

GENDER PERFORMATIVITY AND SEXUAL IDENTITY: A STUDY OF DAMON GALGUT'S NOVELS

Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of

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By

Esha Bhagat

Registration Number: 12021146

Supervised By

Dr. Priyamvada Singh (30458)

Department of English (Assistant Professor)

Lovely Professional University



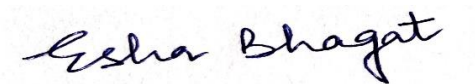
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DECLARATION

I, hereby declare that the presented work in the thesis entitled “Gender Performativity and Sexual Identity: A Study of Damon Galgut’s Novels” in fulfilment of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** is outcome of research work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Priyamvada Singh, working as Assistant Professor, in the Department of English, School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Social Sciences and Languages) of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgements have been made whenever work described here has been based on findings of other investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.



(Signature of Scholar)

Name of the scholar: Esha Bhagat

Registration No.: 12021146

Department/school: English

Lovely Professional University,

Punjab, India

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work reported in the Ph. D. thesis entitled “Gender Performativity and Sexual Identity: A Study of Damon Galgut’s Novels” submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** in the Department of English, School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Social Sciences and Languages), is a research work carried out by Esha Bhagat, 12021146 , is a bonafide record of his/her original work carried out under my supervision and that no part of thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or equivalent course.



(Signature of Supervisor)

Name of supervisor: Dr. Priyamvada Singh

Designation: Assistant Professor

Department/school: English

University: Lovely Professional University,

Punjab, India

Abstract

Damon Galgut's novels explore complex issues of identity, gender, and sexuality within the socio-political framework of South Africa. Despite their depth, the exploration of gender performativity and sexual identity in his works has received limited scholarly attention. Globally, literature has served as a powerful medium to challenge societal norms and to illuminate the lived realities of marginalized identities. This thesis investigates how Galgut's narratives reflect and challenge heteronormative constructs, offering insights into gender performativity, sexual identity and societal norms. South Africa's legacy of apartheid and its continuing struggle with racial and social inequalities provide a poignant setting for examining the intersections of identity. Galgut's novels depict characters navigating these turbulent landscapes, where personal experiences of gender and sexuality is deeply connected to societal constructs. The thesis seeks to uncover how Galgut portrays the fluidity of gender identities through his characters, and how these narratives critique the socio-cultural forces that shape identity. It also aims to explore the extent to which Galgut's work challenges or reinforces heteronormative ideals, providing a deep understanding of marginalized identities.

This research employs Judith Butler's conceptual framework of gender performativity to analyze the portrayal of non-normative sexualities and gender identities across Galgut's novels, emphasizing the interplay of personal and societal influences. Butler's theory of gender performativity forms the theoretical backbone of this study, offering a framework to unravel and reconstruct entrenched gender

paradigms. By emphasizing the iterative and performative nature of gender identity, this approach reveals how Galgut's characters negotiate societal expectations and personal authenticity. The study employs a close reading of Galgut's novels, informed by interdisciplinary approaches that intersect literary criticism, gender studies, and socio-political analysis. This method enables a deeper understanding of how individual narratives reflect broader cultural dynamics. The analysis reveals recurring themes of vulnerability and resistance, as Galgut's characters navigate complex terrains of identity and societal pressure. These narratives underscore the tension between societal conformity and personal autonomy, particularly in the context of gender and sexuality. Findings reveal that Galgut's characters resist, navigate, and sometimes conform to societal norms, illustrating the fluidity of gender identities and the pressures of heteronormative constraints. His works engage with themes of vulnerability, societal expectations, and highlights the embodied realities of intersecting racial, economic and gendered identities in contemporary South Africa. Galgut's narratives do not isolate gender from other dimensions of identity. Instead, they illustrate how race and class amplify the challenges faced by individuals in performing or resisting societal norms. The character's experiences underscore the importance of addressing these intersections to fully understand the dynamics of identity in literature.

The study demonstrates that Galgut's novels functions as contested textual space for interrogating the performative nature of gender and sexuality within South Africa's contested socio-political landscape. By applying Butler's framework, the analysis reveals how Galgut's characters destabilize fixed identities, exposing the constructedness of heteronormative paradigms. Furthermore, the thesis argues that

Galgut's portrayal of performative identities critiques post-apartheid South Africa's unresolved tensions around equality and representation. By centering vulnerability and resistance, his novels amplify voices often silenced by historical and systemic oppression. This research not only expands the scholarly conversation on Galgut but also advocates for intersectional methodologies in literary studies, urging future work to consider how systemic power structures are both reflected and contested in fiction. Ultimately, the thesis positions Galgut's oeuvre as a vital intervention in global debates about identity, agency, and the transformative potential of literature.

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I dedicate this thesis to Almighty God, whose infinite grace and blessings have been my guiding light throughout this journey. I express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Priyamvada Singh, for her constant guidance and support. Your expertise, patience and encouragement have been a continuous source of inspiration and motivation.

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Introduction

Gender performativity refers to the concept that gender and its associated roles are not innate but are socially constructed performances enacted through daily behaviors, with dominant cultural norms shaping the conventional ideas of “masculinity” and “femininity” (Wilson). Judith Butler, a prominent feminist philosopher and gender theorist introduced the theory of gender performativity. Judith Butler argues that gender is not an inherent biological trait but a socially produced construct, formed and reinforced through the repetition of acts, behaviors, and expressions over time.(Butler, *Gender Trouble* 10) In other words, gender is not something that we inherently possess, but rather something that we continually create and recreate through our behaviours and interactions with others.(Ridgeway and Lynn 193) Butler argues that the way we perform gender is closely tied to our sexual identity, or the way we understand and experience our own sexual desires and preferences. She suggests that our sexual identity is also not something that is predetermined by biology, but rather something that is constructed and performed through our interactions with others (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 39). According to Butler, the way we perform gender and sexual identity is not only shaped by social norms and expectations, but also by power dynamics and the larger cultural and political systems that shape our lives. For example, she argues that heteronormativity, or the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, can limit our ability to express our gender and sexual identities in ways that are outside of traditional norms (Schilt and Westbrook 454). Overall, the theory of gender performativity and sexual identity suggests that our gender and sexual identities are not fixed or predetermined, but

rather are constantly being created and recreated through our interactions with others and our engagement with larger social and cultural systems.

Damon Galgut, a South African novelist and playwright known for his compelling literary works that explore the complexities of human nature and the social and political landscape of South Africa was born on November 22, 1963, in Pretoria, South Africa, and grew up in Durban. (Mir) He spent his early years in Durban and later moved to Cape Town, where he currently resides. He grew up in a family that valued literature, and his parents encouraged his early love for reading and writing. Galgut began writing stories and poems from a young age, displaying a talent for storytelling and a keen observation of human nature. Galgut's writing is often characterized by his keen observations, evocative prose and deep understanding of human emotions. He has been widely recognized for his contributions to literature, receiving numerous awards and accolades for his works. Galgut's literary career began with the publication of his debut novel, *A Sinless Season*, in 1984, when he was just 21 years old (Alter 2). Since then, he has gone on to publish several critically acclaimed novels, including *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991), *The Quarry* (1995), *The Good Doctor* (2003), *In a Strange Room* (2010), and *The Promise* (2021). His novels have been translated into multiple languages and have been well-received by readers and critics alike. Galgut's writing often delves into themes such as identity, sexuality, race, power dynamics and the human condition and he has been praised for his ability to capture the nuances and complexities of the human experience. His works have been described as introspective, thought-provoking and haunting, and he has been lauded for his skilful portrayal of characters and his masterful storytelling. Galgut's theatrical works, includes *Echoes of Anger* (1988), *Party for Mother* (1990),

and *The Woodcutter* (1997), which have been performed in South Africa and other countries. Damon Galgut has received numerous notable literary honors, such as the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, two shortlistings for the Man Booker Prize, the Dublin Literary Award and the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction, among others. (Flood). He is considered one of the most prominent contemporary writers from South Africa, and his works continue to captivate readers around the world. Galgut has been termed a "new South African writer" by the literary community as he is perceived as one of the emerging writers after apartheid (Beyer).

The city's spatial organization reflects its political function, with monumental architecture like Church Square anchoring a metropolitan area that blends colonial heritage with post-apartheid transformation. The history of Pretoria is rich and complex, with significant events and developments shaping the city into what it is today. The area where Pretoria is located was originally inhabited by various indigenous tribes, including the San and the Ndebele. The region later became a battleground between different Bantu-speaking tribes in the 18th and 19th centuries (Offenbacher). In 1855, the Boers, who were Dutch-speaking farmers of European descent, founded the city of Pretoria as the capital of the independent Boer republic of the South African Republic (Etherington et al.). The city was established as a center for trade, administration and governance. In 1877, the British Empire annexed the South African Republic, including Pretoria, as part of their expansionist ambitions in Southern Africa. However, Boer resistance against British rule led to the First Boer War (1880-1881), which resulted in the signing of the Pretoria Convention in 1881. (Pretorius) The convention granted self-government to the Boers, and Pretoria was restored as the capital of the South African Republic. In 1900, Pretoria was occupied

by British forces during the Second Boer War (1899-1902), which resulted in the defeat of the Boer republics and the establishment of British control over the region. Pretoria remained under British rule until 1910 when the Union of South Africa was formed, and Pretoria became the administrative capital of the newly created union. In 1948, the National Party came to power in South Africa and Pretoria became a stronghold of apartheid, the system of racial segregation and discrimination enforced by the government. (Evans 245) The city became a symbol of apartheid, with the construction of government buildings, administrative offices and monuments that reinforced the policy of racial segregation. In 1994, apartheid was officially abolished and South Africa transitioned to a democratic system of government. Pretoria remains the administrative capital of the country, housing the government and diplomatic offices.

Apartheid had a deep and lasting impact on South Africa, operating as a state-sanctioned system of racial segregation from 1948 to 1994. It legally enforced divisions between racial groups and systematically oppressed the country's Black majority through institutionalized discrimination (Dubow 240). Apartheid enforced strict racial segregation, with laws and policies that systematically discriminated against Black people in all aspects of life, including housing, education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. This resulted in deep-rooted racial inequality, with Black people being systematically marginalized, oppressed and denied basic human rights. Apartheid also had significant economic impacts, as it created an exploitative system where Black people were relegated to low-paying jobs, often in hazardous and exploitative conditions, while White people enjoyed privileged access to resources and opportunities. The apartheid regime led to the displacement of

millions of Black South Africans, who were uprooted from their ancestral territories and relocated to designated “homelands” or urban townships, causing severe disruption to longstanding communities and cultural traditions (Jolly 191). Black activists, including leaders like Nelson Mandela, were imprisoned for decades and anti-apartheid protests were met with brutal force by the government. Activists, civil society organizations, and ordinary people stood up against apartheid, fighting for freedom, equality and justice. The collective struggle against apartheid, comprising decades of grassroots activism, international pressure and internal defiance, ultimately resulted in the system’s collapse and South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994. The apartheid era left an indelible mark on the nation, creating enduring patterns of racial discrimination, wealth disparity, and social fragmentation. Although apartheid has officially ended, its legacy continues to shape South African society and efforts to address the injustices of the past and build a more inclusive and equitable society.

The transition to democracy in South Africa in 1994 marked the beginning of the post-apartheid era, ushering in significant changes across the political, social and economic spheres. The dismantling of apartheid represented a historic political shift, establishing a multi-racial democracy with universal suffrage. For the first time, Black South Africans were granted full voting rights and political participation, culminating in the election of Nelson Mandela as the nation’s first Black president, a pivotal moment symbolizing a move towards inclusivity and representative governance (Yadav 67). To confront the injustices of the past and facilitate national healing, the newly formed democratic government instituted the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This commission aimed to address human rights violations

committed during the apartheid era by offering a platform where both victims and perpetrators could share their experiences and seek amnesty or forgiveness (Gibson and Gouws 505). Although the TRC faced criticism and controversy, it played a crucial role in promoting a national ethos of dialogue and reconciliation (Allen 5).

In the years since apartheid's end, South Africa has implemented numerous initiatives aimed at redressing socio-economic imbalances. Programs targeting Black economic empowerment, land redistribution and inclusive development have been introduced to bridge the vast economic disparities inherited from apartheid. Despite these efforts, significant economic inequality endures, with persistent gaps in income, wealth distribution and access to opportunities. Additionally, post-apartheid reforms have sought to expand access to essential services such as education and healthcare. While there have been improvements in availability, historically marginalized communities continue to face barriers to high-quality education and medical care. Disparities remain a major challenge in achieving equitable development. Culturally, post-apartheid South Africa has made strides in embracing and celebrating its diversity. The recognition of 11 official languages and the promotion of cultural pluralism reflect efforts to safeguard the rights of all ethnic and linguistic groups. These initiatives are part of a broader commitment to fostering a more inclusive and unified national identity.

Galgut's literary project remains fundamentally concerned with mapping the psychological and spatial contours of post-apartheid South Africa, where the promises of liberation collide with persistent inequalities. The end of apartheid in 1994 and the establishment of a democratic government in South Africa have had a significant

impact on Galgut's life and writing. (Lenz and Wenzel 138) The end of apartheid brought about greater freedom of expression in South Africa, including freedom of speech and artistic expression. This has allowed Galgut, as well as other South African writers, to openly explore and depict a wider range of themes and experiences in their writing. Galgut's works often reflect the changing social, political, and cultural landscapes of post-apartheid South Africa, including issues such as race, identity, and inequality. The post-apartheid era in South Africa has seen efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity, and Galgut's writing often reflects this shift. His works include diverse characters from different racial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, which may not have been possible during the apartheid era due to strict racial segregation and censorship.

Galgut's writing portrays the complexities and nuances of South African society in the post-apartheid era, including the challenges and struggles faced by marginalized communities. Post-apartheid South Africa has emphasized reconciliation and healing as important aspects of the nation's journey towards overcoming the wounds of the past. This theme of reconciliation and healing is also reflected in Galgut's writing, as he often explores the impact of apartheid on individuals and communities and the challenges of healing and moving forward in a post-apartheid society. Galgut's works often portray the scars of apartheid and the complexities of reconciliation, reflecting the ongoing process of addressing the injustices of the past and building a more inclusive society. The post-apartheid era has also witnessed changes in the literary landscape of South Africa. There has been a growing recognition and celebration of diverse voices and narratives, including those of previously marginalized writers. Galgut, as a South African writer, has been part of

this changing literary landscape, and his works have contributed to the evolving literary canon of post-apartheid South Africa. His writing often reflects the contemporary South African experience and the evolving literary traditions of the country. Overall, the post-apartheid era in South Africa has had a significant impact on Galgut's life and writing. It has provided him with greater freedom of expression, allowed for more diverse and inclusive storytelling, explored themes of reconciliation and healing, and contributed to the changing literary landscape of South Africa. Galgut's works often reflect the complexities of the post-apartheid era, capturing the challenges, hopes and aspirations of a changing society.

Damon Galgut has written a total of nine novels. These novels include:

***A Sinless Season* (1984)**

Galgut's debut novel, written when he was only 17 years old, focusses on young boys who get sent to a reform school by the ocean, on the edge of a cliff and lives in a small South African town. It explores themes of innocence, morality, and sexual awakening. It is the tale of juvenile offenders who have been sent to a rehabilitative peak beyond a remote region of the South African coast. It has been compared to William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, and reviews drawn this comparison. When a boy from the school is discovered dead at the base of the cliff edges under mysterious circumstances, the institution's facade of civility begins to collapse. The novel explores the socio-cultural construction of gender identity, particularly how societal expectations shape the boy's understanding of masculinity. The pressure to conform to traditional masculine ideals leads to internal conflicts and emotional struggles.

Small Circle of Beings (1988)

Set in post-apartheid South Africa, this novel delves into the complex relationships within families, the search for identity, and the profound effects of illness. It centres around a mother, her son David and her husband Stephen, who live in a remote stone-walled house. The story begins with David experiencing unexplained stomach pain, which becomes a catalyst for unravelling the family's emotional struggles. The narrative ultimately explores the intricate interplay between affection, grief, and self-discovery within a transforming social landscape. Through the central character's experiences, the story mirrors wider societal tensions—where personal aspirations collide with familial obligations and historical burdens, particularly those shaped by apartheid's enduring consequences.

The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs (1991)

This novel examines the construction of selfhood, intergenerational relationships, and South Africa's evolving postcolonial reality through a deeply personal lens. The story revolves around Patrick, who returns to his childhood home after a long absence, where he confronts the emotional fallout of his family's past, particularly the death of his brother, Malcolm. The theme of loss permeates the novel, particularly through the impact of Malcolm's death on the family. Galgut also delves into the socio-political context of South Africa during this period, as the characters navigate a landscape marked by racial tensions and the struggle for liberation. The narrative captures the complexities of identity formation against this backdrop, with Patrick feeling alienated in both his family and the broader societal context.

The Quarry (1995)

The story follows a fugitive, a man on the run, who encounters a minister while navigating the harsh landscape. Their relationship becomes central to the narrative, highlighting themes of power dynamics and vulnerability. The protagonist's journey is marked by moments of introspection and existential reflection, as he grapples with his identity and the weight of his past. The imagery of the church and its congregation operates as a crucial narrative for the exploration of faith and morality, as the minister delivers sermons that resonate with the struggles of the community. Ultimately, this novel presents a minimalist yet powerful narrative that examines the human condition, the search for redemption, and the impact of constructed norms on personal identity. The character's journeys reflect the broader social and political landscape of South Africa, making the novel a poignant exploration of guilt and the quest for meaning in a fractured world.

The Good Doctor (2003)

This novel portrays the life in a post-apartheid South African hospital, focusing on the complexities of human relationships, identity, and the lingering effects of a troubled past. The novel centres around Frank Eloff, a disillusioned doctor who has grown weary of the socio-political changes in his country. He works in a remote hospital that symbolizes the decay and challenges of the new South Africa. The arrival of Laurence Waters, an idealistic and youthful doctor, disrupts Frank's routine and forces him to confront his own cynicism and emotional detachment. Laurence embodies hope and a desire to make a difference, contrasting sharply with

Frank's resigned outlook. Their relationship evolves into a complex dynamic marked by mentorship, rivalry, and unspoken desires. Major themes in the novel include the exploration of gender and sexual identity, the impact of historical trauma on personal relationships, and the moral ambiguities of doing good in a society still grappling with its past. The character's interactions reveal the complexities of navigating intimacy, vulnerability, and societal expectations in a changing world.

The Impostor (2008)

This novel follows the life of Adam Napier, who finds himself at a crossroads after losing his job and home in Johannesburg, leading him to seek refuge with his brother Gavin in Cape Town. The novel explores themes of identity, alienation, and the socio-political racial capitalism of post-apartheid South Africa. Adam's journey is marked by a sense of humiliation and loss, particularly when he realizes that he has been replaced at work by a younger black intern due to racial quotas, which he perceives as a personal betrayal. This loss of status contributes to his feelings of being stranded and futureless, as he reflects on how his life has unravelled. The novel also delves into the complexities of race and class in South Africa, as Adam navigates a community marked by stark divisions between the wealthy and the impoverished. His encounters with characters like Canning, who embodies the contradictions of privilege and guilt, highlight the moral ambiguities present in their lives.

In a Strange Room (2010)

This novel is a loosely autobiographical account of three different journeys taken by the protagonist, Damon, across different countries and continents, exploring themes of travel, identity and connection. This novel does not investigate questions of

identity within the background of South African culture; somewhat more, it takes place outside of South Africa's boundaries. The speaker is bound to face his feelings of hopelessness and estrangement from the universe around him as a result of his journeys through the story. Rather than mapping institutionalized power, the text reveals how hegemony operates interpersonally through familial hierarchies, gendered gazes, and unspoken social contracts that replicate oppression at human scale

Arctic Summer (2014)

This novel explores the themes of identity, desire, and the complexities of colonialism through the experiences of its protagonist, Morgan Forster. Framed within the setting of early 20th-century colonial India, the narrative traces Morgan's development as a writer alongside his complex emotional relationship with his Indian companion, Masood. One of the major themes of the novel is the exploration of sexual identity and desire. Morgan's attraction to men, especially to Kenneth Searight and Masood, highlights his internal conflict with societal norms regarding masculinity and sexuality. Morgan's observations of the Indian landscape and its people often evoke a sense of longing and dislocation, as he grapples with his own identity in a foreign land. The novel invites readers to throw light on the complexities of human relationships and the enduring impact of history on personal identity.

The Promise (2021)

The novel's exploration of kinship ties and fractured identities mirrors the nation's ongoing negotiation between historical trauma and contemporary reconciliation efforts. The novel centres around the lives of Amor, Anton, and their aunt Tannie Marina, as they navigate personal and collective trauma following the

death of their mother, Rachel. One of the major themes is the impact of historical and cultural legacies on personal identity. Amor, the youngest sibling, grapples with her sense of self and the expectations placed upon her, often feeling disconnected from her family and surroundings. The novel also addresses themes of race and class, particularly through the character of Salome, the family's black servant, who is often overlooked and marginalized.

Galgut's works often touch upon the themes of gender performativity and sexual identity, exploring the complexities and challenges that individuals face in relation to their gender and sexual orientation. Galgut presents characters whose experiences with gender and sexual identity are depicted with depth and complexity, capturing the varied and often conflicting realities of individuals in contemporary society. In several of his works, characters confront the pressures of societal norms and expectations surrounding gender and sexuality. For instance, *The Good Doctor* features Frank, a heterosexual protagonist, who is weighed down by conventional notions of masculinity within the constraints of a conservative South African setting. He struggles with his own desires and societal pressures, leading to inner conflicts and tensions. Similarly, in *The Impostor*, the main character Adam grapples with questions of sexual identity and societal expectations as he navigates his relationships and interactions with others. Galgut's works also often highlight the performative nature of gender and sexuality, suggesting that individuals may feel compelled to conform to certain roles or masks in order to be accepted by society. His novels often explore the ways in which individuals may perform gender and sexuality in different contexts, and the tensions that can arise between one's internal sense of self and external societal expectations.

Galgut's exploration of gender performativity and sexual identity reflects social, cultural, and historical contexts of gender. His novels offer nuanced and thought-provoking insights into the challenges, conflicts, and experiences of individuals navigating gender and sexual identity in contemporary society. Damon Galgut's writing style is often characterized as evocative, introspective, and deeply reflective. He is known for his sparse yet lyrical prose that conveys powerful emotions and captures the nuances of human experiences. Galgut's writing is often introspective, delving into the internal thoughts, feelings, and struggles of his characters, and inviting readers to explore their inner lives. One notable aspect of Galgut's writing style is his keen observation of the natural world and the environments in which his stories are set. He often uses active narrative agents of landscapes, weather, and other sensory details to create a rich and immersive sense of place. His settings, particularly those in South Africa, are often described with a keen eye for detail, reflecting his deep connection to the land and its people. Galgut's writing is also characterized by a sense of quiet restraint and understatement. He often conveys profound emotions and complex situations through subtle gestures, glances, and actions, rather than relying on overt dramatics or melodrama. This understated approach adds to the emotional depth and authenticity of his stories. In terms of structure, Galgut's novels often feature nonlinear narratives that move back and forth in time, providing glimpses into the past and present of his characters. He often employs multiple perspectives and shifting points of view, allowing readers to see events and emotions from different angles and gaining insight into the inner worlds of different characters. Overall, Galgut's writing style is known for its eloquence,

emotional depth, and contemplative tone, which allows readers to engage with complex themes and characters in a thought-provoking and immersive way.

Damon Galgut's literary oeuvre constitutes a significant intervention in both contemporary world literature and South Africa's ongoing socio-cultural discourse. His novels provide insights into the social, cultural, and political landscape of South Africa, particularly during the post-apartheid era. His works illuminate the complexities of the country's history, the challenges of its diverse communities, and the impact of apartheid and its aftermath on individuals and society, contributing to a deeper understanding of South Africa's past and present. Galgut's novels offer profound explorations of the human condition, delving into universal themes such as identity, isolation, longing, and the complexities of human relationships. His empathetic and introspective writing style allows readers to connect with his characters on a deeply emotional level, provoking introspection and reflection on the human experience. Galgut's literary achievements, including winning prestigious awards such as the Booker Prize and being recognized as a prominent voice in contemporary literature, have helped elevate the visibility and recognition of South African literature on the global stage. His unique writing style and compelling narratives have garnered critical acclaim and attracted readers from around the world, contributing to the rich and diverse literary landscape. Galgut's works have inspired and influenced other writers, particularly those interested in exploring themes of gender, sexuality, society, and the human condition. His innovative use of language, characterization, and narrative structure has served as a model for aspiring writers, encouraging them to explore similar themes with depth, sensitivity, and creativity in their own works.

Literature Review

The article “Apartheid’s Patriarchies in Decline: White Masculinities in Damon Galgut’s *The Promise*” by Andy Carolin, published in 2023, critically examines Damon Galgut’s novel *The Promise* through the lens of white masculinities and their decline in post-apartheid South Africa. Carolin argues that while the novel has been widely interpreted as an allegory of racial injustice, its exploration of gender, particularly white masculinities, has been overlooked. The paper identifies key patriarchal institutions: fatherhood, Christianity, and the security state, as central to apartheid’s ideology and traces their disintegration in the novel. Carolin contends that Galgut’s portrayal of white male characters, such as the ineffectual father Manie, the corrupt dominee, and the disgraced police minister, reduces them to caricatures, rendering their power sterile and obsolete. The analysis highlights how the novel’s male characters, including Anton, fail to redefine masculinity in the times of post-apartheid, instead embodying a sense of futility and moral bankruptcy. While the paper acknowledges the novel’s attempt to decenter white masculinities, it critiques the lack of depth in these portrayals, suggesting a bleak outlook for their future. Carolin’s work contributes to discussions on gender and power in post-apartheid literature, aligning with scholarly critiques of patriarchal legacies while calling for more nuanced representations of white masculinities in transitional societies.

“A Postcolonial Reading of Damon Galgut’s *The Promise*” by Liu Hui and Yan Ping, published in 2023, offers a postcolonial analysis of Damon Galgut’s *The Promise*, employing Edward Said’s theoretical framework to explore the novel’s depiction of South Africa’s sociopolitical landscape. The authors contextualize

Galgut's work within postcolonial discourse, emphasizing the unresolved tensions between colonizers and the colonized, particularly regarding land ownership and racial inequality. They dissect the novel in three dimensions: the Swart family's unfulfilled pledge to their black maid Salome, the South African government's broken promises post-apartheid, and the broader disillusionment with democratic progress. The study highlights how historical injustices, such as apartheid, perpetuate existential struggles for both Black and white South Africans, as seen through characters like Lukas and the Swart siblings. The paper contributes to the limited scholarship on *The Promise*, bridging gaps in postcolonial literary criticism by examining the novel's interplay of personal and national narratives. It critiques the cyclical nature of oppression and the failure of reconciliation, drawing parallels to Said's theories on imperialism's enduring cultural and territorial legacies. While the analysis is thorough, it could benefit from engaging with more contemporary postcolonial critiques or intersectional perspectives. Nonetheless, it provides valuable insights into Galgut's portrayal of South Africa's fractured identity and the lingering scars of colonialism.

Nolen's 2020 thesis, "Performativity of Main Character Identity in '*The Color Purple*' by Alice Walker: Feminist Approach" (Putera Batam University), employs Butler's theory to analyze Celie's transformation from a victim of patriarchal violence to a lesbian identity. The study identifies 27 textual instances where Celie's repeated acts—such as her emotional and physical attraction to Shug Avery, demonstrate performative gender construction, destabilizing heteronormative frameworks. Nolen highlights two formative aspects: psychological trauma (sexual abuse, domestic violence) and gender discourse (patriarchal oppression, objectification), which

collectively reshape Celie's identity. While the thesis effectively links Butler's theory to Celie's performative acts, it overlooks intersectional factors like race and class, which Walker's novel critically engages. The research contributes to queer-feminist literary analysis by illustrating how performativity disrupts fixed gender categories, though deeper engagement with critiques of Butler's Eurocentric assumptions could strengthen its framework.

The 2018 thesis by Ms. Rakchuda Thibordee at Thammasat University, titled "Gender Performativity: Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games Trilogy* and the Construction of Gender Identity," investigates the fluid nature of gender identity in *The Hunger Games* series through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. The study examines how protagonist Katniss Everdeen and other female characters challenge traditional gender binaries by adopting both masculine and feminine traits, influenced by societal norms, family, and political structures. The research highlights the trilogy's role in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality, emphasizing how performative acts enable characters to navigate oppression and assert agency. The thesis contributes to feminist literary criticism by illustrating how dystopian fiction can subvert gendered expectations and redefine identity construction.

Carola Beyer in her thesis "'The Man I Could Have Been': Masculinity and Uncanny Doubles in Selected Novels of Damon Galgut" at the University of Stellenbosch in March 2015 (Beyer) explores the representation of masculinity in the selected works of Damon Galgut via the prism of the double and the uncanny. Men's friendships, relationships with women, apartheid and men, white men and

homophobia, and heterosexuality and homosexuality are some of the topics covered. The study raises a number of issues, including how masculinities were viewed before and after apartheid, how the male and female characters interacted, and what responsibilities men and women had to one another.

In her 2013 master's thesis at the University of Jyväskylä titled "The Past Lay Claim to the Present" Memory and Narrative as a Journey to One's Self: A Study of Damon Galgut's *In a Strange Room*," Jonna Holopainen examines how memories influence personal growth within the context of post-apartheid South Africa (Holopainen). This study focuses on how recollections in Galgut's novel *In a Strange Room* help people create their identities. The narrator of this autobiographical book recalls his earlier journeys to distant lands and the people he encountered along the way. The following research queries are addressed: How do memories aid in Damon's self-construction in *In a Strange Room*? How are memories made more tangible through the novel's narratives?

In her thesis "Damon Galgut - South Africa's New Voice?" Anna - Christina Mainhart submitted in 2012 (Mainhart) at Wien University aims to trace Damon Galgut's evolution as South African writer in relation to the country's political developments. It analyzes six of his novels: *Small Circle of Beings* (1988), *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991), *The Quarry* (1995), *The Good Doctor* (2003), *The Impostor* (2008) and *In a Strange Room* (2010). While *A Sinless Season* (1984) functions as a conceptual anchor for Galgut's later works, this analysis foregrounds place identity as a critical lens for understanding character positioning within South Africa's socio-political matrix.

Jesse Arseneault in her dissertation “Races Among Men: Masculinity and Interracial Community in South African Cultural Texts” submitted to McMaster University in August 2010 (Arseneault), analyzes representations of interracial communities and constructions of masculinity within South African literature, cinema, and popular media. This analysis positions masculinity as a historically racialized construct that reveals foundational fissures in segregationist logic. Through close reading of John Greyson's *Proteus* (2003), the study demonstrates how queer masculinities disrupt apartheid's rigid racial taxonomies, offering what Judith Butler might term 'gender trouble' to nationalist historiography. The film's depiction of interracial male intimacy in eighteenth-century Cape Town exposes the erasure of queer narratives from South Africa's liberation metanarratives, while simultaneously interrogating white masculine performances of 'racial bridge-building' as both emancipatory gesture and epistemic violence.

Mignon Eloïse in her thesis “Morgan Among the Minorities: Damon Galgut’s *Arctic Summer* as Biofiction” submitted at University of Liège in 2019-2020 (Mignon) has focussed on Galgut who was born in 1963 within the punitive system of apartheid. The South African author has openly acknowledged his homosexuality, emphasizing that sexuality is a fundamental component of identity and can even foster what he describes as an “ethos of resistance.” Galgut’s novels often explore how politics and historical contexts shape both individual identity and intimate relationships. He has created a biofictional narrative, resembling a *Künstlerroman*, which chronicles Morgan’s quest for both physical and spiritual fulfillment within the environment from which he originates. The author’s sexuality, his commitment to liberal humanism, anti-imperialism, and his modernist approach have sparked divided

critical opinions. Galgut's fictional biography intricately engages with the complex and multifaceted discussions characteristic of postcolonial discourse.

J. U. Jacobs in research article on "Syntax of the Self in Damon Galgut's *In a Strange Room*" published by Rhodes University in 2011 (Jacobs 97), also makes the case that there really are two distinct versions of Damon present in the tale: Damon, the main character of the tale, and Damon, the narrator of the story. The story is a "completely fictitious portrayal of an unfurling transitory identity". In fact, Galgut employs each of these distinct characters of the story in an interchangeable way. According to Jacobs (2011), Galgut alternates between being the actual author, the implicit writer, the storyteller, and the subject/protagonist. As a result, both the book and the writer must be read as a combination of memoir and narrative.

Sofia Lucy Kostelac in her thesis "Damon Galgut and the Critical Reception of South African Literature" submitted at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in 2014 (Kostelac) looks at the changing criteria for local writers' cultural validity that have been in place during the final years of apartheid. It provides a thorough careful reading of each of his books and analyses the difficulties they present for preconceived notions about changes in South African literature over the past three decades. It demonstrates that rather than a straightforward progression, the novels exhibit different levels of alignment and divergence from a dominant metanarrative within South African literature.

According to White and Couzens' *Literature and Society in South Africa* (1984) there is no such thing as South African literature; there seems to be a variety of different literatures. Literatures written in several different languages are found side

by side in the multi-lingual nation of South Africa. Due to the obvious influence of imperial masters, South African literature could be broken down into several distinct sub-branches, the two most prominent of which are black writing as well as white writing, whereas literature authored in the country's indigenous dialects has only lately been recognized. In his writing, Galgut disconnects himself, at least partially, from this society's point of view.

In an interview with Miller in 2006, Galgut said that relationships between people are the most interesting part of human interaction for him to write about. He claimed that the fact that he is a writer from South Africa keeps him constantly cognizant of the larger picture. Galgut's work, wherein the challenges faced by the South African community are used as a background for the anxiousness of his narratives, is a prime example of his intrigue with depicting a common set through individual citizens. In these works, Galgut uses the South African social system as a background.

J. U. Jacobs in his article "Syntax of the Self in Damon Galgut's *In a Strange Room*" published in 2012 (Jacobs 92), makes the case that there really are two distinct versions of Damon present in the tale: Damon, the main character of the tale, and Damon, the narrator of the story. The story is a completely fictitious portrayal of an unfurling transitory identity. In fact, Galgut employs each of these distinct characters of the story in an interchangeable way. According to Jacobs, Galgut alternates between being the actual author, the implicit writer, the storyteller, and the subject/protagonist. As a result, both the book and the writer must be read as a combination of memoir and narrative.

M. Crous in his article “White Masculine Desire and Despair in *The Good Doctor* by Damon Galgut” published in 2010 (Crous 9) analyzes how masculinity is portrayed in Damon Galgut’s novel *The Good Doctor*, focusing on the dynamics between the two male characters, Frank and Laurence. Frank’s performative masculinity expressed through calculated cruelty and emotional withdrawal toward Laurence functions as both defense mechanism and sociohistorical artifact. The text deliberately suspends resolution between two readings: is this bond a sublimated homoerotic connection shaped by apartheid’s violent masculinities, or simply existential solidarity forged in desolate circumstances? This very ambiguity constitutes its political force, exposing how traditional gender scripts fail to contain the complexities of interracial male relationships in transition-era South Africa.

Michela Borzaga in her article “Psychic Unhomings, Amnesia, and the Risk of Decosmopolitanization in Damon Galgut’s *The Impostor*” (2008) published in *Humanities* in 2020 (Borzaga 6) states that numerous structural and persistent home/land disturbances are still present in South Africa today as a result of the apartheid era. *The Impostor* by Damon Galgut depicts homes as fluid and interconnected spaces imbued with emotional pain. This article explores the representation of homes in his novel, arguing that they function as psychological and emotional sites, symbolizing displaced whiteness and a collective forgetting of history.

Research Gap

Existing scholarship on post-apartheid literature has extensively examined race, trauma, and power but overlooks Damon Galgut’s unique portrayal of white

masculinity as a performative construct. While Black masculinities (e.g., Zakes Mda) and feminist resistance (e.g., Gordimer) are well-studied, Galgut's exploration of fragile, guilt-ridden, and performative white male identity remains underexplored. His novels reveal how apartheid's collapse forces white men to renegotiate masculinity amid lost privilege, a theme absent in postcolonial literary discourse. Additionally, while queer and postcolonial readings of Galgut exist, the intersection of whiteness, masculinity, and performativity lacks critical attention. His characters embody masculinity as a failed performance, mirroring global trends (e.g., Trumpism, far-right extremism). Yet, no study positions his work within transnational gender theory or comparative postcolonialism.

This research fills that gap by analysing Galgut's novels as a lens into post-apartheid white male anxiety, while connecting it to broader crises of modern masculinity. The study offers a new framework for understanding performative identity in literature and contemporary politics.

Research Objectives

- 1) To trace the genesis of gender performativity and sexual identity.
- 2) To understand the sexual identity of the protagonist by contextualizing it through the historical pace of the novels.
- 3) To explore gender performativity from the lens of male perspective.
- 4) To study the socio-cultural construction of gender roles in the selected novels.

Chapter scheme

For clarity and convenience, the thesis is written with the following chapters:

Chapter 1 represents the genesis of gender performativity in the history of literary theory and criticism. The concept of gender performativity was first introduced by Judith Butler in her 1990 work *Gender Trouble*. This idea has since played a significant role in literary theory and criticism, transforming how scholars analyze gender within literature. Before the rise of gender performativity as a framework, literary studies often operated within a binary model, assuming a fixed and inherent link between biological sex and socially assigned gender roles. Alongside Butler, numerous theorists have expanded and enriched the understanding of gender performativity. Influential figures include Luce Irigaray (*This Sex Which Is Not One*), Jacques Lacan (*Seminar XX: Encore*), Erving Goffman (*Gender Advertisements*), Raewyn Connell (*Masculinities*), Donna Haraway (*A Cyborg Manifesto*), Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*), and Anne Fausto-Sterling (*Sexing the Body*). During the 1980s and 1990s, feminist and queer theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Gayle Rubin, and Bell Hooks pioneered new approaches to studying how gender and sexuality are constructed and performed in literature and culture. Today, gender performativity remains a crucial concept in literary and cultural studies, with scholars increasingly examining how gender and sexuality are not only portrayed in texts but also how these portrayals influence societal norms and values.

Chapter 2 examines the intersections of gender subjectivity and the sociopolitical realities of post-apartheid South Africa as reflected in Damon Galgut's novels. The chapter explores how the historical and cultural legacies of apartheid,

along with the transformative yet often turbulent socio-political changes in its aftermath, shape the construction and negotiation of gender identities. Particular attention is given to how these narratives illuminate the ways in which systemic oppression, racial hierarchies, and societal expectations influence personal expressions of gender and sexuality. By analyzing character's lived experiences and their struggles for self-definition, this chapter seeks to uncover the nuances of formation of identity in society marked by both continuity and change. The aim is to provide a nuanced understanding of how gender subjectivity is deeply intertwined with the broader socio-political framework of post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter 3 focuses on the pervasive influence of heteronormativity in shaping sexual identities and interpersonal relationships in Damon Galgut's novels. The chapter investigates how societal norms and expectations uphold rigid frameworks of sexuality, often marginalizing non-normative identities. By critically analyzing characters' interactions, internal conflicts, and societal pressures, this chapter reveals the subtle and overt ways in which heteronormative structures influence individual and collective identity. Furthermore, it examines how Galgut's narratives critique these norms, offering alternative perspectives on intimacy, desire, and the fluidity of sexual identity. This exploration highlights the tension between conformity and resistance, illuminating the broader implications of heteronormativity in a socio-cultural context. Ultimately, the chapter seeks to demonstrate how Galgut's works challenge traditional paradigms, encouraging a in-depth knowledge of the struggles surrounding sexual identity and its societal constructs.

Chapter 4 delves into the dynamics of gender performativity as portrayed in Damon Galgut's novels, focusing on the fluid and mutable nature of gender identities. Drawing upon Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, the chapter examines how characters embody, resist, or transform traditional gender roles through their actions, relationships, and self-perceptions. The analysis centers on gender as a performance, investigating the ways in which societal norms and cultural expectations are simultaneously upheld and challenged within the narratives. By studying key moments where identity is performed or contested, this chapter highlights the pull between individual agency and external constraints. Furthermore, it investigates how these performances shift across different social and cultural settings, offering insight into the broader implications of gender fluidity. Ultimately, the chapter aims to illuminate the ways in which Galgut's works challenge binary understandings of gender, fostering a more inclusive perspective on identity.

Chapter 5 examines gender identity as an evolving socio-cultural phenomenon influenced by historical contexts, institutional frameworks, and interpersonal relationships. Expanding on the concept of gender performativity discussed in Chapter 4, this chapter shifts focus from individual gender expressions to the larger systems that shape, control, and challenge identities. Utilizing the insights of theorists like Judith Butler, Raewyn Connell, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, the analysis investigates how gender is formed through cultural narratives, power dynamics, and shared ideological constructs. The chapter examines how gender identities are negotiated within socio-cultural frameworks, particularly in contexts marked by transformation such as post-apartheid South Africa, where rigid racial and gender categories have been destabilized. It investigates how institutions, workplaces, media, and legal

systems reinforce or challenge normative gender expectations, and how individuals navigate, resist, or internalize these influences.

Research Design and Methodology

To study gender performativity in the novels of Damon Galgut, a qualitative research design and methodology is applied. Qualitative research provides a detailed examination of intricate social issues like gender performativity, allowing researchers to better understand the meanings and lived experiences of those involved. The research question focuses on the exploration of gender performativity in Galgut's novels. Close reading of the novels involves a careful examination of the ways in which gender performativity is constructed and performed within the text, paying close attention to the language used to describe characters and their behaviors. Data analysis involves a close examination of the data collected, looking for patterns to identify themes related to gender performativity in Galgut's novels. Secondary data gathering is included in the data collection phase to gather evidence about the origins and features of gender and identity and their reflection in the works of Damon Galgut. The investigation focuses heavily on gathering data from various literary and essay evaluations. Drawing on theories such as those of Judith Butler, this study gathers insights on how gender roles are socially constructed within society.

Chapter 1

Gender Performativity and Sexual Identity: Theoretical Perspectives

“God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”(The Holy Bible : Old and New Testaments 9).

In the Bible, both men and women have equal dignity to share social authority. It emphasises the basic equality between all individuals, regardless of gender, their ancestry, economic status, or age. Both humans and other animals were made in the likeness of God, and both are tasked with taking care of the planet. Men and women are treated equally and are neither given more significance or position. Gender equality is the law of Nature and gender performativity is one of the human natures. And it has been reflected and represented in almost all the religions of the world and their theologies. As commanded: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus”(The Holy Bible: Old and New Testaments 2608). For equality, this gospel states: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”(The Holy Bible: Old and New Testaments 2608). Jesus embraced several underprivileged women and men- those who were ignored or abused by others as his followers and thus served everyone. The manner Jesus welcomed female disciples was unmatched by any other preacher of his era. Jesus embraced the lowly and needy in the name of the Lord while chastising the powerful and affluent who lacked empathy.

The biblical passages posit a spiritual equality that often stands in stark contrast to the social and biological determinism that has historically governed

gender relations. The terms ‘gender performativity’ and ‘sexual identity’ are modern conceptual tools developed to analyze and challenge this very determinism. While their explicit formulation is recent, their conceptual concerns the relationship between biology, social roles and power are traceable in historical and religious discourses. For instance, the story of “Sodom and Gomorrah” is frequently cited in debates on sexuality, but as scholars note, it can also be read as a narrative reflecting broader cultural anxieties about gender and power (Larson 580). Similarly, ancient Athenian cultures reveal complex histories of gender and identity that challenge any notion of a simple or universal gender system (Hardwick 20). These historical instances demonstrate that the relationship between biological sex, socially mandated gender roles, and power is not a modern invention but a persistent cultural concern.

This study therefore engages with these theoretical perspectives to examine how gender identities are constructed, regulated, and contested within cultural discourse. The theoretical framework developed in this chapter establishes the conceptual foundation necessary for analysing literary representations of gender and sexuality in the chapters that follow. The theoretical framework outlined in this chapter will be directly applied to analyze the complex performativity of identity in novels such as *A Sinless Season*, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, *The Good Doctor*, *In a Strange Room*, *The Quarry*, and the Booker Prize-winning *The Promise*.

Genesis of Gender Discourse

The term ‘gender’ traces its linguistic roots to the Old French *gendre* (modern *genre*), originally denoting classification by type or category. Contemporary scholarship understands gender as a culturally variable system of societal roles, behaviors, and expectations designated to individuals based on their perceived biological sex. These socially instituted distinctions govern interpersonal dynamics while prescribing normative conduct for masculine, feminine, and non-binary identities. Unlike biologically determined traits, gender systems demonstrate historical fluidity and cross-cultural diversity in their manifestations. The structural organization of gender frequently establishes hierarchical relations that intersect with and compound other axes of marginalization. Analysis through an intersectional lens reveals how gender-based disparities interact with systems of race, class, ability, age, geographic location, and sexuality to produce complex matrices of privilege and disadvantage. Such intersectional dynamics are particularly significant in literary and cultural analysis, where representations of gender often intersect with broader socio-political histories and structures of power.

Difference between Gender and Sex

The term “sex” originates from the Latin word *sexus*, which denotes the condition of being male or female. It encompasses various physical characteristics such as genetics, hormones, and sexual anatomy that differentiate males, females, and intersex individuals. While sex and gender are interconnected, they are distinct concepts. Gender identity refers to a person deeply held, personal sense of their gender, which may or may not align with the sex assigned at birth (Kassis). Sex

comprises a set of biological attributes present in both humans and animals, including DNA, gene activity, reproductive hormones, and physiological functions. Although sex is commonly classified as male or female, the biological components and their manifestations show considerable variation (McDermott and Hatemi 90).

Difference between Gender and Sexual Issues

Gender describes the social norms and expectations, actions, manifestations, and personalities of boys, girls, men, women and people of all genders. It has an influence on people's behaviours and interactions, how they see themselves as well as others, and how society's allocation of resources and authority. People with various gender identities are badly impacted by rigid gender norms as well; as a result, they frequently experience harassment, assault, and discrimination, particularly in healthcare settings. As a result, individuals are more vulnerable to disease and mental health issues including suicide. Gender identity is not confined to a dichotomy (girl/woman, boy/man); it comes in various forms and can change over time. The various ways that people and organizations understand, perceive, and exhibit gender are influenced by their roles, the assumptions that are placed on them, how they communicate with others, and the subtle ways that it is codified in society. According to performativity theory, the ritualised repeating of behaviours or discursive actions that are categorised as feminine or masculine, respectively, results in the experience of a gendered subjectivity in both the actor and the observers (Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 523). Hence, it is observed that changes in the general nature of gender performative rituals are matched by corresponding changes in the forms of gendered subjectivity. In literary representations, characters frequently

appear in tension with these codified rituals, revealing how identity is negotiated within restrictive social frameworks.

From Linguistic to Gender Performativity

J.L. Austin (1911-1960), a philosopher and linguistic theorist introduced the concept of speech acts and performativity (Taylor 162). He proposed that language functions not only to describe reality but also to perform actions and actively shape it. His theory of performativity has significantly influenced feminist thought, especially in Judith Butler's work, who adapted these ideas to explore gender (Hollywood 104). Butler contends that gender is not an innate attribute but is enacted through repeated speech, gestures, and behaviors (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 160). She argues that gender is socially constructed and maintained through continual performative acts, which are embedded within broader cultural scripts that define societal expectations of masculinity and femininity. By performing gender in a certain way, we both reproduce and challenge these cultural norms. In this sense, gender performativity is a process of constantly negotiating and re-negotiating our gender identities through our actions and interactions with others (West and Zimmerman 135). It is not something that we can simply opt out of, but rather something that we are always engaged in, whether we are aware of it or not.

J.L. Austin's has talked about performativity in his book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). In this book, Austin distinguishes between two types of language: constative and performative. Constative language refers to statements that are descriptive and can be judged as true or false. For example, "The cat is on the mat" is a constative statement (Jacobsen 358). Performatives, on the other hand, are

utterances that do not simply describe reality, rather perform an action. Austin argues that performatives are a fundamental aspect of language use, and that they can be categorized into different types depending on their function. For example, there are performatives that are used to make promises, such as “I promise to be there on time” (Jacobsen 359). There are also performatives that are used to perform social acts, such as “I now pronounce you husband and wife” (Jacobsen 359). In both cases, the utterance itself is the action, and it has the power to create a new social reality. Austin’s theory of performativity emphasizes the idea that language is not just a tool for describing the world but is also a tool for changing it. Through the use of performatives, we can create new social realities and shape the world around us. This has important implications for our understanding of how language functions, and how it is used in different contexts.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler introduces the concept of performativity as a way to challenge traditional notions of gender identity. She says,

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 179).

Butler asserts that gender is not an innate or essential characteristic but rather a performative act that is continuously enacted and reinforced through social interactions. She argues that gender is a societal construct imposed on individuals

rather than an inherent aspect of identity (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 160). Through repeated gendered performances, individuals internalize and come to identify with their gender, despite it being neither natural nor fixed. Performativity refers to the process of enacting gender and constructing identity through these repeated acts. These performances both create and sustain gender categories, thereby maintaining societal norms and expectations. Butler further suggests that by disrupting and subverting these performative acts, individuals have the potential to resist and challenge conventional gender norms, thereby opening up new possibilities for identity formation. As she states, “To challenge gender is to destabilize the very meanings of gender and, hence, to open up the field of possibilities for gendered lives” (*Undoing Gender* 144). This resistance might involve embracing fluid or non-binary identities or rejecting traditional gender expectations in various ways. Ultimately, the concept of performativity in *Gender Trouble* serves as a critique of fixed gender categories and promotes new avenues for self-expression and autonomy. The idea of the “stylized repetition of acts” has become central to contemporary literary and cultural analysis, as it enables scholars to examine how fictional characters negotiate, reproduce, or resist dominant gender norms.

While J.L. Austin’s linguistic performativity provides the foundational mechanism, Judith Butler’s revolutionary intervention was to apply this logic to the very fabric of gendered existence. For Butler, gender is not merely a performance one puts on, like a costume, but a performative construct in the Austinian sense- a reiterated series of acts, gestures, and desires that, through their repetition and citation within a social context, produce the effect of a natural, internal gender core. The

distinction is crucial: if gender were a simple performance, it would presume a pre-existing actor choosing a role. Butler's performativity, however, argues that the 'actor' - the coherent gendered subject is itself produced through these very acts. The appearance of substance, of a 'true' masculinity or femininity, is an illusion generated by a 'stylized repetition of acts' within a rigid regulatory frame that polices the boundaries of cultural intelligibility. The framework composed of compulsory heterosexuality and the gender binary is the powerful, often invisible, script that these performances cite and it is through this citational process that the illusion of a natural and binary gender is solidified and maintained.

Butler's theory, therefore, moves beyond the sex/gender distinction that preceded it. By arguing that the supposedly biological category of 'sex' is itself a discursive construct produced within a gendered matrix, Butler collapses the foundational hierarchy that positions sex as nature and gender as culture. The binary of male/female is not a pre-discursive fact of anatomy upon which gender is built; rather, it is a normative and regulatory ideal that culture installs onto bodies. The deconstruction of the sex/gender binary is politically potent, as it reveals that the very grounds upon which patriarchal and heteronormative power claims natural authority are themselves cultural fictions. The body is not a passive surface awaiting social inscription but is materialized through discursive practices that define what counts as a viable body in the first place. In this view, resistance lies not in expressing a 'true' gender hidden beneath the social veneer, but in the subversive potential of failing to repeat the norms correctly through parodic practices like drag, the incoherence of butch/femme identities, or the outright rejection of the binary, which expose the imitative structure of gender itself.

For literary analysis, Butler's framework provides a powerful toolkit for interrogating how characters are constituted within and against these regulatory norms. A Butlerian reading of a novel does not simply catalogue the gender of characters but analyzes the processes by which their identities are tenuously constituted, contested, and sometimes subverted through their performative acts. It asks: How do characters cite or fail to cite dominant norms of masculinity and femininity? What are the social and psychic consequences of this citation or failure? How does the narrative frame expose the labor, anxiety, and instability inherent in maintaining a coherent gender identity? Through such analytical questions, the theory of gender performativity becomes an effective methodological approach for examining the dynamics of identity formation and the negotiation of social norms within literary texts.

Butler views gender as a series of actions that are performed repeatedly inside a very tight framework that over time blend to give it the impression of substance or a natural kind of being. There is not a true gender identity that lasts forever. All are developed through repeated performances and expressions for the development of gender identity (Fausto-sterling 67). Butler added that identity is arbitrary or transient: "The crucial point is that the very production of identity is at stake in the politics of gender" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 135). Identity is created from performativity, which is ever-changing. Gender suggests that an individual's identity is never fixed or static. Butler also argues that feminists embrace patriarchal culture and help it grow by addressing the inescapably masculine and feminine gender concepts that have been ingrained in society throughout history. She claims that in this instance, the very idea of patriarchy has run the risk of becoming a universalizing concept that obscures or

weakens the various ways that gender imbalance has been expressed in various cultural contexts. She believes that feminists support the notion that patriarchy, as a universal term, develops gender conceptions regarding identity and emphasises a norm or the fact of being physically male or female in different cultural contexts.

Gender norms, according to Butler, are impossible to achieve since they can only ever be approximated. Butler was influenced by Foucault, who argued that sex, gender, and sexual orientation are social constructs that shape our understanding of reality. Gender norms, in Butler's view, negatively characterise a space of unavoidable potentiality where they are either not met or are exceeded (Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 526). However, Butler asserts that gender norms can be demonstrated to be false in ways that are politically significant by virtue of being unappealing. It is important to think about how Butler understands the norm to function in connection to a field of power given how different this view is from Foucault's discussion of norms and the processes of normalisation in the sexual field. Butler emphasises that the disciplinary construction of gender has an impact on a variety of gender identities that are understandable within a system of forced heterosexuality (528). Butler challenges the conventional separation between gender as a cultural interpretation and sex, which is often seen as natural, necessary, and existing prior to cultural discourse. She argues that sex, typically understood as a binary category, is also culturally constructed and carries both prescriptive and restrictive implications similar to those of gender. Consequently, Butler suggests that the distinction between sex and gender is not as clear or meaningful as traditionally thought, proposing that "perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always gender with the consequence that the

distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 10).

Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* is deeply influenced by Michel Foucault’s theories on power and subjectivity. Foucault argued that power is not a possession of individuals or institutions, but rather a diffuse force operating through networks of relations and social practices (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 26). Drawing on these ideas, Butler contends that gender is not an innate or fixed attribute, but a social construct imposed on individuals through various power relations and repeated performances. She emphasizes that gender is enacted through continual acts rather than being an inherent quality. Butler also engages with Foucault’s insights on the interplay between power and knowledge, proposing that knowledge itself is produced within power dynamics. Thus, gender categories are not neutral or merely descriptive, but are constructed through power mechanisms that sustain prevailing gender norms and hierarchies. Moreover, Butler incorporates Foucault’s analysis of sexuality, particularly his critique of the “repressive hypothesis,” which describes how modern discourses on sexuality function to regulate and control sexual behavior (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 10). In this way, Butler’s work in *Gender Trouble* extends Foucault’s critical project by examining how power shapes the social construction of both gender and sexuality.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that gender is not a fixed or essential quality, but rather a performative act that is continually re-enacted and reaffirmed through social interactions. This performative nature of gender, she suggests, creates possibilities for subverting or challenging traditional gender norms and expectations.

Butler highlights drag and cross-dressing as particularly subversive practices that disrupt conventional understandings of gender (Jagose). Through these performances, individuals can experiment with different gender identities and expressions, thereby challenging the fixed and binary categories typically associated with gender.

Similarly, Butler explores the cultural practices of butch/femme identities, which also serve to undermine traditional gender roles and expectations (Crawley 183). By adopting these stylized and performative identities, individuals create new modes of being and identification that resist normative gender frameworks. Overall, Butler conceptualizes performativity as a means to open up spaces for non-normative gender expressions and identities, contesting the rigid, binary categories imposed by society. Embracing subversive practices such as drag and butch/femme identities enables individuals to resist and destabilize dominant gender norms, asserting their own desires and self-definitions. As Butler states, “Drag is not simply the illusion or performance of gender, but rather the exposure of the illusion of gender, the subversive appropriation of the imitative gestures through which gender itself is constituted” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 175)

Butler’s reader’s initial attraction to this concept of gender performativity may be partially explained by the way it was generally understood to associate antinormative subcultural behaviours such as “the cultural practises of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities” (Jagose) that Butler provides as examples with the ability for subversion. Subversion is the word Butler employs most heavily in the book’s subtitle and elsewhere. She contends that ‘the erosion of gender norms’ is the aim of a subversive feminism. Such interpretations of *Gender Trouble* that place an undue emphasis on performativity and assume that it

supports the political efficacy of heteronormativity are necessarily selective readings that must overlook other elements of the text. Despite being unmistakably influenced by a Foucauldian understanding of subjugation, modern feminist discussions about the purported inclusivity of the category women highlight the distinctiveness of Butler's intervention. According to Butler, feminism's attempts to address a contextualised issue "always close with an ashamed" etc. "at the end of the list" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 182). Butler claims that this failure is nonetheless instructive. According to Butler, the term "agency" refers to the constrained and vehemently quasi realm that the political object creates. The autonomous subject's proclamation of free will against institutional control is not what is meant by agency. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that the idea of an agential subject is not essential for understanding the political struggles of marginalized groups, including gay communities. She suggests that traditional notions of an autonomous subject with fixed gender and sexual identities can be limiting and may reinforce oppressive social structures. However, Butler also argues that in the specific context of gay politics, the idea of an agential subject is still relevant and necessary (Valocchi 761). She suggests that the struggles of gay communities are rooted in their desire to be recognized as autonomous, agential subjects with the ability to shape their own identities and express their desires freely. In contrast, Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* argues that the concept of an autonomous, agential subject is a relatively recent development within Western thought. He contends that our understanding of sexuality is largely shaped by broader social and cultural discourses rather than by individual agency alone. While Butler and Foucault differ in their perspectives on the role of agency in political struggles, both emphasize the critical importance of analyzing how

power operates throughout society and how it influences our constructions of identity and subjectivity.

Butler asserted that gender is performative, which means that no one is truly born with a particular gender. It is an act that is continuously produced and performed. The claim leads to the conclusion that gender is a repeat of an individual's behaviour. The act of repetition causes someone to change their gender. Butler views performativity as a process of self-creation rather than compulsion. When a male acts femininely while dressing as a girl, it is not a copy of the other person's behaviour. But it is a behaviour that happens on its own and keeps happening, so that the community values it as a transvestite (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 60). For instance, a woman's sexual identity will change into a lesbian if she repeatedly expresses interest in another woman. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler also stated that "gender is repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 44). Butler disagreed with the idea that gender, including the masculine and feminine genders, as well as sexual orientation, are determined by sex. Butler believes that sex or gender have no impact on identity. Identity derived from performative behaviours lacks a stable framework and is always shifting.

Sex and Gender in History of Ideas

The following study traces the philosophical genealogy of gender as a construct, from its classical origins to contemporary theory. While foundational, this history will be consistently viewed through the lens of its application to the literary

analysis at hand. The ideas of Plato and Aristotle on gender, though historically significant, establish the very essentialist frameworks that later theorists like Butler would dismantle and which Galgut's fiction often dramatizes as sites of conflict.

In *The Republic*, Plato argues that women possess intellectual and moral virtues comparable to those of men and therefore should have equal access to education and governance. However, his vision of sexual equality is grounded not in a recognition of women's inherent dignity and worth, but rather in the notion that women and men are interchangeable when it comes to their capacities and societal roles. For example, Plato argues that in order to achieve sexual equality, women should be trained as warriors and encouraged to participate in military campaigns alongside men. Plato thus propounds:

It follows that women with these abilities should also be selected to live with the men who have these abilities and be fellow-guardians with them. They are quite capable of it, and their natures are closely related to those of the men (Plato, *The Republic* 152)

The approach of Aristotle thus overlooks the fact that many women may not want to engage in warfare or other traditionally male-dominated roles, and that forcing them to do so may actually reinforce gender stereotypes and inequalities. Furthermore, Plato's vision of sexual equality does not necessarily challenge existing patriarchal structures, but rather seeks to integrate women into these structures on an equal basis with men. This can be seen in his proposal for a system of communal marriage and child-rearing, in which women's reproductive capacities are controlled and regulated by the state in order to achieve greater social harmony and stability. Overall, while

Plato's vision of sexual equality was radical for its time and has inspired many later thinkers, it is important to acknowledge that his approach to achieving this goal may be critiqued for compromising women's autonomy and agency.

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher who lived in the 4th century BCE, believed that gender roles were a natural part of human society and were based on biological differences between men and women. He argued that men and women had different capacities and virtues, and that these differences determined their respective roles and functions in society. For example, Aristotle believed that men were naturally suited for roles that required courage and rationality, such as political leadership, while women were suited for roles that required nurturing and domesticity, such as motherhood and household management. Aristotle's understanding of gender was closely tied to his broader philosophy of teleology, which held that everything in nature had a fixed purpose or end goal. He believed that men and women had different telos or natural ends, and that their roles in society were determined by these ends. In his work *Politics Book 1*, Aristotle discusses the division of labour and the roles assigned to men and women in society:

It is clear that all partnerships aim at some good, and that the partnership that is most authoritative of all and embraces all the others does so particularly, and aims at the most authoritative good of all. This is what is called the city or the political partnership (1252 a 3)

According to Aristotle, men's ultimate aim was to engage in public life and participate in the polis (city-state), while women's ultimate aim was to fulfil their reproductive and domestic duties within the household. However, it is important to

note that Aristotle's ideas on gender were based on his limited understanding of biology and society during his time, and his views have been criticized for being essentialist and reinforcing traditional gender roles. Aristotle's ideas do not align with contemporary understandings of gender performativity, which emphasize that gender is not solely determined by biological factors but is also a social and cultural construct performed and constructed through language, behaviors, and social norms. In contrast to Aristotle's essentialist perspective, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity argues that gender is not an inherent or fixed trait, but rather something constantly constructed and enacted through repetitive social and cultural practices. Butler posits that gender is a performative act whereby individuals embody gender norms and expectations through their behaviors, gestures, and language, and these performances collectively shape and sustain the social construction of gender (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 160). According to Butler, gender performativity is fluid and dynamic, not determined by fixed biological or essentialist categories but by social and cultural practices that are subject to change and contestation. Notably, some of the most criticized aspects of Aristotle's philosophy and theology relate to his views on women, which many interpret as reflective of a philosophical predisposition that reinforced patriarchal attitudes. They are also risky and the root of many of the common Western justifications of women's inferiority. According to Aristotle, women's incapacity to generate sperm is what makes them who they are (Deslauriers 217). In Western philosophy, Aristotle's perspective on women is crucial. Arguments made by Aristotle to support his ideas cannot be readily accepted in contemporary society. There are countless incidents that demonstrate how women can function in a variety of capacities better than men. The Enlightenment era shifted the focus towards

individual experience and consciousness, laying the groundwork for understanding identity as something formed, rather than pre-ordained.

An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1689) contains John Locke's (1632–1704) thoughts on “Of Identity and Diversity”, which is regarded as one of the earliest recorded conceptual frameworks of conscious experience as the repetitive subconscious of oneself. Numerous philosophers have long been interested in the subject of individual identity and the obstacles it presents. According to John Locke, mental stability determines one's individual identity. The identity dilemma, which is based on the problem of what characteristics or attributes define a particular individual at any given time, has several theoretical approaches. His ideas on identity, freedom, and individuality can be related to Butler's theory of gender performativity. Locke's theory of identity suggests that personal identity is not fixed or innate, but rather is created by our experiences and memories. He recognizes that gender norms are constructed through social practices and conventions. This has been proposed in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Book II, Chapter XXVIII, Section 10:

‘Virtue’ and ‘vice’ are names that are everywhere said and thought to apply to actions on the basis of their being inherently right or wrong; and as far as they really are applied in that way they to that extent coincide with the divine law above-mentioned. But whatever people say, we can see that the names ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’, in particular instances of their use throughout the various nations and societies in the world, are constantly attributed only to such actions as are in approved of or disapproved of in the country or society concerned. (Locke 124)

Furthermore, Locke's theory of freedom and individuality emphasizes the importance of individual choice and autonomy. He believed that individuals have the right to pursue their own interests and develop their own identities, without being restricted by external forces such as societal norms or gender expectations. This idea parallels Butler's theory of gender performativity, which highlights the role of individual agency in performing gender, allowing for expressions that transcend rigid and limiting gender norms. Locke asserted that because early "associations of ideas" form the basis of the self, they are more significant than later ones (Nimbalkar 138). According to Locke, to have a self, a person must be able to think. Since thinking is always accompanied by awareness, a person's sense of self can only go as far as their consciousness can go. According to a condensed form of Locke's theory of personal identification based on memory, self and personal identity are both necessary and sufficient conditions for memory.

David Hume's (1711-1776) famous *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) is grounded in an understanding of human nature. The scope and effectiveness of such a norm are questioned when gendered ideas are included. It demonstrates the extremely fragile place that the concept of "female" occupies inside conceptions of the "human" (O'Brien 641). David Hume contended that the fundamental idea of human nature is formed substantially differently for men and women. As a result of Hume's denial that moral virtues are grounded in external relations, his philosophy is exempt from having to explain any constant, unchanging norms of conduct. In his analyses of etiquette and marriage traditions, Hume also pursues his interest in the relationships between the sexes. His opinions on unusual sexual practises and moral development are frequently delivered in a tone of address that obscures their intent. Bravery is both

a style and a natural attribute, which contributes to his attraction. Physical strength is how Hume explains the 'natural' advantage that men have over women. He claims that innate male advantage must be abolished in a just society. Hume makes references to women as if they are unrelated to the topic of his research, which is human behaviour. When women are viewed as the targets of judgmental tastes, this mainly happens. Most notably, Hume is compelled to assert that "there is in all men, whether male and female, a desire and power of generation, more active than is ever uniformly exerted" (Korsmeyer 99) in the context of sexual impulses. He claims that the supremacy of men corresponds in a way that makes it challenging. Hume's theory of personal identity suggests that the self is not a fixed or permanent entity, but rather a bundle of constantly changing perceptions and experiences. Hume believed that many aspects of human experience, including gender roles, are shaped by social conventions and customs rather than inherent biological differences. This is similar to Butler's theory of gender performativity, which argues that gender roles and norms are constructed by societal expectations rather than reflecting biological essentialism. Hume emphasized the importance of individual autonomy and the ability to make choices based on personal preference rather than external influences. This idea is similar to Butler's emphasis on the agency of individuals in performing gender in ways that are not limited by societal norms.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) provided some fascinating insights on human moral philosophy and the societal structuring of identities in his state of nature thought experiment. He had a significant impact on political philosophy that came after. Rousseau claims that earlier phase of society "must have been the happiest and most enduring age" notwithstanding his persistent preference for the state as the locus

of natural goodness (Evans 242). His ideas about the nature of human beings and the role of society in shaping our identities can be seen as relevant to Judith Butler's theory. Like Butler, Rousseau believed that gender roles were socially constructed rather than innate or biological. He argued that society-imposed restrictions on individuals based on their gender, particularly on women, who were forced into subservient roles. In *The Social Contract* Book I, Chapter IV, he states... "The women also, except for the role of mothers, would be brought up like men, or rather, there would be no women at all, if nature had given the same physical and intellectual gifts to both sexes." Furthermore, Rousseau advocated for a more individualized approach to education that allowed children to develop their natural inclinations and abilities, regardless of their gender. This perspective aligns with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which posits that individuals should have the freedom to express their gender identity beyond the constraints of traditional gender roles and expectations. Butler argues that gender is not an innate quality but rather a series of performed acts shaped by cultural and social norms. Similarly, Jean-Jacques Rousseau contended that humans are born free and equal, but that societal structures and cultural institutions impose inequalities and hierarchies that restrict individual autonomy. He emphasized the formative role of education and socialization in shaping personal identity and argued that conventional gender roles are socially constructed rather than naturally determined. Both theorists, in their respective frameworks, critique the artificial constraints imposed by societal norms and advocate for a more liberated and authentic expression of identity. We struggle to understand the exact kind of freedom Rousseau believes a human being should have. To sufficiently substantiate Rousseau's developmental account, genuine human liberty

would need to be self-legitimized and self-authorized. In *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau describes how persons who are compelled to submit to the collective will are “forced to be free” (Evans 250). According to Rousseau, all clearly moral behaviour stems from the freedom to select one’s own course of conduct. He believes that one trait that sets humans apart from other animal species is our ability to make choices. In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau makes the case that the establishment of a legitimate state does not result in a net loss of freedom. Individuals are assured a realm of equal freedom under the law once sovereign power is established. The tension between social constraint and individual desire identified in Rousseau’s thought remains a recurring theme in literary explorations of identity and subjectivity.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), a pioneering English philosopher and writer, is widely regarded as one of the foundational figures of modern feminism. In her seminal text *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argues that women are not naturally inferior to men, but appear so only because they have been systematically denied equal access to education and opportunities for self-development (Skolnik 216). Her advocacy for women’s education and self-empowerment can be read as an early challenge to rigid gender roles and societal expectations. In this regard, Wollstonecraft’s insights serve as a precursor to Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, which posits that gender is not a fixed identity but a constructed and reiterated performance shaped by social norms. Wollstonecraft’s insistence on the transformative power of education positions women as capable agents, able to redefine their identities and resist patriarchal constraints. Her famous assertion, “I do not wish [women] to have power over men; but over themselves” (Wollstonecraft 43), encapsulates her vision of autonomy and

self-governance. Moreover, her critique of the arbitrary and socially constructed nature of gender roles anticipates Butler's call to disrupt normative structures that perpetuate gendered subjugation. In envisioning a society premised on equality and freedom, Wollstonecraft lays the groundwork for later feminist theorists seeking to expose and dismantle the ideological foundations of gender inequality. Twentieth-century philosophy deepened this inquiry into the relationship between the body, society, and identity, providing the direct theoretical underpinnings for Butler's work and, by extension, this analysis of Galgut.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) was a French phenomenologist and philosopher who wrote extensively on the nature of perception and embodiment. One of Merleau-Ponty's key insights is that our perception of the world is always embodied. In other words, our understanding of the world around us is shaped by our physical experiences, and our body is always present in our perception. This insight is particularly relevant to discussions of gender identity, as our sense of gender is intimately tied to our physical experiences of embodiment (HE and Ejgil 316). Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy offers valuable insights into the relationship between embodiment and identity, particularly in relation to gender. He posits that the body is not a passive vessel for the mind, but an active, intentional agent through which we engage with and interpret the world. This view challenges the Cartesian dualism that traditionally separates mind and body, offering instead a holistic account of human experience. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodiment as central to perception suggests that identity including gender identity, is fundamentally rooted in lived bodily experience. He further asserts that perception is always situated within specific social and cultural contexts, meaning that our understanding of the

world, including our own bodies and identities, is shaped by the norms and values of the societies we inhabit. From this perspective, gender and sexuality are not merely biologically determined or internally generated, but are co-constituted through embodied existence within a culturally mediated world. Thus, Merleau-Ponty's work provides a philosophical foundation for understanding gender as both an embodied and socially situated phenomenon, aligning with and enriching contemporary theories of gender performativity.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to embodiment and perception serves as a valuable philosophical precursor to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. While emerging from different intellectual traditions, both theorists emphasize the significance of the body as a site of meaning-making and social interaction. Butler's theory, developed in *Gender Trouble*, asserts that gender is not an innate or fixed attribute, but rather a socially constructed identity constituted through the repetition of stylized acts, behaviors, and gestures. In this framework, gender is not something one *is*, but something one *does*, thus challenging the essentialist and binary conceptions of male and female identities. Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body as an active, intentional agent rather than a passive container for the mind aligns with Butler's view of the body as a performative site where cultural norms are inscribed and enacted. For Merleau-Ponty, perception is always embedded within specific social and cultural contexts, meaning that our embodied experience is shaped by the normative structures in which we are situated. Similarly, Butler posits that gender identity is not an internal essence but a process of becoming shaped by the performative reiteration of norms and discourses. The phenomenological understanding of the body as a lived, socially situated entity reinforces Butler's claim

that gender is a dynamic and contingent practice rather than a natural or biological fact. In both frameworks, the body emerges as a crucial site of negotiation between self and society, where identity is not merely reflected but continuously produced and contested. Thus, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body-subject and Butler's theory of performativity intersect in their rejection of essentialism and their shared emphasis on the embodied and socially mediated nature of identity formation. The notion of the 'lived body' is therefore crucial for literary analysis, particularly in narratives that explore the embodied experience of identity, alienation, and social expectation.

Erving Goffman (1922-1982), a sociologist, proposed the concept of "gender display" in his book *Gender Advertisements* (1979). He argued that gender is not only performed through individual acts but also through the presentation of self in everyday life, including dress, body language, and other non-verbal cues. Erving Goffman is known for his research on social interaction, particularly in how people present themselves in everyday life. He introduced the concept of "impression management" (Milic and Bell 209) to describe the ways in which individuals actively work to create and maintain specific impressions of themselves in social situations. His ideas about impression management and the performance of gender are in line with Butler's concept of gender performativity. Goffman's work shows how individuals actively work to create and maintain gendered identities through their presentation of self in social situations. His analysis of gender advertisements also highlights the ways in which gender roles are constructed and performed through cultural symbols and representations (Milic and Bell 219).

Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1976) is a key source for understanding queer interactions with antinormativity. According to Halperin, Foucault was "the intellectual architect of what is arguably the most significant recent development in progressive politics in the U.S. and perhaps elsewhere" (Jagose). Michel Foucault makes a case for the emergence of biopower in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. A new kind of power known as "biopower" (Talcott 260) uses constant normalisation techniques and treats life itself as its subject of study. Sex is at the heart of modernity's tools for regulating demographic populations and the normalisation of the body, which are governed in connection to institutional forces like national economies, political ideologies, legal frameworks, and social policies. Butler's own conceptual coordinates are taken from an equally diverse spectrum of philosophers in an eclectic fashion. Her initial framing and entire execution of *Gender Trouble* are strongly influenced by Foucault, particularly *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (Grow). For the goal of creating a feminist genealogy of the category of women, Butler uses what Foucault achieved for sexuality as a model. The repressive notion, which *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* so comprehensively disapproved, is reinstated by Foucault's theory of normalisation. In accordance with a new kind of power that allows contemporary sexuality to rule existence, Foucault saw sexuality as a tool of comparison across a statistically distributed scale. But according to Foucault, the necessary and immanent coordinates of contemporary subjecthood, not rules, are what constitute exterior violence. This is not the norm as Butler describes it, a norm that may be reversed or at least mitigated against by being revealed as a regulatory exception (Armstrong 7).

In his later writings, Foucault argued for a conception of power that is so common that it leaves no room for a person to seek out their “real self” (Rozmarin 12). Emotional discourses result in the experience of being a subject in and of itself. We can only trace how identity is subjugated to the social and historical context of practices and discourse by challenging the perspective from which identity questions are framed. The idea of a “genuine,” “true,” or “authentic” self-created from one’s emotional experiences is rejected from a Foucauldian perspective on subjectivity and emotion (Taylor 177). The word “becoming” is used to define subjectivity, emphasising how dynamic it is. This dynamic of change is significantly influenced by even little events occurring inside a certain cultural and political context. Foucault examines the training and disciplinary power-related behaviours as he states “Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 105). According to Michel Foucault, disciplinary customs and mechanisms were initially developed within isolated institutional settings such as prisons, military barracks, hospitals, factories, and schools. Over time, these disciplinary methods extended beyond institutional boundaries and became widespread tools of social regulation and control. The defining feature of disciplinary power, as Foucault articulates in *Discipline and Punish*, is its direct application on the body, shaping individuals through surveillance, normalization, and internalized discipline. Feminist social and political theorists have drawn extensively from Foucault’s analysis of power and its relationship to the body to interrogate the ways in which society constructs and enforces norms of gender and sexuality. Foucault reconceptualizes

power not as something held or wielded by individuals or institutions, but as a diffuse and dynamic force that operates through everyday practices. He describes this as a capillary form of power, one that circulates throughout the social body, embedding itself in local, routine practices and yielding concrete, material effects. This understanding of power has enabled feminist theorists to explore how gendered bodies are regulated, disciplined, and constituted within specific socio-cultural contexts. This focus on the routine acts that perpetuate power relations has fused with the feminist quest to examine the politics of intimate relationships. Foucault stresses on the body's historical specificity. Making an appeal to ahistorical biological features normalises and justifies the idea that women are less important than men. Foucault's analysis of biopower and the regulatory control of sexuality therefore provides an important framework for understanding the political and historical dimensions of identity formation within broader cultural and literary contexts.

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), the founder of deconstruction, critically examined the foundations of Western metaphysics. His theories have significantly shaped contemporary thought, particularly in the realm of language, meaning, and identity. One of Derrida's key assertions is that meaning is not stable or inherent but emerges through a system of differences and oppositions (Nuyen 28). This idea has had a profound impact on Judith Butler's formulation of gender performativity. Butler draws on Derrida's conception of meaning to argue that gender is not an innate quality but is instead constituted through repeated acts, gestures, and behaviors that align with societal expectations. Thus, gender is not a biological or natural attribute but a socially constructed and reiterated performance. Butler's theory fundamentally disrupts the traditional binary classification of gender, proposing instead that gender

identities are fluid and continually shaped by cultural norms. In his essay “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida explores the interplay between power and the formation of collective identities (Derrida 282), a notion that closely aligns with the ways in which gender and sexuality are shaped by dominant discourses and institutional power. Through deconstruction, Derrida offers a theoretical lens to interrogate how language constructs gendered identities. By destabilizing the binary oppositions that underpin conventional understandings of gender, his work enables a reconceptualization of gender as dynamic, performative, and contextually contingent. The work of subsequent theorists further expands and applies these core ideas of performativity, construction, and power, creating a diverse toolkit for literary analysis.

Anne Fausto-Sterling (b. 1944), a prominent biologist and gender theorist, offers a critical perspective on the conventional binary model of sex and gender. In her influential work, *Sexing the Body* (2000), she challenges the rigid classification of individuals as strictly male or female, proposing instead a more fluid and multifactorial view of gender and sex. According to Fausto-Sterling, biological sex is not a straightforward or static category; rather, it is shaped by a complex interplay of anatomical, hormonal, and genetic factors. She contends that traditional binary frameworks fail to account for the natural diversity found in human sexual development. Her research foregrounds the existence of intersex conditions and other variations that disrupt the assumed alignment of biological sex with gender identity. While she affirms that gender is socially constructed, Fausto-Sterling also emphasizes the biological dimensions of identity, arguing that biology and culture are deeply intertwined. This approach moves beyond the simplistic dichotomy of nature versus

nurture. As Sax notes, Fausto-Sterling's model highlights the multidimensional nature of gender, acknowledging the intricate connections between biological processes and socio-cultural influences (Sax 175). Her work thus contributes to a more inclusive and dynamic understanding of gender identity.

Raewyn Connell (b. 1944), a noted sociologist, developed the influential concept of "hegemonic masculinity" in her work *Masculinities* (1995). Rather than viewing masculinity as a static or universally defined trait, Connell conceptualizes it as a socially constructed identity shaped by cultural, institutional, and power-based relations. Her theory of hegemonic masculinity underscores the ways in which certain dominant expressions of masculinity are legitimized and sustained through societal structures and hierarchies. While Judith Butler foregrounds the performative nature of gender, Connell focuses on the broader social and institutional mechanisms that produce and regulate gender norms. Despite their differing emphases, both theorists agree that gender is not a natural or essential attribute but is formed through ongoing social processes influenced by cultural expectations (Connell and Messerschmidt 836). Connell's concept is particularly useful for analysing representations of masculinity in literature, where male identities are often shaped by social expectations, institutional power structures, and shifting cultural norms.

Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) explores how cinema reinforces traditional gender roles and perpetuates the male gaze. She argued that cinema was a patriarchal institution that perpetuated a narrow and limiting vision of gender roles and identities. She said that it was indicative of a larger issue in society that needed to be addressed. She called for more diverse representation in

cinema to accurately reflect the diversity of gender roles and identities in society (Landau).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950-2009) in her book *Between Men* (1985), explored the relationship between gender, sexuality, and power. She argued that traditional understandings of masculinity and femininity were intimately tied to power dynamics. She also argued that gender was not a binary category but rather a continuum. Her work has shaped contemporary discussions of gender and sexuality in literary criticism. She has addressed a wide variety of topics, including gender roles, identity politics, and heteronormativity. Her work has been widely read and has had a profound impact on the field of literary criticism. Her insights have also been influential in other disciplines such as sociology and anthropology (Sedgwick16).

“The Laugh of the Medusa” (2010) is the English translation of Cixous' 1975 poem *Le Rire de la Meduse*. She exhorts women to reject the conventionally oppressive, masculine discourse that has long dominated literature. She views women's bodies as the primary source of feminine speech. According to her, a woman may only be freed from the past and its oppressive language if she uses a feminine language to investigate her own body. By eradicating gender differences in language, Cixous breaks down all the barriers that restrict women from being active and exhorts them to create a new system of signification that is not constrained by binary distinctions between man and woman, passive and active, or dark and light. In Greek mythology, the goddess Minerva is said to have cursed Medusa, transforming her into a monstrous figure with serpentine hair and a petrifying gaze. The hero Perseus ultimately defeats Medusa by beheading her. Hélène Cixous reinterprets this myth in

her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*, viewing Medusa's silencing and destruction as symbolic of patriarchal efforts to suppress female voices and agency. She critiques women who conform to phallogentric norms, referring to them as the "woman of yesterday" (Biesecker 90). Cixous urges women to liberate themselves from the constraints imposed by male-dominated discourse and culture, advocating for a form of writing that allows women to express their unique experiences and identities.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity resonates with Cixous's feminist vision. Butler argues that gender is not a fixed or innate trait, but rather an ongoing performance shaped through actions, language, and societal expectations. In this framework, gender is not something one inherently possesses but something one repeatedly enacts. Both Cixous and Butler call for a rejection of traditional gender norms, Cixous through women's writing as a mode of resistance, and Butler through the subversive rearticulation of gender performances (Bowen). *The Laugh of the Medusa*, therefore, becomes a powerful metaphor for the radical potential of women's voices and creative expression. By rejecting patriarchal narratives, women can redefine their identities and open new spaces for autonomy and transformation. While Cixous emphasizes the emancipatory force of *écriture féminine*, and Butler concentrates on performative subversion, both theorists ultimately seek to dismantle oppressive structures and reimagine gendered existence.

The discussion of these theoretical perspectives prepares the ground for the literary analysis undertaken in the subsequent chapters, where these concepts will be applied to examine representations of gender, sexuality, and identity in selected literary texts. This chapter has provided a comprehensive understanding of how

gender is performed, constructed, and regulated within societal norms, paving the way for a nuanced exploration of these dynamics in the literary texts addressed in subsequent chapters. By integrating this theoretical foundation with close readings of Galgut's fiction, this thesis will demonstrate how his narratives serve as a critical site for interrogating heteronormative structures, reflecting on the fluidity of identities, and challenging the binaries of gender and sexuality.

Chapter 2

Gender Subjectivity and Post-Apartheid Society

The transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa did not simply erase entrenched systems of power but reconfigured them, creating a complex new landscape for the performance of gender and identity. The ‘reconfiguration’ is central to the theoretical framework of this chapter. The post-apartheid condition, characterized by the formal dismantling of apartheid’s “rigid regulatory frame” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 43), creates a unique and volatile context for identity formation. Where the apartheid state explicitly scripted racialized and gendered roles through law and violence, the new era is defined by the collapse of these old scripts and the fraught, incomplete process of writing new ones. Damon Galgut’s fiction serves as a critical site for exploring this reconfiguration, where the political becomes intensely personal and theoretically illustrative of how gender subjectivity is negotiated in a historical vacuum. Pre-apartheid refers to the period before the formal implementation of apartheid policies in South Africa. South Africa had a long history of racial discrimination and segregation before apartheid was officially introduced in 1948. During the pre-apartheid era, discriminatory laws and practices were already in place, but they were not as systematic and institutionalized as they would become during the apartheid regime (Cobley 67).

The Post-Apartheid Condition: A Fractured Regulatory Frame

Apartheid was a legally enforced system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination implemented by the National Party government in South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s (Allen 10). The term *apartheid*, derived from the

Afrikaans language, translates to “apartness” or “separateness,” reflecting the regime’s central aim of dividing the population along rigid racial lines. Under this system, South Africans were classified into four primary racial categories: Black, White, Coloured, and Indian (Roberts 58). Classification was based on a combination of physical appearance, ancestry and subjective measures such as social acceptance (Ellis 70). The legal codification of identity makes apartheid a hyper-literal example of what Judith Butler would term a ‘rigid regulatory frame,’ a system that forcibly materializes specific identities through repetitive, state-sanctioned performances of race, gender and sexuality.

The term *post-apartheid* denotes the historical period following the end of institutionalized racial segregation in South Africa and the advent of democratic governance. The transformation officially began with the country’s first multiracial democratic elections in 1994, which resulted in Nelson Mandela’s presidency and symbolized a national commitment to equality and reconciliation. Under the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC), South Africa entered a new phase marked by efforts to dismantle the legacy of apartheid. The utility of the ‘post-apartheid’ concept for this study lies in its function as a state of discursive and normative flux. It is a laboratory where the performative nature of identity, always present, becomes starkly visible. The old regulatory frame is fractured but not absent, creating a space where characters must perform their genders and sexualities without clear scripts, leading to the profound anxiety, alienation, and potential for subversion that Galgut chronicles. The historical context addressed here is not merely a backdrop in Galgut’s work but an active force that shapes, constrains and provokes the gender subjectivity of his characters. The rigid racial hierarchies of the past find their echo in

the rigid gender norms his characters must navigate, and the struggle for liberation at the national level is mirrored by the intimate struggles for personal authenticity. In essence, the post-apartheid condition is the specific socio-historical catalyst that exposes the mechanics of gender performativity itself.

In post-apartheid South African society, gender subjectivity remains a complex issue that intersects with issues of race, class, and sexuality. Some key aspects of gender subjectivity in post-apartheid society like gender-based violence, women's political representation, gender and economic inequality, traditional gender roles, etc. can be traced in the post-apartheid South African society. Galgut's novels meticulously trace these intersections, moving beyond sociological description to expose the internal psychological toll of these external forces. His work demonstrates that these are not isolated issues but interconnected symptoms of a society grappling with the legacy of a system that disciplined bodies and identities according to a strict racial and gendered hierarchy.

Theorizing Gender Subjectivity in Flux

As discussed in the previous chapter, gender subjectivity emerges from theoretical discussions within feminist and poststructuralist thought that challenge the notion of a fixed or unified identity. Rather than treating gender as a stable or biologically determined attribute, contemporary gender theory understands subjectivity as a dynamic process shaped through discourse, social interaction, and historical circumstance. (Alcoff 417) In this study, the concept of gender subjectivity functions as an analytical lens through which the experiences of characters in Damon

Galgut's fiction can be interpreted within the shifting socio-political landscape of post-apartheid South Africa.

Within this framework, gender subjectivity refers to the lived experience of gender as it is negotiated through cultural expectations, personal desires, and social structures. The post-apartheid moment provides a particularly revealing context for this negotiation. The collapse of apartheid's rigid regulatory structures did not eliminate hierarchical power relations but instead produced a condition of instability in which identities are continually redefined. In such a context, the formation of gender subjectivity becomes a historically situated process rather than a purely individual one.

In the context of postmodern feminism, the concept of subjectivity takes on a unique perspective that challenges traditional notions of a stable, unified, and fixed self. Subjectivity, within postmodern feminism, recognizes that our sense of self and identity is not predetermined or fixed but is shaped and influenced by various social, cultural, and historical factors. It emphasizes the idea that subjectivity is fluid, fragmented, and constructed through discourse, language, and power relations. Furthermore, postmodern feminism explores how subjectivity intersects with other aspects of identity, such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. It recognizes that individuals navigate multiple and intersecting systems of power and privilege that shape their experiences and subjectivities differently. Galgut's narrative style, often fluid and resistant to fixed perspective, embodies this postmodern understanding. His characters are not coherent selves but sites where conflicting discourses of race, gender, and history collide. The post-apartheid condition is the concrete historical

instantiation of this collision, a moment where multiple, competing discourses of liberation and retribution, reconciliation and unresolved trauma, new constitutional rights and old social hierarchies contests to define the subject.

The idea that women are seen as victims of “discourse determinism” aligns with certain perspectives within postmodern feminism (Ryan). Discourse determinism refers to the belief that language and discourse have a significant role in shaping and determining our understanding of the world, including gender relations and women’s experiences. From a postmodern feminist standpoint, language and discourse are not considered neutral or objective, but rather as tools that reflect and reinforce power dynamics and societal norms (Bowell 10). In this context, women are often portrayed as victims because dominant discourses and narratives perpetuate patriarchal ideologies and reinforce gender inequalities. Discourse determinism suggests that the way women are represented and discussed in society can have a significant impact on their experiences, opportunities, and self-perception. It emphasizes that the language used to describe women and femininity is not merely descriptive but actively constructs and limits their social roles, agency, and possibilities.

When applied to Galgut’s fiction, this theoretical understanding of subjectivity becomes particularly illuminating. His characters frequently experience identity as fragmented and unstable, reflecting the broader tensions of a society attempting to redefine itself after decades of institutionalized segregation and control. However, Galgut’s female characters often complicate a purely deterministic reading. While they are undoubtedly shaped and often wounded by patriarchal discourses, they also exhibit agency, however constrained. Figures like Ellen in *The Beautiful Screaming of*

Pigs or Amor in *The Promise* actively, if not always successfully, seek to rewrite the narratives that confine them. Their struggles demonstrate how gender subjectivity is not simply imposed from above but is negotiated within the overlapping pressures of history, culture, and personal experience.

Women continue to face significant economic inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. They are more likely to be employed in low-paid and precarious jobs, and to face barriers to accessing education and training. Women are also disproportionately affected by poverty and unemployment. Traditional gender roles continue to shape gender identity and behaviour in post-apartheid South African society. Women are often expected to prioritize caregiving and domestic work, while men are expected to be providers and breadwinners. These expectations can limit individual's freedom to express their gender identities and make choices about their lives. The persistent inequalities are not merely sociological facts but are, in the framework of this study, the material consequences of the fractured regulatory frame. They are the economic and social manifestations of the unresolved tensions in post-apartheid gender performativity. The societal challenges are not abstract in Galgut's fiction; they are the very fabric of his character's lives. The economic precariousness of a character like Adam in *The Impostor* is directly tied to his crisis of masculine identity, while the traditional expectations placed on women haunt characters across his novels, from the protagonist's mother in *Small Circle of Beings* to the Swart family matriarchs in *The Promise*.

Galgut's Literary Laboratory: Analyzing Gender Subjectivity

Sexual identity, a crucial aspect of gender subjectivity, is a recurring theme in Galgut's novels. Rather than presenting fixed identities, Galgut explores sexuality as a terrain of confusion, desire and performance. His characters, across a diverse range of backgrounds and contexts, confront their own desires and navigate the complexities of their sexual orientation. Galgut's exploration of sexual identity goes beyond mere labels, delving into the emotional and psychological landscapes of the characters as they wrestle with their desires, attractions and relationships. Therefore aligns with a Butlerian view where sexual identity is not a core truth but an effect of repeated acts and desires that may or may not cohere into a stable category. In the post-apartheid context, this incoherence is heightened. The collapse of the apartheid state's hyper-moralistic, heteronormative public discourse creates a space where previously suppressed desires can surface, yet they must be negotiated within a society where new freedoms clash with enduring conservative social mores, making sexual identity a particularly volatile and revealing site of struggle.

The theme of identity is intricately woven throughout Galgut's works. His protagonists, often caught between societal expectations and their own inner truths, grapple with questions of self-acceptance, belonging and the search for meaning. The journeys they go through are not toward a pre-ordained authentic self but are characterized by a Butlerian 'stylized repetition of acts' within the 'highly rigid regulatory frame' of post-apartheid society. The frame is uniquely defined by the tension between a constitutional promise of liberated identities (including sexual and gender equality) and the persistent, often violent, enforcement of traditional norms.

The 'post' in post-apartheid thus denotes the specific historical pressure cooker in which this 'stylized repetition' occurs, making every performance of self a negotiation with the nation's own unresolved past and its aspirational future. The gender subjectivity is less a discovery and more a continuous, often fraught, negotiation.

Power dynamics form another crucial aspect of Galgut's exploration of gender subjectivity. Galgut is a master at revealing how large-scale political power (apartheid, colonialism) is internalized and reproduced in intimate relationships. His characters navigate relationships and institutions where power imbalances and societal structures influence their experiences of gender. Galgut presents the protagonist's negotiations of power, both within themselves and in their interactions with others, shedding light on the ways in which power shapes and intersects with their gender subjectivity. The issue of gender subjectivity in post-apartheid society in South Africa is complex and multifaceted. While apartheid was officially abolished in 1994, its legacy still shapes many aspects of South African society, including the way gender roles and identities are constructed and experienced.

Subverting the Binary: Fluidity and Resistance

Despite the pervasive influence of gender norms that apartheid actively reinforced, Galgut's novels also explore the fluidity and ambiguity of gender identity and expression that the new political dispensation inadvertently enables. He deconstructs traditional gender roles and challenges the assumption that gender is binary and fixed. His narrative itself often performs this fluidity, slipping between character's perspectives and refusing a stable authorial voice, thus mirroring the thematic content. The narrative technique used is a formal analogue to the post-

apartheid condition itself: a decentered, multi-perspectival reality where no single voice be it white, Black, male or female can claim absolute authority. His male characters may experience gender nonconformity or ambiguity, and grapple with sexual orientation and attraction. The protagonist of *In a Strange Room* exemplifies this, his identity shifting and dissolving across different travelogues and relationships, never settling into a fixed category. The rootlessness is emblematic of a broader post-apartheid subjectivity, where geographic and psychic dislocation becomes a condition for exploring identities unbounded by the old, rigid categories.

Galgut's novels examine gendered power dynamics. He explores how gender roles shape people's lives and how they interact with each other. He also examines how expectations and assumptions based on gender influence the way people think and behave. Galgut's novels challenge traditional gender roles and show how people can break free from them. He shows how individuals can transcend the limitations imposed by gender roles and how society as a whole can benefit from a more gender-equal approach. He also highlights how meaningful relationships and connections can be created when people can accept and respect each other regardless of their gender. His male characters may wield power over women or other men based on their gendered identities. They may struggle with the ethics and implications of this power. His female characters often challenge the power dynamics of patriarchy, challenging the status quo and demanding political and social change. For example, Amor Swart in *The Promise* operates as a quiet but persistent force of moral challenge to her family's patriarchal and racist foundations, her subjectivity defined by a refusal to conform to their expectations.

Elements of Apartheid Literature and Galgut's Narrative Form

Galgut's novels contain elements of Apartheid literature in terms of scenes, settings, narrative styles, situations, plot constructions, and other ways that reflect gender performativity. However, he does not merely replicate these elements; he re-functions them for a post-apartheid context. The utility of this approach is that it allows him to show how the external, political dramas of the apartheid era have been internalized as psychological and gendered conflicts in the present. As apartheid literature often includes scenes depicting the experiences of individuals and communities affected by the apartheid system, Galgut's work reveals how these same structures now shape the intimate 'regulatory frames' within which post-apartheid subjectivity is performed. The examples of apartheid literature scenes can be reflected through following elements, among them are forced removals, resistance and resilience, life under apartheid, relationships across racial lines, and protests and demonstrations. The forced removals, protests, and racial divisions of classic apartheid literature are internalized in Galgut's work; they become the landscape of the self.

The remote hospital in *The Good Doctor* is less a realistic setting and more a symbolic 'heterotopia of deviation' as described by Foucault, a space where deviant identities are placed and where the power dynamics of the new South Africa are staged in miniature. The setting is not just a relic of apartheid but a microcosm of the post-apartheid dilemma: a space where the promise of reform and healing is perpetually stymied by the lingering logic of segregation and powerlessness. Galgut uses the legacy of apartheid scenes, the lingering trauma, the spatial segregation, the

institutional power as a narrative engine to drive his character studies. These scenes depicts the brutality and trauma of the removal process, as well as the devastation and loss experienced by those who were displaced. Apartheid literature also depicts protests and demonstrations against apartheid policies. These scenes may show the bravery and determination of activists who risked their lives to speak out against the system. In addition, they may show the brutal police repression and violence that often accompany these protests.

Apartheid literature also portrays relationships and interactions between different races of people. These scenes may show the challenges and complexities of relationships across racial lines. In addition, they may show the potential for solidarity and resistance. In the post-apartheid novel, these interracial relationships are no longer solely about political solidarity but become fraught sites where the intimate, often unspoken, legacies of racial privilege and trauma are negotiated, deeply inflecting performances of gender and sexuality. Resistance and resilience in Apartheid literature focuses on the individuals and communities who resisted apartheid policies. They fought for their rights and freedom. Resistance scenes may show acts of defiance, protest, or sabotage. In addition, they may show the creative ways people found to resist the system and maintain their dignity and humanity.

In *A Sinless Season*, the reformatory setting becomes a laboratory for the violent enforcement of gender norms. The narrative unfolds during South Africa's pivotal historical shift from institutionalized apartheid to democratic governance, a transition that is central to the novel's exploration of identity. The setting is crucial because it represents an institution struggling to impose an old, disciplinary order

(turning boys into gentlemen) at the very moment the country's overarching 'regulatory frame' is collapsing. The tension evolved makes it a perfect locus for observing the crisis of gender performativity in a post-apartheid context. The characters in the novel grapple with their identities in a society that has been deeply affected by the legacies of apartheid. The rigid gender roles that have historically defined masculinity and femininity are challenged as the characters navigate their relationships and personal experiences. For instance, the boys at Bleda Reformatory are subjected to societal expectations of masculinity, which dictate that they must embody traits such as toughness, emotional restraint, and dominance, reflecting what R.W. Connell terms "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, *Masculinities* 77), showing how it is instilled through institutional discipline. Mr. Hall's insistence on turning the boys into 'gentlemen' reflects a desire to mold them into socially acceptable versions of masculinity, which can be seen as a response to the chaotic and violent legacies of apartheid:

Remember, we have pride here. That is why we do not call this a reformatory. This is a school, like any other, and you are boys, like any others. Let me be frank with you - other reformatories would treat you like criminals. But not here. We have managed to turn our boys into gentlemen. We hope to do the same to you. You will be struck by the decency of the boys here - there is no coarseness.

(Galgut, *A Sinless Season* 13)

The emotional bonds between characters, particularly between Scott and Raoul, highlight the complexities of male friendships in a post-apartheid context. The relationship between them is marked by intimacy and vulnerability, which challenges

traditional notions of masculinity offering what Eve Sedgwick might describe as a "homosocial continuum" (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 5), where male bonds blur the boundaries between friendship and latent desire, creating a subjectivity fraught with tension. The emotional depth suggests a redefinition of gender subjectivity, where the characters are allowed to express their feelings and desires outside the confines of rigid gender norms. Scott Berry reflects on his sense of alienation and the weight of his past when he states, "How much more than just two years, he wondered, had he sacrificed by his actions?" (Galgut, *A Sinless Season* 11) This introspection highlights his struggle with identity and the consequences of his choices in a society marked by systemic oppression and personal loss. It echoes Judith Butler's idea of "gender melancholia" (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 145), where suppressed desires and traumas resurface as unresolved grief. His alienation reflects the destabilization of identity in a post-apartheid world, where old racial and gendered hierarchies persist despite political change.

The racial divisions and systemic inequalities of apartheid create a backdrop of tension and conflict that influences the character's interactions. For example, the boys at the reformatory come from diverse backgrounds and their experiences are shaped by the legacies of racial oppression. This context complicates their understanding of masculinity and femininity, as they navigate not only gender norms but also the expectations tied to their racial identities. Scott's realization of the impact of his environment is evident when he observes:

He had used to think in terms of good and evil, but not any more. He had thought Anthony Lord was a good person, but no longer. He had simply

suffered, that was all; he had lived and suffered and died. There was nothing good in life. There was only suffering and evil, no more than that. Suffering and evil. (Galgut, *A Sinless Season* 121)

illustrating how the harsh realities of their surroundings shape their perceptions of morality and identity. The evident shift in perspective highlights the struggle to maintain a sense of self in a world that often feels corrupt and unforgiving. The collapse of moral certainty is a quintessential post-apartheid crisis, where the clear binaries of the liberation struggle (good vs. evil, oppressed vs. oppressor) break down, leaving individuals in a nebulous space where identity itself becomes unstable. Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality (Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins" 1265) helps unpack how Scott's identity is shaped simultaneously by race, gender, and class, a nexus apartheid rigidly enforced.

Small Circle of Beings explores gender subjectivity through the lens of hereditary mental illness, framing it as a melancholic inheritance of gendered trauma. The protagonist's struggle with her identity as a white woman in a racially divided society highlights the complexities of gender subjectivity. She reflects on her discomfort with the local community, describing them as "odd" and "strange" while acknowledging her own fear and shame in engaging with their rituals, which she deems "inscrutable" (Galgut, *Small Circle of Beings* 11) exemplifies what Sara Ahmed terms "affective economies" (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 120), where fear and shame circulate to reinforce racial boundaries. This internal conflict illustrates how apartheid's legacy influences her perception of herself and others, creating a barrier that complicates her understanding of identity. The protagonist's

relationship with her mother, who suffers from madness, further emphasizes the theme of gender subjectivity. The mother's condition is described as a hereditary madness, engages Judith Butler's theory of "gender melancholia" (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 145) which the protagonist fears she may inherit, leading her to question her own mental stability. She reflects on this fear, stating, "I think at once of my mother's sister, my aunt, whom I did not know well, but who is, I believe, in an institution somewhere" (Galgut, *Small Circle of Beings* 16). This fear is compounded by the societal expectations placed on women, as she grapples with the notion of being a caretaker while also confronting her own vulnerabilities. The hereditary aspect of madness leads her to question her own mental stability, as she admits, "I have by now, of course, accepted the idea. At times it seems an interesting notion: to endure the shrinking of my brain until my world is an acre of lawn and two dirty rooms" (16). The protagonist's internal struggle is further highlighted when she expresses her dread, saying:

There will come a time in my life when, unbeknown to myself, my comprehension of events will begin to change in subtle ways. I will fail to grasp the true significance of words. People will threaten me, will plan my downfall behind my back. The thought of this is terrible to me: I cry. Stephen tries to comfort me, but there is nothing he can really say. If this will happen, it will happen despite my will. (16).

The protagonist's reflections on her mother's madness reveal how the historical context of apartheid has shaped their familial dynamics, creating a cycle of trauma and emotional disconnection.

The utility of the ‘post-apartheid’ concept becomes crucial here, serving as the theoretical framework for analyzing the reconfiguration, rather than the disappearance, of power dynamics. In this context, the protagonist’s relationship with Cedric represents a shift in her understanding of gender and sexuality. Cedric’s raw masculinity contrasts sharply with Stephen’s polite demeanor, allowing her to explore her desires in a way that defies traditional gender norms. The relationship between them serves as a form of resistance against the constraints of her previous marriage, illustrating the potential for personal liberation in a changing social landscape. The protagonist’s realization that “my body (can it be?) has meaning again” resonates with Judith Halberstam’s concept of “queer temporality” (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* 11), where desire defies heteronormative life scripts, signifies her journey toward reclaiming her identity and desires, reflecting the broader societal shifts occurring in post-apartheid South Africa (Galgut, *Small Circle of Beings* 72). Moreover, the interactions between the protagonist and her servants, Salome and Moses, highlight the complexities of race and class in shaping gender subjectivity. The protagonist’s ambivalence towards Moses, whom she both fears and relies upon, underscores the power dynamics at play in their relationship. The protagonist’s fraught dependence on Moses and Salome exemplifies what Ann Laura Stoler calls “intimate apartheid” (Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* 11), where colonial hierarchies persist in domestic labor. Her acknowledgment of their shared history, as Moses worked for her family long before her marriage, complicates her understanding of identity and belonging in a post-apartheid society. The dynamic of post-apartheid society illustrates how the remnants of apartheid continue to influence personal relationships, shaping the character’s identities in profound ways.

In *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, Ellen, Patrick's mother, embodies the struggle for self-identity in a patriarchal society. As discussed in the previous chapter, gender subjectivity is shaped through historically situated social and cultural forces rather than emerging as a fixed essence. After her divorce, she declares, "I feel like myself for the first time, Patrick. It's all been an act till now" (Galgut, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* 22). This statement reflects her awakening to her own desires and the rejection of the roles imposed upon her by her marriage and societal expectations. The moment of self-realization is critically framed by the post-apartheid context; the collapse of the old political order creates a social fissure that allows for the re-examination of personal, gendered scripts. This moment of self-realization reflects what Simone de Beauvoir identifies as women's struggle against imposed identities: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 283). Ellen's transformation is marked by her engagement in various political movements, which she uses as a means to assert her identity. The novel elaborates on her metamorphosis through Patrick's observation:

As if through the years of her marriage she had been holding herself painfully static, my mother gave in to motion. This was obvious on a physical level: she was constantly restless, looking around her, moving about. But her condition ran deeper than this. She threw herself with wild abandon into different fads and movements, and then discarded them for others. (Galgut, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* 23).

The constant reinvention addressed here signifies her resistance to traditional gender roles, as she seeks to reclaim her agency in a society that has historically marginalized

women. Her 'wild abandon' into various movements illustrates the utility of the post-apartheid concept: it reveals a landscape where political and personal liberation are intensely intertwined, yet also chaotic and unstable, mirroring the nation's own search for a new identity.

Patrick, on the other hand, grapples with the expectations of masculinity in a post-apartheid context. His experiences in the army reveal the pressures of conforming to hyper-masculine ideals, as he describes the environment as "testosterone-swollen animals with whom, it often felt, I had nothing in common" (51). Read through the framework of gender subjectivity outlined earlier, Patrick's alienation illustrates the tension between individual identity and socially imposed masculine performance. The army, a key institution of the apartheid state, becomes in the post-apartheid context a site where an anachronistic, violent masculinity is performed, highlighting the difficulty of reforming gendered identities tied to old power structures.

The impact of apartheid is also evident in the character's relationships, particularly between Ellen and Godfrey, her younger black lover. Their relationship challenges societal norms, as Ellen navigates her feelings of guilt and privilege, stating, "You think you can fuck history away, Ellen? Is that what you think?" (74). The Ellen-Godfrey relationship reflects Frantz Fanon's analysis that "the Negro is a phobogenic object" in colonial desire (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 151). Fanon explicitly examines interracial relationships as sites of historical tension (42-45). Thus, the relationship becomes a powerful illustration of how gender subjectivity is inseparable from racial history in post-apartheid South Africa. This confrontation

underscores the complexities of race and gender in a society still grappling with the legacies of apartheid, revealing how personal relationships are influenced by broader socio-political dynamics.

In *The Quarry*, Galgut explores the complex relationship between two men, Valentine and the unnamed traveller, who are both struggling to come to terms with their identities. Valentine is trying to flee his past while traveller is searching for a sense of belonging. Their relationship exemplifies what Judith Butler terms “the ambivalent production of identity” where “the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 3). Rather than introducing the theoretical paradigm again, this chapter applies the concept to the marginal identities depicted in Galgut’s fiction. The ‘abjection’ is directly informed by the post-apartheid context; both men are, in a sense, refuse of the new system, one a fugitive from justice and the other a spiritual vagrant, their union highlighting the marginalized subjectivities that persist in the new era. As the two men come together, they must confront the choices they have made and find a way to reconcile their differences as depicted in the novel:

He drank another and another and another. He and his ragged companion sat hunkered in the open door together, drinking bottles dry and discarding them. They threw them out of the door and they burst on the ground in tiny and beautiful explosions. There was nothing to eat in the car. He had an urge to take the other man’s hand and because he wanted to he did so. Then they crouched there together like lovers, not looking at each other, not speaking. (Galgut, *The Quarry* 129).

The protagonist's experiences highlight the dislocation and fragmentation of identity in a society still grappling with its past. For instance, when he observes the crowd of people gathering in the township, he feels a strange uneasiness as they stare at him, indicating how racial dynamics influence his sense of belonging and self-perception. This moment underscores the tension between individual identity and collective historical trauma:

In the open tract of land between the township and the town there was a crowd of people gathering. They stood in groups and little clumps among the wind-burned grass. As he drew closer he saw that there were caravans parked in a circular formation and an expanse of canvas lying on the ground. The canvas was limp. There were men in overalls holding ropes in their hands. (75)

Moreover, the interactions between characters often reveal the intersection of race and gender. "The minister had nothing. He sat very upright in the chair with his body angled slightly away from the Captain, fingers held together in his lap" (39) embodies the internalized pressures of conforming to traditional masculine ideals within a racially charged environment. His physical posture reflects the struggle to assert his identity while navigating societal expectations shaped by both race and gender thus embodying R.W. Connell's analysis of "protest masculinity" where marginalized men embrace the hegemonic model while being denied its institutional supports (Connell, *Masculinities* 114). The character of Valentine also illustrates the complexities of gender subjectivity in a post-apartheid context. When he holds the cassock on his lap, it becomes a symbol of both vulnerability and a desire for connection, as he finds comfort in its sensual texture:

He sat in the corner with the cassock in his lap and he rubbed the cloth between his fingers. It had a sensual texture that his life did not and its smoothness was strange and consoling. He sat there, rubbing. His eyes were closed. The lamp was still burning although the sun had come up and it was light in the room. (Galgut, *The Quarry* 44)

The moment addressed here highlights how clothing and material culture can serve as expressions of identity, revealing the emotional weight of gender performance in a society marked by historical oppression. The cassock, a symbol of a rigid, institutional identity, becomes in his hands an object of fluid, personal sensuality. The subversion of a religious symbol mirrors the larger post-apartheid struggle to repurpose the rigid identities of the past into something more fluid and personally meaningful.

Furthermore, the narrative captures the impact of apartheid's legacy on personal relationships. The protagonist's encounter with the police, where he feels weight of his past illustrates how historical trauma continues to shape his interactions and sense of self: "He bowed his head and suddenly he smelled himself, sweat dirt smoke intermingled, all the complex odours of flight." (36) The lingering effects of apartheid create a backdrop against which characters must navigate their identities, often leading to feelings of alienation and conflict. The 'odour of flight' is the somatic manifestation of a post-apartheid anxiety, a physical reminder that the past is a pursued from which one can never fully escape. The novel examines how characters perform and embody different forms of gender identity. It also examines how their relationships are shaped by social and cultural expectations of gender. The novel

paints a vivid picture of the struggles of characters as they strive to find their place in a world where gender roles are rigidly defined. It also shows the beauty of acceptance, empathy, and understanding of gender identity and expression. This is a timely story that will resonate with many readers. It's a powerful reminder of the importance of acceptance of all gender identities and expressions. It also highlights the need for more open dialogue and understanding about these issues.

In Damon Galgut's novel *The Good Doctor*, several characters grapple with power imbalances. The story is set in post-apartheid South Africa and follows the lives of two doctors, Frank Eloff and Laurence Waters, working in a remote and impoverished rural hospital. Frank describes the hospital as a "strange twilight place, halfway between nothing and somewhere" (Galgut, *The Good Doctor* 34). This liminal setting reflects the unstable terrain in which gender and social identities are renegotiated in the post-apartheid era. This setting becomes what Michel Foucault calls a "heterotopia of deviation", a space where individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required norm are placed (Foucault, *Of Other Spaces* 5). As a white South African, Frank Eloff occupies a position of privilege and power within the hospital. He is the superintendent and has a higher social status compared to the majority of the black staff members. However, Frank's power is also constrained by his isolation and his inability to assert control over his own life. He struggles with a sense of powerlessness and frustration, both professionally and personally. This 'halfway' existence mirrors Frank's own fractured identity. As a privileged yet powerless figure, he embodies the contradictions of post-apartheid South Africa. His character demonstrates the utility of the post-apartheid concept by illustrating how historical white privilege becomes hollow and dysfunctional when detached from the

political system that once guaranteed its meaning. His duality is laid bare in a confession:

So for a while I had two lives: one that was empty and adrift, in the hospital by day, and another that was illicit and intense, by the side of the road at night. The one had nothing to do with the other. For a long time she had no curiosity about who I was or what I did. And when she finally asked, I found myself telling a lie. (Galgut, *The Good Doctor* 41)

The juxtaposition of empty (hospital) and illicit (roadside shack) reveals his performative power: though he holds institutional authority, his personal life is marked by guilt and escapism. The shack, the weakest and flimsiest of structures, becomes a metaphor for his precarious moral grounding. The fractured existence is a direct consequence of the post-apartheid condition, where old identities are unsustainable but new, integrated ones remain out of reach.

Laurence Waters is a young, idealistic doctor from the city who arrives at the hospital as a volunteer. Initially, Laurence is filled with enthusiasm and a desire to make a difference. However, he soon becomes disillusioned by the harsh realities of the hospital and the power dynamics at play. Laurence tries to assert his authority as a doctor but often finds himself undermined by the hospital staff, who challenge his decisions and refuse to follow his instructions. The black staff members, including nurses and other hospital workers, face significant power imbalances in their interactions with the white doctors and the system as a whole. They are often marginalized and treated as subordinates, with limited agency and control over their own lives. They struggle to challenge the authority of the white doctors due to fear of

repercussions and the lingering effects of apartheid. The patients in the hospital are also subject to power imbalances. They are often impoverished, lacking access to adequate healthcare, and dependent on the doctors and staff for their well-being.

It was their first posting in the country, the place they wanted to go to. Maybe, like Laurence, they wanted to make a difference. But they couldn't handle the cases that came in all the time. The violence, the extremity of it, was something they'd never seen. On Saturday nights in the emergency room it was knife-wounds and shotgun blasts and maimings and gougings with broken bottles. 'Like war,' Claudia wailed, 'like big war outside all the time!' (51)

They have little control over their treatment and are at the mercy of the decisions made by the doctors. The 'war' Claudia describes is the ongoing social violence born from the unresolved economic and psychic wounds of apartheid, making the hospital a receiving station for post-apartheid's failures. The power imbalance has caused tension between the two, leading to frequent clashes in their opinions and views. The novel examines how gender and race intersect to shape the character's experiences and relationships. It also examines how these dynamics are linked to broader social and historical structures of power.

Something in this country had gone too far, something had snapped. It was like a fury so strong that it had come loose from its moorings. I could only hold her to console her, but then consolation turned to something else. It was very powerful – lust fuelled by grief. (52)

The dynamics are revealed through the character's interactions and their inner reflections, which show how their lives are affected by the larger societal forces. The

‘lust fuelled by grief’ is a powerful metaphor for the distorted intimacies and compulsive performances of identity that characterize a society grappling with a traumatic history, a key concern of post-apartheid literature.

Frank Eloff, the protagonist, embodies a conflicted masculinity that reflects the societal expectations of a post-apartheid South Africa. His identity demonstrates how gender subjectivity is produced through broader socio-historical transformations rather than purely personal struggles. His interactions with women, particularly with Maria, reveal a transactional nature that underscores the impact of historical oppression on personal relationships. Frank admits, “I paid her every time now. And that’s what it was: a payment” (75) embodies R.W. Connell’s concept of “marginalized masculinity”, where men compensate for subordination by asserting dominance over women (Connell, *Masculinities* 114). Frank’s ‘marginalized masculinity’ is a direct product of the post-apartheid context; his loss of broader social power as a white man in a transforming society leads him to reassert a diminished, transactional dominance in the intimate sphere. Frank’s reflections on his relationship with Maria highlight the complexities of intimacy in a changing society. He notes, “My weird romance that belonged to night and silence had become an ordinary daytime affair, as real as my life” (Galgut, *The Good Doctor* 44). This statement underscores how societal changes influence personal relationships, transforming them from secretive to mundane. This commodification of intimacy highlights how traditional gender roles are influenced by the socio-economic realities of a society still grappling with its past.

Laurence Waters, a character filled with idealism, represents a younger generation attempting to navigate the complexities of a changing society. His desire to make a difference in the hospital reflects a hopeful yet naive understanding of his role in a post-apartheid context. He expresses frustration at the lingering inequalities, stating, “They’re high priority, we’re nothing” (31). This sentiment illustrates how the historical context of apartheid continues to shape perceptions of worth and identity, particularly in terms of race and gender. Tehogo’s character adds another layer to the exploration of gender subjectivity. His room, filled with women’s magazines and images, suggests a longing for connection that contradicts traditional masculine norms (149). The juxtaposition reveals the complexities of his identity, shaped by a history of violence and loss. Tehogo’s experiences as an orphaned survivor of political violence inform his understanding of masculinity, as he navigates a world that often marginalizes expressions of vulnerability. His character demonstrates that the performance of gender is deeply inflected by historical trauma, and that the post-apartheid subject must negotiate identities shaped by a past of violence and loss. The interactions between characters also highlight the racial and historical contexts that shape their identities. Claudia’s emotional breakdown after witnessing violence reflects the psychological toll of living in a society marked by trauma. She cries, “How can people do like this?” (67), revealing her struggle to reconcile her understanding of humanity with the brutality she encounters. This moment underscores how the legacy of apartheid continues to influence the emotional and psychological aspects of gender and identity.

The protagonist, Adam in *The Impostor* grapples with his sense of self in a society marked by historical trauma and shifting power dynamics. His feelings of

alienation are compounded by the loss of his job and home, which he attributes to the racial quotas that led to his replacement by a younger black intern, leaving him with a profound sense of humiliation and confusion about his identity in a changing world. Adam's crisis mirrors what Sara Ahmed describes as the "phenomenology of whiteness", where the destabilization of racial privilege produces a disorienting loss of footing in those accustomed to structural advantage (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 138). Galgut meticulously traces Adam's unraveling through two catastrophic losses:

First he'd lost his job and then he'd lost his house. [...] It was he, Adam Napier, nobody else, who had to pack up his desk and take his pictures off the wall and walk through the door for the last time. Afterwards, remembering this scene, what he felt most keenly was humiliation that he hadn't seen it coming. (Galgut, *The Impostor* 19)

The ritualistic dismantling of his workspace (take his pictures off the wall) mirrors the deconstruction of his white masculine identity in post-apartheid South Africa. His interactions with other characters, particularly Baby and Canning, further illustrate the complexities of gender subjectivity in this context. Baby, as a woman navigating her identity in a post-apartheid society, embodies both vulnerability and agency. Her beauty and charm are juxtaposed with the harsh realities of her past, as she is described as a "vain, vacuous, lovely little doll" who uses her appearance to navigate a world that often objectifies her (78). The duality reflects the broader societal expectations placed on women, where beauty can be both a source of power and a means of survival.

Canning, on the other hand, represents a different facet of masculinity shaped by privilege and entitlement. His relationship with Baby and his interactions with Adam reveal the tensions inherent in their identities as men in a post-apartheid context. Canning's attempts to assert his status as a "new South African man" are complicated by his insecurities and the underlying dynamics of race and class that permeate their interactions (56). Adam's observations reveal this tension: With his black wife and his multiracial business associates, Canning's repeated claims to be a new South African man are starting to look less hollow than before. It's Adam, by contrast, who feels a little outside events, a little superfluous. (56) The black wife and multiracial associates function as props in Canning's curated identity, masking what Adam intuits as lingering entitlement. The adverb 'repeatedly' underscores the effort behind this performance, while Adam's superfluous status highlights his alienation from this neoliberal vision of reconciliation. Adam's discomfort with Canning's self-presentation highlights the fragility of masculinity in a society still grappling with its past.

The novel's setting materializes apartheid's enduring logic through stark geographic division: "There was the old racial division, all the whites on one side of the river, in their spacious and expensive properties, and all the coloureds on the other side, in the township, in their crowded little houses between potholed, neglected streets." (30) The division not only affects the character's social interactions but also influences their internal struggles with identity and belonging. The character's experiences are deeply intertwined with the historical context, revealing how the legacies of apartheid continue to impact their identities and relationships. Adam's journey of self-discovery, marked by moments of introspection and confrontation

with his own biases, illustrates the complexities of navigating a world where personal and societal histories collide (171). Through these characters, Galgut invites readers to reflect on the ongoing negotiations of identity in a society still healing from its past.

Galgut's novel *Arctic Summer* explores the life and struggles of the famous British author E.M. Forster, focusing on his experiences grappling with power imbalances. Although *Arctic Summer* is a fictionalized account of Forster's life, it provides insight into how characters in the novel navigate power dynamics. As the protagonist of the novel, Forster grapples with his own personal power imbalances. He struggles with his identity as a gay man in a society that largely condemns homosexuality. Forster's sexual orientation creates a power imbalance within himself as he battles societal expectations and the fear of being ostracized. Additionally, Forster faces the challenge of expressing his unconventional ideas and perspectives as a writer in a world dominated by conservative social norms. Forster's struggle with his homosexuality exemplifies what Michel Foucault terms the "repressive hypothesis", the policing of queer desire through societal silence and shame (Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* 17). The exploration of a repressed identity operating within a rigid social system prefigures Galgut's central theme of how individuals perform identity under constraint, a theme he later maps onto the specific regulatory frame of apartheid and its aftermath.

Set in the early 20th century, it delves into the power imbalances inherent in the colonial and imperial systems of the time. Forster's travels to India expose him to the oppressive nature of British colonial rule and the exploitation of indigenous people. He witnesses first-hand, the unjust treatment of Indians by British authorities,

leading him to grapple with questions of power, morality and his own complicity in the system. The utility of this colonial setting for a post-apartheid thesis is that it establishes the historical blueprint for the racial hierarchies and segregationist logic that would be formalized and intensified by the apartheid regime decades later. The novel also explores power imbalances related to social class. Forster, coming from a privileged background, is exposed to the stark class divisions and inequalities prevalent in early 20th-century Britain. He witnesses the struggles of the working class and confronts his own privilege, challenging his perspectives on social justice and equality. This novel touches upon power imbalances in terms of gender roles and patriarchy. Forster's relationships with women, including his close friend and confidante, Syed Ross Masood, and his love interest, Masood are marked by complex power dynamics influenced by societal expectations and gender norms.

Themes related to post-apartheid society are intricately explored through the lens of personal and cultural identity, particularly in the context of colonial and post-colonial dynamics. The novel's central conflict, a sensitive man navigating the brutalities of an imperial system serves as a direct prototype for Galgut's post-apartheid characters, who must also negotiate their identities within and against oppressive historical legacies. The protagonist, Morgan Forster, grapples with his identity as an Englishman in a foreign land, reflecting on the complexities of belonging and alienation. He notes, "Although he was English all the way through, a great many English attitudes felt foreign to him" (Galgut, *Arctic Summer* 22). This sentiment underscores the disconnection he feels from his own culture, which is further complicated by his interactions with Indian characters like Masood. The sense of alienation from one's own prescribed identity is a key feature of the post-apartheid

subjectivity Galgut explores, where characters feel estranged from the racial and gendered roles they are expected to perform. The novel also delves into the emotional and psychological impacts of colonialism, as Morgan observes the stark contrasts between British and Indian societies. The text's central tension emerges in Morgan's observation of segregated academic life:

There was a great gulf between the Indian staff and students on one hand, and the Europeans on the other. The two groups seemed to mix compatibly together, but when he found himself alone with one or the other, the conversation changed. The English staff in particular lamented that they weren't trusted here and seemed to live in fear that the Mohammedans would turn them out. (69)

This division is not merely social but also deeply personal, as Morgan struggles with his own feelings of inadequacy and longing for connection. The 'great gulf' and the underlying fear of being 'turned out' prefigure the spatial and psychic segregation of apartheid, demonstrating how Galgut uses the colonial past to illuminate the enduring structures of the post-apartheid present.

Moreover, the theme of power dynamics is prevalent throughout the narrative, particularly in the way Morgan navigates his relationships with Indian characters. He experiences a sense of vulnerability when he acknowledges, "The white races are so damned ridiculous, it's an embarrassment to have been colonised by them" (32). This realization reflects a critical awareness of the historical injustices that shape contemporary identities and relationships in a post-apartheid society. As Morgan's journey unfolds, he becomes increasingly aware of the political undercurrents that

influence personal interactions. He notes that “when people talked politics they were talking about the future and it mattered a great deal” (72). This recognition of the interconnectedness of personal and political realms emphasizes the ongoing struggle for identity and agency in a society still grappling with its colonial past. In this, Galgut draws a direct line from the colonial anxieties of Forster’s India to the post-apartheid negotiations of power, showing that the personal is always political and that identity is perpetually forged in the crucible of history.

In a Strange Room, Galgut explores identity fluidity and instability, including gender identity. He examines how identity is shaped by social and cultural forces, and how it is constantly in flux. He also highlights the importance of accepting the fluidity of identity and allowing people the freedom to express themselves without judgment. Galgut’s writing is thought provoking and powerful and ultimately encourages readers to embrace the complexity of identity and accept the diversity of the human experience. He highlights the need for acceptance and understanding in a world that is ever-changing and ever-evolving. The novel is structured as a series of three separate stories, each featuring a different narrator who is dealing with questions of identity and belonging. The narrators are connected by a common theme and a shared history, as their stories are ultimately intertwined. Despite their differences, the common thread of searching for self-discovery is what unites them. The novel examines how gender performance and identity are shaped by context and situation. It also examines how individuals navigate these shifting dynamics to find a sense of self and connection. It follows a group of friends as they grapple with questions of sexuality, gender roles, and identity. Through their experiences, the novel illuminates how the social construct of gender can be both liberating and constricting. By frequently using

the technique of doubling, Galgut expresses the duality and conflict that his characters experience. The main character is consequently confronted by a reflection of himself. This experience of mysterious self-recognition is specifically mentioned by the narrator in *In a Strange Room*. However, he also comes to the realisation that this image is never a pure reflection of himself and that there is, in fact, always "some kind of groping for power" (Galgut, *In a Strange Room* 41) present. The narrator continues,

...they refrain from talking because it might reveal to them how dangerously unlike one another they are. An image in a mirror is a reversal, the reflection and the original are joined but might cancel each other out. So underneath the journey is a conflict, almost another journey in itself, a struggle for ascendancy, which as the days go by begins to push through to the surface.

(41)

The impact of apartheid and the subsequent transition to a new societal order profoundly shape the character's personal and social identities. Rather than presenting identity as fixed, the narrative demonstrates how gender and sexual identities emerge through shifting social encounters and emotional negotiations. For instance, the protagonist's sense of alienation upon returning home is palpable when he reflects, "Everything has changed while he was away... But at the level on which life is lived nothing looks very different" (20). This statement underscores the dissonance between the political changes and the lived realities of individuals, particularly in terms of their gender and sexual identities. The historical context of apartheid continues to influence how characters navigate their identities. The protagonist's experiences of

“placelessness” and detachment from the world around him suggest a struggle to reconcile his personal identity with the broader societal changes (19). His placelessness reflects Frantz Fanon’s “zone of non-being” (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* xv), where colonial violence fractures temporal and spatial belonging. This sense of disconnection is further emphasized when he observes the dynamics of relationships around him, feeling like a ‘stranger’ in a familiar environment (Galgut, *In a Strange Room* 20). The remnants of apartheid’s racial divisions complicate the characters interactions, as seen in the protagonist’s discomfort when he is the only white person in a minibus taxi, highlighting the lingering effects of racial segregation (66).

Moreover, the character’s understanding and expression of their gender and sexuality are shaped by these racial and historical contexts. The protagonist’s relationship with Anna, who struggles with her mental health, reflects the complexities of gender subjectivity in a society still grappling with its past. He notes, “It’s obvious that something in her has come loose from its moorings and is sliding around inside” (132), indicating how personal struggles are intertwined with the broader societal upheaval. In moments of intimacy and connection, the characters navigate their gender identities against the backdrop of a changing society. The protagonist’s evolving relationship with Reiner illustrates this dynamic, as they share a ‘new intimacy’ that challenges traditional notions of masculinity and vulnerability (43). This intimacy is both a refuge and a site of conflict, as the characters grapple with their desires in a society that still holds onto rigid gender norms.

In Damon Galgut's novel *The Promise*, the characters grapple with power imbalances that arise from various social, political, and familial dynamics. Set in post-apartheid South Africa, the novel explores the complexities of power and its impact on individuals. The Swarts family, consisting of the elderly Ma and Pa Swarts, their children, grapple with power imbalances within their own household. As the elderly patriarch of the family, Pa holds significant power within the household. They embody the remnants of the apartheid era, clinging to old ways and ideologies. Their authority and conservative views influence the dynamics within the family, creating tensions and power struggles between generations and differing perspectives. The novel illustrates how gender subjectivity operates within familial structures that reproduce broader social hierarchies. Their dominion over the household mirrors Foucault's "disciplinary power" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 27), producing generational fractures as the children negotiate complicity and resistance. The novel also explores power imbalances within the broader political landscape of post-apartheid South Africa. The characters are affected by the lingering effects of the oppressive system and its aftermath. They navigate the challenges of a changing society, with new power structures emerging and old one's crumbling. The promise of a more equal and just society is confronted with the reality of continued power imbalances and the difficulties of reconciliation. Galgut addresses power imbalances arising from racial and economic disparities in South Africa. The characters encounter these imbalances in their interactions with others and the larger social context. The legacy of apartheid continues to shape the power dynamics, with marginalized communities struggling to overcome the historical inequalities. We are all actually on the same plane, regardless of our position of authority, our social standing, our race,

our gender, or any other stupidity we think separates ‘us’ from the ‘other’. We are not distinguished in this sense by nature or the cosmos as depicted in the novel as:

But in the meantime, there is the body, the horrible meaty fact of it, the thing that reminds everyone... that one day they shall lie there too... emptied out of everything, merely a form, unable even to look at itself. And the mind recoils from its absence, cannot think of itself not thinking, the coldest of voids.

(Galgut, *The Promise* 15)

The character of Amor, for instance, grapples with her self-image and societal expectations, reflecting the internalized standards of beauty that are prevalent in a heteronormative society. She thinks to herself, “I am not beautiful,” which highlights her struggle against the restrictive ideals imposed on women (24). Her alienation mirrors Frantz Fanon’s “racial epidermal schema” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 112), but with a gendered inflection: as a white woman, her body is policed by beauty norms rather than colonial violence. The narrative also illustrates how familial and societal pressures shape gender roles. Tannie Marina’s vocal disapproval of Rachel’s return to Judaism serves as a reminder of the rigid expectations placed on women within the family structure, as she laments, “There’s a right way and a wrong way” (Galgut, *The Promise* 11). This reflects the broader societal norms that dictate acceptable behavior and identity, particularly for women in a post-apartheid context. Furthermore, the interactions between characters reveal the complexities of racial and gender identity in a changing society. For example, Amor’s observations of the “black girl” Salome, who is part of the household yet remains marginalized, underscore the intersection of race and gender in shaping personal identities (156). The narrative suggests that while

apartheid has ended, the remnants of its social hierarchies continue to influence how characters perceive themselves and each other.

In conclusion, gender subjectivity in post-apartheid society in South Africa is a complex and ongoing issue. While progress has been made towards gender equality, women and other gender nonconforming individuals still face many challenges. Apartheid legacy continues to shape gender roles and identities, and efforts to promote gender equality must take this into account. In post-apartheid society, women and gender-nonconforming people continue to struggle with significant issues such as widespread gender-based violence, systemic discrimination, and limited opportunities in education, healthcare, and employment. Addressing these challenges includes legal reforms, policy changes, and grassroots activism. In addition, there are initiatives to promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Despite these challenges, there have also been many successes in promoting gender equality in post-apartheid South Africa. Women are increasingly represented in politics, business, and other fields. There is a growing awareness of the need to address issues such as gender-based violence and discrimination.

Rather than functioning as a purely theoretical discussion, this chapter has examined how the concept of gender subjectivity outlined in the previous chapter operates within the narrative worlds of Damon Galgut's fiction. Gender subjectivity in post-apartheid South Africa, as illuminated by Damon Galgut's fiction, is defined by its precariousness and its potential. The formal end of apartheid did not create a *tabula rasa* but initiated a continuous and often violent renegotiation of the scripts that govern identity. Galgut's characters, in their struggles with alienation, desire, and

power, dramatize the Butlerian process of identity formation within a specific historical pressure cooker. The journeys demonstrate that the 'post' in post-apartheid is not an end point but an ongoing, contested process where the performance of self is always a negotiation with the nation's own unresolved past and its aspirational future. The promise of a new, liberated identity remains just that a promise, perpetually deferred and endlessly performed. By continuing to work towards gender equality, South Africa can build a more just, unbiased, and pluralistic society for all its citizens. Although the official end of apartheid in 1994 brought significant changes in gender equality, there are still many challenges that need to be addressed to achieve true gender equity and promote inclusivity. One of the main issues that persist is gender-based violence, which disproportionately affects women and other marginalized gender identities. Gender-based violence in post-apartheid South Africa is deeply rooted in entrenched patriarchal attitudes and cultural norms that continue to shape gender subjectivity and perpetuate inequality. Despite notable advancements such as increased representation of women in politics, business, and other public spheres significant structural and societal barriers persist, hindering women's full participation and leadership. The struggle for gender equality in post-apartheid South Africa remains an ongoing project that necessitates sustained efforts across societal, institutional, and individual levels. This involves confronting and deconstructing traditional gender roles and stereotypes, fostering education and public discourse on gender justice, and cultivating inclusive environments that affirm and support the diverse identities and experiences of all individuals, irrespective of their gender identity.

Chapter 3

Elements of Heteronormativity and Sexual Identity

Heteronormativity, a term coined by Adrienne Rich (1980) and further theorized by scholars such as Judith Butler (1990) and Michael Warner (1991), refers to the institutionalized system that privileges heterosexuality as the norm, thereby marginalizing and pathologizing other forms of sexual and gender expressions. Within contemporary queer and feminist scholarship, heteronormativity functions as a regulatory framework that naturalizes heterosexuality and stabilizes the gender binary. This system functions through a network of cultural, legal, and social practices that uphold and reinforce the assumption of a binary gender framework, wherein gender is presumed to directly reflect biological sex, and only heterosexual attraction between these so-called “opposite” genders is deemed natural or socially legitimate (Morgenroth and Ryan 3).

At the heart of heteronormativity is the presumption of a binary gender system, where people are typically classified as either male or female, and the expectation of sexual attraction between these defined opposites. This framework not only dictates the parameters of acceptable sexual and gender expressions but also serves as a basis for social institutions, such as marriage and family, that reinforce these norms (Branisa 34). The pervasiveness of heteronormativity in everyday life is evident in its influence on language, media representations, and social policies, which collectively contribute to the marginalization and invisibilities of non-heteronormative identities and practices. Moreover, heteronormativity is deeply intertwined with other systems of power, such as race, class, and nationality, resulting in a matrix of

domination that is both intersectional and hierarchical (Collins 693). This intersection highlights how experiences of heteronormativity are not uniform but are shaped by the interplay of multiple identities and oppressions (Crenshaw 1259).

The persistence of gender inequality and the heteronormative framework that underpins it has been a subject of critical inquiry within feminist and queer theory. Feminist scholars like Catherine MacKinnon (1982) have argued that sexuality is intrinsically linked to gender inequality, while queer theorists have focused on how the “heterosexual matrix” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 144) upholds inequality between men and women. Despite these theoretical insights, the structural relationship between heterosexuality and gender oppression continues to require deeper critical engagement within contemporary social science scholarship (Schilt and Westbrook 441).

The heterosexual matrix is subtly reinforced in everyday social interactions through language, assumptions, and social scripts. For instance, casual conversations often presume heterosexuality when discussing relationships, with phrases like ‘meeting the boyfriend/girlfriend’ or ‘future husband/wife’ being used without considering same-sex partnerships. Similarly, gendered compliments and expectations, such as praising a man for being a ‘ladies man’ or assuming a woman will marry and have children, uphold traditional heterosexual roles. Such discursive practices normalize heterosexuality while simultaneously rendering queer identities marginal or unintelligible. Social events, workplace dynamics and even the design of public spaces, like gender-segregated restrooms, reflect and perpetuate the normativity of heterosexuality and the gender binary. Moreover, media and entertainment consistently portray heterosexual relationships as the norm, further

embedding these expectations into the collective consciousness. Through these everyday mechanisms, heteronormativity becomes embedded within the social imagination, regulating both desire and gender performance. Damon Galgut's fiction interrogates this regulatory system by revealing the psychological and social pressures produced by heteronormative expectations. His narratives depict characters who struggle with compulsory heterosexuality, fragile performances of masculinity, and forms of desire that exceed normative frameworks. Consequently, sexual identity emerges in his work as a contested site shaped by coercion, repression and moments of resistance. This chapter therefore examines how Galgut's novels expose the instability of heteronormative ideals and illuminate the complex negotiations of sexuality within their constraints.

Dimensions of Identity

Identity within literary discourse is understood as a dynamic and historically situated construct rather than a stable or essential attribute. Literature portrays identity as constructed through various experiences, relationships, and social dynamics. Characters evolve, challenge assumptions, and grapple with contradictory aspects of themselves. Literary works often explore how various identities like race, gender, class, sexuality, and religion intersect and influence each other, shaping individual experiences and perspectives. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* defines identity as the distinguishing character or personality of an individual (or group) considered as a whole. Within literary analysis, however, identity is more productively understood as performative, contingent, and socially mediated. Literature portrays how individuals perform parts of their identity in different contexts, sometimes wearing masks or

adjusting aspects to navigate social expectations. This highlights the performative nature of identity, influenced by power dynamics and social norms. The narrative itself is essential in shaping and revealing a character's identity. Flashbacks, stream-of-consciousness, and unreliable narrators allow readers to delve into character's inner lives and understand their self-perceptions. The journey of self-discovery and understanding one's identity is often central to literary narratives.

Characters might confront internal conflicts, societal pressures, and external forces that challenge their sense of self. Identity can be further explained in certain terms as: Psychological Identity that encompasses personality traits, temperament, cognitive abilities, and internal sense of self, Sociocultural Identity that is shaped by cultural background, upbringing, social circles, and shared experiences within a community, Gender Identity is the internal sense of gender identity (male, female, non-binary, etc.) and social expression of that identity, Sexual Identity is who you are attracted to romantically or sexually, shaped by personal experiences, societal norms, and self-discovery, Ethnic/Racial Identity is defined by cultural heritage, ancestry, and sense of belonging to a specific group, National Identity is shaped by the country of origin, cultural symbols, historical narratives, and sense of belonging, Geographical Identity is defined by the place of residence, region, or community, Political Identity is shaped by the political beliefs, ideologies, and engagement in political processes, Socioeconomic Identity is influenced by income, education, social class, and access to resources, and Religious Identity is shaped by faith, community, rituals, and personal interpretation of religious teachings. Together these dimensions demonstrate that identity is neither singular nor fixed but constituted through multiple overlapping social locations.

Having outlined the conceptual framework surrounding heteronormativity and identity formation, this chapter now turns to a close reading of Damon Galgut's fiction. The following analysis examines how Galgut's narratives expose the coercive structures of heteronormativity while simultaneously revealing moments of resistance, ambiguity, and sexual fluidity. In *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, the protagonist Patrick embodies the psychological consequences of rigid gender expectations. The novel portrays masculinity as a disciplinary structure that demands conformity while suppressing individual subjectivity. At first, he fails to connect his personal struggle to the wider socio-political unrest in South Africa. The narrative establishes that he is crushed by a patriarchal system that enforces rigid conformity demanding he suppress his true self, Patrick has internalized submission to such a degree that he cannot even question the meaning behind his forced enlistment in the South African Defence Force, as evidenced by his passive description of his own conscription:

I'd been posted to the border in April the previous year, along with thousands of others: a rankless, nameless number. After basic training I was flown in a Dakota to the far north of Southwest Africa – now Namibia – and deposited at the side of an airstrip in the bush. (Galgut, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* 39)

The protagonist's inability to perform in the rugby games marks him as a queer failure in Jack Halberstam's sense, a figure whose non-compliance with "heteropatriarchy" exposes its artifice (Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* 74). His physical ineptitude therefore becomes a narrative device through which the novel critiques the cultural expectation that masculinity must be validated through athleticism, aggression, and

bodily discipline. The Commandant's intervention reinforces his status as an outsider. While the segregation initially brings relief, it signifies a form of rejection rather than self-discovery. He defines himself through the lens of other men – father, brother, peers. His perception of their unity highlights the rituals of kinship that mark 'true' masculinity in this environment (hunting, drinking), rituals from which he feels inherently excluded. These rituals function as markers of heteronormative belonging from which Patrick feels irrevocably excluded. The protagonist's struggle highlights the rigid norms that define masculinity within this specific setting. The focus on physicality and athleticism underscores a form of embodied masculinity that the protagonist cannot perform. This failure to embody the required physicality is not merely personal but a form of resistance, as his reaction to his outsider status can expose the way individuals can be forced to define their identity in opposition to what is held up as the norm:

Our segregation confirmed what had always been sensed. The others kept their distance from us now. They treated us kindly, but also remotely; we weren't part of the team. We were apart. And there was a certain relief in having been discovered. The pretence wasn't necessary anymore, with all the toil and angst it entailed: the mask had dropped. There was a brotherhood of men, I now clearly saw, to which I would never belong. (Galgut, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* 42)

Patrick's reflection here provides direct textual corroboration for Butler's concept of gender as a 'mask' or a taxing 'pretence.' His 'relief' at having the 'mask' drop demonstrates the psychic toll of performing a compulsory masculinity, while his

observation of the ‘brotherhood of men’ reveals the exclusionary social bonds that uphold heteronormative power.

Ellen, the protagonist’s mother, embodies the struggle against traditional gender roles and expectations. Initially, she conforms to the societal norms of being a devoted wife and mother, a performance the text explicitly describes as remoulding herself to fit her husband’s desires and the expectations of their social circle: “Her big role was the one she played as a housewife, a mother, a maker of homes. She set about remoulding herself in the image my father desired” (15). However, after her marriage ends, she begins to explore her identity outside these confines, engaging in various political movements and relationships, including her affair with Godfrey, a younger black man. Her transformation can be interpreted through Hélène Cixous’s concept of *écriture féminine* (Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* 876), which emphasizes the reclamation of female agency and desire beyond patriarchal constraints. This highlights her resistance to the heteronormative expectations placed upon her, as she seeks to redefine her identity beyond the traditional roles of wife and mother. Moments of resistance and conformity are evident throughout the narrative. For instance, Ellen’s passionate involvement in political activism can be seen as a form of resistance against the patriarchal structures that have defined her life. Yet, her relationships often reflect a struggle between her newfound independence and the lingering expectations of her past. This tension is corroborated in the text when she confronts societal norms, as seen in her argument with Godfrey about the implications of their relationship, making it clear that she is both challenging and grappling with the weight of her choices: “I also have a life, Godfrey. I also have feelings. I’ve also suffered. I’ve had a hard time.” (Galgut, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* 74).

Patrick, the protagonist, also grapples with the pressures of heteronormativity. His experiences in the army reveal a hyper-masculine environment where traditional gender roles are enforced, leading to feelings of alienation and inadequacy that he articulates directly: “Perhaps only I felt it so acutely: the ennui and aimlessness, in which the overpowering maleness of the place started to suffocate me.” (50) He observes the camaraderie among the men, feeling that he does not belong to this “brotherhood” and struggles with his own identity in a space that demands conformity to rigid masculine ideals (54). This conflict is exacerbated by his relationship with his mother, who embodies both the desire for connection and the fear of societal judgment. Patrick’s interactions with his peers in the army illustrate the pressure to conform to heteronormative ideals. His discomfort in these situations reveals the internal conflict he faces as he navigates his identity amidst societal expectations as:

On some other level, now that I was actually there, my presence ceased to be a political act and turned into something else. It turned into an existential test, a contest of endurance between my soul and the material world around me. None of it was real; the thorn trees and grass and termite hills and jackals and barbed wire and boredom and huge, vacant sky were just a set, loaded with dangerous props and hostile extras. All of it to stage my downfall. (51)

The above passage provides powerful corroboration for the performative nature of gender and power. Patrick’s perception of his environment as an artificial ‘set’ and his life as a staged ‘downfall’ directly aligns with a Butlerian understanding of identity as a compelled performance within a rigid, hostile regulatory frame, the military apparatus serving as a literal and metaphorical stage for this enforced drama.

In another novel of Damon Galgut, *A Sinless Season*, Spencer and Raoul engage in a conversation that offers insights into their perceptions of physicality, strength, and, to some extent, their sense of identity. The interaction between Spencer and Raoul includes a focus on physical attributes such as chest hair, muscle strength, and body image exemplifies Judith Butler's theory of gender as "a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 191). These aspects can be seen as performances of masculinity, conforming to societal expectations. Butler's theory suggests that gender is not an inherent quality but rather a repeated set of actions or performances. In this context, both characters are engaging in performances that align with traditional notions of male identity. Raoul's statement about being fifteen and asserting that hair on the chest doesn't matter may indicate his awareness of age-related expectations and the ongoing process of forming his sexual identity. Butler's theory highlights the performative nature of age-related behaviors and expressions of sexuality, suggesting that these are learned and enacted over time as portrayed:

'You've got no hair on your chest,' Spencer observed, bending over and peering. 'Go away! 'Course I got hair,' Raoul said, pulling at the skin around his nipples. 'Here. Here it is. Y'can see.' 'That's not hair, that's fuzz.' 'It's hair, screwball. Can'tcha see? Anyhow, I'm only fifteen. Hair don't matter.'

(Galgut, *A Sinless Season* 31)

Characters like Scott and Raoul experience significant internal conflict as they navigate their feelings for one another while also trying to adhere to societal expectations of masculinity. The fear of being perceived as weak or unmanly can lead to repression of their emotions and desires. This internal struggle is a reflection of the broader societal pressures that dictate how they should behave and whom they should

love. The institutional environment of the reformatory reinforces traditional gender roles, as the boys are constantly monitored and judged by authority figures like Mr. Hall. The expectation to conform to a specific masculine ideal creates a hostile environment for those who may not fit neatly into these roles. This can lead to bullying, ostracism, or violence against those who deviate from the norm as said:

Let me be frank with you — other reformatories would treat you like criminals. But not here. We have managed to turn our boys into gentlemen. We hope to do the same to you. You will be struck by the decency of the boys here — there is no coarseness. We expect the same from you. No swearing, bullying, that sort of thing. Do you understand me?’(13)

There are moments in the novel where characters resist societal expectations. For example, the emotional bond between Scott and Raoul can be seen as a form of resistance to the rigid norms of masculinity. Their friendship allows for vulnerability and intimacy that challenges the traditional notions of male relationships. When they express their feelings for one another, it signifies a rejection of the heteronormative framework that seeks to define their identities. Raoul expresses his vulnerability when he admits, “My nakedness shames me” (19), revealing his struggle with the expectations of masculinity that discourage emotional openness. This moment signifies a rejection of the rigid norms that often dictate male behavior, allowing for a more intimate connection between the two boys. Conversely, there are also moments when characters conform to societal pressures. For instance, when Raoul engages in aggressive behavior to assert his masculinity, it reflects the internalization of societal norms that equate violence with strength. This conformity can lead to further

entrenchment in traditional gender roles, making it difficult for characters to break free from the expectations placed upon them.

Similarly, Frank Eloff, a character in *The Good Doctor* whose sexual identity plays a significant role in the novel is portrayed as a gay man, and his sexual orientation influences his experiences and interactions throughout the story. As a doctor working in a remote South African hospital, Frank navigates his professional life while also grappling with his personal desires and relationships. Galgut explores Frank's sexual identity with sensitivity and insight, highlighting the complexities of his experiences as a gay man in a society that may not fully accept or understand his orientation. As a gay doctor in post-apartheid South Africa, Frank inhabits what Sara Ahmed calls queer phenomenology, an orientation that "slants" away from heteronormative expectations (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 106)

Frank Eloff's internal struggle is one of profound alienation, a conflict between his desires and a society that offers no place for them. His cynical reflection, "The funny thing is, I don't care too much. You think you love something so badly, but when it's gone you find out you don't care so much" (Galgut, *The Good Doctor* 155), is not a statement of genuine apathy but a performance of emotional detachment. The defensive posture reveals the psychological cost of his isolation; he pretends not to care as a shield against the pain of being unable to live authentically. The quote exemplifies his internalized resignation, demonstrating how societal pressure forces him to devalue his own desires to cope with their impossibility. At the same time, he recognizes the power of his own resilience and affirmation of his self-worth. In the end, Frank finds a way to balance himself between the two worlds he

inhabits. Frank seems convinced that storytelling can bring coherence to what he frequently perceives as a chaotic and purposeless existence. However, his deep-seated need for privacy and suspicion of others' intentions drive him to shield himself from scrutiny. By constructing tightly controlled personal and professional spheres, he maintains a guarded autonomy, insulating himself from external interference as depicted:

For a while I had two lives: one that was empty and adrift, in the hospital by day, and another that was illicit and intense, by the side of the road at night. The one had nothing to do with the other. For a long time she had no curiosity about who I was or what I did. And when she finally asked, I found myself telling a lie. (Galgut, *The Good Doctor* 41)

The protagonist's evolving desires suggest a shifting view of his own sexual identity, which in turn impacts his expectations from a sexual relationship. The protagonist's long-established sexual routine with Maria is disrupted by a new desire, marking a shift in his emotional state and how he approaches intimacy. He no longer desires the typical physical performance but instead a deeper, emotional connection. This suggests a fluidity in his understanding of intimacy. His request for Maria's life story reflects a desire for true intimacy, revealing a gap in his understanding of his partner and potentially hinting at his growing awareness of his own internal complexity:

None of this was different; the same things happened every year, all in their usual place. My life looked as it normally did. But somewhere deep down, underneath, it wasn't the same. One night when I was visiting Maria, just as

we'd settled down on the blanket together, I felt my sexual desire – which was almost habit by now – give way to something else: another feeling completely, subversive because it was strange. (99)

Damon, *In a Strange Room*, shares similarities with the Patrick and Frank. Throughout the story, Damon embarks on a series of travels, engaging in encounters and relationships with various individuals along the way. It can be inferred that Damon is a gay man. Damon's experience is a textbook case of what Judith Butler terms "gender melancholia." His perpetual state of self-questioning and regret is captured in his tormented reflection:

Now he feels exquisite agonies of unease, maybe the failure wasn't the mutual one he's constructed in his head, maybe it belongs to himself alone. If I had done this, if I had said that, in the end you are always more tormented by what you didn't do than what you did, actions already performed can always be rationalized in time, the neglected deed might have changed the world.

(Galgut, *In a Strange Room* 61)

The 'exquisite agonies' and the torment over neglected deeds reveal a psyche internalizing its own prohibited desires. He doesn't just feel sadness; he feels a deep, structuring guilt that redirects his longing into a relentless, painful introspection, which is the very mechanism of gender melancholia (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 140).

Another character in the novel is Reiner whose comment on gender indifference is open to interpretation. It could be a genuine disregard for gender in terms of sexual attraction, or it could be a performance meant to convey openness and

a lack of traditional constraints. The ritualistic undressing suggests a deliberate performance, potentially designed to provoke a reaction from the protagonist. However, his offering the apple introduces a gesture of intimacy and sharing those clashes with the potential implied seduction. The interplay of invitation and restraint creates uncertainty about who holds the power. Reiner initiates physical closeness but doesn't pursue further, leaving the protagonist suspended in a state of anticipation. The scene is framed through the protagonist's observation of Reiner's body and actions. This emphasizes the protagonist's position as the observer and suggests a tentative exploration of desire. The act of traveling can be seen as a mask he wears to hide his underlying anxieties and the search for true connection and belonging. Damon acknowledges a lack of love for Reiner, yet their bond is described as a 'dark passion', suggesting a complex mix of attraction, fear, and potentially unspoken desires. He doesn't love Reiner but their companionship does have the shape of a dark passion in it as portrayed:

Later that night in the little room, when they are preparing for bed, he strips down to his underpants, as he did earlier in the day on the rock, then rolls quickly into his sleeping bag. It is very cold tonight. Reiner takes a long time to get ready, folding up his shirt and socks and putting them into his bag. Then he takes off his pants. (Galgut, *In a Strange Room* 13)

The protagonist's reaction to the woman's proposition suggests a potential discomfort with exploring non-normative forms of intimacy or sexuality, which could be linked to societal pressures and expectations as he says: "When we get outside he says to Reiner, she was selling herself." (28) The interplay between condemnation and

acceptance of transactional sex reveals the character's differing values and potential judgments, highlighting the complex ways in which individuals negotiate their understanding of sexuality. Reiner's explanation of using sex to alleviate 'tension' aligns with the concept of performative sexuality, where sexual acts become a way to regulate emotions rather than expressions of intimacy or desire: "I have a lot of tension. Sex helps me to get rid of tension." (29)

In *Arctic Summer*, Galgut extends his exploration of constrained identities into the early 20th century, portraying E.M. Forster's challenges as he grapples with his sexual orientation in a repressive and conservative society. The novel delves into Forster's internal struggles, desire experiences, and attempts to find fulfillment and authentic connections within a world that legally and socially prohibits same-sex relationships. The conflict is crystallized in a moment of profound, simple connection that feels transgressive: "What he sensed more than anything else was kindness - a kindness of a human and immediate sort. It was surprising how very radical this simple emotion could be." (Galgut, *Arctic Summer* 147) The passage underscores how, within a socio-legal system that pathologizes homosexual desire, even ordinary acts of empathy acquire a subversive dimension. By humanizing Forster's story, Galgut provides an important reminder of the power of empathy and understanding. He shows us that even when faced with situations of extreme prejudice and hatred, human connection is still possible. The understanding of these connections, helps us to create a better world for all.

The societal norms of the time impose strict expectations on individuals regarding their sexual behavior and gender roles. For Morgan, the pressure to conform

to these norms creates a sense of alienation and internalized shame, a tension that is vividly corroborated by his envious and troubled observation of another man's sexual freedom:

He had the sense that the other man's sexual practices involved tastes and behaviours that would shock him deeply, if he only knew the details, yet still he envied him the ability to translate yearning into deed. So much sex, so many bodies colliding! Morgan felt flushed and troubled by the images that came to mind. (14)

This passage provides textual evidence of the psychological conflict generated by heteronormative regulation. The juxtaposition of 'envy' and 'shock' illustrates the chasm between his internal desires and the external social codes he has internalized. He feels compelled to hide his true self, leading to a fragmented sense of identity. Forster's envy of men who act on their yearning reveals what Eve Sedgwick identifies as the "homosocial continuum" where homosocial bonds both facilitate and prohibit homosexual desire (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 5), a theoretical framework that helps explain his position: he is close enough to masculine circles to feel desire, yet the rules of those very circles prohibit its consummation, leaving him in a state of suspended 'yearning.'

The relationships Morgan forms are heavily influenced by these societal pressures. His interactions with women, such as Goldie, are often superficial and lack genuine emotional connection, reflecting the constraints of heteronormative expectations. In contrast, his deeper emotional connections with men highlight the tension between his desires and societal norms. His performance mirrors Butler's

theory of gender as “a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 191), where the fragmented self emerges from the tension between desire and social expectation. There are moments in the novel where characters resist societal pressures. For instance, Morgan’s attraction to Masood represents a defiance of heteronormative expectations. Their relationship, though fraught with complications, allows Morgan to explore his desires more freely, even if only temporarily. This resistance is significant as it highlights the possibility of alternative expressions of identity outside societal norms as “He found himself behaving in ways that were potentially dangerous, without quite knowing what he was up to.” (Galgut, *Arctic Summer* 110) The language of risk underscores how same-sex desire, within the novel’s social context, is framed simultaneously as transgression and self-discovery.

“She was wearing a long flannel bathrobe with tiny faded flowers on it. It was tied at the waist but it looked to him as if there was nothing underneath it. Fine bones and shadows and skin” (Galgut, *The Quarry* 31). The perception that “there was nothing underneath” the robe foregrounds the reduction of the female body to eroticized visibility. This gaze reduces her to her physical attributes, reinforcing gender norms that prioritize women’s physical appearance and sexual availability. The fine bones and skin mentioned in the quote underscore a sense of vulnerability and fragility. This portrayal aligns with traditional gender roles that view women as delicate and in need of protection, reinforcing patriarchal structures. The description from a male perspective exemplifies the male gaze, where women’s bodies are seen and interpreted through a male viewpoint. This gaze often dictates how women should present themselves and behave, perpetuating gender norms that place women in a passive, observed role. The male gaze in this context reinforces the power dynamics

between genders, where the male perspective is dominant and the female body is subject to scrutiny and judgment.

The character of Valentine also embodies the tension between conformity and resistance to societal pressures. When he is encouraged to “throw them away” regarding his clothes, it signifies a moment of rebellion against the expectations of masculinity and the desire for authenticity (42). Discarding clothing functions as a metaphorical renunciation of socially prescribed roles and identities. The scene’s subversive energy is heightened by its visceral imagery and communal intimacy, as depicted in the following passage:

They looked at the minister’s clothes. There was a great deal of blood on them. ‘No,’ said Valentine. ‘Throw them away.’ ‘Ja,’ said Small. ‘Throw away.’ The clothes were thrown into the corner. They rolled a joint and passed it between them, squatting together on the floor. Then Small had a bottle in a brown paper bag and this was also handed round. By this time they were happy. (42)

The blood-stained garments symbolizing the violence of rigid social norms are literally and symbolically discarded. Their replacement by acts of communal pleasure, the shared joint and bottle, creates an alternative social bond that challenges dominant moral codes. The repetition of “throw away” underscores the deliberate refusal of prescribed identities, while the physical closeness of squatting together and passing objects between them suggests an alternative kinship rooted in defiance. This moment of collective joy, achieved through transgressive solidarity, disrupts heteronormative paradigms and frames Valentine’s rebellion as both personal and politically resonant.

The concept of a ‘normal’ family, as presented in the novel *Small Circle of Beings*, is indeed a critique of heteronormativity, which posits that heterosexuality is the default and most natural state of being: “He thought they were a normal family, which is to say that there was nothing remarkable about them: Shell, his sister Estelle and their two parents” (Galgut, *Small Circle of Beings* 140). The casual invocation of “normality” reflects the cultural assumption that the heterosexual nuclear family constitutes the natural social unit. This notion is often accompanied by traditional gender roles that dictate how men and women should behave within the family structure. In the context of the novel, the family consists of Shell, his sister Estelle, and their two parents. The description of this family as ‘normal’ suggests that they adhere to societal norms and expectations, which typically include a heterosexual couple raising their children in a stable environment. This configuration is often seen as the standard against which other family structures are measured. However, the novel subtly challenges this notion of normalcy by highlighting the complexities and dysfunctions within the family. For instance, Shell’s introspective nature and his avoidance of social interactions, as well as the strained relationships between family members, suggest that the family does not conform to the idealized image of a happy, functional unit. This critique undermines the notion that there is a single, ‘normal’ way for families to be structured or to behave.

There is the protagonist’s former marriage with Stephen, which is characterized by a sense of decorum and restraint. The description of Stephen suggests a relationship that adheres to traditional heteronormative standards as depicted:

I think of Stephen, the polite, demure lines of his body. I see him atop Gloria MacIvor and feel, in the slippery pounding of Cedric as he coaxes me closer to my nightly death, a triumph of a sort. Stephen phones me one day as I am weeding in the garden. For the first time since our parting he sounds unsure of himself. Who, he wants to know, is the man I am with? (73)

The relationship with Stephen reflects the social expectations attached to marital propriety and sexual moderation. The protagonist's current relationship with Cedric is portrayed as a liberating experience that challenges these traditional norms. The 'slippery pounding' and the animalistic imagery used to describe Cedric indicate a raw and uninhibited sexual encounter. This contrasts sharply with the image of Stephen and Gloria, where the protagonist imagines a more conventional sexual relationship. The protagonist's sense of triumph in the midst of her passionate encounter with Cedric can be interpreted as a celebration of sexual fluidity and the breaking of heteronormative boundaries. Sexual fluidity refers to the idea that sexual orientation is not fixed but can be flexible and change over time. The protagonist's journey from a conventional marriage to an unconventional relationship with Cedric exemplifies this fluidity, as she explores new dimensions of her sexuality and desires outside the confines of societal expectations.

The protagonist's reflection on her body and rediscovery of its meaning in the context of her relationship with Cedric suggest a liberation from traditional norms and an embrace of a more authentic and fulfilling sexual expression:

It is strange to have a lover again after so much time has passed. It has been a long while, measured in nights, since hands have touched me. Cedric makes

love as Stephen never did, crouched above me on hands and knees, breathing hard. With Stephen there were rules to be observed, courtesies that should not be broken. (72)

The description of Cedric's lovemaking, characterized by a more primal and uninhibited approach, stands in stark contrast to the more restrained and rule-bound intimacy she shared with Stephen. This contrast highlights the concept of sexual fluidity, which suggests that sexual orientation and behavior are not fixed but can be flexible and change over time. The protagonist's journey from a conventional marriage to an unconventional relationship with Cedric exemplifies this fluidity. She explores new dimensions of her sexuality and desires outside the confines of societal expectations, particularly those associated with her previous heteronormative relationship.

The Impostor reflects a departure from the traditional heteronormative ideal of a committed, monogamous relationship. The subversion is central to the protagonist Adam's character, as his aversion to a long-term commitment with Baby directly challenges the normative life script. Heteronormativity is a cultural norm that privileges heterosexuality, gender binaries, and traditional family structures. In this context, Adam's perspective subverts these norms as the narrative voice reveals his internal reasoning:

He doesn't want to be with her for the rest of their lives; he doesn't even want to be with her for a few hours. What happens between them is powerful precisely because it is hurried and secret. Living in drab semi-poverty together, one day following on another, he suspects they would start to loathe

each other very quickly. They can only conduct this business in little sequestered interludes, where they seem to strike each other at angles, generating fire. (Galgut, *The Impostor* 125).

Adam's preference for secrecy and transience undermines the heteronormative valorization of permanence and domestic stability. This perspective challenges the notion that romantic relationships must conform to societal expectations of permanence and instead embraces a more fluid and transient form of connection. The text further complicates this by portraying Adam's experience of sex as a moment of introspection and disconnection, rather than connection, which suggests a fluidity in the experience of sexuality that does not conform to heteronormative expectations of intimate bonding:

The sex itself takes on the same melancholic quality. The shape of her, the bones and blood and warm flesh, throws him back almost entirely into himself, so that he is caught up in the labyrinthine complexity of his own loneliness. The room falls away; he loses himself, his sense of time and place; he is nowhere. It's not ecstasy, not even pleasure—more like blankness. (159)

The description of sex as 'blankness' and a trigger for 'loneliness' powerfully challenges the heteronormative assumption that sexual intimacy within a heterosexual pairing is inherently fulfilling or unifying.

Furthermore, the novel uses the landscape as a metaphor for a sexuality that exists beyond heteronormative constraints. Adam's perception of the environment mirrors his own non-normative inner world: "He has a shivery sense of the whole landscape looking utterly different, full of sex and death in forms he can hardly

imagine” (51). The ‘forms he can hardly imagine’ imply that Adam is grappling with a vastness of sexual expression that extends beyond the familiar, static categories imposed by heteronormativity, thereby corroborating the theme of fluidity.

In *Arctic Summer*, Galgut explores the constraints of heteronormativity through the lens of E.M. Forster’s repressed homosexuality. The tension between public conformity and private desire is established early through Morgan’s encounter with the work of Searight, whose art offers a ‘carnal frankness’ that both shocks and attracts him:

In Searight’s hand, the sullen Sicilian youths, lolling among ruins and statuary, took on a carnal frankness. His voice became husky with awe on the subject of youthful male beauty. Flesh and feathery moustaches and defiant yet vulnerable eyes . . . “And look at his sultry cock, angled to the left at about forty-five degrees. It’s a real beauty. To say nothing of the testicles, which are spectacular, especially the one on the right.” (Galgut, *Arctic Summer* 13)

The above quote highlights the tension between public personas and hidden sexual identities. Searight’s outward appearance as a respectable military officer clashes with his private life, which challenges heteronormative expectations. The need for secrecy reflects the societal pressure to conform to heteronormative standards, where homosexuality is marginalized. The imagery of the ‘carnal frankness’ in the photographs symbolizes a more open and liberated view of male beauty and desire, contrasting with Morgan’s initial cryptic and repressed understanding. Morgan’s exposure to Searight’s bold appreciation of male beauty represents a pivotal moment in his sexual awakening, revealing the potential for living authentically outside

societal norms. Morgan's envy of Searight's experiences and confidence in pursuing same-sex encounters reflects his internal struggle and desire to reconcile his sexual identity with societal expectations.

Forced by societal taboos to explore his desires in secrecy, Morgan turns to writing as a private outlet. The act of writing sexually explicit stories is described as 'forbidden', which highlights how heteronormativity marginalizes and stigmatizes non-heteronormative sexualities: "He had started to write another kind of short story. These were sexual in nature, a living-out of what he had only dared imagine in his mind" (55). Morgan's internalization of these societal taboos is evident in his furtive approach to writing these stories. Morgan uses his writing as a medium to explore and express his sexual identity, which he cannot openly live out due to societal constraints. The act of writing becomes a means for him to navigate and understand his own desires. The stories reflect his repressed sexual identity and the fantasies he cannot realize in real life. The fact that these stories are meant to excite him personally underscores the intensity of his suppressed desires and the lack of an outlet for their expression in his everyday life. The recurring figure in his stories- tall, dark, athletic and good-looking represents an idealized version of his desires. This figure is simultaneously a ubiquitous presence in his fantasies and an unattainable reality, reflecting his internal conflict and longing.

The limits placed on Morgan's physical expressions of affection highlight the constraints of heteronormativity, which often enforces rigid boundaries around acceptable forms of intimacy, especially in same-sex relationships. This restriction illustrates how deeply entrenched societal norms influence personal interactions and

create barriers to fully expressing one's desires. Morgan's frustration with the situation signifies a conflict between his natural desires and the societal norms that dictate appropriate behavior. The tension is exacerbated by the fact that he is in a relationship that already transgresses heteronormative boundaries, making the refusal of further sexual advances more poignant and problematic for him. The negotiation of boundaries in their physical relationship illustrates the ongoing process of defining and understanding each other's comfort levels and limits. This negotiation is particularly significant in same-sex relationships, where traditional guidelines and norms may not apply or may be actively resisted. The refusal to engage in more explicit sexual acts can be interpreted as an internalized response to societal stigma and shame associated with same-sex relationships. Mohammed's stopping of Morgan's advances suggests a level of discomfort or fear rooted in the broader societal condemnation of their relationship.

In *The Promise*, Anton, the heir of the Swart family, is haunted by social and personal impotence, symptomatic of postcolonial nations and masculinities. His impotence is physiological, spiritual, and psychological. His spiritual bankruptcy is mapped onto the Dutch Reformed Church's support of racism, represented in the novel by dominee Alwyn Simmers, who is described as:

a large, soft man, with a sideways wave of crinkly brown hair. Much about him has a crumpled look, for his sister Laetitia, who tends to him at home, is not a dab hand with an iron. And the skin on his hands and neck and face, all that's visible of him, is loose and lined, and you really wouldn't want to see

the rest, under his clothes. He has a natural heaviness (Galgut, *The Promise* 28)

Simmers fornicates with his sister and harbors sinister intents towards Manie, as he “sits flanked by the two of them” during the family’s moments of grief, revealing his opportunistic nature (45). As a result, he sacrifices Manie for material gain, reflecting the moral decay within the church and its followers.

At the age of eighteen, Anton is conscripted into the army, where he grapples with the weight of his actions. His cousin, Wessel, who has completed military training, suffers withdrawal symptoms that no one understands, and the family describes him:

He’s already twenty-four but ever since finishing the army he’s done nothing except sit around at home, attending to his stamp collection. Apparently he has some problem with going out into the world. He’s depressed, according to his father, and his mother says that he’s finding his way. (159)

Anton realizes that he lives in a psychological hell caused by his intentional/nonpolitical killing of a black woman in Katlehong, a moment that haunts him as he reflects, “I shot and killed her yesterday” (32). He conflates the death of the black woman with his mother’s death, leading him to believe that “the country becomes a miniature hell” for him (36). As a fugitive, he seeks solace in alcohol, attempting to numb the pain of his guilt and the chaos of his life, which he describes as:

First time he's held a weapon since the army. First time he's fired one since then too. Since that day which by agreement with himself he does not contemplate, and will not now. Even though the jolt of power, the kick and clap of it, is instantly familiar and thrilling. Enough to repeat, and repeat, as he runs. Blam! And Blam again! The noise rolls out in concentric rings, like the giant extent of my reach. (105)

As the firstborn son, Anton occupies a position within a traditional family structure that grants him specific privileges and assigns him particular responsibilities. The description of him as “the firstborn, the only son” (50) implies an inherent expectation to fulfil a role shaped by the values typically associated with male heirs. Such roles align with societal norms that place a premium on male ambition and public success. Anton's aspirations to travel, to learn, to write poems and lead nations reveal his desire for achievements that resonate with ideals celebrated within a heteronormative framework, where ambition and public influence are often markers of male identity and worth. Additionally, Anton's sexual identity is informed by these societal expectations. His relationship with Desirée, through which he lost his virginity, underscores the societal pressure on young men to pursue heterosexual relationships as a formative rite of passage. This experience is not solely about intimacy, it is interwoven with his perceptions of power and status. Anton is drawn to the outward trappings of power embodied by Desirée's family, a reflection of the societal appeal of wealth and influence, which underscores the complex interplay between sexuality, power, and social identity in his development.

Astrid's sexual awakening signifies her initiation into the domain of heteronormative identity formation. Astrid's experience of losing her virginity is described vividly, as she feels "sex flows through her like a golden wind," (33) indicating a powerful and transformative moment in her life. This newfound desire is intertwined with her emotional state, as she grapples with the implications of her actions and the expectations placed upon her by society. Here, Astrid's behavior and self-perception begin aligning with societal norms that equate female maturity and identity with heterosexual relationships and desire. According to Butler's theory of gender performativity, gender is not a stable trait but rather is constituted through repeated performances that align with social expectations. In Astrid's case, her experience with sexual desire can be seen as an enactment of normative femininity that society associates with womanhood. This alignment with prescribed norms not only shapes her sense of self but also reinforces heteronormative ideals, which dictate that a woman's identity and worth are often contingent upon her role within heterosexual relationships. As she navigates her feelings, she acknowledges that she loves Dean, which illustrates her attempt to reconcile her desires with societal expectations of romantic relationships as portrayed in the novel:

I didn't think about what I was doing, I just did it. My body did it, you could say. My mind was somewhere else. Now I've got two children and I'm exhausted and I don't feel young and beautiful any more. She frowns. What's the hold-up in front? She toots the horn. I love Dean, she says. I mean, I'm fond of him. (92)

Further, Astrid's experience of sexual initiation suggests that she is conforming to an ingrained societal script, one that reinforces heterosexual coupling as an essential aspect of female maturity. This scenario speaks to Butler's notion that identity is performatively constructed by continuously enacting behaviors and adopting roles that society prescribes. Astrid's sexual experiences, therefore, reveal her as both a subject moulded by societal expectations and an active participant in the perpetuation of heteronormative structures. By following this societal script, Astrid is navigating the boundaries between personal autonomy and culturally enforced performances, which define the experience of gender for many women.

Amor's struggle with heteronormative standards of femininity is viscerally experienced through her own body. Her stark, simple thought, "I am not beautiful" (25), is a direct internalization of societal judgment. This is compounded by her physical discomfort, as she feels her body is "exaggerated, obscene" and notes how "Her hips have widened, and the thickening seems heavy to her" (24). Galgut connects her mental self-assessment directly to a sense of physical alienation. The "heaviness" she feels is not just physical but the weight of societal expectation, making her own body feel like a foreign and "obscene" object that fails to conform to the prescribed ideal. Furthermore, her sleepless nights are filled with thoughts of her body and its changes, indicating a deep-seated discomfort with the expectations placed upon her as a young woman.

The internal conflict is emblematic of how societal expectations shape individual identities, as Amor's struggle reflects the broader implications of conforming to specific ideals of femininity that are often dictated by a

heteronormative society. Her thoughts reveal a profound sense of alienation, as she reveals in the novel:

She feels ugly when she cries, like a tomato breaking open, and thinks that she must get away, away from this horrible little room with its parquet floor and barking Maltese poodle and the eyes of her aunt and uncle sticking into her like nails. (12)

The feeling of ugliness further emphasizing her discomfort with her emotional and physical self. Ultimately, Amor's experiences illustrate the pervasive impact of societal standards on self-perception, as she navigates the complexities of growing up in a world that often equates a woman's worth with her adherence to conventional beauty norms.

The chapter provides a critical examination of heteronormativity and sexual fluidity within Damon Galgut's novels, uncovering the ways in which his characters navigate and challenge traditional gender and sexual norms. Through his unflinching exploration of characters like Patrick, Frank, Damon, Ellen, and Morgan, Damon Galgut systematically dismantles the facade of heteronormative naturalism. His novels reveal it to be a powerful, often brutal, regulatory system that produces profound alienation, psychological fragmentation, and internalized shame. By focusing on relationships, societal expectations, and personal identity crises, the chapter reveals how heteronormative constructs often suppress individual expressions of desire and identity. The analysis highlights the intersectionality of sexual identity with broader societal factors such as culture, class, and race, which shape and sometimes constrain the character's experiences. Through intimate and often

unspoken struggles, Galgut critiques the enforcement of traditional gender roles while celebrating the possibilities of fluid and nonconforming identities. His narratives demonstrate the personal costs of conforming to societal norms and underscore the liberating potential of embracing one's authentic self. This chapter lays the foundation for exploring more complex layers of gender performativity and societal constructions in subsequent chapters. By addressing themes of repression, ambiguity, and resistance, it advances the thesis central argument that Galgut's works serve as a powerful lens for understanding the evolving dynamics of gender and sexuality in contemporary literature.

Chapter 4

Gender Performativity and its Dynamics

Gender performativity, a concept extensively explored by Judith Butler, challenges the traditional notion of gender as a fixed, intrinsic attribute of individuals. Instead, it posits that gender is a continuous and iterative performance, shaped by societal norms and expectations. This chapter delves into the intricacies of gender performativity and its dynamics, drawing on Butler's seminal works to unravel how gender identities are constructed, maintained, and potentially subverted. Judith Butler's exploration of gender performativity begins with the assertion that gender is not an inherent quality but a series of acts and gestures that consolidate over time to produce the illusion of a stable identity. As Butler elucidates, "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 16). This perspective underscores the idea that what we perceive as gender identity is the cumulative result of repeated actions that align with societal expectations.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler further clarifies that the performative nature of gender involves a compulsory practice of embodying norms. She states, "The practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 238). This highlights the tension between societal pressure to conform to gender norms and the individual's capacity to resist and reinterpret these norms. The concept of performativity extends beyond mere mimicry of gender roles; it involves the citation and reiteration of norms that both constrain and enable identities. Butler

argues that the very act of performing gender can expose and disrupt the norms it seeks to emulate. In this sense, performativity has a dual function: it can reinforce dominant gender norms or, conversely, subvert them through hyperbolic or parodic enactments. This subversive potential is illustrated in Butler's discussion of "Drag is not unproblematically subversive. It serves a subversive function to the extent that it reflects the mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalized" (238).

Moreover, the dynamics of gender performativity are not static but are subject to historical and cultural shifts. Butler emphasizes the fluidity and temporality of gender, suggesting that the meanings and performances of gender can evolve. This evolution is often propelled by the destabilization of established norms, allowing for new forms of gender expression to emerge. As Butler notes, "the resignification of norms is thus a function of their inefficacy, and so the question of subversion, of working the weakness in the norm, becomes a matter of inhabiting the practices of its rearticulation" (244). Judith Butler's theory provides the essential framework for understanding that gender is an effect, not a cause, of our actions. As this chapter will demonstrate, Galgut's characters are constantly engaged in this "repetition and a ritual" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 16) that produces the illusion of a natural gender core. However, Galgut's crucial contribution is to show this process as it is inflected by race, class and national identity. The 'forcible production' of gender in his fiction is never abstract; it is the work of specific institutions: the military, the reformatory and the family that discipline bodies into normative shapes. The dynamics of performativity, how it is enforced, how it fails and how it might be reworked form the core of Galgut's character studies.

Michel Foucault argues that sexuality is not something innate that power tries to control; rather it's a social construct shaped by history (Foucault 58). This idea can also be applied to gender. Just like sexuality, normative gender roles and behaviors have been a central and ongoing topic of debate and analysis in literary criticism. Michel Foucault's theory emphasizes the intricate relationship between power and sexuality. Foucault's concept of power is multifaceted, encompassing not only top-down structures but also interactive and enabling aspects (Haugaard 347). He explores how power dynamics influence gender-related power, often making the objects of power appear complicit in their own oppression. Foucault also delves into the productive nature of power, highlighting how individuals react and resist power dynamics, shaping their ethical and aesthetic values. Furthermore, Foucault posits that knowledge and power are intertwined, with power exercises always resulting in knowledge and vice versa, illustrating how individuals are both subjects and objects of power networks. Overall, Foucault's theory elucidates how power intricately shapes our understanding and expression of sexuality through complex dynamics of agency, resistance, and knowledge.

Galgut frequently situates his male characters in total institutions where the performance of a specific, violent masculinity is not just encouraged but mandated. In these spaces, the regulatory frame is starkly visible and the consequences of performative failure are severe. In *A Sinless Season*, the way Spencer and Raoul attempt to perform masculinity through physical attributes (chest hair, muscles) and toughness exemplifies R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, wherein masculinity is constructed in opposition to vulnerability and femininity (Connell, *Masculinities* 77). However, Raoul's initial defiance gives way to a

desperate need for acceptance, shifting his performance to match Spencer's expectations when he says,

'I am well built.' Spencer glanced down at his hard, flat belly and inhaled deeply. 'Anyway, that's not what I meant by tough.' 'Then what?' 'You've got to be able to take pain.' 'I can take pain,' Raoul said. 'I can take any pain.' 'Can you?' Spencer looked around. There was a long pause. (Galgut, *A Sinless Season* 26)

Both characters engage in a competition, emphasizing traditional masculine traits like strength and pain tolerance. The focus on physical attributes like body hair and muscles reinforces the association of masculinity with strength. Their dialogue mirrors what Michel Foucault terms the "disciplining" of male bodies through societal expectations, the insistence on enduring pain functions as a regulatory practice that polices gender norms (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 138).

Raoul initially tries to maintain a tough exterior with the line, "I could kill him, Scottie"(63), but his fear and desperation "I'm so scared" (Galgut, *A Sinless Season* 63) break through the facade. The unspoken rules of masculinity seem to prevent Raoul from openly expressing his pain and fear. Raoul's initial attempt at a tough exterior could be seen as a defense mechanism, but ultimately, he seeks help by expressing his vulnerability to Scott:

Last night, after you went to sleep, they came and took me out of bed. They did things to me, Scottie. terrible things. Serious. Please help me. I can't tell you what they did. It's terrible. Really. They raped me, Scottie, I don't know

who they were, it was too dark to see. It was lots of them, though. I'm so scared, Scottie, it hurts. I'm so scared. Serious. (63)

Raoul's admission of fear and pain directly contradicts the expected stoicism associated with traditional masculinity. The threat of becoming 'bad' himself highlights the pressure to conform to a violent and aggressive form of masculinity. This instance can support the idea that gender performativity can be a barrier to expressing vulnerability and seeking help, especially for victims of violence. However, it is crucial to note that this performance unfolds within the specific, racially charged context of a South African reformatory. The pressure to conform to a violent masculinity is not abstract; it is a microcosm of the broader national culture of apartheid, where state-sanctioned force was the ultimate arbiter of power, making Raoul's victimization a stark contrast to the aggressive masculine ideal he is forced to emulate.

Mrs. Delaney's flamboyant appearance (large, untidy hair, stylish coat) and her way of addressing Anthony: "'Darling,' breathed Mrs Delaney, and then again, as though she had underplayed the huskiness in her voice on her first try — 'Darling'" (110), suggests a performance of femininity associated with wealth and social status, which reflects Judith Butler's notion of gender as a repeated stylization of the body (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 191). Anthony, in contrast, is not described in detail, but his silence and waiting for his mother imply a power dynamic where she takes charge. "'My God, but I spent a terrible night last night,' Mrs Delaney cried joyfully. 'The hotel, you know! So shabby! But what do you expect here? At the end of the earth, you know, darling'" (Galgut, *A Sinless Season* 111). She then drew on her

cigarette, before dangling it out of the window in its long green holder. This thus supports the idea that gender performativity is intertwined with social class and expectations of behavior. Scott feels ‘out of place’ which could indicate a pressure to conform to a certain social class or gender performance in this situation. Scott’s internal struggle and ‘altered perspective’ suggests a negotiation of his own performance of masculinity in this new social setting. His discomfort highlights how gender performances are assessed and policed within rigid class hierarchies, where Mrs. Delaney’s affluent femininity temporarily destabilizes his own sense of masculine belonging.

In *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, Ellen, the mother’s transformation after marrying Patrick’s father suggests societal expectations for wives to conform to their husband’s desires: “Although she did try her hand at a few acting jobs over the years, she had never really had a career of her own. Her big role was the one she played as a housewife, a mother, a maker of homes. She set about remoulding herself in the image my father desired” (Galgut, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* 15). Her ‘rustic Afrikaans beginnings’ are seen as undesirable, implying a pressure to perform a more ‘cosmopolitan’ femininity. The mother performs a specific type of femininity for her husband, sacrificing her career aspirations and cultural identity. Patrick feels his mother wields power over him by making him participate in her ‘games’ with Godfrey. The father seems to hold the economic power, providing money and material consolations in exchange for the mother’s performance. This highlights the emotional toll of conforming to gender expectations, similar to Raoul’s struggle in the beach scene. While Raoul’s struggle is about reconciling the pressure to perform a tough, emotionless masculinity with his genuine need for connection and his desire to

express his vulnerability in the face of trauma. Raoul as we see suppresses fear and pain due to pressure to be tough. Ellen, on the other hand, might have suppressed her true desires to fit into her husband's expectations. Ellen seems to conform to a more traditional feminine role. She enjoys quiet activities like sewing and writing letters, contrasting with the father's boisterousness. However, her hidden past "Howard... Howie... what have you... done...?" (16) which hints at a potential desire or strength that doesn't fit this mold.

The performance is deeply inflected by class and race. Her erasure of her 'rustic Afrikaans beginnings' in favor of a 'cosmopolitan' femininity desired by her husband illustrates how gender is a vehicle for class mobility and respectability within white South African society. The father embodies a stereotypical image of masculinity. He's obsessed with hunting trophies, displays wealth through possessions, and pressures Patrick to play sports:

He needed to advertise his sophistication, because it was entirely fake. His real love was for hunting. The walls downstairs were covered in animal heads. He had killed every one of them, he would tell his visitors proudly, as he showed his collection of guns and rifles. He never tired of handling them, taking them apart and cleaning them, his hands more loving on those hard bits of metal than they'd ever been on us. (17)

The performance is a hyper-articulation of white patriarchal power, where dominance over nature and family becomes the measure of manhood. The father's attempts to connect with Patrick through sports feel forced and highlight a lack of genuine understanding. He seems to favour Malcolm, who embodies his desired image of

masculinity. This creates a strained relationship with Patrick. Malcolm's athletic prowess and rebellious spirit create a sense of competition for Patrick's father's approval. This rivalry reinforces the idea that masculinity is something to be competed for.

Caught between his parents' expectations, Patrick dislikes sports but feels pressured by his father. He might feel like an 'imposter' for not embodying his father's idea of masculinity which is similar to Raoul's struggle to reconcile vulnerability with societal expectations in *A Sinless Season*. Patrick finds solace and affection with his mother when they are alone. This challenges the traditional view of fathers as the primary source of love and guidance for sons. Her withdrawn behavior when the father is home suggests a power dynamic where she hides her true self to maintain peace. He struggles to express his dislike of sports or his fear of the ball:

There was a brotherhood of men, I now clearly saw, to which I would never belong. My father, my brother, the boys at school – they knew things I didn't know. There was something in their hands that helped them to catch balls in flight. More than that: it was beyond me to participate in their rituals of kinship. I would never hunt animals in the bush, or stand around a fire with them, beer in hand, tugging at my moustache. I was pale, I was weak, my jokes made them blanch. I would never be part of their club. (54)

He feels he must conform to his father's idea of masculinity, leading to frustration and a sense of inadequacy, which is again like Raoul suppressing his vulnerability and trauma. Patrick's exclusion from the brotherhood of men mirrors Jack Halberstam's analysis of "failed masculinity" as a site of queer potential (Halberstam, *Female*

Masculinity 27). The failure seen here is politically significant. Patrick's inability to perform the rugged, militaristic masculinity of his father and the army marks his rejection of the very identity that underpins the apartheid state's ideology. His queer failure is, therefore, a silent form of political dissent. Godfrey's wealth, hunting trips, and boisterous friends all contribute to a performance of a rugged, outdoorsman type of masculinity. Malcolm, his brother embraces his father's definition of masculinity by going on hunting trips and participating in the 'odysseys'. He boasts about drinking and hunting, seeking his father's approval. Patrick feels pressure to conform but doesn't enjoy hunting or the company of his father's friends. He experiences a mix of relief and jealousy when Malcolm goes on these trips as seen in *A Sinless Season* where Raoul also struggles to fit in with the group on the beach.

The arrival of Lappies provides a sense of relief and companionship. Their shared feeling of being 'at odds' with the camp environment creates a bond. This friendship suggests a need for connection beyond the rigid expectations of masculinity. The arrival of Lappies demonstrates the fluidity of performativity. Their shared sense of alienation creates a new space where they can perform a different kind of masculinity – one that allows for vulnerability and connection. The protagonist's experience in the border camp also highlights themes of isolation, masculinity, and the search for connection. The narrator is stationed far away from home, surrounded by an unfamiliar landscape which he calls the shades of brown. This physical isolation contributes to his emotional loneliness. He feels disconnected from the other men, described as "testosterone-swollen animals" (Galgut, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* 51) with whom he has nothing in common as he describes:

Perhaps only I felt it so acutely: the ennui and aimlessness, in which the overpowering maleness of the place started to suffocate me. It was the first occasion in my life that I had been in a group of men, with not a single female face. More to the point, it was the first occasion I'd been away from my mother for any length of time. It was like being with my father and his friends in an isolated hunting lodge, deep in the swamps somewhere, for months and months and months. (50)

The description dehumanizes the very men who embody the state's ideal, highlighting how the compulsory performance of hyper-masculinity within the racist military apparatus is itself a form of violence that alienates the individual. This highlights the pressure to conform to a specific type of masculinity. The narrator's initial struggle to fit in highlights the dynamic nature of performativity. He's expected to perform a specific type of masculinity – tough, emotionless, focused on physicality. However, his internal conflict reveals a constant negotiation between his authentic self and the expectations of the environment.

The camp enforces a narrow view of masculinity through its structure and routines. The emphasis on physical training contributes to a dominant performance of masculinity. This performance is not just about athleticism; rather, it is a brutal assertion of power, as seen in the violent contests between soldiers:

It was terrible. It was like being a boy again, hopelessly overcome by the world. And at the same time there was nothing boyish about it: the contest of knees and fists and will on the baked, cracking earth was elemental, old. (53)

The struggles are not youthful games but primal assertions of masculinity, reinforced by the military as a social institution. The military as a social institution reinforces these norms. Rank and authority become intertwined with a specific type of masculinity, embodied by figures like Commandant Schutte. He represents the extreme of enforced masculinity. He is religious, militaristic, and obsessed with the enemy. His emphasis on physical fitness and rugby reinforces a narrow image of what it means to be a man. The other Soldiers' enthusiastic participation in rugby and adherence to Schutte's ideals highlight the pressure to conform. Yet the narrator and Lappies, unable to meet these expectations, are marked as outsiders. Their failure to perform: whether in rugby or in the unrelenting displays of toughness demanded by the Commandant exposes their lack of conformity, leading to exclusion as depicted in the novel:

Our segregation confirmed what had always been sensed. The others kept their distance from us now. They treated us kindly, but also remotely; we weren't part of the team. We were apart. And there was a certain relief in having been discovered. The pretence wasn't necessary anymore, with all the toil and angst it entailed: the mask had dropped. (54)

The separation carries a twisted relief, as the narrator no longer has to maintain the exhausting pretence of belonging. Still, the shame lingers. The narrator's fear of being 'found out' forces him into secrecy, suppressing his true self to avoid further ostracism. This emotional labor, the constant performance of a masculinity that feels alien weighs heavily on him, a quiet but relentless toll exacted by an institution that demands conformity at all costs. The narrator recognizes a sense of camaraderie

among the other men but feels he can never truly belong. This highlights the limitations of a masculinity that excludes those who can't conform.

In *The Impostor*, Adam Napier, embodies a fragile masculinity shaped by failure and displacement. His self-perception as a poet, a traditionally unmanly pursuit in his brother Gavin's eyes clashes with societal norms of male success. Gavin mocks Adam's unemployment, asking, "Poetry... but what's your job?" (Galgut, *The Impostor* 24), underscoring the tension between Adam's artistic identity and capitalist definitions of masculinity. Adam's retreat to the Karoo symbolizes a rejection of hyper-masculine urban life, yet his inability to write poems reflects internalized shame about his "disappointing" face (25), a metaphor for his fractured selfhood. Gavin, in contrast, performs a hyper-masculine role as a wealthy property developer, flaunting his "affluent, satisfied look" (20) and dismissing Adam's struggles as weakness. His brother Gavin's mockery aligns with Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, where institutions (family, economy) police gender norms by equating masculinity with financial success (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 138). The conflict is framed by the economic transition in post-apartheid South Africa. Gavin embodies the new, hyper-capitalist masculinity, where value is determined by financial success, while Adam's poetic identity represents an outdated, seemingly worthless form of white male identity in this new order.

Gavin's dominance is performative: he offers Adam financial help but frames it as pity, reinforcing patriarchal hierarchies. This is evident when Adam reflects on his interactions with Gavin's friends, describing them as "big, boozy men with simpering wives, who talked about business deals and cars and insurance, and made

jokes about blondes and blowjobs” (Galgut, *The Impostor* 21). The atmosphere is one of superficial camaraderie, where Adam’s unemployment is met with a “hot, scratchy silence” when he admits his status, highlighting the stigma attached to his situation (21). Charmaine, though a minor character, subverts traditional femininity by claiming psychic intuition, a role typically marginalized. She asserts, “I can read auras. Your aura is very dark,” which reflects her attempt to assert agency in a male-dominated environment (21). However, her warnings about Adam’s need for change are dismissed by Gavin, who retorts, “Jeez, babe, leave my brother alone,” illustrating how women’s voices are trivialized in the face of patriarchal authority (21). The portrayal of dominated environment is a perfect depiction of a hegemonic, capitalist and patriarchal white masculinity, where women are accessories and value is measured in transactions. Adam’s exclusion from this circle is a classed and gendered failure.

Baby, Canning’s wife, exemplifies gendered exoticism and resistance. Her “shimmery blue dress” and “long nails” (55) align with fetishized femininity, yet she openly despises the rural setting, declaring:

‘I hate it here.’ ‘You’re not serious, are you?’ ‘Of course I am. All this space. All this...wildness. They can cover it in cement as far as I’m concerned.’ ‘But it’s beautiful,’ he says. She gives a snorting laugh. ‘You look at it once and then what? There’s nothing to do here. It’s boring. Give me the city—the city’s what I like. Clubs and parties and people, something happening.’ (60).

Her performance is a complex intersection of gender and class. She performs a glamorous, urban femininity that is utterly alien and resistant to the rural, Afrikaner

masculinity of the Karoo. Her declaration stated above is a rejection of the traditional gender roles assigned to women. Her boredom and refusal to perform domesticity (e.g., ignoring household chores) challenge the ‘angel in the house’ trope. However, her agency is constrained by Canning’s obsession; she is both a trophy and a silent rebel, as seen when she coldly rejects Adam’s poetic idolization of her (89).

Canning’s gender performance is fraught with contradiction. His flamboyant affection for Adam, such as kissing him drunkenly (63) which hints at repressed queerness, clashing with his macho posturing as a landowner. His performance reveals the instability of the white landowner identity post-apartheid; it is a fragile amalgam of inherited patriarchal authority and unmanageable, repressed desires. His sentimental nostalgia for childhood with Lindile (82) contrasts with his capitalist ruthlessness, revealing masculinity as a fragmented performance. Even his father’s legacy, a hyper-masculine “feudal overlord” (80) haunts him, showing how patriarchal expectations distort selfhood.

Blom, the neighbor, embodies another facet of masculinity: the “rough diamond” (73) whose manual labor and religious fervour align with Afrikaner stoicism. Yet his fear that Adam “will kill me” (92) exposes the paranoia beneath his performative toughness. His vulnerability such as offering Adam weed killer as a pragmatic solution softens his archetype, complicating rural masculinity.

Blom’s Afrikaner stoicism (“rough diamond”) mirrors R.W. Connell’s “protest masculinity”, where marginalization breeds exaggerated toughness (Connell, *Masculinities* 109). Galgut frames gender as a series of unstable performances.

Adam’s poetic aspirations, Gavin’s bluster, Baby’s defiance, and Canning’s theatricality reveal the exhaustion of sustaining these roles. The novel’s arid Karoo

setting mirrors the barrenness of rigid gender scripts, suggesting that identity, like the resurrected weeds in Adam's yard (Galgut, *The Impostor* 91), persistently resists control. Through these dynamics, Galgut critiques the emotional cost of performativity, showing how it stifles authenticity while offering no escape from its demands.

In a Strange Room, Damon and Reiner engage in a polite conversation, a behavior sometimes seen as 'feminine' in stereotypical masculinity. The formality of their conversation despite the close proximity creates a layer of tension. This ambiguity could hint at a potential attraction that defies traditional expressions of male desire. The 'curious formality' with which they interact creates a space for a different kind of connection, one that's not explicitly sexual or aggressive. Despite the close quarters, both men choose not to fully undress. This could be due to shyness, cultural norms or a deliberate attempt to maintain some boundaries. The act of exchanging names signifies a level of intimacy, but the formality of "good night" keeps things polite (Galgut, *In a Strange Room* 11). The exchange of names suggests a shift in power dynamics. They are no longer anonymous figures on a road. Both characters seem hesitant and unsure, a vulnerability that might not be readily associated with stereotypical masculinity. The shared sleeping space creates an opportunity for intimacy, yet both men maintain some physical distance through their sleeping bags and clothes. This could be a way to navigate their newfound connection without fully committing to a specific performative role (sexual partners, close friends, etc.). While exploring non-normative masculinity, they are enabled by their privileged mobility as white travellers. Their performance of gender ambiguity is a

luxury not afforded to those whose identities are more rigidly policed by state and economic pressures.

Reiner's physical beauty is acknowledged in the novel. His 'perfectly proportioned' body and 'long, hard' physique could be traditionally masculine traits, but the association with 'ugliness' challenges that definition as:

Reiner comes out onto the roof, drying his long hair with a towel. He is wearing the same black pants from yesterday, but no shirt, his body is brown and hard, perfectly proportioned. He knows that he is beautiful and somehow this makes him ugly. He stands in the sun, drying himself, and then also crosses over to sit on the parapet. The towel is slung around his neck, his skin is full of goose-bumps from the cold, beads of water shine like metal in the coarse hair on his chest. (12)

His 'perfectly proportioned' body, paired with the narrator's observation that 'this makes him ugly', critiques the violent idealization of male beauty. The 'ugliness' points to the perceived tyranny of his perfection, a performance of idealized masculinity so complete it becomes alienating. It is a crisis of white male beauty, untethered from other identity struggles like race or class, and is thus experienced as a purely psychological and aesthetic problem. Butler's notion of "gender melancholia" (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 21) applies here: Reiner's self-awareness renders his beauty grotesque, exposing the impossibility of embodying an idealized masculinity. His stoicism and silence could be seen as masculine strength, but they also suggest an emotional distance. The act of climbing the mountain together creates a sense of shared adventure and risk-taking, often associated with

masculinity. However, the physical closeness and challenge also create a space for a different kind of intimacy. Damon taking off his shirt and pants can be seen as a vulnerable offering, a physical expression of his emotional openness. Reiner's reaction putting his shirt back on and suggesting lunch remains ambiguous, leaving the power dynamic unclear.

Reiner's confession of visiting prostitutes in Canada challenges traditional notions of masculinity, particularly the association with emotional stoicism and heterosexuality. However, his actions suggest a potential disconnect between desire and intimacy. Sex for him seems like a way to release tension, devoid of emotional connection, a dynamic which mirrors the compulsory heterosexuality Adrienne Rich critiques, where male intimacy is permitted only through violence or exchange (Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 23). The power dynamic shifts as Reiner asserts his desires, leaving the protagonist conflicted and somewhat subservient.

In *Arctic Summer*, Forster's relationship with Masood disrupts traditional notions of masculinity. Their deep emotional connection transcends the boundaries of a purely platonic friendship, pushing the boundaries of what was considered acceptable male intimacy in that era. Masood's character, with his emotional vulnerability and unconventional expression of masculinity, provides a counterpoint to the expectations placed upon Forster. Their relationship forces Forster to confront the limitations of the prescribed masculine role and the potential for alternative forms of male identity. The relationship is immediately complicated by the colonial context. Morgan, the Englishman, and Masood, the Indian, navigate their intimacy across a

power imbalance dictated by race and empire. The bond between them is not just transgressive in terms of gender and sexuality, but also in its challenge to colonial hierarchies.

The descriptions of the “military types” (Galgut, *Arctic Summer* 6) and their wives onboard the ship paint a picture of rigid gender roles and social expectations. Morgan’s internal struggle with societal expectations and his own attraction to Searight reflects the complexities of navigating gender identity in a restrictive environment. His observations of the women on board highlight the limitations placed upon them and the casual prejudice they perpetuate. Despite their initial differences, Morgan finds solace in Searight’s company, suggesting a shared desire for connection beyond the confines of prescribed social roles. Their potential for a deeper bond, despite the societal constraints of the time, hints at the possibility of finding kinship based on shared values and genuine human connection.

Searight appears as a strong, masculine soldier, well-respected among his peers. He avoids women and maintains a facade of normalcy. However, he leads a secret life characterized by intense interest in young men and a vast number of sexual encounters. Morgan witnesses this hidden side and feels a mix of shock, fascination, and envy:

Over the next few days, Morgan watched Searight carefully and observed that his life was broken into two. In his military existence he put on a public face, and in this area he was to all appearances vigorous and masculine (12)

He realizes the vast difference between his own internal desires and Searight’s active expression of them. Morgan grapples with his own sexual inexperience and the

societal norms surrounding him, particularly the image of his mother that intrudes upon his thoughts. Searight embodies the expected public image of a masculine man. He is part of a respected regiment, drinks with fellow officers, and avoids women. This performance reinforces the traditional binary of masculinity and femininity. When alone with trusted people, Searight reveals his attraction to young men and boys. This challenges the societal expectation of heterosexuality and disrupts the rigid binary of masculinity. Searight's sexual desires and behaviors do not conform to the dominant norms. He engages in acts typically associated with a non-heteronormative identity, even though there's no explicit mention of him identifying as such. Searight disrupts the traditional binary by having a hidden self that expresses desires outside societal norms.

The story surrounding Masood's arrival at the Morisons suggests a potentially unconventional family situation, possibly involving same-sex elements. This challenges the ideal of the nuclear family and introduces the possibility of alternative kinship structures. Masood's Indian heritage and upbringing in a British household create a unique blend of cultural expectations and performances. This highlights the fluidity of cultural norms and the potential for individuals to navigate them in non-conforming ways. Morgan, initially reserved and adhering to societal norms, finds himself drawn to Masood's expressive and emotionally open nature. This challenges the narrow definition of masculinity he might have internalized. Masood openly expresses his emotions, including sadness about his father and fear during the incident. This challenges the stereotype of stoic masculinity prevalent in British society. Masood's physical affection towards Morgan, like tickling him, blurs the

lines of acceptable behavior between men and potentially hints at non-normative desires:

Then he sprang up and seized hold of Morgan, pushing him backward on the couch and tickling him furiously. It was shocking—for the first instant like assault and only then like play. Something in Morgan was thrown back in time to childhood, afternoon, the smell of straw in the heat. Ansell, his favourite of the garden boys, had frolicked with him like this. That moment did it; Masood became his friend. The distance between them had closed. (21)

The physical contact and emotional intimacy between Morgan and Masood push the boundaries of conventional male friendships, suggesting a potential for deeper connections outside the constraints of traditional masculinity. Morgan's initial discomfort gradually gives way to acceptance and even admiration, suggesting an openness to alternative ways of being a man.

The novel explores the complexities of same-sex attraction and the challenges faced by individuals defying societal norms surrounding masculinity and sexuality. Both Morgan and Hom engage in performances that mask their true desires while grappling with internal conflicts and the fear of social disapproval. Hom challenges the societal norm of heterosexuality by engaging in physical intimacy with Morgan:

One night, in the middle of a frantic discussion on the Symposium, they found themselves entangled on Hom's couch, fingers running through one another's hair. "I love you," Morgan told his friend, but the emotion had only risen in the wake of the words—fierce and freshly minted, true somehow for the very first time. (27)

This disrupts the expectation of male friendships being solely platonic and hints at same-sex attraction. Both Morgan and Hom question the rigid rules and expectations surrounding relationships and sexuality. They experiment with defying societal norms and exploring their desires outside the boundaries of conventional masculinity. Despite the physical intimacy, both men express a degree of emotional vulnerability. Morgan confesses his love for Hom, and Hom acknowledges his fondness while grappling with his own internal struggles.

Morgan exhibits a struggle with societal expectations of masculinity. He feels a dissonance between his desires and the “fey and weak” (109) qualities his mother disapproves of in his father. This suggests that he views masculinity as a performance, a set of expected behaviors rather than an inherent trait. Morgan’s attraction to Masood and his longing for a connection outside societal norms highlight the restrictive nature of traditional masculinity. He feels pressure to conform to what he perceives as normal behavior, leading to internal conflict and the search for potentially risky outlets. Morgan’s loitering in public spaces and fascination with Nijinsky’s performance represent a subversion of societal expectations. He’s drawn to the fluidity and freedom expressed in these acts, which challenge the rigid definitions of masculinity. Masood’s limited communication and eventual engagement to a woman further emphasize the societal pressure towards heteronormative masculinity. His silence around Morgan’s feelings can be seen as a form of maintaining his own performance of masculinity within the expected boundaries. Lily’s negativity towards Morgan’s father and his perceived ‘fey’ qualities reinforces the association of these traits with weakness and undesirability within the societal construction of masculinity.

The physical contact between Morgan and George disrupts the expected behavior within their class and social circles. The suggestive touch and George's possessive gesture represent a transgression of the boundaries established by traditional masculinity, where such intimacy wouldn't occur between men of different social standing as depicted:

“Oh,” he said, surprised. And then a little frightened. Because George was touching him. It was merely a hand, in the lower curve of his back. The contact was suggestive, though the fingers didn't move. Perhaps it was the talk they'd been having, or the thoughts he'd entertained, but there was something subversive about that hand. (118)

Morgan's initial shock and fear upon being touched by George reveal his internal struggle with societal expectations of masculinity. He contemplates the possibility of a different life and experiences a shift in his understanding of himself and his desires. The incident suggests that Morgan's sense of self is not fixed but rather a construct that can be reshaped through experiences and desires. The physical touch acts as a catalyst, prompting him to reassemble the fragments of his identity and potentially explore a more fluid understanding of masculinity. The suggestive touch from George disrupts the social order and traditional performances of masculinity associated with their class. It serves as a pivotal moment in Morgan's journey of questioning and potentially redefining his own gender identity.

Morgan's act of writing the 'homosexual story' is a performative act that reveals a hidden aspect of his identity. He sheds the societal expectation of heterosexual performance and expresses his true desires. He chooses to write about

same-sex attraction, demonstrating that his desires are not inherent but a performative choice. “He could never publish it. He couldn’t even show it to most people he knew” (119). This quote underlines the social constraints that restrict Morgan’s open performance of his homosexual identity. While drawing inspiration from his own experiences, Morgan also fabricates elements of his narrative. “He plucked the name of Maurice from his afternoon with Carpenter; it would do as well as another” (120). This highlights the performative aspect of the narrative, where Morgan creates a fictional character to explore his desires. The fear of societal disapproval and potential repercussions forces Morgan to conceal his true identity. He writes for a limited audience, acknowledging the power dynamics that restrict open expression of homosexuality.

Morgan’s role as a Red Cross worker positions him outside the traditional masculine ideal of the soldier. He avoids direct combat and embodies a more nurturing and caregiving role. The Red Cross badge allows Morgan to express a tenderness and care that might be deemed unmanly in another context, demonstrating the performative power of social symbols as portrayed in the novel:

His Red Cross insignia provided a cover for tenderness that might otherwise have been suspect. Their talk was frank and unvarnished; idealism had been scraped off the bare facts. They had been sent to face the guns, while the gentlemen-officers, like the awful colonel, tended to linger in the rear. (139)

His discomfort with the Egyptians and his attraction to a young man on the tram reveal a dissonance between his performative role and his underlying desires, which might not align with the expected wartime masculinity. His distaste for the ‘natives’

and the realization of his own 'racial arrogance' highlight the internalized prejudices that shape his performance of masculinity, potentially mirroring the colonial attitudes of the time (138). His preference for the company of ordinary soldiers over the officers challenges the established class structure and its associated expectations of masculinity: "He thought of them as the real England; once snobbery was set aside, you saw the true qualities" (139)

The physical touch between Morgan and Mohammed (touching the knee, stroking hair) disrupts the expected performance of masculinity within their respective cultures, particularly for Morgan, who grapples with the social implications of his same-sex desire: "He lifted his hand to stroke Mohammed's hair. The feel of it was very distinct, as if his sense of touch had been magnified. He was frightened, because he couldn't pretend that his interest was casual. If there was cruelty, it would come now" (167) The expressions of fondness and the kiss further challenge the traditional notions of stoic masculinity, highlighting the emotional connection that transcends societal expectations.

Mohammed's decision to stay in Mansourah after his father and brother's deaths suggests a potential deviation from the expected masculine role of being the breadwinner and supporting the family. His inheritance of multiple houses, while unconventional, doesn't necessarily challenge traditional gender norms. The possibility of marrying his brother's wife aligns with the societal expectation of a man taking care of a widow and her child. This act reinforces the masculine responsibility of providing and protecting as he said:

I am thinking of marrying my brother's wife." "Is that possible?" "Many people do. No dowry has to be given, so it's cheaper. There is also a child, who needs a father." After a pause, and in a different, quieter voice, he added, "I want to be a happy man in my own paternal home. "(181)

In the opening scene of *The Good Doctor*, Frank immediately judges Laurence based on his appearance and demeanor, perceiving him as "young and lost" (Galgut, *The Good Doctor* 12), reflects hegemonic masculinity (Connell, *Masculinities* 77), where authority is tied to physical presence and emotional stoicism:

I was sitting in the office in the late afternoon and he appeared suddenly in the doorway, carrying a suitcase in one hand and wearing plain clothes jeans and a brown shirt – with his white coat on top. He looked young and lost and a bit bewildered (Galgut, *The Good Doctor* 12)

This initial assessment might be influenced by stereotypical expectations of masculinity, associating strength and confidence with a more robust physical presence. Laurence's confusion and disappointment upon encountering the harsh reality of the hospital environment suggest a potential deviation from the expected stoic and unemotional performance of masculinity. Frank's actions of cleaning and preparing the room for Laurence, tasks often associated with femininity, disrupt the conventional expectations of male behavior. Similar to Morgan and Mohammed's relationship in *The Arctic Summer*, Frank and Laurence's dynamic potentially exists outside the boundaries of conventional masculinity, particularly within the isolated and potentially judgmental environment of the hospital. The isolated and potentially judgmental environment of the hospital adds another layer of complexity, as their

actions and interactions might be subject to scrutiny or societal expectations within this specific setting.

The dwindling hospital staff, primarily consisting of men, reinforces traditional notions of masculinity as the primary force in the professional sphere. Sharing a room with another male doctor, though inconvenient, doesn't inherently challenge these expectations: "It wasn't just that Laurence Waters and I were doctors; it was that we were two white men, and we belonged in a room together" (20). The dynamic is framed by their shared whiteness. Frank's observation therefore is crucial. The racial identity creates a bond that supersedes other considerations, granting them a privileged homosocial space to navigate their masculine performances, a privilege starkly denied to the Black nurse, Tehogo. Dr. Ngema's decision to place Laurence with Frank, despite an available room, highlights an unspoken understanding that two white men sharing a space is somehow more 'natural' or appropriate than a white man and a black woman, Tehogo. This reflects racial and gender biases that influence how social spaces are allocated. Laurence's initial anxiousness and restlessness could be interpreted as a deviation from the expected stoic and unemotional performance of masculinity. He expresses a desire for immediate action and interaction, contrasting with the more reserved demeanor of Frank.

The interaction between Frank and Maria showcases how gender roles and identities are constructed performances influenced by their social positions and power dynamics. Frank, as a white man with a relatively privileged position, holds a certain power over Maria, who exists in a more vulnerable state. The power dynamic is therefore explicitly racial and economic. Maria's "demure determination" and

“obscure calligraphy of gestures” (37) are performances of a survival femininity, tailored to navigate the demands of a poor, Black woman interacting with a powerful white man. Her performance is not freely chosen but is a strategic response to systemic inequality. The power dynamic shapes their interactions and expectations. The novel emphasizes the performative nature of gender through Maria’s limited use of language and her non-verbal cues. Her ‘demure determination’ in setting boundaries and her “obscure calligraphy of gestures” suggests a constructed persona within the context of their encounters (37) and exemplifies Butler’s “gender-as-drag”, where femininity is a survival performance (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 237). While the power dynamic leans towards Frank, there are subtle subversions. Maria’s initial control over the situation, setting the time and terms of their interaction, challenges the traditional power imbalance associated with gender. The boundaries they establish, like the ‘no kissing’ rule, highlight the constructed nature of their relationship and the unspoken rules that govern it.

The novel portrays both Frank and Laurence engaging in the performance of specific masculine norms. Frank initially resists the label of ‘friend’ associated with Laurence, possibly due to the emotional vulnerability it implies, which might contradict his constructed image of stoicism:

‘Who? Laurence? He isn’t my friend.’ ‘No? But you are everywhere together.’

‘Dr Ngema put us in the same room. But I don’t know him well.’ ‘He is a good young man.’ ‘I’m sure he is. But he’s not my friend yet.’ It was strange, but I felt uncomfortable at being linked with Laurence in this way. The word ‘friend’ had associations for me. Mike had been my friend, until he ran off

with my wife. Since then I hadn't made any friends. I didn't want anyone getting too close to me. (Galgut, *The Good Doctor* 64)

Laurence, on the other hand, expresses his desire to be a 'good young man' and someone who makes a difference, aligning with traditional masculine ideals of strength and purpose. Their relationship develops through shared activities like table tennis and walks, which become a form of performative bonding within the masculine sphere. Despite spending more time together, Frank hesitates to fully embrace the label of 'friend', highlighting the constructed nature of this social bond and the emotional boundaries he maintains. As their time together increases, Frank's initial resistance to the friend label softens. He finds himself drawn to Laurence's company and gradually accepts the changing dynamic of their relationship. This acceptance suggests a performative shift in Frank's own construction of masculinity, where emotional connection and shared experiences become part of the evolving definition.

Astrid's character in *The Promise* embodies the pressures of traditional femininity, which she performs with a mix of compliance and covert resistance. Her preoccupation with beauty and desirability is evidenced by her secretive vomiting to maintain her figure, which reflects an internalized anxiety about failing to meet gendered expectations. Her interactions with men, such as her flirtation with Dean de Wet and the older man at her mother's funeral, reveal a performative reliance on male attention for validation that aligns with Laura Mulvey's "male gaze", which positions women as objects of desire (Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* 62). However, Astrid's performance is that of a specific, white middle-class femininity. The performance of white femininity is starkly contrasted with that of Black

femininity. Her secretive vomiting and reliance on male attention are strategies to secure her value within a social circle defined by racial privilege and economic comfort, a world away from the survival performances of characters like Salome. Yet her moments of vulnerability, like her breakdown after her father's death, expose the psychological toll of this performance. Astrid's struggle to reconcile her desires with societal norms underscores the emotional fragility beneath her constructed femininity.

Anton's relationship with masculinity is marked by defiance and instability, particularly as he navigates the expectations imposed by a patriarchal society. His military service and subsequent desertion frame his rejection of the hyper-masculine ideals imposed by apartheid-era nationalism and critiques apartheid's hyper-masculine nationalism, echoing R.W. Connell's "protest masculinity", a destabilized performance born of systemic violence (Connell, *Masculinities* 109). This is evident when he reflects on his time in the army, stating, "I shot and killed her yesterday" (Galgut, *The Promise* 32), which underscores the violent realities he faced and the emotional toll it took on him. His violent outbursts and sardonic humour serve as performative shields against vulnerability. For instance, he remarks, "I wish I didn't do that" (138), revealing his internal conflict and the inadequacy of his attempts to mask his emotional pain. His emotional unraveling, particularly his guilt over his mother's death, is palpable when he admits, "I was crazy when Ma died" (74), indicating the profound impact her loss has had on his psyche. This guilt is compounded by his fraught reconciliation with his father, where he confronts the toxic dynamics of their relationship, stating, "You were an alcoholic shit to my mother" (74), which highlights the deep-seated resentment he harbors.

The scene where Anton capitulates to Alwyn Simmers, despite his disdain for the minister, illustrates the coercive power of patriarchal and religious structures in dictating masculine behavior. Anton's forced submission to Simmer's authority, as he reflects on the minister's influence, reveals how deeply entrenched these societal expectations are:

The father loves the prodigal, he says, more than the dutiful son. Always seemed unfair to me. But it's the way of the world. The Lord is never unfair! Come now, Andrew, pray with me. Andrew/Anton/aka the prodigal can't quite bring himself to kneel as the minister does, but goes so far as hunching over in his chair (88).

The moment here encapsulates the psychological conflict between societal expectations and individual identity, as Anton struggles to reconcile his sense of self with the roles imposed upon him by family and society. Ultimately, his trajectory highlights the inadequacy of traditional masculine performances in the face of personal trauma and societal pressures.

Amor's character disrupts gendered norms through subtle but persistent resistance. Unlike Astrid, she rejects performative femininity, opting for simplicity in dress and demeanor. Her refusal to conform whether in her vegetarianism, her indifference to romantic entanglements critiques Adrienne Rich's "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 24), or her insistence on Salome's right to the house signals a rejection of prescribed roles. Her non-conformity is intersectional. She rejects not only gendered expectations but also the racial and class complacency of her white family, symbolized by her

insistence on fulfilling the promise to Salome. Her identity is constructed in opposition to the entire system of privilege she was born into. Her emotional detachment, particularly during her mother's funeral, masks a deeper sensitivity, as seen in her private grief and physical pain during her first menstruation. Amor's journey reflects the psychological burden of nonconformity, as well as the quiet strength required to navigate a world resistant to change.

Salome's performance of gender is inextricably tied to her racial and class position, as her role as a domestic worker demands a performative subservience that is deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of the household. Her silent endurance during Rachel's illness and death exemplifies the exploitation underlying these expectations, as depicted in the novel:

Salome sweeps and cleans the house and washes the clothes of the people who live in it, she looked after Ma through her last illness, dressing and undressing her, helping her to bathe with a bucket of hot water and a lappie, helping her to go to the toilet, yes, even wiping her arse for her after she used the bedpan, mopping up blood and shit and pus and piss, all the jobs that people in her own family didn't want to do, too dirty or too intimate, Let Salome do it, that's what she's paid for, isn't it? (Galgut, *The Promise* 19).

This highlights the gendered and racialized division of labor, where Salome's contributions are rendered invisible, despite her critical role in the family's life. The unfulfilled promise of her house symbolizes the broader denial of agency to Black women, as Amor reflects on the promise made to Salome, stating, "I heard him. He promised Ma he would give Salome her house" (63). This promise, however, remains

unacknowledged by the family, illustrating how Salome's emotional and physical labor is often overlooked and unvalued. Tannie Marina's dismissive attitude towards the idea of giving Salome her house "We're not going backwards now" (107) which further emphasizes the systemic barriers that prevent Black women from claiming their rights and agency.

Salome's character underscores how gender performance is mediated by power and privilege, as her existence within the household is marked by a "natural heaviness" (28) that reflects the burdens she carries. Despite her unwavering dedication, her labor is often taken for granted, and her silent endurance and unacknowledged labor reveal the exploitation underlying these expectations that exemplifies Patricia Hill Collins's "controlling images" of Black women as self-sacrificing (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 72). Salome's resilience in the face of such exploitation reveals the complexities of her identity, navigating the intersections of race, class, and gender within a society that seeks to render her invisible.

The exploration of gender performativity and its dynamics in Galgut's novels reveals an extensive understanding of how gender is constructed and performed. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Michel Foucault's insights into disciplinary power, this chapter has demonstrated that gender in Galgut's fiction operates not as a stable identity but as a set of socially regulated performances shaped by institutions such as the family, the military, and the broader socio-political structures of South African society. Through various characters and their interactions, Galgut illustrates that gender is not a fixed or innate quality but a set of behaviors and roles enacted in response to societal norms and expectations.

Across the novels examined in this chapter, characters repeatedly negotiate, reproduce, and at times destabilize dominant models of masculinity and femininity. For example, the failed masculinity of Patrick, a white conscript in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, becomes a site of resistance against the militarized masculinity associated with apartheid ideology. Similarly, Raoul's traumatic experience in *A Sinless Season* exposes the violence embedded in hegemonic masculinity, where vulnerability is suppressed and physical endurance becomes the measure of manhood. These moments illustrate how institutional environments such as reformatories and military camps function as disciplinary spaces that enforce particular masculine performances.

At the same time, Galgut reveals the instability of these gender performances through characters such as Adam in *The Impostor*, whose fragile poetic identity conflicts with the hyper-capitalist masculinity embodied by his brother Gavin. Likewise, the ambiguous intimacy between Damon and Reiner in *In a Strange Room*, as well as Morgan's emotional and physical connections with Masood and others in *Arctic Summer*, challenge rigid heteronormative models of masculinity by foregrounding vulnerability, ambiguity, and emotional openness. In these instances, the performative nature of gender becomes visible precisely at the moment when characters fail to embody the dominant scripts expected of them.

The dynamics of femininity are similarly shaped by social expectations and power structures. Astrid's performance of white, bourgeois femininity in *The Promise* reflects the internalization of patriarchal ideals of beauty and desirability, while

Amor's refusal to conform to these norms signals a quieter but significant form of resistance. In contrast, Salome's role within the Swart household illustrates how gender performance is profoundly mediated by race and class. Her silent endurance and unacknowledged labour demonstrate how Black femininity is constructed through systems of exploitation and historical inequality, revealing that gender performance cannot be understood apart from the intersecting structures of power that shape it.

What emerges most clearly from this analysis is that Galgut does not present masculinity or femininity as universal categories. Instead, he depicts them as historically and culturally contingent performances that are deeply entangled with race, class, colonial history, and economic transformation. The tension experienced by many of his characters between societal expectations and personal identity exposes the emotional and psychological costs of maintaining these performances. By portraying moments of failure, vulnerability, and resistance, Galgut reveals the fragility of the gender norms that structure social life.

Ultimately, the dynamics of gender performativity in Galgut's fiction highlight the continuous negotiation between conformity and resistance within systems of power. Through characters who struggle to inhabit, reject, or reconfigure socially prescribed identities, Galgut exposes the instability of the very norms that claim to define gender. His narratives therefore not only dramatize the lived consequences of these performances but also open up the possibility of imagining alternative modes of identity beyond the rigid confines of heteronormative and patriarchal structures.

Chapter 5

Gender Identity: A Socio-Cultural Construct

Butler writes, “This sex posited as prior to construction will, by virtue of being posited, become the effect of that very positing, the construction of construction” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter On the Discursive Limits of Sex* 5). Therefore, ‘sex’ is retroactively constructed as the foundation for gender and culture. In essence, sex itself is produced by the concept of gender: “we cannot think about sex or sexualized objects content fully or experience them independent of the conditions of gender” (Sveinsdóttir 56). While Butler provides the theoretical framework, Damon Galgut’s novels offer a literary laboratory where this construction is vividly enacted and tested. His unique contribution lies in portraying how gender identity is not just socially constructed, but is specifically forged in the crucible of South Africa’s violent history, where the personal crises of his characters mirror the nation’s own struggle with identity. Our understanding of sex, our bodies, and even how we perceive individual body parts are all influenced and shaped by the societal framework of gender. Sex is presented as natural, but it is deeply intertwined with and influenced by the concept of gender.

Many believe that modern society, often viewed as innovative, progressive, and constantly evolving, has grown more inclusive and accepting of diversity (Morgenroth et al.,3). Ideally, in the 21st century, people would treat others with respect, irrespective of differences such as race or gender. However, certain individuals continue to face exclusion in various societal domains because they do not conform to traditional norms. In Galgut’s fictional world, this theoretical concept

becomes a lived, often painful, reality. His characters do not simply perform gender; they are often crushed by the specific, hyper-masculine and racially-charged expectations of their environments. The gender binary classifying people strictly as male or female, remains prevalent in today's society. This is evident in various aspects of daily life, such as gender-segregated product sections in stores, labelled public restrooms and toys marketed specifically to boys or girls (Murto 12). These practices reinforce the dominance of binary gender norms, often excluding non-binary identities. Additionally, many still assume that gender is solely determined by biological sex at birth and remains fixed throughout life. This perspective leads to the widespread, yet outdated, belief that sex and gender are synonymous and interchangeable (Hyde et al.178). Galgut's work exposes the violent enforcement of this binary in contexts like the apartheid-era military or the patriarchal Afrikaner family, showing it to be a mechanism of social control as potent as racial segregation.

Gender identity, as a concept, has evolved significantly over time, moving beyond biological determinism to encompass a complex interplay of social, cultural, and psychological factors.(Boichenko 15) Unlike sex, which is often understood in terms of physiological characteristics, gender identity refers to an individual's deeply felt sense of being male, female, a blend of both, or neither, which may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth. This chapter explores the emergence of the term gender identity, its theoretical underpinnings, its various types and expressions, and its implications in contemporary society and literature. Galgut's oeuvre serves as a narrative archive of this evolution, tracing the collapse of traditional, colonial masculinities and the fraught emergence of new, more fluid identities in the post-apartheid landscape. By analysing its socio-cultural construction,

this discussion will highlight Galgut's distinctive literary project: to reveal gender identity as a site of national as well as personal conflict, where the body itself becomes a terrain upon which historical forces are played out.

Instead of accepting sex as an uncritical biological fact, Butler argues it deserves scrutiny as well. She points out that simply stating someone's sex can be seen as imposing a norm (Sveinsdóttir 50). In other words, it can enforce expectations of how someone should behave. For Butler, declaring someone female isn't just a neutral observation; it's an act that establishes a norm and shapes the body it defines (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 12). For example, checking female on a form isn't merely reporting a fixed fact, it's subjecting yourself to the binary system of sex and its accompanying expectations for behavior. Essentially, repeated adherence to these norms shapes who we are perceived as, and potentially who we perceive ourselves to be. Judith Butler challenges the traditional assumption that nature passively awaits cultural meaning. In this view, nature is a blank canvas, ready for social interpretations to be inscribed upon it (14). Here, nature is linked to "a white paper, void of all characters" as described by John Locke. (Duschinsky 516) This traditional account positions sex as something pre-discursive, existing before culture defines it. Butler argues against this, suggesting instead that the very distinction between sex and gender is a product of ongoing cultural discourse. She asks why "the materiality of sex is understood as that which only bears cultural constructions and, therefore, cannot be a construction?" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter On the Discursive Limits of Sex* 28).

Butler's idea of performativity may not really give a boost to the notion of fluidity of gender in that it opposes the fetishising of the transsexual body as this body is seen as an agency of further driving home the duality of sex and sexuality and gender. Rather, it tells us that the roots of gendered binaries reside in the cultural, social and political regimes rather than in the natural or biological world. It lends credence to trans accounts of feeling out of place in the bodies they were born in. But her ideas on the materialisation of the body do carry the significance of the cultural recognition that lends volubility to the material recognition of the body. This is so because the materiality of an entity cannot exist in dissociation from cultural attestation. But even in the realm of cultural attestation, what happens is that the continuous performances rob the central trope of its power to maintain its integrity as the spin offs would certainly be parodies and mutations of the norms. Also, "The loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: 'man' and 'woman'" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 187). The need to understand this constant destabilization is inscribed in her work as she asks,

... the power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek themselves through a constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysic, and their naturalized ontologies does not imply that repetition itself ought to be stopped-as if it could be. If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities, then the crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself? (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 42)

Lesbian and gay are terms used both in sexual contexts to describe homosexual women and men and culturally and politically to depict women who challenge traditional femininity and men who are perceived as less masculine. These terms carry deeper connotations when examining lesbian performances, such as butch, femme, leather, or Goth, which reflect different expressions of sexuality and positions within the sexual spectrum. Similarly, gay men may be categorized as passive, active, or identified by terms like jock, otter, bear, or wolf, based on factors like body hair, musculature, clothing, sexual preferences, and partners.

Heterosexuality has historically been viewed as the standard sexual orientation, with the expectation that the most suitable sexual relationships occur between men and women. This perspective, which perceives heterosexual relationships as natural, contributes to the prevalence of heteronormativity in society. As a result, societal attitudes toward sexuality are often shaped by heteronormative norms, leading to the establishment of norms and judgments about sexual relationships as normal or abnormal. Even today, heterosexuality is still commonly regarded as normal and acceptable, while other sexual orientations, such as homosexuality and lesbianism, are often seen as deviating from the norm or being different and abnormal.

Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking book, *The Second Sex*, sheds light on the social construction of gender. Her famous quote, "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir 330), emphasizes this point. Beauvoir argues that girls are not inherently feminine; they learn and acquire feminine traits and behaviors through cultural conditioning. She further explores how femininity itself has been

defined and imposed on women by society. Beauvoir argues that true liberation for women can only happen through collective action. Women must recognize their marginalized position in society and fight for their freedom and independence. She encourages women to reject the passivity expected of them and embrace an active role – thinking, taking action, working, and creating alongside men as equals (Beauvoir 57).

Following the 1960s, the concept of feeling trapped in the wrong body gained traction. To understand this phenomenon, Robert Stoller, in his book *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (1968), proposed a clear distinction between biological sex and gender identity. According to Stoller, sex refers to a person's biological traits, such as chromosomes and anatomy. In contrast, gender encompasses a person's behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and fantasies related to masculinity and femininity, independent of their biological sex. This distinction between sex and gender allowed Stoller to better explain the experience of people who identify as transgender. Galgut's literary power lies in his ability to dramatize Butler's theories in settings where the stakes are life and death. For his characters, the 'performance' of gender is not an academic exercise but a daily negotiation for survival, acceptance, or a semblance of power.

In *A Sinless Season*, Galgut explores the institutional construction of masculine identity. The reformatory is not just a backdrop but an active agent in molding boys according to a specific, rigid blueprint of masculinity. Gender identity is portrayed as a socio-cultural construct that is influenced by the character's environments, relationships, and societal expectations. The novel explores how the

boys navigate their identities within the confines of the reformatory, revealing the complexities of masculinity and the pressures to conform to traditional gender roles. Scott experiences a deep sense of conflict regarding his identity:

His voice, whether unheard or unheeded, had no effect. Scott had again that sense of being almost a physical anachronism in his circumstances; an Aeneas in a metaphorical underworld. How much more than just two years, he wondered, had he sacrificed by his actions? (Galgut, *A Sinless Season* 11)

This metaphor illustrates his struggle to reconcile his true self with the identity that society expects him to embody. His feeling of dislocation (an Aeneas in a metaphorical underworld) mirrors Judith Butler's concept of "gender melancholia", where failure to conform produces psychic alienation (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 145). Galgut uses the classical reference not merely to signify alienation, but to frame Scott's experience as a heroic, yet doomed, journey through a modern institutional hell designed to break and remake him. The boy's physical appearances and behaviors are often scrutinized, as seen when Mr. Hall appraises Scott's "sensitive brown eyes" and "meekness," questioning whether these traits are misleading (Galgut, *A Sinless Season* 12). The moment addressed here is quintessentially Galgutian: a swift, clinical dissection of how perceived gender non-conformity is pathologized by institutional authority.

Raoul's character embodies the tension between traditional masculinity and emotional vulnerability. He expresses a desire for connection and acceptance, stating, "I want you to help me. You must, please. Please, screwball" (64). This plea reveals his struggle to navigate his emotions within a context that often discourages

vulnerability in boys. Raoul's actions often challenge traditional gender norms, as he expresses anger and frustration towards Spencer Hardy, saying, "You lie, you lie, you lie, you lie..." (87). This defiance against Spencer's authority illustrates Raoul's rejection of the passive role often expected of boys in their environment. The bond between Scott and Raoul serves as a crucial aspect of their identities. Scott reflects on their relationship, noting, "What he could not discover in his friend was the depth of feeling that necessitated such intensity" (59). This observation underscores the complexity of their friendship and how it shapes their understanding of masculinity and identity.

The statement by Mr. Hall, the principal of Bleda Reformatory, reflects a societal expectation that aligns education with specific gender roles:

"'You will find,' he said, 'that education here is geared towards the mechanical, the industrial side of things. Intensely so. Our teachers are few. If you find it difficult to adjust, come and speak to me. I doubt that you will, however; very few people do'" (15).

The emphasis on mechanical and industrial education for the boys at Bleda Reformatory can be seen as an attempt to instil in them a sense of responsibility and discipline that is traditionally linked to masculine roles in society. In Galgut's hands, this is more than socialization; it is the creation of a labor force for a specific socio-economic order. The 'mechanical' education mirrors the desired 'mechanical' performance of masculinity: unthinking, functional, and durable. In R. W. Connell's terms, such training represents "hegemonic masculinity," a culturally exalted form of male behavior that legitimizes male dominance and reinforces gendered labor

divisions (Connell, *Masculinities* 77). By focusing their education on these areas, the institution is preparing the boys for what is considered to be a man's world of work, which is often seen as a rite of passage into adulthood and respectability. This educational approach also serves to reinforce the gendered division of labor, where men are expected to engage in productive, often manual, labor outside the home, while women are traditionally associated with domestic and care-giving roles. Galgut connects this gendered training directly to the economic logic of the state, showing how identity is engineered for utility. By gearing the education towards these specific fields, the institution is not only providing the boys with vocational skills but also socializing them into the gender roles that are expected of them in society.

‘You are allowed to ... um, I said that ... We trust you.’ Smoke scrolled up across his face. ‘I must impress certain things on you, though. Remember, we have pride here. That is why we do not call this a reformatory. This is a school, like any other, and you are boys, like any others. Let me be frank with you — other reformatories would treat you like criminals. But not here. We have managed to turn our boys into gentlemen. We hope to do the same to you. You will be struck by the decency of the boys here — there is no coarseness. We expect the same from you. No swearing, bullying, that sort of thing. Do you understand me?’ (Galgut, *A Sinless Season* 13)

The term gentleman historically refers to a man of good social position, character, and manners. By emphasizing the reformatory's success in turning boys into gentlemen, Mr. Hall is invoking a specific set of behaviors and values that are considered socially acceptable and desirable for men in society. These include

honesty, integrity, self-control, and a commitment to moral and ethical standards. This echoes Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary institutions, which, under the guise of normalization, produce docile bodies that internalize expected behaviors (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 138). The expectation that the boys will embody these qualities is a clear example of societal control over gender roles. Mr. Hall's insistence on behavior that eschews coarseness, swearing, and bullying is a directive to conform to a particular masculine ideal that is civilized, disciplined, and respectful. This ideal is in stark contrast to the criminal or delinquent identity that the boys may have previously embodied or been labelled with.

In *Small Circle of Beings*, the protagonist's efforts to dress up and paint her face, reflects a powerful depiction of the exhaustion of performed femininity. Galgut does not just show the performance; he reveals the profound alienation it creates within the domestic space, which becomes a stage for a failing act as depicted in the novel:

I make an effort for him. There are nights, yes, when I dress up in pretty clothes, when I paint my face the way he wants me to do. I put on stockings. I pin up my hair and am, if only for a few hours, the girl he met ten years ago. I am once again Miss Roper, the laughing schoolteacher who somehow seduced him. But there is something false about these evenings, no matter how much he claims to like them. It is as if I am only dressing up, as if I'm putting on a costume in which I no longer belong. (Galgut, *Small Circle of Beings* 20).

The passage above illuminates what Judith Butler identifies as the "performative contradiction" inherent in gender construction, the simultaneous necessity and

impossibility of authentic gender expression (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 179). This notion is rooted in traditional gender roles where a woman's value is often tied to her physical appearance and her ability to please her husband. The protagonist's feeling of falseness during these evenings underscores the performative nature of these actions, suggesting that she is conforming to a role rather than expressing her true self. Galgut captures the moment when the performed identity ceases to fit, when the self evolves but the role does not, creating a crisis that is both personal and deeply cultural. The protagonist's internal monologue serves as a critique of the rigid gender expectations that confine women to specific roles. Her sense of falseness and the performative nature of her actions reveal the psychological toll of these expectations. Galgut's contribution is his unsentimental focus on the 'falsehood' not as a simple lie, but as a corrosive substance that eats away at the soul. The societal pressure to be perpetually attractive and subservient creates a dissonance between her true self and the role she is expected to play.

Cedric's description as "crouched above me on hands and knees, breathing hard" (Galgut, *Small Circle of Beings* 72) conveys a sense of raw physical power and dominance in the sexual relationship with the protagonist. His body becomes a source of strength and vitality, contrasting with the more subdued and polite demeanor of Stephen. This physicality not only represents sexual prowess but also challenges traditional notions of masculinity, suggesting that power can be expressed in more primal, less restrained ways. In contrast, Stephen's "polite, demure lines" (73) symbolize a more conventional form of masculinity that adheres to societal expectations. His physicality reflects a type of power that is rooted in social norms and propriety, which can be seen as limiting. The protagonist's reflections on

Stephen's body highlight how societal expectations can shape one's identity and the power dynamics within relationships.

The protagonist's relationship with her body is where Galgut makes one of his most original contributions: he portrays the aging female body not as a site of dignified maturity, but as a material entity succumbing to visceral, almost grotesque, physical laws. She grapples with feelings of aging and vulnerability. Her concern about losing her mental faculties and the significance of her body in the context of her relationships reflects societal pressures on women to maintain youth and beauty. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the expectations placed on her to conform to traditional gender roles, which often prioritize physical appearance over personal agency as she says:

I take off my clothes and stand before the mirror. I scrutinise my body, examining my sagging flesh. Gravity has had its effect. As I grow farther and farther from my birth, my body succumbs to the pull of the earth. It melts from my bones and begins to drip and ooze downward under my clothes. (20)

This is not a passive observation but a brutal, materialist inventory. Galgut uses language of liquefaction and decay ("drip and ooze") to strip away cultural idealizations and present the body in its raw, abject materiality, a perspective rarely afforded to female characters with such unflinching honesty. Her experiences with both Stephen and Cedric reveal how emotional vulnerability is intertwined with physical intimacy. The contrast between the emotional distance in her marriage and the raw, passionate connection with Cedric illustrates how the body can be a site of both vulnerability and empowerment, depending on the nature of the relationship. The

shift from a conventional marriage to a more liberated sexual relationship with Cedric signifies a resistance to societal norms surrounding gender and sexuality:

Cedric, though, is younger than I, and I wonder sometimes if I'm not repulsive to him. His body is stocky and hard, compressed into a dense red tunnel of flesh. He carries no flab. I am excited by the sight of this man, by the coarse hair on his back and bum, by the rank, hooved smell of him. He is, sometimes, that goat he carved for me: a beast without mind, a driving, biting, savage thing, balanced on the earth. (73)

The passage demonstrates what Stacy Alaimo's work on trans-corporeality suggests about embodied agency, the ways bodies exceed normative boundaries through their material encounters with the world (Alaimo, "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms"). Her embrace of a more primal and uninhibited expression of her desires challenges the expectations of femininity that dictate how women should behave in intimate relationships. Her journey of self-discovery through her body: rediscovering its meaning and significance- serves as a form of resistance against the constraints of heteronormativity. By engaging in a relationship that defies traditional norms, she asserts her agency and reclaims her body as a site of personal expression rather than societal expectation.

Cedric's approval of David being set to work signifies a traditional view of masculinity that associates being a 'real man' with physical labour and resilience. The narrator imposes tasks on David, such as weeding the lawn and painting his room, not only as a means of discipline but to shape him into what Cedric and societal norms deem as a strong and capable man: "I set David to work not for my sake, but for his

own: Cedric is a hard man and would approve of this” (*Small Circle of Beings* 80).

This reflects a cultural belief that boys must engage in and endure physical toil to develop into strong, masculine men. The expectation for David to suppress his emotions and not cry is another aspect of the gender role construction. Cedric’s mocking of David’s tears and the narrator’s plea for him not to cry underscore the cultural expectation that men should not display vulnerability or sadness. This emotional stoicism is a significant part of traditional masculinity, where showing emotions is often equated with weakness.

In *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, Galgut situates the crisis of gender identity within the ultimate masculine institution: the apartheid military. He demonstrates that in this context, failure to perform masculinity is not just a personal shortcoming but a form of political dissent. The protagonist, Patrick, becomes Galgut’s archetypal outsider, whose internal landscape of alienation maps directly onto the external, hostile landscape of the border war. Patrick observes the transformation of his mother, Ellen, after her divorce, noting that she “threw off the role of wife as if it had been weighing her down” (Galgut, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* 22). This shift signifies her rejection of traditional gender roles, exemplifies what Raewyn Connell terms the “gender regime” (Connell, *Masculinities* 83) as she embraces a new identity that is more aligned with her desires and aspirations. Ellen’s journey reflects the complexities of gender identity as she navigates her newfound freedom. She confides in Patrick, saying, “I feel like myself for the first time, Patrick. It’s all been an act till now” (Galgut, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* 22). This statement underscores the performative nature of her previous identity, suggesting that her role as a wife was a societal expectation rather than an authentic expression of

self. As she engages in various political movements and adopts different lifestyles, her physical appearance changes dramatically, symbolizing her emotional and psychological liberation.

Conversely, Patrick grapples with the pressures of masculinity, particularly during his time in the army. He describes the environment as:

Perhaps only I felt it so acutely: the ennui and aimlessness, in which the overpowering maleness of the place started to suffocate me. It was the first occasion in my life that I had been in a group of men, with not a single female face. More to the point, it was the first occasion I'd been away from my mother for any length of time. It was like being with my father and his friends in an isolated hunting lodge, deep in the swamps somewhere, for months and months and months. (50)

The observation highlights his feelings of alienation and inadequacy in a hyper-masculine setting, where traditional gender roles are enforced. The commandant's assertion that "this place is for men, not girls" (79) further emphasizes the rigid expectations of masculinity that Patrick feels compelled to navigate, exemplifies what Butler terms the "abjection" of femininity to stabilize masculine identity (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 3). The dynamics of gender identity are also explored through the relationships between characters. Ellen's affair with Godfrey represents a challenge to societal norms, as she seeks to assert her independence and agency. However, her declarations of belonging to the continent and her passionate involvement in politics reveal an underlying struggle with her identity. Patrick's interactions with Godfrey

also reflect the complexities of gender and power, as he confronts the implications of their differing backgrounds and experiences.

In *The Quarry*, gender identity is portrayed as a socio-cultural construct that is deeply influenced by the character's environments and experiences. The protagonist's initial state of undress, where he is described as "naked in the cold wash of sun," symbolizes a raw and unfiltered identity, free from societal constraints, yet also highlights his vulnerability in a harsh world (Galgut, *The Quarry* 11) therefore functions as a powerful metaphor for what Judith Butler conceptualizes as the precarious materiality of the body prior to its "cultural articulation" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 8). His clothing, a "peculiar mixture of articles," reflects a fragmented identity shaped by theft and survival, indicating how socio-economic conditions impact personal expression (Galgut, *The Quarry* 11). Galgut explores identity at its most elemental and stripped bare. The protagonist's initial state of undress is more than a symbol; it is a statement of his pre-social existence, a tabula rasa upon which society will inscribe a new, criminal identity. The interactions between characters further illustrate the complexities of gender identity. For instance, the minister's attempt to assert his authority is undermined by his physical posture, suggesting discomfort with the expectations of masculinity in a post-apartheid context. This tension reveals how traditional gender roles can create internal conflicts, as characters navigate their identities within a society that imposes rigid norms depicted as:

The two men sat opposite each other with the surface of the desk between them. The Captain had a white pad in front of him and a ball-point pen in his

hand. The minister had nothing. He sat very upright in the chair with his body angled slightly away from the Captain, fingers held together in his lap. (39)

Additionally, the character of Valentine embodies the struggle for self-definition against societal expectations. When he dons the cassock, it becomes a symbol of both his desire for connection and the weight of imposed identity, as Small remarks, “It’s a dress,” which evokes laughter and highlights the fluidity of gender perception (41). This moment underscores the performative aspects of gender, where clothing and roles are not merely functional but laden with cultural significance. The novel also explores the emotional toll of these constructs. The protagonist’s experience of washing himself is described as “perfunctory and detached,” indicating a disconnection from his own identity and the emotional weight of societal expectations (11). This detachment reflects the internal struggle many characters face as they grapple with their identities in a world shaped by historical and cultural legacies.

Adam, the protagonist of *The Impostor*, is perhaps Galgut’s most comprehensive portrait of a masculinity in crisis. His failure is multifaceted: economic, creative, and sexual. Galgut uses Adam to explore the specific predicament of the white male in post-apartheid South Africa, whose inherited scripts for identity have lost their power. He embodies a deeply conflicted masculinity shaped by the tension between societal expectations and his own sense of inadequacy. His identity crisis is rooted in the loss of his job, which he attributes to racial quotas that led to his replacement by a younger Black intern, a moment that exposes his fragile grasp on traditional male roles (Galgut, *The Impostor* 19). This displacement is not merely

economic but existential, as Adam's self-worth was tethered to his position as a white professional in post-apartheid South Africa. His bitter reflection is portrayed as:

His boss had been apologetic, talking about racial quotas and telling him it was nothing personal. But how could it not be personal? It was he, Adam Napier, nobody else, who had to pack up his desk and take his pictures off the wall and walk through the door for the last time. Afterwards, remembering this scene, what he felt most keenly was humiliation that he hadn't seen it coming.
(19)

Galgut masterfully captures the intersection of personal and political failure. Adam's humiliation is not just about losing a job, it is the humiliation of a whole demographic realizing its historical privilege is no longer a guarantee. His poetic identity becomes a refuge, but also a marker of his irrelevance in the new, pragmatic capitalist order.

Adam's alienation is compounded by his brother Gavin's hyper-masculine success, which serves as a foil to his own perceived failures. While Gavin thrives as a capitalist entrepreneur, Adam retreats into poetry, a pursuit culturally coded as feminine and unproductive within patriarchal frameworks. His self-description as "a penniless poet, with nothing to offer anybody except words" (Galgut, *The Impostor* 24) underscores his dislocation from hegemonic masculinity, which prizes economic dominance and assertiveness (Connell, *Masculinities* 77). Yet, Adam's poetic aspirations also subvert these norms, aligning with Jack Halberstam's notion of "queer failure", a rejection of conventional success that opens space for alternative identities (Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* 88). His inability to conform to traditional male roles such as provider, breadwinner, decisive leader that exposes

the violence of gendered expectations, as Butler describes, where those who fail to perform masculinity “correctly” face social erasure (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 16).

The novel further complicates Adam’s masculinity through his ambivalent relationships with Baby and Canning. His attraction to Baby reflects a heteronormative impulse, yet it is tinged with a poetic idealization that borders on self-delusion: “She is like an exotic doll, all her tiny features in immaculate proportion” (Galgut, *The Impostor* 55). Conversely, his bond with Canning is marked by emotional intimacy and a near-romantic tension that suggests a latent queer potential that destabilizes rigid binaries. When Canning drunkenly kisses him, Adam’s muted response “It’s a startling moment” (63) hints at a fluidity that contradicts his otherwise straight-presenting identity. This duality resonates with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s concept of the “homosocial continuum”, where male friendships often harbour unacknowledged erotic undercurrents (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 2).

Ultimately, Adam’s masculinity is a site of contradiction and collapse, reflecting the broader societal shifts in post-apartheid South Africa. His poetic retreat to the Karoo, a space symbolic of stasis and decay, mirrors his own arrested development as he grapples with a world where his inherited privileges no longer guarantee authority. In a conversation with his former fiancée, Adam reflects on his disorientation:

‘Adam,’ she said eventually. ‘What is it you want?’ ‘I don’t know. Just to catch up, I guess. Find out how you are.’ ‘Well, I’m fine, Adam, I’m fine. My life is good. And how are you?’ But she’d already asked him this; he didn’t

feel like lying again. ‘Pretty shitty, actually. I’ve kind of lost my way. Midway on life’s journey, as Dante has it.’ (Galgut *The Impostor* 40)

This exchange highlights his sense of disconnection and the inadequacy of his previous identity, further emphasizing the fragility of his masculinity in a changing societal landscape. This admission invokes a crisis of purpose that underscores Judith Butler’s claim that gender is a “melancholic performance,” haunted by the ghosts of unrealized ideals (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 146). Through Adam, Galgut critiques the unsustainability of traditional masculinity, revealing it as a construct that falters under the weight of its own contradictions.

In *The Good Doctor*, Frank Eloff embodies the pressures of traditional masculinity, but Galgut’s unique twist is to place this archetype in a decaying, post-apartheid hospital: a metaphor for the state itself. Frank’s emotional detachment is not just a personality trait but a survival strategy in a collapsing system. The novel demonstrates how traditional masculinity operates as what R.W. Connell terms “a configuration of practice within a system of gender relations” (Connell, *Masculinities* 84). His father’s expectations and the heteronormative framework of his upbringing reinforce his sense of duty, yet his relationships suggest an underlying ambiguity in his gender identity. Frank’s marriage to Karen is described as a hollow institution rather than a genuine emotional bond, reflecting how heteronormativity dictates life choices:

I made my move up here a month early, to learn the ropes from her. But a week or two after I arrived, the post, whatever it was that she’d been aiming for, became suddenly unavailable again. Something had shifted somewhere.

And my new job was suddenly unavailable too. I could have left. I was offered a payout and an apology, and I could have retreated to the shambles of my old life. But I decided to stay. (Galgut, *The Good Doctor* 45)

Frank's decision to 'stay' in a place of stagnation is a profound character note. Galgut specializes in characters who choose the slow rot of familiar failure over the terror of the unknown, and he links this psychic state directly to the national mood. His transactional relationship with Maria further complicates his masculinity, he exerts control over her economically, yet their encounters are tinged with a mix of desire and detachment. His interactions with Laurence, however, reveal an emotional intimacy that defies traditional male bonding: "I liked him too. The feeling wasn't based on anything except the few hours we'd spent in each other's company, but already I was finding it difficult to resent him completely." (55) Frank's struggle between societal expectations and personal desires illustrates how masculinity is not innate but constructed through cultural conditioning.

Laurence Waters arrives at the hospital with an idealistic view of relationships, symbolized by his shrine-like display of Zanele's photographs. His belief in love as transformative reflects heteronormative romanticism, yet his bond with Frank disrupts this rigid framework. His evolving dynamic with Frank, marked by emotional dependence and unspoken tension, suggests a fluidity in his understanding of intimacy:

'You know, Frank,' he said sadly, 'I think you're the only one here who really understands me.' 'Come on.' 'No, really. The rest – they're selfish. They don't get it.' 'I'm selfish, Laurence.' 'That's just a game with you.' 'No, it's not.

I'm the most selfish person in this place, I promise you.' 'That's not true. You like to think badly about yourself, Frank. You mustn't undervalue yourself.'

'Come on. Let's go to sleep.' 'I don't think I can sleep now. What were they doing – hitting each other?' 'Something like that.' 'You're my friend, Frank. You must remember that.' (95)

Laurence's journey demonstrates how gender identity is not fixed but shaped by experience, challenging the heteronormative scripts he initially upholds. Maria and Zanele represent contrasting yet constrained expressions of femininity. Maria, trapped in poverty, performs subservience in her relationship with Frank, reinforcing patriarchal power structures: "She took me by the hand and led me in and turned her back briefly while she latched the door, a lock a child could break, a piece of string wound on a nail." (35) Zanele, though more independent, struggles against Laurence's idealization, revealing how even progressive relationships are filtered through gendered expectations: "I don't care about you or Laurence. The two of you are obviously in love with each other, so why don't both of you just fuck off." (122) Both women highlight how femininity is policed, Maria by economic survival, Zanele by romantic idealism.

In *The Impostor* Adam's character exemplifies the crisis of hegemonic masculinity in post-apartheid South Africa. Unlike his brother Gavin, who embodies capitalist success and hyper-masculine confidence, Adam is unemployed, introspective, and emotionally vulnerable, traits that clash with societal expectations of male dominance. His self-identification as a poet further destabilizes traditional masculinity, as creativity and sensitivity are often culturally coded as feminine. Judith

Butler's concept of gender as a stylized repetition of acts applies here: Adam's inability to conform to the 'script' of male as provider renders him socially impotent. His attraction to Baby is tinged with heteronormative longing, yet his ambiguous intimacy with Canning marked by emotional dependency and a near-romantic tension that suggests a latent queer fluidity. This duality aligns with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's argument that desire exists on a spectrum, resisting fixed categorization (Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*). Adam's gender performance is thus a site of failure and subversion, revealing the coercive nature of prescribed roles.

Canning's relationship with Adam is indeed laced with homoerotic tension, subtly woven into their interactions through an undertone of intimacy and emotional neediness. This is evident when Canning expresses a desire for closeness as portrayed in the novel:

He says, neutrally, 'I gave up a lot to be with Baby.' But a moment later, he relents; he takes Adam by the arm. 'I hope you don't mind me talking like this, Nappy. Please understand—I adore her. I would never give her up.' 'I do understand.' 'I know you do. You're my best friend, Nappy. You're the only person I can talk to like this. (Galgut, *The Impostor* 103).

Such declarations highlight a level of emotional dependence that transcends typical friendship, suggesting a queered desire that cannot be comfortably named within the rigid heteronormativity of their society. Butler argues that desire itself is not outside the reach of performativity, it is shaped by what is culturally intelligible and permissible. Canning's attraction to Adam operates in a space of repression, illustrating the limits of social recognition when it comes to non-normative

sexualities. His emotional dependence, possessiveness, and passive-aggressive manipulation underscore the ways in which closeted identities are shaped by the need to conceal, distort, or redirect desire to maintain social acceptability.

Canning's relationship with Baby further exposes the performative nature of gender. He constructs her as the idealized feminine object "my wife is amazing" (55), yet their marriage is devoid of genuine intimacy, with Baby withholding both emotional and physical connection. This dynamic illustrates Butler's claim that gender is a compulsory performance, one that Canning perpetuates to maintain social legitimacy. His desperate need for Baby's validation: "I don't think she notices me at all" (102) reveals how his masculinity depends on external affirmation, particularly from women. Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1976) contextualizes this further: Canning's attempts to control Baby (e.g., monitoring her movements, boasting about her beauty) are acts of disciplinary power, reinforcing patriarchal norms even as they fail to fulfil him. His eventual confession that Baby was once a call-girl "she wasn't a common street whore" (104) lays bare the transactional nature of their relationship, undermining the romantic ideal he tries to project.

"His body struggles to accept it. He is constantly on edge, constantly prepared for crisis. He sleeps badly and lightly, and wakes long before dawn"(Galgut, *In a Strange Room* 178) portrays Damon's internal turmoil and resistance to the aimlessness he experiences. This reflects the impact of socio-cultural factors on his embodied experience, as he struggles with the lack of purpose and direction in his life. The character's struggle to accept the aimlessness is indicative of the psychological

and emotional toll of navigating a state of uncertainty and disconnection, which is influenced by broader socio-cultural dynamics. Damon's constant state of alertness and sleep disturbances underscores the pervasive impact of his environment and circumstances on his well-being. The aimlessness and lack of direction he faces are likely influenced by societal expectations and norms, contributing to his internal power struggle and resistance. This internal conflict reflects the broader socio-cultural context in which the character exists, highlighting the profound influence of external factors on his embodied experience.

Traditionally, masculinity has been associated with the suppression of emotions and the management of stress through physical or sexual means rather than through emotional expression. This behavior aligns with the cultural stereotype that men often resort to sex to deal with emotional or psychological stress: "I have a lot of tension. Sex helps me to get rid of tension" (35). The protagonist's reliance on sex to relieve tension reinforces the idea that sexual activity is a socially acceptable outlet for male stress and frustration, reflecting the cultural construction of masculinity. Using sex to manage tension underscores the socio-cultural pressures placed on individuals, particularly men, to find acceptable ways to cope with stress. This behavior might indicate an inability or unwillingness to address underlying emotional issues directly, which can be linked to the societal expectation for men to remain stoic and emotionally reserved. This performance reinforces the idea that gender roles are not inherent but are enacted through repeated behaviors and actions that align with societal norms.

The desire to 'seize' the man suggests a rejection of passivity often associated with femininity. The character feels empowered to take charge; a quality typically ascribed to masculinity:

It's hard to believe, under the circumstances, that modesty should be a priority. I want to seize this plump, complacent man, who seems almost to be enjoying my plight, and shake him till his teeth rattle and he concedes that a dress doesn't matter, no not at all, at a moment like this. (158)

The quote critiques the societal expectation that modesty should be maintained regardless of the circumstances. Modesty, often gendered and more stringently applied to women, becomes a tool through which societal control is exerted over individual behavior and appearance. This reflects the rigid socio-cultural construction of gender roles that dictate how individuals, particularly women, should present themselves. The protagonist's frustration with the emphasis on modesty, even in a dire situation, highlights the societal fixation on appearance and decorum. This fixation is rooted in gender norms that prioritize outward appearances, especially for women, and impose a standard of modesty that can be constraining and oppressive. The protagonist's urge to confront the man who trivializes his predicament by focusing on the dress underscores the impact of these gender norms on individual experiences. The man's complacency and perceived enjoyment of the protagonist's plight signify a broader societal complicity in upholding these norms, even to the detriment of those suffering under them. The protagonist's desire to shake the man and make him understand the irrelevance of modesty in a crisis reflects a resistance to

these gender norms. This act of defiance symbolizes a rejection of the socio-cultural expectations that prioritize modesty and appearance over more pressing concerns.

Damon, finds himself enacting a role traditionally associated with femininity specifically that of a 'querulous maiden aunt'. This role involves anxious caregiving, emotional labour, and a sense of duty and worry, which are stereotypically feminine traits. Meanwhile, the woman he cares for adopts the role of the innocent, naive figure, emphasizing a dynamic where she appears helpless and dependent:

In all of this he is constantly running behind, anxiously cleaning up or checking on her. He has begun to feel like a querulous maiden aunt, always worried and unhappy, and she has started to play the other part, of the innocent unfairly put upon, her wide eyes startled at the upset. (142)

Damon's transition into a caregiving role typically associated with femininity demonstrates the fluid nature of gender roles. This fluidity suggests that gender is not fixed but performed based on situational needs and cultural expectations. The cultural expectation that caregiving is a feminine role is challenged by Damon's actions. This challenge reveals the tension between societal norms and individual behavior, highlighting how gender roles are socially constructed and maintained. The performance of gender roles affects the characters' identities and interactions. Damon's self-awareness and discomfort in his new role, juxtaposed with the woman's passive acceptance of her role, illustrate how deeply ingrained gender norms influence personal identity and relationships.

The roles they adopt impact their gender identities and how they perceive themselves and each other. Damon's feeling of being a 'maiden aunt' suggests a

challenge to his masculinity, as he takes on attributes culturally assigned to women (142). The woman's role as the 'innocent' reinforces a passive femininity that relies on male protection and care, further entrenching traditional gender dynamics. Despite the reinforcement of traditional roles, there is also a subversive element in Damon's enactment of a caregiving role. By assuming a position typically reserved for women, he challenges the rigidity of gender roles and highlights their performative nature. This subversion underscores the fluidity of gender and the capacity for individuals to transcend societal norms. Additionally, Damon's lack of real authority over the woman complicates his masculine role:

Besides which, he's afraid of a moment of truth, because he has no real power over her. If he tries to exert his authority and she refuses to obey, well, what could he do about that. If she walks out the door with her bag, telling him to get lost, he would have no recourse but to plead. Then they might both see where the power lies. (142)

The tension portrayed further destabilizes conventional power dynamics, revealing the fragility of prescribed gender roles when tested in real interactions.

Damon's attempt to emulate Reiner's stoicism despite feeling himself 'falling apart' underscores the internal struggle and pressure to conform to traditional gender expectations. This internal conflict reflects the socio-cultural construction of gender roles, where individuals may feel compelled to embody certain traits or behaviors associated with their gender. "Reiner never complains, and Damon finds himself trying to emulate this stoicism, even as he feels himself falling apart" (30) reflects the theme of gender roles and the influence of socio-cultural factors on the characters'

behaviors and interactions in the novel. This highlights the dynamic between Reiner and Damon, emphasizing the stoic and uncomplaining nature of Reiner. This stoicism can be seen as a manifestation of traditional masculine traits, where emotional restraint and resilience are valued. Reiner's behavior aligns with societal expectations of male strength and emotional control, reflecting the influence of socio-cultural norms on gender roles.

Damon's hesitation to express his emotions and physical closeness to Jerome may be influenced by traditional gender norms and societal pressures. The unspoken words and the heaviness he feels could signify internal conflict, possibly related to the fear of deviating from societal expectations of masculinity and the associated stigma. "He is lying next to Jerome, close enough to touch, but he doesn't. Instead, he turns away, feeling the heaviness of his unspoken words"(93) underscores the impact of socio-cultural factors on the character's behaviors and emotional experiences. It highlights the complexities of gender roles, emotional expression, and the internal struggle to navigate societal norms and personal desires. The protagonist's internal conflict and the unspoken words convey the nuanced exploration of gender dynamics and the influence of socio-cultural factors on the characters' interactions.

In *Arctic Summer*, Morgan's interactions with men, particularly Masood, highlight the ways in which physical touch and intimacy become powerful forms of expression. However, these expressions are often fraught with tension due to the societal constraints surrounding same-sex desire. The body becomes a battleground where personal desires clash with societal expectations, leading to moments of both connection and conflict. Morgan's struggle with his writing reflects his broader

struggle to understand the societal constructs around him, particularly gender roles. Morgan lives in a society where men are expected to take on roles of power and responsibility, such as “taking over from their fathers, grasping the levers of power, learning how to run the Empire” (Galgut, *Arctic Summer* 43). This expectation is juxtaposed against his own life, where he remains at home, engaged in what he perceives as frivolous pursuits like writing and piano playing. As the text notes:

He didn't need to work; he had received a legacy from his great-aunt Monie that kept him comfortably. Nevertheless, he thought that in time he would like to find a real job, as most of his friends were doing. He understood that they, his peers, were taking over from their fathers, grasping the levers of power, learning how to run the Empire, while he stayed at home with the women (43).

The comparison to his peers underscores the societal pressure on men to engage in public, influential roles, while he feels relegated to the domestic sphere traditionally associated with women, amplifying his sense of alienation from conventional masculinity.

Characters who conform to traditional gender roles often wield power in their relationships and social interactions. For example, Morgan's relationships with women may reflect a certain societal power dynamic, where he is expected to take on a dominant role. However, his attraction to men complicates this dynamic, as he navigates feelings of vulnerability and the potential loss of power associated with deviating from heteronormative expectations. Morgan's internal conflict about his writing mirrors his uncertainty about his role in society. He acknowledges his lack of deep understanding about 'money and power' and, implicitly, about gender dynamics.

His failure to convincingly write about ‘the seduction, the pregnancy’ stems from his limited experience and understanding of women’s lives and perspectives. This highlights the societal barrier that separates men’s and women’s experiences, making it difficult for him to authentically depict women's inner lives and social realities.

Hom’s dismissal of marriage as a ‘silly business’ lacking nobility challenges the traditional view of marriage as a sacred and noble institution. This critique suggests that marriage, rather than being a fulfilling union, is emblematic of modern life’s triviality and banality. The novel portrays marriage as a social construct that enforces specific gender roles and expectations, often leading to dissatisfaction and disillusionment. Traditionally, marriage has been seen as the cornerstone of a stable society, with defined roles for men and women. Men are expected to be providers and protectors, while women are often relegated to the roles of caregivers and homemakers. This rigid structure can stifle individuality and perpetuate gender inequality. Morgan’s desire to ‘be treated the same’ and to live with a man in a ‘happy home’ is met with Hom’s scepticism and criticism. Hom’s view that Morgan is romanticizing marriage highlights the tension between societal ideals of romantic love and the reality of marital life. This romanticization often glosses over the power dynamics and gendered expectations that can make marriage oppressive for many.

That we can only know by trying. I am sick of following rules that society has laid down. ‘You may do this but not that, you may feel this but not that.’ It’s intolerable. I would like to go where my feelings lead me. (28)

Both Morgan and Hom question the rigid rules and expectations surrounding relationships and sexuality. They experiment with defying societal norms and

exploring their desires outside the boundaries of conventional masculinity. The same-sex attraction between Morgan and Hom remains largely unspoken and veiled due to societal constraints. Their physical encounters are framed as experiments or expressions of feeling, masking the true nature of their desires. While initially drawn to Hom, Morgan experiences moments of discomfort and confusion regarding their relationship. He struggles to reconcile his desires with societal expectations and the potential consequences of defying them. Moments of resistance are evident in how characters use their bodies to defy societal expectations. For instance, when Morgan allows himself to express affection towards Masood, he is momentarily breaking free from the constraints of heteronormativity. This act of physical intimacy becomes a powerful statement against the societal norms that dictate how men should behave. The body, in this sense, becomes a site of rebellion, where personal desires challenge the status quo.

Morgan's internal conflict highlights the repression imposed by societal norms on expressions of sexuality, particularly non-heteronormative desires. The sense of shock he anticipates upon learning the details of Searight's sexual practices underscores the moral and social boundaries that define acceptable behavior. These boundaries are reinforced by the rigid gender roles and expectations of propriety, especially within the military and upper-class circles that Searight navigates. Searight, a military man embodying traditional masculinity in public, reveals a hidden, more authentic side of himself only to those he trusts. This duality reflects the societal pressure to conform to normative gender roles and the consequent need for secrecy to pursue personal desires that deviate from these norms. Morgan's envy of Searight's ability to 'translate yearning into deed' underscores the struggle between desire and

the fear of societal condemnation: “He had the sense that the other man’s sexual practices involved tastes and behaviours that would shock him deeply, if he only knew the details, yet still he envied him the ability to translate yearning into deed”.(14) Morgan’s lack of experience and his romantic idealization of relationships contrast sharply with Searight’s active pursuit of his sexual desires. This tension reveals the internalized societal norms that inhibit Morgan’s ability to act on his feelings, showcasing the powerful influence of socio-cultural expectations on personal behavior.

In *The Promise*, Galgut’s socio-cultural critique reaches its zenith. The Swart family becomes a microcosm of South Africa, and the broken promise to Salome is the novel’s central metaphor for the nation’s failed ethical commitments. Within this, gender roles are exposed as foundational to the family’s, and by extension the nation’s, dysfunction. A central concern in the socio-cultural construction of gender roles within *The Promise* is the novel’s exploration of traditional expectations and the weight of societal norms on individual identity. This is particularly evident in the characterization of Amor Swart, whose fraught relationship with her changing body underscores the pervasive influence of gendered ideals of beauty and femininity. Amor’s internal turmoil is rendered with striking psychological depth, and serves a specific narrative function: she is the quiet, perceptive conscience of the novel, whose non-conformity is her strength. She wrestles not only with the physical transformations of adolescence but also with the external pressures that dictate how her body should be perceived. Galgut captures this struggle with visceral precision:

She dislikes her stomach and her thighs and the way that her shoulders hang down. She dislikes her whole body, as many of you do, but with special adolescent intensity, and it seems even more present than usual today, more thickly, heatedly present (Galgut, *The Promise* 24).

Here, the repetition of ‘dislikes’ amplifies her self-alienation, while the invocation of a collective ‘you’ implicates the reader in the broader cultural scrutiny of female bodies. Galgut’s use of the second-person ‘you’ here is a brilliant narrative stroke. It directly involves the reader in the cultural scrutiny of the female body, breaking the fourth wall to suggest that Amor’s self-alienation is a collective social crime.

Furthermore, the novel also explores the dynamics of power and privilege in relation to gender. The character Anton, as a white male, grapples with his own desires and societal expectations. His interactions with Desirée’s family, particularly with her father, highlight the complexities of power dynamics and the influence of privilege on gender roles. The passage, “Desirée’s father is an important cabinet minister, a physically as well as morally repugnant person with the blood of innocents on his hands, and Anton would like to hate him unequivocally but finds himself secretly stirred by the outward trappings of power,” (44) reflects the intersection of gender, power, and social status.

Moreover, the novel also delves into the impact of societal constructs on the character’s sense of self and identity. The character Astrid’s internal struggles and fears reflect the societal pressures and expectations placed on women. Her fears, including the fear of being unloved and the fear of societal structures coming undone, offer a glimpse into the socio-cultural construction of gender roles and the impact on

individual identity. Astrid's relationship with her body is complex and fraught with societal expectations. When she puts on her mother's bracelet, she feels a sense of ownership, thinking, "It has always belonged to her" (24) which signifies her attempt to assert her identity through a physical object that connects her to her femininity. This act of wearing the bracelet can be seen as a performance of gender that both honors her mother and allows her to navigate her own identity within the confines of familial expectations.

Anton's character grapples with the expectations of masculinity, as he reflects on his physicality and the scars that tell a story of violence and survival. He admires his "lip, which is becoming sensual and pendulous" (103) indicating a conflicted relationship with his own body and the societal pressures that shape his identity. This self-examination reveals how male bodies are also subject to societal scrutiny and expectations, complicating the notion of masculinity. The character of Anton provides a rich avenue for exploring the socio-cultural construction of gender roles. His actions and internal conflicts reflect the pressures and expectations placed upon him as a white male in South African society. Anton is introduced with a sense of being chosen, carrying the weight of future expectations. His internal conflict is evident as he struggles with societal roles and his own desires:

Anton the firstborn, the only son. He is anointed, to what he doesn't know, but the future is his. What is it you want? To travel, to learn, to write poems and lead nations, he wants to grab hold of everything, all of it is possible, he wants to eat the world. But a tiny sourness at the back of his throat seems always to have been there, though his life is pure and mild as milk. Wherefrom this

curdling? There is a lie at the heart of everything and I have just discovered it in myself. Spit it out. What is wrong with you, man? Nothing is wrong with me. Everything is wrong with me. (50)

The 'curdling' mentioned above is Galgut's master theme. It is the internal corruption that precedes external collapse. Anton's poetic ambitions ('to write poems and lead nations') are impossible within the rigid framework of his inheritance, and this irreconcilable conflict 'curdles' his potential into bitterness and violence. Galgut shows that the system of male primogeniture doesn't create strong leaders, it produces psychologically broken men. Anton challenges societal and familial norms by questioning his father's decisions and advocating for his mother's wishes. This could be seen as a subversion of traditional male roles. Despite his outward confidence, Anton experiences internal conflict and a sense of something being wrong. This suggests that even defying expectations can come with emotional costs.

Astrid embodies the societal expectation for young women to prioritize physical beauty and attract male attention. The text emphasizes her preoccupation with "fine, sculpted surfaces" (59); referring to the house and her revealing clothing choices. This aligns with Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, where individuals do gender through actions that comply with societal norms. The passage highlights how Astrid can "always sense male attention, especially when it's concealed" (59). This awareness of the male gaze reinforces the idea that women's bodies are objects of scrutiny and judgment within a patriarchal society. This concept is explored by Laura Mulvey in her theory of the male gaze in film, where the female body is presented from the perspective of the desiring male audience.

Amor's decision to arrange her own taxi and leave the funeral early does signify a break from traditional female roles. Traditionally, women, especially within families, are often expected to be passive and compliant. By taking charge of her departure, Amor defies these expectations and asserts her agency: "Amor is the first to leave. She called earlier from the house to arrange a taxi in advance, without telling anybody else, and now she hurries out just before the end, carrying her little backpack" (157). Arranging her own taxi demonstrates Amor's self-sufficiency. She doesn't rely on others, particularly men, to handle her needs. Her decision to leave quietly, without informing anyone, suggests a desire to set boundaries and prioritize her own needs over social obligations. This can be seen as a form of quiet defiance against societal pressures.

The discomfort Amor feels with her 'budding flesh' and widened hips can be linked to the internalized norms of how a female body should appear. These feelings of her body's obscenity and heaviness reflect a societal tendency to hypersexualize young women's bodies while simultaneously policing them for not fitting the narrowly defined standards of beauty. Amor's focus on her stomach, thighs, and shoulders showcases a detailed self-surveillance that aligns with cultural messages women receive about maintaining a certain physical appearance, reinforcing the gendered expectation to constantly monitor and critique one's body:

I am not beautiful. So thinks Amor, not for the first time, as she regards herself in the mirror behind her cupboard door. She's in her underwear, which includes a small, recently acquired bra, the sensation of budding flesh still new and unsettling. Her hips have widened, and the thickening seems heavy to her,

exaggerated, obscene. She dislikes her stomach and her thighs and the way that her shoulders hang down. She dislikes her whole body, as many of you do, but with special adolescent intensity, and it seems even more present than usual today, more thickly, heatedly present. (24)

This mirrors the broader societal pressure on young women to conform to idealized standards of beauty, often leading to body dysmorphia and low self-esteem. The special adolescent intensity suggests that such feelings are particularly acute during teenage years, a critical period for identity formation, heavily influenced by cultural representations of femininity and attractiveness. Amor's experience of her body 'as new and unsettling' points to the transitional nature of adolescence, where bodily changes trigger a reassessment of self-identity. For young women, this period is often marked by a struggle to reconcile their emerging adult identities with societal expectations of femininity.

In exploring the works of Damon Galgut, particularly in the context of socio-cultural constructions of gender roles, a recurrent theme emerges: the interplay between societal norms and individual identities. Galgut's novels consistently delve into the complexities of human relationships, the constraints imposed by societal expectations, and the personal struggles for authenticity and fulfillment. Throughout his works, Galgut presents characters who struggle with their identities within the confines of rigid gender roles. These characters often lead double lives, embodying societal ideals in public while privately yearning for different forms of self-expression. This duality highlights the pervasive influence of societal norms on personal behavior, as seen in the characters' struggles to reconcile their public

personas with their private desires. His characters often navigate a world that demands conformity to traditional gender roles, yet they find themselves at odds with these expectations. The conflict is particularly evident in their romantic and sexual lives, where the pursuit of personal desires clashes with societal condemnation and internalized repression.

Rather than offering a final summation of Galgut's entire oeuvre, this chapter has examined how his narratives illuminate the socio-cultural processes through which gender identity is constructed, regulated, and contested within specific historical and institutional contexts. Across the selected novels, gender identity emerges not as a stable or innate characteristic but as a dynamic formation shaped by social expectations, power relations, and historical forces. Galgut's fiction repeatedly situates gendered experience within environments marked by political tension, institutional authority, and cultural transition. In these settings, characters such as Patrick, Adam, Damon, and Morgan confront the limits of socially prescribed roles, while figures like Ellen, Amor, and Astrid reveal how femininity is similarly structured through surveillance, expectation, and negotiation. Through these varied portrayals, the novels demonstrate how gender identities are continually produced through interaction with family structures, state institutions, and broader socio-cultural discourses.

The analyses presented in this chapter therefore underscore the significance of viewing gender identity as a historically contingent and socially mediated phenomenon. Galgut's narratives offer rich literary representations of individuals navigating the pressures of heteronormativity, institutional discipline, and shifting

cultural landscapes. By foregrounding the tensions between personal desire and social regulation, his works provide a compelling site for examining the socio-cultural construction of gender within the South African context. These observations contribute to the broader arguments of this study by highlighting how Galgut's fiction dramatizes the lived consequences of gender norms and their intersections with race, class, and national history. The following concluding section will draw together the insights developed across the preceding chapters to reflect more fully on the implications of gender performativity and sexual identity in Galgut's literary corpus.

Conclusion

Damon Galgut's novels critically interrogate gender performativity and sexual identity by examining how individuals negotiate, challenge, or comply with dominant societal norms regarding gender and sexual identity. Through richly layered narratives and complex characterizations, Galgut explores the construction and enactment of identity through repeated social performances, highlighting the tension between societal norms and personal desires. Through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, his works expose the fluid and constructed nature of gender and sexual identity, while simultaneously offering a critique of heteronormative constraints.

An analysis of Damon Galgut's characters reveals a profound critique of traditional gender roles and their impact on individual identity, particularly within the complex socio-political landscape of South Africa. His works present a diverse array of masculinities and femininities that challenges rigid binary categorizations and highlights the performative nature of gender. Male characters like Raoul in *A Sinless Season* and Patrick in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* confront societal expectations that equate masculinity with toughness and emotional detachment, offering a poignant critique of the pressures associated with conforming to traditional norms. Their struggles reinforce the fluid and constructed nature of gender identity illustrating how societal expectations can inhibit authentic self-expression.

Similarly, Galgut's depiction of female characters, such as the protagonist in *Small Circle of Beings*, reveals the psychological burden of adhering to stereotypical gender roles. Her experiences reflect the constraints imposed by familial and societal

pressures, exposing the inner conflicts and vulnerabilities that arise from navigating these expectations. Together, these narratives provide a nuanced exploration of the intersections of gender, identity, and societal norms, demonstrating how Galgut's works contribute to a broader understanding of the complexities and variabilities inherent in gender performance.

Galgut's characters cope with the expectations imposed by societal norms, showcasing the performative aspects of gender. In *The Promise*, Amor's rejection of traditional roles assigned to women, such as the expectations of beauty and desirability, challenges normative gender frameworks. Her resistance to societal pressures highlights Butler's concept that gender is not innate but is constructed through repeated performances enforced by societal norms. Similarly, female characters like Astrid embody the internalization of these norms. Her sexual awakening and alignment with traditional femininity demonstrate how gendered expectations are perpetuated through social scripts.

Galgut's works continually depict non-normative sexual identities and experiences, questioning the binary understanding of sexuality. Characters such as Patrick in *The Good Doctor* or the unnamed narrator in *In a Strange Room* embody fluid or ambiguous sexual identities, resisting categorization within heteronormative frameworks. These portrayals emphasize the complexity of sexual identity, challenging the reductive binary of heterosexuality versus homosexuality. Galgut's exploration aligns with Butler's idea that sexual identity, like gender, is performative and shaped by cultural forces. In *The Quarry*, the nameless fugitive's journey is marked by a continuous re-negotiation of identity, reflecting the transformative

potential of gender performance. This transformation is not limited to a single trajectory but involves multiple shifts and reconfigurations of self. Understanding these fluid or ambiguous sexual identities is essential for fostering inclusivity and challenging societal norms that perpetuate narrow definitions of sexuality. By acknowledging the diversity of human experience, we can create a more compassionate and accepting world where individuals have the freedom to authentically explore and express one's identity without facing prejudice or oppression

A recurring theme in Galgut's novels is the tension between personal desires and societal restrictions. Anton in *The Promise* embodies the societal pressure on men to conform to ideals of ambition, heterosexual dominance, and familial responsibility. His relationship with Desirée, where he loses his virginity, is portrayed as both a personal and societal milestone, reflecting the heteronormative expectation that young men must assert their masculinity through heterosexual relationships. Galgut also critiques how institutionalized systems, like patriarchy and religion, regulate expressions of gender and sexuality. The character's struggles highlight the oppressive weight of these societal structures on individual freedom.

Galgut critiques the rigidity of heteronormative frameworks by depicting the alienation, marginalization, and internal conflict experienced by characters who deviate from societal norms. For example, in *In a Strange Room*, the narrator's longing and unarticulated romantic relationships with both male and female companions subvert traditional expectations of sexual identity. Galgut also portrays the isolating effects of societal judgment on those who fail to conform, as seen in

characters who experience guilt, shame, or exclusion because of their desires or identities. Galgut's narratives highlight how identity is shaped not only by personal experiences but also by intersections of power, culture, and history.

The societal allure of power, wealth, and status often intertwines with characters' gender and sexual identities, as seen in Anton's attraction to the outward trappings of power in *The Promise*. Through this lens, Galgut critiques the commodification of relationships and the reinforcement of patriarchal structures. Galgut's characters frequently resist and subvert normative gender roles, challenging the status quo. In *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, Patrick grapples with his masculinity against the backdrop of political upheaval in Namibia. His relationship with his mother and his experiences as a conscript highlight the tensions between societal expectations of masculinity and his personal inclinations. Patrick's journey symbolizes a broader resistance to prescribed gender roles and an assertion of individual identity.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity offers a valuable analytical lens for examining how Damon Galgut's narratives grapple with issues of gender and sexual identity. According to Butler, gender does not originate from a stable or inherent essence; rather, it is continually produced and reinforced through repeated performances that conform to prevailing cultural and social norms. This theory illuminates the ways Galgut portrays characters negotiating their identities within rigid social frameworks while also exploring the fluidity and complexity of gender and sexuality. Butler's assertion that gender is 'performed' rather than 'innate' is evident in Galgut's characters, who often resist or fail to fully embody prescribed

gender roles. In *The Promise*, Amor's quiet defiance of traditional femininity, including societal expectations around beauty and desirability, reflects Butler's idea that gender norms are artificial constructs imposed upon individuals. Amor's refusal to conform highlights the performative nature of these norms and suggests that identity can exist outside of their bounds.

Similarly, Astrid exemplifies the internalization of gender norms. Her sexual experiences and preoccupation with her physical appearance illustrate how societal scripts compel individuals to enact specific gendered behaviors, aligning with Butler's argument that such performances reinforce the social reality of gender. Butler's emphasis on the fluidity of identity resonates with Galgut's portrayal of non-normative sexualities and ambiguous relationships. In *In a Strange Room*, the narrator's relationships with both male and female companions defy clear categorization, challenging binary notions of sexuality. This fluidity mirrors Butler's claim that sexual identity, like gender, is not a stable or essential truth but is shaped by cultural and social forces.

Galgut's characters often navigate identities that resist societal labelling, thereby deconstructing the boundaries between heterosexual and queer experiences. Galgut's works critique the dominance of heteronormative ideals, which Butler argues are upheld through the repetition of normative gender performances. Anton's arc in *The Promise* demonstrates the pressure to perform a traditionally masculine identity, rooted in ambition, power, and heterosexual dominance. His longing to lead nations and his sexual relationship with Desirée reflect an attempt to align with these ideals. However, his internal conflicts and eventual disillusionment reveal the limitations and

artificiality of these expectations, echoing Butler's critique of the coercive power of heteronormativity. In *The Good Doctor*, the dynamics between characters challenge the supposed stability of normative relationships, exploring how power, desire, and societal expectations shape identity. The setting of a remote hospital in post-apartheid South Africa becomes a space where traditional gender roles are questioned and redefined. The characters in this novel exhibit varying degrees of conformity to and rebellion against prescribed gender norms, influenced by their unique personal histories and the shifting societal landscape.

Butler's notion of agency within performativity that individuals can subvert norms through alternative performances illuminates moments of resistance in Galgut's narratives. Amor's quiet defiance of societal and familial expectations in *The Promise* illustrates a refusal to adhere to traditional roles, offering a subtle yet powerful critique of patriarchal and heteronormative constraints. The characters' nonconformity in *In a Strange Room*, their inability or unwillingness to fit into predefined roles becomes an act of resistance against societal structures that demand coherence and conformity. In *The Impostor*, Adam navigates his identity in a society that imposes strict gender expectations. Adam's interactions with other characters, such as Canning, reveal the performative nature of gender roles. Canning's overt masculinity, combined with underlying vulnerabilities, underscores the idea that gender is an ongoing performance shaped by societal pressures and personal insecurities. Galgut uses these interactions to illustrate how individuals adapt their gender performances to meet or subvert social expectations.

Butler's theory illuminates the intersection of identity with societal power structures in Galgut's works. In *The Promise*, the interplay between gender, sexual identity, and power is evident in the family's dynamics, where patriarchal expectations shape Anton's role as the firstborn son and influence how other characters, like Astrid and Amor, navigate their identities. Galgut's works explore how societal norms surrounding race, class, and gender converge to create unique constraints and opportunities for individuals, reflecting Butler's argument that identity is a site where cultural norms and power relations converge. In *Arctic Summer*, the exploration of Forster's homosexual identity in a repressive society highlights the interplay between gender and sexual orientation. Forster's struggles with societal norms and his attempts to navigate his desires in various cultural contexts underscore the fluid and intersecting nature of gender performance.

The research contributes significantly to society by challenging and redefining the understanding of gender and sexuality. One of the key contributions is the critique of normative frameworks surrounding gender, which Butler argues are often restrictive and exclusionary. She states the ability to critically examine societal norms first requires detachment from them, highlighting the importance of questioning societal norms to foster inclusivity. Butler highlights how gender intersects with race, sexuality, and other social vectors, contending that racial governance doesn't operate as a discrete sphere of power separate from the regulation of sexuality. This perspective encourages a more understanding of identity politics, which is crucial for social justice movements that seek to address multiple forms of oppression.

Moreover, Butler's exploration of the performative nature of gender challenges the binary view of gender identity, suggesting that gender is constituted through repeated acts rather than being an inherent quality. This insight has profound implications for how individuals understand their identities and navigate societal expectations, ultimately promoting a more fluid and inclusive conception of gender that can lead to greater acceptance and rights for marginalized communities. Butler's exploration of the performative nature of gender can inform advocacy efforts for transgender and non-binary rights. She argues that the very possibility of interrogating dominant norms depends on occupying a position not wholly subjected to their disciplinary power, suggesting that understanding and challenging societal norms can empower marginalized communities to assert their identities and rights.

Galgut's narrative often reflects the tensions and contradictions that arise in this evolving landscape. By portraying characters navigating their identities amidst shifting societal norms, he highlights the interplay between personal experiences and broader cultural movements. This exploration can illuminate how the legacies of apartheid continue to shape perceptions of gender and sexuality, influencing individuals' self-conceptions and their interactions with others. Moreover, the impact of historical injustices on contemporary identity cannot be overstated. The struggle for recognition and acceptance in a society still struggling with its past can lead to a rich tapestry of experiences that inform one's sense of self. Galgut's work may serve as a lens through which to examine these dynamics, revealing how the quest for personal authenticity is often intertwined with collective memory and the ongoing fight for social justice.

Moreover, studying such themes in literature encourages critical reflection on the ways in which societal structures perpetuate inequality and exclusion. It underscores the importance of recognizing and dismantling these structures to create a more equitable world. By bringing marginalized voices and experiences to the forefront, literature can inspire meaningful dialogue, promote inclusivity, and empower individuals to challenge oppressive systems. Ultimately, the exploration of gender performativity and sexual identity in literature is not merely an academic endeavour, it is a vital step toward understanding the shared humanity that transcends cultural and societal boundaries. It reminds us that the stories we tell, and the stories we engage with, hold the power to reshape our perceptions, ignite change, and build a more compassionate and inclusive society.

Galgut's novels not only interrogate gender and sexuality but also position South African literature within global discourses on queer and postcolonial identity. Unlike Western narratives that often frame queerness as an individual struggle, Galgut's works embed non-normative identities within collective histories of apartheid, displacement, and cultural transformation. For instance, *The Promise* juxtaposes familial decay with South Africa's political transitions, suggesting that personal and national identities are equally performative and unstable. This dual critique of both colonial legacies and heteropatriarchy, positions Galgut as a vital voice in postcolonial queer studies, where gender and sexual dissidence are inseparable from broader struggles for decolonization and social justice.

A recurring motif in Galgut's work is the use of silence, ambiguity, and unresolved narratives to challenge fixed identities. In *In a Strange Room*, the

narrator's undefined desires resist categorization, mirroring Butler's argument that identity is constituted through absence and instability as much as through explicit performance. This narrative strategy not only reflects the internalized repression of queer individuals in conservative societies but also invites readers to interrogate the naturalized epistemologies underpinning their conceptions of gender and sexuality. By refusing to neatly resolve his characters' identities, Galgut underscores the limitations of language and societal frameworks in capturing the full spectrum of human experience, thereby advocating for a more open-ended understanding of selfhood.

Galgut's exploration of fractured identities ultimately suggests that literature itself can be a form of resistance, a space where marginalized voices reclaim agency. Characters like Amor, who reject prescribed roles, or the fugitive in *The Quarry*, who constantly reinvents himself, embody the transformative potential of storytelling. In a South African context, where historical trauma continues to shape individual and collective identities, Galgut's narratives offer a means of confronting and reimagining oppressive structures. This aligns with Butler's assertion that subversive repetitions of gender norms can destabilize power. Thus, Galgut's fiction does not merely depict struggle; it enacts liberation through narrative form, challenging readers to envision alternatives to dominant ideologies.

The themes in Galgut's work resonate far beyond South Africa, speaking to global movements for gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. His critique of performative masculinity, for example, finds parallels in contemporary debates about toxic masculinity and male vulnerability, while his portrayal of fluid sexuality aligns

with non-binary and queer activism. By situating these struggles within a postcolonial framework, Galgut also highlights the need for intersectional solidarity, recognizing that gender and sexual liberation cannot be achieved without addressing race, class, and geopolitical inequities. This universality underscores the urgency of literary analysis like yours, which bridges academic theory with real-world advocacy, demonstrating how storytelling can fuel social change.

The thesis provides a rich foundation for future academic exploration by uncovering how gender and sexual identities are performed, constructed, and challenged in a South African context. While this research focuses primarily on Galgut's works, its findings and methodologies offer several avenues for future scholars. Researchers can extend Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to analyze other South African or post-colonial authors, exploring similar themes of identity, fluidity, and societal expectations. The integration of other critical theories, such as post-colonial feminism, queer theory, or intersectionality, can deepen the understanding of how race, class, and gender intersect in literature. Scholars can compare Galgut's treatment of gender and sexuality with that of other contemporary South African writers like J.M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, or Zakes Mda. Cross-cultural comparative studies could examine how authors from different post-colonial societies address gender performativity and sexual identity. This thesis primarily addresses male characters; future research could examine how women, non-binary, or transgender individuals are portrayed in South African literature, including in Galgut's lesser-discussed works. Expanding the scope to indigenous or rural perspectives could reveal unique intersections of gender, culture, and tradition. Future research could assess the relevance of Galgut's works in contemporary South African

society, especially in light of ongoing debates about gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. Scholars might also explore the educational implications of using Galgut's novels to teach gender and sexuality studies.

The study of gender performativity and sexual identity in literature offers profound insights into the complexities of human identity and the societal forces that shape it. Through the exploration of characters and narratives, literature reveals how gender and sexuality are not fixed or inherent traits but are fluid, socially constructed performances influenced by cultural norms, power structures, and personal experiences. Through the lens of Damon Galgut's novels, this research has demonstrated how literature serves as both a mirror and a critique of the cultural and political structures that govern our understanding of gender and sexuality. By engaging with characters who navigate fluid, non-normative identities within the socio-political landscape of South Africa, Galgut's works illuminate the dynamic interplay between the personal and the political, revealing the possibilities for resistance, transformation, and self-discovery. Literature remains an essential medium for challenging entrenched norms and imagining alternative ways of being. It allows readers to step into the lived experiences of diverse characters, fostering empathy and broadening perspectives. Galgut's portrayal of gender and sexual identity, set against the backdrop of a society marked by historical trauma and ongoing transformation, underscores the urgent need for inclusive narratives that validate and celebrate individuality.

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Original Research

Performative Spaces: Mapping Gender Identity in Damon Galgut's *In a Strange Room*

Esha Bhagat, Lovely Professional University, India
Priyamvada Singh, Lovely Professional University, India

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Abstract: This research article explores the intricate interplay between performative spaces and gender identity in Damon Galgut's critically acclaimed novel, *In a Strange Room*. Drawing on Judith Butler's theories of performativity and Michel Foucault's discourse on the construction of identity within spatial contexts, this study aims to unravel the nuanced ways in which the characters in Galgut's work negotiate and express their gender identities within the confines of specific spaces. This article investigates the concept of performative spaces in Damon Galgut's novel, to understand how gender identity is constructed and challenged. The analysis focuses on the concept of "strange rooms" as liminal spaces where characters actively negotiate and perform their gender identities. By examining their dialogues, actions, and internal monologues within these shifting spaces, the article explores how performativity allows individuals to experiment with and express their gender. This analysis reveals the limitations of fixed gender categories and highlights the complexities of mapping gender identity solely through the lens of performance. The exploration of performativity in the novel contributes to a broader understanding of how social spaces influence the construction and expression of gender identity, moving beyond rigid definitions and emphasizing the fluidity of self-presentation.

Keywords: Performative Spaces, Gender Identity, Sexuality, Performativity, Gender Fluidity

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Neuropsychological Impact of Apartheid in Damon Galgut's *The Promise*

Section A-Research paper

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NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF APARTHEID IN DAMON GALGUT'S *THE PROMISE*

Dr. Valiur Rahaman¹, Esha Bhagat²

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Abstract

This study focuses on neuro-sociological impact of apartheid as depicted in lifestyles and lives of characters in Damon Galgut's novel *The Promise*. It studies his sharp portrayal of a white family in post-apartheid South Africa. It chronicles the experiences of a white, affluent family who runs a small farm over the course of several decades. It focuses on a dying family member's promise to leave their belongings to their black domestic worker. Future generations of the family ignore this commitment. The paper presents a comprehensive analysis of alienation, suppression and quest for home and identity as the results of neuropsychological conditions in the novel. The impact of alienation is revealed in the forms of anxiety, despair, loneliness, and struggle for identity. The consequences of alienation and suppression of the characters in the novel are studied. This novel will be examined with two proposals in mind: first, to view the alienation and suppression and its consequences on the characters and second, to observe the mental status of characters for the quest for identity and home.

Keywords: Alienation, Suppression, Quest for Identity, Cultural assimilation, Apartheid, African Literature.

ASPECTS OF ALIENATION IN SALMAN RUSHDIE'S MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN

ESHA BHAGAT¹, DR. NIRMALA DEVI M²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

² Assistant Professor, Department of English, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

ABSTRACT:

The underlying condition of man's existence on Earth is alienation and estrangement. Man is not only cut off from society and its institutions, but he is cut off from himself as well. Everyone must be capable of charting their own significant path in life. Is there, however, such a skill? The historical context in which one is born always throws roadblocks in one's path. Persons, institutions, and relationships from a dilapidated and degraded social order are confronted by the individuals. Self and society are at odds in this situation. Midnight's Children's universe is made up entirely of fragments. All social cohesion has gone as it should in the face of aggressive self-seeking and terrifying animosity at every turn. Atavistic and feudal relics unclear and perplexing past fails to mesh with the equally perplexing and nebulous present. All of Midnight's Children are wandering waifs.

KEYWORDS: self-identity, exile, alienation, loss and estrangement

INTRODUCTION:

Rushdie is arguably the most well-known English-language author of magical realism. He tells stories in a magical realist style, in which myth and fantasy are mixed with reality. His *Midnight's Children* links the protagonist Saleem Sinai's life with postcolonial India's national history. Saleem mixes his numerous identities as a postcolonial citizen, and his narrative represents India's plural identities and the search for self-identity. Because dealing with these concerns through realism is difficult, if not impossible, Rushdie has successfully and deftly employed the magical realist technique. Besides, this, "the real history of India that Rushdie saw and in the first thirty years of his and the nation's life was so fantastical that a traditional realist novel could not properly describe





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Prof. Haribandi Lakshmi
Dean, School of Literary Studies

Prof. Samson Thomas
Dean, Academics &
Head, Department of English Literature

Dr. Eligedi Rajkumar
Conference Coordinator

CHAPTER 17
CHALLENGING GENDER NORMS IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE: A DAMON
GALGUT PERSPECTIVE

Dr Priyamvada Singh & Esha Bhagat

Assistant Professor, Department of English, School of Liberal and Creative Arts, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

Research Scholar, Department of English, School of Liberal and Creative Arts, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

Abstract: This chapter offers an insightful exploration of Damon Galgut's significant contributions to the subversion of traditional gender norms within the unique context of South African literature. Damon Galgut, a notable South African author, has garnered critical acclaim for his thought-provoking narratives and his deep engagement with complex themes of gender performativity and sexual identity. The chapter begins by providing an introduction to South African literature's historical context, emphasizing the impact of colonialism, apartheid, and cultural diversity on gender norms. It highlights the ways in which traditional literature often reinforced patriarchal norms and limited opportunities for women. It then introduces Damon Galgut as a celebrated South African author and examines the purpose of the chapter, which is to analyze how his literature challenges and redefines gender norms within the South African context. His works are characterized by their complex characters, LGBTQ+ representation, and a commitment to empathy and understanding. The chapter delves into the literary techniques and narrative styles used by Galgut to address gender norms. It explores his use of symbolism, language, and characterization to challenge traditional gender roles. These techniques enable him to create characters who are multi-dimensional, who defy stereotypes, and who navigate questions of identity and self-discovery. The impact of apartheid, post-apartheid society, and cultural diversity on gender norms is also discussed, emphasizing the ways in which these historical and social factors have influenced the evolution of gender roles in South Africa.

Keywords: Damon Galgut, South African literature, gender norms, apartheid and post-apartheid society



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[Signature]
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[Signature]
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