

THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
ABDERRAHMANE MIRA UNIVERSITY OF BEJAIA
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



**Reading the Post-Apartheid Era in Kopano
Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007).**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for an M.A. Degree in English Literature and Civilization

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Academic Year: 2023 / 2024

Dedication

First of all, I am profoundly thankful for Allah who guided me and illuminated my path throughout this journey of academic pursuit, thank you Allah for providing me with strength, wisdom and inspiration to realize this.

I would like to take a moment to express my gratitude to myself! Despite facing challenges, I have remained true to my goals...

I am thankful for the efforts I make to keep me standing. I want myself to know that I appreciate all the progress I have achieved, every small success and every step I walk forward to create a successful version of me. Thank you myself you are incredible!

My beloved Family, throughout my academic trip you have been my support, and inspiration. My Mom, Dad and siblings, your confidence in me and your endless encouragements have been my guide in my road into knowledge. Your strong belief in my abilities has made of me a strong and confident girl who does not give up.

My friends, who have been constant sources of motivation through ups and downs especially Mr. Djebbar Hammeche and Aissa Foughali. Thank you; you have always been my inspiration. To you Djellal Dahbia, you are not only my "Thesis Partner" but you are my support and source of motivation. Your strong efforts and collaboration have made our academic journey more splendid.

Each of my beloved ones is rare gem in the treasury of my heart, sparkling with the brilliance of priceless diamonds, lightening my existence with their luminous presence that equals the brilliance of thousands stars.

Meriem

Dedication

First of all, I want to express my profound gratitude and thankfulness to the Almighty God for providing me with strength throughout my Academic Journey. With his guidance and blessings I succeeded in realizing this modest work.

I would like to dedicate this humble work to:

My beloved parents who supported and encouraged me throughout my whole school career, and mainly in conducting this work. They have always been by my side, taught me to always trust in Allah and gave me strength and hope when I thought of giving up. They instilled in me a great sense of enthusiasm and perseverance. Without their affection and support, this research would not have been achieved.

To my Adored brothers “Yacine” and “Rafik” who despite their young age knew how to offer me support and stand by my side through ups and downs. I would like to express my deep affection for them.

To the most precious person “Safy” who always stood beside me through the hard times in my life. From the inception of our bond, he has always believed in me and supported me with affection in everything I do. He is a person who embodies determination and valor; I am filled with heartfelt appreciation for his assistance and generosity.

To my friends among them Meriem Gougam who before being my co-researcher is my dear friend. She is an example of support and inspiration, with her cooperation and her determined labor we succeeded in creating a modest work that reflects our persistence.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my beloved grandparents. Despite your absence but your spirits live on within the pages of this work.

Dehbia

Acknowledgements

First of all, we thank the Almighty God for guiding us throughout our academic journey towards knowledge and for giving us the strength to conduct this research work.

We would like to express our special thanks and profound gratitude to our supervisor Dr. CHIOUKH- AIT BENALI Ounissa who graciously accepted to supervise this work. We would like to thank her for her valuable insights, her productive evaluation, her significant guidance and her consistent perseverance during this research.

We intend to offer distinct thanks to the members of the jury for having accepted to assess and evaluate this work.

Finally, we would like to express our warm thanks to all teachers of the department of English and for all those who helped us from near or far.

Abstract

This research work undertakes the study of an African modernist novel entitled *Coconut* (2007) written by Kopano Matlwa. Based on the New Historicist theory, this work analyses the social and historical backgrounds of the novel. Moreover, through the paradigm of New Historicism, we demonstrated how the novel mirrored the author's background which is the post-Apartheid period. Furthermore, we studied how the two protagonists of the novel shaped their own identities and persona using an important tenet of the New Historicist theory which is self-fashioning. Besides, we endeavored to explore the nuanced layers of racist discourse depicted in the novel from different angles. Finally, we demonstrated how the novel paralleled real historical events by using the anecdotal storytelling technique.

Key words: Apartheid, *Coconut*, Identities, New Historicism, Post-Apartheid.

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General Introduction

Literature has always been a powerful tool for exposing the societal, cultural, historical as well as political dynamics across different nations in the world including South Africa. South African writers have written works that refer to the country's complex history by exploring issues such as the negative impacts of the post-Apartheid period on the black South Africans' lives. Kopano Matlwa is among these writers who address this issue that shapes the South African people in the post-Apartheid society. Through her novel *Coconut* (2007), she portrays the post-Apartheid society and discusses the harsh conditions under which the black South Africans still live long after the end of Apartheid. An oppressive system that shaped the South African environment and led to the emergence of many inequalities including racism and the issue of identity formation with which the black population grapples in the modern South Africa.

Apartheid is an ideology issued by the National Party (NP) government in South Africa in 1948. It calls for the separate development of the different racial groups in South Africa. Apartheid has made laws that force the different racial groups [whites, Indians and blacks] to live and develop separately, but unequally. More than this, Apartheid is a social system which intensely disadvantages the majority of the black population, simply because they do not share the same skin color of the rulers. Apartheid does not differ that much from the policy of segregation of the South African government existing before the Afrikaner Nationalist Party came to power in 1948. The only difference is that Apartheid has legalized segregation ("History of Apartheid"1).

This system started to be abolished when non-discriminatory elections were first launched in 1994 after winning the big victory by the African National Congress, then the election of Nelson Mandela as South Africa's first black president. After 1994, despite the end of the Apartheid system its legacies continue to have an impact on black people in South Africa. The

government which came after 1994 keeps some of the same legacies of the Apartheid system. Many black South Africans still suffer from many inequalities including racism. However, this updated form of racism displays in subtler ways compared to the one existing during the period of Apartheid.

According to many black narratives, racism has become a way of life for blacks, among the factors which intensifies and shows the presence of racism in the post-Apartheid context, are the racist terms used by the whites to refer to black people. Though in this context these terms are used indirectly they still affect the blacks in a negative way. We can see this through the black students attending white schools and thus facing racism from white students who address them using racial terms (Mtose 330). Discrimination is more present in the post-Apartheid times than during the period of Apartheid and this is because it is until the abolition of Apartheid that blacks South Africans are able to socialize with whites. As a result this contact with whites has made them discriminated.

Racial segregation continues to exist in the post-Apartheid era. However, it has taken on a new form; it is hidden and imposing itself indirectly. Black students for example who finally manage to have access to white schools and socialize with whites still find themselves segregated and separated from whites inside schools. Yet, they are not only separated inside schools but even in their living areas and public spaces (Mtose 333). Hence, the interactions between the black South Africans and whites create a distinction that sets them apart and alienates them from other members of their black community. In fact only blacks from the middle classes mastering English language are able to associate with whites. Other ones mainly those of the townships and those who speak their native language are considered as defiant.

The blacks trying to become like whites and adopt the white civilized culture, experience racism. This shows that even inclusion is experienced as racism (Mtose 335). Those

who try to fit into the white society by adopting the white civilized culture, find themselves lost between their own culture and the white one. They are rejected by both the white society because of racism and by the black community because of their ignorance of their origins. This makes them struggle to find their real identities and belonging in the post-Apartheid society. Based on the information mentioned above, this research work undertakes an analysis of the novel *Coconut*, and aims at studying the post-Apartheid era by using the theory of New Historicism.

Review of the Literature

Matlwa's novel *Coconut* is considered as a contemporary novel in South African literature. Like every literary work, it attracted the interest of researchers from different generations who addressed and analyzed it from different perspectives and aimed at reviewing and interpreting it from various points of view. In their article entitled "Coloniality and Identity in Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007)", Moopi and Makombi tried to analyze post-Apartheid identity crisis and dislocated senses of being in the novel *Coconut*. They use the theoretical prism of coloniality of the scholar Maldonado Toré which according to him can be divided into three dimensions. First, coloniality of power, second, coloniality of being and last coloniality of knowledge. They wanted to explore the impact of coloniality in shaping the construction of black South African identity in post Apartheid (Moopi and Makombi 2).

Moopi and Makombi assert that Matlwa's novel is a "decolonial" text. It highlights the persistence of colonial matrices of power in the everyday lives of black South Africans. They claim that Matlwa uses the metaphor of coconut to interrogate coloniality of being among young South Africans. They argue that the characters used by Matlwa in the novel are not simply examples of black people having lost their culture and embraced a foreign culture, or mere victims, but they are

agents who want to influence their future in a different way. These characters represent young black South African people who do not only escape and avoid blackness as an identity but also as a spot of social and economic rejection (11).

Another theme which is tackled by other researchers in *Coconut* is class and masculinity. In her article entitled “Class and Masculinity UN/Making” (2019), Dlamini explores the theme of class and masculinity through the black masculine characters in the novel (Dlamini 13892). She argues that *Coconut* does not only display the harsh conditions black females experience in the post Apartheid society. Instead, the study goes deeper to depict the strategies invented by the black masculine characters to overcome the psychological obstacles affecting them when living in a white society. She aims at exploring how the black masculine characters psychologically started to question themselves (13895).

Dlamini claims that the characters’ masculinities can be examined by means of the kind of relations they have, and how they relate to centers of authority and effects of hegemonic masculinities. She contends that the relationship and masculinities they perform are mediated by their socio-economic context and place of work. Dlamini states that the intersection of race and masculinity positions black masculinity in an oppositional relationship to whiteness, it is characterized by lack and inadequacy (13901).

Afrocentric underpinnings of beauty is another theme which attracted the interest of some researchers. This theme is analyzed and placed at the center of research. Edward Montle in his article entitled “Scrutinizing Eurocentric stereotypes against Afrocentric underpinnings of beauty” (2022), sought to examine the Eurocentric stereotypes against the Afrocentric beauty through *Coconut* using a qualitative method. Despite decolonization attempts, Eurocentric notions

that had defined Africa during the colonial period persist in galvanizing stereotypes that marginalize Africans especially those who embrace Afrocentric ideas of beauty in the post colonial age (Montle 34).

Today South Africa is still encircled with residues of colonialism, such as the Eurocentric ideals of beauty. Edward Montle states that these Eurocentric ideas have been propagated through the edges of post colonial Africa, and affected social reactions, beliefs and perceptions of beauty. This is mirrored in the novel *Coconut* where African beauty is marginalized while Eurocentric ideals of beauty are promoted.

Edward Montle claims that the loathing against the black identity through skin whitening, as well as hair straightening is shaped by Eurocentric beliefs that were preserved by colonialists in the African continent. He adds that the concept of beauty is a dire issue that comes with life-threatening agents such as skin whitening and body shaming. It is therefore crucial to conscientise the skin whiteners about the hazards that come with this practice as well as its effect in Afrocentric identities (40).

Significance of the Study

From the previous review of literature regarding Matlwa's novel *Coconut*, we can notice that the novel had already been studied and analyzed by other researchers. However, the previous studies did not examine the book from a new historicist outlook. For this reason, we decided to study it from new historicist perspective by analyzing the novel's sociohistorical background, and concentrating on its depiction and representation of the post-Apartheid period in South Africa.

There are many motives that pushed us to study this novel under a new historicist perspective. Firstly, the two protagonists' struggle to construct their identities in a contemporary South African society is the first rationale which motivated us to analyze this novel, as these two characters represent the black population in real life.

Secondly, the harsh realities that the black South Africans live because of the corrupted system, is another motive since this issue does not only exist in the country of South Africa but in all African and non-African colonized countries. At last, as African individuals, it is obvious that we are more interested in African literature due to its tackling of many themes related to our lives as African people in general.

Aim and Problem of the Study

Our research paper aims at analyzing the novel *Coconut* by focusing on the impact of the post-Apartheid era on the characters in the novel. So the research paper will hold for the main topic a New Historicist analysis of the mentioned novel for the sake of highlighting the effects of the post-Apartheid era on the modern South African society and its black population.

Method and Material

In order to achieve the aim of our research, an analysis of the novel will be carried out. We will focus on bringing insight to the post-Apartheid period and this is by using the theory of New Historicism which argues that each piece of literature should be interpreted within its unique social, cultural and historical contexts and the circumstances in which it is created.

Structure of the Thesis

Our research paper will be divided into two chapters. In the first chapter we will provide a glimpse into the socio-historical background of the novelist Matlwa and her novel *Coconut*. First and foremost, we will provide a biographical outline of the author Matlwa together with her literary influence. Second, we will provide a concise summary of the novel, after that we will explore the novel's socio-historical background and discuss the Apartheid and post-Apartheid period in the South African society. Then, in the section which is kept for the theoretical framework of our research, we will present our chosen theory of New Historicism by providing its definition, origins and principles. Later, we will introduce some of the selected concepts of self-fashioning, racist discourse and anecdotes that we are planning to apply in our analysis of the novel.

The second chapter will be concerned with the New Historicist analysis of the book. First, we will study the two protagonists' self-fashioning, and then we will analyze some parts of the book presenting racist discourse. Eventually, we will show how the novel represents real events and happenings in history by utilizing the anecdotal concept.

Chapter one: Literary, Historical and Theoretical Background of the Study

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Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the socio-historical background of the author Matlwa and her novel entitled *Coconut*, while also establishing a theoretical framework for this analysis. Initially, we will delve into Matlwa's biography and her literary influence. Following this, we will supply a brief synopsis of the novel's plot. Subsequently, we aim to introduce the New Historicist theory which is going to be applied on the novel, outlining its definition, origins and principles. Then, we will discuss its key concepts such as self-fashioning, racist discourse and anecdotes.

I. Text in Context

I.1. Kopano Matlwa's Biography

Matlwa is one of the South African writers who emerged in contemporary literature and who is known for her thought-provoking novels. She was born in 1985 in South Africa. She studied medicine at the University of Cape Town South Africa where she earned her medical degree, and then she pursued her education at Oxford University to gain her Master's degree in Global Health Science. Then, she received her Doctorate (Ph.D) in Population Health.

Matlwa was just a young girl of nine years old in 1994 when Nelson Mandela was first selected as president of South Africa. She describes it as an exciting period saying, "We were the 'Rainbow Nation,' and kind of the 'golden children' of Africa." (Wikipedia "Kopano Matlwa"). As she grew up, she noticed the corruption of the government and the reality of its corrupted system which later on led to the fading of the optimism that came with Nelson Mandela's presidency by

the corrupted ruling. However, despite the challenges she witnessed and the disillusion she lived in that period, she succeeded in achieving great things. She managed to be an important Rhodes Scholar and physician as she managed to write her first novel entitled *Coconut* in 2007 while studying medicine and she has been praised for its quality and significance, as it tackles important issues South Africans face such as poverty, corruption, race and gender as well as the issue of being a black woman in a patriarchal and racist society.

In addition to all that is mentioned above, Matlwa succeeded in winning the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa in 2010 due to her impressive literary works *Coconut* (2007), *Split of Milk* (2010) and *Period of Pain* (2017) in post Apartheid South Africa. She has received prestigious literary awards for her works that have garnered international recognition, considering *Period of Pain* (2017) as an example of her works that were selected among the big literary arts in the global scale.

All the awards that she gained fueled her literary works and despite her literary talents and her ability to write more incredible works, writing did not distract her from her main goals. She kept helping children grow up healthy in post Apartheid South Africa as well as developing her medical experiences. In fact, just after earning her medical degree at the University of Cape Town she had the opportunity to move to England for the sake of pursuing her studies. There, she studied the health system and then she got her Master's and Doctorate in Public Health at Oxford University. Hence, with all these achievements, she could write two other novels as she gave birth to her first child. Later on, she started a program to bring mobile ultrasound clinics to the Democratic Republic of Congo (Wikipedia "kopanoMatlwa").

Moreover, she has been rewarded for her work as a public health physician and social entrepreneur. Recently, she receives the Emerging Leader award in 2019 South African Health Excellence Awards. Besides this, she is an Archbishop Desmond Tutu Fellow and an Aspen New Voices Fellow. Also she has been selected as one of the youngest board members of the International society of Global Health. Yet, she led the Grow Great Company in Johannesburg during the period of 2014 till 2018 (Wikipedia “KopanoMatlwa Biography”).

The year of 2020 was considered as a turning point in Matlwa’s remarkable achievements, and marked an impressive success in her career. In fact, the beginning of this year has been marked by the coming of Bill Gates to Africa and met with Matlwa who was celebrated as a “Hero in the Field” by Bill Gates on his personal blog Gates Notes (Wikipedia “kopano Matlwa Biography”).

I.2. Literary Influence

Matlwa’s writings have made a fascinating impact on the world of literature. Her unique storytelling and writing style as well as her thought-provoking themes have attracted the readers’ attention in the world. Her works often tackle important issues related to the South African society, including racism, belonging, identity and other issues faced by the individuals in the post Apartheid era. She focuses on the hardships and complexities of the humans’ daily experiences and the challenges they grapple within the contemporary South African society.

Matlwa, has been influenced by many factors that shaped her writings and ignited her creativity. In fact, she finds her inspiration in the old African literature which motivated her to write about the black race and explore various themes where she depicts a set of social issues that she and the South African community have experienced.

At first glance, one can take the Apartheid era as the most influential factor which had a profound influence on Matlwa's novel *Coconut*. In fact, the end of the Apartheid system brought new challenges that still affect the South African people especially the young generation. Thus the neocolonial era has left youths struggling with different issues including identity crisis which made them struggle to find their identities in the modern South African society.

The African literature eagerly grapples with the burdens of the colonial period. It represents and portrays the black people's experiences through the lenses of memory. Hence Matlwa's novel *Coconut* portrays the colonial mentality adopted by South Africans from the Apartheid period, and how it subtly persists and shapes the South African society by shedding lights on how the blacks are influenced by the white culture.

Carrying on with the apartheid era which had a great impact on the contemporary African writers and which is considered as the main motive that pushed writers such as Kopano Matlwa to explore and tackle different problems that cover the South African society mainly. Yet, during the end of apartheid, South African writers actively reacted and responded to the political systems and its impact on the people, they wrote about the aspects of their society using satirical and critical ways as well as questioning the concept of reconciliation and self rebuilding, however, addressing these issues has played an important role in shaping ethnic identity and national unity.

At least but not last, Matlwa and other South African writers grappled with transnationalism as another key issue caused by colonialism and imperialism. This led to the emergence of a new South African English fiction which aims to assert the black nationhood and showcase the resilience of collective cultural identities (Desmond and Leah tutu Legacy Foundation 6:29-24:39).

Away from the influence of the Apartheid system and its impact on the people and writers including Matlwa, it is worth mentioning that this writer talked about her inspiration after reading books. She says that the earliest memory of owning a book was when she went to the post office, and for the first time there was a package with her name on it, a book by Dr. Seuss entitled *Oh the Places you'll Go* (1990). She affirmed that it was the book that opened up the world to her, and to many realities and existences that made her courageous and enhanced her belief that she could be and do anything she wanted to do (NationalBookWeekTV 0:27-1:22).

To sum up, through the information mentioned above, one can say that these features have touched her soul, that she started jotting down her words to convey her powerful meanings, and inform the coming generations about the issues that the black population is still grappling with to construct their identities inside their country.

I.3.Coconut: Plot Overview

Coconut is one of the main contemporary South African novels written by Matlwa, one of the South African writers who emerged during the Contemporary period. Through this novel Matlwa depicts an image of the contemporary South African society in Johannesburg, and the struggle of the black South African young generation with the effects of the Apartheid system. The novel follows a non-chronological order of narration in depicting the life of two teenage black girls named Ofilwe and Fikile who are born in two different worlds and thus possess different social backgrounds.

The novel is divided into two chapters, the first chapter is told from Ofilwe's perspective and the second chapter is told from Fikile's perspective. It gives diversified insights into life in post-Apartheid South Africa by using two narrators from different backgrounds. Both

protagonists Ofilwe and Fikile grow up in a white suburb and struggle in finding and constructing their identities, meaning that their lives as black females in a white suburb have created an identity crisis and a sense of loss in finding their real belonging. They find themselves lost between their own African values and western white values left by the Apartheid system long after its official ending.

Ofilwe is born into a rich middle class family who lives in a gated community in an elite white suburb called the Little Valley Country Estate. Her father named John Tlou is a beneficiary of the Black Economic Empowerment Policy established by the post-Apartheid government. Ofilwe's family migrated from the poor black township of Mabopane to the predominantly white suburb of Little Valley Country Estate in Sandton Johannesburg, to start their new life as a black middle class family. Ofilwe's father John Tlou owns a communication company while her mother named Gemina works as a nurse but later she resigns to take care of Ofilwe and her brother Tshepo. Ofilwe's family lives a modest lifestyle that is different from other black people's lifestyle. She and her brother Tshepo attend former white schools, have many white friends and speak English as their mother tongue.

However, the interracial cultural differences and the legacy of Apartheid introduced obstacles and complicated the Tlou's new life. The white South Africans inherit the same mentality of the Apartheid era and consider blacks as being inferior, making it hard for Ofilwe as well as Tshepo to integrate into and be accepted by the white society. Consequently, both Ofilwe and her brother start questioning their identities in a white society which remains aggressive and racist to black people.

Ofilwe attended a white school and succeeded in having many white friends. However, she faced racism and through time she becomes aware of being marginalized by her own friends and classmates due to the color of her skin. She has always wanted and tried to fit into the white society by adopting the white culture and lifestyle. Her desire to be white was excessive. Despite all the efforts she made to be accepted in the white society, she could not and she always find herself rejected by this white circle to which she always dreamed to belong to and to be part of.

Her rejection of her own black culture which can be seen in her lack of mastering her mother tongue called the Sepedi which is a Bantu language spoken by black South Africans, results in her ignorance of her black heritage. Ofilwe thus, finds herself struggling to find her belonging, for she is rejected by both the white and the black groups who perceive her as cultureless. However, she soon realizes the value of her own black culture. So wanted to recover her African roots and started making efforts in learning her mother tongue the “Sepedi”, which she neglected and disvalued right from the beginning. Then, she finds it difficult to reconstruct her identity and find her real belonging in a post-Apartheid context.

The second part of the novel focuses on Fikile Twala’s life, a young black girl who grew up in a typical South African township called Mphebotho. This township contains all sorts of economic and social challenges including crime, violence and mainly poverty. Fikile lived in poverty, her mother committed suicide when she was very young. As a result, she grew up as an orphan and lived with her uncle who adopted her. They both live in a one bedroom in a rented hovel, which does not have basic commodities enabling decent human life such as running water and flushing toilets.

Fikile experienced a traumatic and a painful childhood as she was sexually abused by her uncle when she was a child. Eventually she abandoned her studies, dropped out of school and started working as a waitress in a restaurant called Silver Spoon Coffee Shop which is mainly frequented by white people. Inspired by images of white women she sees in magazines, Fikile decides to pursue the life of the whites which according to her is the best one. Just like Ofilwe she desires to escape her black origins and embrace the white culture.

She has always dreamed of living the same luxurious life as Ofilwe's and get rid of poverty. She wants to live as a white person and fit into the white society. At Silver Spoon for example, she works hard to assimilate into the Silver Spoon culture of the white employers and customers. She even changes her name from Fikile to Fiks and creates her life history in an attempt to erase her dirty past and embrace the new life of her dreams.

Both Fikile and Ofilwe feel uncomfortable with their names because their names always remind them of their black origins. While Ofilwe prefers to be called Fifi, Fikile also prefers the name Fiks, an anglicized version of their Zulu names. Fikile fabricates a white identity by narrating a fictionalized past where she lived in England for a while in an attempt to place herself within Western modernity. She immerses herself into the lives of Silver Spoon clientele picturing herself not only as a server but also as an important person in the operations of Silver Spoon Coffee Shop. However, despite all these attempts, she always finds herself marginalized and thus could not be accepted in the white society. She always receives bad treatments from white employers who consider her as a stranger and always remind her that she is nothing more than a black and poor waitress and all this is because of her black skin.

Through time, Fikile becomes aware that reaching wealth will cause her the loss of her identity, as a result, she finds herself lost in making her decision whether to follow wealth and lose her identity or to keep her black identity and stay in poverty. The novel ends with both protagonists facing the same struggle and issue. They both suffer from the effects of whiteness on their self-perception, culture, belonging and identity formation.

II. Social Background

II.1. Post-Apartheid

The early years of 1990's witnessed the end of the Apartheid system. A racist system aimed at separating the different races existing in South Africa. The races include the whites which occupy the highest status followed by the Indians and colored occupying the middle status and then come the blacks at the lowest status.

The year of 1994 commemorates the beginning of a democratic government and celebrates the first post-Apartheid elections. The elections allowed individuals from any race to vote, as well as the establishment of a new constitution. During this year, South Africa moved from the era of Apartheid toward a new era, an era of democracy which marks the beginning of a post-Apartheid period. During this period, the contemporary South African society experienced some changes, and the black South Africans were offered some opportunities which could not be offered during the Apartheid era (Harber 4).

The democratic elections were followed by a process of racial desegregation in South Africa. It offered the black South Africans the right to live in white areas and have contact with the white race. Moreover, the post-Apartheid era saw a change in the class structure of the country.

This change can be seen in the growth of the black middle class (Ballard 1). This expansion of the black middle class has been largely credited to the enactment of legislation, transforming the social, economic and political landscape as well as the adoption of affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment to redress the inequalities caused by the colonial rule (Khunou 27).

Further, the desegregation of the public and private fields of society including the government, education and the workplace resulted in racially varied social spaces and higher upward mobility of historically designated black groups into the middle class (Southall 6). As a result, this rising mobility and new freedom provided by the democratic era, had significant implications for residential desegregation as some black middle class took the opportunity to move from townships to white suburbs (Ndlovu 15).

Residential Gated Communities are parts of these white suburbs; that are created by whites as living environments which would facilitate their modern European way of living. While these were considered as white spaces, the changes in class dynamics gave rise to the growth of the black middle class living within these white spaces (Ballard 2). However, this inclusion of the black race into these former white areas is accompanied by some conditions. The blacks find themselves obliged to adopt the white culture, norms and standards as well as follow some rules to fit into the white society (Letsoko, et al 838).

In addition, this integration created new forms of conflicts and politics of belonging for the black middle class. There was a general sense of detachment concerning the broader community by the black residents, and a distorted sense of belonging due to the historical legacy of being viewed as part of an inferior race which makes the black middle class struggle to find its sense of belonging (Ballard 9).

Besides, these blacks included in white suburbs having the desire to be white and be accepted in the white society, always find themselves marginalized and not belonging anywhere in the country. Neither to the white society because of stereotypes, nor to the black community due to the underdevelopment of the townships where the blacks live. The black middle class find themselves being members of two different communities, thus they feel great pressure to adhere to both sets of standards and as a result they find themselves not belonging to either groups (Letsoko, et al 839).

Likewise, the white suburbs provide a fake experience of the country which negatively impact the black identity formation, mainly the young's black identities in the post-Apartheid period .The young's black identity is believed to be at threat due to adopting white culture and eliminating the black culture and traditions by the white rules. This exclusion of the black culture has started with language. Most of the blacks, mainly young blacks living in white communities only speak English instead of their mother tongue whether at home, at school or outside and this is due to the effect of the white culture (Letsoko, et al 839).

During the post-Apartheid era, white spaces offered opportunities for the black middle class, compared to the townships which seem to be forgotten spaces and which were not given any intervention by the government. Yet, the members of this black middle class find themselves unable to practice their traditions and cultures freely in a white area and obliged to adopt the rules created by these white spaces that are based on Westernized ideals of community (Letsoko, et al 840).

Furthermore, the process of school desegregation that started in 1990's in South Africa, allowed the black students to attend white schools and universities. The post-Apartheid government passed the South African school act the (SASA) of 1996 legislating a series of democratic changes

in education among these changes the desegregation of public schools. Hence, despite the end of Apartheid and despite the end of segregation, black students still experience racism in desegregated white schools. Post-Apartheid South Africa's education policy aims at providing the same educational opportunities and helping facilitate equal access to quality education while reform initiatives still exist with the legacy of Apartheid (Ndimande 123).

Despite the democratic changes made in educational policy, the school system appeared with other dilemmas like the township schools resources which are still a far cry compared to the white schools resources. This problem pushed many black parents to transfer their children to wealthy schools in suburban areas in which these black children experience racism (McKay, et al 4).

Regardless of all the offered opportunities, the black South Africans still struggle with the effects of the white culture in a post-Apartheid era bearing some of the legacies and inequalities of the Apartheid system. Among these inequalities, poverty which exists mainly in rural areas, alongside with the new forms of racism which seems to be indirect and subtle, compared to the old form of racism, however still affecting the black South Africans and their identity formation in a negative way.

After discussing the literary and social background of our study, we will move to the theoretical framework in which we will present the New Historicist theory and its selected concepts that we will apply in the analysis of the novel.

III. Introduction to New Historicist Theory and Selected Concepts

III.1. New Historicism

In the 1980's a new movement of literary criticism termed New Historicism appeared in the United States. This new movement was introduced and led by the American theorist and scholar Stephen Greenblatt whose book *Renaissance self-fashioning: From more to Shakespeare* (1980) and essays including "The Improvisation of Power" (1980) were generally viewed as its beginning.

New historicism is considered to be the result of concepts and ideas of literary analysis as well as interpretations that have been incorporated from various post-structural theorists, mainly Louis Althusser's Marxist ideology, Michel Foucault's discourse and power, Clifford Geertz's anthropology and also Jacques Derrida's idea of deconstruction and instability of language (Lyu 1075).

This new movement emerged as a reaction against new criticism, a formalist movement in literary theory which follows a specific method. This method is based on a close reading of literary works, by focusing only on the form. It treats literary texts as being autonomous and not having any connection or link to their cultural, social, historical and political context, as well as to the author's biographical context (Doğan 80). Another literary approach against which New Historicism appeared as a reaction is Old Historicism, which claims that history works as a background to literature and that a literary text reflects the history of its time.

New Historicism was considered to be a modified and an edited version of Old Historicism. Since both literary approaches seek to analyze literary works in relation to their historical and cultural context. However, there are some differences which made New Historicism appear as a reaction against Historicism. In this context, R. Murfin writes in his article entitled "The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms" (1998) that new historicists' critics view

history as a social science like anthropology and sociology, whereas old historicists tended to view history as literature's background (Murfin 35).

Historicists study literature in the context of social, political and cultural history as well as placing history as being the background of literature. New historicists come up with a new idea which asserts that the literary text is located within the institutions, social practices and discourses that construct the global culture of a specific time and space. They claim that a literary text is a product and at the same time a producer of cultural energies and codes. Further, New Historicism puts history at the core of research and holds a different understanding of history compared to the traditional historicism which views history as being universal. New historicists rather consider it to be cultural and lack faith in objectivity since they are subjective (Abrams 238).

New Historicism focuses more on the historical and cultural context of any literary text. Yet, this cannot be considered as a simple coming back to the traditional historicism since the previous scholars of Old Historicism viewed the social and intellectual history as a background of literary works and tried to separate history into various epochs. Hence, New Historicism had a different view of literature, according to new historicists, literature reflects the worldview of a given period, and history is not only a background of literature. New Historicism asserts that literary texts serve to describe the conclusion of a cultural conversation in a given historical period as well as participate in that conversation. Following the new historicist idea, literary works are regarded as representatives or agents as well as results of a cultural change and are included in documents which form history (Lyu 1075).

New Historicism claims that every literary text serves to depict a particular cultural, historical or political event. On this basis, Evrim Doğan in his article entitled "New Historicism

and Renaissance Culture” (2005) notes that literature becomes the means to represent the ideology of a culture through resonant texts (Doğan 77). New historicists focus also on the marginalized voices including people of color, women, working class people who usually have not been taken into consideration or included in mainstream literature and history.

The preliminary concern of New Historicism is to refigure the relationship between texts and the cultural system in which they were produced (Doğan 80). Based on the new historicist theory, literary works can not be interpreted and analyzed in isolation, or without taking into consideration the cultural, historical social and political context, as well as the author’s biographical context which led to their emergence. Literary texts are another form of social relevance which is formed by society and which in response is involved in reforming the culture of that society (Montrose 24).

As believed by new historicists, historical events can be granted not only a single interpretation but different and multiple interpretations, depending on the reader’s view and attitude. It is the reader’s task to analyze and interpret a given literary work to come to a clear understanding of the events being described in the interpreted literary works. Moreover, New Historicism follows a method which is based on a parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, generally of the same historical epoch. It practices a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given the same importance (Joshi 4).

III.2. Self-fashioning

Stephen Greenblatt, in his book entitled *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) explores the English Renaissance literature which was impacted by questions about identity. He stands against the Elizabethan and the

Jacobean theatre's point of view, and asserts the importance of looking at the texts in relation to the social and cultural contexts. Moreover, Greenblatt used this term "Self-fashioning" to refer to the process of constructing the individual's own identity, and how people shape their identities and public image following the social aspects of the society.

He claims that "There were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned" (Greenblatt 1). Besides this, he aims to show how individuals model themselves for the sake of constructing their identities by imitating the well-respected and admired people in society. Greenblatt defined the term self-fashioning in his work *Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning (1980)* as,

It describes the practice of parents and teachers; it is linked to manners, particularly that of elite; it may suggest hypocrisy or deception, an adherence to mere outward ceremony; it suggests representation of one's nature or intention in speech or actions [...] it invariably crosses the boundaries between the creations of literary characters, the shaping of one's own identity (3).

This passage highlights the idea of people pretending to be something they are not. It is like when someone acts really polite and proper in the outside, but inside, they might not actually believe or feel the way they are acting.

According to Greenblatt, individuals inherit this behavior from the authority figures like parents or teachers, and it is commonly linked to the behaviors of high-class people. This idea of pretending can be seen both in real life and in stories, where characters might act a certain way

to fit in or hide their true feelings, which can affect how they see themselves and how others see them.

In addition to this, Greenblatt sees that self-fashioning is a part of culture. It means that the process of defining oneself is influenced by both existing norms and external elements. Ultimately, whenever identity is constructed, it always holds within it the potential for subversion and eventual loss as he says, “always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion and loss” (9).

According to Greenblatt, the upper classes adopted this process of self-fashioning during the Renaissance era, meaning that all the fancy folks in lower classes were about self-fashioning and this can be seen through their portraits, the way they acted and how they dressed. He then, added that the noblemen were expected to fashion themselves by wearing luxurious clothes, be fluent in literature, art and other artistic fields. Additionally, the relationship between self-fashioning and arts can be seen in the way they both influenced and impacted the people of that era (15).

III.3. Racist Discourse

Racist discourse is among the dominant forces that shapes society. It is linked to issues like immigration, slavery and the settlement of new population in a particular area. Hence, the concept of racism has become deeply spread in our society, shaping identities and realities. Yet, the influence of racist discourse is evident in literary texts, media and political movements; however, it imposes itself in our social interactions (Vanduk 351).

At first glance, racist discourse refers to the ways in which individuals communicate about race and racism. It is a harmful language that transmits harmful and disrespectful representations of racial groups serving to uphold existing racial hierarchies (351). Ultimately, it is placed as a discriminatory social practice which is used by the individuals in their daily interactions.

Secondly, racist discourse is considered as a tool that reinforces the reproduction of racism as a system of racial dominance. Typically, racist discourse permits the spread of racial beliefs and behaviors imposed by the dominant groups. Yet, there are two forms of racist discourse that can be classified as directed at ethnically different Others and racist discourse about ethnically different Others (350).

The first form of racism involves members of a particular dominant group disrespecting and mistreating other marginalized groups such as immigrants, and refugees. This mistreatment often includes derogatory language, insults and impolite language in addition to other offensive forms of communication that contain harmful messages to expose superiority and humiliation (352). In modern times, various forms of verbal discrimination are widely considered as unacceptable. Yet, racist discourse towards the marginalized groups is widely condemned, so people instead of using derogatory language they may use disrespectful behaviors like interrupting them or ignoring them by focusing on stereotypes.

In essence, these forms of verbal interactions are seen as inappropriate and considered as a new form of everyday racism that conveys dominance and marginalization to the society. Those behaviors emerge in conversations with people from minority groups when they are recognized as rude and impolite by the society. If these behaviors occur within members of

dominant groups, they will not be judged the same way as minority groups are judged. Consequently, these minority groups face all types of racial harassment which threaten and shape their well-being and their self-construction.

The second type of racist discourse is about ethnically different Others which may take various forms from everyday conversations to more formal ones such as parliamentary debates. Thus, it will be exposed through multimedia formats like TV shows, news reports, movies, laws and so on. In general, racist discourse aims at depicting “them” (racial minorities) in a negative image, while portraying “ourselves” which is the dominant groups in an idealized image. This system aims at ignoring any achievement that could be realized by the minorities, at the same time making sure not to show any negative side of the dominant groups (353).

III.4. Anecdotes

As Greenblatt says, the term “anecdotes” is a literary term that refers to portraying a story based on historical events “The anecdote thereby exposes history”(Greenblatt 50). He claims in his book entitled *Practicing New Historicism*(2000) that the story of anecdotes is such a representation of a larger structure unlike the traditional historical anecdotes. This latter focuses on capturing the role of the character and explains it instead of choosing ambiguous moments which are symbolically significant and explored in literary texts (47).

Anecdotes are a central feature in New Historicism. New Historicists as Ronald Barthes and Joel Fineman, argue that any short story disrupts the historical narratives in which it is placed. Fineman adds that every anecdote disrupts the coherence of the larger historical explanation. In other words, anecdotes portray the coherent structure of long historical narratives, offering self-

contained and often singular perspectives that challenge and complicate the broader historical contexts (49-51).

Anecdotes contain concise and effective narratives with more experienced and concrete details about the narrated events as claimed “Each explanatory narrative can be summed up in a further anecdote” (50). The latter may be either fictional or real and it is commonly considered as real daily life stories that reflect people’s experiences in a specific setting. It often has a sense of realism and contains a particular purpose in mind.

New Historicist anecdotes serve as a tool for conveying counterhistorical insights and aspirations into the realm of literary history. Anecdotes often attempt to blend conflicting desires such as maintaining mysteries while also attempting to reconstruct forgotten or obscured historical contexts. They sometimes aim at opposing events anachronistically, placing them out of their real and original historical contexts (54).

For New historicists, anecdotes is a powerful process to bring back and revive the archival materials as Greenblatt says, “The anecdotes were to be drawn from "archives of confinement police, petitions to the king, and lettres de cachet" of Foucault's "classical" age”(69). They take its elements including chronological order of occurrence, control subjects, beginning, middle and its end into consideration. Since these features help in relating events and transforming them into stories then constructing them as reliable evidence, and into more detailed facts which consequently remain as a source of historical knowledge.

Critics have been raised about Greenblatt’s use of anecdotes due its lack of concrete evidence and its consideration of contradictions. Further, it is also criticized for being such a revived version of new criticism. However, Clifford Geertz’s cultural anthropology says that

“anecdotes” reflects large cultural frameworks it belongs to. In other words the anecdote is a result of expressing cultural lived facts it belongs to (“Beyond New Historicism?”499).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we introduced the literary, historical and theoretical background of the study. We began by providing insights into Matlwa’s life and background shedding light on the literary influences that motivated and impelled her to write *Coconut*. Following this, we offered a short overview of the novel’s plot. Then, we explored the socio-cultural backdrop of the post-Apartheid era to understand the narrative. Later, in the final section kept for the theoretical framework of our study, we introduced the New Historicist theory that will be used in the analysis of the novel. Finally, we highlighted some key concepts to apply in the coming chapter that are: self-fashioning, racist discourse and anecdotes.

Chapter Two: A New Historicist Analysis of the Novel Coconut

Chapter Two: A New Historicist Analysis of the Novel *Coconut*

Introduction

In this chapter we will analyze the novel *Coconut* by applying some concepts of the New Historicist theory including self-fashioning, racist discourse and anecdotes. We will start by studying the self-fashioning of the two characters. After that we will examine the novel's parts that showcase racist discourse. Later, we will demonstrate how the novel depicts real events in history by applying the notion of anecdotes.

I. Self-Fashioning in the Novel

I.1. Ofilwe and Fikile's Self-Fashioning

As it is claimed by Greenblatt, self-fashioning is a term which is used to describe how individuals construct their own identities according to the social norms and standards, thus, crafting their public image and persona. He explained that these individuals fashion their identities by imitating esteemed and important figures in society (1). In her novel *Coconut*, Matlwa uses two main characters named Ofilwe Tlou and Fikile Twala who went through the process of self-fashioning during their lives and who experience a change in their identity formation. Both protagonists grow up in a white environment and thus seek to construct their identities to fit in that environment.

Greenblatt in his introduction to *Renaissance Self-fashioning* (1980), aims at figuring out the ways through which identity was constituted in the sixteenth-century English culture. In a similar vein, in this research we aim at exploring the way the two characters in the novel fashion their identities in the post-Apartheid era.

The first chapter of the novel introduces a young black girl named Ofilwe, who after the end of the Apartheid system in South Africa moves with her family from the township of Mabopane, integrating themselves as a black middle class family into the Residential Gated Communities in Johannesburg where the wealthy whites live. The second chapter introduces the other protagonist Fikile, a poor young black girl who lives in the township of Mabopane and who is adopted by her uncle after her mother's suicide. Despite the poverty in which she is living she always has a hope that her life will change to the better if she escapes her blackness.

Growing up as a young black girl in a white society, Ofilwe starts to be admired by the white people surrounding her everywhere. One day, on a Saturday afternoon, she spends hours covering her bedroom wall with posters of white people she believes are the most extraordinary human beings on earth. She says, "I covered my bedroom wall with posters of people I thought were the greatest breathing beings of our time" (Matlwa 71). She often lays on her back and admires the beauty of her bedroom walls covered with only white faces everywhere. She reckons that she does not find black faces which attract her or which she likes.

Like Ofilwe, Fikile grows up in an environment peopled by whites throughout her entire life, she says, "I grew up in white environment for the most part of my life, from primary school right through to high school" (107). At the age of nine years old, she starts reading many magazines talking about white celebrities' lives. The white environment in which she lives and those magazines she keeps reading play a great role in influencing her and making her obsessed by the life of the whites. When she was a child she used to spend hours browsing through the albums photo of her uncle growing up in a white family. She imagines herself instead of her uncle in every single photo surrounded by those white people; she says, "I would stare for what have been hours at each individual photo and then close my eyes and try to picture myself in them" (90).

Both girls have a dream which is to become rich and white. Fikile calls this dream 'Project Infinity', she discovers this word in a class of mathematics, and from that day it became her secret word which she uses as a name for her dream. The two girls consider project infinity as a dream which must be realized because it represents their whole life. So in order to achieve this dream, they must change their selfhood.

Believing that their black identities would not afford them the ability to fit into the white society in which they are living. Ofilwe and Fikile choose from an early age to construct a new identity, a white identity which could help them suit the social and cultural aspects surrounding them. In other words, the fact of being rejected by the members of their society due to their black origins alongside with their obsession with the white race, push them to refashion their selfhood in an attempt to make themselves fit into their society. Alternatively, the hard situation in which Fikile lives because of poverty is another important reason which pushes her to reject her black roots and refashion her identity.

The two characters begin by changing their names from Ofilwe to Fifi and from Fikile to Fiks, an Anglicized version of their names which they prefer and which they believe suits them more for their new identities. It is to be mentioned that their names always remind them of their black origins, this is why they decide to change them. Ofilwe, prefers the name Fifi because her white friends call her with this name. Ultimately, Fikile prefers the name Fiks because all the white customers coming to the coffee shop where she works call her Fiks. She always introduces herself as Fiks and that Fikile is her second name which she never uses because many white people can not pronounce it.

Vivian de Klerk in her survey entitled “Changing Names in the ‘New’ South Africa” writes that from 1997 the South Africans start to favor English names over their African names. She claims that socio-cultural factors are among the reasons that push people to change their names. She further states that changing African names into modern ones is a direct consequence of the influence and domination of English colonizers with whom Africans come into contact (de Klerk 202).

Both the characters adapt the white standards of beauty by imitating the white important people surrounding them. On the first hand, Ofilwe consistently admires the white girl’s beauty with whom she attends classes, for being beautiful with very soft hair, she says, “Kate Jones had the most beautiful hair I had ever seen in all my eight years of life” (9). However through time, this admiration turns into influence as she starts imitating those white girls. She changes her appearance to suit the societal white standards of beauty.

Desired to get rid of her wiry African hair which is the second representative of her black identity, she starts going to hair salons at the age of ten to straighten her hair using the Black Queen hair-straightener cream and other vitamins. Ofilwe recounts her experience during the process of straightening her hair; she says,

A painful exothermic chemical reaction. Burn. Burning. Burnt. When OusBeauty asked me if I was ready to wash it out, I said no. I wanted every last tiny winnie curl straight. In the mirror I watched the fine-toothed comb slip effortlessly through my silky soft and straight Black Queen hair. I was not bothered by the tenderness of my scalp that sent quivers down my neck

as the teeth of the comb slid past it nor was I alarmed at the white of my roots that had come to the surface. No I was just delighted to be beautiful again (11).

Despite the extreme pain and suffering she undergoes through the process of straightening her hair because these hair creams are highly chemical, she chooses to endure this pain. She rather observes the hairdresser applying the Black Queen hair-straightener cream on her hair assuring that she does not miss any strand of hair. In fact her yearning for having a straight hair and becoming a white person exceeds everything even the pain she goes through. She can wait for so long and bear the suffering just to have that beautiful soft hair she always dreams of. When her hair is done, the result makes her forget all the pain; she is so thrilled to see herself beautiful with a hair so straight and soft just as she wants it to be.

In the same way, Fikile imitates the white celebrities she sees in the magazines she reads. She begins by changing her appearance and embodies white ideals of beauty through the consumption of beauty products, using lenses, caramel blond hair extension and other products. What she uses the most is the Lemon Light skin-lightener cream to lighten her skin because she does not like her black skin; she rather wants to have a white skin. She cites, “My Lemon light skin-lightener cream, my sunscreen, my eyeliner, mascara, eye-shadow, blush and the pieces of caramel blond hair extension” (87). In hot days she avoids going outside because she does not like to be exposed to the heat of the sun, for she fears that her skin will get darker as she says, “It’s hot outside and my skin will get dark”(97).

From this we can see how Matlwa addresses the issue of adopting Eurocentric and white ideals of beauty by many black South African women and rejecting the Afrocentric ideals of

beauty. In fact, she is not the only one who sheds light on this problem. Sabrina E. Robinette is one of the researchers who discussed this matter in her thesis entitled “The Imposition of White Beauty Standards on Black Women” (2019). She proclaims that white ideals of beauty are a form of oppression that operates through media’s attempts to make black women feel insecure about their blackness and profit off of their desire to erase their black identity (Robinette 10).

Another researcher who discusses this subject is Maxine Gabrielle Thomik in his thesis titled “Reflections on the post Colonial and post Feminist in the Work of Two South African Photographers Jodi Bieber and Zanele Muholi” (2014). He confirms that black women who are mostly stigmatized and scorned due to their black skin color are often tempted if not impelled to use skin whitening products to whiten their skins. He adds that this could mean that authentic beauty can be understood as a counter point to notions of what beauty means in society, and could be seen as a point of departure from ideas of oppressive systems of beauty that the West is said to perpetuate (Thomik 60).

Ofilwe and Fikile do not only adapt themselves to the societal white standards of beauty but to the white culture and way of life in general. Both of them realize from an early age that their ancestors’ language will not take them somewhere in their life, and will not help them achieve their main goals which is to suit the social and cultural facets of their society. They both decide to stop speaking in their mother tongue and start speaking only in the English language. They deem that English is the language of success and the language that will help them belong to the white society and that their mother tongue will do nothing but keep them backward.

Ofilwe appraises the English language because it is the language spoken by the most important people living in her society including movie stars, singers and her wealthy friends whom

she desires to resemble like. She believes that her choice of the English language over the “Sepedi” language spoken only by the members of her family, made her more visible and more valued by the members of her society mainly by the whites. She notices that she receives different treatments from people comparing to those who do not speak English, and all this is because she speaks good English, she says, “it is because I am smart and speak perfect English. That is why people treat me differently” (45). She devalues her ancestors’ language because she thinks that this language will keep her ignorant and will make her stuck in her place rather than pushing her forward.

She rather values the English language because she considers it as the language of success which will make her succeed in her life. She states, “I spoke the TV language: The one daddy spoke at work, the one mama never could get right, the one that spoke of sweat success” (46). At family reunions, she feels herself special when being among her poor cousins who live in townships and who are regularly mistreated just because they can not speak perfect English like her. This reinforces her belief that her mastering of the English language turns her into a special person. Feeling sorry for her cousins, she promises to teach them English so they could be special like her.

Like Ofilwe, Fikile prefers the English language being the language spoken by the key figures holding significant influence and power within the social context in which she is living. She keeps working so hard and practicing her English to sound perfect exactly like the whites, because according to her the accent is very important. For her speaking perfect English will make her well-treated and respected by the people of her society especially by the whites, she proclaims, “My whole life has become about how I speak” (113). She is convinced that her knowledge of the English language will guarantee her a successful future.

This process of using English language as a tool in the individuals' self-fashioning is reflected through Greenblatt's book in which he sees language in the English renaissance as a discursive power, a social self-fashioning force and an impression of the temporal aspect of history. However language is considered as the main component of identity construction which is indeed interconnected with other social factors (Awad Elaref 723). This is the same thing that has occurred in the post-Apartheid society. After the Apartheid system, the English language remains the dominant language in the modern South African society.

Ofilwe and Fikile choose to speak only in English for they believe that it is the language that enables them to be noticed and be among individuals of high significance in their society. For them mastering English language is related to civilization. In order to escape their ancestors' identity which they consider as barbaric, they opt for the English language as a representation of their cultural and societal advancement. This is confirmed by Greenblatt in his essay on *The Tempest* entitled "Learning to Curse" where he analyzed the characters' use of language with reference to Cicero De Orator, he claims,

Virtually every Renaissance schoolboy reads in Cicero Deorator that only eloquence had been powerful enough to gather scattered mankind together in one place, to transplant human beings from barbarous life in the wilderness to a civilized social systems, to establish organized communities, to equip them with laws and judicial safeguards and civic rights (20).

According to the two characters, language is the only thing that reduces the human aggression, and changes man's life to the better, they believe that it is indeed a means of civilizing

individuals in uncivilized communities. This justifies their choice of English language as a process which leads them towards civilization.

Ofilwe and Fikile always avoid having contact or building relationships with any black person. They rather prefer and try building good relations with only wealthy white persons of high standing in their society. For instance, Ofilwe used to have a friend named Belinda who is a poor girl. They are friends since their teacher seated them together in grade three. However, as time passes she breaks up her relation with her because she wants to have more important friends. Although she loves Belinda and she has a great time with her but the environment in which she is living pushes her to break up her relation with her and look for more useful friends who will shore up her coveted image. She is ashamed of having Belinda as a friend because she is poor.

She alienates herself from her until they become strangers, she even hesitates and renounces meeting her, she says, “ when I spot Belinda and her father coming out of the Bread Lady across from Silver Spoon, I change direction and enter the pharmacy on my right” (36). When Ofilwe spots Belinda, she tries to flee away because she does not want to see her. Unfortunately, things do not go the way she desires. Belinda finally sees her letting her no other place to escape to. Belinda is so cheery to see Ofilwe, she immediately starts a conversation with her telling her that it has been a long time they did not see each other. After a long conversation, Belinda goes leaving Ofilwe who seems to be untouched by her words. She rather believes and is still convinced that rejecting Belinda from her life will be advantageous for her. She confirms, “I began to believe that I was really better off without them because I really am” (41).

Ofilwe prefers having rich friends mainly white ones who can add something to her life. She starts building new relations with her classmates being rich and belonging to the upper

class. When Samantha Grey, a rich girl comes as a new student to the school where she studies; Ofilwe finds it as an opportunity to have a friend from the upper class. She tries to ingratiate herself with her and she succeeds in doing so. She affirms, “In our arms Samantha promised that if we proved to be as cool as her friends from her previous school she could consider asking her dad if we could spend a weekend at the dam” (39).

In grade seven, she is attracted by a boy called Junior P. Mokoena who comes from a rich family. She does many things to make him notice her and build a good relation with him. She even works really hard in mathematics class tests so that her teacher makes her seat next to Junior’s table because he gets the highest marks in mathematics class tests, and also because the teacher makes pupils having best marks seat next to each other. Ofilwe proclaims, “I had worked hard for this class tests because I knew that it was the only way I would ever get Junior P. Mokoena to recognize me” (24). On her sixteenth birthday, she is so happy to be surrounded by her new friends; she is contented because she enjoys her life the way she desires.

In the same way, Fikile tries so hard to avoid building relations with black people mainly those in the township where she lives because she abhors them and considers them as dirty people. She believes that there is no need to build relations with those poor people of her township because she is convinced that she will soon leave that place. She prefers to be alone and not mixing herself with any black person. When she was a child she used to refuse going outside and play with girls of her age because those girls are black and can not speak English. Thus, she considers them moronic and dull as she says, “they are the same, they are boring, they can’t speak English, they are stupid” (96). She favors making acquaintances with white rich people only because they are the kind of people who can help her fit into the white society.

When she is dropped out of high school she starts working at a classy Coffee Shop called Silver Spoon. She chooses this Coffee Shop because it is frequented by white important people of the country. She particularly likes working in this Coffee Shop because it gives her the opportunity to meet those important people, as she states, “At Silver Spoon Coffee Shop I get to mix with the who’s who of this country” (103).

When being at Silver Spoon, she tries her best to build good relations with those wealthy white customers coming everyday by treating them in every good way and having long conversations with them listening to their stories. She knows every customers’ preferred dish as she points out, “I know exactly what you need Peter, something really greasy coming up!” (122). She even makes efforts remembering their middle names and every single detail about their lives. Fikile and Ofilwe make efforts to associate themselves with individuals of significance who can help them draw their desired picture.

Another way through which the character Ofilwe tries to integrate herself into the white society is via her participation in esteemed gatherings. Ofilwe’s attendance of prestigious occasions starts at the age of twelve years old when she receives her first invitation to a party from a wealthy boy called Tim Browning. She is exhilarated because it is the first time she attends an important event. When everybody at school is talking about the type of clothing to wear for the party, she is so delighted because for the first time she is able to participate in such conversations. She declares, “for the first time in a long while I was actually going to a real party” (13).

She considers the party as a big chance which will afford her the ability to integrate into her social circle which considers wealth, and at the same time make herself noticed by the wealthy boy Tim Browning whom she thinks admires her and invites her for a reason. Through

time she attends more occasions though not prestigious ones but those small occasions like dinner gatherings with important friends.

The two characters' yearning to fit into the white society and ensure their self-value turns them into selfish individuals who are unable to differentiate between morality and immorality. This is seen through Ofilwe who when receiving for the first time her two white friends Karen and Liza at home, is so excited; however becoming embarrassed later because of being ashamed of her mother who keeps bothering her each time by asking her if she and her friends need something. Ofilwe's reverence for her white friends turns her into a person who can not distinguish between right and wrong manners. Her only aim is to make herself viewed as a civilized affluent girl who deserves a place in her society even if it will cost her the disrespect of her parents as when she says, "Mama is dumb" (45).

Likewise, Fikile's extreme desire to become white and valued by the members of her society transforms her into a narcissistic and racist person. She becomes racist towards the blacks considering them as filthy ignorant people who can do nothing but only destroy instead of creating something beneficial. She says, "Black people! Why must they always be so damn destructive?" (99). She devalues every black individual she sees mainly those of her township and those poor ones selling at the roads whom she considers as disgusting.

When serving the customers at Silver Spoon, she always avoids serving black families, she prefers serving only the whites, and she confirms this by saying, "I do not serve the black families" (120). She hates those blacks coming to the Coffee Shop because they are part of those black economic empowerment families who have just come to Little Valley and who represent new money. She views herself different and believes that she can not relate to them because simply she

does not belong to them, per her statement, “I never could relate to other black South Africans” (107). She tends to believe that she belongs more to the whites because according to her they are her kind of people.

Both the two protagonists pretend to be wealthy in order to make themselves noticed by the prominent personalities of their society. Each one of them finds a specific way to do so. After her father bought a new fancy car, Ofilwe becomes so excited that finally she can enjoy the feeling of being viewed as an affluent girl who will be fetched in a Ritzy car. She informs almost everybody that her father will come and fetch her from school with his snazzy expensive car. When her father arrives she makes sure that everybody sees her getting into the most bewitching car in school. She mentions, “I wave bye to him so that he can see me climbing into the most captivating car on the school grounds” (19). She focuses mainly on her rich friends and classmates whom she wants to make regret the fact that they belittle her and realize that she too belongs to a wealthy family even if it is not really the case.

Similarly, at the Coffee Shop, Fikile used to imagine and invent stories about her life by lying to the white customers. She tells them that she lived in England and that she returned to South Africa because of the bad weather leaving her parents teaching there as she narrates, “I lived in England for a while, mummy and daddy still lecture there” (107). By creating stories about her life, she tries at the same time to innovate a new identity in an attempt to integrate herself into the white society and be viewed as a member of those white wealthy communities whom she wants to be like. She thinks that many white people believe that she is foreign because she has a very good accent and good behaviors just like the whites.

On her way for work she always chooses a crimson taxi which is spray painted on its back window first class. Though there is no such a thing as first class taxies but she always chooses that crimson taxi because she loves pretending that she is really travelling first class. It makes her feel good and also she believes that though she is only pretending but it will come a day and she will really travel first class.

Religion is another crucial element in the self-fashioning of the two figures, mainly in the character of Ofilwe who goes to St. Francis Anglican church every Sunday since she moved from Mabopane to Little Valley Country Estate. Although she knows nothing about the history of that church neither what the word Anglican itself means as she explains, “I understand nothing of the history of the church” (15), she chooses Christianity as a religion solely because the individuals with whom she lives in her society are Christians. She believes that Christianity will make her conformity with social and cultural facets of her society, since religion is the dominant aspect of any given society. This is the case for Christianity since it is the dominant religion in the post-Apartheid society where she lives, as she states, “Our whole social system is built on Christianity: our calendar, holidays, laws. Our upbringing” (12).

Through time, she reinforces her knowledge and belief in Christianity in an attempt to integrate herself more in the surrounding white circle. At the age of eleven years old, she stops using the prayer book when being with the congregation at church. This shows her efforts to fortify her faith as well as her understanding of Christianity. According to Stephen Greenblatt, there are two ways through which self-fashioning occurs, either by submitting to the authority, or by going against the authority. In this case the individual will be called the Other and will be viewed as a stranger or an alien who must be destroyed by the same authority (Greenblatt 9).

Ofilwe's choice of becoming a Christian showcases her conscious efforts to fashion her identity and personality by submitting to the authority. The fact that she lives in a society whose members are Christians shoves her to line up with them and believe in Christianity, because she reckons that it is the only way to make herself belong to that society. Believing in another religion mainly her ancestors' religion called the [Badimo] will make her viewed as a stranger who does not have a place among the members of her society and who should be destroyed as claimed by Greenblatt because in this case she is going against the authority. Thus she decides to construct her identity by submitting to the authority rather than going against it.

In a different light, concerning Fikile there is no a clear passage that mentions the kind of religion she believes in. She rather claims that she does not pray thinking that there is no need to. When she was young she used to believe that her grandmother waists her time in praying asking God how long the blacks should suffer because of the inequalities in the post-Apartheid society. She considers the evenings when her grandmother drags her out of bed and makes her kneel down forcing her to pray on her turn as moments of fun. She only repeats what her grandmother says without emotions which shows her lack of faith and her strong belief that the whites are created superiors as an example for the blacks to follow and that things are never intended to be equal.

In fact during the process of recreating her identity according to the surrounding environment, Ofilwe tries at the same time to understand something about her black roots, she asks her mother about the kind of religion they used to believe in before Christianity. She seems to be interested to know. She asks questions about her ancestors too, whether they used to be brave people fighting for their nation and whether they still exist. She regularly finds herself in very embarrassing situations and suffers humiliation whenever she is among black people who consider her as a sell out who prefers and adapts herself to a foreign culture. Thus, she knows nothing about

her own black culture. This pushes her to make some efforts and try learning her first language but unfortunately she fails since it is really hard and complicated. Therefore, she feels depressed and confused.

She starts blaming herself for rejecting her own identity and seeking to invent and construct another one which unfortunately does not suit her. She says to herself, “I do not like to see you sell your soul for a silver skin” (50). She feels herself destroyed and broken from the inside. She ignores how to adjust herself and prefers to close her eyes and see nothing in an attempt to ease herself because she does not know what to do. She feels lost and stuck in one place; she does not know where to go anymore or which path to choose because everything around her seems to be a lie.

When growing up, Ofilwe realizes that those she thinks are the greatest human beings and those she craves so hard to resemble like have rejected her because she is not one of their own race, and whatever she does she will never be viewed as one of them. When she tries to go back to those she thinks are the most ignorant people and those she always rejected, there too she finds no acceptance due to her extreme change.

Similarly, Fikile at the end is fired by her white boss and is obliged to go back to the township and to the people she has alienated herself from and whom she thinks are ignorant. She becomes depressed and tired of waiting to be able to live like all the whites she admires. She desperately says, “I am tired, I have tried, I am always trying but now I am tired” (133). Fikile realizes that blacks are nice people too after having the first long conversation with a black man. At the beginning, she enjoys listening to the man but later, she becomes bothered by his words since he has tackled a sensitive subject.

He talks about the small black children growing up to become foreigners and reject their own origins. These black children living in townships and attending white schools become affected by the white culture and thus speak only the English language instead of their own language. Fikile feels embarrassed and exasperated because she is targeted in the subject since she too has rejected her origins from an early age and preferred to fashion a white identity instead. Ultimately, like Ofilwe she realizes that the things she perceives as her greatest hurdles reveal themselves as the least, and that the things she considers uncomplicated and easy to overcome are the ones which bother her most and which cause her troubles. She says, “What you thought would be easy enough to conquer troubles you still” (140).

From all this, we can see how the post-Apartheid society has a strong impact on Ofilwe and Fikile’s inner selves and pushes them to refashion their identities and personalities in conformity to the mainstream society. However despite all their efforts to integrate themselves into the modern South African society, they still face racism and find themselves rejected by those white people they consider as models. Thus we can say that their self-fashioning is not successful since they have failed to merge themselves into this social circle. The rejection they have received from both sides makes them struggle to find their real identities and belonging. They find themselves stuck between two different worlds and unfortunately not belonging to either one.

By means of this new historicist analysis we can conclude that this literary work is a product and a result of various happenings in the South African society. We can see that the two protagonists above are strongly connected to their society and are disappointed at the end due to the inequalities which still exist in the South African society. Moreover the impact of the time span during which the novelist Matlwa lived plays a significant role in shaping her own and her

characters' identities. Likewise in the forthcoming analysis we will explore the racist discourse in the novel and how racism still exists in the post-Apartheid society.

I.2.Racist Discourse

Racist discourse refers to the manner in which individuals discuss race and racism. It is a type of racism in which the dominant groups use derogatory language and insults towards the minority groups. It is a language that conveys harmful portrayals of racial groups, and is considered as a verbal discrimination used by individuals in their daily conversations (Vanduk 350).

Matlwa sheds light on various themes in her novel *Coconut* including race, identity and other societal expectations in the post-Apartheid South Africa. She depicts the challenges faced by the blacks during the post-Apartheid period and how they are still confronting with the issue of constructing their identities and struggling with different types of racism.

The novel basically, holds a multifaceted issue within its two chapters to reflect the prejudices and the divisions within the contemporary South African society. Therefore, the reader may put his attention on the title of the novel, since it symbolizes the black South Africans who are physically black but mentally Westernized. Besides, it shows how the blacks have adopted the whites' western behaviors and values ignoring theirs. As a result, they struggle in finding their real identities and cultural heritage within a white dominated contemporary South African society.

It is worth to mention that racist discourse in this novel, premises around the challenges of racial identity and self acceptance by the two main characters Ofilwe and Fikile and other secondary characters. Instantly, the character Ofilwe straggles with exploring her identity as a

coconut where she tries to fit into the white spaces in modern South Africa. However, she experiences all kinds of marginalization and verbal accusations due to her black race.

It is important to mention that Fikile consciously enjoys being with the whites and rejects to be black and poor. As a result, like Ofilwe, she faces inequality, racism in addition to verbal accusations. Furthermore, Matlwa highlights the difficulties of racial consciousness and the verbal insults the blacks receive in the contemporary South Africa. This reinforces the idea of Gibson who in his book entitled *Do Strong Group Identities Fuel Intolerance? Evidence From The South African Case* (2006), argues that the experiences of everyday racism remain a historical and current reality for black South Africans. He claims that these experiences suggest that the legacy of Apartheid racism continues to have a significant impact on black people in South Africa, and that racism is still manifested in different ways (Gibson 435).

Throughout the first chapter of the novel the reader can notice how the protagonist Ofilwe and the other secondary characters seek to transmit their points of view as well as their experiences and show their relationship towards the white community inside their country. In fact, each one of these characters tries to give the reader a hint about what the African population was exposed to in the history of post-Apartheid era.

Yet, one can take Ofilwe as the main character on whom Matlwa focuses in the first chapter. Right at the beginning, Ofilwe gives a vivid image of a black girl called Sponono, capturing her physical appearance using terms not suitable to describe a person with. She gives an ugly image to this girl describing her using inappropriate terms like “scraggy” and “jabbing” as she says, “her scraggy neck and jabbing elbow” (Matlwa 09). From this, we can notice that Ofilwe

gives a rough and awkward capture of the girl's physical appearance and this is considered as an offensive language related to racist discourse.

Matlwa uses this style to showcase the image of black people not only from the perspective of whites but also from the perspective of black individuals themselves, who normally are supposed to describe each others in a beautiful way. Hence, this type of language is often considered as a racist discourse that will be clearly shown in the coming events of the novel. Matlwa uses another character named Kate Jones who is quickly mentioned at the beginning to whom Ofilwe gives an idealized image that suits the white beauty. She describes her hair as absolutely stunning when she says, "the most beautiful hair" (09). Unlike her hair which is full of braids that symbolizes South African hairstyle by which the reader can easily differentiate black from white races.

The author, however, uses the school teacher Mrs. Reed's speech to Ofilwe as a clear image of how blacks are verbally accused and blamed while saying, "You insolent child" (10). Here, the teacher's use of the word "insolent" could be considered as negative and disrespectful towards Ofilwe. Her negative and aggressive tone when she says, "Take it out! Take it out, Take it out now!" seems to be forceful and quite aggressive and displays anger towards Ofilwe even if she did nothing to Kate.

The teacher's reaction reflects the racial biases and racism black children suffer from inside white schools in the post-Apartheid era. This is also reflected in Bekisizwe S. Ndimande's interview with many black parents about the experiences of their children in desegregated white schools. He claims that the black children experience racism in white schools and that this affects them to an extent that their educational opportunities are compromised (Ndemandi 134).

Racist discourse is heavily depicted throughout the novel, taking as an example the dialogue that arises when the school teacher Mrs. Williamson asked Ofilwe where she was born, and Ofilwe's classmate Zama responds, "Don't lie, Ofilwe, you were born in a stinky shack!"(18). Through this expression, the reader understands that it is a shame to describe someone's house using these terms. However, this expression could be seen as a racist discourse, in fact describing Ofilwe as a liar at first, and then saying that she was born in a stinky shack, suggests a bad and negative stereotype and prejudice of her background. Her living conditions also reflect the idea that the black population is inferior and should live in such poor conditions.

Another statement that showcases racist discourse is the one of a secondary character named Junior P Mokoena where he mentions that he only dates white girls and does not date black ones. He says, "Tell her that I only date white girls."(25), this statement brings up another aspect of racist discourse that suggests a preference of the white race over the black one. This is seen as discriminatory for blacks and a perpetuation of stereotypes based on race. However, this statement makes the reader ask questions about the societal norms on relationships to understand and explore issues such as identity, the difficulty of establishing interracial relationships between individuals of different races and different backgrounds as well.

Such discourse invites the reader to focus on the consequences these negative and offensive verbal expressions have on the individuals' self value. It reinforces the spread of negative and unfair beliefs about any other different race groups which leads to discrimination and prejudices.

Racist discourse is illustrated through the character of Tshepo [Ofilwe's brother], who expresses the feeling of being ignored and marginalized in the restaurant where he works as he

says, “Why do they look through me as if I do not exist, click their fingers at me as if it is the only language that I understand” (28) . The writer through this speech tries to transmit a message to the reader about racial dynamics that the South Africans face in their daily life. Later on, Tshepo’s dissatisfaction with being unseen and unheard by others reflects the impact of racism in the South African society. It sheds light on the individuals’ troubles as being alienated due to their race.

Following Tshepo’s speech there is another statement which is explicitly related to racist discourse. This statement shows how black people are struggling to keep their real identities while the ruling groups deny it. Ultimately, it depicts the blacks’ experiences in different places such as restaurants, malls, schools, suburbs and so on due to the societal expectations and stereotypes that are extremely imposed on them. This, consequently, prevents them from embracing their blackness as Tshepo claims, “We may not be black in restaurants, in suburbs and schools.”(30). The word “black” in this case holds negative connotations since it is related to race. It often shows the ability of language in spreading racism and discrimination in the society.

Belinda’s description of her teacher’s way of dressing displays racial discourse as she states, “She should be looking in the mirror and looking at herself funny. Maybe she doesn’t have a mirror.”(40), through this statement the reader can understand how it is not ethical to judge a person based on his appearance. It is preferable to build a society where respect, equality, acceptance of the other is valued. Matlwa’s use of this language is made on purpose. It is for the sake of showing that racist discourse is not only limited to relationships between different racial groups but it can also occur between individuals within the same race.

When it comes to discuss the issue of racist discourse in the novel, it is worth to mention how language impacts and perpetuates negative and damaging stereotypes. In fact while reading

this novel, the reader can turn his attention to the discussion raised between Tshepo and his father. This discussion reflects the derogatory language by which Tshepo is insulted when his father tells him, “You are a lazy bugger Tshepo. That is what you are bloody lazy” (63) this statement reflects the verbal insults that could be received within the black families. The fact is that Tshepo wants to embrace his Africanism and his blackness but his father wants to distance him from the African identity and cultural heritage. This leads to a conflict between the family members and consequently causes the rise of these verbal insults that are related to racist discourse.

Matlwa portrays the behaviors and attitudes of her black characters and how they react aggressively against each other using negative language which is considered as a racist discourse. Among these characters, the protagonist Fikile who avoids building relationships with black people and considers them as ignorant. Fikile tries to escape her origins and change her belonging this is why she describes and expresses a negative and offensive image of herself as a black girl as she claims “They can serve as a constant reminder to me of what I do not want to be: black, dirty and poor” (87). Fikile for instance, claims that to be a black is to be “dirty and poor”. This case reminds her of what she does never want to be. She is glorifying the white race rather than embracing her black one. However, her statement reflects the fact that she internalizes negative stereotypes and perceptions about her black race.

This statement mentioned above is associated with racist discourse. In fact, the language used by Fikile in this statement, signifies negative stereotypes and biases. Besides, her use of this language gives a hint to how the black community is still seen in the post-Apartheid society. This used language signifies the indirect racism that blacks have faced. Through this statement, the reader understands that Fikile rejects conformity and being exposed to the black societal norms. Thus, her use of the word ‘they’ reflects what she has experienced while living with

the black individuals, then expressing the desire of distancing herself from them. In addition to this, the statement highlights Fikile's pressure to adhere into certain rules that are based on her black racial identity.

Fikile's thoughts about her black neighbors showcase her racist side and her overgeneralization as she says, "They are all the same, they are boring, they can't speak English, they are stupid, and they steal my stuff" (96). This statement reflects racial discourse by transmitting negative stereotypes about the black population, and suggesting a prejudice over her black neighbors. It signifies that their behaviors and bad attitudes result from their black race which is the source of every bad thing.

The reader can depict another form of racist discourse that mainly covers various aspects of the society through Fikile's friend's reaction about Fikile's desire to be white, she says, "You so stupid Fikile, don't you know you going to be as black as dirt for the rest of your life! Tell her Mrs. Zola; tell her she's going to be as black as dirt forever."(99). This derogatory statement reflects and portrays layers of racial prejudices as colorism and racism that definitely reflect a large systemic inequalities. This dehumanizing language relates blackness with something dirty by disvaluing the identities of the black individuals. This implies stereotypes as it suggests that having a black skin is a shame. This speech underlies the dynamics of internalized racism that black individuals may have against each others. They view themselves as inferior and unattractive, unlike the whites, who have light skins and are seen as superior, more attractive and preferable.

Another passage in which racist discourse is included is when the character Fikile expresses her hatred towards the black families coming to the Coffee Shop where she works, mainly the Tlou family as she says, "The Tlous, the family that I hate with everything in me" (120).

She confesses that she even does not like serving them, and that she prefers serving only the white families. From this we can see how the blacks receive hatred not only from the whites but even from each other and how the blacks perceive each other as inferiors and view the white race as the ideal race.

This is what Ana Rodriguez-Knutsen refers to as interpersonal racism in her article entitled “Types of Racism” (2023). She states that interpersonal racism occurs when a person’s conscious or subconscious racial bias influences their interactions and perceptions of other people. It is characterized by the use of racial slurs or similar hate speech against an individual or group of people (Rodriguez-Knutsen 2).

The reader comes to comprehend that interpersonal racism impacts individuals’ behaviors, as it maintains discrimination despite sharing same racial roots and identity. This is seen through Fikile’s behavior towards the Tlou black family and this may prompt questions about the interpersonal racism and its role in devising groups by spreading negative stereotypes among them.

Turning the focus into another statement in the novel, where the same character Fikile gives a negative image of the black individuals. She describes them in a bad way and considers them as dirty people. She asserts, “They were so dull, so dirty, smelling of petroleum jelly and wearing the same old faded brown tunics, white socks (now yellow) and worn school shoes”(122). Fikile’s portrayals of the blacks’ appearances reflect stereotypes that are often linked to marginalized communities. The depiction of dirtiness and dullness reflects the sense of poverty of the black population. However, by describing the blacks’ uncleanness, Matlwa seeks to explore and subtly criticize the systemic inequalities as well as social injustices that are considered as the main causes of these harsh realities faced by the alienated black groups.

IV. Anecdotes

As it is said before, Greenblatt in his book entitled *Practicing New Historicism*(2000), claims that the term anecdotes in literature refers to the narratives that can be extracted from historical incidents. He argues that these anecdotes when being analyzed within a literary text can provide us with insightful comprehension about the social, cultural and historical facts (50).

The novel *Coconut* is full of anecdotes that highlight the complexities as well as the harsh realities that South Africans face even after the end of the Apartheid system. In fact, they still straggle with the complexities of identity, racial and social expectations. Matlwa reveals the struggles and pressures of the protagonists Ofilwe and Fikile who share their experiences trying to fit in a white society they do not belong within the post-Apartheid South Africa.

At first glance, the novel exposes a set of narratives told by the protagonists that show moments from their lives. Ofilwe and Fikile display the way they are treated in their society. Thus, through these narratives and some symbols, Matlwa links these situations to capture an image of the two black girls in their trip to construct their identities and discover themselves.

The writer uses symbols to show how South Africa is transformed in the post-Apartheid era. She showcases how this country is Christianized after the erosion of its population's own religions. Through Ofilwe's speech she describes the churches that are built by the Westerners in the South African lands. Ofilwe says, "The upper half of the walls of our church is made completely of glass. The glass is brightly colored into images of the saints" (11). Describing the church as bright and colored highlights the construction of new systems which symbolize the whole country's transition after the Apartheid. Through this statement, the writer tries to show the transition from a traditional South Africa into a modern one.

The use of a glorified image of the church makes reference to how South African religions and traditions are erased. It particularly reflects the South African nation dealing with the new legacies of the country. Mentioning the saints of the church comes as a reminder of European cultural and religious domination in South Africa. Matlwa reflects the versatile nature of South Africa in the post-Apartheid era through a vivid picture that reflects its modernity that stands as a symbol of the dilemmas that the South Africans face between embracing their traditional religions and adopting a new religion.

Another sign that makes reference to the early existence of the British colony in South Africa is seen through Tshepo's questioning about the South African history which reflects his limited knowledge of his country's past. He asserts, "Does my royal family still exist, some place out there in barren, rural South Africa? I'm afraid my history goes far back as lessons on the Dutch East Indian Company in grade two at Laerskool Valley primary school" (21).

Tshepo's words spark curiosity with reference to the obstacles he faces in his early education, highlighting the limitations imposed on him. His mention of the Dutch East India Company which was once the central territory in the history of the British Empire refers to the Eurocentric system presented in classrooms in South Africa in the post-colonial era. This statement signifies Tshepo's eagerness with the past narratives for self-understanding.

Indeed, the passage is an anecdotal passage due its reference to Tshepo's awareness about history offering a focus on the hardships of identity formation, trying to link between his personal experiences and the historical narratives in a critical way. The reader understands the desire of Tshepo to know the truth about the history of his country. This shows that he is among

the black people who are against the Apartheid system and the huge changes that it has created in South Africa after its end.

The author tries to expose the changes that occur within South Africa. Among these changes the creation of Residential Gated Communities in cities mainly in Johannesburg after the 1990s. This is affirmed through Ofilwe's assertion in what follows:

Daddy says that there were many such developments coming up in the city when he bought our house because South Africans were attracted to the idea of a residential area right in the melting pot of the country but even more so to ones that also assured the 24-hour a day maximum security mandatory for survival in Johannesburg (59).

This is what Greenblatt calls the expose of history through his definition of anecdotes, since this fact is reflected in another book entitled *Changing Space, Changing City* (2014) written by the two authors Karina Landman and Willem Badenhorst who argue that the number of gated communities in South Africa has increased tremendously since the late 1990s, with various types across the urban landscape. Thus, as a significant contributor to urban spatial transformation in many areas, there is a need to understand the extent and impact of different types of Gated Community in Greater Johannesburg and their implications for spatial restructuring and sustainable development (Landman and Badenhorst 215).

In fact, Ofilwe's assertion explores the residential developments in Johannesburg which becomes such a societal trend in South Africa including the emergence of prioritized communities with maximum security, consequently impacting the South African urban life. The urban lands in South Africa were affected by the history of racism and segregation in addition to the history of Apartheid legacies. As a result, all these events enhanced and helped in the raise of spatial divisions,

specifying areas with good conditions for white privileged communities whereas the underdeveloped areas are kept for the poor marginalized groups. Ultimately, even after the end of apartheid this system of spatial divisions and inequality still exists.

Johannesburg has become one of the most secured cities in South Africa. Therefore, people from upper and middle classes choose to settle there and live in safety due to the high crime rates which exist in other cities. The emergence of those gated communities in Johannesburg with such good living conditions, symbolizes the injustices and inequalities in the South African country. While some groups managed to be secured, other populations are totally excluded from those secured places and remain marginalized. Consequently this fact seems to be an example of spatial divisions and segregation in the country.

Another anecdote can be depicted through the life of those minority groups of black South African families who escape poverty and create for themselves a place in the Residential Gated Communities in Johannesburg where the whites live. Among these families, Ofilwe and her family who despite the fact of being a middle class family like the majority of the white families of the post-Apartheid society but they still live under the power of the whites just because they are blacks. Ofilwe reports that the members of her family can not embrace their blackness or practice their traditions and rituals freely while living in the Residential Gated Communities.

They always find themselves obliged to respect some rules and adapt white behaviors in order to be considered as members of those Gated Communities. She states, “Driving into the estate strictly adhering to the 40 Kph rule” (59). Ofilwe adds that whenever breaching one of these rules, her family receives harsh penalties. She recounts that one day, when her whole family is gathered in a Thanksgiving Ceremony, they are surprised to receive a letter of warning from two

security guards explaining to them that their neighbors alert them that they are sacrificing animals after seeing a chicken hang up on their washing line. Ofilwe asserts, “the letter warned that we were liable to be heavily fined because we have breached rules no. 12.3 and 15.1 in the Little Valley Country Estate Code of Conduct Handbook”(58).

This anecdote still exists in the real life of the black South Africans in the post-Apartheid era. Vuyiswa Letsoko, Kammila Naidoo and Trynos Gumbo confirm this in their article entitled “The Struggle to Belong: Middle Classing and social change in post-Apartheid South Africa” (2022). After making many interviews with black individuals living in the Residential Gated Communities in Johannesburg, they assert that these individuals can not fully express themselves as black persons in a Gated Community, and that they should adopt a different type of behavior like a white behavior to be viewed as a member of those Gated Communities. They also mention that these black residents use assimilation and adaptation strategies to conform the norms of Gated living, even though this might have a negative impact on how they experience their communities (Letsoko, et al 838).

Moreover, the phenomenon of using nameless black faces as pawns for striking black economic empowerment deals in the novel is another anecdote since this fact exists in the real life of the South African population. Matlwa portrays this through Fikile’s uncle who is used by his chief as one of those nameless black faces who could bring profit for Lentso Communications Company. He reports, “they would once again introduce me as Silas Nyoni, their Black Economic Empowerment Partner” (78). Though Fikile’s uncle works only as a simple security officer in the Lentso Communications Company his chief uses him for his profit after he discovers that he speaks English perfectly. He gives him a fake identity and takes him to every meeting he goes to, mainly

to those meetings with Borman-Nkosinathi to introduce him as their Black Economic Empowerment partner and the newly appointed Operations Manager of the mentioned company.

From this, we can see that though the Black Economic Empowerment is created as a policy which aims at redressing the inequalities caused by the Apartheid system, and empower the black population by giving them the ability to participate in the economy of the country but still the whites are using this policy for their profits and controlling the country. This is confirmed by the author Vrinda Chopra in her article entitled “The inadequacy of South Africa’s Black Economic Empowerment policy” (2017). She states that although the Black Economic Empowerment was created as a landmark policy for reversing the historical marginalization of the black people, and promoting non-white ownership. However nearly fourteen years since the construction of this policy, there is still much to be desired in the empowerment of the historically marginalized, and this is seen in the high levels of inequality in the country (Chopra 1).

Fikile’s uncle serves as an example to reflect the hardships that restrict black people from not only enjoying their desired works but even from embracing their real identities as black persons. Through the characters of Fikile and her uncle, the writer gives an insight about the life of the blacks living in townships highlighting their inability to achieve economic sufficiency because of poverty. This is confirmed through Fikile’s speech as she says, “Perhaps if Uncle spent less time crying and more time finding ways to capitalize on his new position as fake black economic empowerment partner, then maybe we could afford to install a toilet or even a bath in our home” (87). In this passage, Fikile gives the reader an insight about her life as a poor black girl, highlighting the economic struggles existing in the townships.

Many researchers discuss this issue, among them Johannes Hoogveen and Berk Özler who in their thesis entitled “Not Separate, Not Equal: Poverty and Inequality in Post-Apartheid South Africa” (2005), assert that the end of Apartheid has left the black population with various inequalities. They affirm that 58% of all South Africans were in poverty in 1995, while poverty was virtually non-existent for whites. They add that South Africa has seen many inequalities in various sides including health and basic infrastructure, such as access to safe water, sanitation and housing. For instance, while only a quarter of South Africans had access to piped water in their houses, whites had universal access (Hoogveen and Özler 2).

Fikile gives a hint to comprehend how the black economic empowerment is at some point impossible to achieve. Instead of realizing a huge empowerment, Fikile and her uncle find themselves stuck in a world of poverty where their black race is taken as an advantage to make things even more worse and challenging. Matlwa invites the reader to explore the harsh realities of the post-Apartheid African society with all its systems including the unequal economic opportunities that mostly challenge the black South Africans.

The policy of lands unequal division is another issue that Matlwa refers to in her narratives as a historical fact in South Africa. Professor Bernadette Atuahene in her book *South Africa's Land Reform Crisis* (2011) writes that 87% of the country's lands were owned by whites, even though they represented less than 10% of the population in 1994. She adds that, in the politician James Gibson's survey with 3,700 South Africans, 85% of the respondents believe that “most land in South Africa was taken unfairly by white settlers and they therefore have no right to the land today” (Atuahene 121).

Through this we can assure that the legacy of lands division that occurred under colonialism and Apartheid still present in the post-Apartheid South Africa. Hence, this reflects Matlwa's narrative in which the character Ayanda claims, "Ten per cent of them [whites] still living on ninety per cent of the land, ninety per cent of us living on ten per cent of the land (111). She highlights the social contradictions and explores the inequalities of wealth division between both the few privileged and the huge marginalized communities in the contemporary South African society.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we emphasized the obstacles faced by the South Africans in the post-Apartheid era. Moreover, we have analyzed the characters portrayal of their experiences in a modern society using the New Historicist literary theory. Then, we have focused on the period under which Matlwa has portrayed the South Africans' everyday struggles and some facts in the history of South Africa that shaped the lives of the black population. By doing so, we have illustrated how post-Apartheid legacies have negatively impacted the characters' real identities. Then, we have examined the self-fashionist, racist, and anecdotal sides of the novel in accordance with New Historicism. In this regard, we have concluded that the legacy of Apartheid is the main source of these conflicts that the blacks still overcome nowadays. Finally, we have exposed the most prominent theme which is the issue of identity formation in a modern South African environment which is affected by the contemporary South African systems.

General Conclusion

Through this research paper, we studied an African novel written by one of the recent African writers named Kopano Matlwa. The novel depicted a specific period in South Africa which is the post-Apartheid period. Relying on the theory of New Historicism, we explored this timeframe and demonstrated the representation of the author's world and social background. In fact, the New Historicist theory was a useful tool that helped us to study the post-Apartheid period and its impact on the South African black population nowadays.

We investigated an important aspect of the New Historicist theory which is self-fashioning through our analysis of the novel's central figures. Further, we examined how the novel embodies elements of racist discourse by examining the societal context in which it was written and the dynamics that characterized that era. Hence, by using the anecdotal concept, we managed to expose the prejudices and stereotypes that are prevalent in the author's time.

Moreover, the fact that the two protagonists belong to different social spheres in the South African country helped us to depict the injustices that still exist in the modern South African society. Among the results we have reached, we can mention the issue of inequality which is still present in the South African society even with the demise of Apartheid. While only a minority group of the black South Africans have managed to escape poverty and live in good conditions within white areas, the majority of them are still living in poverty and extremely hard conditions in townships.

By examining the novel, we came to the conclusion that the whites' dominance is the cause of the existence of Apartheid legacies which later on became the source of the obstacles the black South African population face. We also found that the harsh realities this black population

lives have pushed them to reject their blackness and adopt white standards of living. Consequently, this has created for them issues of identity and belonging for being rejected by both the whites and by the members of their own race. In addition to this, we have come across the realization that racism with all its types is another challenge that the blacks face nowadays. Indeed, this racism is not only existing between two different races but even among the members of the same race; this is what is called as interpersonal racism.

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Abstract in French (Résumé)

Ce travail de recherche entreprend une étude d'un roman moderniste africain intitulé *Coconut* (2007), écrit par Kopano Matlwa. En s'appuyant sur la théorie du Néo-historicisme, ce travail analyse les contextes sociaux et historiques du roman. De plus, à travers le paradigme du Néo-historicisme, nous avons démontré comment le roman reflète le contexte de l'auteur, qui est la période post-apartheid. En outre, nous avons étudié comment les deux protagonistes du roman ont façonné leur personnalités en utilisant un principe important du Néo-historicisme qui est l'auto-façonnage. Par ailleurs, nous avons exploré les aspects nuancés du discours raciste représenté dans le roman sous des perspectives variées. Enfin, nous avons démontré comment le roman met en parallèle des événements historiques réels en utilisant la technique de la narration anecdotique.