RACIAL EXPLOITATION AND DOUBLE OPPRESSION IN SELECTED BESSIE HEAD AND DORIS LESSING TEXTS

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in any part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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Date
ABSTRACT

During the era of discrimination and disparity in Southern Africa, racial inequality silenced many black writers. It was the white authors that dominated the literary environment presenting their biased views on social and political concerns; the black authors’ standpoints were seen as unimportant and they were deemed inferior to the white authors. Consequently, it was particularly difficult for black writers to voice their experiences of living in a society riddled with oppression, prejudice and unequal opportunities.

The purpose of this study is to critically compare selected texts by African authors Doris Lessing and Bessie Head, which depict the political and social struggles within Southern African society during the era of unequal opportunities. Lessing and Head’s works present incidents of life experiences in Southern Africa from two contrasting viewpoints. The selected texts explored are: The Grass is Singing and “The Old Chief Mshlanga” by Doris Lessing, a white author, in contrast and comparison to the texts: A Question of Power and “The Collector of Treasures” by Bessie Head, a coloured author.

The research for this thesis is conducted from an ethnic literary perspective with careful consideration to critical race theory and cultural studies. From this perspective, the focus of the study is on the struggles that affected both the victim and perpetrator during the apartheid era as well as on the idea that those in power determined what was deemed acceptable and unacceptable, behaviourally and ideologically. Specifically, the plight experienced by the female characters living in a patriarchal society, and the segregation and racial inequality faced by the characters of colour is explored by
analysing these characters’ influences, pressures and societal manipulations and constraints in the texts.

Thus, this study will provide a more in-depth understanding of Southern African society during the apartheid era and the strategic use of literature to spotlight the subjugation and disparity.

**Key Words:** Ethnic Literary Perspective Critical Race Theory Cultural Studies Racial Inequality Double Oppression Doris Lessing Bessie Head
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Psychiatrist and political theorist, Frantz Fanon, postulates that racism generates harmful psychological constructs that both blinds the African person to his/her subjection to universalised white normality and alienates his/her consciousness (qtd. in Dangarembga xi). The relevant quote in Jean-Paul Sartre’s introduction to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*: “The condition of the native is a nervous condition” reveals how a racist culture and the conflicting attitudes between the colonizer and the colonized prohibit psychological health in the African people and consequently, as literature very often reflects life, it is transmitted into African characters in literature (qtd. in Dangarembga xi).

Henry Louis Gates and Gene Andrew Jarrett in the introduction to the book, *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation and African American Culture 1892-1938*, expand on these conflicting attitudes by focussing on the term “culture politics” (Gates and Jarrett 2). They explain this as the politics pertaining to culture and how people acquire, understand, and apply power to their relationships with one another. These power relations underwrite the formation of certain patterns of human values, discourses, attitudes, actions or artefacts (Gates and Jarrett 2). With this said, members of Southern African society create the power relations by comparing the different cultures in that society and elevating the status of their particular culture by creating negative attitudes towards alternative unknown cultures. A term of importance here is “xenophobia”, dictionaries define this as an unreasonable fear, distrust or hatred of strangers, foreigners or anything perceived as foreign or different.
The racist policies written in this era of Southern African history, acquired a peculiar importance in shaping and informing international understanding of the racial politics and inequality in this era. Racial inequality caused the stereotyping and labelling of black African writers in numerous ways. White authors and publishers dominated the literary environment, presenting their stereotypical views, while black authors were seen as unimportant and inferior to their white counterparts. It was extremely difficult for black African writers to voice their views and experiences of living in a society riddled with oppression, prejudice and unequal economic and educational opportunities. The silencing of black writers is reinforced in the fact that by the time Doris Lessing was of world wide fame, no writer had yet emerged among the black population of five to six million, whose fate was entirely in the hands of 300 000 white settlers in Rhodesia (Gerard 256).

The literature produced by authors during the era of inequality acted as one of the primary tools used by both white and black authors for representing their unique standpoint on the challenges they faced in the biased Southern African environment. Literature acted as a megaphone for authors to make their voices heard and to persuade members of Southern Africa and the global society to observe their world from their distinct liberal outlook. An example is white South African author, Alan Paton, founder and president of the Liberal Party which opposed apartheid and offered a non-racial alternative to government policy. His novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country* depicts friendship across racial prejudices in the story of a black South African rural pastor and a white wealthy businessman; thus, depicting his vision and hope for the people residing in apartheid society in South Africa to be living in harmony.
Unquestionably, white authors and black authors produced their works for many different purposes and with diverse aims in mind. It is noticeable that the literature produced by authors of white culture often distorted the experience and realities, and inscribed the inferiority of black people. Thus, it is through literature that the white authors justified their actions and provided evidence of their superiority and power. Based on this, the whites painted a dehumanizing picture of the blacks by portraying their behaviour as driven by the unconscious and primitive desires in order to restrict their access to power and supremacy in society. Michel Foucault substantiates the relations of power in his quote:

Relations of power are not in themselves forms of repression. But what happens is that, in society, in most societies, organizations are created to freeze the relations of power, hold those relations in a state of symmetry, so that a certain number of persons get an advantage, socially, economically, politically, institutionally. And this totally freezes the situation. That’s what one calls power in the strict sense of the term: it’s a specific type of power relation that has been institutionalized, frozen, immobilized, to the profit of some and to the detriment of others. (Foucault)

Toni Morrison, in her article, “Playing in the Dark,” interrogates the under-representation of African-American people in literature and the efforts of white authors to disguise their racist agenda and commentary in American literature. Anthonia Kalu substantiates this in the quote: “For African literature in European languages, the dynamics of scholarly inquiry ignores African-
centered scholarship but admits the creative writer’s portrayals of the African experience” (Kalu 25). This analysis can also be applied to the Southern African context where there is similar literary evidence of the misrepresentation of black people and the insignificant role played by black characters within Southern African texts.

For those oppressed by racist policies, literature became a powerful tool of resistance and was a significant weapon used by black Africans in particular, to stand firm against their oppressors as they could actually state their opinions and feelings concerning the injustices they faced. Henry Louis Gates emphasises this point: “Almost as soon as blacks could write, it seems, they set out to redefine – against already received racist stereotypes – who and what a black person was, and how unlike the racist stereotype the black original indeed actually could be” (Gates, “The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black” 321). Thus, the literature of the colonized also attempted to restore dignity to Africans by invoking and reconstructing a heroic, meaningful African history. In *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History*, David Attwell substantiates this by arguing that “the use by black intellectuals of print culture has been crucial to their establishing themselves as modern subjects, in direct opposition to the identities ascribed to them in colonial and apartheid ideology” (Attwell 2).

Black authors such as Alex La Guma, a coloured author from District Six had intimate knowledge of the frustrations and deprivations of the disfranchised segment of the African population and such literary works capture the dilemma of blacks in Africa who were at the mercy of an
authoritarian society and an oppressive environment (Janmohamed 272). Henry Louis Gates Jr. again further substantiates the position of blacks narrating African identities:

the act of writing was no idle matter; it represented a profound definition and defense of critical self: in an act of self-defense, the writer asserts the integrity of the self through the device of displacement; through the very forces of displacement, the self is both distanced and affirmed. (Gates, “Criticism in the Jungle” 2)

In this regard, W.E.B. Du Bois, African American scholar and activist coined a metaphor for the black condition which he called “double consciousness” to explain the issue of being the other in a world that deems the colonized as inferior and uncivilised (Du Bois ix).

Kenyan writer of Gikuyu descent, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, maintains that African writers are further faced with boundaries concerning the language choice of their writings (wa Thiong’o 1126). Ngugi views “language as a dual character as it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture” (wa Thiong’o 1132). Language as communication and as culture are products of each other as it is through communication that culture is created and culture is a means of communication as to who people are.

He further affirms that as language is a carrier of culture it articulates the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. Ngugi argues that this is disadvantageous to African writers who use English as a vehicle for their writings, as they are taking on the European semiotic system and culture in the way they perceive and project themselves and their place in the world. Thus language and hence
literature may potentially take Africans further and further away from themselves to other selves and from their world to other worlds (wa Thiong’o 1132).

Ngugi stated: “The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized” and acts as a powerful instrument in oppressing African people and writers (wa Thiong’o 1135). He argues that African writers should rather write their novels in their own language in order to transport their own culture and heritage through their writings, instead of writing in English which carries the culture of the whites.

Notably there is not just conflict between cultures, there is also conflict between members of the same cultural group. This is apparent in cultures where there is intra-group conflict between the men and women of the same group or ethnicity. Thus, the African women found themselves in an even more disadvantaged state than black men in society as they lacked interiority twice over. They were not only oppressed because of their colour, but also because of their gender as they lived in a stringent patriarchal society in which men claimed all the power. African women have a history of oppression within African culture and most of women’s problems are rooted in the tradition that men held a superior position to females (Chetin 121).

African women’s texts such as those by Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangarembga and Senegalese author Mariama Bâ are dramatic indicators of the oppressive attitudes of both white colonizer and black men toward the women in society as their literature reveals both the oppression and subjugation of colonisation and patriarchy that the African women often
endure in their society. Their exposition of their experiences breaks the silence of their suffering. The content of female literature also encourages women to change their position in society by resisting their oppressors – both colonizers and African men. Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Tambudzai in Nervous Conditions and Mariama Bâ’s Aissatou in So Long a Letter are literary characters who are not willing to accept their inferior position in society, but resist it openly and proudly.

Thus, the intention of African women writers is to inform a society of readers about the plight of African women. Morrison reinforces the purpose of women’s writing: “to find and expose [the] truth about the interior life of people who didn’t write it . . using. . . the approach that’s most productive. . . the recollection that moves from the image to the text (qtd. in Kalu). In reading works by African female authors, the reader is confronted with the similar struggles that the writer experienced as a black woman living in the African racially conflicted environment. The purpose of women’s literature is reinforced by Françoise Lionnet:

Rather they are intended to function as literary figures whose extreme predicaments haunt the reader’s imagination, and help to crystallize awareness of gender oppression while problematizing these issues in reference to a specific cultural context. (Lionnet 208)

This is evident in most autobiographies of Southern African women writers, and particularly in the autobiography of Sindiwe Magna, a novelist who maintains that literature (writing) is mainly undertaken to inscribe the undocumented life of the black African woman and to reveal the unknown and unidentified issues faced by these women in society (Nuttall 86). Thus, in this
instance, literature offers information and inspiration, and through reading this literature, the reader acquires an awareness of the pertinent issues at hand. “It is not the imagination that is stressed but a useful reading or knowledge; reading can provide inspiration, but it is mainly for social knowledge rather than escape, a means through which identity is achieved and confirmed” (Nuttall 87). Consequently, women writers from diverse cultures created their literary works for diverse purposes aiming to achieve liberating goals. For example, Nadine Gordimer distinguishes herself as a writer by undertaking a unique position in literature as a privileged, white female author supporting the plight of poor black South Africans.

Important to this study is the comparison between writers of diverse races as their authorial racial distinctives represent the differing African experiences in their lives and their writing. In order to explore these similarities, selected works of two significant African authors, one the white, middle class Doris Lessing, and the other, the coloured, impoverished Bessie Head will be analysed.

Doris Lessing is an author deeply concerned with the cultural inequalities of her society and writes from the perspective of a white woman of British descent living during the racist regime. She was born in Persia, now known as Iran, to British parents in 1919; she later moved with her family to Rhodesia, (now Zimbabwe) “when her parents wanted to escape from England’s narrowness and provincialism” (“Doris Lessing”, Elements of Literature 1146). It was in Rhodesia where her life was marked by the culture of colonialism and of white settler farmers (Gikandi 287).
In Zimbabwe, as everywhere in Africa, the history of black struggle against white minority rule was a long one. Zimbabweans link the beginning of their resistance to white rule in the 1890’s when their ancestors rose against the first white settlers to try stop them from settling on their land (Sibanda 1). It is important to note that “Rhodes believed that the English had an inherent right to imperial rule because they were the first race in the world and therefore the more of the world (they) inhabited, the better it would be for the human race” (Nyangeni 19).

Thus, the Africans were ruled by a white government in which they were prohibited from participating. It was only the whites that were allowed to vote and elect the leaders for Rhodesia. Additionally ordinances allowed for the inequitable distribution of the land that provided farmers with sustenance where under these ordinances, 6000 whites seized the best half of the land while the worst half was left to 600 000 black peasant farmers (Chung 211).

It is evident how racism in Southern Rhodesia had more of a systematic cause as its roots lay in a powerful combination of ideology and material interest (McCulloch 67). It is an ensemble of material practises where prejudices are institutionalized in administrations, legal systems and labour markets (McCulloch 69). McCulloch uses the term “racial formation” to illustrate that racial categories are created, inhabited and transformed over time and place and are primarily about power (McCulloch 69).

Doris Lessing had to escape the society based on unequal opportunities thus, in 1949; she left Rhodesia and moved to England. It is important to note that: “Although Doris Lessing has lived in England since 1949, she is considered an African author because the twenty-five years she
spent growing up on a small farm in what was then Southern Rhodesia had such an impact on her writing” (Sizemore 282). Lessing returned to visit Rhodesia in 1956, it was hereafter that she was declared a prohibited immigrant and was banned from returning to the country because of her opposition to colonial rule in the region (Gikundi 287).

Although Lessing’s non-fiction works are a powerful reflection of her literary craftsmanship and feminist ideologies, it is in her fiction that she encapsulates her strongest statements as she bases her works around the dilemma of colour, gender and race and the responsibility she feels as a writer to be an instrument of change. She articulates that “it is not merely a question of preventing evil, but of strengthening a vision of a good which may defeat the evil” (“Doris Lessing”, Elements of Literature 1146). Her writing is fuelled by her feelings of anger and frustration at the social and political oppression of a racially divided nation.

Lessing’s writing career, which spans more than fifty years began with the publication of her first book, The Grass is Singing in 1950 which is described as: “a psychological exploration of the colonial settler class and the frustrations caused by imposed racial and sexual boundaries” (Gikundi 287). This novel deals with the issues in society in the time of its writing as it reflects a time in Rhodesian history prior to its independence in 1980, a period when racism and power relations were prevalent in society. With this said Lessing incorporates the ideology of members of Rhodesia and white versus black power relations between racial groups into this text. Elizabeth Maslen discusses Lessing’s writing and the power relations therein, claiming:
power relations in Lessing’s writing always nudge from simply private towards the public and the representative, and wider historical, political and social implications are invariably part of the picture, especially since her characters are frequently framed as ‘representative’. (Sceats 143)

Many of her characters resemble their creator in that they share her personal experiences and feelings of rebellion against the cultural restrictions of their societies. According to Albert Gerard, Lessing uses her writing in order to “write her issues out of herself in order to escape from it” (Gerard 253).

Lessing’s interest in psychology, the internal processes of the mind and the limitations facing women triggered her investigation of feminism and the negative effects of patriarchy on women. This further led her to fictional explorations of introspection and psychological madness and much of her work is concerned with the everyday and inner lives of psychologically displaced women. In England Lessing underwent Jungian analysis and then studied Sufism which influenced many of her novels (Sizemore 284). By the 1970’s she had achieved international recognition and by the 1980’s her works had been translated into many languages (Sizemore 284).

This project will specifically interrogate Lessing’s short story “The Old Chief Mshlanga” and first novel The Grass is Singing. The short story “The Old Chief Mshlanga” is an excellent example of the degrading way in which black people and women were treated in her African society. Lessing offers a piercing indictment of the prejudicial attitudes which maintain the iniquities and inequalities of the racist-orientated society. She goes further in this story
to explore the notion of white guilt as the reader is faced with the internalized turmoil of the white characters with regard to their actions and racist attitudes. She illustrates through her nameless white protagonist, who feels remorseful for her treatment of African characters, how white people were fully aware that their oppressive actions were unacceptable, even ridiculous. This remorse eventually leads to inner turmoil and psychological trauma, as they struggle with the guilt of their unjust psychological behaviour.

The novel, *The Grass is Singing*, on the other hand, which takes its title from T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, documents the complex white master – black servant relationship, and traces the racial subjugations and inhumanities suffered by black Africans. It also explores the complacency and shallowness of white colonial society in Southern Africa. Instead of focussing on the inner workings of the demoralized black mind, Lessing turns her attention to the psyche of the “domineering and disturbed encrusted white minds” (Vlastos 245). Lessing, therefore, subtly illustrates how the white perpetrators of racism were psychologically de-stabilized through their racially prejudiced actions. Some characters even show signs of psychosis in the texts.

In contrast to Lessing who belonged to the hegemonic racial group, Bessie Head’s placement within the coloured community contributed to her sense of alienation in the land of her birth. Cecil Abrahams confirms this in the quote:

Head’s auspicious birth and difficult physical and psychological development, in a country already beriddled by vicious racism, contributed greatly to her tragic experience both in South Africa and Botswana. The fact that she was racially a member of the Cape
coloured community of South Africa, and yet never felt part of this community, led her to a restless search for an identity within the confusing racial spectrum of southern Africa; and this insecurity contributed as well to her perception regarding the efficacy of organized political action. (Abrahams 3)

Head’s writings cover many aspects of her personal experiences as an impoverished, racially mixed person growing up without family in South Africa. Her works deal with issues of discrimination, isolation, abandonment, racism and poverty, connected to the psychological dismemberment inherent in racially separated South Africa. Head’s works are strongly autobiographical and interrogate the lives of poor and emotionally abused black women who experience racial and sexual discrimination (Elder 279). The characters, therefore, portray similar emotions to those experienced by Head in her lifetime. The turmoil she experiences is evident in her quote:

Life is a funny thing. There are no clear warning signs along the way, even for the very alert and there is something strange about the soul; it won’t get relaxed and free and ungrasping unless suffering is so excruciating as to be a big howl. (Head, “The People Rise Up”)

During Head’s lifetime, racial segregation was a political and sociological entity that ruptured equality between people of different races and cultures. In the land of her birth, South Africa, it was the white people who had all the power, whereas the people of colour, like Head, were seen as creature-like and viewed as a serious danger to the white people. Therefore one of Head’s distinctive approaches, in both her life and her writing, was to herald the lives
of ordinary people pitted against people with power. She always emphasised that her outlook was universal as she believed that she wrote for all demoralized people (Chetin 120).

Although Head was racially identified as a member of the Cape Coloured Community of South Africa, she never felt part of this racial group, a fact which further exacerbated her restless search for identity (Abrahams 3). It is for this reason that Bessie Head decided to leave South Africa in 1964 on an exit visa in search of finding peace within herself and the country of Botswana. “Bessie Head left her homeland not only because she detested apartheid, but chiefly because she hoped to find peace in another country far from the racial sickness of South Africa” (Abrahams 3). Hence in her writing, Head explores how an individual’s inner sense of integrity, dignity and identity are often at odds with the society’s rules which demand conformity and stifle self-fulfilment (Chetin 119).

Head relocated to Botswana two years before the country’s full independence. A year after she arrived, Britain granted Bechuanaland (later Botswana) internal self-government in 1965 prior to the country attaining full independence as the nation of Botswana on 30 September 1966 (LeVert 25). However, there were still socio-political issues in Botswana after independence. An external problem was that its African neighbours were in turmoil, as South Africa still faced apartheid and Rhodesia also had a white dominated, repressive regime in the years that followed after Botswana’s independence (LeVert 25-26). According to Suzanne LeVert this is problematic as “although Botswana disapproved of both Rhodesia and South Africa’s policies, the country needed to maintain good political relationships in
order to promote trade, as well as to preserve access to other parts of the continent on neighbours roads and railways” (LeVert 26).

Furthermore, J. Clark Leith in *Why Botswana Prospered* written in 2005 observes:

The people of Botswana live and work in a political system whose roots lie in both their own cultures and the British tradition. The interests of the elite, which dominated at Independence, have remained influential, leading some observers to suggest that Botswana is a democracy in name only. (x)

This suggests that freedom from colonial rule did not put an end to all the problems in Botswana, as even in the present time there are still issues pertaining to Botswana prior independence. It is also important to note that at the time of Head’s writing, post-independence, many Basarwa were still being treated as slaves and inferiors by the Batswana (Starfield 656). However, even with these issues; the black population had more freedom and rights than those in the neighbouring countries.

Head sought asylum from racial oppression and, according to Huma Ibrahim, “When she(Head) went to Botswana she began writing in earnest, an activity that had been jeopardized, in her words, by a “culture of hate” which is how she saw South Africa under apartheid” (Ibrahim 219). Additionally, Head identifies the nature of oppression emphasizing that, for a woman of colour, she is doubly oppressed, both by race and gender. Thus, Head’s stories deal primarily with the fate of women in African society and she writes from both a colonized and feminist perspective. Head’s variety of characters are both young and old, and male and female, and as a result, this variety allows her to
approach the same themes from different visual and psychological perspectives with the same focus – the struggles and hardships of life riddled with gender and racial oppression.

The works of Bessie Head that are to be explored in this study are “The Collector of Treasures” and *A Question of Power*. The short story, “The Collector of Treasures” from the collection *The Collector of Treasures*, acts as a dramatic indicator of the oppressive attitudes of the men in her culture and focuses on the unstable position of African women in society as it explores the idea of the “good wife” (Harrow, “Bessie Head’s: “The Collector of Treasures”” 177). The main character, Dikeledi, is expected to be a “good wife” by her dedicated service to a wayward husband. “She, too, refuses to accept her husband’s insistence to be a “good wife”, that she prepare him his meals and bath, and serve him in bed, regardless of his own conduct and relationships with other women” (Harrow, “Bessie Head’s: “The Collector of Treasures”” 177). However, she resists her husband’s infidelity and abuse, and resorts to murdering him. The tale suggests that women resist male oppression even to the point of violence.

In the novel *The Question of Power*, “Head negotiated questions of power, good and evil as well as how humanity, identity and sexuality were affected by societies, such as apartheid South Africa, which was built on oppression” (Ibrahim 219-220). The novel recounts the breakdown and recovery of its central female protagonist, Elizabeth, formally from outside her consciousness, effectively from inside her mind (Rose 405).

It is rooted locally and historically in its world as it reflects Head’s personal experience of a nervous breakdown as fictionalised in her character
Elizabeth, who suffers from a similar mental disorder. The topics of Head’s concern in this novel are those considered by Fanon – madness, sexuality and guilt. Thus she uses paranoia, the voices in her head, as the perfect metaphor for colonisation which is the incursion of voices compelling the body and the mind of the colonised. Notably, the linkage between colonialism and madness effectively describes the devastating effects of colonisation on a person of colour.

Without a doubt, exiled writers Doris Lessing and Bessie Head created their texts from two divergent perspectives. The writing career of Doris Lessing focuses on a wide range of twentieth century issues and concerns, from the politics of race portrayed in her novels set in Africa to the politics of gender. She is now regarded as one of the most important post-war writers in English, a title affirmed through her Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007 (Sinha 29). On the other hand, Jane Starfield comments on the nature of Bessie Head’s works: “rich with life, her always intense writings beat paths through many areas of human experience. Her work resonates with the recognition that women writers and writing about women ‘are inscribed in relations of power’” (Starfield 655).

A thorough, text based literary study of these particular works will be conducted exploring the characters and themes created by the authors, in order to examine how these relationships reflect racial and gender disparities. Thus, the research method to be applied in the scrutiny of the texts is the literary theory of cultural studies and critical race theory. The focus of the paper will be on the societal influences, pressures, manipulations as well as
constraints on the characters and their resultant dysfunctionality which pivots on the race issue.

The purpose of this study is to critically analyse and compare selected texts by African authors Doris Lessing and Bessie Head, which provide an exploration of the abuse and mistreatment of black African people and subjugation of women in pre-democratic societies, as evident in the texts. Thus, the study will investigate literary constructions by the selected authors and how they spotlight the oppression and inequality concomitant within the Southern African society during the era of unequal opportunities. More specifically, the aim of this study is to scrutinize the psychological fractures caused by the dual oppression of race and gender; and to investigate the inner conflict and emotional turmoil experienced by the white perpetrators and black victims, displayed in the texts.

The selected area of study for this dissertation focuses on the genre of literature which exposes an era of social injustice in Southern Africa that had a tremendous influence on the shaping of the society in which Africans live today.

Lessing and Head's works present incidents of life experiences in Southern Africa, from two contrasting view points. In the texts in question, Lessing presents the point of view of a troubled white woman residing in Rhodesia, whereas Head presents a similar view from the perspective of a racially mixed person, who is suffering from the psychological scars of poverty and abandonment while growing up in South Africa and later residing in Botswana. Thus, they both examine the tensions that exist between white,
coloured and African people who were forced to subsist in racially oppressive systems.

With this in mind, the authors and the predominant themes in their texts investigate the plight experienced by the female characters living in a patriarchal society, and the racial segregation and racial inequality faced by the characters of colour in the texts. Feminist theory, which acts as an indicator of the domineering attitudes of men and race theory which displays the repressive attitudes of the white minority, is often applied to their analysis.

However, the use of critical race theory and theories of cultural studies as analytical tools provides a fresh and alternative angle in interrogating these concepts and themes. These theoretical frames enable the reader to interrogate these themes in a way that broadens his/her knowledge and understanding of the former era based on unequal opportunities as well as the evolution of gender inequality and racism in that society (Rivkin and Ryan, “Introduction: Situating Race” 962).

Moreover, this analytical technique investigates the way in which racism is normalised in society through a pervasive and deeply rooted social racism (Rivkin and Ryan, “Introduction: Situating Race” 962). Secondly, with regard to female oppression, critical race theory provides an understanding as to the origin of gender inequality. In this theory, unlike feminist theories, the focus is on the development and construction of gender inequality rather than specifically on the social differences between men and women. Therefore it can be said that critical race theory looks beyond the feminist approach to literature provoking an important contribution to a new approach to gender disparity.
Race is viewed as a social rather than a biological construction in this theory; it is even applicable to the society at present as, despite the continuous efforts to eradicate race and gender subjugation in society, these remain pressing issues, evidenced in the recent xenophobic attacks. Thus possible recommendations for improvement in race relations will be offered through a consideration of this ethnic literary theoretical framework.

The exploration of African characters and the oppression of the female characters in selected texts by Lessing and Head will be conducted based on critical race theory and cultural studies. Ethnicity and race emerged as an important new approach to literary study in the late 1960's and early 1970's in the American academy. Writers from a diverse range of ethnic minority perspectives – African American, Asian American, Hispanic American and Native American – have been actively engaged with the problem of presenting the experiences and the lives of the Anglo-American majority’s “others”. The last two decades have seen a rise of an explicitly theoretical body of writing on race which can be gravitated to the South African environment (Rivkin and Ryan, “Introduction: Situating Race” 959).

An early theorist of race, W.E.B. Du Bois, constituted the first real critique of a scientific racism inherited from the nineteenth century when he created a movement toward a cultural understanding of race (Rivkin & Ryan, “Introduction: Situating Race” 962). Du Bois challenged the notion that race was understood as a biological category and also a justification for white supremacy. Therefore critical race theorists extended works on a social rather than biological concept of race as attention was drawn to scientific evidence that biological genetic differences did not arrange themselves evenly
into distinguishable races. Thus, race is seen as more of a cultural and social category than a natural, genetic or biological one.

Research indicates that there is greater genetic variation that exists within the populations typically labelled as black and white than between these different populations (Rivkin and Ryan, “Introduction: Situating Race” 961). “The data compiled by various scientists demonstrate, contrary to popular opinion, that intra-group differences exceed inter-group differences. That is, greater genetic variation exists within the populations typically labelled as Black and White than between these populations (Lopez 967). With this said, this theory can, therefore, offer a reader an explanation as to how racial inequality evolved and why it is a dominant theme in both Lessing and Head’s texts.

Gender inequality in the selected texts will also be explored based on the theory of Judith Butler who explored the relationship between performance and gender identity. She espouses the view that gender is entirely imitative, performative and actuated (Butler 900). Butler maintains that the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time. In this sense, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time; an identity established through a stylized repetition of acts (Butler 900).

Butler compares gender to a performance act, in the sense that, “just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and a play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives” (Butler 901). Therefore with regards to behaviour which is
performative, gender is an act which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority.

In effect, gender is made to comply with a model of truthfulness and falseness which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves as a social policy of gender regulation and control. Thus, the female oppression in the selected texts can be examined effectively according to Butler’s theory of gender, as the female characters in the texts “perform” their genders based upon the hegemonic constraints actuated by the male characters.

Moreover, the negative representation of the African characters in Lessing and Head’s selected texts can be interrogated according to Teun van Dijk’s theory of racism. Within this theory, ideologies are viewed as interpretive frameworks which organise sets of attitudes about other members of modern society. Ideologies, therefore, provide the ‘cognitive foundation’ for the attitudes of various groups in societies, as well as the furtherance of their own goals and interests (van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* 37).

Van Dijk offers a ‘schema’ of relations between ideology, society, cognition and discourse. Within social structures, social interaction takes place which is presented in the form of discourse and speech, then categorised according to a cognitive memory. Thus, group attitudes represent an array of ideologies which combine to create one’s own personal ideology and conform to one’s identity and social position. Some people are persuaded or forced socially and economically to go against their best interests. The discrepancy between group ideology and group interest implies
that power relations in society can also be produced and legitimated to control other people resulting in racial inequality (van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* 37).

The exploitation and oppression of the African characters in Lessing and Heads’ works can further be analysed according to the theory by Louis Althusser. At the heart of this theory is the notion of ideological state apparatuses, i.e.: social institutions such as the media, family, the educational system, language and the political system produce the tendency in people to behave and think in socially acceptable ways (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 695).

It is important to note that social norms are not neutral or objective; they have instead been developed in the interests of those with social power, and they work to maintain their sites of power by naturalising them into common sense. Social norms are, therefore, ideologically slanted in favour of a particular class or group of people, but are accepted as natural by the other classes, even when the interests of those other classes are directly opposed to these norms. The infiltration of these social norms disturbs Lessing and Head’s African characters. Hence, an analysis of interactions between characters in Lessing’s texts in comparison to those in Head’s selected texts will provide a clear illustration of this theory.

The gender and race issues that are portrayed in the works of Doris Lessing and Bessie Head can be further scrutinized by the notion of social constructionism. Burr explains that: “Social constructionism involves challenging most of our commonsense knowledge of ourselves and the world we live in” (Burr 12). This school of thought postulates how social phenomena develop in particular social contexts. Here it is argued that the
ways in which people commonly understand the world, the categories and concepts we use to define race and class are historically and culturally specific (Burr 5).

Marvin Carlson believes that within people’s lives, their behaviour is structured according to repeated socially sanctioned modes of behaviour and this raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as performance (Culler, *The Literary in Theory* 138-139). Thus the idea of social construction is the unnatural way in which people act in public in order to conform to the demands of societal expectation (Burr 5).

Antonio Gramsci devised a theory of hegemony which both prefigures and enriches social constructionism. He took the idea of hegemony as ideological dominance and expanded it to the common sense knowledge of everyday (Germain and Kenny 388). In Gramsci’s view, the interests of the ruling class are not only reflected in politics and ideologies, but are also projected as common sense, assumed as natural knowledge and applicable in society. This is reiterated in the quote:

The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (Gramsci 673)

Therefore by people accepting a version of common sense, the interests of those identified as superior are acknowledged as natural and
inevitable, while those considered inferior ‘consent’ to domination; revolution is prevented and the social order is maintained (Burr 9). An explication of this theory illustrates that racism in these novels is socially constructed as people are seen as being products of their culture and history, and they depend upon and submit to the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in their culture at that time.

In conclusion, the research for this dissertation will be carried out from a literary perspective focused on race and racial issues paying careful consideration to critical race theory and cultural studies. From this perspective, the focus of the thesis will be on the political and social struggles that affected both the victim and the perpetrator in the Rhodesia and Botswana historical context as well as on the idea that those in power determined what was deemed acceptable and unacceptable, behaviourally and ideologically. Additionally, the oppression and exploitation of African people as well as the double oppression of women will be explored by analysing the characters’ influences, pressures and societal manipulations and constraints in the texts, *The Grass is Singing* and “The Old Chief Mshlanga” by Doris Lessing, in comparison and contrast to *A Question of Power* and the short story “The Collector of Treasures” from the collection of stories *The Collector of Treasures* by Bessie Head.
Chapter 2: Literary Theory

Critical race theory developed in the 1960’s and early 1970’s in a period when fresh approaches were essential to deal with new types and subtler forms of racism that were gaining ground (Delgado & Stefancic 4). It was also at a time when individuals were infuriated by the continually discussed race and racial discrimination issues, with improvement aimed action being crucial in order to carefully scrutinize increasing racism and its effect on the society at large.

The Civil Rights Movement in America was at its peak when critical race theory originated. This movement strived for basic civil rights for all Americans, regardless of race, thus empowering the people of colour in society (Morris 518). The Civil Rights Movement echoed the objectives of The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured people (NAACP), ensuring the political, social and economic equality of minority group citizens of the United States. Primarily they aimed to eliminate racial prejudice and eradicate all barriers of racial discrimination in society (Morris 518).

The forefather of critical race theory, law professor, Derrick Bell recognised the race dilemma and centred many of his works on racism. His primary concern was racism in the legal field, thus it is for this specific reason that critical race theory has its origins in critical legal studies (Delgado and Stefancic 5).

Critical legal studies place much emphasis and attention on economic and cultural structures as well as on hierarchical injustices of institutions and the legal system (Delgado and Stefancic 5). This school of thought also discusses how the system of law was actually in favour of those with power in
society, as it reflects the biased and prejudiced attitude of the privileged people with power in society.

Furthermore, critical legal studies’ emphasis is on class and economic structure, as a consequence, critical race theorists look beyond the economic and class structure of society, by addressing the problem of race from a broader perspective, focussing on all the possible causes of racism.

Another important architect of critical race theory is American law professor, Kimberlé Crenshaw, as her studies were on a similar path to those of Bell. She began organising a course on the issues discussed by Bell. “The course brought together a critical mass of scholars and students, and focused on the need to develop an alternative of racial power and its relation to law and antidiscrimination reform” (Crenshaw xxi) It was from this course that a distilled version of the concept of critical race theory emerged (Crenshaw xxi).

This theory alters the preconceived thoughts of racism by providing a fresh angle in addressing the “ordinariness” of racism and racial differentiation within a society (Delgado & Stefancic 7). What is meant by “ordinariness” is the fact that racism is often regarded as a very ordinary and normal issue in society, demonstrating the usual, accepted way of life and representing the common experience of individuals in society, whether they are of colour or not. In addition, it is also commonplace for people to be both governed and divided by race creating racist members of society who detest people from diverse races. Critical race theory also examines how society has constructed and stereotyped the black individual in society (Delgado & Stefancic 7). It, therefore, focuses on how racist attitudes and behaviours are societally instilled and investigates how this problem can in fact be changed.
The core principle of critical race theory is the notion of the social construction of race. To elucidate, the emphasis is on the fact that race and differential racism are considered to be products of social thought, eliminating the conception that races result from biological or genetic differences (Delgado & Stefancic 7).

Instead, these disparities can be explained as being created by the individuals in society that rank others in accordance with distinct racial categories for particular purposes. Consequently, an individual’s genetic composition has no influence on the distinctions between races; instead, it is individuals in society that consciously create these differences. Assigning people to specific economic strata or labour enterprise is an example of this. This is evident in the workforce of the miners in Rhodesia.

As an empirical study of the social consciousness of the White mineworkers it is characterized by an extraordinary selectivity of data and, worse, by simple obfuscation of the most vital elements in the ideology of White labour. There is no doubt that race is a central category in that ideology, but racism is not an ‘attitude’ that exists in a vacuum. It exists within and derives from a particular set of social relations, those relations governing men in the process of production. (Perrings 73)

With this said, the dominant group in society constructs the differentiation in race in order to produce a suitable workforce from the less powerful and racially different people in society. This particular way of organising society then results in racism, and benefits the power group within a society; thus,
racism is not seen as problematic to that segment, and, as a result, they do not wish to eradicate it.

Critical race theory further provides an account of how stereotypes develop in society and how these stereotypes can change over time (Delgado & Stefancic 7). An illustrative example of the shifting of stereotypes is the feelings and thoughts of the whites towards the blacks during apartheid. In the apartheid society, some black African people were content and eager to serve their masters’ needs without question, willingly working as slaves performing strenuous, unpleasant and poorly paid duties. They were simply too scared to put one foot out of line as they lived in constant fear of the whites, who were known for torturing and ill-treating noncompliant blacks.

Doris Lessing portrays this situation in her text *The Grass is Singing* through her characters Mary Turner and Charlie Slatter, two characters who are not afraid to turn to violence and abuse in disciplining the farm labourers. In turn, the workers obey all their instructions and adhere to the masters’ needs without dispute. Through this perception of the black African as obedient and complacent with their slave-like role in the labour sector, the whites developed the stereotype that black people as a group were simple, docile and compliant.

However in instances of resistance, there was a transformation in this stereotype when conditions changed and the black African people displayed an independent mind and refused to accept their vulnerable situation in society. Then they were viewed as defiant and aggressive if they refused to follow the instructions of the white people.
An example of this defiance is in the short story, “Six Feet of the Country” by Nadine Gordimer where the black characters are viewed as disobedient when constantly enquiring about the wrong body found in the coffin at the funeral. Instead of simply accepting the error, as expected by the white characters, the blacks were annoyed and seeking answers to the whereabouts of their loved one’s body. Even though they do not have much money they are willing to pay in order to locate the whereabouts of the body. The white character was disturbed by their persistence: “I took it in irritation more than astonishment, really – irritation at the waste, the uselessness of this sacrifice by people so poor” (Gordimer, “Six Feet of the Country” 11).

In response, the white citizens developed the stereotype that black persons are rebellious, brutish and violent, which now contradicted the submissive stereotype. This is evident in the attitude of Lerice’s husband when the black characters would not give up the struggle to find the missing body. “Christ, what d’you think I am? Am I supposed to bring the dead back to life?” (Gordimer, “Six Feet of the Country” 11). The sarcastic tone of the white character illustrates his pure frustration with the persistence of the black characters.

A thorough interrogation of cultural studies requires an established definition of the term “culture.” Within this paradigm culture is not associated with art, literature and classical music as before, instead it refers to a person’s way of life. Theorists Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan state:

the way people behave while eating, talking with each other, interacting at work, engaging in ritualised social behaviour such as
social gatherings, and the like constitute a culture. (Rivkin and Ryan, “Introduction: The Politics of Culture” 1233)

Every individual deems his/her culture the best and most appropriate way of living; hence it can be offered that people view cultures as hierarchical. This cultural bias provides a basis for inequality, as it promotes the domination of one class/group over another, and also acts as a means of acquiring oppositional points of view to those in dominance (Rivkin and Ryan, “Introduction: The Politics of Culture” 1233).

With this in mind, cultural studies as a form of analysis, is concerned with the generation and circulation of meanings in industrial societies. “They start with the belief that meanings and the making of them (which together constitute culture) are indivisibly linked to social structure and can only be explained in terms of that structure and its history” (Fiske 1268). It focuses on the relationship between social practices commonly separated so that culture is seen as a whole way of life, a social totality exploring and aiming to understand the maintenance and formation of inequalities within and between social groups.

These racial inequalities and ideologies are perpetuated in literature. The selected texts of Doris Lessing and Bessie Head reflect and emphasise the unjust and divided societies of Rhodesia and Botswana. The power and authority of race is of significance as human fate was dictated and manipulated by a person’s ancestry and appearance. The characteristics of a person’s hair, complexion and facial features mediated every aspect of the African person’s life. People were judged solely on external biological aspects of race, and these determined their standards of living, and ultimately their
destiny and fortune. It was these physical characteristics that were an immense influence as to whether a person was figuratively free or enslaved in society.

Unlike the black African people who were a race and ethnicity of their own, the coloured people felt as if they did not have a specific position in society as they were regarded as both black and white. The white community deemed them to be too dark in skin colour whereas the black community considered their skin colour to be too white; thus they acquired the label of half-breed.

Bessie Head is a prime example of the complex position faced by the coloured people in the social order as she resided in a few homes to find her correct place in society. After birth she was first given to a white family for adoption, however, after realising that she was not white, the family returned her where she was placed in the home of the Heathcote family, a coloured couple who were devout Catholics. Hereafter she was sent to St. Monica’s home, a school for coloured girls situated near Durban (Eilersen 18-19). Consequently, Head, as a coloured, had no sense of belonging and felt as though she lacked an identity in society, problems which resulted from continuous social ridicule. The dramatic impact of society on Head is evident even after she has left South Africa and is living in Botswana. Abrahams notes:

It is, therefore, not surprising, that her first novel set in Botswana, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, published in 1968, should emphasize so heavily the twin aspects of hope and despair. In subsequent works she continues to be preoccupied with the familiar South African themes of
political and spiritual exile, racial hatred and the source of corrupting power and authority (Abrahams 4)

The hierarchical relationship between the black African people and the white people can be attributed to that of puppet and puppeteer. In the *Oxford School Dictionary*, a puppet is defined as “a kind of doll that can be made to move by working it with strings and wires, whose actions are controlled by someone else” (Hawkins, Delahunty & McDonald 463). One can immediately see the analogy: the role of the black African person was that of a puppet, as he/she was on the strings controlled by the puppeteer. Clearly, the puppeteers were the ruling power who orchestrated every political and social movement of the oppressed group, thus mediating every aspect of their restricted lives.

Ian Lopez, in his critical race theory, examines the social construction of race and tackles the wide-spread debate concerning the origins of race and its distinctions that have been the foundation of racist policies. To counter this contention, Lopez argues that race is a social construct rather than a biological reality (Lopez 964). He illustrates his point by focusing on two distinct races, blacks and whites, and how these two groups are in fact formed by the strength of social beliefs in a society rather than by natural differentiation or biological factors. In addition, research indicates that diverse races are not genetically distinct branches of humankind, therefore reinforcing the social nature of race (Lopez 966).

In order to nullify the belief in the biological construction of race, Lopez illustrates how genes and genetics are not responsible for racism and race
issues in society. He emphasizes that “there are no genetic characteristics possessed by all Blacks but not by non-Blacks; similarly, there is no gene or cluster of genes common to all Whites, but not to non-Whites” (967). Interestingly, the data compiled by various scientists demonstrate, contrary to popular opinion, that intra-group differences exceed inter-group differences; therefore, greater genetic variation exists within the populations typically labelled as Black and White than between these populations (Lopez 967). As a consequence, intra-group conflict between members of the same race should exceed the conflict between members of different races.

With this in mind, in the racially afflicted literary context in question, the differences between the white characters and the black characters should actually be minimal compared to the differences between the members of the same group. In the Lessing and Head texts under examination, gender inequality, rather than inherent biological differences, can be argued to be the result of the intra-group conflict resulting from the differences in the beliefs of the female and male characters pertaining to patriarchy and the treatment of the female characters in their society. Additionally, in Lessing's text in particular, the difference in attitudes of the white government and the minority of the white characters with a guilty conscience for their improper behaviour is also caused by the difference between members of the same hegemonic group.

Lopez maintains that humans and human interaction must be seen as the source and continued basis for racial categorisation also paying particular attention to racial formation, the process in which racial meanings arise (969). “Race is not a determinant or a residue of some other social phenomenon, but
rather stands on its own as an amalgamation of competing societal forces” (Lopez 969). Hence, it is the people in society who are to blame for racism as they construct and extenuate the differences in races. Thus, he concludes that the key element in racism and racial conflicts is the people within that particular society. This is evident in his quote:

Race is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing, and plastic process; subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle, and the micro effects of daily decisions. (Lopez 966)

He further expands on his theory by arguing that races, differentiated through human constructs, constitute an integral part of the whole social fabric that includes gender and class relations (Lopez 969). Based on this, the source of the problem of race can be identified by the fact that races are constructed relationally, against one another, rather than in isolation to one another. This then results in further conflict with unnecessary and superfluous competition between the people of different races. Lopez further argues that race is not an inescapable physical fact; rather it is a social construction that remains subject to individuals and community attitudes alike.

Netherland theorist Teun van Dijk in his extensive work on Critical Discourse Studies, advances a theory of ideology further endorses Lopez’s argument and is useful to explain the dynamics of racism and the maintenance of minority white rule for the purposes of this paper. He explains:

Dominance is defined here as the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality. This production
process may involve such different ‘modes’ of discourse – power relations as the more or less overt support, enactment, representation, legitimation, denial, mitigation or concealment of dominance, among others. (van Dijk, *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* 300)

Van Dijk’s theory appears to be informed by that of Louis Althusser who states that ideology represents the *imaginary* relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 693).

Althusser rejects the idea that the economic base of society determines the entire cultural superstructure. Unlike Marxist theorists, who suggest that the more economically stable group seizes all the power, Althusser argues that the economic situation of individuals does not result in distinct cultures or groups. According to him, ideology is a dynamic process constantly reproduced and reconstituted in practice (qtd. in Smith 518). Therefore the ways in which people think, act and understand themselves and their relationship to society is vital to ideologies.

Althusser replaces the Marxist theory with his theory of over-determination. At the core of this theory he lays emphasis on state apparatuses such as the social institutions of media, family, the educational system, language and the political system as crucial in the reproduction of ideology (Smith 518). These state apparatuses are part of every individual’s life and these institutions are continually conveying messages or are “speaking” to individuals about societal expectations whereby individuals must be represented in certain ways (Smith 518). In addition, he maintains that these institutions produce the tendency for people to think and behave in
socially acceptable forms. Cultural theorist, Stuart Hall substantiates Althusser’s argument as he states:

A set of social relations obviously requires meanings and frameworks which underpin them and hold them in place. These meanings are not only meanings of social experience, but also meanings of self, that is, constructions of social identity that enable people living in societies to make of themselves and their social relations. (qtd. in Fiske 1268)

An important point made by Althusser is the fact that social norms are not neutral or objective; they are in fact, biased and influenced by personal feelings and opinions; hence, the social norms have developed in the interests of those who hold social power, and they work to maintain their sites of power by naturalising them into common sense (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 693). As has been pointed out, it is pertinent to note that the social norms are ideologically slanted in favour of a particular class or group of people in society, but are accepted as natural by other classes, even when the interests of those other classes are directly opposed by the ideology reproduced by living life according to these norms (Smith 518).

Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of linguistic signs can further highlight these ideologies based on inequality. He pays particular attention to the sign, the signifier and the signified (Appiah 129). According to Saussure, “a sign is a term given to a word or sound, which acquires its
meaning only in relation to or contrast with other signs in a system of signs” (Appiah 129). The sign is further constituted of two segments, the *signifier* and the *signified* (Appiah 129).

Firstly, the *signifier* simply refers to the actual object or image represented by the sign: “The *signifier* is just the spoken or written word” (Appiah 129), whereas the *signified* refers to the thought or concept that is created in a person’s brain/mind when reading or hearing the signifier, “it is rather the idea, the mental object, which you have and which you succeed in communicating when you get your message across” (Appiah 129). The processing of the signifier by the mind in constructing a product (signified) is termed *signification* (Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure* 43).

In applying this theory to *The Grass is Singing, The Old Chief Mshlanga, A Question of Power* and *The Collector of Treasures*, the black and coloured characters in the literary societies act are identified as *signifiers* by virtue of their colour; for example “black” or “coloured”. However, for each individual that perceives the *signifiers*, a mental concept is created in the minds of other characters in viewing these black and coloured characters in a discriminatory manner termed the *signified*. Hence the *signified* are the black and coloured characters interpreted by the white characters as being almost animal-like and an inferior form of human life. Additionally these black and coloured characters when considering their identity have been similarly conditioned to associate the idea of blackness with inferiority.

The racial oppression projected in the particular texts of Lessing and Head can be meticulously examined according to this theory, as it suggests that the black or coloured characters had no choice but to accept the unfair
social norms conveyed to them through socio-political institutions in the racially biased society. With the social norms constructed in favour of the hegemonic group, the black or coloured people had to incorporate these racialised norms into their lifestyles, and continue living life as if racism is natural and normal.

Althusser also emphasises the role played by social institutions and language in the construction of the individual. In order to explain these influences, he uses the terms “interpellation” and “hailing” (qtd. in Fiske 1271). These terms derive from the notion that when an individual communicates with another individual, he/she is reproducing social relationships with people in society.

He insists that when we communicate with people, we begin by “hailing” them, using the example of “hailing” a taxi (qtd. in Fiske 1271). Based on this, the first progress we make in communicating with another person is to shout or call loudly to them in greeting or to attract their attention. In answering the “hailing”, the respondent has to recognise and acknowledge that the person is in fact communicating with him/her and is not talking to someone else (qtd. in Fiske 1271).

Essentially, the fact that a person recognises that he/she is being communicated to derives from signs carried in the language we use, that determines who we think they are (Fiske 1271). Fundamental to this concept is that people “hail” each other differently, according to who they are, and their age and status in society. As a consequence, the way a person is spoken to and addressed is often determinant upon his/her social standing in society.
This is apparent in the selected texts by Lessing and Head especially because the authoritative characters address and communicate with the subjugated black or coloured people in a demeaning and disrespectful way, thus using language as a carrier of the belief that the Africans of a designated colour, are worthless and unimportant in society. This point is emphasised in Lessing’s novel, *The Grass is Singing*, in which the white characters refer to the black characters using degrading terms such as “niggers” and “kaffirs”. For example Charlie says, in the presence of Moses: “Have you any idea why this nigger murdered Mrs Turner?” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 22). This quote confirms Althusser’s notion that “hailing” is the process by which language identifies and constructs a social position for the addressee” (qtd. in Fiske 1271) as Charlie is reiterating the black character’s substandard position in society by referring to him as a “nigger”.

Althusser subsequently shifts his focus to the response of the addressee. He claims that the addressee recognises the social position that the language has constructed when responding to the initial “hail” (qtd. in Fiske 1271). Furthermore, if the addressee’s response is supportive of the means of communication, he/she accepts this same position.

Focussing on the texts of Lessing and Head, the Africans of colour accept and to a certain degree, agree with their inferior position in society when they respond to the hailing of the characters enjoying superior social status. *The Grass is Singing* by Lessing, again illustrates this concept as Samson, a black African character responds to Mary’s hailing in a respectful manner using the terms “missus” and “madam”, which suggest Mary’s superiority and power. This is evident in the quote: “The old boy kept his eyes
on the ground and said “Good morning, missus” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 68). Therefore, it can be said that “interpellation, is a larger process whereby language constructs social relations for both parties in an act of communication and thus locates them in the broader map of social relations in general” (qtd. in Fiske 1271).

The theory of Louis Althusser is of value as Teun van Dijk utilizes his conceptualisations as a building block in the construction of his theory for addressing social inequality in society by means of offering a schema of relations between ideology, society, cognition and discourse. van Dijk states that the ideas and objectives that influence a group or culture shaping their political or social system are viewed as interpretation frameworks which organise sets of attitudes about other elements of modern society (van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* 37). These ideologies provide the cognitive foundation for the attitudes of various groups in societies, as well as the furtherance of their own goals and interests (van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* 37).

Similarly to Althusser, van Dijk asserts that social interaction, presented in the form of discourse and speech, takes place in every social structure in society. The social interaction is essential to this theory as the relations that people have with other members of society is then conceptualized according to a cognitive system or memory (van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* 37). It is evident that racism, a social problem, is a cognitized notion embedded in the individuals’ minds and is a social problem that deteriorates the quality of life of the black Africans on a large scale (Good & Ben-Yehuda 151). Thus the categorising in society is not objective, but is determined by the thought processes of the individuals in society.
In this cognitive system, van Dijk distinguishes between short term memory and long term memory, with each implementing a specific function in the system as a whole. Decoding and interpretation takes place in the short term memory, while the long term memory serves as a holder of socio-cultural knowledge of language, discourse, communication, persons, groups and events existing in the form of scripts (Fetzer and Meierkord 21).

It is also in the long term memory where prejudicial group attitudes and social group attitudes exist, which provides further decoding guides (Fetzer and Meierkord 21). Consequently, each of these group attitudes can represent a number of ideologies which combine to create one’s own ideas and objectives conforming to his/her identity, goals, social position, values and resources (Fetzer and Meierkord 21). At this point, individuals in society construct certain beliefs about their particular culture while simultaneously synthesising ideas and beliefs about other cultural/social groups. A significant term relating to this process is cognitive bias. This is a mechanism by which inequality is recreated in everyday life (Risman 445). For example: individuals of a certain culture will view their culture as superior to a diverse culture in society by synthesising negative ideas about the dissimilar culture.

van Dijk maintains that there is a discrepancy between group ideology and group interests which implies that power relations in society can also be produced and legitimated to control other people (Risman 445). In this situation some people may be forced to go against their best interests, both socially and economically. In addition, these individuals do not have a choice but to behave and live in accordance with the interests of the powerful people
in society. Therefore it can be claimed that the exercise and control of power in societies is both persuasive and punitive (Risman 445).

The racial disparity between diverse cultures or groups of characters in the texts can be explained using the theory of van Dijk. The white characters in Lessing and Head’s texts uncritically believe that their culture is more civilised and ultimately more superior to that of the black characters. It is for this reason that the white characters structure the functioning of society, politically and socially, on their group ideology resulting in their opposition to the black character’s best interests. Therefore, like in van Dijk’s theory, the exercise and control of power is persuasive as the vulnerable Africans of colour are forced to live according to the controlling white characters’ regulations and best interests.

The continued invisibility, mistreatment and exploitation of the Africans of colour results in devastating effects to the individual incurring emotional and psychological trauma. Furthermore, the physical abuse endured by the Africans of colour had a harmful and injurious impact; yet this physical mistreatment was over-shadowed by the resultant mental destruction of the individual’s psyche.

Frantz Fanon was interested in racial differences, “and his thinking brings together insights into psychology and a concern for the effects of domination on subjugated peoples” (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 462). He examines the effects of white authority on the subjugated black people of society by incorporating his knowledge of psychology and the working of the human brain into the argument. Fanon affirms that “there are close connections between the structure of the family
and the structure of the nation” (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 462). It is for this reason that the characteristics and qualities of the family are projected onto the social environment in which they reside.

Fanon begins his argument by considering the difference between the childhood of a white person compared to the childhood of a person of colour. He maintains that “a normal child that has been raised and has grown up in a normal family will be a normal man” (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 462). However, he notes the opposite in the childhood of a person of colour, “a normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world” (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 463).

Fanon explains this phenomenon by emphasising the racial differences between the white and the black child. He argues that the white family is the agent of a certain system and acts as the workshop in which a person is shaped and trained for life in society (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 465). Thus, this family structure is internalised in the superego and projected into political and social behaviour. Fanon further argues that when the child of colour makes contact with the white world, a certain synthesizing action takes place. In this process the child of colour’s own “unacceptable” family structure is cast back into the id (unconscious) where it is repressed (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 467).

Furthermore, according to Fanon, if the child of colour’s psychic is weak, there will be a crumpling of the ego (the conscious), where the person of colour will stop behaving as an “actional” person, in a way that is well-known and unique to him/her (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology”
It is at this point that the child of colour adopts a white person’s attitude and behaviour through a process of identification (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 465). The goal of his/her behaviour now turns to that of the white person in society, to “The Other” which is in the semblance of the white person (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 467). It is through “The Other” that the person of colour will gain worth and self esteem in society as the whites were the only admirable and respected citizens in society (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 467).

This transformation of behaviour in the person of colour can be used to explicate the mistreatment of black African women by the African men in society. The white population, in the racist regimes of Rhodesia and Botswana, were known to portray aggressive and violent characteristics towards the black individuals in society, abusing them physically and emotionally. The black African people had contact and relations with the white world as they provided domestic labour and labour forces for these cruel people. As a result of this, the blacks were subjected to the vindictive attitudes of the whites, thus, reinforcing this behaviour in the psyche of the blacks. It is for this reason that the blacks adopted the hostile attitude of their superior counterparts.

The intimidating and brutal attitude of “The Other” is then incorporated into each facet of the black’s life, as it is through the disguise of a white person that offers the black person a feeling of importance and worth. A black male’s attitude and power, in the imitation of a white man, is then reinforced in his conduct towards the black women in his society where he portrays his mimicked violent and aggressive attitude. This results in the mistreatment,
oppression and abuse of the black women by the black men in their lives, mirroring the poor manner in which the black men themselves were treated by the white citizens in society.

The psychological stress experienced by Southern African citizens during the imbalanced society rife with power and discrimination issues, can also be scrutinized by investigating the emotional trauma experienced by both powerless victims and authorial perpetrators of the cruel African society.

Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane offer an account of how traumatic experiences can damage a persons’ mind, occasionally causing permanent damage to the psyche. These psychiatrists commence their argument by stating that although experiencing trauma is an essential part of being human and is an inescapable part of human life, all people are not similar in their reactions when faced with difficulties pertaining to emotions and trauma (van der Kolk & McFarlane 487). Some individuals are able to adapt in order to cope with traumatic events in an attempt to resume their lives as normally as possible. Other individuals become fixated on the trauma experienced, causing them to lead lives that are continually affected by the distress. For these individuals it is difficult to lead a healthy normal life as the trauma becomes the centre of their world (van der Kolk & McFarlane 487).

Important to this study is how traumatic experiences can change a person’s psychological, biological and social equilibrium to such an extent that the memory of one particular event comes to contaminate all other experiences, causing the individual to dwell on that experience and pay no attention to the present (van der Kolk & McFarlane 488). This inability to deal with trauma has been termed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which
provides a way of understanding how a person’s biology, personality and conception of the world are intertwined and shaped by experience (van der Kolk & McFarlane 488). They state:

the PTSD diagnosis has reintroduced the notion that many neurotic symptoms are not the results of some mysterious, well-nigh inexplicable, genetically based irrationality, but of people’s inability to come to terms with real experiences that have overwhelmed their capacity to cope. (488)

With this in mind, it is possible to understand the troubled characters of the selected Lessing and Head texts. The fact that the black characters are discriminated against by the racist characters of power, causes them to be exposed to extreme stress and trauma. However, some black characters develop a more adequate coping mechanism in dealing with trauma than others; therefore, these characters can effectively deal with and adapt to the appalling way in which they are treated.

In other instances, the black and coloured characters in the texts are unable to deal with the traumatic events experienced. These psychologically damaged characters are thus portrayed as being mad or irrational, illustrating their inability to deal with the trauma endured. An exemplar of such a character is Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*. In the novel, she represents a mentally ill person as she suffers from hallucinations in which she is tormented by sexually deviant or perverted creatures and phantasms who continuously try to destroy her. It can be said that her madness results from
her inability to cope with the repressive society in which she lives, as she is oppressed by her race and gender.

In Head’s “The Collector of Treasures” Dikeledi is not depicted as being a mad or irrational character, like Elizabeth, however she is still unable to cope with the oppressive society in which she resides. The fact that her husband, Garesego, is adamant in his patriarchal practices of superiority and that he expects her to be submissive, also has a negative impact on her psychologically. Garesego causes her to experience trauma and suffering with regard to the children as well, as he does not maintain his fatherly duties of financial maintenance and support emotionally, causing Dikeledi more distress. In order to alleviate her emotional distress, Dikeledi displays madness in the sense that she essentially resorts to murdering her dominating husband by cutting off his penis, his physical representation of manhood and authority.

In examination of the texts by Doris Lessing, it is apparent that it is not solely the victims of oppression who are subjected to trauma and extreme suffering; the perpetrators also exhibit symptoms of PTSD. In The Grass is Singing, Mary Turner, a white, racist female character displays extreme hatred towards black African characters and treats them like worthless animals. She manipulates situations giving her reason to physically inflict harm on them, further intensifying her hatred for them. Mary’s obsession with the black characters eventually leads to her own destruction as she becomes psychotic and consumed in her own inner world of fear and revulsion. It is her tremendous hatred for the black people that results in her insanity, and, ultimately, her death.
In a closer examination of the ordered Southern African society, attention also needs to be paid to the repressive roles thrust on women in society. Well known theorist of power, gender, sexuality and identity, Judith Butler, shows particular interest in the notion of acquiring a specific gender in a society. In exploring this, it is vital to differentiate between the similar concepts of sex and gender. According to Butler, the sex of a person is determined by their chromosomal constitution; thus it is their biological form that is significant in determining their sex (Butler 902). Conversely, the term gender refers to the cultural interpretation or signification of the person’s sex. More specifically it is the display of masculine and feminine behaviour associated with the notion of the sex (Butler 902).

In her theory, Butler pays specific attention to the construction of gender identity in a society. She utilizes the idea presented by Simone de Beauvoir which claims that one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes a woman: “We are exhorted to be women, remain women and become women” (de Beauvoir 2). This means that when a child is born, it will be of a specific sex determined by whether the child has an X or a Y chromosome; however, the child will not have a specific gender at this stage of his/her life. It is only when the child is developing that he/she will be habituated to behave in a way that is pertinent to his/her gender. Consequently a person’s gender is entirely “imitative” as he/she will mimic the behaviour of a person with the same gender and perform this gender in a similar manner to the original (Butler 900).

Butler views the body as an active process of symbolizing certain cultural and historical possibilities (902). She focuses on the construction of
the female gender in society and argues that to become a woman is to allow the body to conform to a historical idea of women and to persuade the body to become a cultural sign of women (Butler 902). This is emphasised in the quote:

   Gender performativity is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today. Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self (qtd. in Culler, *The Literary in Theory* 158).

Therefore, Butler hypothesises that the body of a woman becomes its gender “through a series of acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time” (900). A woman, therefore, gains her femininity by repeating the acts that she is expected to mimic from other women in society, which represents a gender identity that is accepted by the hegemonic gender, men.

However, this process of performing a gender can also transform the expected behaviour of a gender in a given society. Thus Butler argues that the ideas concerned with masculine and feminine behaviour can be altered. It is the women in society that can change their expected gender roles and social order by performing roles equating them to men, instead of performing the expectations of the men in society.

In order to elaborate on her theory, Butler compares the process of acquiring a gender to a drama executed on stage where the actors and actresses have to perform certain character roles. In the play, the actors follow a script which ought to be enacted in specified ways; likewise, society resembles the play in the sense that the gendered body is obliged to act out the “script” of how that particular gender is portrayed in society. Additionally,
as a play requires both text and interpretation, “so the gendered body enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives” (Butler 907). Therefore gender also acts as a performance indicative of what you do at particular times, rather than a universal of who you are.

Butlers’ focus on the relationship between society and gender can be reinforced by the ideas presented by social constructionists. A major focus of social constructionism is to examine the ways in which social phenomena are created, institutionalised and traditionally lived by humans. These theorists argue that all knowledge is culturally and historically specific; thus, the way a person understands the world, and the concepts and categories that he/she uses is based on his/her construction of the world (Burr 3). Similar to Butler’s theory where gender identity is constructed and differentiated by means of different performances by men and women fulfilling their specific gender roles, social constructionists hypothesize that knowledge is sustained by social processes (Burr 4).

For example, it is through daily interactions between people in their everyday lives that social knowledge or shared versions of knowledge are constructed. Thus, gender roles in society are products of the culture and the history prevalent at that specific time. This is apparent in the Lessing and Head texts that are of significance to this study. In the era that their African characters were created, great importance was placed on the gendered and racially differentiated distinction between human beings, to such a degree that these categories of personhood influenced every characters’ economic, social and psychological well being (Burr 4). With this said, the characters’ understanding of the African world and their knowledge of society is
understood in terms of racial and gendered categories where each character’s identity is determined by these pertinent societal issues.

Barbara Risman acknowledges the theory of gender as a social construction where a person’s gender is embedded in the individual, and in the interactional and institutional dimensions of society (Risman 429). She maintains that the creation of difference between men and women in society provides the foundation of gender inequality (Risman 431). As a consequence, the differences in gendered behaviour justify the construction of women as a group which is forced to be subordinate to men as a group.

The interlinked theory of Butler and Risman can be applied to analyse the female characters created in the fiction of Lessing and Head. Head’s character of Dikeledi in “The Collector of Treasures” is a woman who has constructed her gender by performing acts similar to the other women residing in her society. For example, women were conditioned to carry out household chores and subsist as obedient wives, who were primarily used for sexual pleasure and reproductive purposes. As a result, these are the gendered qualities that gave Dikeledi and other black African women their gender identity and sense of worth in society.

Like Dikeledi, Lessing’s fictional character, Mary Turner in The Grass is Singing, also exemplifies a character who imitates the subjugated behaviour of women in society at that time. Even though Mary is a white woman, who is deemed to have more power than the black African women, she is also conditioned to carry out certain roles and responsibilities as a married woman living in a society rife with unequal opportunities. The white woman, like the black African woman, must be a good wife and homemaker. In contrast to the
women, it is the males in both societies who were the heads of the household, holding responsibility for the family’s subsistence and functioning. Therefore, it is these gender roles that emphasise the distinctions between the males and females in society and substantiate each group’s gender identity.

Luce Irigaray expands on the identity and worth of women as a group by examining the social roles imposed on them by men in society. She argues that women are assigned labels relating to sexual pleasure which contain certain expectations that are geared towards the fulfilment of male needs. In patriarchal societies, women are classed as objects; more specifically they are categorised as objects of desire used to perform sexual labour (Irigaray 809). Additionally, women also acquire labels from men that equate their worth and value to men in society. In discourse, women are restricted to these labels which limits their representation in literature. Dikeledi in “The Collector of Treasures” is a character governed by specific labels relating to her gender. This is apparent through her relationship with her husband, where he only finds her useful sexually, to give him children and as a homemaker, to feed him, care for the children and perform all household duties.

Irigaray considers three main categories surrounding female sexuality into which a woman is placed (808). The first category is woman as the mother figure where the woman remains confined to reproduction (Irigaray 807). This label is derived from a woman’s reproductive and nurturing abilities. Her main function here is to bear and raise children. The argument of Dorothy Driver can be used to reinforce this category defined by Irigaray. Driver claims:
Conventionally, the figure of the mother spells silence. The mother, socially constituted as the place of nature within culture, as the matrix out of which the child’s subjectivity is developed, and as the object of the other’s desire, assumes a marginal position in culture, perpetually alienated from her own subjectivity. (Driver 239)

Thus, this category into which women are placed focuses on and maintains the submissive role of women in the patriarchal society.

The next category is that of “virginal woman” and describes a woman who is sexually pure and ignorant about sexual matters, perhaps even lacking interest in such pleasures (Irigaray 808). Interestingly, women who belong to this category are valued more by the men in society. The fact that the woman is a virgin gives her more worth as she is deemed pure and innocent.

The last type of woman that is discussed by Irigaray is the prostitute. The prostitute defines a woman who passively accepts men’s sexual advances, offering her body, without demanding pleasure in return (808). Women who are placed in this group have little or no value to men and exist primarily to be used by both married and unmarried men, simply for their sexual gratification.

The female characters in A Question of Power exemplify the labels discussed by Irigaray. In her state of madness, Elizabeth is haunted by Dan and Sello, characters who have no respect for women. These hallucinations provide insight into how the male characters objectify the female characters, treating them as their sexual property. Head’s character Elizabeth states: “All the men were like that, they had prostitutes in the background. A long story
was to unfold about the women. Half of them belonged to Dan” (Head, A
Question of Power 119).

Head’s interesting choice of names for the women in her character’s
hallucinations also substantiates Irigaray’s theory. These names relate to
either character’s physical appearances or their sexual representation, for
example, Madame Make-Love-on-the-Floor, Body Beautiful, The Womb and
Madame Loose-Bottom signifying that the female characters are only
important to the males for sexual purposes.

To recapitulate, a close examination of critical race theory and a
thorough analysis of the literary texts by Doris Lessing and Bessie Head allow
for the careful scrutiny of the racial and gender stratification in their literary
worlds. Within this perspective the subsequent theories presented by the
influential theorists provide the issue of gender discrimination and racial
prejudice to be examined through various lenses. The theories of Ian Lopez,
Louis Althusser, Ferdinand de Saussure and Teun van Dijk provide an
account as to how racism and the social order can be applied to Lessing and
Head’s fictional worlds as racism is socially constructed by the members
within those specific environments. The resultant mental effects on the
characters living in societies riddled with racial oppression are also to be
scrutinised in relation to the theory on psychological trauma and stress
presented by Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane.

Furthermore the gender oppression pertinent in the fictional societies
of these female authors can also be investigated by applying the theories of
Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray where the social, economic and psychological
effects on the female victims can also be evaluated. This study further
explores the creation and maintenance of power and how the powerful characters determine acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and create stereotypes in society. As a consequence, this study will investigate the literary interpretation of different societies riddled with inequality.
Chapter 3: Exploitation of Black African Characters

“It is by the failures and misfits of a civilization that one can best judge its weaknesses” (Lessing, The Grass is Singing 2).

The injustices and struggles of Rhodesian and Botswana society are mirrored in the fictional lives and communities created by Lessing and Head in their literary constructions. Racial oppression, hatred, prejudice, detestation, intolerance, cruelty, subjugation, and brutality are a few terms that reflect the callous and cruel characteristics of these racially divided societies. Racism is the primary doctrine blamed for the weaknesses and severe suffering in Southern Africa’s disordered societies.

Researcher and theorist Mark Halstead focuses his attention on race, the origin of racial divisions in society and identifies various categories of racism. The first type he terms Pre-reflective Gut Racism, based on the intense hatred of people who are of a different race or culture which results in dominance, superiority and aggression against certain members of society (Halstead). Halstead advances his argument by claiming that the root of this racism stems from emotional origins rather than rational origins; hence it pertains to the psychological problems of the individual rather than on his/her logic and reasoning.

Halstead suggests that racism is based on the psyche; the racist person tends to be frightened, anxious and even fearful of an individual from a diverse race, which creates suspicion and distrust toward citizens from a different culture (Halstead). Even though the dominant group has limited
knowledge of the other racial group, they create broad, exaggerated stereotypes.

The racism or racial oppression presented in *The Grass is Singing* by Doris Lessing can be analysed as *Pre-reflective Gut Racism*. The main character Mary Turner’s extreme hatred for the black African characters can be defined as psychological as she has been infused with racist notions. The inferiority of the black characters and the notion of white supremacy has been instilled in her psyche by the other white racist members of society as seen in this quote:

> When the old settlers say ‘One has to understand the country,’ what they mean is ‘You have to get used to our idea about the native.’ They are saying, in effect, ‘Learn our ideas, or otherwise get out: we don’t want you.’ (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 20)

Ironically, later in the novel there is a shift in the power relations between Mary and Moses. Instead of Mary holding all the power, as in the beginning of the novel, she has now placed Moses in a powerful position as she has come to rely on him. This is evident when Moses leaves the house to return to his sleeping quarters and Mary commands him to stay with her.

> But in spite of the attitude of dignity she was striving to assume, she sobbed out again, ‘You mustn’t go,’ and her voice was an entreaty. He held the glass to her lips, so that she had to put up her hand to hold it, and with the tears running down her face she took a gulp. She looked at him pleadingly over the glass, and with renewed fear saw an indulgence in his eyes. (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 186)
This quote emphasises the fact that Mary is utterly dependent on Moses. Although she is loathe to have him touch her, of needing a black man, yet she is comforted by “by his voice firm and kind like a father commanding her” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 187). He, in a sense, is able to console and calm her, which contradicts her racist feelings towards him at the beginning of the novel. Furthermore, it is also ironic that Moses is a black character that is now giving instructions to a white character. This is evident when Moses orders Mary to drink water. “‘Drink’, he said simply, as if he were speaking to one of his own women; and she drank” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 186).

Here he is speaking to Mary in the same manner he would speak to the submissive women in his culture. The tone he uses is also important as it is similar to the commanding tone used by the white characters.

All white, black and coloured characters are conditioned to behave in a certain manner in society; if they do not conform to this conditioning, they are shunned for their alternate beliefs. “... for to live with the colour bar in all its nuances and implications means closing one’s mind to many things, if one intends to be an accepted member of society” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 30). Thus, Mary, like other members of society, is taught to view the differences between black and white characters as fundamental to Rhodesian society. Mary increases the intensity of her hatred for the black characters by continually reaffirming in her mind their inferiority and danger to the white characters. The psychological state of Mary is evident in the quote: “She was afraid of them, of course. Every woman in South Africa is brought up to be ... . . . . that they were nasty and might do horrible things to her” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 70).
As a result, Mary reaffirms her white authority in the presence of the black characters working in her house or as labourers on Dick’s farm by continually giving orders and scrutinising their behaviour and work. “The sensation of being boss over perhaps eighty black workers gave her new confidence, it was a good feeling, keeping them under her will, making them do as she wanted” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 138).

The fact that Mary Turner and the other white characters distanced themselves from the black characters and discounted their tradition and culture leads to the characters’ creation of racial stereotypes in the text. This is apparent throughout the story where the black characters are continually likened to animals. For instance, whites arriving from Europe are shocked by the ill-treatment of blacks: “They were revolted a hundred times a day by the casual way they were spoken of, as if they were so many cattle . . .” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 20). In another instance the black characters are also regarded as tantamount to dogs. “A white person may look at a native, who is no better than a dog” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 176).

It was also assumed by Mary Turner that the black characters were thieves waiting for an opportunity to steal the white’s belongings. Even Mary’s murderer was initially accused of theft and his crime was thought to be motivated by alcohol: “It was suggested that the native had murdered Mary Turner while drunk, in search of money and jewellery” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 35).

In his investigation of racism, Halstead also focuses on *Cultural Racism* which involves prejudice against individuals merely because of their
culture. In this form of racism, the culture of other individual’s is viewed as flawed and is believed to be a barrier to their progress as a people (Halstead).

The racism portrayed in Doris Lessing’s short story, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” can be categorised as Cultural Racism since the black characters are oppressed as they are from an unknown or different culture. In this society, the black people were only useful for the labour on the white character’s property:

The Black people on the farm were as remote as the trees and the rocks. They were an amorphous black mass, mingling and thinning and massing like tadpoles, faceless, who existed merely to serve, to say ‘Yes, Baas,’ take their money and go. (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 267)

The social order in this fictional society is reiterated by the boundaries between races and cultures; therefore the fact that a black character is born to his or her specific culture or race acts as a barrier to his/her progress as a black person. It is propagated that a character’s dark skin colour, limits his/her function and relations in society, preventing not only physical but emotional proximity.

It was even impossible to think of the black people who worked about the house as friends, for if she talked to one of them, her mother would come running anxiously: ‘Come away; you mustn’t talk to natives.” It was this instilled consciousness of danger, of something unpleasant, that made it easy to laugh out loud, crudely, if a servant made a
mistake in his English or if her failed to understand an order (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 267)

This point is further illustrated in the attitude of Mary in The Grass is Singing:

“It was like a nightmare where one is powerless against horror: the touch of this black man’s hand on her shoulder filled her with nausea; she had never, not once in her whole life, touched the flesh of a native” (Lessing, The Grass is Singing 186). Furthermore she adds:

“She thought of herself weeping helplessly, unable to stop; of drinking at that black man’s command; of the way he had pushed her across the two rooms to the bed; of the way he had made her lie down and then tucked the coat in round her legs. She shrank into the pillow with loathing, moaning out loud, as if she had been touched by excrement.” (Lessing, The Grass is Singing 187).

The racism portrayed in Bessie Head’s short story, “The Collector of Treasures” can also be an example of Cultural Racism. Even though the racism in this text is more subtle, the black characters are seen to be an inferior form of human life as they are of a different race or culture to the characters of the dominant culture. Even though Botswana had gained its independence when this text was written, Garesego Mokopi is still portrayed as a victim of his culture and race - the effects of inferiority prior to the independence of the country. This is evident when Head pays attention to the fact that he was forced to provide labour for the white characters prior to his freedom: “Colonialism scarcely enriched his life. He then became “the boy” of the white man and a machine tool of the South African mines” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 59).
In further discussing race, Halstead focuses on *Institutional Racism* where the white individuals are the source of institutional power (Halstead). This type of racism refers to the way that the institutional arrangements and the distribution of resources serve to reinforce the advantages of the Whites. Thus, institutions are viewed as long established organisational practices which disadvantage members of different racial groups for no other reason than for the mere fact that they are members of these particular minorities (Halstead).

The society based on unequal opportunities in *A Question of Power* can be analysed according to *Institutional Racism*. The white characters in the novel acquire their wealth from the hard labour of the black characters whose minimal wages are barely sufficient to properly feed their families. Head illustrates the poverty of the black characters in the novel by providing a comparison between the reality of impoverished black children and the literary myth of privileged white children:

They ate no breakfast in the early morning, and by midday their mouths were white and pinched with starvation. Other children had soft mounds of butter where their cheeks ought to be, and dimpled smiles. The children she had taught were stark, gaunt, thin like the twisted thorn-bush. (Head, *A Question of Power* 68)

Lessing incorporates this idea of black labour supporting white productivity and profit in the book, *The Grass is Singing*: “. . . and above all he was hard with his farm labourers. They, the geese that laid the golden eggs, were still in that state where they did not know there were other ways of living besides producing gold for other people” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 15).
In addition, in *Institutional Racism*, the black people are disadvantaged by the continued existence of the institution; thus, the white people maintain their power by means of society institutions acting as stabilizers. For example, the white people have superior schools, businesses and police force at their disposal to both achieve their own goals and successes, and simultaneously oppress the black people. *Institutional Racism* is pertinent in the life of Sindiwe Magona who experienced an impoverished youth in South Africa, with personal and political struggles as a black South African woman hoping to achieve racial and gender harmony in the country. The blatant discrimination is discussed in Magona’s first autobiography, *To my Children’s Children* when she explains that she was initially forced to do domestic work because as a black woman, she was relieved of her teaching duties due to her premarital pregnancy.

Similarly, in *A Question of Power* Head bases her fictional society on the world she experienced while living in South Africa. Consequently, the black characters were denied education as this could lead to their empowerment; however the whites believed that education was the key to their power; thus they were the ones who were sent to well-resourced learning institutions. In addition, the white characters did not want the black characters to better themselves in any aspect of their lives, as this could potentially threaten the superiority of the white characters. This is supported in the quotation:

They conjured up in the minds of the poor and starving a day when every table would overflow with good food; roast chicken, roast potatoes, boiled carrots, rice and puddings. They felt in every way like
food and clothes and opportunities for everyone. It wasn’t like that in his country, South Africa. There they said the black man was naturally dull, stupid, inferior, but they made sure to deprive him of the type of education which developed personality, intellect and skill. (Head, A Question of Power 57)

The notion of supremacy and the discriminatory attitude displayed by white characters is also one of the main themes in The Grass is Singing by Doris Lessing. The introductory paragraph to the novel acts as a good indication of the context in which the story is written.

Mary Turner, wife of Richard Turner, a farmer at Ngesi, was found murdered on the front verandah of their homestead yesterday morning. The houseboy, who has been arrested, has confessed to the crime. No motive has been discovered. It is thought he was in search of valuables. (Lessing, The Grass is Singing 3)

Here the reader acquires an idea as to how prejudice and racism are present in a Rhodesian racist society; furthermore, the fact that this is projected as a newspaper report further suggests Rhodesian society’s attitude reflected in the works of African authors at the time. Additionally, the reader is presented with the supremacy and domination of the white literary characters and the negative representation and inferiority of the black characters portrayed in the mirrored Southern African literary society.

Teun van Dijk argues that ideologies provide the cognitive foundation for the attitudes of various groups in societies which furthers their own goals and interests. He discusses a scheme of relations connecting ideology,
society, cognition and discourse. In the social interaction of the characters through their discourse, certain ideologies are cognitized by each racial group according to a cognitive system. In this cognitive system van Dijk differentiates between short term memory and long term memory that can be applied to the creation of the racially prejudiced ideologies in the unjust Southern African literary society (Fetzer and Meierkord 21).

Firstly, the short term memory is where the decoding and interpretation of acquired information takes place; thus it can be suggested that this part of the mind that the white literary characters scrutinize and evaluate the black characters and hypothesise reasons to strictly demarcate the colour bar. “There was no great money-cleavage in those days (that was before the era of the tobacco barons), but there was certainly a race division” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 3). The structure of society and evaluation of the black characters also reinforces white superiority, further leading to the creation and maintenance of stereotypes regarding the black characters.

The long term memory, on the other hand, retains the socio-cultural knowledge of the social/group attitudes created in the short term memory. Due to the inferior status of the black characters, the white characters’ ideologies combine to create their own personal ideology enabling the achievement of their own goals, social position, and values. Ultimately, this reinforces the power relations in society, resulting in the entrapment of the black characters and the dominance of the white characters.

The control of the white characters and their power is illustrated in the description of Charlie Slatter’s unpunished murder of a black character.
But Slatter believed in farming with a sjambok. It hung over his front door on the wall: You shall not mind killing if it is necessary. He had once killed a native in a fit of temper. He was fined thirty pounds. Since then he kept his temper (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 15).

This shows the small value placed on the black characters’ lives, as it was a trivial matter for a white person to murder a black person “in a fit of temper”. The levy of a minimal fine for murder is a clear illustration of this fact; a black person’s life is worth a mere pittance. This is substantiated by the quote:

> In most cases in which a white man was accused of having killed a worker, the only witnesses were blacks and juries were loath to accept their testimony, no matter how compelling. The quality of jurors was often poor and judges were sometimes incompetent in their interpretation of the law, thereby increasing the likelihood of unsound verdicts. (McCulloch 36)

To elaborate on this, the black African experiences many hardships as a result of being of a darker skin colour. Firstly, it is believed that he/she is savage and is a danger to society; secondly, the black person is deprived of education as it is believed that this will empower him/her, creating a disturbance in the ordered society; and thirdly, no matter how decent or honest a black person is, he/she is always the main suspect in the event of a crime. Mpofu in his article written in 2008 titled, “The Absence of Black Intellect in Universities” suggests how the position of the black person is still faced with some of the issues faced by Africans in the 1950’s.

The black as a member of society is constantly on the back foot. Before he leaves his home, he has three strikes against him. The first
strike is him being born black. The second strike is for him being relegated to inferior status in society where he is regarded as an animal. The third strike is that regardless of how hard he strives to lead a decent and honest living, he is always your suspect when something goes missing. (Mpofu)

Throughout Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*, the black characters are portrayed as a group of people that are thieves and scheme to obtain wealth by stealing from the whites. This notion is observed in the novel’s opening paragraph in which Mary’s murderer is assumed to be a thief. Moses, the confessed murderer, is immediately labelled a thief, regardless of what the actual motive of the murder might be. He is conformed to the stereotype that black characters are dishonest and dangerous to the whites in society.

This negative stereotype of the black characters is maintained throughout the novel as evidenced by Mary’s abject distrust of the black characters. Her first contact with a black character is seen in her relationship with Samson, her domestic worker whom she deemed a criminal. As a result of his darker skin colour, she resorts to hiding the keys to the storeroom as a precautionary measure against the probability that he will steal her groceries and belongings. “Boss has keys, he explained; and she was amused at his matter-of-fact acceptance of a precaution that could only be against his stealing” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 71).

Mary furthers the stereotype of dishonest Blacks by vigilantly supervising Samson’s work.
She put out, carefully, every meal, and so much sugar; and watched the left-overs from their own food with an extraordinary, humiliating capacity for remembering every cold potato and every piece of bread, asking for them if they were missing. (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 77)

After driving Samson away, Mary’s mistrust and suspicion of the black characters intensifies in the presence of the new “houseboy”. Although Mary has never been wronged by a black character, and has always been treated respectfully, she grows more suspicious and weary of the black characters, especially the black male characters. This is evident in her attitude towards the next houseboy:

... and all the time, at the back of her mind, was the thought that the new servant was alone in the house and probably getting up to all sorts of mischief. He was certainly stealing while her back was turned: he might be handling her clothes, looking through her personal things.

(Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 84)

This mentality of Mary’s can further be analysed according to the theory of Sigmund Freud. Freud paid much attention to the unconscious and repressed fears and wishes. He argued:

Unconscious is not simply a repository for what we do not remember. It is a repressive force, preventing awareness of painful memories/desires that would conflict with our conscious goals. However, these unconscious fears and wishes inform our actions so that we may behave, not necessarily irrationally, but from motives
deeper than we realise. The unconscious makes itself known through our small mistakes, such as forgetting or slips of the tongue, through jokes, dreams and neurotic symptoms. (Horton 142)

Mary’s neurotic symptoms and irrational fears can be said to be based in the unconscious part of her mind, as this was instilled in her thoughts since she was a child. Now that she is an adult, her unconscious makes itself known through her neurotic symptoms. Another possible explanation for her racist attitude is that she could be repressing her sexual desires for the black character, the same desires as those present towards the end of the novel.

The new servant is also a victim of his skin colour as it was also assumed by Mary that he is more of a liability than an asset to her. Mary illustrates this notion when she returns from the fields and resorts to investigating what work has not been done and what belongings are missing. “When she got back at lunch-time the first thing she did was to go round the house, looking for what he has left undone, and examining her drawers, which looked untouched. But then, one never knew - they were such cunning swine!” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 84).

These negative stereotypes developed by the white characters emphasise the social construction of race in society where racism and racial group categories are created and maintained by the members of that particular community. Thus, the way a character understands the world, and the categories and concepts he/she uses, are historically and culturally specific. Not only are they specific to particular cultures and periods of history, they are seen as products of that culture and history, and are
dependent upon the social and economic arrangements prevalent in the culture at that time.

With this in mind, the Rhodesian society in *The Grass is Singing* is described as an unpleasant and aggressive environment as evident in Charlie Slatter’s attitude: “Anger, violence, death seemed natural to this vast, harsh country . . . he had done a lot of thinking since he strolled casually into the house that morning” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 22). It was the norm for the characters living in a racist society to live according to distinct racial categories/groups, separate from and ignorant of dissimilar groups.

And anyway, what had one’s ideas mounted to? Abstract ideas about decency and goodwill, that was all: merely abstract ideas. When it came to the point, one never had contact with natives, except in the master-servant relationship. One never knew them in their own lives, as human beings. (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 21)

This quotation reasserts the idea of isolation and the fact that different cultural groups did not have much knowledge on the beliefs, cultures and way of living of diverse cultures due to the separation of racial groups.

Secondly, reference is continually made by characters to the discriminatory organisation of society in Southern Africa. For example, the phrase “When you have been in the country long enough” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 25), is repeated by the characters in the novel, illustrating that outsiders may not yet be in tune to the appropriate manner in which to behave in society, with minimal contact to other racial groups, further emphasising the normalised segregation of races and the discrimination of the black characters.
Additionally, the emphasis of different racial groups is important as the white characters used this distinction between the races as a method to elevate their superior status and the advancement of their economic well being. “They talk about their labourers with a persistent irritation sounding in their voices: individuals they might like, but as a genus, they loathe them. They loathe them to the point of neurosis” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 92).

Althusser proposes a theory of overdetermination, which, when applied to *The Grass is Singing*, interrogates the formation and endorsement of diverse racial groups in Rhodesia at that time. In his theory, Althusser argues that members of a society conduct themselves in a manner that is determined by the ideological state apparatuses, therefore highlighting the importance of society’s social institutions. This theory explains why the characters in Lessing’s fictional prejudiced world have a tendency to behave and think in ways that are applicable to the standards of their family, media, political and educational systems.

In the characters’ world most social institutions elevate the status of the white characters while diminishing the position of the black characters. This is apparent in the quote:

The three men looked at the murderer, thinking their own thoughts, speculative, frowning, but not as if he were important now. No, he was unimportant: he was the constant, the black man who will thieve, rape, murder, if given half a chance. (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 29)

This quote reinforces the insignificance of the black characters and the way the white characters make certain that black characters are aware that they are a threat and menace to them.
According to Althusser’s theory, the social norms portrayed in society are biased and subjective as they have developed in the interests of the powerful white characters who integrate these norms as common sense in order to maintain their social power. With this said, the social norms in Lessing's fictional community are in favour of the white characters; however, these are also accepted as natural and normal by the black characters, even though their subjective promotion is opposed.

Thus, the created social norm of inequality is accepted by the black characters as it is impossible for them to go against the white characters who hold the social power. This is evident in the novel after Moses’ arrest for the murder of Mary; he is forced to walk to the police station as the white authorities refused to allow him to travel in the same car as Mary’s body, his white female victim. “And then there was another problem: they could not put Moses the murderer in the same car with her; one could not put a black man close to a white woman, even though she was dead and murdered by him” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 28-29).

The power relations between the races in the novel are also reinforced by the communication strategies utilised by the characters of different races. Althusser argues that in communicating with one another, individuals substantiate their social status in society (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 699). The white characters in the novel reinforce their power and authority by addressing and communicating with the black characters in a manner that is derogatory and abusive. For example, the black characters are referred to as “fools”: “That old fool has let the dogs go again. I told him not to” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 72), denoting the belief that
they are unintelligent, immature and irresponsible. The difference between the races is also highlighted by the fact that the black characters are termed “natives” which again is regarded as an insulting and offensive term which connotes a primitive tribalism: “But then, she had something to do in the house, supervising that native” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 84).

In communicating with people, Althusser argues that an individual must first “hail” or call to another individual, a process by which language identifies and constructs a social position for the addressee (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 699). The white characters in *The Grass is Singing* communicate or “hail” to the black characters in an insulting and dehumanising manner in order to exemplify the black characters inferior status and their own superior standing. For example, the black characters are referred to as “farm boys” which diminuates these adult male labourers to the station of children (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 12). Even the black characters who are policemen are referred to as “boys”, illustrating that even those few black characters that hold positions of societal status and authority are still frequently reminded of their inferior station in society: “. . and black men, even when policemen, do not lay hands on the white flesh” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 13).

Althusser also investigates “interpellation”, a larger process than “hailing” whereby language constructs social relations for both parties who are communicating with one another (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 699). “Althusser characterizes the phenomenon of interpellation as a kind of hailing that has the formative power of configuring one’s identity in a particular way and of making one accept this concrete
configuration as what one is” (qtd. in Médina 168). This process occurs when the black characters in the novel acknowledge that the white characters are in fact talking to them while using derogatory language. Additionally, in recognising and responding to the white character, the black characters situate themselves in a substandard position in society. For example, when the black characters respond to the white characters, they are accepting their destined status in society as they unquestioningly overlook the racist and insulting language used.

Their substandard position is further emphasised in their response to the addresser as they use courteous language and lexis that demonstrates respect and acceptance of the whites’ elevated status in society. This is evident in Moses’ respectful responses to Mary; he refers to her as “missus” and “boss” reinforcing her superiority and his inferiority in their relationship (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 71).

Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of linguistics pertaining to the *sign*, *signifier* and *signified* can be used to broaden the explanation of the hierarchical relationship between white and characters of colour. The first concept defined is the *signifier* which is the actual object or image that individuals can observe and experience, whereas the *signified*, is the thought/concept that is constructed in a person’s brain/mind in association with the *signifier*. In *The Grass is Singing* the black character represents the *signifier*, a person with a different skin colour and appearance to the white characters in the novel from which the white characters develop the *signified* (thought or concept of an inferior person).
However, the racism in this literary society originates from the signified created in the minds of the judgemental white characters. It was important to them that they continually highlighted that the black characters are in fact different to them and, because of this, the black characters are deemed unworthy of associating with the white characters. It was catastrophic for the white characters to cross the racial borderline with the black characters, both socially and emotionally. This is evident in the citation: “South Africa gets into you, these self-exiled people would say, ruefully” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 37). The word “self-exiled” illustrates how it was the choice of the white characters to isolate themselves from the “different” black characters in society.

A prime example of a character which reinforces de Saussure’s theory is Mary Turner and her attitude towards the black women in society. She cannot even tolerate being in the same vicinity as black women let alone the thought of socialising with them. This is evident in her stance when she opens the shop where the black women purchase goods. The signifier black women had become signified to represent immoral, strange and disgusting. The shop, in essence, helps Mary’s own economic situation, yet she deemed “these black women, as strange; they were alien and primitive creatures with ugly desires she could not bear to think about” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 116). The lexii Mary chose to describe the signifier, the alien black women, illustrates the extreme mental concepts/ideas she has developed concerning them and their different culture.

Stereotyping, violence, intense mental and physical abuse are but a few factors that are frequently endured by the black characters in *The Grass*
is Singing. Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane’s chapter, “The Black Hole of Trauma,” primarily deals with trauma and how traumatic experiences can damage and scar the psyche of an individual; their ideas can be used to provide a mental evaluation on the characters in the novel (Van der Kolk and McFarlane 487). A character experiencing trauma and possible signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is Moses as he has been the black character most affected by physical violence and emotional abuse.

The primary traumatic incident experienced by him is the severe whipping by Mary, occurring merely due to the fact that he needed a rest and a drink of water while performing strenuous work in the field.

Involuntarily she lifted her whip and brought it down across his face in a vicious swinging blow. . . . A thick weal pushed up along the dark skin of the cheek as she looked, and from it a drop of bright blood gathered and trickled down and off his chin, and splashed to his chest. (Lessing, The Grass is Singing 146-147)

The violence portrayed in this section of the novel is not uncommon in the Rhodesian society. According to Jock McCulloch; “minority rule in Southern Rhodesia was often brutal. Fears of further resistance and the frustrations of an unsuccessful economy were conducive to assaults upon workers” (36). Thus, the white people used violence as a strategy to curb resistance and ensure maximum production on the work front. The signifier, black labourers, had been correlated with the signified “lazy and must be beaten to work”.

Later in the novel, Dick selects Moses to work as a servant in his and Mary’s household where he further experiences severe physical and emotional abuse. This abuse is portrayed in the fact that he is expected to
work as if he does not have any feelings or limitations. “As always, he behaved as if he were an abstraction, not really there, a machine without a soul” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 188). Hence Moses as a black character is objectified as he is not viewed by Mary as a person with feelings. She portrays him as being more machine-like than human.

All these negative experiences escalate the level of trauma Moses endures, resulting in the possibility that Moses, later on in the novel, suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder. This disorder is characterised by the fact that a victim of trauma is unable to effectively deal with the trauma experienced. Moses’ inability to objectify the trauma that has damaged his psyche is displayed in the fact that he resorts to murdering Mary Turner. The murder of Mary allows Moses to release his anger and resentment towards her, the root and cause of his trauma. “And this was his final moment of triumph, a moment so perfect and complete that it took the urgency from thoughts of escape, leaving him indifferent” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 255). Here, both characters use violence to regain identity and sense of power over their lives and others.

The theme of crime prevalent in racist society is further explored in Lessing’s short story “The Old Chief Mshlanga.” However, instead of the black characters being portrayed as thieves who are always planning to steal the white characters belongings, the roles have been reversed in this text. In this fictional society it is the white characters that Lessing portrays as the criminals, who just claim the land of the black characters – the only privilege that they possess. This is evident in Chief Mshlanga’s visit to the Jordan’s farm in order to claim back the land originally belonging to his people. “My
father says: All this land you call yours, is his land and belongs to our people” (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 275).

Furthermore, Lessing’s placement of stereotypes on the black characters changes from that of criminal in The Grass is Singing to the black characters being portrayed as savage in the short story. This is evident in Lessing’s discussion of “natives” through the white main character known as Nkosikaas. The black characters or the signifiers are signified as dangerous and savage. This is obvious when Nkosikaas says:

They were thought of as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ natives; which meant: how did they behave as servants? Were they lazy, efficient, obedient, or disrespectful? If the family felt good-humoured, the phrase was: What can you expect from raw black savages? If we were angry, we said: These damned niggers, we would be much better off without them. (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 270)

This warped mindset of the white characters illustrates how, even though they depend entirely on the black characters for labour and economic survival, the whites are still inclined to view blacks as a burden to them. The black characters are in an oppressive situation as no matter what effort they make to obey and impress the white characters, they are always viewed as primitive and as an annoyance to their “bosses”.

The prolonged suffering of the blacks is further emphasised by Lessing in “The Old Chief Mshlanga” with regard to the ownership and development of land. Ordinances in Rhodesia allowed for the inequitable distribution of land that provided farmers with sustenance (Chung 211). Lessing’s white characters reside in an area that is above standard, rich in nutrients for the
cultivation of crops and abundant space of unused and unnecessary land. “They were good, the years of ranging the bush over her father’s farm which, like every white farm, was largely unused, broken only occasionally by small patches of cultivation” (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 266).

Unlike the white characters who had expansive tracts of land, the black characters were given limited access to productive land during the colonial period (Vambe, Chikonzo and Khan 134). Furthermore, the white settlers in Rhodesia, under the guidance of Rhodes, resorted to taking over black land (Vambe, Chikonzo and Khan 134). This point is evident towards the end of the story when Chief Mshlanga and his people are removed from their initial residence and placed far from the Jordan’s farm in a black only area: “Some time later we heard that Chief Mshlanga and his people had been moved two hundred miles east, to a proper native reserve; the government land was going to be opened up for white settlement soon” (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 276).

The pertinent issue of stereotyping and segregation is further enforced by the thought processes of the main character Nkosikaas. Like Mary in The Grass is Singing, the young girl’s racist thoughts and ideologies are influenced by her experiences with other characters in the social situations and institutions prevalent at that time. Theorist, Louis Althusser argues that the behaviour of a person is based on the specific standards that he/she is taught by social institutions which reflect the common views of the powerful people in society (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 695). Thus, Nkosikaas is guided by the racist views of her parents, the police,
the media and other white characters which are inescapable aspects of her everyday life.

Even though Nkosikaas is a character much younger than Mary Turner in *The Grass is Singing*, she has the same mentality and racially prejudiced attitude as Mary. Despite the fact that children should respect their elders, Nkosikaas maintains that she should be respected by all the black characters in society, regardless of their age. Her twisted viewpoint is apparent when she says:

I whistled the dogs close to my skirts and let the gun swing in my hand, and advanced, waiting for them to move aside, off the path, in respect for my passing . . . It was ‘cheek’ for a native not to stand off a path, the moment he caught sight of you. (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 268)

Furthermore, most of the young white characters display no conscience when ill treating or disrespecting the black characters, as this was acceptable and common behaviour to them. “The child was taught to take them for granted: the servants in the house would come running a hundred yards to pick up a book if she dropped it” (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 267).

To make matters worse, the famous old black character who is held in high esteem among his people and explorers addresses the white child as “Nkosikaas” which is a greeting used to address well respected and powerful people. This illustrates the narrow mindedness of the white characters as they choose to ignore any power wielded by the black characters in their own communities. For example, the white child’s mother denies the Chief of his power by claiming that he is not officially the Chief yet, regardless that it was
custom for him to take over his father’s role of Chief in their society. She refuses to admit the possibility of a black character holding any power; it was not in the best interests of the whites for blacks to have power; thus, they used any excuse to counter the thought. “My mother became strict with him now she knew about his birth and prospects. Sometimes, when she lost her temper, she would say: “You aren’t the Chief yet, you know”” (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 271).

An important tool used by the white characters to tyrannize and govern the black characters is language. A person’s language gives him/her a sense of worth and identity. “Indeed the acquisition of language in childhood is intimately bound up with becoming a social being, for learning to communicate through words the child takes on the concepts, values and modes of relationship of the society into which it is born” (Montgomery et al. 88). A white child growing up in the ordered African society acquires the dominant language at that time, the language defining the racially prejudiced thoughts, ideals and principles that ought to be adhered to in the social setting.

The white characters in “The Old Chief Mshlanga” are English speaking individuals; they possess the acceptable and prominent language of racially biased Africa, reinforcing their superior ranks and position in society. The fact that the black characters possess a “foreign” language and consequently, have a limited English vocabulary encourages further ridicule and scorn from the white characters. This derision is apparent when the children, in the text, laugh at the black characters who often make grammatical errors in their attempt to speak English, their non-mother tongue
language. This is evident in the quote: “that made it easy to laugh out loud, crude, if a servant made a mistake in his English or if he failed to understand an order - there is a certain kind of laughter that is fear, afraid of itself” (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 267).

In addition many white characters despised it when the black characters used English. Mary illustrates this point when she says: “He spoke in English, which as a rule she would have flamed into temper over; she thought it impertinence. But she answered in English, ‘Yes’ (Lessing, The Grass is Singing 189).

Moreover, Lessing exposes the discouraging situation of the black characters in society by placing emphasis on the police and subsequent Rhodesian authorities in the text. The police, supposedly responsible for the well being of all citizens in society are just as racist, or in some cases more racist than the white characters. This racial bias is evident when Chief Mshlanga confronts Mr. Jordan about the land; instead of Mr. Jordan reasoning with the chief, he refers him to discuss the matter with the police. “Go to the police, then, said my father, and looked triumphant” (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 275). The word “triumphant” illustrates how the white character was certain that the police would support his side of the argument, prior to even being consulted about the problem. The plight of the black characters was simply ignored, as it was automatically assumed that they are in the wrong regardless of the facts of the matter.

This point is clearly illustrated in the narrative when the policeman was informed of the argument between the men of different races, and he, without hesitation, supported the argument of the white character (276). Moreover,
he further states that the black characters should not be residing in that area in the first place, as they should not live in such close proximity to the white characters. “That kraal has no right to be there; it should have been moved long ago. I don’t know why no one has done anything about it. I’ll have a chat to the Native Commissioner next week” (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 276). Consequently, the black characters found themselves in a never ending battle regarding the state of their lives.

It was not only the black characters who were silenced and ill-treated by the white characters; Bessie Head depicts this in the world of her coloured characters facing a more traumatic existence and struggle than the black characters. A section of the poem, “God” by D.H. Lawrence is quoted at the beginning of A Question of Power by Bessie Head.

Only man can fall from God

Only man.

That awful and sickening endless, sinking

Sinking through the slow, corruptive

Levels of disintegrative knowledge . . .

the awful katabolism into the abyss

(qtd. in Head, A Question of Power 2).

She includes this stanza from the poem in order to encapsulate the dysfunctional fictional society of her novel and the immoral and brutal world in which she, as an author, actually resided. Head frequently felt like an outcast in Southern African society which influenced the psychological viewpoint from which she examined the racist society.
“Head’s exile in 1964 did not allow her to leave her racial prejudice behind her, for in Botswana, she came to feel as marginal as the Masarwa underclass and to identify with them. Her ‘coloured’ looks made the Batswana believe that she and her son, Howard, were, indeed Basarwa. As a result, they were treated like outcasts. (Starfield 660)

Head felt ostracised by her colouredness and gender thus, her careful scrutiny of living in a society riddled with both biased black and male characters is illustrated through the character of Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*. “It was much worse from her side, she wasn’t a genuine African; she was a half breed” (Head, *A Question of Power* 104). Elizabeth, Head’s fictional self, feels as if she has been brutalised, dealing with the constant social ridicule and derision. “Elizabeth listened to the words alertly. How they fitted her own circumstances! Maybe Dolly had been to hell and back” (Head, *A Question of Power* 111).

In contrast to Lessing, Head provides an alternative perspective into the lives of the characters and their inner turmoil. Instead of focussing on the mental effect on the black characters in society, she focuses on a character, like herself, of mixed descent, who is depicted as even worse off than the subjugated black people. “You are inferior as a coloured” (Head, *A Question of Power* 127). Another example that substantiates this poor treatment of the Coloureds is:

The poor man had been sent into the job with a leprosy-like fear of coloureds or half-breeds. That was one of his favourite records. He
was afraid he might have to touch the half-breed at some point and contaminate his pure black skin. (Head, *A Question of Power* 127)

Elizabeth is the fictionalized representation of Head's subjective experience where even though half of Elizabeth’s genetic composition is from a white character – her mother, she is still discriminated against because of her black genetic composition. Illustrative of this is Elizabeth's childhood when she is sent from one foster home to the next in order to try and find her the most suitable place in society. It was deemed unacceptable for her to continue living with the white family with which she was initially placed as she was not regarded as a white person; however, she was also not regarded as a black person, thus she felt no sense of belonging in apartheid society.

First they received you from the mental hospital and sent you to a nursing home. A day later you were returned because you did not look white. They sent you to a Boer family. A week later you were returned. The women on the committee said, ‘What do we do with this child? Its mother is white.’ (Head, *A Question of Power* 17)

Head's examination of oppression and racial prejudice is based on Elizabeth's exiled perspective of the Southern African world. With regard to power, Head does not just portray the battle for power between the races; she goes further than Lessing and pays attention to the power battle between people of similar ethnicity. Interestingly, the black characters in *A Question of Power* resent and ridicule other characters of the same race that hold more power or those who are deemed more powerful than them. Theorist, Ian Lopez, argues that the conflict between groups or intra-group conflict is more
widespread than the conflict between groups or inter-group conflict (Lopez 967). This mindset of the black characters is evident in the statement: “People there had an unwritten law. They hated any black person among them who was ‘important’. They would say behind a person’s back: Oh, he thinks he’s important, with awful scorn” (Head, A Question of Power 26). This is reiterated in the quote: “The reasoning, the viciousness were the same, but this time the faces were black and it was not local people. It was large, looming soul personalities (Head, A Question of Power 57).

As already mentioned, Lopez maintains that it is the competition between the people in society from which racism evolves. Instead of individuals identifying races in isolation to one another, races are pitted against one another, resulting in intergroup conflict supporting the notion of racism being socially constructed (Lopez 269).

In A Question of Power, white characters as a race compare and compete with the black characters as a racial entity. These white characters are responsible for the creation of this racism as it has been found that there are no genetic differences between white and black people, the only differences between the two groups are in fact physical – their skin colour. Thus, like the argument of Lopez, the actual characters in the novel reinforce the physical differences in order to elevate their particular race or themselves in society. The manner of how racism is created is evident in the quote:

Knowing that Elizabeth was more literate than the students, she thrust her down too. She flung information at her in such a way as to make it totally incomprehensible and meaningless, subtly demonstrating that to
reach her level of education Elizabeth had to be able to grasp the incoherent. (Head, *A Question of Power* 76)

This proves how the white characters always make sure that they are in a better position than the black characters which ultimately directs them to the success and triumph of their own race.

Education is also a key factor to ensure the success of the white characters in Head’s fictional world. The white characters prefer the black characters to be uneducated, thus guaranteeing minimal opportunities for the blacks. However, if some black characters are fortunate enough to attend school and receive an education, they had teachers who were not as qualified as the teachers in the white schools. An example of this is Elizabeth’s son’s teacher who cannot even spell properly. “Tom shook his head: ‘You must have made a mistake, Shorty. It’s wrong.’ ‘It’s right,’ insisted the small demon. ‘My teacher spells it like that!’” (Head, *A Question of Power* 125).

Teun van Dijk’s theory of racism and ideology can be used to further explain the relationships between characters in the novel as the white characters’ deliberate hatred for the black characters validates them to strategically place themselves in a powerful position in society. Thus, it was this intense hatred that they used as a tool in order to oppress them economically and socially. Interestingly, the Batswana also despise the Masarwa characters, but this did not provide them with an elevated position as they are not as economically and politically advanced as the white characters.

The organised attitudes of the white characters then helps them with the furtherance of their own goals and interests in their fictional world as once
the white characters have the black characters in the position that they want them, they make certain that it is here where they remain. The whites, therefore, have it in their minds that the black characters are repulsive and do everything in their power to substantiate this warped view of the black characters. Furthermore, the black characters are constantly reminded of this intense hatred by the white characters as this was explicitly displayed at every possible opportunity. The racist attitude that oppressed her from youth is evident when Elizabeth feels as if she has a record playing in her mind, constantly reminding her of her inferior status: “Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death. Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death” (Head, *A Question of Power* 46).

To elaborate on van Dijk’s argument and his discussion of cognitive frameworks, when a white child is born into this society, he/she is conditioned to conform to the white people’s social identity and their social position. Thus, prior to the acquisition of knowledge and subsequent development of the child, the mere fact of his/her skin colour is essential to his/her attitude and overall advantage in life. Consequently, a white child is expected to detest blacks and to treat them in a derogatory way. Elizabeth emphasises this particular point when she exclaims:

In spite of her inability to like or to understand political ideologies, she had also lived the back-breaking life of all black people in South Africa. It was like living with permanent nervous tension, because you did not know why white people there had to go out of their way to hate you or loathe you. They were just born that way, hating people, and a black
man or woman was just born to be hated. (Head, *A Question of Power* 19)

This illustrates how the preconceived roles for the different people in society are determined prior to their birth – the only influencing factor here essentially is ethnicity.

Another effective tool the white characters use in order to keep the black characters in their desired place in society is the way the white characters use language and speak to these characters. It is important to note that language varies according to the context in which it is used.

The term register is used by linguists to describe the fact that the kind of language we use is affected by the context in which we use it to such an extent that certain kinds of language usage becomes conventionally associated with similar situations. (Montgomery et al. 67)

Thus, the register used by both the white and black characters in *A Question of Power* is influenced by the social relationships of the participants in that specific situation.

Frantz Fanon in his theory of “The Negro and Psychopathology” showed interest in racial differences and how these differences affect a person of colour and his/her view of the world. In his investigation of the effects of oppression on the subjugated people of society, he places importance on the families in society, which he argues subsequently constitute the nation as a whole (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 465). Moreover, he claims that the white family structure is the agent of a certain system and acts as a workshop in which a person is shaped and
trained for life in society (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 465). This socialization process is then transferred into the nation as a whole.

As a result, a white child growing up in this society is to benefit economically, socially and politically; however, Elizabeth, who is not regarded as either white or black, finds herself in quite a complex situation in this regard. According to Fanon:

when the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place. If this psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The black man stops behaving as an actional person. The goal of his behaviour will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth. (Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” 467)

As a consequence the child of colour will adapt to a white person’s attitude and behaviour through a process of identification (465). Homi Bhabha expands on Fanon’s theory by arguing:

In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of truth, not to subject its representations as a normalizing judgement. Only then does it become possible to understand the productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse – that ‘otherness’ which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity. (Bhabha 67).

In A Question of Power it is this theory of Fanon that can be used to explain why Elizabeth felt ostracised in her fictional world. While living with the white family, she lived like a white person, conforming to the behaviour of white
people during the apartheid era. However, this had negative consequences for Elizabeth as she also had black genes in her makeup which placed her in a predicament as she could not scorn black characters when they too are a part of her genetic makeup.

In addition it is not just the whites that loathed the black characters; the relationship is shown to be reciprocal as the black characters also resent the white characters for placing them in a hopeless situation in the world. “You must have suffered a lot in South Africa, he said, by way of introduction. ‘But you are not to hate white people’. ‘Why?’ she asked. ‘Most of the Gods are born among them,’ he replied calmly” (Head, A Question of Power 29). This quote also supports the idea that even the black characters elevated the whites as they viewed the white characters as God, a supreme being capable of controlling the entire universe, as they are seen as capable of achieving anything they desire.

Elizabeth, while living with the white family was encouraged to discriminate against black characters; however she also felt a sense of hatred towards the white people because of their actions and of her having a black father. This attitude is apparent when she compares Dan’s oppressive manner of living to the terrible ways of the white people: “Once you stared the important power-maniac in the face you saw people, humanity, compassion, tenderness. It was as though he had a total blank spot and only saw his power, his influence, his self” (Head, A Question of Power 19). Therefore Elizabeth was not comfortable living as neither a white character nor a black character.
Unlike Lessing who compares the black characters to animals, Head likens the white characters to animals in *A Question of Power*. She compares the white characters to carrion-feeders. “What did they gain, the power people, while they lived off other people’s souls like vultures” (Head, *A Question of Power* 19). By using this comparison, Head is illustrating how, like vultures who feed off their prey, the white people live off the black characters, negatively instilling them with their fuelled aggression. Thus, in comparison to Lessing who emphasises the negative characteristics of the black characters by likening them to animals, Head illustrates the terrible characteristics of the white characters. As can be clearly seen, the roles are now reversed.

Rose points out the psychological effects on Elizabeth in Head’s work:

> At the borderline of fiction and chronicle, *A Question of Power* recounts, close to the detail of one episode of Head's life, the breakdown and cure of its central woman protagonist, Elizabeth, in the village of Motabeng-formally from outside her consciousness, effectively from inside her mind. (Rose 402)

It is for this reason that the main character of Elizabeth in this text can be examined according to the psychological theory of Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane. Elizabeth is portrayed as a character that is not mentally sound. Throughout the novel Elizabeth battles to distinguish between stark reality and the nightmarish vision of her inner world, eventually confusing the difference between the two. “She was not sure if she were awake or asleep, and often after that the dividing line between dream
perceptions and waking reality was to become confused” (Head, *A Question of Power* 22).

Elizabeth’s strange behaviour results from her unsuccessful coping mechanism and inability to deal with racial issues in her world. Elizabeth continuously experiences trauma as a coloured, and feels like an outcast.

In South Africa she had been rigidly classified Coloured. There was no escape from it to the simple joy of being a human being with a personality. There wasn’t any escape like that for anyone in South Africa. There were races, not people. (Head, *A Question of Power* 44)

Thus, the endless social ridicule and forced isolation causes damage to Elizabeth’s mind.

Interestingly, these issues faced by Head and her literary self, Elizabeth, are not unique. South African author, Zoe Wicomb depicts in her novel, *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, a similar painful history of colonization, displacement, and apartheid. She pays particular attention to the cultural and economic hierarchy in society, positioning Africans as the lowest group, followed by the Indians and Coloureds, and above these, the white European settlers (Wright x). In addition to these issues, Wicomb examines the ambiguity that Coloureds face because of their mixed ancestry, which results in two forms of prejudice – prejudice based on colour and prejudice against women in particular (Wright xvii). This reinforces the unbearable situation and predicament faced by all Coloured people in Southern African society.

Not all people are the same in their reactions when faced with difficulties pertaining to emotions and trauma. Some people have developed
healthier coping mechanisms and can handle stressful situations more effectively than others. Unfortunately Elizabeth is a character that cannot cope with the traumatic events of abandonment and rejection she experiences; instead she becomes fixated on the actual trauma experienced. This is evident when she cites: “In fact, I’m astonished to see the blue sky today. And you know what sort of world I live in? It’s midnight all the time” (Head, *A Question of Power* 58). For Elizabeth, this trauma becomes inescapable and the centre of her world, as she obsesses on her racially based suffering.

The fact that Elizabeth’s life is based on her disconnection to other characters and inner turmoil is evident in Head’s portrayal of Elizabeth as psychologically unstable and her display of madness in the novel. According to Jacqueline Rose it was widely believed by colonialists in Africa that African women did not go mad as they were said to have not reached the level of self awareness required to go mad (Rose 404). Thus, Head’s portrayal of the psychological effects on Elizabeth in the novel is meant to be seen as a reaction against the stereotypes prevalent in the society at that time and challenges the stereotypes reinforcing the psychological trauma experienced by women of colour.

The fact that Elizabeth hears voices inside her head, and lives in a world governed by these internal voices illustrates her inability to effectively navigate the circumstances in which she lives. “What was she to do with this record inside her head? It was more real because it had feeling behind it too, a cringing, deep shame” (Head, *A Question of Power* 117). Therefore the continuous rules, instructions and racial slurs recited to her on a daily basis
incite the paranoia she depicts. Theorists have now identified this as posttraumatic stress disorder resultant from the racial war and the victim’s sheer helplessness in dealing with colonialism (van der Kolk and McFarlane 488).

In the short story “The Collector of Treasures”, Head does not explore racism and racial discrimination in as much detail as it is done in *A Question of Power*. Unlike in the novel, Head in this piece portrays the psychological effects of colonialism on her characters by paying particular attention to the behaviour of the male characters in this fictional society. This does not mean that the female characters are not affected by racial discrimination in the text; however, Head focuses more on their suffering caused by the male characters – the inhuman products that evolved from racial oppression and continuous abuse by the white characters.

Head examines the use of labour as a tool of oppression in the short story. Firstly, she discusses how the white characters use labour to cause even more suffering to the black characters by forcing them to live and work apart from their families. One such system of oppression in the colonial era was the migratory mining labour system in South Africa. It was in this system that the black families were separated for many months as the black male characters were forced to work in other selected areas, remote from their families.

The colonial era and the period of migratory mining labour to South Africa was a further affliction visited on this man. It broke the hold of the ancestors. It broke the old, traditional form of family life and for
long periods a man was separated from his wife and children. . . .

(Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 59)

Furthermore, this separation from their families and their sense of helplessness in the situation has a dramatic impact on these characters and their psychological well being. The minimal benefits of colonialism is emphasised when Dikeledi states: “Colonialsim barely enriched his life” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 59). Garesego Mokopi is unable to manage the situations that he faces living in a society under white rule. The continual verbal abuse and complete control of his body and mind by the white characters dramatically affects the behaviour of Garesego. Pertaining to the argument of Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane, Garesego cannot deal with the trauma caused by the white characters; thus he vents his frustration, anger and bitterness by ill-treating the female characters with whom he associates.

It is in this way that he is able to most adequately deal with the trauma and psychological disturbance caused by white rule. It can even be said that it is the white characters that created Garesego to be a cruel, heartless and inhuman person.

It was the man who arrived at this turning point, a broken wreck with no inner resources at all. It was as though he was hideous to himself in an effort to flee his own inner emptiness, he spun away from himself in a dizzy kind of death dance of wild destruction and dissipation. (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 60)
Interestingly, Garesego seems to actually adopt the exact characteristics of the dominant white characters, but instead of oppressing other races, he brutalises women whom he considers inferior.

The employer-employee relationship between the white and the black characters in “The Collector of Treasures” can be investigated according to the theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. The black male character, like in the selected texts of Lessing, is signified as a non human entity designed solely to perform strenuous and dangerous jobs primarily for the benefit of the economically powerful white characters. “He then became “the boy” of the white man and a machine-tool of the South African mines” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 59). The whites in the story do not work in the mines; it is the black characters who were assigned this task as it is deemed too hazardous and exhausting for the white characters. Thus reflecting the tragedy and injustice of colonial exploitation.

To reiterate the detrimental effects of colonialism and racial oppression illustrated in Lessing and Head’s selected texts focus must be placed on Alan Paton’s quote in Cry, the Beloved Country: “The dead streams come to life, full of the red blood from the earth” (Paton 7). This quote is symbolic of the hurt that colonialism has brought to Africa as a whole. This is seen when the red soil of the hills is washed into the rivers through erosion which discolours the river, resembling the appearance of human blood (Locke 2). The river looks as though it has an open wound, thus this projected image is symbolic of how Africa bleeds because of the unfair distribution of land, unequal human rights and ill-treatment of the people of colour. The river is reflecting the physical and emotional pain of the characters, mirroring the extent to which
people of Southern Africa were aggrieved by discrimination and racial subjugation.
Chapter 4: Marginalisation of Female Characters

Writing is a form of personal freedom. It frees us from the mass identity we see in the making all around us. In the end, writers will write not to be outlaw heroes of some underculture but mainly to serve themselves, to survive as individuals. (DeLillo)

Deirdre LaPin in her chapter “Women in African Literature” discusses how women use their writing in order to gain an identity and, more importantly, how they use it as a way to make their voices heard by the rest of society. This is evident in the quotation: “When society does not grant women the power to make choices, women must summon the courage to claim that right for themselves” (LaPin 159). Lionnet expands on this point by claiming that: “women writers are often especially aware of their task as producers of images that both participate in the dominant representations of their culture and simultaneously undermine and subvert those images by offering a re-vision of familiar scripts” (Lionnet 205).

In Southern Africa women constitute the category of the population most seriously affected by inequality as both white and black women are subject to double oppression. White women face oppression because of their gender and their class, while similarly the black women experience oppression because of their gender, race and class. In the African society women did not have equal rights to the men in society. Furthermore, the women of all races were often subject to men for financial support and release to secure employment; therefore it was very difficult for them to alter their position.
American feminist theorist, bell hooks, argues that black women as a group find themselves in an unusual position in their society as their overall status is lower than other social groups, resulting in sexist, racist and classist oppression (hooks 144). She also notes how white women and black men can have dual roles as both oppressor and oppressed in society. Black men are victims of racism; however, their sexist behavioural attitude allows them to have power over the women in society. Similarly, white women face oppression by the males in their society while racism allows these white females to hold power over both black men and women in society (hooks 144).

This theory effectively describes the position of the women of colour in the African fictional world who find themselves more subjugated than the black male characters as their lives are not just governed by racial inequality, but they are also deeply affected by gender inequality. Women of colour have a history of oppression within African culture which is rooted in patriarchal custom and tradition. Men are often shown to be the victims of their history and tradition with no choice to transcend this tradition as they face ostracism by other members of their culture or by their ancestors.

Furthermore, according to Yaba Badoe, the female characters in literature and newspaper journalism in Africa, are depicted as “alluring and dangerous, an anarchic force in society to be disciplined by the assertion of male authority” (Badoe 102). As a consequence, the male supremist beliefs forced women into a state of double oppression in this period of racial and gender inequality in Africa. South African coloured novelist, Zoe Wicomb emphasises the position of coloured people, in her discussion of respectability
and colour. She states the complexities of mixed ancestry and discusses two types of prejudice, prejudice against them because of their colour and the view that they were “sexual liaisons” (qtd. in Wright xvii). This subjectivity is clear when Bessie Head makes her own voice heard through the character of Dikeledi:

The ancestors made so many errors and one of the most bitter-making things was that they relegated to men a superior position in the tribe, while women were regarded, in a congenital sense, as being an inferior form of human life. (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 59)

Head emphasises the everyday experiences of both Botswana and South African women and their double oppression in her short story, “The Collector of Treasures”. This story depicts oppressive attitudes of men in Head’s own life and her character Dikeledi’s life. Head struggled to understand the male psyche and their abuse of women, and her confusion propelled her to interrogate the African men’s hegemonic viewpoint. Her desire to interrogate the mentality of men is reinforced through Dikeledi’s thoughts: “Since that kind of man was in the majority in the society, he needed a little analyzing as he was responsible for the complete breakdown of family life” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 59).

Head, in this short story, distinguishes between two types of men existing at the opposite spectrums of society: “There were really two kinds of men in the society. The one kind created such misery and chaos that he could be damned as evil. . . That kind of man lived near the animal level and behaved the same. . .” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 58-59).
Firstly, she portrays the majority of the men in African society, those who mistreat women and envision them as inferior. Dikeledi describes this type of man as sex-driven and almost canine in their carnal lusts, with the belief that women exist in order to satisfy their sexual needs. In contrast, she also portrays the minority of respectable men in society, those who compassionately care for their women, treating them with equality and kindness. This is how Dikeledi describes this type of man: “There was another kind of man in society with the power to create himself anew. He turned all his resources, both emotional and material, towards his family life” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 60).

Dikeledi’s husband, Garesego, is a prime example of the first type of male discussed; he is portrayed as a typical black male who lives by the traditions outlined for men by the forefathers of the tribe. Garesego views himself as superior to women and firmly believes that Dikeledi must faithfully obey him, and perform her specific gender role according to his standards. Furthermore, he also maintains that the women in society exist for his own sexual pleasures. Garesego’s lust is apparent in Dikeledi’s description of him: “Even during his lean days he had a taste for womanizing and drink; now he had the resources for a real spree. He was not seen at home again and lived and slept around the village from woman to woman” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 60).

Garesego impregnates Dikeledi three times in four years and then abandons her and their three young children. He fails to financially support his family and openly displays his adulterous affairs. Garesego is, therefore, a male character who embraces tradition for his own selfish ends and is the
type of man whose perspective of women is embedded in his character. This point is substantiated when Garesego discusses the controversial issue of education for women: “Garesego said at that time that he’d rather be married to my sort than the educated kind because those women were stubborn and wanted to lay down the rules for men” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 63). Education gave women some power, therefore, Garesego feels threatened by educated women and rather prefers them uneducated so that they would remain more compliant and submissive.

Luce Irigaray’s theory that explores the identity and worth of women as a group by investigating the social roles imposed on them by men can be applied to Garesego’s chauvinistic attitude. Her theory is centred on sexual pleasure and how women are categorised according to the men’s evaluation of them in this regard (Irigaray 809). In this story Garesego’s use of the female characters for his own sexual needs would seem to be in line with two of the three categories of women portrayed by Irigaray, to be discussed below.

The first category she describes is women who are only important to society because of their reproductive abilities (Irigaray 807). It is in this category in which Dikeledi can be placed as she has given birth to Garesego’s children and raises and cares for them single-handedly. Furthermore, Garesego’s ill treatment and stereotypical view of women can also be discussed using Irigaray’s theory and her mention of the category of women as prostitutes (Irigaray 809). Garesego is known to be a “wanderer” as he is promiscuous and is interested in sex with many women in Head’s fictional society. This is evident in Dikeledi’s comparison of Garesego to a dog: “The
rest of the hapless dogs would stand around yapping and snapping in its face while the top dog indulged in a continuous spurt of orgasms, day and night until he was exhausted” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 58).

In addition, the women that Garesego uses for his sexual gratification can be placed in this category as this is his primary objective in his relationship with them. Yaba Badoe expands on this viewpoint of women as she argues that African women find themselves in one of either two categories when described by their male counterparts. They are either seen as “rootsie rural sisters or ravaged urban whores” (Badoe 102). The label of “ravaged urban whore” placed on some female characters is reinforced in the statement: “The attraction of this particular woman for Garesego Mokopi, so her former lovers said with a snicker, was that she went in for heady forms of love-making like biting and scratching” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 68).

On the other hand, Head creates the contrasting character of Paul in the story too. He is a male character who transcends custom and tradition and he does not look down upon the women characters in his life; instead he views them as being of equal status to himself. Unlike Garesego, he treats his wife, Kenalepe, with respect; thus they have a desirable marriage and a healthy sex life. This is evident in the fact that Kenalepe thoroughly enjoys sexual intercourse with her husband: “Oh, if you knew what it was really like, you would long for it, I can tell you! Paul knows a lot about all that. And he always has some new trick to surprise me” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 65).
Paul, therefore, represents a minority of the African men that exist in Head’s culture. As a result of this, Paul contributes to Dikeledi’s desire to transform her situation as he illustrates to her that there are men that exist in society who are not sex-crazed like Garesego, and who do respect women. For example, Paul compliments Dikeledi saying: “You are a very good woman, Mma-Banabothe,” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 67). The distinction between Garesego and Paul is also significant in the sense that Bessie Head avoids the pitfalls of over-generalisation in terms of which men are seen as a homogenous entity in their attitude to, and their practise of, tradition/patriarchal order.

It is at this point in the story that Dikeledi decides that this is how she ought to be treated by a man as she too deserves love and respect. This is evident when she remarks that she agrees with Paul’s opinion that she is a good woman. “It was the truth and the gift was offered like a nugget of gold. Only men like Paul Thebolo could offer such gifts. She took it and stored another treasure in her heart” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 67). For the first time in her life, Dikeledi has gained a sense of self-worth and the confidence to stand firm against the oppressive behaviour of the evil male character in her life.

Judith Butler argues that the power lies in women to transform the expected behaviour of a gender in a given society. In a patriarchal society like that of Dikeledi, the men lay down the rules for the expected behaviour of women in society; thus, it is the men who demand that the women should behave in a submissive and obedient way. Furthermore, if women change their behaviour from that which is expected of them by males, female
characters can challenge their oppressors, as their negative attitude also maintains self-subjugation and makes them compliant in their own oppression.

According to Kenneth Harrow the subject of Head’s fiction is change itself, and specifically the threshold where change takes place as change has become the issue of women’s writing since independence (Harrow, “Bessie Head’s: ‘The Collector of Treasures’” 169). Based on this notion, the female characters in Head’s stories experience moments of transition, blasphemy, violence and death either because of the strength of their desire or, like Dikeledi, because of their insistence upon preserving integrity and independence (Harrow, “Bessie Head’s: ‘The Collector of Treasures’” 169).

Dikeledi has reached a stage in her life where she can no longer undergo the suffering of living with a husband who endorses oppression. The emotional pain caused by her husband is just too much for her to handle and she has decided to throw off the shackles of subjugation. Her special relationship with Paul, her ability to raise her children alone and her sense of sisterhood with Paul’s wife are all the premises which lead Dikeledi to the conclusion that she needs to gain her economic, physical and emotional independence. However, it is in response to double oppression and subjectivity that Dikeledi has learnt to believe in herself, regardless of gender bias and social censure. Thus Head uses the character of Dikeledi, a woman who can no longer endure the continual patriarchal oppression and societal inferiority to pose a challenge to masculinity and the stereotypical behaviour of the male characters in the text.
In order for Dikeledi to escape from the stressful situation in which she finds herself, she murders Garesego by cutting off his genitalia. Much emphasis is placed on Dikeledi’s preparation for her fight for independence. Head gives a detailed account of her considerable effort in sharpening the knife, the tool used to liberate her from her sense of entrapment. “But it was only a vague blur, a large kitchen knife used to cut meat and Dikeledi knelt at a grinding stone and sharpened it slowly and methodically” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 71). Furthermore, the knife Dikeledi utilises is specifically used to cut meat, this suggests that Garesego’s tool of oppression can be compared to a slab of meat, drastically reducing its significance and power.

Interestingly, the fact that she will be convicted of manslaughter does not deter her, for she realises that she can no longer live under the oppressive conditions in which she has been living. This is apparent when she almost boasts to her son that she killed Garesego and commands that he phone the police to arrest her: “I have killed him,” she said, waving her hand in the air with a gesture that said – well, that’s that. Then she added sharply: ‘Banabothe, go and call the police” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 73). Dikeledi’s hand gesture illustrates her feeling of victory over the man in her life and ultimately frees her, her children and society’s women from Garesego’s clutches.

In Dikeledi’s mind the suffering she will endure in prison is worth her fight against gender oppression; to her, being a prisoner behind bars is better than being the prisoner of a man in her own home. This is obvious during Dikeledi’s awaiting-trial period: “She had experienced such terror during the
awaiting-trial period that she looked more like a skeleton than a human being” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 53). Dikeledi’s nervous tension is now different as she, at this point, is stressing about the consequences of her actions and the anxiety caused from the separation from her children. This illustrates how the harmful effects of subjectivity on Dikeledi are even worse than this distress she experiences as a prisoner.

The manner in which Dikeledi murders her husband has symbolic meaning in the story. Head incorporates this method of murder into the storyline in order to illustrate how, by Dikeledi slicing off Garesego’s penis, she is in essence taking away his manhood – the root of his authority as a male in society. In this way, his phallocentric power is removed, and as a woman, she is making herself of an equal status to her husband as the penis is a man’s weapon of abuse and authority. This symbolic murder is also indicative of the reversal of roles in the text; Dikeledi is the one in the relationship with all the power as Garesego comes off second best to her. This is reinforced when Dikeledi attentively observes the suffering of her husband before he bleeds to death; in her moment of triumph and catharsis she watches his demise. “And Garesego bellowed. He bellowed his anguish. Then all was silent. She stood and watched his death anguish with an intent and brooding look, missing not one detail of it” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 73).

It is important to note how Dikeledi’s crime is not unique as she is not the only character in the story that resorts to murdering her husband in this particular manner. It is as if this is becoming a trend as there are four other female characters in prison for the same crime of murdering their husbands.
Other women are reframing their roles in their relationships with men. This is reiterated when the prison warder notes:

‘So, you have killed your husband, have you?’ the wardress remarked, with a flicker of humor. ‘You’ll be in good company. We have four other women here for the same crime. It’s becoming the fashion these days.’ (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 54)

Head incorporates this into the story in order to illustrate to the reader exactly how terrible it must have been for these women to live in a patriarchal society as the only way that they could “free” themselves from their situation was to eliminate their husbands permanently, destroying them for society’s sake. This story portrays one of the core themes of Bessie Head’s writing: the theme of subjection. The female characters no longer find themselves under the men, especially in the sexual sense, but are now in charge. Head’s focus on change encourages the women to change their position in society by opposing their oppressors.

Head’s title of the story, “The Collector of Treasures”, is also of importance as Dikeledi has lived a life riddled with heartbreak where she has not collected any treasures in her lifetime (Chetin 121). However, the opening passages of the story illustrate how Dikeledi has become accustomed to prison life and her close relationship with the women, who have been placed in prison for the same crime, shows that she feels her life is better off since her husband is dead. Dikeledi’s relationship with the other female characters in the text reinforces the strength of the sisterhood. The women are compassionate and supportive of one another as they can relate to common problems and concerns and act as a support system for each other.
As a result of her hardships, Dikeledi has psychologically developed and has even earned the respect of Paul who offers to care for her children while she is serving her prison sentence: “You don’t have to worry about the children, MmaBanabothe. I’ll take them as my own and give them all a secondary education” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 73). This further illustrates how Paul understands the drastic actions of Dikeledi and does not condemn her. He does not conform to the stereotypical behaviour of the other men in society, and, he understands her situation and her determination to resort to such extreme behaviour.

The fact that Dikeledi freed herself from a disastrous marriage has actually made her a stronger and happier person.

Without the ugliness and brutality of Garesego, without his rejection of Dikeledi’s legitimate demands, her own personal struggle would not have begun, and her own quest for the treasures in life would not have been fulfilled in prison. (Harrow, “Bessie Head’s: ‘The Collector of Treasures’” 178)

In prison she is surrounded by a community of like-minded women who, like herself, also found the courage to fight back and regain the control of their own lives. Furthermore, it is in prison that Dikeledi finds all the satisfaction that is denied to her by a patriarchal society. For example, she has now found her worth as she has friends who love, care and respect her in the way that she feels she deserves to be treated. [B]ell hooks maintains that it is important for women of colour to recognise the vantage point that marginality gives them; she encourages them to use this perspective to criticise racist and sexist domination and envision a counter hegemony (hooks 145).
Bessie Head continues the theme of suffering and double oppression of the female characters into her novel, *A Question of Power*, as a way of expressing her views on oppression. It is in this text that she explores the effects of both patriarchy and racism on the female characters from an alternative angle and in more detail than in “The Collector of Treasures”. She takes this theme to a new level, as, unlike Dikeledi who commits a heinous crime in resistance to patriarchy, *A Question of Power*’s main character Elizabeth actually mirrors Head’s own experience of a nervous breakdown. This representation reinforces the notion that the male characters are to blame for the psychological problems endured by the female characters in the novel.

Head also highlights mental illness in the novel to inform her audiences of her predicament and that of black African women in general. For example Elizabeth says: “She meant she hated those black hands that were bashing her head to pieces” (Head, *A Question of Power* 183). Here Elizabeth uses the description of physical abuse in order to illustrate exactly how oppression and the male characters are causing her mental anguish and severe suffering, similar to that of physical abuse.

Head again reinforces the psychological effects of double oppression when she allows Elizabeth, her literary self, to state:

The second social defect is a form of cruelty, really spite, that seems to have its origins in witchcraft practises. It is a sustained pressure of mental torture that reduces its victim to a state of permanent tremor, and once they start on you they don’t know where to stop, until you become stark raving mad. (Head, *A Question of Power* 137)
Elizabeth, in this quote, discusses how the blame for her madness or voices inside her head is primarily on the men in society who are continuously speaking down to them as women and demanding submission.

The fact that Elizabeth’s life is harassed by the imaginary male characters of Dan and Sello, illustrates how patriarchy is an inescapable part of her life. These men are ever-present and communicate with her in every situation she faces. She appears to feel totally trapped by Dan and Sello and their constant governance. Her sense of entrapment is reiterated in the quote:

. . . the fearful thing was that Dan had decided that he was a much better manager of the universe than Sello. What was eating him was that no prophecies had preceded him; and yet in some way he had gained directorship of the universe in 1910. (Head, A Question of Power 25)

Elizabeth’s choice of lexis in this quote is also noteworthy as she uses words that indicate leadership and control like the word “manager” and “directorship”. Firstly, the word “manager” depicts a person who is deemed more powerful than other people in a company. Similarly, the word “directorship” is also a word that denotes power and authority as a director is a person who is in charge of the actors on a movie set or people in a company. Thus Head uses this specific lexis to reiterate how it is the men that are in charge of the universe and more importantly in charge of the female characters. The use of the word “universe” is also interesting as Head illustrates the extent to which men have power as the universe is the broadest representation of a geographical area.
Elizabeth emphasises the oppression of women by making an interesting comparison between Hitler and Dan. “He had not yet told the whole of mankind about his ambitions like Hitler and Napoleon, to rule the world” (Head, A Question of Power 14). In this way she illustrates exactly how much power Dan, and the male characters in general have or believe they have in her fictional society. Hitler, a German political and military leader was one of the twentieth century’s most powerful dictators and, in his pursuit to conquer the world was responsible for the suffering of millions of Jews. “The Hitler Youth did this to the Jews. They were so demoralized by the propaganda, they cringed like this man. They began to believe they were inferior” (Head, A Question of Power 47).

Elizabeth likens Dan to Hitler as his actions and that of his followers and the male characters in general share Hitler’s ruthless attitude toward people and power. They mercilessly inflict distress on their victims in their pursuit and maintenance of power. Through this comparison Elizabeth substantiates the point that men will do anything to rule the world; no matter how much destruction they cause, their aim is to gain and retain power over other members of society they deem weaker or inferior, particularly women. The damage propagated by the male characters is further emphasised when Elizabeth compares the destruction of men to the damage of a windstorm: “He came rushing towards her like a violent windstorm, full of sand and swirling dust. Everything seemed about to disappear under the impact of the storm” (Head, A Question of Power 147).

Male hegemony begins at an early age as revealed by the relationship between a mother and her son in the novel. Even though the son is a child,
he shows no respect for his mother, an elder, by speaking to her as if she is of an inferior status to him. This is evident when he reprimands her because the food is not ready:

She heard the other small boy set up a loud argument with his mother in the kitchen. He was very domineering. He moaned: ‘You haven’t any lunch for me, and I’m so hungry.’ ‘Lunch will be ready in a few minutes, Jimmy’, his mother said. ‘Well hurry up about it,’ Jimmy said offhandedly. (Head, A Question of Power 59)

In a similar vein, Elizabeth can easily relate to this relationship between parent and child as this was a replica of her fictional relationship with her own son who is also domineering and demanding, resembling the adult male characters in their fictional society. Male children mimic the behaviour of male adults and thus act like the domineering male adults. Elizabeth compares Jimmy, the bad-mannered child to her own son: “Elizabeth could see that this little Jimmy, like her own son, was an imitator of some other adult in that household” (Head, A Question of Power 59).

This behaviour and the roles imposed on men and women can be investigated using the theory of Judith Butler who argues that gender is performative and men and women perform the roles that are applicable to their specific gender. Butler claims that to become a woman is to allow the body to conform to a historical idea of women and persuade the body to become a cultural sign of women (Butler 902). With this said, women perform the certain gender requirements that they are expected to perform in a given society, for example, they are expected to be submissive.
In Head’s fictional gender-biased society, the women are forced to serve and obey the instructions of the men in their lives. For example, it is a requisite to do the housework, prepare the meals and provide adequate care for the children. These expectations of the female characters is apparent in the quote discussing the lifestyle of Elizabeth’s friend, Kenosi: “She was really the super-wife, the kind who would keep a neat, ordered house and adore in a quiet, undemonstrative way both the husband and the children” (Head, A Question of Power 90).

Furthermore, the characters of Dikeledi and Elizabeth emphasise the importance of the penis. Like Dikeledi, Elizabeth also views the man’s penis as being a powerful oppressive tool, as it is this physical attribute of men that represents their dominance and elevated status in society. This flaunting of sexuality is evident when Head states: “He had been standing in front of her, his pants down, flaying his powerful penis in the air and saying: ‘Look, I’m going to show you how I sleep with B” (Head, A Question of Power 13).

Consequently, like Dikeledi, Elizabeth also detests the man’s penis; she is convinced that it is the root of all evil, as it is this source of pleasure that is also men’s source of power driving them to maintain their dominant position in Head’s fictional world. Elizabeth also believed that men were fully aware of the influence of their penises. Thus they boasted about it and showed it off, reinforcing their domination over women. This is evident in the citation: “Naked women were prancing wildly in front of her and there was Dan, gyrating his awful penis like mad” (Head, A Question of Power 14). Consequently the men appear to resemble prostitutes as they are sexually driven characters.
Head depicts the male characters as sexual predators whose behaviour is driven by their sexual urges that they even resort to raping young females in order to satisfy and empower themselves. “It was the nightmare of the slums she had grown up in South Africa, but it never dominated her life. Usually small girls got raped, but the men were known” (Head, *A Question of Power* 117). This further tallies with Zoe Wicomb’s conception of women being merely regarded as “sexual liaison”, regardless of whether they are adults or children, the women subsist in society in order to provide the men with sexual satisfaction.

This also illustrates the extent to which male characters use sex as an oppressive tool where a male character’s power is relative to the number of women with whom he has been intimate. This is apparent in the citation: “But he thrust black hands in front of her, black legs and a huge, towering black penis. The penis was always erected. From that night he kept his pants down, after all the women of his harem totalled 71” (*Head, A Question of Power* 128). This reiterates how the male characters did not hesitate to fully display their power and authority.

An interesting attribute of patriarchy also highlighted by Head is that it is only acceptable if the male characters in society enjoy and desire sexual pleasure; the male characters deem it unacceptable if the female characters desire them in any sexual way. In addition, women did not usually enjoy sexual intercourse as it was only to benefit the men; the needs of the women were usually simply ignored. This is reiterated in Dan’s statement: “My whole body is on fire, he said, then he looked at Elizabeth accusingly and added: It’s you. You are not supposed to think of me with any desire, or else I shall fall
“down” (Head, A Question of Power 126). Implicit here is the assumption that if Elizabeth desires Dan; this elevates her to a similar sexual position of power as the male characters. He says that he will fall down if she desires him – he will lose his power over the female characters as the act of sex is a tool used for maintaining power.

The categories of women identified by Luce Irigaray are important in the analysis of the fictional world in the novel. The three main categories: the mother figure, the virginal woman and the prostitute are imperative to the study of female subjectivity (Irigaray 808). Elizabeth is shown as the female character representing the mother figure. Irigaray argues that the primary role of the mother figure is to bear and raise children – the role that Elizabeth plays in the novel as she has a son that she is raising to the best of her ability.

The next category described by Irigaray is that of virginal woman, a woman who is ignorant with regards to sexual matters and completely lacking interest in such pleasures (Irigaray 808). The women in this category are said to be of more value to men than the rest of the females in society as they are deemed pure and innocent. The character of Miss Pink Sugar-Icing is an example of such a woman as she is the one character in the novel that Dan is interested in and intends marrying. This is evident when Dan is listing the interesting names of some of the female characters: “Miss Pink Sugar-Icing, whom he was on the point of marrying, Madame Make-Love-On-The-Floor where anything goes, The Sugar-Plum Fairy, more of Body Beautiful, more of the Womb, a demonstration of sexual stamina with five local women. . .” (Head, A Question of Power 148).
Madame Make-Love-On-The-Floor represents Irigaray’s category of prostitute. Irigaray defines the prostitute as a woman who passively accepts men’s sexual advances and exists primarily to be used by men for sexual gratification (808). This female character, as her name suggests, is someone who is used by the male characters in the novel primarily for sex.

In order to eradicate both sexual and subjugation problems the female characters aim to destroy the root of the problem - the penis. Like Dikeledi who cut off Garesego’s manhood, Elizabeth, in her hallucinations, depicts the death of a man where the focus is also on the penis. This is evident in the citation: “As she closed her eyes all these Coloured men lay down on their backs, their penes in the air, and began to die slowly. . . . Medusa’s mocking smile towering over them” (Head, A Question of Power 45). Again the disintegration of manhood enables gender roles to be reversed as the instrument of power is destroyed. It is the woman, Medusa, who has supremacy as she stands “towering” over the dying men. She reverses the submissive position to one of dominance and self-determination.

Medusa, an evil female character representing evil women that are also capable of seeking sexual and physical power, lives in the mind of Elizabeth and shows no fear of men and their dominance, she views herself as being the person who is in control. The authority of Medusa is further emphasised in Elizabeth’s hallucinations: “At some stage Medusa entered. She could hurl a thunderbolt like nothing ever seen before and shatter a victim into a thousand fragments: ‘Who’s running the show around here? I am’” (Head, A Question of Power 43). In this scene in the novel the gender roles have been reversed and instead of the women portrayed as the inferior sex, it
is a female character that has achieved liberation and holds all power and authority. In essence this represents the feminist cry for victory over male domination.

The term “Medusa” means sovereign female wisdom (Ferenczi 360). Medusa in Freudian psychoanalysis is connected to both male and female sexuality. Freud likened her to the male fear of castration as she is the symbol of the female genital region. The many serpents which surround the head ought to signify the absence of a penis, and the phantom itself is the frightful impression made on the child by the penis-less (castrated) genital (Ferenczi 360).

Subsequently, Head notes how the male characters fear Medusa even though she is a woman. This is evident when a male character is described using the characteristics that would usually be used when referring to a female character.

Elizabeth had never seen such a spineless, backboneless man. He was terrible about women when he had an obsession about them. At the time he was so frightened by the thunderbolt Medusa had hurled at Elizabeth that he quickly pulled out a photograph of the future. (Head, A Question of Power 43)

This emphasises his fear of a society in which females have the power and freedom to rule autonomously. Instead of the male characters using power to their benefit, the future he sees is one where the female characters hold authority in society and use this power to manipulate the submissive male characters.
The future he predicts is opposite to the fictional world in which the characters reside, instead of the males causing turmoil in society, it is the female characters that cause chaos in their pursuit to eradicate the men in the fictional world that Head creates. Furthermore, a male character is admitting that it was the males that ruined African society. This is clear in the citation: “If I don’t let go of her she’ll ruin the African continent the way we ruined so many civilizations together” (Head, *A Question of Power* 44). This quote reads like a confession by a male character of his awareness that men’s desire for dominance is detrimental to their fictional society.

Head also attempts to illustrate the concept of androgyny in the text. She purposefully illustrates how women and men can have similar characteristics. For example in one instance Elizabeth notices that she and a male character, David, are quite similar in their physical appearances and behaviour. “The scenes shifted. Elizabeth stood next to a man who slightly resembled her” (Head, *A Question of Power* 33). Ironically, both Elizabeth and David find themselves possessing the same physical features; thus Head illustrates that it is at this point that they are on an equal level. In essence, both the male and female characters are in the same situation in society, this scenario being a replica of Head’s utopian world of equality. Her ideal world is portrayed in the citation: “It was this period she was familiar with, the compassion and tenderness with which people regarded each other, the uncertainties of questing within, the lack of assertion and dominance” (Head, *A Question of Power* 42).

The female characters in the fictional world of Doris Lessing, even though of a different race to those of Head, face the same predicament with
regard to the men in their society. Lessing reinforces this dilemma in the quote made by Mary in the novel, *The Grass is Singing*: “He’s a man, isn’t he? He can do as he likes” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 41). This stance taken by Lessing’s character, Mary Turner, mirrors the mindset of the subjugated female characters in the selected texts by Head. Head portrays fictional societies riddled with the double oppression of her African female characters; likewise, Lessing, a white author, paints a comparable picture of the gender oppression experienced by her white characters in society. Like the female characters in Head’s texts, the female characters in Lessing’s fiction are also expected to live according to specific societal expectations and roles.

Ian Lopez’s theory concerning group conflict in his discussion of racism seems appropriate in one’s analysis of gender differences and inequality in *The Grass is Singing*. The findings of his studies concerning racism can also be used to examine the possible causes of female oppression in the Southern African environment. Lopez argued that the data compiled by various scientists demonstrates that intra-group differences exceed inter-group differences as greater genetic variation exists within populations than between populations (Lopez 967). Therefore one should notice more conflict between members of the same hegemonic group than between members of different hegemonic groups. It is for this reason that there is conflict between the white male and female characters based on competition, between the two groups, and their differing beliefs pertaining to patriarchy and the unfair treatment of the female characters in *The Grass is Singing*.

Like Head’s female characters that face double oppression, it can be said that Mary too experiences double oppression in the text. Even though
Mary is not oppressed because of her skin colour, she is denigrated because of her class. Mary and Dick Turner are not wealthy people; as a result, Mary is given an inferior status by the other white characters as she is deemed a “poor white”:

What, indeed! Living the way they did! That little box of a house—it was forgivable as a temporary dwelling, but not to live in permanently. Why, some natives (though not many, thank heavens) had houses as good; and it would give them a bad impression to see white people living in such a way. And then it was that someone used the phrase ‘poor whites’. (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 11)

Therefore, even though the white female characters are believed to be in a better and healthier situation than the black female characters, the white females, like Mary, still face many issues when they do not conform to the expectations of the other white characters. In essence, like the black female characters who suffer emotional distress, the oppression faced by the white female characters also negatively affects their emotional well being.

Mary in *The Grass is Singing* is in the identical situation to Head’s characters, as the expected stereotypical behaviour of white women portrayed in Mary’s society leads her into a loveless, unwanted marriage. Mary’s reflection on her life before marriage is a life free of worries and filled with extreme happiness, however, it is after her marriage to Dick that she experiences a complete personality change, leading to her dysfunction as a character. Her carefree existence as an unmarried woman in African society is reinforced in her statement: “South Africa is a wonderful place for the unmarried white woman” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 44).
Lessing also illustrates Judith Butler’s argument of gender as performative in her novel. As already discussed, Butler theorized that masculinity and femininity are not traits people have, but effects people produce by the way of particular aspects that they perform. Butler suggests that becoming a woman or man is not something that develops in early life, instead gender is constantly reaffirmed and publically displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with cultural norms which define masculinity and femininity (Butler 900). Thus, gender is regulated and policed by rigid social norms.

Mary is “forced” by members of the society into marriage in the plot of the novel as white women in that society are conditioned to believe that they should get married – if a woman chooses not to follow this particular gender expectation, that female character is ridiculed and scorned by the other characters in Lessing’s created world. Mary’s predicament concerning marriage and the single life is reiterated when she says: “It was during these two hours of half-consciousness that she allowed herself to dream about the beautiful lost time when she worked in an office and lived as she pleased, before people made her get married” (Lessing, The Grass is Singing 118).

This quote also emphasises the constraints placed on the female characters and the negative impact of these restrictions on the emotional well being of the character. Like the female characters of colour, the white female characters also lose their independence when marrying. Renu Khanna and Janet Price present a discussion on the models of sexuality arguing that the acceptable and “natural” face of sexuality is represented by the adult, preferably married, able-bodied, heterosexual couple, in which man and
woman have different roles and modes of behaviour which are predetermined by their biological sex (Khanna and Price 29). Thus, like the theory of Butler, it is a woman’s sexuality that places her in an inferior position in society.

This point is clearly illustrated in the behaviour of Mary once she conforms to societal expectations and gets married. After marrying Dick Turner who seems genuinely concerned about Mary’s well being, she still loses her independence and zest for life. As a married woman, Mary is now expected to perform certain responsibilities and household tasks. Instead of working and having a measure of autonomy and independence, she is now expected to bear and raise Dick’s children and to be a housewife maintaining and running the household. The required expectations of Mary as a female character are shown in the quote: “He knew perfectly well what he wanted: a pleasant companion, a mother for his children and someone to run his house for him” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 50).

A theme prevalent in both authors’ texts is the female characters’ hatred and detestation of sex. Like Dikeledi and Elizabeth who view sex as an oppressive tool, Mary shares the same sentiments. As a child she witnessed her father’s chauvinist behaviour towards her mother, allowing her to reach these conclusions about sex, and her view of it as being of no benefit to the female characters in society. This is evident in Lessing’s description of Mary’s attitude towards children:

Mary liked other people’s children but shuddered at the thought of her own. She felt sentimental at weddings, but she had a profound distaste for sex; there had been little privacy in her home and there were things
she did not care to remember, she had taken good care to forget them
years ago. (Lessing, The Grass is Singing 46)

Mary’s father is a male character who portrays the typical behaviour of
most male characters in society. He has the identical opinion and beliefs
regarding women as the male characters highlighted in Head’s texts. He can
be likened to Garesego as he too expected Mary’s mother to raise the
children with very little money, instead of using his money in the household,
he would spend the money on himself and his drinking habits. Mary’s account
of her mother’s frustrating financial situation reflects the mirrored attitude of
Garesego:

Am I expected to bring up three children on the money that is left over
when he chooses to come home. And then she would stand still,
waiting for condolences of the man who pocketed the money which
was rightly hers to spend for the children. (Lessing, The Grass is
Singing 38)

This quote further confirms how the male characters, both white and those of
colour are not supportive of their wives, and more importantly, their children.
Like Garesego who abandons his family, Mary’s father also turns his back on
his family as he provides them with minimal financial support and no
emotional support. Thus, it is not just the women of colour that are deeply
affected by gender oppression; the white female characters are in the
equivalent predicament. The negative impact of subjugation on the female
characters is further illustrated by Mary’s mother, whom Mary remembers as
continuously crying because of her husband’s antics: “She used to cry over
her sewing while Mary comforted her miserably, longing to get away, but feeling important too, and hating her father" (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 39).

Lessing also incorporates the creation and maintenance of gendered stereotypes where the female characters in the text are subject to stereotypes created by the male characters. The bigoted behaviour of the male character, Charlie Slatter, emphasises the theory of Teun van Dijk regarding the social group attitudes that are created and adhered to in societies. In Lessing’s fictional world Charlie Slatter does everything in his power to reinforce his dominance over the female characters. An example of his approach to women is portrayed in his relationship with his wife: “he was hard with his wife, making her bear unnecessary hardships at the beginning” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 15). He constructs certain positive beliefs about the male characters while at the same time he synthesises negative ideas and beliefs about the women as a gender in order to oppress them.

van Dijk argues that there is a discrepancy between group ideology and group interests leading to power relations in society being produced (Dant 162-163). With this said, Charlie Slatter is just concerned about the well being and success of the male gender in the text, he is of the opinion that the female characters ought to fend for themselves. This is evident in his attitude towards Mary when giving her a lift to the station: “He got into the car, and she climbed in beside him, fumbling with the door, while he stared ahead down the road, whistling between his teeth: Charlie did not believe in pampering women by waiting on them” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 121). This attitude of Charlie reinforces how he would not even take the time to assist
Mary with the car door in her struggles to close it. Thus, he, at every opportunity reinforced his stereotypical dominant position over women which was socially acceptable in society.

Furthermore, Charlie Slatter is also a character who creates unfair stereotypes concerning the female characters. He makes the assumption in the text that all Southern African women pester the men in their lives by continually nagging them. “Nagged at him, eh? Oh well, women are pretty bad that way, in this country, very often. Aren’t they, Slatter? The voice was easy, intimate, formal. My old woman drives me mad—it’s something about this country” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 27). This quote illustrates how the female characters annoy and are almost an irritation to him, and to the other male characters in the text.

It can be inferred, Doris Lessing does not investigate the double oppression of her female characters in the text, “The Old Chief Mshlanga”. She rather focuses on the absence of the female characters in this literary society where the female characters do not have an influence or play a significant part in the plot of the story. The feminist issues are not blatant in this text like they are in the texts by Head and in Lessing’s novel, *The Grass is Singing*. As a result of this, the absence and subsequent silence of the female characters will be explored from a deconstructionist perspective where it will seek to dismantle some of the normative structures that create meaning in the text, which may contain different probable truths. In essence, the text is a construct of the reflection of the world, therefore, allowing for possible deconstruction (Belsey 104).
The object of deconstructing a text is to examine the process of its production, not the private experience of the individual author, but the mode of production, the materials and their arrangement in the work (Belsey 104). As a result the meaning becomes plural and open to re-reading. At this point the text is no longer an object of passive consumption, but is instead an object of work by the reader to produce meaning (Belsey 104). Thus, it is the reader’s interpretation and response to the text that allows the production of multiple meanings.

Having said this, deconstruction is a literary theory which seeks to oppose the idea that language contains words with fixed meanings. A deconstructive analysis of the text uncovers the conflicts presented in the discourse through deciphering its multiple meanings. Jacques Derrida, one of the leading proponents of deconstruction, asserted that there are no external truths and all meanings are contained within the text. It is also important to note that as social values change, a text will be interpreted in different ways through the course of history (Rivkin and Ryan, “Introductory Deconstruction” 259).

Another theorist that is important to this study is Ferdinand de Saussure and his discussion of the signification process (Culler, Ferdinand de Saussure 43). Ideas only exist through their signification, without this they have no identity (Rivkin and Ryan, “Introductory Deconstruction” 259). As previously discussed, he interrogated the idea of language as a social construction. “The Old Chief Mshlanga”, published during the 1950’s was created in a time in Southern Africa’s history where inequality affected the structure of society. Even though Lessing does not examine the relationship
between the male characters in too much detail, there are hints of gender oppression in the construction of the text.

Furthermore de Saussure asserted that language is a system based on the relationship between its elements and that words do not have an inherent meaning, but rather that meaning derives from its difference from another (Belsey 104). Thus, in order to investigate the oppression of the white female characters and the double oppression of black female characters it is important to compare the portrayal of female characters in Head's texts and *The Grass is Singing* with this particular short story. In all the other texts explored, the female characters are given life by being given a name by the author. However, in this text by Lessing, the main female character is not given a name, thus she is almost a faceless perhaps universal character. She is completely nameless in the first half of the text, thereafter she is addressed as Nkosikaas as a sign of respect by the black characters, however this is not her actual name in the text.

The fact that she is not given a name links to the era in which this text was created. The women played a minimal role in society as they were viewed as insignificant and lived under the rule of the male counterparts in their lives. The anonymity of this character also reiterates the background role of women in society mirrored through this character of Lessing, as even though a main character; she is still portrayed as marginalized.

Furthermore, both parents of the main character are mentioned and referred to in the text. In this instance Lessing again opts to give minimal detail of the female character as she is just referred to as the mother throughout the text. On the other hand, the father is given some form of
identity as he is referred to as Baas Jordan and Lessing also depicts some of his personality traits through his actions in the story. As a character he is more realistic as Lessing pays attention to the feudal relationship between him and Chief Mshlanga. “My father sat himself down in his big chair below the steps of the house; the old man squatted carefully on the ground before him, flanked by his two young men” (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 274).

In contrast, the main character’s mother, like all Southern African women, is strategically placed on a lower level than the male character as Lessing fails to develop her as a character, a replica of the inferiority and powerlessness of the female characters.

The black female characters, and their role in Rhodesian society, is also portrayed in the text, in this regard Lessing completely excludes black female characters from this story. Thus the placement of the black female characters at the bottom level of the social hierarchy in Southern African society is mirrored in this text as Lessing does not even mention a female black character. Their absence and silence indicates their total irrelevance in a society. Therefore, according to a deconstructionist perspective, Lessing’s “The Old Chief Mshlanga” is carefully crafted in order to give an accurate representation of the male and female characters and the power relations between these two groups.

To reiterate, “Women writers are often especially aware of their task as producers of images that both participate in the dominant representations of their culture and simultaneously undermine and subvert those images by offering a re-vision of familiar scripts” (Lionnet 205). Southern Africa, previously a patriarchal society, negatively affected all women of the
continent, irrespective of their race or ethnic origin. It is not only the black women that faced oppression, the white women, deemed more privileged also experienced the drastic effects of subjugation. Frene Ginwala in the article, “Women in South Africa Shape Democratic Change” discusses the status of women in Southern Africa and their relationship with the men in their lives.

Ginwala argues that black women are often described as “chattels” (Ginwala Web). A chattel refers to a person’s property or his/her ownership of property. In a similar vein, this position of black women is emphasised in Lessing and Head’s texts as the amount of power held by these characters is always minimal, instead they existed under the ownership of the male characters in their lives.

In addition, Ginwala describes the white women as “pets” as they are submissive but they do share the privilege of being white (Ginwala Web). This is depicted in Lessing and Head’s texts as the white characters are not the property of the males; therefore they find themselves in a better position than the black female characters, however, they are still forced to conform to the expectations of the men.

Incidentally, Maya Angelou’s poem, “Equality” centres on the position of women in society which is authenticated by the men in their lives. The speaker in the poem is pleading for the man in her life to actually view her as a person of importance. Angelou constantly repeats the lines: “Equality, and I will be set free, Equality and I will be set free” (Angelou 12). This plight of the speaker mirrors the troubles of female characters in the texts as gender equality is the only policy that will enrich their lives and literally set them free.
Chapter 5: Perpetrators of Racial and Gender Inequality

There are so many kinds of madness, so many ways in which the human brain may go wrong; and so often it happens that what we call madness is both reasonable and just. It is so. Yes. A little reason is good for us, a little more makes wise men of some of us - but when our reason over-grows us and we reach too far, something breaks and we go insane. (Curwood 54)

According to James M. Jones, “one of the problems with racism is that its existence, expression, and consequences vary between those who most frequently perpetrate it and those who are most frequently its targets” (Jones 278). As a result, prejudice and racist actions have a tremendous impact on the lives of both the perpetrators and the victims of these actions. This chapter will investigate racism from an alternative angle as the focus is on the perpetrators of racial and gender oppression, examining the social and psychological effects on these characters in the texts.

Toni Morrison in her article “Playing in the Dark” examines racism in literature and the impact not only on the victims of racial oppression, but also comments on its effect on the perpetrators of racism. She maintains that the analysis of the perpetrators of racism is just as important as the study of the experiences of victims. This is apparent in her quote: “What I propose here is to examine the impact of notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion and racial vulnerability and availability on non blacks who held, resisted explored, or altered those notions” (Morrison 1009). She interrogates the relationship between slave and master to substantiate her claim that studying the mind,
imagination and behaviour of slaves is valuable, however, she reiterates that equally valuable is the effort to examine what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behaviour of masters (Morrison 1009). Thus, it is not just the victims that are physically, socially, and psychologically damaged by perpetrator’s racist actions; these actions also have a tremendous influence on the people actually implementing them.

This theory can effectively be applied to the texts of Lessing and Head where it is not just the victims who are psychologically affected and scarred by the actions of the white xenophobic characters. The white perpetrators of racism in these fictional worlds are also psychologically damaged as their constant participation in and implementation of methods to create miserable environments for the black characters, may affect their sanity. In “The Old Chief Mshlanga,” The Grass is Singing, A Question of Power and “The Collector of Treasures” the perpetrators themselves endure or have endured emotional and psychological trauma, and some characters are more seriously affected than others as their racist actions actually lead to their destruction in the text.

In “The Old Chief Mshlanga,” Lessing illustrates the consequence of racial discrimination on the perpetrator through the actions and feelings of the nameless main white character in the short story. The main character finds herself in a predicament with regard to the characters of colour in the text. From a young age she is conditioned to live her life in a certain manner; more especially, she has been conditioned by her family and other white characters in Rhodesian society to treat the characters of colour in a dehumanizing way. However, this character begins to experience internal conflict with regard to
racism as she realises that her discriminative behaviour is ridiculous and unacceptable.

The white young character begins to display a conscience with regard to her treatment of the black characters. In the beginning of the story she walks past the chief and does not show him the respect he deserves, as she has been trained to see herself as having an elevated status in her culture. Unlike many other white characters, this character demonstrates a sense of guilt and remorse because of her actions and behaviour towards these people. Her reflection of her inappropriate behaviour is reinforced when she comments: “A Chief! I thought, understanding the pride that made the old man stand before me like an equal, for he showed courtesy, and I showed none” (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 268). In this statement she reflects the realization that the perpetrators of racism are actually the ill-mannered characters whereas the “savage” black people are now viewed by her as polite and gracious characters.

At one point in the story Lessing depicts the white character’s growing interest in the black characters, a forbidden trait in a white person in Rhodesian society; the whites should definitely not be intrigued by a person of colour. Her fascination with these characters is emphasised when she states:

What had I expected? I could not join them socially: the thing was unheard of. Bad enough that I, a white girl, should be walking the veld alone as a white man might: and in this part of the bush where only government officials had the right to move. (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 273)
Here it is evident how the character experiences internal conflict when she realises that she is interested in the black characters and she wishes to learn more about their culture, but at the same time, the expectations of her as a white character are continuously being reinforced in her mind:

I have come to pay you a friendly visit, Chief Mshlanga. I could not say it. I might now be feeling an urgent helpless desire to get to know these men and women as people, to be accepted by them as a friend, but the truth was I had set out in a spirit of curiosity. (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 274)

Even though she should not be interested in them, she is, which leads to her feelings of uneasiness and restlessness. She even mentions that she would like to be friends with the black characters – definitely forbidden by her prejudiced society. The internal conflict experienced by the main character is further emphasised when she says: “I saw they caught the name; they did not understand what I wanted. I did not understand myself” (Lessing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga” 273). It is at this point where she cannot explain her feelings and actions regarding the black characters, thus contributing to her sense of confusion and restlessness. These feelings are aggravated by the psychological tensions that result from individual-level versus group-level dynamics (Jones 278). The societal expectations of her as a character clash with her individual thoughts and feelings pertaining to the black characters.

The suffering of the perpetrator is also reinforced through the character of Mary Turner in The Grass is Singing. Mary is portrayed in the beginning chapters of the text as an emotionally and psychologically stable character. However, her intense hatred for the black characters and her efforts to
overpower them has destructive psychological effects on her psyche. Mary’s suffering as a perpetrator goes further than that of the nameless character in “The Old Chief Mshlanga” as she ends up driving herself to a nervous breakdown. This is evident when Tony describes Mary’s condition in the text: “‘Complete Nervous Breakdown’, diagnosed Tony, who was just off to bed. He had the kind of mind that is relieved by putting things into the words: the phrase was an apology for Mary; it absolved her from criticism” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 228).

Mary’s main aim is to cause the black characters as much suffering and distress as possible. In the text Mary becomes obsessed with the black characters and her world becomes consumed by her extreme hatred for them. In her obsession, Mary loses grip with reality and she begins leading the life of someone who is in a trance and who is not in touch with the real world. “. . . and she struggled in her mind to separate dream from reality” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 204). It is at this point that Mary lives in a world of her own, a world that exists merely in her mind: “Mary moved about her work like a woman in a dream, taking hours to accomplish what would formerly have taken her a few minutes” (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 182). Thus, it is evident how the perpetrator of racism is also negatively affected by her racist actions, as Mary’s obsession influences every aspect of her life.

The theory presented by Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane can be used to analyse the psychological effect of racism on Mary Turner. As previously discussed, Van der Kolk and McFarlane pay attention to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a diagnosis that has created a framework for understanding how people’s biology, conceptions of the world,
and personalities are linked to and shaped by experience (van der Kolk and McFarlane 488). Mary can be said to be a character that cannot cope with the suffering and trauma she brings upon herself in her efforts to dehumanize the black characters. Van der Kolk and McFarlane further argue that “the core issue is the inability to integrate the reality of particular experiences, and the resulting repetitive replaying of the trauma in images, behaviours, feelings, physiological states, and interpersonal relationships” (van der Kolk and McFarlane 491). As a result, Mary experiences trauma and becomes fixated on this trauma in her plight to make the life of the black characters unbearable.

Mary’s inexplicable rage is a side-effect of her fixation on the trauma. Her severe temper is emphasised when she severely whips one of the labourers for no logical reason:

Involuntarily she lifted her whip and brought it down across his face in a vicious swinging blow. She did not know what she was doing. She stood quite still, trembling; and when she saw him put his hand, dazedly to his face, she looked down at the whip she held in stupefaction, as if the whip had swung out of its own accord, without her willing it. (Lessing, The Grass is Singing 146)

Lessing’s description of this incident illustrates the psychological effects on the perpetrators of racism as she shows how the white characters have become robot-like in their thoughts and actions. The fact that she uses the word “involuntarily” emphasises how Mary is no longer in control of her actions; her extreme racist attitude has caused not only the victims unnecessary suffering, it has also caused her excessive suffering. Lessing
also mentions that Mary has reached a point where she does not know what she is doing, illustrating the extent of Mary’s suffering and how no other character is responsible for her suffering; the blame lies entirely on her as she has driven herself mad, to the point of psychosis.

It can be said that it is the internal conflict experienced by Mary that leads her to violent actions like the one described above. It is also difficult for the white characters to continuously keep the black characters in a position in which they want them, with the aim of maintaining them at primal level. If they are unable to hold this belief, or begin doubting it, they become anxious and resort to physical violence in order to reassert their authority and supremacy. This is reinforced in the quote:

> What had happened was the formal pattern of black-and-white, mistress-and-servant, had been broken by the personal relation; and when a white man in Africa by accident looks into the eyes of a native and sees the human being (which is his chief occupation to avoid), his sense of guilt, which he denies, fumes up in resentment and he brings down the whip. (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 178)

Therefore one can see the internal conflict that is aroused in the white characters when their conscience plays on their mind. Lessing highlights the extent of Mary’s emotional suffering towards the end of the novel when Mary experiences hallucinations, one of the main symptoms of psychosis:

> She heard a boom of thunder, and saw, as she had done so many times, the lightning flicker on a shadowed wall. Now it seemed as if the night were closing in on her, and the little house was bending over like a candle, melting in the heat. She heard the crack, crack; the restless
moving of the iron above, and it seemed to her that a vast black spider, was crawling over the roof, trying to get inside. (Lessing, The Grass is Singing 252)

With this said it is evident that Mary's behaviour in the novel can be evaluated as her being psychotic. It is important to note that hallucinations, delusions are the main symptoms of psychosis (Wagner 40). Other symptoms of this disorder she portrays are disorganisation, confusion and deterioration in functioning (Wagner 40). Interestingly, Mary's psychological suffering can be compared to the emotional suffering of Elizabeth, a victim of oppression in A Question of Power as both characters are portrayed as mentally ill in the texts. This comparison further illustrates that both perpetrator and victim experience similar psychological issues and suffering.

Mary's suffering is amplified by the social expectations required of her as a white character. Towards the end of the novel Mary almost begins to view Moses as a person and she even becomes reliant on him to perform simple tasks for her that she should be doing herself, illustrative of her deterioration in functioning. An example is when Moses is obliged to assist Mary while she dresses and to aid her in buttoning up her dress:

Beside her stood Moses, and, as Tony watched, she stood up and held out her arms while the native slipped her dress over them from behind. When she sat down again she shook out her hair from her neck with both hands, with the gesture of a beautiful woman adoring her beauty. Moses was buttoning up the dress; she was looking in the mirror. (Lessing, The Grass is Singing 230)
At this point in the text, Mary can be said to be psychotic as she has completely lost touch with reality as she surrenders her life into his care; she is no longer in control of the relationship. In addition, her reliance on a black character is totally inappropriate in the social setting. This sudden change in attitude leads to the inner conflict she experiences as a white character who, instead of viewing the black character as an inanimate object, sees a black character as a sexual object. This confusion between societal expectations and her actual actions is a major contributing factor to the emotional distress of Mary, and ultimately her downfall as a white character. Her socially unacceptable behaviour is emphasised in Tony’s quote:

> God, the woman is as mad as a hatter! he said to himself. And then he thought, but is she, is she? She can’t be mad. She doesn’t behave as if she were. She behaves simply as if she lives in a world of her own, where other people’s standards don’t count. She has forgotten what her own people are like. (Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* 232)

This quote also reiterates the pressure placed on the white characters to conform to the acceptable standards in society of how they ought to treat black characters. If a white character’s conscience begins to play on his/her emotions, he/she will be placed in a challenging social situation with devastating emotional effects.

On the other hand, Bessie Head does not place much emphasis on the suffering of the perpetrators of racism in her texts. Unlike Lessing, who paints a clear description of the psychological suffering of the white perpetrators of racism, Head focuses more on the portrayal of the perpetrators of gender inequality. In “The Collector of Treasures” the effect of the perpetrator’s
actions on themselves is not as blatant as in Lessing’s texts; however there are events in the plot that illustrate how Garesego is negatively influenced by his prejudiced behaviour.

It can be said that Garesego’s attitude towards women, more specifically towards his wife, has made him a hard, cold person as Head portrays him as a character that shows no emotion or feelings towards other characters in the text. In order to conform to society and portray the behaviour of how men ought to behave in society, Garesego has become almost machine-like in his actions as he displays no conscience and remorse for his actions. This point is emphasised when Dikeledi passes Garesego in the street and he barely has the decency to greet her, let alone inquire about his children: “She had not seen him in eight years except as a passer-by in the village. Sometimes he waved but he had never talked to her or inquired about her life” (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 67). Therefore Garesego is portrayed as a conformist whose actions have contributed to his obsession to make the life of his wife difficult.

Garesego has become so set in his ways that he becomes an inconsiderate and spiteful person. Throughout the short story, he has been trying to make his wife’s life as trying as possible, and in this attempt he is actually spiting himself. Garesego, in his mind, thinks that Dikeledi is suffering because he shows no interest in their children; however, in essence, this is self-defeating on his part as he is the one who is an outcast in their lives. Interestingly, the male characters in all the texts used the female characters for procreation as it was important for them to have children and continue their family name. Garesego, unlike the other male characters, has
children, but has no interest in their development and well being as he does not even make the effort to contribute to his children’s school fees. This is evident in Head’s discussion on Dikeledi’s money making ways in the story:

The people who called did business with her; they wanted her to make dresses for their children or knit jerseys for the winter time and at times when she had no orders at all, she made baskets which she sold. In these ways she supported herself and her three children. (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 61)

Furthermore, Garesego thinks he is destroying Dikeledi by not supporting the children financially and emotionally when ultimately he is actually harming his children as he is placing their education and future at stake. This is evident when Dikeledi asks him for R20 towards the children’s school fees, the only money she was not able to save herself, and he gives her a sarcastic answer.

‘Why don’t you ask Paul Thebolo for the money?’ he said. ‘Everyone knows he’s keeping two homes and that you are his spare. Everyone knows about that full bag of corn he delivers to your home every six months so why can’t he pay the school fees as well?’ (Head, “The Collector of Treasures” 68)

Thus, he has become so obsessed with making his wife’s life miserable that he has totally lost perspective and has become an irrational character in the text. He accuses his innocent wife of the same adulteries that he is committing as a way of negating his responsibility to her and his children.
To further investigate the suffering of the perpetrators of racial and gender oppression in the texts, in *A Question of Power*, Bessie Head poses an interesting question: “Who is the greater man – the man who cries, broken by anguish, or his scoffing, mocking, jeering oppressor?” (Head, *A Question of Power* 84). This is a fascinating inquiry as it encourages the reader to closely compare the behaviour and the lives of the victims and the perpetrators of racial inequality in the text. In doing so, the reader is able to note how the lives of both victims and perpetrators are quite similar as they are both subject to the instructions of other characters in the story. The victims of racial oppression live under the subsequent rule of the white oppressors, while similarly, the white oppressors are not in charge of their own behaviour and outlook on life as they have to conform to the racist attitudes of the other oppressors in society. With this said, Head has a point when she asks: “Who is the greater man?” (Head, *A Question of Power* 84).

Head affirms that it is the victims who are the better people as they submissively endure numerous hardships presented by the perpetrators; the perpetrators, on the other hand, show no remorse for their actions and just continue to throw problems at their victims. This is evident in the quote: “The faces of oppressed people are not ugly. They are scarred with suffering. But the torturers become more hideous day by day. There are no limits to the excesses of evil they indulge in” (Head, *A Question of Power* 84).

In her examination of the question, Head makes the point that it is the perpetrators who are more entrapped than the victim, as, socially, they are obliged to conform to the “normal” behaviour portrayed by the other white characters in the fictional world. Secondly, the perpetrator’s lives are
consumed by their attempts to create an unpleasant world for their victims, thus, driving their whole world and purpose in life. Thus, the perpetrator suffers to a greater extent than the victim as their rules for living are constituted for them to maintain and strive toward, if they do not conform, they are castigated by the other oppressive characters in the text.

Based on this argument, Head argues that it is the victims of racism who are the characters that are most free and it is the perpetrators who have the most difficult life. This is evident in the citation: “The victim is really the most flexible, the most free person on earth. He doesn’t have to think up endless laws and endless falsehoods” (Head, A Question of Power 84). Thus, as victims of racial inequality are trapped by the oppressive characters, the perpetrators of racial bias are trapped by their continuous efforts to escalate the suffering of their victims.

Nothing highlights the point that it is not just the victims of racial oppression that suffer mentally and socially and that the white characters who do not conform to society’s expectations also suffer the same psychological trauma, as the principal of Motabeng Primary School, an Afrikaner man from South Africa. This is evident when he visits Elizabeth in hospital: “He furrowed his brow and offered some personal information: ‘I suffer, too, because I haven’t a country and know what it’s like. A lot of refugees have nervous breakdowns” (Head, A Question of Power 52). With this said, being an outsider and non-conformist in the country, the principal, like Elizabeth also suffers a nervous breakdown. Therefore white characters that do not conform are also subject to social and psychological suffering; it is not just the black characters that are subject to this condition.
The perpetrators of gender oppression also have a difficult life in the fictional society of Bessie Head. Like the white characters ought to conform to “the normal behaviour” of white characters in society, the black men also have to conform to the sexist attitudes of other black male characters. The discussion on Sello’s behaviour in the text is an example of this: “Sello was never explicit about this ‘killing’ business. He said he had ‘killed’ several women. He said it in an aloof, detached way; as though it were simply part of a job he was on” (Head, A Question of Power 28). The fact that Head mentions that he killed women in a detached way, emphasises how he is also a conformist in his actions – it is implied here that he is not responsible for his actions, he is simply forced to carry out a duty. As a male he has the duty to ill-treat women, if he does not live his life according to this, he will be denigrated by other male characters in the society. Thus, the perpetrators of sexism, like the female victims, are also subject to social and psychological suffering.

To conclude, Head concludes A Question of Power with the description of her utopian world, a world free of racial and gender inequality:

There was no direct push against those rigid, false social systems of class and caste. She had fallen from the very beginning into the warm embrace of the brotherhood of man, because when a people wanted everyone to be ordinary it was just another way of saying man loved man. (Head, A Question of Power 206)

It is only in a world like this where the characters pursue harmony and equality that ensures a mentally healthy society is established. In “The Old Chief Mshlanga,” The Grass is Singing, “The Collector of Treasures” and A
It can be said that the society riddled with gender and racial oppression has a tremendous impact on all the characters living in the fictional worlds of Lessing and Head, and it is evident how the mental well being of both perpetrators and victims are affected, creating instability in the society as a whole.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Literature, as a discursive practice that encodes and transmits as well as creates ideology, is a mediating force in society: it structures our sense of the world since narrative or stylistic conventions and plot resolutions serve to either sanction and perpetuate cultural myths, or to create new mythologies that allow the writer and the reader to engage in a constructive re-writing of their social contexts. (Lionnet 205)

This study investigated how the authors of Botswanan and Rhodesian society depicted the strains of socio-political society into their fictional worlds. It sought to provide a comparison between writers of diverse races, as their alternative approaches represent the differing African experiences in their lives and their writing. In order for these similarities to be explored, selected works of two significant African authors, Doris Lessing and Bessie Head, were analysed. A thorough, text based literary study of these particular works has been conducted which explores the characters and themes created by the authors, and examines how these relationships reflect racial and gender differences. Thus, the research method applied in the interrogation of the texts is the literary theory of cultural studies and critical race theory. The focus of the paper highlights the societal influences, pressures, manipulations as well as constraints on the characters and their resultant dysfunctionality.

This study critically analysed and compared the characters created by Lessing in Rhodesia prior independence, and Head in Botswana post independence, which provides an exploration of the abuse and mistreatment of black people and subjugation of women in pre-democratic societies, as
evident in the texts. Thus, the study investigated literary constructions by the selected authors and how they spotlight the oppression and inequality prevalent within their Southern African society. More specifically the paper examined the psychological fractures caused by the dual oppression of race and gender and investigated the inner conflict and emotional turmoil experienced by both the perpetrators and victims, as displayed in the texts.

The selected area of study for this dissertation focuses on the genre of literature which exposes an era of social injustice in Africa that had a tremendous influence on the shaping of the society in which Africans live today. With this said in order to examine racial differences and issues, critical race theory is the best theory to be applied here. As indicated in chapter two, critical race theory focuses on racial injustices and the structuring of society based on racial differences. The core principle of critical race theory is the notion of the social construction of race. Here the emphasis is on the fact that race and differential racism are considered to be products of social thought, eliminating the conception that races result from biological or genetic differences (Delgado & Stefancic 7).

As previously stated, these disparities can be explained as being created by the individuals in society that rank others in distinct racial categories for particular purposes. Consequently, an individual’s genetic composition has no influence on the distinctions between races; instead, it is individuals in society that consciously create these differences. Assigning people to specific economic strata or labour enterprise according to a racially structured hierarchy is an example of this. The dominant group in society constructs the differentiation in race in order to produce a suitable workforce
from those they have rendered powerless by virtue of their race. This particular way of organising society then results in racism, benefiting only the hegemonic group within a society; thus, racism is not seen as problematic to that segment and, as a result they do not wish to eradicate it. Furthermore, critical race theory further explains how racial stereotypes develop based on the emphasis on the differences between racial groups (Delgado & Stefancic 7).

An additional angle used in the investigation of Lessing and Head texts is based on cultural studies. To recap on this school of thought it is important to acquire a thorough understanding and established definition of the term “culture.” Within this paradigm, culture is defined as “the total product of a people’s “being” and “consciousness” which emerges from their grappling with nature and living with other humans in a collective group” (Ogundipe-Leslie 25). Furthermore it can also be described as the behaviours and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic or age group.

As already proven, it is important to note that every individual deems his/her culture the best and most appropriate way of living; hence it can be offered that people view cultures as hierarchical. This cultural bias provides a basis for inequality, as it promotes the domination of one class/group over another, and also acts as a means of acquiring oppositional points of view to those in dominance (Rivkin and Ryan, “Introduction: The Politics of Culture” 1233). Therefore cultural studies as a form of analysis, is concerned with the generation and circulation of meanings in industrial societies.

To recapitulate, Ian Lopez, in his critical race theory, examines how race is socially constructed in a society and pays specific attention to the
debate concerning the origins of race. He interrogates the idea of how race is a social construct rather than a biological reality (Lopez 964). Thus, he claims that it is the members of a society that create racial differences; it is not based on genetics as it is claimed to be. Therefore, it can be said that the racism portrayed in the texts of Lessing and Head is socially and psychologically created by the characters in the society who emphasise the difference between races.

Another theory of importance to this study is Teun van Dijk’s theory of ideology which further emphasises Lopez’s argument as it is utilized to explain racism issues and how the white people maintained their rule during the era of inequality. As can be clearly seen, these theories illustrate how the xenophobic characters manage to suppress their victims in the fictional worlds of the Lessing and Head texts. The racial inequality between diverse cultures or groups of characters in the texts can be explained using the theory of van Dijk. The attitude and conduct of xenophobic characters in Lessing and Head’s texts are based on the premise that their culture was more civilised and ultimately more superior to that of the characters of the opposing race. It is for this reason that the racist characters structured the functioning of society, politically and socially, on their group ideology resulting in a contradiction to the black and coloured character’s best interests.

To review the theory of Louis Althusser, he places emphasis on the ways in which people think, act and understand themselves and their relationship to society which he believes is vital to ideologies. Having said this, he reinforces the importance of social institutions in the ordering of society as the media, the educational system, and the family unit all convey
societal expectations which govern individual lives. This study has shown that the prejudice and discriminatory behaviour of the characters created by Lessing and Head is created by the xenophobic characters that conform to the requirements expected of them as presumably racially superior people in society, made clear to them through social institutions.

Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of linguistic signs further highlights Althusser’s ideologies. He pays particular attention to the *sign*, the *signifier* and the *signified* (Appiah 129). He examines how different concepts can be interpreted differently by individuals and importance is placed on the association an individual constructs based on his/her understanding of what certain signs mean to him/her. The xenophobic characters negative attitudes and prejudices concerning the black or coloured characters can be attributed to this theory.

Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane offer an account of how traumatic experiences can damage a persons’ mind, occasionally causing permanent damage to the psyche. With this in mind, the troubled characters of the selected Head and Lessing texts can easily be analysed and understood. The fact that black and coloured characters were discriminated against by the xenophobic characters caused them to be exposed to extreme stress and trauma. However, some victims developed a more adequate coping mechanism in dealing with trauma than others; therefore, these characters were able to effectively deal with and adapt to the appalling ways in which they were treated.

In other instances, the black and coloured characters in the texts were unable to deal with the traumatic events experienced. These psychologically
damaged characters are thus portrayed as being mad or irrational, illustrating their inadequate coping mechanism. In the examination of the texts by Doris Lessing, it is apparent that it is not solely the victims of apartheid who are subjected to trauma and extreme suffering; the perpetrators also exhibit symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and psychosis. However, in the texts by Head the effects on the perpetrators is not as apparent as in Lessing’s texts. Head focuses on the psychological effects on the male characters – the perpetrators of gender inequality. The male characters lose perspective on their lives and families in their pursuit to make the female coloured character’s lives as oppressed as possible.

In the era that their African characters were created, great importance was placed on the gendered and racially differentiated distinction between human beings, to such a degree that these categories of personhood influenced every characters’ economic, social and psychological well being (Burr 4). Accordingly, the characters’ understanding of the African world and their knowledge of society is understood in terms of racial and gendered categories where each character’s identity is determined by these pertinent societal issues.

As indicated in chapter three, the black or coloured person faces a difficult life with many hardships plainly because he/she is of a darker skin colour. The fact that a person is of a different skin colour also subjects him/her to various stereotypes created by the xenophobic characters in the text. The first common stereotype is that he/she is savage and is a danger to society; secondly, the black person is also placed on the primal level where they are considered to be animal-like. Another misfortune experienced by the
black person is that he/she is denied an education as, if educated, it is believed that he/she will gain power and create a disturbance in the ordered society.

The xenophobic characters are also very suspicious of the black or coloured characters; it is irrelevant how decent or honest a person is, he/she is always the main suspect in the event of a crime. Furthermore, even though the xenophobic characters depend entirely on the black characters for labour, in their homes and in their businesses, the xenophobic characters are still inclined to view blacks or coloureds as a burden to themselves and their society. The oppressed characters find themselves in a hopeless situation, as no matter what effort they make to obey and impress the xenophobic characters, they are always viewed as an annoyance to their “bosses”. In addition, it is important to note that it was not just the racists that loathed the oppressed characters; the relationship was reciprocal, as the oppressed characters also resented the xenophobic characters for placing them in a hopeless situation in the world.

Throughout Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*, the black literary characters are portrayed as a group of people whom the white characters believe are continually strategising to steal their belongings. These negative stereotypes developed by the white characters emphasise the social construction of race in Rhodesian society whereby racism and racial group categories are created and maintained by the members of that particular community. Firstly, the black characters are not white; thus, they are automatically deemed inferior as a person had to have a white skin in order to be significant in society. As a result, the black characters are placed in a
lower position as they are automatically termed “savage” by the white characters. Thus, the characters understand the world in terms of categories and concepts he/she uses which are historically and culturally specific.

According to Althusser’s theory, the social norms portrayed in society are biased and subjective as they have developed in the interests of the powerful white characters who integrate these norms as common sense in order to maintain their social power as espoused in Lessing's book, *The Grass is Singing*. The white characters have many economic, political and social opportunities available for them to utilise in order to better themselves in the society. The black characters, on the other hand, have no such opportunities as the white characters place restrictions on them in all spheres of their lives in order to retain their own social power and wealth in the fictional societies. Due to their diminished and politically powerless status, the black characters have no option but to accept this as a norm; it was impossible for them to resist the white characters; if they did, the white characters were determined to inflict further psychological and physical retribution for the insubordination.

As noted, the prolonged suffering of the Blacks is further emphasised by Lessing in “The Old Chief Mshlanga” with regard to the ownership and development of land. The black characters are seen to be an inconvenience to the white characters with regard to the area in which they reside. The black characters are cramped into small demarcated areas specifically labelled as native areas; however, Lessing portrays this as a great inconvenience to the white characters, even though the black characters were placed far away from
them. She does this deliberately to highlight the outright hatred for the black characters and the obvious selfishness of the white characters.

The psychological effects on the black characters are also of importance to this study. With regard to suffering and trauma, some people have developed healthier coping mechanisms and can handle stressful situations more effectively than others. The old chief in “The Old Chief Mshlanga” does not allow the stressful racial situation to affect him emotionally and psychologically; he remains a strong and determined character.

In *The Grass is Singing*, the negative experiences escalate the level of trauma Moses endures, resulting in the possibility that Moses suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder. This disorder is characterised by the fact that a victim of trauma is unable to effectively integrate and respond to the trauma experienced and thus murders his oppressor. Similarly, Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* becomes consumed by this trauma leading to it becoming an inescapable part of her life. As a result she centres her world on the effects of the injustices of her situation in the fictional society.

Furthermore, in *The Collector of Treasures*, Garesego cannot deal with the trauma caused by the white characters; thus he vents out his frustration, anger and bitterness by ill-treating the female characters with whom he associates. This is how he is able to best deal with the trauma and psychological turmoil caused by white rule. It can even be said that it is the white characters that made Garesego to be a cruel, heartless and inhumane person.
It is important to reiterate that it is not only the black characters that are ill-treated and discriminated against by the white characters; Bessie Head illustrates this in the world of her coloured characters that face more struggles and identity issues than the black characters. In contrast to Lessing, Head provides a different angle into the lives of the characters and their emotional and psychological issues. Instead of focussing on the mental effect on the black characters in society, she focuses on a character, like herself, of mixed descent. In Head’s *A Question of Power*, Elizabeth, a character of mixed descent, is more adversely affected than the black characters as she can not find her place in society. The theory of Frantz Fanon was utilised in order to explain the psychological impact on characters of mixed descent and how contact with the white world affects their identity.

Head, like Lessing, also examines power issues between characters; however, she does not just portray the battle for power between the races; she goes further and pays attention to the power battle between people of similar ethnicity. The characters of mixed descent in *A Question of Power* reinforce the notion of intra-group conflict as there is conflict between those coloured characters that seem to have more power than the others. She also pays attention to inter-group conflict between the races and how they are in constant competition with one another.

Gender inequality in the texts can be said to result from intra-group conflict as there are more genetic differences between men and women than there are between people of different races. Women, as a group, are the category of people who were most affected by the society categorised by unequal opportunities. All women of Southern Africa, be it Blacks, Whites and
Coloureds were oppressed based on the fact that they were female. Firstly, the white women were in a better position than the women of colour, as they were not oppressed by their race, but were oppressed because of their gender. The black and coloured women, on the other hand, were subject to double oppression – that is oppression based on both race and gender. With this said, they were even more subjugated than the black males who were of a higher status than the females.

In a closer examination of the ordered Southern African society, the focus is also on repressive roles assumed by women in society. In analysis of these feminist issues, theories of Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray are significant in the analysis of these issues in the texts. Judith Butler shows particular interest in how individuals in a society live their lives according to the gender roles which they are required to enact. Thus, she pays specific attention to the construction of gender identity in a society.

Based on this, the women in the fictional societies of Lessing and Head place themselves in an inferior position as they perform their roles as women in a way that they are expected to act determined by the male characters. Luce Irigaray discusses the three categories into which women are placed: the mother figure, the virginal woman and the prostitute (Irigaray 807). These categories represent the different social values that men place on women. In the texts these categories are clearly visible as most of the male characters use the female characters primarily for sex or for reproduction.

Head focuses on the double oppression faced by the female characters in “The Collector of Treasures”. In this text she portrays the typical male figure in African society who mistreats women and views them as inferior. Luce
Irigaray’s theory was effective in the analysis of this story as the worth of the female characters is depicted by Head as being linked to their sexual worth to men. The women are either only useful for pleasurable sex or they are used for their reproductive abilities.

Judith Butler’s theory was also applicable here as she claims that the women in a society are able to transform their expected behaviour. Thus, she argues that women must not conform to the demands of the men in society; instead, they must conform to their own needs and way of life. Dikeledi in “The Collector of Treasures” is a character who exemplifies this theory; she reaches a stage in her life where she is unable to deal with a chauvinist husband who tries his utmost to make her life difficult. The pain caused by the oppression is just too much for her to handle and she resorts to murdering him. She is so determined to free herself from oppression that the fact that she faces imprisonment and separation from her children does not deter her.

An important aspect highlighted in the text is that this crime is not unique; she is portrayed as one of the many female characters who face prison time for the same crime. Gender inequality is also a theme prevalent in A Question of Power as Head uses this novel as an opportunity to express her views on the subject. In this text she explores the effects of patriarchy through an alternate lens and in more detail than in “The Collector of Treasures”. Head pays particular attention to the psychological impact of gender oppression on the female characters in the story and how men are the primary cause of the psychological problems endured by the female characters.
It is evident that Elizabeth’s life is smothered by the imaginary male characters of Dan and Sello, illustrating that patriarchy is an inescapable part of the female characters’ lives. She reinforces the hopeless situation of the female characters by comparing Dan to Hitler. Just as Hitler had a great influence on a number of people, Dan has the same negative influence on the females. This behaviour and the roles imposed on women is examined using Butler’s performative theory as the male characters perform their authorial roles while at the same time women perform their submissive role in society, the roles that are deemed applicable to their specific genders.

As in “The Collector of Treasures”, Head also emphasises how the male characters use sex as an oppressive tool resulting in most of the female’s detestation of the act. This is imperative to the study of female subjectivity as sex is one of the main causes of gender oppression. In both texts Head also places much emphasis on the penis, the root of phallocratic logic. In “The Collector of Treasures”, Dikeledi murders Garesego by cutting off his genitalia, in this way she is eradicating the root of the problem. In the same way, she emphasises the power of the penis through her character of Medusa in *A Question of Power* which represents men’s castration anxiety. She also uses this character to emphasise gender role reversals where Medusa represents female characters seeking sexual and physical power.

This study proves that the female characters in the fictional world of Doris Lessing, even though of a different race to those of Head, face the same predicament with regard to the men in their society. In Lessing’s fictional societies she also portrays the double oppression of women, whereas at the same time she also focuses on the white female characters in the text.
and the oppression that they too face. Thus, Lessing’s focus is on how all female characters, regardless of race, are required to live according to societal expectations in Rhodesia.

Based on this, it is noticed that there is just as much conflict between members of the same hegemonic group as there is between members of different hegemonic groups. The conflict between the white male and female characters can be attributed to the constant competition between the two groups and their role and significance in society. Mary, as a female character is expected to be the homemaker while Dick is the breadwinner. Even though Dick is not generating a sufficient income, he will not allow Mary to work and pursue a career. Thus, like Head’s female characters who face double oppression, Mary also faces the same issues. It is noted that Mary is not oppressed because of her skin colour, but she, as a white character is oppressed by her class.

Interestingly, Lessing does not explore gender issues in “The Old Chief Mshlanga”. In this way, she illustrates the insignificant role women play in the fictional society, and in society at large. Lessing does not give the character a name for a specific purpose – to illustrate the silencing of women and their marginalized roles in society. The insignificant role of the black female characters in society is also portrayed in the text as Lessing completely excludes black female characters from this story. Thus the placement of the black female characters at the bottom level of the social hierarchy in Southern African society is mirrored.

The point Toni Morrison discusses in “Playing in the Dark”, pertaining to racism in literature is a valid point as in both texts, racial and gender
oppression does not only impact the victims of inequality, but it also affects the perpetrators of oppression. In both Lessing’s and Head’s texts examined in this study it is not just the victims who are psychologically affected and scarred by the actions of the xenophobic characters. The perpetrators of racism in these fictional worlds are also psychologically affected as their constant hatred and schemes to create miserable worlds for the subjugated characters has a negative effect on them as well.

In “The Old Chief Mshlanga”, Lessing illustrates the consequence of racial discrimination on the perpetrator through the actions and feelings of the nameless main white character in the short story. The main character begins to experience conflict when her conscience begins to play on her mind and she begins questioning her unjust behaviour. Furthermore, she reaches the realisation that her behaviour is ridiculous and as a result, experiences internal conflict.

The suffering of the perpetrator is also reinforced through the character of Mary Turner in The Grass is Singing. Her intense hatred for the black characters and her efforts to overpower them has destructive psychological effects on her psyche. Mary’s suffering as a perpetrator goes further than that of the nameless character in “The Old Chief Mshlanga” as she ends up driving herself to a nervous breakdown, and ultimately to her death.

Unlike Lessing, who paints a clear description of the psychological suffering of the white perpetrators of racism, Head focuses more on the portrayal of the perpetrators of gender inequality. In “The Collector of Treasures”, Garesego aims to live according to societal expectations that he has become almost robotic in his actions and behaviour. Head also portrays
him as a character that has no conscience or sense of guilt concerning his malicious actions.

To further investigate the suffering of the perpetrators of racial and gender oppression in the texts, in A Question of Power, Bessie Head makes the point that it is the perpetrator who is more entrapped than the victim, as, socially; they are obliged to conform to the “normal” behaviour portrayed by the other characters in the fictional society. She also illustrates how the perpetrators do not script their own lives or world. Thus, a valid point to make is that both perpetrator and victim are entrapped in the circumstances prevalent in their societies. Furthermore, the perpetrator suffers to a greater extent than the victim as their rules for living are constituted for them to maintain and strive toward. If they do not conform, they are denigrated by the other conformist characters in the texts.

The Grass is Singing, “The Old Chief Mshlanga”, A Question of Power and “The Collector of Treasures” are texts that highlight the societal issues faced by Doris Lessing and Bessie Head, as these texts are created based on their experiences of these issues and the influences thereof on them as individuals in Botswana, South Africa and Rhodesia. The focus on Lessing, a white African author and Head, an African author of colour, allows one to compare the lives and writing of the two writers, drawing the conclusion that all individuals, no matter what skin colour, were negatively affected by the era of racial oppression. The works also emphasise the attitudes of the fictional characters based on the hostile attitude of the actual individuals in the Southern African society.
The literature of Southern Africa underwent many changes in a period of transformation. As opposed to the previous silencing of most black Southern African writers, this period allowed these authors, especially black female authors, to narrate their experiences. Prior to this era of opportunities for black writers, the black Southern African women’s writings of the sixties to the nineties dealt with different facets of a displaced people (Mphahlele 169). It was a struggle for these writers to display their texts to readers as well as to gain recognition as African writers.

At present many black writers have more freedom in their writing; however, some are still dealing with their personal struggle against the inequalities of that era. The change in literature in Southern Africa is underlined by the fact that fiction has been written in all of Africa’s official languages depicting various African cultures. This illustrates how writers are creating texts in their mother-tongue languages in order to carry their tradition and culture through their work.

In conclusion, the texts and theories discussed in this study still remain of significance today. A careful reading and scrutiny of these texts by Lessing and Head allows the reader to gain knowledge of, and experience the lives lived by these authors, and the significant impact their experiences have on their writings. Furthermore, one can actually observe the extent to which society affected writers and impacted on the creation of their texts. Engagement with the Lessing and Head texts also adds to the reader’s knowledge of the issues prevalent in an era of racial oppression, and, thereby increases the reader’s literary understanding and knowledge.
The theories examined are also of importance as these encourage readers to analyse the issues faced by all Africans in the pre-democratic and post democratic society and to demonstrate how life in Southern Africa has changed. Consequently, these theories underline how individuals are the ones responsible for change in society’s attitudes. It was the people of Southern Africa that were responsible for the racism and racist ideologies in African society, thus, critical race theory and cultural studies allows individuals to reflect on how they have the power to rectify and change a racist and patriarchal society with the hope of an improved future.
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