The Publishing Race:

a debate

By A.W. Misbach | Opinion

A note from the editor:

In October 2020, The Thinker received an open letter from Waghied Misbach as part of a call for papers on a special edition on "Race. Racism. Anti-Racism." As this letter was about what he termed, "the erasure of black lives" in publishing, I decided to publish the letter and invited Terry Morris from Pan Macmillan to respond in the interests of fairness and open debate.

Terry Morris, in turn, sent the letter to Fiona Snyckers. While Fiona Snyckers send me a response, it was not addressed as an open letter. As such, it has not been published here. What follows is the original open letter from Waghied Misbach, Terry Morris' response and finally Waghied Misbach's response in return. Due to publication deadlines for this issue, we have not been able to follow up on this debate any further at this time. The Thinker supports open debate and academic freedom. However, a portion of the first letter has been redacted with the author's permission, due to the potential for litigation. The Thinker encourages a scholarly engagement of ideas and does not serve as a vehicle for potentially litigious comment.

Pan Macmillan South Africa's Erasure of Black Lives: An Open Letter

Re: Pan Macmillan South Africa wanted my full manuscript, but signed a white author instead

Attention: Pan Macmillan South Africa MD Terry Morris

Dear Ms Morris

It has been two years since my last interaction with some representatives of your company and I think it is now time to write this open letter. I want to raise my concerns about your representatives' marginalisation of my work as a Black writer foregrounding characters and issues that have been ignored over many decades in academia and the publishing industry, and then signing up a white author to do a similar but highly flawed work, which raises issues of integrity and ethical responsibility. I will, over the course of this letter, sketch the background to my work and my submission to your company. I will then conclude with a specific critique on content, highlighting what I believe are the racist and Orientalist tropes in the work published by Pan Macmillan South Africa.

My novel The Girl with the Red Flower is a response to Nobel Prize laureate J.M. Coetzee's controversial Booker prize-winning 1999 novel Disgrace, from the perspective of the marginalised character Soraya, the Muslim woman who is portrayed by Professor Coetzee as a sex worker, who I consider a rape victim. My view goes against the almost overwhelming consensus of the literary establishment over two decades that she is not a victim of rape, in comparison with other female characters, which has resulted in scant critical attention and further marginalisation, a situation I consider to be the trahison des clercs. My novel is the creative component of an academic study at the University of the Western Cape, completed in 2017. F. Fiona Moolla, Professor in the English Department, supervised my work, and Professors Imraan Coovadia and Ashraf Kagee (from the University of Cape Town and the University of Stellenbosch respectively) assessed it cum laude.

After an initial submission to your company on 6 June 2018, your representatives responded positively on 25 June 2018 asking for the full manuscript of The Girl with the Red Flower and promising a review in six to eight weeks. Surprisingly, your company announced on 11 September 2018 that a white author, Fiona Snyckers, would write on the same topic, covering

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the same issues with a novel entitled Lacuna, which would highlight the plight of the character Lucy Lurie, who is also a rape victim in Disgrace. I will discuss later what I consider to be your company representatives' unsalutary conduct.

Worse still, Ms Snyckers, believing that Lucy Lurie was the only rape victim, lacuna, or missing voice in Disgrace, proceeded to exclude all the Black, raped women I had attempted to foreground in my work. Ms Snyckers and her supporters do not even recognise as a rape victim the student Melanie Isaacs, who is violated by Professor Coetzee's protagonist David Lurie. In addition, Ms Snyckers' novel is marked by several Orientalist (racist) tropes, as I indicated earlier. Only two critics, whom I will discuss later, unaware of my work and its connection to Lacuna and your company, have identified Lacuna as a work of 'privileged white feminism'.

Ms Morris, I now want to, as briefly as I can, talk about my 2017 academic study, in which I raise concerns about the portrayal of Soraya in Disgrace and in the critique that followed, including the use of the words 'sex worker' for people who are often forced to sell their bodies to live and feed their children, risking life and limb. I consider these people to be enslaved and rape victims. As you know, people of colour, particularly women and girls of colour, have long been

victims of rape during South Africa's slave, colonial, and apartheid eras – a violence that continues today.

Disgrace has divided opinion because of its perceived negative representation of Black people, with critical responses from several people, including the late Nobel Prize laureate Nadine Gordimer and Booker Prize winner Salman Rushdie. Professor Gordimer would write quite negatively about Disgrace, as quoted in J.C. Kannemeyer's insightful 2012 biography of Professor Coetzee, A Life in Writing. This criticism could well be equally applied to Ms Snyckers' Lacuna:

> In the novel Disgrace there is not one black person who is a real human being. I find it difficult to believe, indeed more than difficult, having lived here all my life and being part of everything that has happened here, that the black family protects the rapist because he's one of them. If that's the only truth he could find in the post-apartheid South Africa, I regretted this very much for him. (563)

The Girl with the Red Flower merges the character of Soraya with that of Mrs Noerdien, a Muslim assistant bookkeeper, who is another minor female Muslim character in Professor Coetzee's fictionalised autobiography, Scenes from Provincial Life (2011: 479–480). Mrs Noerdien is objectified, Orientalised, and presented as a docile, submissive stereotype by Professor Coetzee in the novel, through the eyes of the fictional John Coetzee. The surname Noerdien is actually Nur Al-Deen, Arabic for Light of the Faith, and is indicative of how Muslim people in the Cape have attempted to counter discrimination and sought to assimilate with Afrikaans- or English-sounding surnames, or have had their names spelt or mangled in this manner by white government bureaucrats.

Professor Coetzee juxtaposes the oppressed, industrious, and sexually-arousing Mrs Noerdien (she wears a headscarf and likely needs a male guardian, who is absent from the text as most oppressive, Black Oriental/African men usually are in the existential tales of white males), with benevolent Jewish male figures who own an auto-parts firm (480). This is similar to the way the exoticized, sexually industrious Soraya is placed opposite the disgraced and somewhat redeemed David Lurie, who may also be Jewish. (Ms Morris, for a possible etymology of the name David Lurie, consider Chaim Potok's 1975 novel In the Beginning, with the main character being an orthodox Jewish boy, David Lurie, growing up in the Bronx in the 1920s.)

Professor Coetzee's portrayals of Muslim women opposite Jewish men perhaps hints at what I view as his 'flexible positional superiority' over the Orient, which is all about power and dominance 'which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand', as Edward Said argued so convincingly in Orientalism, which I will discuss later with regard to Ms Snyckers' novel.

This is Professor Coetzee writing through the fictional John Coetzee: 'How does it happen that Mrs Noerdien, who wears a headscarf and is presumably Muslim, comes to be working for a Jewish firm, one where there is no male relative to keep a protective eye on her?' Professor Coetzee then uses the fictional John Coetzee to ask that if he were married to 'such a woman, what would it take for a man to traverse each day the space from the exalted heights of the feminine to the earthly body of the female?' (480).

Ms Morris, I am writing at a time of much debate on the value of Black lives. Your company has identified this as an important moment in history in a blog post on 26 June 2020, stating: 'In this seminal moment, remaining silent and neutral on these matters of representation and commitment to change is not an option.' Your blog talks further about developing Black talent and identifying new voices through your annual open window for submissions, as long as it also makes business sense. I remain a sceptic. I have waited two years in vain to see whether your company would do something significant with regard to my work, which is eminently publishable, no matter its harsh and 'anti-intellectual' tone. I wrote The Girl with the Red Flower in the manner I did as a challenge to the seemingly intelligent and ironic novels by white (and self-loathing Black) authors that obscure a real love for Black people.

I submitted The Girl with the Red Flower to your company during your annual 'open window' that you have identified as a positive mechanism to identify Black voices. Several questions arise: What are the obligations and ethical responsibilities of Pan Macmillan South Africa towards authors whose

work is solicited directly in this manner? I raise these questions because you had three chapters of my work and a full summary. Your representatives then asked for my full manuscript, which I contend means they read my summary and were very much interested in seeing more. What follows then is that they seemingly decided to ask a white author to write a similar work. When I sent two emails to your representatives with the essay I wrote as part of my 2017 academic work, as a means to seek some clarification on your promised review, your company fell silent. So, what exactly did your representatives need to see in my full manuscript?

There are similarities in our books: these include Soraya's unreliable narration in parts of the novel, and the foregrounding of a relatively minor character, although I do not consider Lucy Lurie to be as marginalised as Soraya in Disgrace: she speaks her mind, has agency, and makes her own decisions. She also has a full name and a complete family history. The other similarities between Lacuna and The Girl with the Red Flower are the focus on the life of a raped woman, her existential crisis, her involvement in legal wrangles, and having David Lurie as a crooked and immoral father (in my novel David Lurie is Soraya's husband) who is eventually convicted of sexual assault. The plot twist at the end of my novel, in which David Lurie is found guilty of sexual assault, is repeated exactly in Ms Snyckers' novel in slightly different circumstances. Why was her manuscript chosen for publication over mine?

In addition, the similarities extend to the critique of the largely white-controlled, publishing industry and academia; the debunking of the myth of white genocide; and in particular the critique of Professor Coetzee himself, who is one of many male authors who uses rape as a metaphor/allegory for political debates, apart from his quite Orientalist and racist depictions of Black people. In my view, Professor Coetzee is one of those super-literate writers whose Orientalism is often hard to identify, but not so with Disgrace. Ms Snyckers is less literate, but her Orientalism in Lacuna is equally easy to identify, although one would not think so if one reads or listens to the critics' positive reviews of her novel.

I would appreciate your company's representatives indicating whether this is a case of some kind of excusable lack of oversight involving some of Pan Macmillan South Africa's employees. There is the question of how to classify this type of conduct. Ms Morris, I look forward to your response to this.

Further, do your company's representatives believe that a Black man cannot write about a Black woman's life? Or that a Black man has no understanding of rape? Or that a boy or man cannot be raped by a man or a woman and therefore cannot conceive of a raped person's emotions? Or does your company simply think that the lives of a Muslim woman and her children and family are not worth the attention and investment?

What made you choose the white author when you clearly had a choice? I believe your representatives knew well that a novel challenging a world-renowned author like Professor Coetzee using the 'minor-character elaboration' genre has become increasingly popular and wanted the white author to gain all the benefits that would likely accrue from it. I wonder then how your current contracted Black authors fare in terms of your company's advertising and marketing spend, and support for literary agency representation and publication on international markets.

Of course, to emphasise a point I made earlier, I argue that your representatives' core belief was that Lucy Lurie was the only rape victim in Disgrace and that my story of Soraya was therefore not as worthy. This is what Soraya thinks about how she is presented to the world by her dead former husband, David Lurie, in The Girl with the Red Flower:

> She is convinced this is how a rejected lover would have wanted to present her: as half a person, with no real name and her two boys, her living, breathing children, also unnamed. In this he was much like his settler forefathers who, unable to possess the land they so desired, made the people invisible – a land without people. So, like those who came before her, she became an ephemeral woman, with no history, no past, no future, and not even an existential crisis. A figure from the margins of history, as David ironically described his own condition. But she was beyond a further border – a figure from the margins of the margins of history. It is a crime he committed. Not only did he shackle her with his words, he murdered her.

> Here she is waiting, hawking silence in the wings of a stage, for condolences or just an apology that no one is going to give. (1)

Ms Morris, as you may know, Soraya, her unnamed children, and invisible partner/husband, have been routinely ignored by academics studying Professor Coetzee in South Africa and around the world. A quick observation on her invisible partner/husband: as I indicated earlier, in many works by white authors, Black men are either rapists, villains, general layabouts, or lifeless two-dimensional ironic representations à la Professor Coetzee, who need to be shunted aside so that their abused women can be saved by the Rational and Sensitive White/Occidental/Western Man, as our own colonial masters had often told us. I deliberately muted the voice of the father of Soraya's children in my novel to make this point about what white authors do. On Soraya's presence in literary criticism, the academic and poet Gabeba Baderoon has written several insightful paragraphs in her excellent 2001 work Regarding Muslims (91–93). However, I do not agree with Professor Baderoon's defence of Professor Coetzee's portrayal of Soraya.

Ms Snyckers foregrounded characters in her novel Lacuna that have received widespread attention in academia and the literary media. I am sure you know just how much has been written about the existential crisis of David Lurie and the plight of Lucy Lurie – literally hundreds of mentions in journal and newspaper articles and books, apart from academics giving lectures and speaking at conferences around the world, while supervising tens of theses on Professor Coetzee's oeuvre that barely mention a word about Soraya. I am simply saying Black lives matter too.

Ms Morris, if you think that I am exaggerating about all this, I have a quite illustrative example that would indicate just how far this rabbit hole goes. I will summarise: Sue Kossew and Melinda Harvey of Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, edited a collection of essays Reading Coetzee's Women, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2019, based on the papers presented at a conference held in Italy in September 2016. The papers were written by academics from all over the world, all admirers of Professor Coetzee, who himself attended and delivered a speech. The papers consider all of Professor 'Coetzee's women' – his narrators, his characters, his relationship to women writers in South Africa and globally. The papers mention the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the literary world. There is much talk, and rightly so, of Lucy Lurie, at 124 mentions, but a lamentable lesser mention of Melanie Isaacs at 19, over whom there is a debate about whether she is raped or not. In contrast, there is not a single mention of Soraya or Mrs Noerdien.

In my novel The Girl with the Red Flower, I included Lucy Lurie as a rape victim and as a lesbian, as Professor Coetzee portrayed her, with a daughter from her rape, Anna Magdalena. Ms Snyckers 'unqueered' Lucy Lurie and erased her former partner, Helen, described in Disgrace as 'a large, sad-looking woman with a deep voice and a bad skin, older than Lucy' (58) for the purposes of exploring how a raped woman can get her libido back in an intimate relationship with a man. Perhaps it would have been more insightful to ask how abused people who identify as gay or lesbian, whose narratives are often marginalised in literature, would attempt intimacy with their own partners.

See Ms Snyckers talk about this at a panel discussion at the 2019 Franschhoek Literary Festival: 'The Women Left Behind: Who are feminists really fighting for? Fiona Snyckers and Ena Jansen (Like Family) discuss how good intentions can sometimes get in the way of impactful results in the pursuit of equality.' Strangely, none of the Black women left behind by Ms Snyckers in Lacuna, including Soraya and Melanie, are mentioned during the discussion.

The purpose of my work was not to marginalise Lucy: the issue of rape is far too important in this country to do that (although there is another view of Lucy's

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rape that I will discuss at another time). But I wanted to highlight that it was time to also write about the women of colour from Disgrace, because no one else seemed to have done it, bar Michelle Cahill with her short story 'Letter to John Coetzee' in 2016 that foregrounds Melanie Isaacs, although Professor Cahill does not identify her as a raped woman. Ms Snyckers and her supporters do not consider Melanie a rape victim, much like Professor Coetzee's former student David Attwell, the academic. Professor Attwell, who was also a participant at the Italian gathering, believes David Lurie is a 'near-rapist' despite forcing Melanie to have sex with him, and her repeatedly saying 'no', as quoted in Professor Kannemeyer's biography (559).

Before moving onto the specific critique of Ms Snyckers' work as containing quite marked Orientalist tropes, I want to quote here both Professor Coetzee and Professor Gordimer. Professor Coetzee, despite recognising how his own writing has been 'deformed and stunted' by apartheid, still continued to ironically silence and marginalise Black people in Disgrace. This quote is from his speech when accepting the Jerusalem Prize in 1987, twelve years before the publication of Disgrace, from his 1992 collection of essays, Doubling the Point:

> At the heart of the unfreedom of the hereditary masters of South Africa is a failure of love. To be blunt: their love is not enough today and has not been enough since they arrived on the continent; furthermore, their talk, their excessive talk, about how they love South Africa has consistently been directed toward the land, that is, toward what is least likely to respond to love: mountains and deserts, birds and animals and flowers. (97)

And this is what Professor Gordimer had to say about love and Professor Coetzee's Disgrace as quoted in Professor Kannemeyer's biography:

> Now in this elegantly and powerfully written novel there is no deep feeling (except, maybe...self-disgust), no love, until there is a need to put down a stray dog, the feeling for which is the sole life-affirmative emotion for anyone or anything in the professor. (562)

Ms Morris, I will now move onto the part of my letter that deals with what I consider to be the quiet violence of Orientalist nostalgia and 'privileged white feminism' because what writers do on the page, and publishers do in the boardroom, to vilify or marginalise or erase, can certainly be considered violence of a social, cultural, and economic sort. This entire argument is contained to some degree in my 2017 essay and novel, and is supported by Danyela Demir and Lucy Valerie Graham in their articles published in September 2019 and March 2020 respectively.

I need not repeat all their arguments. I choose here part of Dr Demir's argument in her review of Ms Snyckers' work: 'Who is the Real Gap?: Reviewing Fiona Snyckers Lacuna', which appeared in The Thinker Volume 81, published in the third quarter of 2019. Dr Demir states clearly that in Disgrace: 'the lacuna is not the white woman as Snyckers would have us believe. Coetzee's lacuna is the voice of the Black woman and the woman of colour: Soraya, Melanie, and a nameless Black sex worker, who David picks up from the side of the road towards the end of the novel, are the voiceless, the women without agency (73).'

Further, Dr Demir points out how 'Lucy's ordeal is 247 pages long while Melanie's rape is referred to as a 'misunderstanding'' (73). I make this same point in Chapter Two of The Girl with the Red Flower with Soraya thinking (the italics are indicative of Soraya's thoughts) about her dead husband David Lurie and identifying Melanie Isaacs as a rape victim:

> Does anyone want to know how many times that doos David mentioned me in his overrated story but never even gave my full name? Thirty times. Even Byron's dead Teresa is mentioned more than me at forty-six, and gets a surname and whole family history. Melanie, that student girl he raped, is at seventy-three. Bev Shaw, his married girlfriend, is at ninety-three. And how many times did he mention animals? Also more than me at thirty-seven. And dogs? Wanna take a wild guess? One-hundred-and-forty-one-fucking-times. I've counted, gone through every godforsaken page, that's how I know. (18)

I have added to the critiques by Dr Demir and Dr Graham by identifying Soraya as equally, if not more, marginalised than Melanie, and as a victim of rape because of the structural inequalities and violence in South Africa that force young women to sell their

bodies to make a living, risking not only their physical and mental health but also that of their families, particularly if they are mothers like Soraya, and possibly married, as Professor Coetzee has suggested with his portrayal of Soraya in Disgrace.

In addition, I want to argue that Ms Snyckers, having knowingly marginalised Soraya, the one Muslim woman in Disgrace, then makes a revealingly Orientalist statement through the character Lucy Lurie about Muslim women, indicating that she as a white feminist knows exactly what is on the minds of these nameless and faceless Muslim women, from some imaginary, homogenous group that she has concocted in her mind. This is much like the manner in which the superior Western Occidental considers and represents the homogenous Orient despite the dizzying diversity of ancient cultures and languages in Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East.

Reasonable questions to ask are these: What Muslim women is Ms Snyckers referring to, whom Lucy Lurie can so easily identify and label, and whose thoughts she can read? Are they feminists from Muslim/Asian/Oriental/Arab/Mideast/North African/Brown/Black backgrounds like several of her fellow writers at Pan Macmillan South Africa and journalists currently working in the media? Or does Ms Snyckers want to go further back to the older generation of activists, like the late Fatima Meer, many of whom have ancestry traced to Asia and Arabia? What, also, does Ms Snyckers think of men of this above category, or are they of a brutish type, of no intellectual consequence and easily brushed aside? This is what Ms Snyckers has Lucy Lurie say in Lacuna:

> I retreat into the world of my phone, scrolling through social media posts and news sites. It is a soothing world. Everything that appears in my feed is designed to reinforce my world view. I permit no cognitive dissonance to intrude. It is a world I can lose myself in for hours. I am in the middle of reading about '10 things that Muslim women wish white feminists would stop doing' when I become aware of a weight descending onto the bench next to me. It is a policewoman. She is fanning herself with a manila folder. (2019: 161)

What Ms Snyckers tries to say here about Muslim women highlights the 'two great themes' of Orientalism, which are 'knowledge and power'. This is how the late Professor Said rightly describes it in his seminal 1979 work Orientalism, which he uses as an example of how this was used by colonial administrators, including Arthur James Balfour and Lord 'Over-Baring' Cromer, as justification for the imperialist enterprise or mission civilisatrice in Egypt and elsewhere (32). This followed the work of those eminent scholars Silvestre De Sacy and Ernst Renan, two of their era's leading anti-Semites, erudite thinkers to a degree but lacking in their love for Arabs, Muslims, and Jews. They are, I argue, some of Professor Coetzee's literary forefathers, in setting up an Orientalist genre that allowed the rational and civilized Occident to study and then represent in journals, novels, poetry, and travel writing the barbaric, violent, and irrational Orient and Africa.

The whole idea that Ms Snyckers reinforces here is that to have knowledge of a thing is to 'dominate it, to have authority over it', as Professor Said describes it (32). This means Ms Snyckers' intelligent, academically trained Lucy Lurie knows the minds of these people from degraded civilizations and belief systems. In addition, they are not African like the other real Africans whom she refers to later, and to whom she looks for an education on rape and abuse. These Orientals, Ms Snyckers argues, can easily be countered with the understanding and rationality of the white feminist, who reads this post about the protests of Muslim women quite calmly, or as a 'soothing' read, as she puts it.

Further, it is not enough for Ms Snyckers to simply dismiss Muslim women, those half-literate and invisible Orientals who are not feminists like white feminists. She then goes on to set part of her novel in a run-down Bo-Kaap (a historically largely Muslim neighbourhood, as I have indicated previously), which is not populated by any real people, only poor, uneducated souls, with one clearly uneducated guard character speaking in the vernacular, or her version of it, of Kaaps, which Ms Snyckers mocks through Lucy Lurie, and then says that she knows exactly what she is doing and that she cannot participate in 'blackface' (269).

Apart from Ms Snyckers 'knowing' exactly how to speak like this person, one can reasonably ask here: would Ms Snyckers have dared to mimic/mock

the accent of a 'real' African, say a Xhosa-speaking person, in the same manner? This is similar to Professor Coetzee's Orientalist depiction of Soraya, in the opening pages of Disgrace, as uneducated and having no moral compass, similar to the ways in which Professor Coetzee portrays all the other Black characters throughout the novel (and in many of his other novels), including the sly and villainous Petrus and the mentally deficient Pollux. In Disgrace, this is how Professor Coetzee has David Lurie describe Soraya:

> In bed Soraya is not effusive. Her temperament is in fact rather quiet, quiet and docile. In her general opinions she is surprisingly moralistic. She is offended by tourists who bare their breasts ('udders', she calls them) on public beaches; she thinks vagabonds should be rounded up and put to work sweeping the streets. How she reconciles her opinions with her line of business he does not ask. (1)

Further, Ms Snyckers and Professor Coetzee adopt a position of superiority or 'architecture moralisée', as the late Linda Nochlin described it in her seminal essay 'The Imaginary Orient' which analyses French Orientalist painters including Jean-Léon Gérôme through the lens of Professor Said's Orientalist arguments. Professor Coetzee places the naked and desirable Soraya in the sparsely furnished, lifeless, and seedy flat at Windsor Mansions in Green Point, Cape Town; Ms Snyckers goes much further by describing Bo-Kaap as quite empty of Muslim people, rundown and neglected, in their colourful houses, an imaginary Bo-Kaap that hardly fits the reality of the diversity of the community. As Professor Nochlin states in the May 1993 edition of the magazine Art in America:

> The lesson is subtle, perhaps, but still eminently available, given a context of similar topoi; these people – lazy, slothful and childlike, if colourful – have let their own cultural treasures sink into decay. There is a clear allusion here, clothed in the language of the objective reportage, not merely to the mystery of the East, but to the barbaric insouciance of Moslem peoples, who quite literally charm snakes while Constantinople falls into ruins. (123)

Dear Ms Morris, I will have to end here, for the time being. I have so much more to say about the publishing industry, the continued depictions of imaginary backward African and Oriental peoples, and of course about Soraya. I hope we can initiate a conversation that would delve into these issues and find solutions that would benefit the industry and society.

Sincerely,
Waghied
A.W. Misbach

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Dear Mr Misbach

In acknowledgement of your open letter to be published in the The Thinker, Pan Macmillan South Africa appreciates this opportunity to respond where appropriate to some of the issues you raise.

We apologise unreservedly for the lack of follow-up in 2018 to the email you received requesting the full manuscript of The Girl with the Red Flower. We have a small local publishing team made up of three full-time employees and we make use of the services of a few freelancers, who understand our publishing ethos and commercial imperatives. The open submission period you refer to in 2018 is not one that we are proud of in terms of how it was managed. The in-house employee who was overseeing the submission process resigned and left the company at the end of August 2018. This departure unfortunately led to several tasks not being effectively followed up or completed, including the open submission period. There were several would-be authors, yourself included, who heard nothing more from us on their full manuscript submissions, which were not read or reviewed any further. This is extremely unprofessional, and it is a failure we acknowledge, which is why we offer our sincere apologies in this regard.

It is important for us to comment further on two related points. The first is that as publishers we absolutely guarantee and protect the intellectual property of the works and the authors who submit material to us. Each manuscript is unique to an author and there is no sharing of concepts or ideas between projects. We wouldn't have a business model if we didn't prioritise this.

The second point, which is related, is that however flawed our open submission process was in 2018, Pan Macmillan received the full manuscript of Lacuna by Fiona Snyckers a few days after The Girl with the Red Flower via the same open submission process. We do therefore feel that the accusation levelled against us that 'What follows then is that they seemingly decided to ask a white author to write a similar work' is untrue, unsubstantiated and unfair to Pan Macmillan and, more importantly, to Fiona Snyckers as an author, who had spent several years crafting Lacuna before submitting the manuscript to Pan Macmillan.

Our small team is unable to read all of the submissions received in an open submission period. As a result, we recruit a wider team of readers, both in-house and freelance, to aid us in the reading and review process. These readers are provided with guidelines but we do rely on their input and initiative. It was one of our trusted freelance readers who brought the initial submission of Lacuna to our attention and then recommended the manuscript to us for a closer look after she had reviewed the material received.

We have been aware of the shortcomings in the administration of our open submission process. As a result, we have taken steps to ensure that the opportunity for would-be authors is managed more effectively and closely to deal with the high number of submissions we receive.

Pan Macmillan is only able to publish four or five novels a year owing to our capacity and the relatively small consumer market for local novels. We don't therefore claim to have a flawless system and a model whereby we are able to publish as widely as we would like, but we do endeavour to provide a platform for diverse voices. A look at the fiction titles we have published over the past few years showcases a broad range of South African authors, and several of the novels published have gone on to win awards.

Finally, we note your critique of Lacuna and Disgrace; each of these novels has provoked diverse reactions from readers and critics. And that is, at heart, what we hope our fiction publishing contributes to: a local literary landscape that allows for a range of responses, questions, reflections and critique, which enrich the reading experience for all.

Yours sincerely
Terry Morris
on behalf of the Publishing Team

FEB 2021 RESPONSE TO TERRY MORRIS' RESPONSE

Racism and Islamophobia probe of Pan Macmillan SA urged
Full transparency and revelation of all facts in the public interest

Dear Ms Morris,

In response to your letter I acknowledge with reservations your unreserved apology for the manner in which The Girl with the Red Flower disappeared without trace during your company's Open Window period in 2018, while Fiona Snyckers' deeply flawed work on the same subject and in the same genre was published. Your explanation leaves several unanswered questions on transparency, which I believe is a disservice to me and the public.

I have rightly asked you several probing questions, sketching out possible scenarios of what may have happened, concerning the circumstances around the disappearance of The Girl with the Red Flower. And I have asked you about Lacuna's possible conversation with and similarities to The Girl with the Red Flower because Ms Snyckers was aware of my work in 2018, months before Lacuna's April 2019 publication (I have the screenshots from Facebook that attest to this, if you need to see them). You have now responded rejecting some of these possible scenarios that I posed. I believe I am the aggrieved party who had my manuscript lost, so I can also adopt my journalist hat to ask any further follow-up questions, in a bid to get access to all the facts for an interested public.

As a follow-up, I believe it is in the public interest for Pan Macmillan South Africa to launch a thorough independent probe on issues of process, representation and inclusion, including whether racism and Islamophobia exists within Pan Macmillan South Africa and then to publish the full findings. This would allow your readers/consumers to know the full details of what transpired, so that we can retain our trust in the intellectual products you produce with your suppliers/collaborators. I propose that this probe should include all your freelancers and editors, especially those involved intimately with Lacuna.

These are some of the questions I believe you should answer in the public interest: Who read my initial submission and made the assessment of the manuscript for further review? Who was this assessment sent to for approval and communication with me? Was this a senior person? If not, do you have junior employees making such decisions? You point out that one of your 'trusted freelance readers' flagged Ms Snyckers' work, can you indicate who read my work?

You say that the in-house employee who left at the end of August 2018 coordinated the submission process, but my email correspondence included one of your most senior executives, namely Sandile Nkosi, who is still with your organisation and is responsible for editorial coordination, which I assume happens at regular editorial meetings. I would like to know why Ms Nkosi did not flag my work to Publisher Andrea Nattrass, as would be expected from a senior employee.

Ms Morris, in your probe of racism and Islamophobia and institutionalised forgetting, I would urge you to ask why Ms Snyckers mentioned my work for the first time only on 1 February 2021, referring to 'an unpublished novel' without naming me or the title, in her interview and webinar with Sarah Mosoetsa, chief executive officer of the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences. What is further worrying to me is that Ms Snyckers did not acknowledge that Soraya and Melanie are rape victims. She simply said to Professor Mosoetsa that they are the 'marginalised' women from Disgrace.

Ms Morris, this photoshopping of the Black women from Disgrace by Ms Snyckers and Pan Macmillan South Africa is mirrored by the almost unanimous agreement by the critics. It is perhaps important to place this all on record, to show how pervasive it was. This is what Black people have to contend with on a daily basis, which has become so entrenched that some of us Black people even partake in it. Of course, many of us do so for the obvious reason of survival, to literally put bread on the table.

Ms Snyckers mentioned to Professor Mosoetsa about other writers who had responded to Disgrace in the past, without naming them. This includes Elleke Boehmer's short-story collection Sharmilla, and Other Portraits published in 2010. There is clearly an allusion here to a sex worker from Cape Town in Professor Boehmer's work. But what is most remarkable is that Professor Boehmer does not mention Sharmilla or Soraya in her essay published as part of the Reading Coetzee's Women collection of essays that I mentioned to you in my original letter. In addition, Sharmilla is not mentioned in Professor Boehmer's biography published at the front of the book, although her 2019 second short story collection is mentioned.

There is a further purge of Soraya (Melanie gets two mentions) in academic Richard Alan Northover's 'Lucy's Precarious Privilege in Fiona Snyckers' Lacuna'. Professor Northover defends Ms Snyckers as being a critic of White privilege, which is similar to the arguments supporting Professor Coetzee's Disgrace over the past twenty years.

In Litnet on 10 July 2019, publisher and author Karina Magdalena Szczurek (wife of the late Andre Brink, who himself responded to Disgrace), erases her Black sisters from Disgrace. There is a similar glowing tribute from author Nthikeng Mohlele in 'A Novel Response to Disgrace', in the Mail & Guardian on 12 April 2019, who also renders invisible his Black sisters.

Another positive short review is from well-known author Lauren Beukes, who declared on the Pan Macmillan South Africa Facebook page on 30 August 2019: 'Fiona Snyckers' novel Lacuna is furious and incandescent, told from the perspective of the rape survivor in [J.M.] Coetzee's Disgrace. It deserves to win all the awards.' Ms Beukes clearly thinks that there is only one rape survivor in Disgrace. Another positive review is by Jonathan Amid 'Disgrace op sy kop gedraai' on 8 July 2019 in Beeld who also makes no mention of the Black raped women from Disgrace.

In the same vein is the Rapport review on 16 June 2019 of Fanie Olivier, the translator of Disgrace into Afrikaans (titled 'n Oneer) with 'Verkragte vrou praat hier terug'. Reviewer Lloyd Gedye, in New Frame on 15 May 2019 with 'Lacuna disputes the rape narrative of Disgrace', states that Professor Coetzee's Lucy has 'an absence of real agency', but does not recognize the other agency-less Black women. Eusebius McKaiser, the former radio host, also had unqualified praise for Lacuna, in interviews with Ms Snyckers in 2018 and 2019 while offering no incisive commentary on or even naming the missing Black women. Also following this narrative was radio host Jenny Crwys-Williams.

Ms Morris, I will now return to the probe I have proposed. I believe it is perfectly reasonable for Pan Macmillan South Africa's investigation to determine the views of both Ms Snyckers and Helen Moffett, her editor, in producing a work about the female character Lucy Lurie (whose religious beliefs are not identified clearly), of a Muslim like me writing about a clearly Muslim female character. This question goes to the heart of the issue of representation and inclusion that Pan Macmillan South Africa and others are grappling with as Blacks and Muslims across the world are being marginalised and slaughtered.

Pan Macmillan South Africa should ask Ms Snyckers and Dr Moffett why they think it is acceptable to single out (or ghettoise) and then render invisible and nameless Muslim women in relation to White women and the feminist Lucy Lurie. Why not single out, and name, Melanie Isaacs (clearly identified in Professor Coetzee's Disgrace as Christian but not so in Lacuna) in the same way?

Ms Morris, unconsciously or likely quite consciously, I argue that Ms Snyckers and Dr Moffett are here clearly drawing on the ideological work of the late Bernard Lewis and his much-touted essay 'The Roots of Muslim Rage' that appeared in The Atlantic in September 1990. Dr Lewis' work then inspired the late Samuel Huntington's 1993 questioning essay 'The Clash of Civilisations?' and later 1996 book with the emphatic title The Clash of Civilisations.

These works have been used as intellectual backing for various imperialist adventures in the Middle East; and further bolster the notion of Dr Lewis that the Judeo-Christian civilisation was under threat from Islam, meaning Muslims and Arabs. It now

appears that this is how Ms Snyckers views Lucy on one side, versus Soraya and her Muslim/Arab 'rage' on the other.

Ms Morris, what I am essentially arguing here is that Ms Snyckers and Pan Macmillan South Africa are appearing to indulge in a discredited ideology under the guise of progressive liberalism. Words and representations do matter. This raises the obvious question of Ms Snyckers' political affinities, as well as those of Pan Macmillan's South Africa's 'trusted' freelance reader who had flagged her book as important in the first place. Ms Snyckers raises the issue of the attitude of Muslim women toward White women. Why not now ask what she feels about Muslims, Arabs and Palestinians and the continued violation of their human rights?

I must say, Ms Morris, that I am not surprised by the insouciant tone of moral equivalence and flexible positional superiority that pervade your letter. I suppose this is to be expected considering how you described Lacuna on Twitter on 7 October 2020 when Ms Snyckers won the novel prize at the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences awards: 'What a book – congratulations @FionaSnyckers! Adding to [the] evening's excitement level.' It seems fairly obvious that you have decided that the White voice is the superior one to bolster what appears to be your small, book-buying White public, and that Black voices, bar the outstanding individual performers (in your assessment of course), is to simply make up the numbers in your publication list.

I want to emphasise the commitment to diversity and inclusion and the pledge adopted by your parent company in September 2020. For the benefit of the uninformed, I will quote a short extract from the 'The Pan Macmillan Diversity and Inclusion Pledge and Associated Action Plan – September 2020'.

> We believe that racism and prejudice of many kinds are still insidious in our societies and that these issues must be effectively addressed. There is an urgent need for individuals, and companies such as ours, to be better allies and equitable employers to POC [People of Colour] staff, authors and illustrators, to educate ourselves on issues of racism and prejudice, and to commit to sustained and effective action to oppose racism and ensure that it has no place at Pan Macmillan.

Ms Morris, I look forward to further interaction but considering your response, I am not confident at all that you will make more than just cosmetic changes. I hope I am wrong.

Best,
Waghied.
A.W. Misbach