

**Research Article**

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## Ethnicity, identity and the search for a new social order: A study of Zakes Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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**Abstract:** This research paper examines ethnicity and identity as represented in Zakes Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. In the reading of these novels one realises that the South African and Indian societies still face ethnic rivalry which has been a perennial problem from time immemorial. The bone of contention underlying this research is the fact that Zakes Mda and Arundhati Roy in their texts present societies fragmented by ethnic rivalry and identity crises which have hindered the effective evolution of these societies. This paper thus, seeks to answer the following questions: How is the fragmented nature of South Africa and India presented by Mda and Roy and what

strategies are adopted by characters in these novels to remedy this situation? As a follow-up to these questions, this paper hypothesised that Zakes Mda and Arundhati Roy in similar ways highlight the predicaments of their societies and propose reconciliatory strategies through which these societies can evolve. To proceed with this study, we have chosen the postcolonial theory which aims at scrutinising the inter-human relationships in these societies as presented in these novels. Throughout the analysis, we realised that in societies with many ethnic groups, relationships are developed based on colour or tribal lines, or upon the binaries of the Manichean Allegory, which have a great impact on the relationship between characters. This led to the conclusion that a future space of peace, harmony and fraternity can only be achieved if characters express tolerance, respect each other, and above all reconcile their differences.

**Keywords** – Discourse, Ethnicity, Identity, Ideology, Postcolonial, Racial other

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to explore ethnicity and identity which are topical issues in our contemporary societies. In formally colonised societies, identities are ascribed on characters based on their skin colour and ethnic background. South Africa and India have a rich history of oppression, racism and ethnic rivalries which have been a hindrance to the development of these post-colonial communities. In most cases, legislation has been passed as a measure to eradicate these trends but writers and literary critics propose strategies which reveal that the destiny of each community lies in the goodwill of its people towards fraternity. The stories recounted by authors about these communities are touching, and at the same time interesting since they give insight into the true nature of man in

the face of difference. In effect, when people of different backgrounds come together, instincts of rejection and considerations of otherness hinder cooperation. However, these authors devise strategies for the resolution of such racial and ethnic conflicts. Thus, this literature is a presentation of the South African and the Indian space destroyed through discourse and repression and the reconstruction of these spaces through the vision of the different authors.

Ethnicity and class are topical in South Africa and India. They constitute some of the factors of stratification that characterise colonial domination in these societies. In *The Madonna of Excelsior* and *The God of Small Things*, there is a plethora of different groups that can be classified as the dominant and the dominated or better still as masters and servants. The latter group faces political, ethnic and patriarchal oppression. In these novels, we are faced with ideologies that depict people of different racial groups and caste systems as basically different and thus are placed in the position of other. Abdul JanMohamed in his article "The Economy of Manichean Allegory", elucidates that motivated by his desire to conquer and dominate, the imperialist configures the colonial realm as a confrontation based on differences in race, language, social customs, cultural values and modes of production. Faced with an incomprehensible and multifaceted alterity, the European theoretically has the option of responding to the other in terms of identity and difference (Ashcroft, et al., 1995b, p. 18). This provokes violence as the colonised strives to reverse the status quo.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory chosen for this work is the postcolonial theory. It refers to a set of critical perspectives in literature that grapple with the legacy of colonial rule. As a literary theory, it deals with literature produced in countries that were once or that are presently colonies of other countries. It can still be better described in the words of Elleke Boehmer as a literary analytic approach about the "conditions in which colonised people seek to take their place forcibly or otherwise as historical subjects" (Boehmer, 1995: 3). Postcolonial theory further involves analysis of the dilemmas of developing a national identity in the wake of colonial rule, the ways in which writers of colonised countries attempt to articulate and even celebrate their cultural identities and reclaim them from the colonisers. It also considers the way the knowledge of the colonised peoples has served the interest of the colonisers and how the knowledge is produced and used and the ways in which the discourse of the colonial powers is used to justify colonialism through the perpetuation of the images of the colonised as inferior. Edward Said's book *Orientalism* published in 1978 is considered to be the theory's founding work. However, other advocates of this theory include Chinua Achebe, John Lye, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, just to name a few. According to Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, postcolonial literary criticism is "the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (p. 12). From the claim of these various critics, the postcolonial theory aimed at debunking the status quo of colonialism. This theory will help us discuss the themes of otherness and resistance.

The postcolonial theory is supported by a variety of concepts but for the sake of this paper, we are going to use the concepts of otherness, resistance and hybridity. The postcolonial theory is supported by a variety of concepts. One of the major concepts of postcolonial theory is otherness. To John Lye, in an article entitled "Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory", "The western concept of the oriental is based, as Abdul JanMohamed argues, on the Manichean allegory (seeing the world as divided into mutually excluding opposites): if the west is ordered, rational, masculine, good, then the orient is chaotic, irrational, feminine, evil and many more." (<http://www.Brocku.ca/English/course/4F70/postcol.html>) This quote by John Lye is relevant because in our texts under study, characters are faced in situations that address them as other.

One of the most disputed concepts in postcolonial theory is hybridity. It commonly refers to "the creation of a new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonialism" (Ashcroft et al, 1995a: 118). These critics also highlight in the *Post-colonial Studies Reader* that the crossover inherent in the imperial experience is essentially a two-way process and postcolonial writing has focused on the hybridised nature of postcolonial culture as strength

rather than a weakness. As seen above, hybridity basically refers to mixture. The term originates from biology and was subsequently employed in linguistics and in racial theory in the nineteenth century. The history of hybridity is characterised by literature and theory that focuses on the effects of mixture upon identity and culture. A key text in the development of hybridity is Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* which analyses the liminality of colonial anxiety. His key argument is that colonial hybridity, as a cultural form, produces ambivalence in the colonial masters and as such alters the authority of power (p. 112).

Homi Bhabha explains the idea of a 'a new social order' as a contingent borderline experience that opens up in-between colonisers and colonised (Bhabha, 1994: 112). In this sense, hybridity is an ambivalent location, "a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures, between different hegemonies in active contention" (Bhabha, 1994: 206). Popi in *The Madonna of Excelsior* is a biological hybrid, a product of the relationship between Niki and Stephanus Cronje.

### 3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The bone of contention therefore, is that Zakes Mda and Arundhati Roy in their texts present societies fragmented by ethnic rivalry and identity crises which have hindered the effective evolution of these societies. The multiplicity of ethnic groups in South Africa and India where difference is expressed based on skin colour has adversely affected the idea of nationhood.

#### 3.1. Research Questions

The following questions will guide this study: How is ethnicity presented in the texts under study? How do characters resist ethnic repression psychologically and coercively? And what are the reconciliatory strategies adopted by characters in order to represent themselves as historical subjects?

#### 3.2. Research Hypothesis

This paper is predicated upon the hypothesis that Zakes Mda and Arundhati Roy in similar ways highlight the predicaments of their societies and propose reconciliatory strategies through which these societies can evolve. The current paper therefore, seeks to examine how Zakes Mda and Arundhati Roy highlight measures through which people in ethnically segmented societies integrate themselves as historical subjects, thereby making their societies a better place.

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OR METHODS

This paper makes use of the qualitative research design and analyses two novels chosen for the study. *The Madonna of Excelsior* by Zakes Mda and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. These novels were intentionally chosen for this study due to their contemporariness and the thematic issues raised in them as the authors painstakingly give an insight into ethnic issues and identity crises destroying the crux of present-day South Africa and India. Both novels were read and the thematic concerns raised were analysed using the comparative method of analysis as defined by Henry Remak in *Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective* (1961), and Gregory Reid in *A Prolegomenon to Comparative Drama in Canada: In Defense of Binary Studies* (2005).

### 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Through the reading of these novels, we realised that in countries like South Africa and India with many ethnic groups, relationships are developed based on colour or tribal lines. Certain groups are therefore considered inferior and their customs derided. Such groups are often excluded from the political sphere and are not given opportunities for economic growth. This provokes violence as the other strives to reverse the status quo.

### 5.1. Ethnic Repression in *The Madonna of Excelsior* and *The God of Small Things*

Ethnicity is one of the aspects that provoked colonialism/apartheid and it still prevails in contemporary South Africa and India. Ethnicity engulfs aspects of race and class, and shows how people of a certain cultural background or colour could perceive others they consider different. It constitutes some of the factors of stratification and identity that characterise colonialism/apartheid in South Africa and India. During the colonial/apartheid days, the relationship between the Indians and South Africans in most cases was developed based on colour and even tribal origins. This was because the whites considered the other races as inferior and thus exclude them from the economic and political sphere of their countries. This colonial/apartheid ideology of whites' superiority placed the blacks in a position of servitude in South Africa. The post-apartheid South African and Indian societies are still haunted by these ethnic rivalries and identity crises, hence accounting for the continuous violence and instability in these post-colonial societies. There are many instances in *The Madonna of Excelsior* and *The God of Small Things* whereby ethnicity has determined the relationship between characters, while leading to violence.

In *The Madonna of Excelsior*, the white minority treat the Africans on the basis of White/Black, master/slave, dominant/subaltern, self/other relationships. The whites consider themselves as the proper self and the Africans as the other. Due to this, the Africans receive poor treatments from the whites who classify them as sub humans. Such is the case experienced by Popi when she goes to the bank in order to cash a cheque. The queuing behaviour at the bank angers Popi a great deal. This is due to the fact that "White customers did not join the queue. They walked straight to the teller who would immediately stop serving the black customers to attend to the white one" (Mda, 2002: 153). Such a treatment by the whites on to the blacks is as a result of the fact that the former regard the later as different. According to Hall (1954), "Race prejudice is often due to predicate thinking" (p. 40). It is such thought pattern that drives the West to perceive the blacks negatively and as a result, implore derogatorily adjectives to describe them. It should be emphasised that such classifications of the natives is based on their skin colour. The West had associated black to stand for evil, backwardness, savagery, and irrationality. Thus, since the natives are dark in complexion, they are a replica of these vices according to the whites. David Hume supports this point by saying that "I am apt to suspect the Negroes and in general all other species of men ... to be naturally inferior to the whites" (Yarwood, 1982: 16). Therefore, the queues were put in place so as to enforce racial segregation. Due to this, the theme of racism is brought to light. Such humiliating treatments prove that the Boers consider the Africans as sub-humans and having no history. It is therefore not taken for granted the fact that Tjaart regards Popi as Popi and not Popi Pule. This means that Popi is not qualified to own a surname. Ashcroft et al (1995a) purport that "Postcolonial theory reflects the egregious classification of 'first' and 'third' world and contests the lingering fallacy that the postcolonial is somehow synonymous with the economically underdeveloped" (pp. 2-3). According to these critics, it is clear that the postcolonial theory basically 'de-centres' assumptions of superiority in any human society.

In this novel, Mda also presents the church as an institution which intensified the ideology of white's superiority. The church that Niki attends on Sunday has indications which prove that apartheid is encouraged by the church "...As a Calvinist people we Afrikaners have, in accordance with our faith in the Word of God, developed a policy condemning all equality and mongrelisation between White and Black. God's..." (Mda, 2002: 29-30). It is thus, clear that the church played a vital role in imposing white's supremacy over the natives. As a result, the church becomes a hindrance to national unity, peace and development. In Mda's novel, there exist separate churches for the whites and the blacks. Not only were there separate churches but that of the white "(w)as beautifully built of sandstone and roofed with black slate" (Mda, 2002: 29), while the Blacks fellowship in poorly constructed dilapidated buildings with leaking roofs (Mda, 2002: 28-29). This discourse of inequality between colonisers and the natives in South Africa was aimed at separating these races for political and economic domination.



Roy presents the height of British superiority in *The God of Small Things*, through the discourses used by the church. The church ascribed an identity to the Untouchable Christians so as to separate them from the other Christians. Roy narrates that:

When the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Puyalas (among them Velutha's grandfather, Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability. As added incentives, they were given a little food and money. They were known as the Rice-Christians. It didn't take them long to realise that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests...It was a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all. (Roy, 1997: 74)

From this citation, we see that the Untouchables in India witnessed a similar form of domination from the church like the native South Africans. These Untouchables saw the coming of Christianity as a blessing and the church as a place where they could get refuge since it preaches the message of equality and brotherhood. Ironically, they received a heavy hand of marginalisation from the church. The Untouchables and the native South Africans in this case, fall under the subaltern group. Gayatri Spivak, quoting Guha (1982), asserts that in the Indian context "people" and "subaltern classes" are used to describe those assumed to have no history and who cannot speak as opposed to the elite group (p. 26). This brings to light the concept of Center-Margin. Being at the margin, the blacks and the Untouchables could not attend the same churches with those at the centre. Christianity through the church helped in strengthening the colonialist idea of white superiority, thus creating an inferiority complex in the minds of the colonised.

Also, during apartheid, the blacks were considered as filth, and as dogs fit for servitude. Their relationship with the Whites was limited to the labour they provided. Pule is an example of the blacks who were cheaply exploited and abandoned to perish. Mda asserts:

Pule had returned the week before a shadow of the man he used to be. A fleshless body that coughed blood. The doctors have diagnosed him with phthisis... But his mouth and nostrils continued to spew blood ...This sickness of Pule's: It was like that with many men from Mahlatswtsa Location. They worked in the gold mines of Welkom, and when they came back, they were finished. Gold had eaten their lungs. Gold had drained them from all flesh and blood. They were gaunt. They were walking skeletons. (Mda, 2002: 134-135)

Pule represents the black South Africans who are exploited by the apartheid system and allowed to die. The image of a shadow used by Mda is to express the fact that before Pule returned, he had been drained to death by the whites. Mda also uses the metaphor "they were walking skeletons" (*Ibid*), to expose the lifeless state of all the men of Mahlatswtsa when they return from Welkom. This implies that these men return as 'living corpses', waiting for time to decide on their fate.

Also, the blacks in Excelsior were restricted from public places due to their skin colour. Popi asserts "(H)ere in Excelsior, we still enter the hotels only as cleaners" (Mda, 2002: 141). This supports the domineering attitudes of the whites who considered the blacks as sub humans. A similar situation can be seen in *The God of Small Things* where the Untouchable servants are considered filthy due to their ethnic background. Based on this consideration, they are expected to serve just as workers and are restricted from certain environments. "Mammachi didn't encourage Velutha to enter the house" (Roy, 1997: 77). Thus, the relationship between the Paravans and the Syrian Christian family is reduced to the binaries of master/servant, superiority/inferiority, dominant/subaltern relationships. The Touchables believed that the Paravan could pollute them if they were allowed to come closer to them. This explains

why a Paravan could not enter the house of a touchable and was even forbidden to touch what Touchables touched. Mammachi asserts, "As a young boy, Velutha would come with Vellya Paapen to the back entrance of the Ayemenem House to deliver the coconuts they had plucked from the trees in the compound. Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touch" (Roy, 1997: 73). Such treatment is due to the fact that the Untouchables were perceived by the Touchables as different and thus, treated them as such. The postcolonial critic John Lye (1998), describes this as otherness.

The Touchables just like the whites in *The Madonna of Excelsior* treat the Untouchables as subalterns. Velutha suffers a dual form of maginalisation due to his caste and because of his extreme black colour which is a mark of 'inferiority' in his society. Ironically; "He was called Velutha – which means White in Malayalam – because he was so black" (Roy, 1997: 73). This also implies that the predominantly Hindu religion in India is not different than Christianity because both advocate racial discrimination. It is for this reason that the community identifies Velutha as being extremely inferior. Baby Kochamma even wonders how Ammu managed to survive the disgusting presence of Velutha when she says: "How could she stand the smell? Haven't you noticed, they have a particular smell, these paravans?" (Roy, 1997: 78) With all these, it is clear that being a caste in India prevents you from interacting with others in the society hence, preventing you from achieving greatness. Dooley (2007), claims that Untouchables are the scapegoats of a society environmentally and culturally infected and broken at every level of its being. Evidently, because of his inferior caste, Velutha is condemned to remain an invisible man who leaves "no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors" (Roy, 1997: 216). Velutha's skin colour therefore makes him to become a mirage in his community. Fanon (1962), pictures this racial prejudice when he says "White and black represent the two poles of a world, two poles in perpetual conflict: a genuinely Manichean concept of the world... I am white: that is to say that I possess beauty and virtue, which have never been black. I am the colour of the daylight" (pp. 33-4). Such stereotypical claims are deeply rooted in the psyche of the whites as they labelled those they perceive as 'Other' (the natives) as lacking "beauty and virtue", while they stereotyped the 'Self' as "beautiful, angelic and civilised". The agenda behind such stereotyping was to prove that the indigenous people were in dire need of help, hence, justifying the purported white civilising mission which aimed at 'saving' the indigenous population. Due to his colour, and as an Untouchable, Velutha is considered to have a particular smell that is capable of polluting the Touchable. Added to this, his kind as well as the Blacks in South Africa are exempted from mingling with anything that has links with the Whites.

The untouchables in *The God of Small Things* had witness an even worse treatment during the pre-independent period. The indignities that the untouchables had undergone in a caste bound society is brought to light when Mammachi recounts the pre-independence period to Estha and Rahel:

Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint. In Mammachi's time, Paravants like other Untouchables, were not allow to walk on public roads, not allow to cover their upper bodies, not to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. (Roy 1997: 73-74)

This excerpt demonstrates the degree of harsh treatment experienced by the Untouchable during the pre-colonial period. In the post-colonial epoch, things are expected to change but we see the contrary as they face an even worse treatment than in the past. The Touchables thus assume the position of the colonisers and treat the Untouchables as people having no identity. In the post-colonial point of view, this practice is known as othering. Since the former is civilised, ordered, masculine and rational, the latter is uncivilized, disordered, barbaric, inferior, and evil (Ashcroft et al, 1995b: 18). However, the savage is sometimes perceived to possess a primitive beauty. (Tyson, 2008: 420). The fact that Mammchi laments the wasted talent of Velutha proves that he possesses a primitive beauty. "If only he

hadn't been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer. He mended radios, clocks water-pumps. He looked after the blumbing and all the electrical gadgets in the house... (Roy, 1997: 75-76) Velutha remains a mute spectator even though he is pregnant with talents. Chacko further confirms to this when he says "An excellent carpenter with an engineer's mind. If it wasn't for –" (Roy, 1997: 277). A similar situation of this primitive beauty is seen in *The Madonna of Excelsior*. The Afrikaners in South Africa in a similar manner considered the black women as filthy, uncivilised, backward irrational and evil. However, they still find much pleasure in the 'dirty black thighs' of these same black women.

On the issue of language, the Boers consider Afrikaans as the best and ultimate language to be used in the board. This was to stress the 'superiority' of their culture since language denotes culture, while exposing the inferior status of the other languages. This issue of language is one of the causes of the so many clashes between Popi and Tjaart during the board meetings of Excelsior, especially when Popi proposed that "The council minutes and agenda should no longer be in Afrikaans, but in English" (Mda, 2002: 178). This proposal received a categorical objection from the National Party members who objected in strong terms "We all speak Afrikaans... Our proceedings are in Afrikaans" (*Ibid*). According to Popi, "Afrikaans is the language of the oppressor!" (Mda, 2002: 179) and it is also "The language over which people died" (Mda, 2002: 180). This excerpt portrays the fact that though apartheid has been dismantled, the memories of the sufferings is yet to be forgotten by the people. It is for this reason that even the language of the Boers is perceived by Popi and other characters as a representation of domination and subjugation. Popi's reactions force us to think that the language is the cause of the death of all South African heroes. However, the language symbolises the white colonisers who oppressed the blacks.

In the same line of thought, we see the superior status of English language as opposed to Malayalam in *The God of Small Things*. This is seen in the exaggerated preparation and rehearsals made by the Syrian Christian family to welcome Chacko's Ex-English wife. Such exaggerated preparations exposes the veneration of the west by the native Indians. Again, this brings to light the inferiority complex of the self embedded in the minds of the natives who now consider their culture to be less deserving to that of the west. This is seen in Baby Kochamma's actions towards Estha and Rahel: "Baby Kochamma eavesdropped relentlessly on the twins' private conversation, whenever she caught them speaking in Malayalam, she levied a small fine which was deducted from their pocket money...she call them I will always speak in English ... she had made them practice an English song on their way back" (Roy, 1997: 36). This was aimed at creating an impression on the mind of the English visitors. Thus portrays how some Indians adore the English language to their home language which they themselves considered to be inferior to English language. Baby Kochamma's sense of inferiority complex at being Indian makes her to "speak with an artificial accent and ask Sophie Mol questions on Shakespeare's *Tempest*" (Roy, 1997: 144). This is to illustrate her credentials to the English woman. Baby Kochamma represents the indigenous Indians who have been made to believe that they reside in the 'heart of darkness' as Roy puts it. The darkness in this case refers to the subjugation and ignorance of the colonised people in Kerala, who have been made to believe in their own inferiority. It is such 'darkness' that causes Baby Kochamma to speak with an artificial accent and even fines the children for speaking Malayalam in the presence of the English guest.

## 5.2. Countering Racist Ideologies and Discourse

The level of ethnic rivalry in South Africa and India could only lead to the reactions of the oppressed communities as they developed strategies to combat oppression and domination. According to postcolonial critic Elleke Boehmer (1995), the postcolonial theory is a literary analytic approach on literature about the "conditions in which colonised people seek to take their place forcibly or otherwise as historical subjects". One of such strategies according to Fanon (1962), is resistance. There are many moments of resistance against repressive structures by characters in Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* and Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

In *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Popi discovers a terrible situation at the Bank. What shocked her is that “[t]he white customers did not join the one queue... It was the same when Tjaart Cronje entered. He went straight to the head of the queue.” (*Op cit*) This situation causes her to fall into a trance. Popi could not stand such discrimination. Through her thoughts, we realised that she was not happy. “Anyway, what made Tjaart Cronje think he could just walk at the head of the queue and get service when she had been waiting in the line for almost twenty minutes? Was it because he was Tjaart Cronje? And she was just Popi? ... She was fuming inside while she displayed an indifferent outside” (Mda 2002: 154). Racism thus incited resistance which could be mental or physical as mentioned earlier. Through the rhetorical questions, we discover the anger and resistance in Popi. She is Popi Pule who comes from a background of people who serve God and are respectful. Therefore, she too has a culture and identity which makes her equal to Tjaart. Even though she is silent, psychologically, she is in conflict with Tjaart. In between Popi and Tjaart, there is a third space. According to Homi Bhabha, it is a space of conflict due to the fact that Popi is in disagreement with Tjaart’s behaviour. Here, the racial other interrogates the subaltern status ascribed on to her by the colonisers. She is in disconformity with the positioning attitude of the line which becomes questionable. The one line is the new dispensation of South Africa which represents the rainbow colour. But the Afrikaners do not respect the line as they simply move straight to the teller. This is what makes Popi angry and she resist by interrogating such attitudes. The type of resistance presented by Popi is characteristic of moments in the colonial setting when characters react internally but remain silent due to socio-ideological circumstances. In addition, Popi is not only fuming in anger due to the fact that she has been deprived of her right. She is boiling in anger because in *Excelsior* the Boers refer to the Africans as boys and girls. A surname has an attachment to a family background and history. The fact that Tjaart refers to Popi with no surname meant that Popi had no history. Thus, Popi reminds him that she is Popi Pule. Popi does not however perceive herself as a subaltern and this idea incites resistance in her psyche.

Following the inhuman treatments received by the local community from the Boers, many youths as seen in *The Madonna of Excelsior*, joined movements which aimed at resisting apartheid by going underground for guerilla activities. Mda tells us the following about Viliki:

He had the tendency to disappear for days on end. And no one knew where he was. No one but Popi, for after she had pestered him enough, he had confided in her about his activities. He had joined the guerrilla forces, those who were fighting to liberate South Africa from the oppression of the Boers. He was working for the underground olitical movement [...] He crossed the Caledon river every week to smuggle out young men and women who were going to join the forces of liberation. Young men and women who came from all over South Africa, and were directed to his conduit by cell leaders. He took them across the river where he introduced them to Maseru-the only guerrilla leader he met. From there, some of them would be smuggled out of the country for military training, after which they would be infiltrated back to cause havoc to the enemy.... (Mda, 2002: 125-128).

In this quotation, we discover the potent role played by the movement in the resistance and rejection of apartheid. Due to the torture that these characters received they are forced to put up coercive resistance against the rule through apartheid. There were several armed underground groups during the struggle against apartheid. Viliki belongs to an anti-colonialism team and teaches his sister songs of liberation. The songs of liberation he teaches Popi are intended to sow a seed of awareness, fury and obsession in the move to overhaul repression. These songs bring out the optimistic spirit of Viliki about the movement and its goals towards liberation.

Another moment of resistance against white ideologies and discourse in *The Madonna of Excelsior* is seen when Popi is mocked by Tjaart on the hairy nature of her legs. Being a coloured, the dark hairs on her legs are so visible



such that some whites see her as uncivilised and not as a lady. When she discusses the essence of a library to the locality that is “going to cultivate a new culture of reading in the natives” (Mda, 2002: 194). Tjaart who is in disagreement with the project because he is against the development of the blacks, turns in anger towards Popi and insults her hairy legs. Tjaart retorts; “What do you know of culture when you can’t even shave your legs?” asked Tjaart Cronje looking at Popi’s legs with disgust. “[Popi] is no lady”, insisted Tjaart Cronje. “Ladies shave their legs. She doesn’t. She is therefore no lady” (*Ibid*). According to Tjaart the white’s culture is supreme and must be copied by the Blacks, Coloured and Indians in South Africa. Popi is coloured and her refusal to abide by the leg-shaving culture of the Whites gives her the ascription of an uncultured woman. She later makes her refusal to the leg-shaving by telling who she really is to Lizette de Vries: “But I am not a white woman!” screamed Popi. “I am not white,” insisted Popi. “I am a Masotho girl” (Mda, 2002: 198-9). Popi perceives beauty in her colour, outlook and cultural values and refuses to be acculturated irrespective of the ideology and discourses of the racist Boers in her community.

There are also moments of resistance against repressive structures in Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. In this novel, characters stand to resist economic exploitation, domination and marginalisation which have eaten their society for a long period. Roy asserts:

Their comrade in the Trivandrum would march to the secretariat and present the Charter of the people’s Demands to Comrade E.M.S. himself. The orchestra petitioning its conductor. Their demands were that paddy workers who were made to work in the fields for eleven and a half hours a day – from seven in the morning to six-thirty in the evening – be permitted to take a one-hour lunch break. That women’s wages be increased from one rupee twenty-five paise a day, to three rupees, and men’s from two rupees fifty paise a day to four rupees fifty paise a day (Roy, 1997: 69).

The march to the secretariat is a potent side of resistance against economic exploitation where by demands are made to improve upon the livelihood of the workers. As can be seen in the above excerpt, Coercive resistance through demonstrations was potent in erasing economic exploitation in India. Another instance of resistance can be seen through Velutha’s skills and his love affair. The Untouchable through his skills makes a space in the world of the Touchables and becomes a victim in the “Love Laws”. Thus, he becomes successful in making the “unmixable” mixable. This highlights the opposing forces that Velutha and Ammu nurtures within them; “They broke the love laws that lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much” (Roy, 1997: 328). Despite the dictates constructed by the society regarding inter-human relationships in India, Ammu from the upper caste and Velutha from the lower caste decide to go against these laws and allow nature to play its role by following their hearts. Even though the cost of his actions is his life, he becomes a great figure of admiration as the readers sympathise in his tragic end. He thus, becomes a figure of the ‘Small Things’ such as love, unity and fraternity which the contemporary society has ignored. His greatness is brought to light when he is compared to ‘Caesar’ (Roy, 1997: 38).

### 5.3. The Construction of a New Social Order

This section goes beyond the examination of the prowess of coercion and examines other models applied by characters in post-colonial and post-apartheid societies, which have gone beyond colonialism and are part of this contemporary space of globalisation. In this contemporary context, differences in race and customs still exist but the postcolonial writers and critics seek sites that could reconcile humanity. We shall be examining the potency of these sites in this contemporary setting where humanity must learn to adopt fraternity as the only option towards the elimination of xenophobic behaviour.

In *The Madonna of Excelsior*, characters experienced marginalisation, exploitation and rape in the hands of the Afrikaners. Niki for instance was stripped nude by her employer Madam Cornelia Cronje and she was bent on avenging. With the passage of time to post-apartheid Niki becomes a new character matching with the ideals of the new dispensation. In this regard, Niki is regarded as a model because despite all the humiliation, torture, and rape she experienced, she is able to forget everything and look towards the construction of a new South Africa. This is evident in her position in the crisis between Popi and Tjaart. Popi holds a deadly anger against her brother Tjaart since he constantly abuses her because of her skin colour. However, Niki tells her, “you must be nice to Tjaart” (Mda, 2002: 121). Niki has finally realised that peace can only be attained if characters genuinely reconcile their differences. Towards the end of the novel, Popi finally reconciles with Tjaart. “... Then Tjaart Cronje made some small talk about their days in the council. He did not talk about their fight. He recalled only some of the funny moments when the joke had been on him. Self-deprecating moments. Soon Popi was laughing” (Mda, 2002: 262). Tjaart apologises to Popi for his racist verbal violence against her. Thus, he now considers Popi human, deserved of dignified treatment. This is the type of new South Africa that Mda suggest where there will be no racial fight but rather a rainbow nation where all the colours are able to live peacefully. Therefore, Niki stance as a symbol of reconciliation. However, racial justice can only be attained through genuine reconciliation and compensation.

Viliki now the mayor of Excelsior is unable to forgive and accept people like Sekatle to join the Board because Sekatle was a sell-out during the period of resistance against apartheid. Viliki considers him as “nothing but an opportunist” (Mda, 2002: 180-181). Being on the side of reconciliation, Popi asks Viliki: “Where is your spirit of reconciliation, Viliki? (*Ibid*) This defeatist attitude is Eurocentric and benefits the oppressor. It robs the oppressed of an opportunity to demand justice for crimes perpetrated on indigenous South Africans. Until black South Africans are compensated for the more-than three decades of enslavement they went through under the Boers, this reconciliation the texts advocates is tantamount to what Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr referred to as ‘dry as dust religion’(1958).

Furthermore, Niki and Johannes Smit have carried on grudges since from the apartheid era. Niki’s hatred for him stems from the fact that he used her as an instrument for masturbation and succeeded in stealing her maidenhood. On his part, Johannes Smit is mad against Niki because she preferred Stephanus Cronje to him and also because she finally gets married to Pule. The height of his grudge towards Niki is seen when he treats Niki like an animal when he discovered her in his farm. Johannes released his dogs which attacked and ravaged Niki (Mda, 2002: 121). This evil treatment made Niki and Johannes Smit to be parallel lines. However, before Popi meets Tjaart, Johannes Smit takes the courage to discuss reconciliation with Niki. In this new era, he tells Niki: “I think we must declare a truce. We can’t live in the past forever. Bygones should be allowed to be bygones, Niki” (Mda, 2002: 261). It is thus clear that the whites have come to discover that in this new era reconciliation is a prerequisite for the advancement of South Africa.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy also presents characters who want to make an overhaul of their situation by employing other subversive strategies like the creation of third spaces rather than putting up coercive resistance. Ammu’s character, and the way she interacts with the people around her reflects the concept of hybridity highlighted by Homi Bhabha. Ammu’s decision to have an affair with Velutha from the Untouchable caste is something that captures our attention. Ammu remains indifferent and seems not to be part of the superior nature displaced by the other members of her family like Baby Kochamma. She understands the significance of the simplicity of life and thus courageously challenges the cross-cultural boundaries erected by the society. As a hybrid character, Ammu is perceived as a threat and as a disgrace by her siblings. Ammu is said to live in the “penumbral shadows between two worlds, just beyond the grasp of their power’ (Roy, 1997: 44). To Ammu, inter-caste interaction is a virtue that dismantles hegemony of any sort. Her marriage with Baba and subsequently, her relationship with Velutha, a paravan reveals that, “They broke the love laws that lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much” (Roy, 1997: 328). Therefore, these characters succeeded in dismantling the laws that

envelops them, hence, making the 'unmixable' to be mixable. Evidently, Ammu; "love by night the man her children loved by day. To use by night the boat that her children used by day" (*Ibid*). However, she pays the borderline crossing with her life. It is however sad that her death has not absolutely eliminate this vice from the India society. According to Pooja Jain-Grégoire in "How India can Stem the Rising Scourge of Racism Against Africans", for racial discrimination to be eradicated in this society, Indians should be sensitised about how Indians and people of Indian origin are able to live peacefully and prosper.

Also, Ammu can be considered a hybrid character in the way she considers neither her culture nor the English culture as inferior. Ammu's steadfastness to teach her children the Western way of life is to acquaint the children with the different cultures of the world so that they grow up as models in their society:

'How d'you do, Esthappen?' Margaret Kochamma said.

'Fine thank you.' Estha's voice was sullen.

'Estha,' Ammu said affectionately, 'when someone says How d'you do?

You're supposed to say How d'you do? back. Not "Fine, thank you" (Roy, 1997: 145).

From this citation, we see Ammu as an ideal character who represents national integration and unity. She expresses duality in the novel as a result of her knowledge of the Western and indigenous world. As a model, she is bent on teaching her children the Western culture while keeping intact their native sensibilities. Thus, such cultural balance encourages acceptance and unity. Towards the end of the text, the adult twins are presented as complete and comfortable, thanks to the education they from Ammu as children. Similarly, in *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Viliki becomes such an ideal hybrid character who sees beauty in Poipi his sister as well as in the seller of songs.

## 6. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has compared works of two authors from different areas that have never been studied together. Secondly, it reveals the perception of a male and a female author on the issue of ethnicity, class politics, and the resolution of conflict. This work will therefore serve as a beacon to people living in unfavourable conditions as it highlights subversive strategies, and the need to develop self-confidence, hope and the believe in oneself. A possible avenue for future research is "Ethnicity, Arts and Landscape: A study of Zakes Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Such a project entails a study on communities exceedingly burdened by ethnic rivalries and violence. This study aims at making a comparative study on the way both authors use arts and landscape to resolve conflict.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In the course of our analysis, we have shown how the authors weave the various themes and styles to pass across their message. One of the devices commonly used by the authors was metaphor. Most characters were used to symbolise striking issues in the community that the authors presented. The authors also made good use of vivid description aimed at ridiculing the practices of the society. These descriptions were often characterised by hyperbole which aimed at mocking the foes of their communities that have hindered the idea of nationhood. The novels present societies constructed upon the binaries of the Manichean Allegory of white/black, civilised/primitive and master/slave. Such classification resulted to conflict as the coloniser was portrayed to be civilized, metropolitan, organised and ordered while the colonised was presented as primitive, barbaric and savages fit for servitude. This helped to create an inferiority complex on the minds of those considered as the colonised. Due to all these, the colonised strived to resist the status quo.

Through the reading of *The God of Small Things*, we realised that Roy presents the plight of the Dalits who had been enslaved, oppressed and humiliated for so many generations. The idea of nationhood had been a challenge to

this community because it had failed to embrace the small things in life that brings harmony among people such as love, peace, justice, brotherhood and unity. These were the small things that gave meaning to life unlike money, power, fame and pride. Many Indians no longer observed the god of these 'small things' that brought people together. The neglect of these small things was also the cause of racial segregation, exploitation, dictatorship and violence in the South African society as presented by Mda in *The Madonna of Excelsior*. The neglect of these small things is also the cause of the continues violence in most African societies. A popular Nigerian musician called Tekno, points out that the decay, underdeveloped and fragmented nature of Nigeria is as a result of the neglect of these small things. Thus, in his music entitled "*Rara*", Tekno calls on the Nigerian community to "forget about the big things and pay attention to the small things..." Therefore, we realise that in multicultural and multiethnic societies, each group always seeks to assume superiority over the other groups. We also discovered that for a society to evolve, its inhabitants have to show self-interest ethnic tendencies and reconcile their differences. For these are stepping stones towards the idea of nationhood.

The analysis of *The Madonna of Excelsior* and *The God of Small Things* lead to the conclusion that a future space of peace, harmony and fraternity can only be achieved if characters are able to tolerate, respect one another, and above reconcile their differences. This is because it is through unity and national integration that political, economic and cultural growth can become a reality.

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