos or slums. “With that background,” writes Thompson, “millions of youths were socialized in lawless gangs, which contributed to the rampant crime that was a hallmark of the society” (267). This background provides reasonable linkage not only for Lurie's comment on the three assailants but Dawn's motive of emigration. After hearing the news of Lucy's pregnancy, Lurie describes the assailants as “the gang of three” (*Disgrace* 199). Furthermore, he regards “the leader of the gang” as “a blade cutting the wind” (171). These descriptions reflect his awareness of the situation in new South Africa. He obviously knows that new South Africa is a dangerous and turbulent country in which violence can be arbitrarily imposed upon innocent bodies. As to Dawn's motive, before the narrator reveals that her family plans an emigration, she tells Lurie that there are “drug-peddlars<sup>4</sup> hang around the playing fields” at

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<sup>4</sup> In an essay written by Loren B. Landau (which we will encounter in the next paragraph), the drug traffickers are deeply connected to the illegal immigrants. “Even casual conversations with South Africans reveal tropes linking foreigners to the proliferation of drug and weapons syndicates”, writes Landau, “prostitution, smuggling, rings, and confidence scams” (335).

“her son’s school” (8). Due to the large influx of illegal immigrants who “pick and choose which laws they want to obey,” the stability of the governmental system is constantly under threat (9). Since the stability of the polity cannot be maintained, it is recorded that “the dollar value of the rand dropped by 17 percent in 1998; unemployment continued to increase; public services continued to deteriorate; more professional people emigrated” (Thompson 281). As Dawn straightforwardly questions Lurie: “How can you bring up children when there’s anarchy all around?” (*Disgrace* 9) The consequences of illegal immigrants and pervading crimes can be divided into two dimensions. On the one hand, the illegal immigrants not only threaten the ordinary populations, but render violence ordinary. On the other hand, the rampant crimes delineated in the novel resonate with Thompson’s pertinent commentary. “South Africa was,” he writes, “an exceptionally violent society” (Thompson 267).

The flood of immigrants and the turbulence it brings threaten not only ordinary civilians but the entire nation. This is a featured trait in post-apartheid South Africa, and it is Loren B. Landau who investigates the harms the trait may bring in his “Immigration and the State of Exception: Security and Sovereignty in East and Southern Africa”. The consequence of immigrant issue has been explicated in the previous paragraph. Therefore, I intend to inaugurate a foray into how the issue provides the government a possibility to establish a void concerning the very biological bodies of immigrants based on Landau’s investigation. Landau’s discussion mainly takes place in “Johannesburg,”<sup>5</sup> a place which occurs in the novel as well (332). In the novel, it is a place where Lucy’s friend Helen comes from (*Disgrace* 60). Moreover, it is the setting for the drama named “*Sunset at the Globe Salon*,” a drama rehearsed and played by Melanie (23). Coetzee further reveals the theme of the drama:

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<sup>5</sup> Johannesburg is an exemplary location for the discussion of how exceptional measures can be imposed upon the very biological bodies of victims under emergent situation. In Johannesburg, the illegal immigrants consist of “25 percent of total” residents (Landau 332). In fact, the “non-nationals”, a term used by Landau to designate the status of illegal immigrants, are all over the country (325). It is estimated that “the foreign-born population . . . increased from 4.8 percent of the total population in 1996 to 5.4 percent in 2001” (Landau 332). In this light, the exceptional measures taken by government, as Agamben suggests, extends to a fuller scale of entire nation.

“all the coarse old prejudices” (23). This deliberation precisely points out that Coetzee is aware of the strife between immigrants and residents which ultimately develops the conflict into “vilification and violence” imposed by government arbitrarily (Landau 334). At the very beginning of his essay, Landau points out that “the imperative to protect national territory from the unplanned movements of people across borders has generated exceptional, often extra-legal, responses from countries throughout the world” (325). The perspective quoted above resonates with the policy of illegal immigrants in new South Africa. At first, the government does not pay attention to this emerging crisis. However, as the situation goes from bad to worse,<sup>6</sup> facing the enormous pressure from ordinary civilians which can topple the mountains and overturn the seas, the government cannot but inaugurate exceptional measures in dealing with illegal immigrant issue. This gesture precisely coincides with the Agambenian “zone of anomie” created by the state of exception, for what happens to the illegal immigrants is indeed anomie<sup>7</sup> in its literalness (Agamben 2005: 23). In order to inaugurate exceptional measures in dealing with the issue, the first step is to recognize “a state of necessity,” that is, to regard the approaching issue as a threat to the nation (Agamben 2005: 1). Following this logic, the government of South Africa comes to the conclusion that “non-nationals are understood as acute threats made all the more dangerous for the ease with which they conceal themselves among citizenry” (Landau 337). In reconsidering the illegal immigrants as a potential threat which may endanger the country, the government thus can suspend certain laws and impose exceptional measures upon those immigrants. On the one hand, the “identity documents” of illegal immigrants are unacceptable (Landau 340). Hence, their social identities are completely deprived. On the other hand, due to the deprivation of

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<sup>6</sup> Landau points out that, due to the boost of the population of illegal immigrants, “robberies with firearms nearly doubled and the number of assaults with intent to cause grievous bodily harm also sharply increased” (335).

<sup>7</sup> A “Sierra Leonean man” recalls that the officials curse at him and rob his properties. Furthermore, after the robbery, an official shocks him with a “shocker” and threatens to shock him till he dies if he does not be quite (Landau 341).

identity, the immigrants are constantly exposed to harassment of governmental officials. The actions taken by the government, to illegal immigrants, is indefensible. They are indefensible for two reasons: (a) the statuses of illegal immigrants, due to the deprivation of identity, are “simply too vulnerable or marginalized”; and (b) these actions are taken, professed by government, for the good of the entire nation. This is why “many South Africans see such harassment as a legitimate form of territorial control” (Landau 341).

Under such extreme situation, it is possible to bring another Agambenian figure into play in order to develop a fully comprehension of the life status under the state of exception. Although this analogy may be slightly exaggerated, the figure nevertheless provides a possibility to shed light on the situation in post-apartheid South Africa after the inauguration of exceptional measures. This figure occurs in Agamben’s *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, and it is called the “*Muselmann*” (41). Through the reminiscences provided by the survivors of Nazi camps, Agamben vividly brings the peculiar figure in the past to the present. Four major traits can be attributed to this peculiar figure: *Muselmann*<sup>8</sup> is the figure that (a) “constantly” set “between life and death” (Agamben 2002:70); (b) one cannot be sure whether he is alive or dead (44); (c) is completely deprived of dignity (69); and (d) one hesitates to call him human (47). Yet, none of these traits can be compared with its deepest horror. The deepest horror which the *Muselmann* brings to the world, according to Agamben, is the fact that mass corpses can be “produced” as long as the “assembly line” functions (72, 73). What, then, is this assembly line? The answer to the question lies within the hidden implication of the camp provided by Agamben:

In the camp, every distinction between proper and improper, between possible and impossible, radically disappears. . . . The appropriation of the improper is no

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<sup>8</sup> The term is originally used in Nazi camp, and it designates “the prisoner who was giving up and was given up by his comrades, no longer had room in his consciousness for the contrasts good or bad, noble or base, intellectual or unintellectual. He was a staggering corpse, a bundle of physical functions in its last convulsions” (qtd. in Agamben 41).

longer possible because the improper has completely assumed the function of the proper. . . . This means that in Auschwitz<sup>9</sup> it is no longer possible to distinguish between death and mere decease, between dying and ‘being liquidated’. (76)

Does the quotation above ring a bell? In addition to the familiarity of the implication, the fact that the term “extreme situation” numerously appears in this monograph is crucial (46, 48, 49, and so forth). In fact, what Agamben desperately tries to remind of his readers is the concept discussed in the first section of this chapter, namely, the state of exception. “Auschwitz is,” writes Agamben, “precisely the place in which the state of exception coincides perfectly with the rule and the extreme situation becomes the very paradigm of daily life” (2002: 49). Two insights can be deduced from this proclamation: (a) it is evident that the assembly line is the metaphor for the state of exception; and (b) it is through the establishment of permanent state of exception in the camp that the *Muselmann* can be produced. Through the inauguration of the state of exception, the exceptional measures taken inside the Auschwitz become merely facts, facts which cannot be differentiated from violence.<sup>10</sup> Thus far, the traits and the hidden implications of the *Muselmann* have been briefly discussed. The *Muselmann* is the product of the state of exception, and the *Muselmann* cannot but bear the arbitrary violence which blurs with normalcy due to the state of exception.

Having come this far, we can finally turn to the hidden political essence in post-apartheid South Africa depicted in *Disgrace*. The violent incidents and the implication of immigrant issue pervade the novel. This is why Petrus, a rising indigenous South African due to the collapse of the apartheid regime, profoundly and justly articulates that “it is dangerous . . . . Everything is dangerous today” (*Disgrace* 64). As a black who survives the apartheid and who lives in the “frontier,” Petrus obviously realizes the extreme situation the country is in (62). He is aware of the government’s ability to create a juridical void when it

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<sup>9</sup> Auschwitz is, not like the ordinary camps, consisted of “concentration camp and extermination camp” (51).

<sup>10</sup> This notion is explicitly illustrated in *The State of Exception*. See footnote one and section one of this chapter.

comes to the safeguard against the potential threat which may subvert the country. In the case of post-apartheid South Africa, the reconstruction of the nation is the most urgent issue other than the immigrant issue. In order to reconstruct the nation, the primary requirement is to have, as Thompson rightly suggests, a “robust economy” (267). However, the economy in post-apartheid South Africa suffers from “the recession that began in 1988” due to the devastation of apartheid (Thompson 267). Therefore, the revitalization of the economy is the primary task for the new government to deal with. It is at this point that the state of exception gradually encroaches upon the core of the nation’s policy. The fear that depressed economy may jeopardize the entire nation propels the government to “open South Africa to the world economy” (Thompson 279). This gesture is implicit in the guiding principle of the “Cape Town Technical University” in which Lurie “earns his living” (*Disgrace* 3). From the renaming of the university, the reckless resolution of government to improve the economy so that the country can be distant from danger is revealed. In post-apartheid South Africa, everything has to be practical for the sake of economy. A professor of modern languages like Lurie can, “since Classics and Modern Languages were closed down as part of the great rationalization,” merely offer one course related to his specialty a year (3). Sadly, what he offers includes a practical purpose as well. Lurie may offer “a course in the Romantic poet” because it “is good for morale” (3). This limitation of courses discloses that, in order to achieve its goal, the government is able to establish certain limit for the good of all.

At the beginning of this section, I deliberately bring Gordimer’s opinion into play. It is under this extreme context that various “morbid symptoms” arise (qtd. in Gordimer 1). However, those symptoms do not arise out of nothing. Rather, it is through the encroachment of the state of exception that those symptoms are able to pervade the new South Africa. In explaining why the novel wins the Booker Prize in 1999, the announcer praises the novel for its profundity as “an allegory about what is happening to the human race in the post-colonial era” (qtd. in McDonald 2002: 321). This assertion resonates with Petrus’s insight. Near the

end of the novel, Petrus is still reminding us of the dangerous situation in the new South Africa. “[It] is dangerous, too dangerous,” says Petrus (*Disgrace* 202). It is a dangerous era, for the ferocity in Auschwitz is implicit in the core of the nation. Our lives, upon which the nation is built, are subjected to arbitrary violence as long as a deemed turbulence which may endanger the nation occurs. In this light, one can never be sure of the atrocity of Auschwitz may reemerge in modern epoch. Facing this indeterminacy and possibility, one can solely, as Agamben suggests, “[bear] everything that he could bear—even what he would not have wanted to or should not have had to bear” (2002: 77).



## Conclusion

Through Agambenian notions, the consequence the novel's particular setting brings has been explicated. Once the notion of state of exception gradually encroaches upon the core of a nation, lives are subjected to arbitrary violence. In addition, to render the arbitrary violence possible, "the production of a biopolitical body and that the institutionalization of law is inseparably" required (Lemke 6). These biopolitical concerns can be seen in Coetzee's critical essays. In fact, Coetzee and Agamben share a mutual conception toward biopolitics. In other words, what Agamben theorizes resonates with Coetzee's idea. Coetzee shows his biopolitical concern in his very first essay collection named *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*:

But 1945 so clearly marked an epoch both in the history of the West and in the development of anthropology that . . . in South Africa, where a party with Nazi sympathizers in high positions was elected to office in 1948 and set about a program of racial legislation whose precursor if not model was the legislation of Nazi Germany, political prudence dictated that the rationale for racial classification, race separation and race dominance should not be couched in terms of eugenics and biological destiny. (1988: 137)

The mechanism which takes hold of lives, suggested Coetzee, has evolved. Biopolitics no longer reveals its "nakedness" and "shamelessness" (Coetzee 1988: 137). In modern era, it is a systematic "political prudence" in which life serves as the foundational sill (Coetzee 1988: 137). Coetzee's saying resonates with Lemke's observation. "Life is not only the object of politics and external to political decision-making," writes Lemke, "it affects the core of politics—the political subject" (4).

This biopolitical concern is in full bloom in Coetzee's meditation upon

apartheid system. In his “Apartheid Thinking,” Coetzee insightfully points out that “apartheid legislation was a by no means irrational response to social developments which threatened the expectations of Afrikaners and the privilege of white South Africans in general” (1996: 163). Van der Vlies offers a similar insight: the system is “the logical – though no less horrific, tragic and culpable – outcome of centuries of colonial exploitation” (Van der Vlies 6-7). Generated by a system which is chaotic on the surface yet lucid in essence, the turbulence left by apartheid “[casts] a long shadow” over the new South Africa (*Disgrace* 197). The system is not “a form of hubris or madness”; on the contrary, it is a well-organized and prudent interplay of various laws and the very biological lives of the entire nationals (Coetzee 1996: 163). The fact that apartheid is a mechanism concerning “bodies” is crucial (Coetzee 1996: 164). Since it is a system concerning lives, the end of the regime is only the beginning. The system “will go on long after [Lurie is] dead and [Petrus is] dead” (*Disgrace* 202). Indeed, as Van der Vlies points out, the new South Africa “continues to bear the scars, and deal with the aftermath, of a long history of brutality and oppression” (7). The system does not simply fade away; rather, it dissimulates its lethal fang under the polity of democracy, and it is ready to thrust the fang directly at the bare life once the extreme situation occurs or is created. This is why the legacy of the system functions violently after the collapse of the regime.

Coetzee’s biopolitical concern dismantles a crucial trait in modern politics: modern politics concerns lives. Modern governmental systems are “by no means irrational” (Coetzee 1996: 163). What lurks underneath those systems is the lucid and organized notion of biopolitics. Coetzee raises a pertinent simile when it comes to the society we are in. “Society itself is an organism,” writes Coetzee (1988: 142). Indeed, the world we are in is like an organism, an organism constantly produces and consumes bare life. In this light, as Coetzee insightfully observes, “the individual is

simply a carrier of . . . life” (1988: 146). According to Coetzee, it is at this point that a “scientific basis for totalizing ethic in which ‘incidental suffering’ can be ignored as ‘the great scheme of perfect happiness’ unrolls” is provided (qtd. in 1988: 144). What Coetzee proposes perfectly coincides with the Agambenian notion of state of exception. For the state of exception provides a space “that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system” (Agamben 2005: 2).

Perhaps the most important message from *Disgrace* is that the novel demonstrates a new biopolitical epoch. Gerald Kaufman, the announcer of “the winner of the Booker prize in October 1999,” attributes the award to Coetzee’s splendor of contributing a “millennial book,” a book contains an itinerary “through the 20<sup>th</sup> century into a new century in which the source of power is shifting away from Western Europe” (Kaufman qtd. in McDonald 2002: 321). After quoting Kaufman’s words, McDonald adds that the novel “may . . . be a story set in South Africa and written by a South African, but it is not *ipso facto* a ‘South African novel’” (2002: 322). Indeed, *Disgrace* depicts a global phenomenon in which “human life is included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion” (Agamben 1998: 8). Since one of the novel’s concerns is life under extreme situation, it delineates a framework in which everything “has been more or less under the influence of biological thinking” (qtd. in Coetzee 1988: 160). Indeed, in the new biopolitical epoch, power no longer solely concerns governance. As Agamben summarizes Foucault’s conception, it “penetrates subjects’ very bodies and forms of life” (Agamben 1998: 5). In this light, *Disgrace* is not only a novel solely concerns what happens inside the new South Africa, but a novel which can be seen as a demonstration of the “new planetary order,” an order that, through the intervention of various laws under certain circumstances, life is reduced to the rawest and the nudest form (Agamben 1998: 12).

From this perspective, Agambenian apocalyptic assertion that “we are all virtually *hominess sacri*” strikes us as a precise prophecy whenever state of exception functions directly upon the very biological lives (1998: 115).

My aim in embarking on the present exploration has two dimensions: (a) to provide an alternative approach in approaching the novel which has received vast attention and interest among scholarly circles; and (b) to dive further into the biopolitical concern expressed by Coetzee in his critical essays. As we have seen in the very beginning of this section, Coetzee’s endorsement of the biopolitical concern in his thinking provides the best stance to interpret *Disgrace* in the light of biopolitics. The biopolitical reading of the novel not only reflects what happens to human entirety in modern era, but dismantles the fact that biopolitical concern indeed is rooted deeply inside both Coetzee’s writing world and mode of thinking. Under the extreme situation, individual life is irreparably exposed to politics and violence. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, the arbitrary violence is indeed prevalent throughout the novel. The violence Lurie suffers is precisely the consequence of the operation of the mechanism that manipulates life arbitrarily. Lurie’s life can be seen as an epitome of the life situated in extreme situation. In a context in which rampant crimes and the freeze of law coexist, Lurie inevitably enters a domain where legal protection cannot reach. Perhaps, through Lurie, what Coetzee tries to remind of his readers is the hypocritical aspects of democracy. Although the notorious apartheid regime collapses, its aftermath and biopolitical strategy leave behind a huge impact on democratic government. Democratic system, in this light, forges a secret alliance with totalitarian regime. On the surface, the democratic state builds a false impression so that the people living in it celebrate their right and liberty. Yet, what dwells deep inside the core of democratic polity is the mechanism which, once an extreme emergency occurs, arbitrarily manipulates the bare life of the people. Unfortunately,

facing this anomic phenomenon, life can only be “indifferent” (*Disgrace* 107). As the novel demonstrates, Lurie, facing the arbitrary violence done upon his very biological body, desperately comes up with an indifferent attitude: “let it all go to the dogs, I do not care” (107). From this perspective, Coetzee’s biopolitical concern coincides with Agambenian biopolitical notions. Both Agamben and Coetzee demonstrate that a democratic polity tends to transform into a totalitarian regime once an extreme turbulence emerges. Once the state of exception encroaches upon the core of a nation, be it a democratic nation or a totalitarian regime, life will be delivered to an unlimited possibility to be discarded. From this perspective, life under the state of exception coincides with the life of the superfluous stray dog whose euthanasia is advanced by Lurie (215). Under such anomic space, life is, like the superfluous stray dog, completely exposed to the possibility of being discarded arbitrarily. Reading the novel through Agambenian biopolitical notion enables us to scrutinize into the hidden political structure in modern democratic polity.

Agamben often compares the state of exception to “a killing machine” (2005: 86). This is precisely what Lurie experiences in the new South Africa. Sadly, there is no way out as long as the machine continues to function. To kill the first dog is not an easy job, and to kill the second dog doesn’t make it easier, but “[o]ne gets used to things getting harder,” thinks Lurie tacitly (219). Gradually, Lurie becomes so indifferent to the killing and seems to identify with the brutality when, at the end of the novel, he offers the dog as a sacrifice to the merciless god-like killing machine. In *Disgrace*, sad to say, in his fight, if any, against the biopolitical machine, Lurie generates nothing but disgrace. It’s disgrace all along.

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