UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM INGLÊS:
ESTUDOS LINGUÍSTICOS E LITERÁRIOS

OLIVE SCHREINER: AN EARLY POSTCOLONIAL VOICE?

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Tese submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em cumprimento parcial dos requisitos para obtenção do grau de doutora em Inglês: Estudos Literários e Culturais

Florianópolis,
março de 2016

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Heidenreich, Viviane d'Ávila
Olive Schreiner: an early postcolonial voice? / Viviane d'Ávila Heidenreich ; orientadora, Susana Bornéo Funck - Florianópolis, SC, 2016.
158 p.

Tese (doutorado) - Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Centro de Comunicação e Expressão. Programa de Pós Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários.

Inclui referências

1. Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários. 2. Análise da obra da escritora feminista e socialista Sul-Africana Olive Schreiner sob uma perspectiva da teoria pós colonial.. I. Funck, Susana Bornéo. II. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários. III. Título.

Esta tese de Viviane D'Ávila Heidenreich, intitulada *Olive Schreiner: an Early Postcolonial Voice?*, foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final, pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários, da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, para fins de obtenção do grau de Doutora em Inglês: Estudos Literários e Culturais

Área de concentração: Estudos Literários e Culturais
Linha de Pesquisa: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa

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I dedicate this work to all the people who, like Olive Schreiner,
courageously go against the stream and devote their lives
to fighting injustice and oppression.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In concluding this work, accomplished through four long years of dedication and commitment, it is impossible not to remember some of the people and institutions that were part of this process. Now the time has come to say thanks to them.

I want to start with my dear adviser, Dr. Susana B. Funck, and thank her for accepting me again as her advisee, twenty-five years after supervising me in my master's degree. Her motivation and confidence in my capacities were stimulating. I also want to express my admiration for a person, who with her constant cheerful spirit, her competence and her passion for literature, has been a source of inspiration for me, since I was a graduate student here at UFSC.

I am also thankful to the staff, coordinators and professors of the Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários at the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, for their support and guidance along this period. Likewise, I owe many thanks to the staff of Instituto Federal de Santa Catarina, for allowing me to take a further step in my academic life. Special thanks to the 'girls' at the DGP – Departamento de Gestão de Pessoas (Elaine, Judite, Sabrina and Odilane), and the boys at the reprography department (Tido, Jorge and Washington) who helped me with all the bureaucratic and logistic matters; to Maria Teresa Collares, my English teacher colleague, who took over some of my classes when I most needed it, and to Vidomar da Silva Filho, who kindly accepted to review my work, making pertinent comments and putting it in its correct format.

I want to acknowledge my gratitude to the Brazilian Government, especially to the CAPES Foundation, for granting me the opportunity of a six-months scholarship in England, where I could greatly improve my research.

I am equally grateful to the staff of Leeds Metropolitan University (now Leeds Becket University), in particular to Dr. Ruth Robbins and Dr. Susan Atkins, former and present Heads of the School of Cultural Studies and Humanities, for kindly receiving me as a visiting scholar and providing all the assistance I needed.

I am particularly indebted to Dr. Helen Dampier, my supervisor as a doctoral fellow at Leeds Met, who, from her first acceptance letter in August 2013 until now, has revealed the wonderful person and the highly competent professional she is. Her attention and academic support while I was in England were fundamental for the development of my research. I will never forget the receptiveness, kindness and

guidance that she offered me throughout the months I spent in Leeds. Thank you warmly, Helen.

My research would not have been possible without the Olive Schreiner Letters Online Project. Thus, I want to acknowledge its importance and thank the team who accomplished such a huge work in transcribing thousands of the extant letters of Olive Schreiner, making them accessible worldwide and permitting that researchers like myself could benefit from their work.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to all the members of my dear great family, especially my parents, Marly and Alécio, and my siblings Miriam, Jane, João Paulo, Leila and Alex, who are the first characters in the history of my life. I am also grateful to all my friends and to my partner Eugênio, for their encouragement and emotional support. To my children, Sofia and Lucas, a special thanks for understanding that my dedication to this project, and as a consequence, my painful absent periods, was the best example of courage, self-determination and persistence that I could possibly give them.

Thank you all!

ABSTRACT

OLIVE SCHREINER: AN EARLY POSTCOLONIAL VOICE?

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UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
2016

Supervising Professor: Dr. Susana B. Funck

This dissertation examines, from a postcolonial perspective, the work of Olive Schreiner, a South African feminist and socialist writer and social theorist. Schreiner lived at the turn of the nineteenth century, a period when the New Imperialism was at its height, and witnessed some of the most relevant events in South African history. Emotionally divided by a double identification with both England, her mother's land, and South Africa, the land where she was born, her bi-national sense of identity did not prevent her from becoming one of the most active voices against British imperialist policies in South Africa. The aim of my research is to bring to light the political side of Olive Schreiner, exploring some of her fictional and theoretical works, as well as her personal letters, to trace mainly her anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideas. In doing so, I will show that Schreiner's discourse of resistance somehow advanced some of the issues developed later by postcolonial critics and theorists.

Key words: Olive Schreiner. Colonialism/imperialism. Postcolonial theory.

Number of pages: 160
Number of words: 56295

RESUMO

OLIVE SCHREINER: AN EARLY POSTCOLONIAL VOICE?

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2016

Orientadora: Dr.ª Susana B. Funck

A presente tese examina, sob uma perspectiva pós-colonial, a obra de Olive Schreiner, uma escritora feminista e socialista e teórica social sul-africana. Schreiner viveu na virada do século dezenove, período em que o Novo Imperialismo estava no seu auge, e testemunhou alguns dos eventos mais relevantes da história da África do Sul. Dividida afetivamente entre a Inglaterra, terra de sua mãe, e a África, lugar onde nasceu e cresceu, seu senso de identidade binacional não a impediu de tornar-se uma das vozes mais ativas contra o imperialismo britânico na África. O objetivo da minha pesquisa é trazer à tona o lado político de Olive Schreiner, explorando algumas de suas obras, ficcionais e teóricas, assim como suas cartas pessoais, em busca principalmente de suas ideias anti-imperialistas e antirracistas. Com essa análise pretendo mostrar que o discurso de resistência de Schreiner, de algum modo, antecipou alguns dos conceitos explorados pela teoria pós-colonial.

Palavras-chave: Olive Schreiner. Colonialismo/imperialismo. Teoria pós-colonial.

Número de páginas: 160
Número de palavras: 56295

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INTRODUCTION

As a high school English teacher for twenty years, I came across situations where students showed an unfavourable opinion of the English language for associating it to the economic and political power of the United States and its negative implications. Although at that time I was still unware of the 'Prospero-Caliban Syndrome', my argument was that students should think of English less as a language of domination and more as a means of international communication, and thus as a way of being understood more widely in their criticism of oppressive systems. I was not aware all along that I was in a way dealing with one of the most polemical issues in Postcolonial Criticism: that of language as power.

The power imbalance between the language of the colonizer and that of the colonized and the use of the former by colonial writers has been a question of much debate among postcolonial theorists and writers, for, although the choice for the colonizer's language may be a guarantee of international visibility and recognition, it may also imply linguistic and cultural subordination. The fact that language is inseparable from one's cultural identity makes the problem even more complex, for it may reflect and perhaps interfere in the perception one has of oneself and of others. The debate over these issues and others concerning the process, impact and legacy of the invasion, occupation, subjugation and control exerted by European powers over other nations constitutes the raw material of postcolonial discourse. The set of theoretical and critical issues resulting from this debate forms what became known as Postcolonial Theory.

For Leela Gandhi, "postcolonial studies has come to represent a confusing and often unpleasant babel of subaltern voices" (3). This interesting statement reveals the dimension and complexity of this recent area of studies. This 'babel of subaltern voices' is 'confusing and unpleasant' because it touches one of the most profound wounds in the history of humanity: modern European colonialism, a series of historical events which have left indelible marks in the geography of our planet, and in the economy, politics and culture of most peoples on the globe. The scope, complexity and impact of such experience could only result in confusion and resentment at the moment of paying one's dues. It is at this moment, when the 'empire writes back to the imperial centre' (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back,* 33), that those whose voices

have been silenced during the colonial period can finally tell their version of history, reclaim their share and perhaps be heard. Sartre's words in the preface of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965) elucidate how such a process works: "an ex-native, French speaking, bends that language to new requirements, makes use of it, and speaks to the colonized only" while the Europeans become the "object of [his] speech" (10). Through Fanon's voice, Sartre claims, "Third World finds *itself* and speaks to *itself*" (10). In what could be termed a *mea culpa*, Sartre exposes the responsibility of all Europeans for the atrocities perpetrated on account of colonialism and endorses Fanon's words, making an appeal for Europeans to read the book and learn from it.

In literature, the claim for recovery is present in the 'subaltern voices' who offer a counter-narrative in reaction to the consequences of European imperialism and Eurocentrism. Chinua Achebe, for example, conceives his *Things Fall Apart* (1958) as "an act of atonement with [his] past, the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son" (193). His words express the significance of this revealing moment:

> The nationalist movement in British West Africa after the Second World War brought about a mental revolution which begun to reconcile us to ourselves. It suddenly seemed that we too might have a story to tell. *Rule Britannia!* to which we had marched so unself-consciously on Empire Day now struck in our throat. (Achebe 193)

Postcolonial texts, therefore, usually present a resistance to and a subversion of the discourse of the colonizer, a perspective which raises the question of whether some texts written during the colonial period might also be considered postcolonial.

The concepts and issues discussed by postcolonial theory and the new possibilities they provide for reading literary texts have led me to think about one of the writers I analysed in my MA dissertation twenty years ago: Olive Schreiner. On that occasion, I worked on her texts in the light of feminist criticism, comparing her fictional and theoretical work with those of an American contemporary, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, examining their role as social reformers and their defence of women's economic independence as an essential condition for the development of the human race. At that time, I had already realised that

Olive Schreiner was a very complex and special woman whose interests went beyond the woman's question.

Schreiner was born in a remote District of the British Cape Colony from an English mother and a German father. She was brought up as a Christian English girl under peculiar conditions in an unstable and poor environment. Her family history and her strict education may have been the source of her identification with the weak and powerless from an early age. Her European cultural background and her closeness to African landscape and people have certainly played an important role in fashioning her identity. All the complexities that moulded her life and shaped her personality are reflected on her choices, her actions and her writings.

Olive Schreiner lived from 1855 to 1920, therefore witnessing some of the most relevant events in the history of South Africa: the dismantling of the Zulu kingdom and of other native chiefdoms by Dutch and British settlers/forces; the discovery of gold and diamond deposits and its radical impact on every sphere of society; the Jameson Raid episode, the two Anglo-Boer wars, the process of unification of South Africa and the scramble for the African continent by European powers. In short, she lived at the height of the New Imperialism.

At first, Schreiner had a somewhat naïve view that the relationship between England and its colonies, South Africa in particular, "would conform to the most enlightened and generous notions of colonial stewardship" (Berkman 102). In time, she realized that British imperialism was much different from her idealistic view of colonization as a natural human enterprise or as a noble mission of spreading altruistic values such as justice and freedom. Though aware of the difficulties, she worked through her writing, to reach people's conscience, both metropolitans and colonials, and change their attitude, by adopting a non-(or at least a less) racist and anti-imperialist position, as a way to achieve social justice.

According to Berkman, "between 1890 and 1914 [Schreiner] emerged as both the foremost South African critic of British imperialism and the leading exponent of an independent, federalist, and democratic union of South Africa" (100). The ideas she developed on imperialism and capitalism, as well as her views on gender, race and class issues would be echoed much later in the postcolonial debates. In this context, the present analysis aims at investigating the work of Olive Schreiner in an attempt to find whether her ideas may be said to carry seeds of some of the concepts discussed by recent postcolonial theorists.

In the first chapter, I will provide a brief summary of the history of South Africa, situating it as a postcolonial country and pointing out the peculiarities of its colonial condition as a way to clarify the historical context in which Schreiner lived. I will also present an overview of postcolonial theory, highlighting some of the concepts and questions raised by its main representatives. Those conceptions will be used in subsequent chapters to investigate Schreiner's writings in the search for traces, which will hopefully prove their postcolonial feature.

The second chapter consists of some biographical accounts in order to explore Schreiner's double position as both colonizer and colonized as an essential aspect in shaping her identity.

The third chapter is devoted to exploring Schreiner's role as both a creative writer and a political activist. Her criticism on imperialism and her commitment to racial matters will be traced through some of her fictional and theoretical texts, as well as through her personal letters.

In the fourth chapter, concepts such as knowledge, truth, power, discourse and representation are raised to discuss the validity of Schreiner's writings as a postcolonial counter-narrative and the value of her words as a tool for promoting people's awareness and social change.

Finally, in my conclusion I hope to confirm my hypothesis that Olive Schreiner was indeed an early postcolonial voice.

CHAPTER I

Postcolonial Theory and South African Colonialism

1.1 Colonialism x Imperialism

Before providing a panorama on South African colonialism and addressing some of the main issues and representatives of postcolonial theory, it is necessary to clarify the implications of the terms *colonialism* and *imperialism*, which are often used as synonyms, causing therefore some confusion. One may even find them mingled, as in the expressions: "imperial colonialism" and "colonial imperialism".[1] According to the *Oxford Online Etymology Dictionary* both terms originate from Latin roots: *colonialism*, derives from *colony*, which comes from *colonia*, meaning 'a settled land, farm', or from *colonus*, meaning 'setller, farmer' and still from *colere*, denoting 'inhabit, cultivate, guard, respect'; and imperialism comes from *imperium*, which means 'rule, command'.[2] While the first term, *colonialism*, suggests a constructive and pacific idea of agricultural communities, the latter, *imperialism*, implies a somewhat violent enterprise involving power and control. The difference that these words might have had in their original meaning has disappeared in their modern use, probably because since ancient times empires have been formed by mingling these two activities: the settling of people on alien lands and the political and economic control over those territories. Therefore, both terms have acquired the idea of domination, be it territorial, political, economic or cultural, of one people or nation over another. Imperialism and colonialism, in this sense, have been practiced by different peoples – Romans, Mongols, Aztecs, Moors, Ottomans, Chinese – at different times (Loomba 2-3). Therefore, they are not a 'modern phenomenon'.[3]

Nevertheless, it was from the sixteenth century on that, due to technological developments in navigation, colonial practices gained new configurations, which affected the whole globe. According to Ania

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[1]http://www.semioticon.com/virtuals/postcol.htm.

[2]http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=oxford.

[3]*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism/#PosColThe.

Loomba, the crucial distinction between earlier colonialisms and modern European colonialism for Marxist thinking is that the first were pre-capitalist whereas the latter occurred alongside capitalism in Western Europe. This means that, besides exploiting its colonies, modern colonialism restructured the economies of the metropolises and of the colonies, creating a complex relationship marked by the exchange of human force and goods between them, and a dislocation of people, raw materials and goods, always to the benefit of the imperial centre.

As for its geographical scope, the extension of the colonial encounter can be measured by the proportion of the earth's surface under direct European control, which according to Edward Said, in a hundred years – from 1815 to 1914 – expanded from about 35 to about 85 percent (*Orientalism* 41). Despite the fact that the colonial enterprise occurred differently in each place, in all of them the relationship between 'the original inhabitants and the newcomers' was rather complex and traumatic. The result of that intense and long process is that more than three-quarters of the world's population today have been affected by the advent of colonialism (Ascroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* 1).

The conflicts we currently hear on the news, concerning the great number of immigrants from ex-colonies and their accommodation into European countries, are but a single example of the consequences of colonialism. According to Edward Said, "[h]ardly any North American, African, European, Latin American, Indian, Caribbean, Australian individual […] who is alive today has not been touched by the empires of the past" (*Culture and Imperialism* 4). In this sense, it really seems that, as Loomba states, 'the whole world is postcolonial', since the descendants of once-colonized peoples can be found everywhere (7). Thus, it is undeniable that modern European colonialism, as a set of historical events, has affected and reshaped the world as we know today.

Although focusing on South Africa, I will use the term *colonialism* as defined by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* to refer to the European project of settlement and political and economic control over inhabited territories in all the continents from the sixteenth to the twentieth century which lasted until 'the national liberation movements of the 1960s'. Implicitly and most importantly, the word *colonialism* will also be critically referring to the political ideologies which legitimated such project, as well as to its real economic motivations and oppressive methods.

The definition of *imperialism*, by its turn, encompasses economic, military and political domination, which can be exercised directly or indirectly. As Ania Loomba explains, "imperialism can function without formal colonies (as in United States imperialism today) but colonialism cannot" (7). In the present study, I share Said's view of imperialism, in a broad sense, as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" (*Culture and Imperialism*, 8).

Olive Schreiner has been criticized for overlooking colonialism in her work. In her articles, published posthumously in book format as *Thoughts on South Africa* (1923b), for example, she defends the first colonizers, the Boers, in search for their "Promised Land", and oversimplifies their fight with the original inhabitants, the little Bushmen: "The plains were not enough for both, and the new-come children of the desert fought with the old" (151). "[I]t was a merciless primitive fight", she continues, "but it seems to have been on the whole, compared to modern battles, fair and even, and in the end, the little Bushmen vanished" (152). I suspect that Schreiner, as most white people of her time, considered colonialism in its original meaning, regarding it as an altruistic enterprise and as a natural human activity, that is, as the result of a spontaneous process related to the "sudden movements of entire peoples in a given direction", which has no explanation and subtle scientific causes (48).

However, Schreiner made a clear distinction between colonialism and imperialism, connecting the latter with the growing capitalist forces acting in South Africa at that moment. Her fierce criticism on British imperialist policies there as an inhuman undertaking matches Lenin's view of imperialism as "a system oriented towards economic exploitation".[4] For Schreiner, imperialism, unlike colonialism, encompassed the evil mechanisms of capitalism, such as the oppression of natives through the destruction of their political and social organization, the appropriation of their land, the denying of their rights and the exploitation of their labour force.

1.2 Postcolonial Theory

The terms *'postcolonial'* and *'postcolonialism'* have usually been the subject of much debate among theorists and critics, who seem

[4] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism/#PosColThe.

unable to find conclusive definitions for them. One of the main conflicting points is around the meaning of the prefix *'post'*, which, according to Loomba, "implies an 'aftermath' in two senses – temporal, as in coming after, and ideological, as in supplanting" (7). What many theorists contest is the fact that the colonial condition, with its inequities, has not been entirely suppressed in a number of former colonies, even after their political independence. Therefore, the prefix *'post'* becomes a void, if not in its temporal, at least in its ideological meaning.

Furthermore, the idea that the process of decolonization has covered a long time span of three centuries (from the eighteenth century in America and other countries, to the 1970s in some African countries), and that it has occurred in different contexts (being accomplished by peoples suffering different kinds and degrees of oppression) makes the term *postcolonialism* rather controversial and thus inadequate for being used in a single sense.

For Leela Gandhi, the semantic dispute around postcolonial terminology reflects the divergent perspectives regarding 'usage and methodology' within postcolonial studies, which in her view "[have] emerged as a meeting point and a battleground for a variety of disciplines and theories" (3). What is implicit in the use of the prefix *post* with or without a hyphen, she claims, is the question around the beginning of the postcolonial condition. While for some critics the hyphenated form emphasizes the beginning of decolonization, for others the unbroken term '*postcolonialism'* conveys the idea that the postcolonial condition starts "with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation" (3), covering therefore the whole period of colonialism and its aftermath.

Following this train of thought, I opted for using the term *postcolonial* and its derivatives without a hyphen. Despite the profusion of possibilities and uncertainties surrounding the term postcolonialism, I will use what Rukundwa and van Aarde call the 'optimistic point of view' and consider postcolonial theory as "a means of defiance by which any exploitative and discriminative practices, regardless of time and space, can be challenged" (1171). In this sense, analysing Schreiner's texts within the postcolonial perspective means to undertake an affirmative action against any kind of power imbalance (be it economic, racial or sexual) and embrace an attitude of resistance against the inequities produced by such imbalance.

An essential feature concerning postcolonial theory is the reference to the colonial experience of oppression and to the struggles for decolonization. Contemporary studies of colonialism and postcolonialism are concerned with the practices developed in the process of colonization and decolonization, such as "trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement and rebellions" and with the writing which produced or was produced by such practices, including "public and private records, letters, trade documents, government papers, fiction and scientific literature" (Loomba 2). The collection of theoretical, critical and fictional works, produced to examine the implications of the colonial past, by "revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating it" (Gandhi 4), characterizes what Leela Gandhi defines as postcolonialism: "a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath" (4).

Nevertheless, postcolonial theory is not concerned only with discussing the legacy of the colonial past; it also encompasses elaborations of resistance to colonialism in the very moment of the colonial encounter. For example, according to Leela Gandhi, based on Gyan Prakash, despite their radically different approaches, [Mahatma] Gandhi's and Fannon's acts of anti-colonial resistance should be regarded as "first elaborations of a postcolonial theory" (18). Following this reasoning, Schreiner's attitudes, writings and speeches against British imperialism in South Africa should also be considered embryonic elaborations of postcolonial discourse. This quality of resistance is also present in the definition of postcolonial literature provided by Ascroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, for whom the distinctive feature of the written production by peoples from ex-British colonies is the experience of colonization, the tension with the imperial power and the emphasis on the differences in relation to the colonial centre (*The Empire Writes* Back: 2).

My interest in this regard is the suspicion that, even within a traditional colonial environment and in spite of being a white European voice, Olive Schreiner may have presented such postcolonial characteristic in her texts, revealing such tension and acknowledging the difference between the colony and the empire. If we consider postcolonial texts "those which write against any kind of imperialism and colonialism, subverting and deconstructing the discourse of the colonizer" (Nenevé 20), we are led to think that Schreiner's works fit into this category. Although she does not speak directly in the name of the oppressed natives of South Africa, her texts urge her readers to reflect on the colonizer's ideology of white European superiority and

question the imperial order, alerting for the damages of colonialism/imperialism in the process of human development. Moreover, because Schreiner's texts were clearly written in what Mary Louise Pratt calls "contact zones", that is, within a social space "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power…" (2), they possess a special value when read in a postcolonial perspective.

1.3 Postcolonial Literature

> But a far more subtle and inevitable form of evil must ultimately overtake us. It is ordained by the laws of human life that a Nemesis should follow the subjection and use, purely for purposes of their own, of any race by another which lives among them. […] In the end the subjected people write their features on the face of the conquerors. (Schreiner, *Closer Union:* 53)

Ascroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin distinguish three stages in the development of post-colonial literatures. The first stage includes texts produced during the imperial period, in the language of the imperial centre by a literate elite who identified with the colonizing power (1991: 5). Drawing on Albert Memmi's analysis of the protagonists of the colonial situation, this literate elite would correspond to the colonizer who accepts himself as such, the one who agrees "to be a nonlegitimate privileged person, that is, a usurper" (96). Such colonizer, Memmi states, "endeavors to falsify history, he rewrites laws, he would extinguish memories – anything to succeed in transforming his usurpation into legitimacy" (96). Therefore, the texts produced at this stage, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain, are not representative of the indigenous culture. Although they offer detailed description of the landscape, customs and language, "they inevitably privilege the centre, emphasizing the 'home' over the 'native', the 'metropolitan' over the 'provincial' or 'colonial' and so forth" (*The Empire Writes Back*, 5). This overvaluing of the motherland, in Memmi's analysis, worked as a strategy to empower the colonizer who, though feared and admired in the colony, knew that back in his mother country he would lose his aura of superiority and become nothing.

The second stage relates to "the literature produced 'under imperial license' by 'natives' or 'outcasts'", as for instance the works written in the nineteenth century by the "English educated Indian upper class, or African 'missionary literature'" (*The Empire Writes Back*, 5). The fact that these texts were written in the language of the dominant gave their authors the false impression that they belonged temporarily or permanently to the privileged class. Memmi's analysis of the dilemma faced by the colonized writer due to his/her bilingualism may well illustrate the literature produced at this stage. For him, "colonial bilingualism […] is a linguistic drama" (152) which derives from the experience of partaking two worlds that are in conflict, both in physical and cultural terms. In the linguistic conflict within the colonized, he concludes, "his mother tongue is that which is crushed" (151). Having to write in the colonizer's language for an alien public, usually for the conquerors of their own people, these early postcolonial authors produced texts that lacked what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin call "the potential for subversion" (*The Empire Writes Back*, 6). According to them, apart from the available discourse, what restrained the development of a more combative literature at this period was the material conditions involved in its production, such as publication and distribution, controlled by the imperial ruling class. Indeed, despite writing in the conqueror's language, later postcolonial writers managed to impose a subversive local voice to their texts, because they were relatively free from the material conditions imposed by the metropolis on earlier periods.

The last stage is marked by the emergence of independent literatures. This became possible with the suppression of the constraining power within the institution of Literature exercised by the dominant colonial class, and also with "the appropriation of language and writing for new distinctive usages" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* 6). Within this stage, Ashcroft et al. state that the Received Standard English, claimed as the universal norm and spread across the globe through British imperialism, is "transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world" (8). The hierarchical structure of power, perpetuated through language, is rejected and "an effective post-colonial voice" emerges. The process of "writing back to the centre" is then accomplished and "the language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority [is] wrested from the dominant European culture" (8). This subversive strategy challenges the assumptions and the world-view of the centre, questioning the hierarchical order and offering new perspectives.

Within these three stages of postcolonial literature, Olive Schreiner would chronologically belong to the first. She lived during the imperial period, her texts were written to the metropolitan public in the language of the imperial centre, and she was surely a member of the literate elite. Nevertheless, she was not a typical representative of the colonizing power. Following Memmi's portrait of the colonizer, Schreiner would fit best the description of the 'benevolent colonizer', the one who rejects colonialism, though in her case, she rejected imperialism. Although her texts may not emphasize the indigenous culture, despite the rich description of the landscape that they usually portray, they cannot be said to privilege the centre either. But, rather than trying to insert Schreiner in one of those three stages, my interest lies in exploring whether and how she imprints an effective postcolonial voice in her works and what new distinctive usages she makes of the English language in her writings so that they can be characterized as postcolonial.

1.4 Historical Context: a Brief Account of South African History

In order to understand the historical context in which Olive Schreiner was inserted, a brief account of South African history is necessary. I will start with Ania Loomba's analysis of the term colonialism provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Loomba calls attention to the fact that the definition presented does not make any reference to people other than the colonizers, thus exempting the word from any implication "of an encounter between peoples, or of conquest and domination" (1-2). According to her, the root word for colonialism, colony, is defined in the OED as:

> A settlement in a new country… a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state; the community so formed, consisting of the original settlers and their descendants and successors, as long as the connection with the parent state is kept up. (*apud* Loomba)

This definition mirrors the conception of the first European settlers in South Africa, who simply disregarded the existence of native

peoples already living as politically and culturally organized societies in the lands they took possession of. The pastoral Khoekhoe and the hunter-gatherer San (called respectively "Hottentots" or "Khoikhoi" and "Bushmen" by early European colonizers and known collectively as Khoisan) and other ethnic groups, such as the Bantu and Xhosa-speaking people, gradually lost their lands and lives, as European settlers invaded their territories bringing disease and death.

Relatedly, this definition of colony throws light into Schreiner's conception of the Boer as an intrinsic element of the South African population. In her detailed analysis of the Boers in *Thoughts on South Africa*, Schreiner emphasizes the fact that they had cut relations with their original country, starting a completely new life in South Africa. Because they were "the result of an intermingling of races, acted on during two centuries by a peculiar combination of circumstances", she considered them "the most typically South African[s]" (1923b: 65). For her, like some endemic species of the fauna and flora, the Boer was "peculiar to South Africa" (65).

Most authors consider South Africa a unique case if compared to other European colonies. Its strategic geographical position, midway between East and West, turned South Africa a coveted land, used and disputed by many Europeans since 1488 when the Portuguese navigator Bartolomeo Dias first stopped there on his way to the East (Davenport and Saunders 8). The long dispute between Dutch and English colonizers places South Africa, using Annia Loomba's words, in "a bizarre" situation and the "layers of colonization" to which it was subjected seem to have been determinant to the way political life was organized later on (10).

Starting from the Portuguese navigators, who regularly stopped at South African coast on their way to India in the early 1500s, the contact continued with the Dutch, who set up a station at Table Bay (Cape Town) in 1652, to provision passing ships. In 1657, the first European settlements, farms allotted by Dutch colonial authorities to nine Dutch East India Company (VOC – Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) servants, were established in the arable lands around Cape Town. In 1689, some 180 Huguenot refugees fleeing from France arrived, increasing the number of settlers among the Dutch. As European colonists – mainly of Dutch, German and French Huguenot origin – gradually lost their connection and identification with Europe, the new Afrikaner nation started being formed. Davenport and Saunders claim that:

> An originally diverse European settler population was thus coaxed into cultural uniformity, with the language of the Netherlands and the religion of the Reformed Church for cement. The Afrikaner people, an amalgam of nationalities, came gradually into being during the century after Hendrik Bibault described himself as an 'Africaander' in 1707 (22).

With the spread of the colonists into the hinterland, the growth of agricultural activities and the increasing conflicts with the natives, the demand for labour required the importation of slaves from East Africa, Madagascar and the Dutch colonies of East India. Meanwhile, the indigenous inhabitants who had been dispossessed of their land were incorporated into the colonial economy as domestic servants. By the mid-1700's the need of labour force, with the increase of independent farmers called *trekboers*, made the number of slaves exceed that of the white population. A multiracial society started evolving from the unions across Asian, African and East India slaves, as well as indentured Indian labourers and native people. A great deal of racial mixing and intermarriage continued throughout the 1800's, mainly among the poor. This group of 'coloured people', which also included the offspring of unions between non-white and European peoples, suffered discrimination both for their working-class status and for their racial identity in a society ruled by white Europeans.

British occupation started as early as 1795, when the Cape was taken over from the Dutch, and a strategic base to control the sea route to the East was established. The process of incorporating Cape Colony into the British trading empire ran parallel to the work of Protestant missionaries, like Schreiner's father, who, believing in the 'civilizing mission' of British imperialism, campaigned on behalf of the oppressed Khoisan, in the hope that they would eventually be converted into Christian faith. The result of such a campaign, led mainly by John Philip[5] – the superintendent of the London Missionary Society – was

[5]Ruth First and Ann Scott provide an enlightening explanation about the role of the Christianizing Missions and the Mission Stations in the forming years of South Africa. John Philip's advocacy of the natives' interest, for example, proved a drawback to their free condition. Condemning the maltreatment of the Khoikhoi (Hottentots) by the colonists who considered them as properties and used them as cattle and sheep, he advocated their training 'as agriculturalists

Ordinance 50. Approved in 1828, it aimed at improving the situation of the 'Hottentots and other free persons of colour', freeing them from the obligation to carry passes, giving them legal right to possess land and to be hired under short-term contracts, so they could escape from unbearable work situations (Davenport and Saunders 48).

Later on, in 1834, the proclamation of emancipation determined that slaves should have a four-year apprenticeship with their former owners in order to be prepared for freedom, which became official on 1 December 1838. The free status of these 'coloured people', however, did not change their dependent and harsh condition as dispossessed and exploited. In fact, such measures, aimed at diminishing racial discrimination and improving the living conditions of the oppressed coloured people in Cape Colony, had no real practical effect. Instead, they caused dissatisfaction among the Dutch colonists and provoked a negative reaction against British rule.

By mid 1830's, 12,000 discontented Afrikaner farmers, or Boers, moved north and east with a number of black servants in what became known as The Great Trek, to escape government measures that tried to diminish racial discrimination. These Boers settled on the Highveld and Natal, occupying areas devastated during a period of disruption and state formation marked by wars of conquest between indigenous ethnic groups known as *Mfecane* (*'crushing'*) for Zulu speakers *or Difaqane* (*'forced migration'*) for Sotho speakers. This process of 'Mfecane' has been questioned and remains a subject of dispute among historians. The Boer settlement in these new lands was not a peaceful process and a number of conflicts with the Zulus and other groups culminated at the Battle of the Blood River (1837-1838), which the white colonists won. However, this victory was soon to be undermined by the British annexation of Natal in 1843, forcing the Boers to move once again northwards where they founded the South African Republic (Transvaal) and the Free State of Orange.

By the late 1800's, the discovery of diamond-mines in Kimberly (in 1867) and gold in the Transvaal (in 1886) attracted thousands of treasure-hunters and speculators and provoked changes which would

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and as artisans'. An adept of Adam Smith's ideas on political economy, Philip viewed the natives not only as labourers, but as potential consumers, who would contribute to the economic growth and prosperity of the colony. According to Philip, they state, missionaries helped to assuage the native's prejudices against the colonial government and to increase their dependence through "the creation of artificial wants" (First and Scott 29-30).

definitely alter the course of South African history. A succession of annexations carried out by British forces – Kimberly diamond fields in 1871, the Transvaal in 1877, the Griqualand West colony in 1880, and independent African chiefdoms, such as Zululand in 1897 – consolidated British hegemony. Besides transforming agricultural South Africa into an industrial nation, the mineral revolution also had a significant impact on politics and social organization, aggravating the already problematic race relations among South African mixed population, mainly in what concerned the connection between the colonizer and colonized groups. The negative implications of the kind of human relationship generated by colonialism – a regime of oppression based on exploitation, inequality and contempt (Memmi 106) – would become evident in the future of South Africa.

The two Anglo-Boer wars were also directly linked to the discovery of wealthy areas and the dispute over their control. The first started as a rebellion, in 1880, against the forced annexation of the Transvaal by the British. Within a year, the Boers regained their independence, and Paul Kruger became the president of the South African Republic (ZAR) in 1883. The seed for the second Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902) was sowed with the failed attempt at seizing the South African Republic (Transvaal) again in 1895. The mining magnate Cecil Rhodes, then Prime Minister of Cape Colony, planned this attack, which became known as The Jameson Raid. Nevertheless, the pretext for the war itself was the refusal of President Paul Kruger to concede the voting rights demanded by the British for the 60,000 English-speaking immigrants, known as the Uitlanders. After the occupation of Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Pretoria by British forces, Kruger fled to Europe and General Jan Smuts assumed the command by employing a guerilla war strategy. The British responded by adopting a scorched-earth policy and setting up concentration camps where 26,000 Boer women and children and 14,000 black and coloured people died from disease and hunger. The war ended with Boer defeat and the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging in 1902.

The consequences of the mineral revolution and the Anglo-Boer war, although mainly a white man's war, were disastrous for the black population. Thousands were killed in battles as soldiers of either Boer or British armies, despite their agreement that black people were not to be used as combatants, and many died in concentration camps. Those who expected to gain some civil and political rights after the war were disillusioned. In order to supply the massive labour force needed for

rebuilding the mining industry, the government adopted a series of measures – including conquest, land dispossession, high taxation and pass laws – forcing black people to leave their lands and work for low wages. With the decline of the homestead economy, black Africans relied increasingly on wage labour for survival. In urban areas, deprived of any rights, they were segregated to restricted locations.

On 31 May 1910, the four colonies and republics – Cape Colony, Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State – became an independent dominion called Union of South Africa, governed by British and Boer settlers on a white rule prerogative. By this time, only the Cape Province retained the non-racial franchise, which in practice did not mean equal rights for coloured people, since only whites could be elected members of the parliament. The segregationist legislation that followed anticipated what later would become the apartheid policy. In short, "[b]lack people were defined as outsiders, without rights or claims on the common society that their labour had helped to create".[6] English and Dutch became the official languages while all the other, indigenous as well as Afrikaans, a hybrid language spoken by the Boers and most coloured people, were relegated to a second class status.

1.5 Language and Eurocentrism

The question of language in a multi-lingual society, such as South Africa, deserves a special attention when analysed within the historical context of colonialism since "the colonial process itself begins in language" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader:* 283). The triplet language, knowledge and power works in a vicious cycle: the function of naming reality endows language with knowledge over it, and those who hold the knowledge of the language will be invested with the power over reality, which again will be determined by language. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin put it, "to name the world is to 'understand' it, to know it and to have control over it" (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*: 283). Thus, one of the new aspects in European colonialism – the "submission of the world to a single 'universal' regime of truth and power" (Shohat and Stam 15-16) – was implemented through language. For Leela Gandhi, "colonialism […] marks the historical process whereby the 'west' attempts

[6] http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/history.htm.

systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the 'non-west'" (16).

The imposition of the language of the centre, either by displacing native languages or establishing itself as the standard against other varieties considered impure, becomes the most potent device to exert oppression through cultural control by the colonial powers. It is not by chance that Edward Said considers culture as an effective tool for the colonialist and imperialist control over distant lands and peoples. In fact, he regards culture and imperialism as an inseparable pair.

> Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations which include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with that domination. (Culture and Imperialism 8)

Said claims that culture operates "within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci calls *consent*" (*Culture and Imperialism* 7). This consent is accomplished when the predominance and influence of certain cultural forms and ideas become culturally hegemonic. Europeans' idea about themselves as superior to all non-European peoples and cultures became a 'universal truth' and strengthened the discourse described by Said as 'orientalism'. Said reveals the ideological component of imperialism, showing how European discourse established itself as the 'universal truth' to implicitly impose and justify its authority over non-Europeans. In a certain sense, we could say that Orientalism, as a western discourse used to undermine the Orient, is the counterpart of Eurocentrism, also a western discourse, but used with the opposing strategy of aggrandizing and empowering Europe. In Shohat and Stam's words,

> Eurocentrism bifurcates the world into the "West and the Rest" and organizes everyday language into binaristic hierarchies implicitly flattering to Europe: our "nations, their "tribes"; our "religions", their "superstitions"; our "culture", their "folklore"; our "art", their "artifacts"; our

> "demonstrations", their "riots"; our "defense", their "terrorism. (2)

Used initially as a "rationale for colonialism", Eurocentrism evolved into a discourse which subtly "'normalizes' the hierarchical power relations generated by colonialism and imperialism" (Shohat and Stam 2). This naturalization of European superiority, they claim, is achieved by emphasizing the noblest scientific and humanistic achievements of the west while reinforcing the real or imagined deficiencies of the east (3).

In *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Shohat and Stam propose to deconstruct Europe's supposed supremacy opposing "the idea that any race, in Aimé Cesairé's words, 'holds a monopoly on beauty, intelligence, and strength'" (3). Their criticism aims at denouncing the oppressive relation Europe has maintained with its 'others' throughout history. For them, the antidote for this biased discourse is multiculturalism, a way of regarding "the world history and contemporary social life from the perspective of the radical equality of peoples in status, potential, and rights" (5).

Although Schreiner might have never come across the word Eurocentrism, she seemed to have been aware of its effect, and like many postcolonial theorists and writers of the present, she knew that such ideology was accomplished through language. In her texts she constantly questioned and denied the 'truths' imposed by the imperial discourse to justify and legitimate the power of the colonizer over the colonized. In a way, Schreiner was already making an attempt to "decolonize knowledge" (Pratt *apud* Nenevé 11), providing alternative truths by offering a different perspective, that of the colonized. A good example of this is an allegorical tale inserted in *From Man to Man*, Schreiner's last novel (published posthumously in 1923). In fact, the story illustrates how relative and inconsistent are the concepts of the alleged superiority of one race over another. In it, Schreiner playfully rearranges the position of 'superior and inferior' races, inverting the notion of 'self' and 'other'. By dismantling the Eurocentric view over other peoples and cultures and disregarding it as a universal truth, Schreiner disrupts or 'decolonizes' the idea of supposed superior and inferior societies, which, according to Shohat and Stam, is one of the functions of multiculturalism.

In postcolonial literatures, the issue of language and power is manifested in what Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin call linguistic alienation, i.e., the "gap between the experience of place and the

language available to describe it" (*The Empire Writes Back* 9). This happens because the colonizer's language seems inadequate or inappropriate to describe the new place, its fauna and flora, its physical and geographical conditions or its cultural practices (10). Thus, in order to account for the postcolonial experience, it is necessary to develop an appropriate usage of the English language. It then becomes "a distinct and unique form of english (sic)" (11).

Postcolonial writers have developed a number of textual strategies to deal with the complexities of using the colonizer's language to express the experience of colonialism. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, the two most common processes of "seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place" (*The Empire Writes Back* 38) are abrogation and appropriation. The first is the "denial of the privilege of English" (38), achieved through a refusal of the Received Standard English as the correct and only usage of the language. The second consists in the process of adopting the language as a tool and using it in various ways "to express widely differing cultural experiences" (39). In a more poetic way, as described by the Indian writer Raja Rao in his essay "Language and Spirit" (1995), it is a process by which an author "conveys in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own" (296).

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1991) list a series of strategies used by postcolonial writers in order to construct difference and effect the appropriation of English, such as authorial intrusion in the form of footnotes, the glossary and the explanatory preface, parenthetic translation and untranslated words, interlanguage, syntactic fusion, code-switching and vernacular transcription. Consciously or not, Schreiner applied some of these strategies in her fictional works, which will be further analyzed.

1.5 Place and Displacement

In his article "Named for Victoria, Queen of England", Chinua Achebe asserts that his people "lived at the crossroads of cultures […]. On one arm of the cross we sang hymns and read the Bible night and day. On the other my father's brother and his family, blinded by heathenism, offered food to idols" (191). His statement demonstrates how difficult it might have been for natives to live under such opposing cultural codes and deal with them. This experience of living between

two worlds fosters a crisis of identity, which according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, reveals a major feature in postcolonial literature: the concern with place and displacement (*The Empire Writes Back* 8). For them, the lack of identification between self and place – caused by forced (enslavement) or voluntary (migration, indentured labour) 'dislocation' or by 'cultural denigration' (the undermining of the indigenous culture by an alleged superior race or culture) – fosters a displacement which will be perceptible in postcolonial texts in the form of an "alienation of vision and the crisis in self-image" (9).

The concern with place and displacement becomes even more complex if we consider, as Fanon does, that "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 38). For Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "culture is almost indistinguishable from the language" (289) since it is language that carries the moral, ethical and aesthetic values embedded in culture. Once identity is formed by the values implied in language, the dilemma of living 'at the crossroads of cultures' will be dramatized in the moment of choosing the means in which the postcolonial writer wants to write, to communicate. There are two possible alternatives. The writer can either reject the colonizer language and, as Thiong'o, adopt the native tongue in an attempt to regain a pre-colonial identity, dispersed or displaced by the language of the invader (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 283); or accept it, as most postcolonial writers have done, subverting and appropriating it in such a way that it will be considered a different language.

The personal drama can be extended if we view the concept of national identity as equally intrinsic to that of language. Thiong'o's argument for writing in Gikuyu relies in this association:

> Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form

> and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. (290)

Nevertheless, some postcolonial writers point to the fact that, in some contexts, the foreign ruler's language has become a necessary evil, as it happens today in India, where English is regarded as a neutral code, free from the ethnic and religious associations of the native languages (Kachru 291). Others conceive the English language as part of their identity. As the Indian writer and philosopher Raja Rao, for example, suggests: "We [the Indians] shall have the English language with us and amongst us not as a guest or friend, but as one of our own, of our caste, our creed, our sect and our tradition" ('The Caste of English' 421). He claims that Indians are 'instinctively bilingual' and that, although they cannot and should not write like the English, they 'cannot write only as Indians' either (Rao, 'Language and Spirit' 296). An enlightening explanation of how this happens is given by Kamala Das, according to herself, a "very brown Indian born in Malabar", in her poem "An Introduction":

> […] I speak three languages, write in
> Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they
> [said,
> English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
> Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
> Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
> Any language I like? The language I speak
> Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernessess,
> All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
> Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
> It is as human as I am human, don't
> you see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
> Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
> Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
> Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
> Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears
> and is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
> Of the trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of
> [rain or the
> Incoherent mutterings of the blazing
> Funeral pyre […] [7]

[7] http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/kamala-das/an-introduction-2/.

What we learn with Kamala Das is that English, fused with her mother tongue, has been incorporated into her identity, becoming an authentically human language, which conveys the speech of a conscious mind. In this sense, the Caribbean writer George Lamming is right when he states that "English is no longer the exclusive language of the men who live in England" but "among other things, a West Indian language" (16).

It becomes clear, through Rao's and Lamming's words, that the use of the colonizer's language has become part of their national identity. This is a very problematic issue, since the idea of nation, used as a resistance strategy in the struggle against imperial control, relies on "myths of racial and cultural origin" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 183) as a way to establish cultural distinctiveness and to create a separate identity. The concept of nation and national identity becomes even more intricate in the case of settler colonies, like South Africa, which present a diverse cultural reality in terms of language, race and religion.

The hybridized feature of such postcolonial societies has been the focus of much recent debate among theorists. Although the term hybridity might have been negatively associated with the mixture of races, endorsing a racist colonialist discourse, it has lately acquired positive connotations as an undeniable and integral part of postcolonial societies. The concept of hybridity encompasses the idea of a mutual process, in which new forms will emerge from the cultures involved, instead of simply implying the loss of some of their traditional traits. In addition, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin point out, hybridity neutralizes the "binary views of the past" and develops "new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth" (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 183).

For Homi Bhabha, hybridity is "the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority)" (Signs Taken for Wonders 34). In his view, the repetition of the colonial discriminatory discourse generates hybridity since "the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different* – a mutation, a hybrid" (Signs Taken 34). This strategy of emphasizing difference functions as a mirror where the colonial power is reflected, or as Bhabha prefers, as "a negative transparency", where both discriminated and discriminatory appear, in a light and dark contrast, forcing the colonial authority to recognize itself in an unexpected way. At this stage, asserts Bhabha, "the colonial

discourse has reached that point when, faced with the hybridity of its subjects, the *presence* of power is revealed as something other than what its rules of recognition assert" (Signs Taken 35). The blurring of borders between discriminated and discriminatory, self and other generates an uncertainty and an ambivalence that fosters a revaluation of colonial discourse and authority creating possibilities for subversion, which take place in what Bhabha calls a "Third Space". It is in the realm of the 'in-betweeness' that the meaning of terms like alterity and otherness are negotiated and concepts such as identity and culture battle with adjectives such as original, fixed and (im)pure. In Bhabha's view,

> The intervention of the Third Space, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys the mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is continuously revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. […] It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew. (Cultural Diversity 208)

Thus, it is within this 'Third Space' that hybrid agencies will be effected. Bhabha's statement about hybrid agencies somehow reminds us of Schreiner's position and work within the South African colonial context:

> Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy: the outside of the inside; the part in the whole. ("Culture's in Between," 212)

What remains as a fact in the midst of all the issues raised by postcolonial theory is that European colonialism cannot be erased, and the consequences of the colonial experience cannot simply be

disregarded. Colonialism has left deep and irreversible marks on the history of both the colonizer and the colonized people, chiefly of the latter; it has become, undeniably, part of their history. Those affected by such a long and intricate historical event will have to decide what to do with its heritage, which is certainly very unequal for the two main groups involved, in general terms, the rulers and the subjected peoples/the dominating and the dominated. Theorists and creative writers from both groups and either from colonial or postcolonial periods have been engaged in this task. Their responses have been varied.

Unlike many postcolonial creative writers of indigenous ancestry, like Achebe, Lamming and Rao, Schreiner's European descent and influences prevented her from having such an intense experience of the 'crossroads of cultures'. She was not a native and did not identify with them but with the land itself, the South African landscape, the place where she was born, and lived most of her life. Nevertheless, Schreiner's self-image and identity have certainly been influenced by her 'in-between' position. Although in the colony she was identified as a white British colonizer by non-English South Africans, in the metropolis her colonial status, as one who lacked "formal education and the advantages of 'home'" (Berkman 6), did not go unnoticed. This double and ambiguous position within a land ethnically and culturally diverse certainly contributed to enlarging Schreiner's views on the cultural and racial diversity of South Africa and also to sharpen her awareness of the unbalanced power relations that were emerging in that hybridized society. In the next chapter, a brief account of Schreiner's biography will be provided in an attempt to understand her complex identity.

CHAPTER II

A 'True and Faithful Picture' of Olive Schreiner

This is a true and faithful picture of mine.
OLIVE SCHREINER,
CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

WHEN SHE WAS A LITTLE GIRL
SHE LIVED AT HEALD TOWN,
CAPE OF GOOD HOPE,
SOUTH AFRICA. .[8]

If I had twelve lives one life I should be a mother devoting myself entirely ^the joy of^ ~~to~~ bearing rearing & suckling my ^14^ children, one life I might devote to study of the past, one to labouring in the present for the future, one mainly to science another mainly to travel,& so on. Now I've only one life, & try to satisfy that illimitable craving to live all lives ^I have always had ever since I could remember^ as far as I can in a small way, ~~to sol~~ living all round…

[…] in my poor little handful of life, which consists now mainly of cooking & house cleaning, I shall know few things, I am only a broken and untried possibility – but this I have that I can sympathize with all the lives with all the endeavours, with all the accomplished works; even with all the work attempted & not accomplished of <u>other men</u>. I love nature, & I love men; I love music & I love science; I love poetry & I love practical labour: I like to make a good pudding & see people eating it; & I like to write a book ~~M~~ that makes their life fuller. I can do very little and have never been so situated that I could

[8]Olive Schreiner to Louie Ellis, 19 April 1887 - Letter Reference Letters/227, lines 9-15.

> do my best – but I can live all the lives in my love & sympathy! [9]

The danger of analysing and judging the past using an ideological framework of the present is that the result may lead to unfaithful and unfair conclusions. Liz Stanley alerts us to this danger and also to the problem of relying on secondary, rather than archival sources, in the re-reading and assessment of Olive Schreiner's work by many modern scholars and critics. She claims that Schreiner's writings are sometimes considered faulty due to "highly 'presentist' ideas which recycle often erroneous secondary sources 'as fact'" (*Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman* 10). Although it is impossible to return and experience the past to fully understand the social and historical context in which Schreiner lived, I will try to assess her work by looking at her, as Stanley does, "as a woman of her time" (13). However, we know that Schreiner was not simply 'any' woman. Who was Olive Schreiner, then, living as she did in a period effervescent with new ideas and changes? To say the least, she was, using Stanley's words again, "a complicated woman living in interesting times" (13). Thus, in this chapter I will dig a little into Schreiner's life, calling upon some events that helped to build her sense of 'self' and addressing some of the social and political atmosphere in which she was inserted, in an attempt to grasp her identity, particularly in relation to the historical context of colonialism.

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[9]Schreiner's letter to Havelock Ellis 25 July 1899 - HRC/CAT/OS/4b-x
All the letters quoted in this thesis were drawn from The Olive Schreiner Letters Online, available at: https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?page=295. This outstanding and huge project was funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (RES-062-23-1286). All research, transcriptions and project leadership were led by Prof. Liz Stanley from the University of Edinburgh as principal investigator and Dr. Helen Dampier from Leeds Beckett University, as co-investigator, and researchers Dr. Andrea Salter, Dr. Sarah Poustie and Dr. Donna Hetherington. Prof David Shepherd headed up the technical side of the project and managed the technical team at HRI, University of Sheffield. The project ran from 2008 to 2012, and resulted in the transcription in detail and faithful to the manuscript of the nearly 5000 extant letters by Olive Schreiner located in sixteen archives in three continents and their publication in electronic form. The letters were transcribed exactly as Schreiner wrote them, including omissions, underlining words, spelling mistakes, deletions and insertions (marked with the ^ sign). A doubtful reading is signalled with a question-mark. This is the form the letters are quoted in this thesis.

In their biography of Olive Schreiner, whose life and writings are depicted as a "product of a specific social history" (First and Scott 23), Ruth First and Ann Scott provide a brief review of the European presence in colonial South Africa. According to their account, missionary life and politics played an essential role in shaping the future of South Africa. The first Christianizing missions, they claim, helped to expand the frontiers of the British Empire and served to implement a Westernization process, which, although strongly resisted by many African communities, would ultimately transform most of them, by (in)directly instilling the moral precepts and the western way of life. By changing the native's social and economic organization, imposing a new sexual division of labour and new clothing and housing standards, for example, the politics behind the missions fostered a relation of dependence that gradually diminished the political power of local chiefs.

Schreiner's parents would also become part of that process. Gottlob Schreiner, a German of humble origins, who became a minister for the London Missionary Society, and Rebecca Lyndall, a young educated cosmopolitan woman from an English middle-class family, met in London in 1837 and embarked for South Africa shortly after their marriage, imbued with the same dubious ideology of 'civilizing the heathen' implicit in those Christianizing missions. Thus, Gottlob's function was not only to introduce "the practices of Christian worship", but also to instill "the ethics of the new religion" (First and Scott 35) among peoples who had a completely distinct social structure. Rebecca, as a missionary wife, reproduced the same rigorous code of moral and religious behavior, which she had received in England, within her family and the mission Sunday School, her realm in the new country. First and Scott describe the cultural panorama of that period in the colony, as thus:

> Race and cultural prejudice were all pervasive: English-speaking South Africans were contemptuous of Afrikaners, all Whites despised all Blacks. This was a colonial culture almost bare of serious books, and one in which the struggle between good and evil was conveyed through religious texts. Farming communities in the interior operated restrictive and punitive moral codes; girls were raised for household duties and marriage, and little beyond. (23)

It was within this religious and cultural atmosphere that Olive Emilie Albertina Schreiner, named after three dead brothers[10] and the ninth of twelve children, was born on 24 March 1855, at a Wesleyan Mission Station in Wittenbergen, a remote frontier district in the Cape Colony. There, where she spent the first six years of her life, and then in Healdtown, where she lived until twelve, Schreiner started her long and painful journey in search of self-definition and of her place in the world. 'Unusual', 'eccentric', 'different', 'peculiar' are words repeatedly used by those who knew Schreiner to describe her as a child and youth. It is not surprising then that her novel *Undine*, which she did not want to have published in life (probably for being too autobiographical), starts with the sentence: "I was tired of being called queer and strange and odd".[11] Her fictional children characters (Lyndall, Waldo, Undine, Rebekah) seem an extension of her lonely infancy and of the hardships she had to endure in that period.

Much of that suffering is usually attributed by her scholars and biographers to the roughness and austerity with which her mother treated her and her siblings. However, it might not have been an easy task for Rebecca to withstand the difficulties she encountered as a missionary wife. In *The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner* (1989), Joyce Averech Berkman depicts Rebecca as a cultured woman, having "definite artistic tastes, being a fluent letter writer, proficient in French and Italian and skilled in flower painting and music" (18). But those qualities were certainly non-essential in the wild isolation of the African landscape where Rebecca lived, in her words, "among the gross sensual heathen" (16), except for the education of her own daughters, which she vigorously undertook.

The image Schreiner gives of her mother, as "a grand piano" being used as "a common dining table" (Berkman 18) gives us the dimension of Rebecca's wasted potentialities in the Mission Station. We can conceive then Rebecca's harshness towards her children as some kind of unconscious strategy she used not only to strengthen herself, but to prepare her children for the stern conditions of life. In fact, although Schreiner praised her father's sensitive and tender character, it was her

[10]For Anne McClintock, being named after her three dead brothers implies that Schreiner's identity "took its first shape around a female grief and the mourning of a lost male identity" (261-262).

[11]Quoted in First and Scott (84).

mother's realism and toughness that played a more decisive role in shaping her "childhood sense of self" (Berkman 15).

Rebecca raised her children in consonance with the evangelical theories of her time, emphasizing the same religious concepts that molded her own religiosity: sin, guilt, conversion and salvation or damnation. She believed that "children should submit to adults and older siblings in the same way that humans should submit to God, female to male, and blacks to whites" (Berkman 16).

The rigidity of Schreiner's upbringing is revealed in two episodes that were to remain meaningful memories of her childhood, and certainly contributed to the formation of her 'self'. Both involve physical punishment for reasons incomprehensible and unacceptable for her childish mind. The first, at the age of five or six, was for mentioning a Dutch word, a forbidden language within the household. "Ach, how nice it is outside!" exclaimed little Olive, inadvertently, while swinging on the door handle. For using that expression, 'Ach', she received "about fifty strokes with a bunch of quince rods tied together" (Berkman 16). On the second occasion, Schreiner was beaten for disobeying her older sister Alice and catching rain drops in her hands. Schreiner later claimed that such whippings aroused in her not only a sense of revolt but also a desire for justice. The "unutterable bitter rebellion and hatred" (Berkman 17) that she felt on those occasions against those who exerted power unjustly awakened in her an identification with the weak and a desire to protect them. (Un)consciously Schreiner was already getting aware of the imbalance of power in human relations, an issue which would be constantly addressed in her writings in the future.

In the essay 'The Dawn of Civilization', written during World War I, Schreiner explains her position as a 'Conscientious Objector' to any war, drawing on a 'personal element', an episode in her childhood, which revealed her place and role in the universe. She '"was not yet nine years old", she recalls, but her innocent heart was already tormented by the greediness, the cruelty and injustice that she witnessed in the ill-treatment of the powerful towards the weaker beings. Feeling that 'all the world was wrong', she asked herself:

> Why did everyone press on everyone and try to make them do what they wanted? Why did the strong always crush the weak? Why did we hate and kill and torture? Why was it all as it was? Why had the world ever been made? Why, oh why, had I ever been born? (217)

Little Olive found the answer to her existential questions through nature. Alone in the dawn, observing the sun rise and transform the scenery around her, she "seemed to see a world in which creatures no more hated and crushed, in which the strong helped the weak, and men understood each other, and forgave each other […]" ('The dawn of civilization' 218). However, she knew that the ideal world she had envisioned while watching the 'intolerable beauty' of the African landscape was not real. She was aware that the great real world was there, 'rolling on', and that she could not alter or reshape it. At that moment, though, she discovered her part in it: she could "strive to kill out hate" and help the weak, the oppressed, the unjustly treated. The feeling that she was part of "the great Universe" enwrapped and comforted her and she concluded:

> […] as I walked back that morning over the grass slopes, I was not sorry I was going back to the old life. I did not wish I was dead and that the Universe had never existed. I, also, had something to live for – and even if I failed to reach it utterly – somewhere, some time, some place, it was! I was not alone. ('The dawn of civilization' 219)

This insight would accompany Schreiner throughout her life and she would return to it repeatedly, especially when she was feeling depressed, perhaps as a reminder of her mission and as a way to strengthen herself and renew her hope in a better world. In 1884, in a letter to Havelock Ellis, one of her closest friends in England in the 1880's, she asks him: "Do you <u>long</u> so too sometimes to lessen the pain & suffering in the world?" Her own answer reaffirms her childhood intent:

> That feeling is always growing in me and sometimes it breaks over me in a wave of passion. It isn't for happiness or good to myself, or to make others merry it is to lessen the suffering of others that I have to live. It is for this that I have lead the life that I have, that now when the power

> of self-feeling is almost worn out in me, I should comfort others.[12]

Schreiner's determination to lessen human suffering explains her lifelong desire to become a doctor: "The dream of my life always was to be a doctor; I can't remember a time when I was so small that it was not there in my heart".[13] She considered being a doctor "the most perfect of all lives" because "it satisfies the craving to know, and also the craving to serve. A nurse's life is sweet, but not so perfect".[14]

In 1881, she left South Africa for England with the primary intent of fulfilling that dream[15]. However, she also cherished a parallel dream of finding a publisher for her first novel, *The Story of an African Farm.* Written in her twenties while working as a governess, Schreiner had previously sent the manuscript to her friends Mary and John Brown. After a couple of years of painful attempts, Schreiner gave up her medical training, due mostly to her poor health. From her late adolescence, Schreiner developed an asthmatic condition, which would accompany her thereafter, affecting her production as a writer and her personal relations. Ann McClintock interprets Schreiner's asthma as "a form of symbolic protest", meaning "a convulsive bellowing for help" (275). For McClintock, through her asthma, Schreiner could give a voice to her voicelessness: "Beaten as a child for speaking out of turn, unable as an adolescent to discuss religion, politics or philosophy with her family and unable to speak to anyone about an obscure sexual calamity that befell her at this time, her life breath turned inwards,

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[12]To Havelock Ellis, 11 July 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1b-ii, lines 66-73. Havelock Ellis was an English essayist and physician whose pioneering writings on human sexuality are found in the multi-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897- 1910). His lifelong and intense friendship with Olive Schreiner started in 1884 after his letter to her about *The Story of an African Farm.*

[13]To Havelock Ellis, 2 May 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1a-vi –lines 3-35.

[14]To Havelock Ellis, 2 May 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1a-vi - lines 38-40). Being conscious that becoming a doctor "costs money of which [she had] none", she decided to be a nurse then, because she wouldn't have to pay anything for it and although nurses "can not be of so much use as the doctors they can still relieve a great deal of suffering".

[15] Schreiner payed her trip to London with the money she had earned as a governess. Her eldest brother Frederick, who lived in England since a young boy, gave her financial support for the first two years of her stay there. After the publication of her first novel, Schreiner could finally enjoy some financial independence.

cheated and strangled like her words" (275)[16]. As an adult Schreiner would consciously resort to silence whenever she felt necessary or inevitable. On these occasions, she would only say: "Great is silence!" McClintock also adds that asthma "gave Schreiner a motive for mobility as well as an excuse for failure" (275). Apart from its symbolic and psychological associations, Schreiner's disease was real and caused her a great deal of physical discomfort and suffering.

Unable to accomplish her medical aspirations, by becoming either a doctor or a nurse, Schreiner had to redirect her urge for healing other people's pains to her activities as a writer. Her words would be her tool for comforting and helping the suffering, the weak and the poor. The publication of *The Story of an African Farm*,[17] by Chapman and Hall, in 1883, and the positive response from readers showed her, according to Stanley, that her role as a writer could be more effective in reaching people's minds and promoting change than her work as a doctor (*Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman* 24). In this sense, writing became for her, not "an end in itself", as Stanley points out, but a "political act", a form of "intervention for ethical, political or other purposes" (2).

Schreiner's identification with the powerless also stems from internal conflicts generated by her religious upbringing. The fear of a punitive God, whose expectations she was unable to fulfill, and the sense of the original sin with its consequent feeling of guilt would bring her closer to the damned (Berkman 17). From the age of twelve to fifteen Olive saw herself in an orphaned condition. Due to her parents' financial inability to support her and her younger brother Will, they were sent to live in Cradock, with their older siblings Theo and Ettie (then 23 and 17 respectively). There she would receive the first and only formal education she had in her entire life, since Theo was the headmaster of a school. In spite of that advantage, those three years are recalled as being very unhappy ones. Deprived of a loving family atmosphere and feeling persecuted by her older siblings, who were

[16] The 'obscure sexual calamity' refers to her short period engagement in mid 1872 to Julius Gau, an older man of German descent. The speculation around their relationship, despite no actual evidence, involves a pregnancy and a natural abortion.

[17] According to Berkman, *The Story of an African Farm* soon became a best-seller, "stirring worldwide interest". During Schreiner's lifetime, fifteen editions were published (1989: 26), providing her some financial stability.

extremely religious, Schreiner's estrangement from the Church grew stronger and so did her sense of detachment from people.

Schreiner's decision to stop attending church or reading the Bible, by this time, must have been received as heresy by the orthodox religious community in which she lived. Her severance from formal religion became a brand of her unique personality and, as she gained autonomy and freed herself from family approval, she started to adopt freethinking more consistently as a way of life. It was during this period, in a demonstration of self-assertion and independence, that she decided to be called by her first name, Olive, instead of Emilie as people had been calling her since her birth (Berkman 10).

Although Schreiner claims, as an adult, to owe "nothing to the teachings of Jesus: except the 5th & 6th chapters of Mathew",[18] the Bible remained one of the most important sources in her moral formation. As a child, she rejoiced when reading The Sermon on the Mount and feeling "her own creed formulated" (First and Scott 52). The compassion for all human beings, good and evil, and the forgiving tone of Jesus' words conformed to Schreiner's views of an ideal world and became part of her ethical principles.

The Bible Schreiner used as a child, and which she gave to Karl Pearson, a freethinker friend she met in the 1880s in England, is full of marks that meant some particular crises in her life. First and Scott observe that the underlined passages in the New Testament coincide with "the moral position she came to assume and then maintained throughout her life" (55). The Bible would also be present in her literary style, flooded with biblical references and language, and she would constantly quote from it although sometimes "for the devil's own purposes".[19]

Schreiner`s witness, as a child, of the inconsistency between theory and practice, between people's discourse and their acts, led her to affirm later in life that "the agony of [her] childhood"[20] was the impossibility to reconcile her perceptions with what she was taught in religious terms. The death of her two-year-old sister Ellie aggravated that 'agony', increasing her questionings. The pain that little Olive felt

[18]To John T. Lloyd, 29 October 1892 - Olive Schreiner: J.T. Lloyd MSC 26/2.5.1, lines 103-104

[19]To Havelock Ellis, 3 November 1888 - Olive Schreiner: Havelock Ellis 2006.29/11, lines 34-35

[20]To John T. Lloyd, 29 October 1892 - Olive Schreiner: J.T. Lloyd MSC 26/2.5.1, line 38.

on that occasion would shape her views on the universe, religion, life and death ever after. Her belief in the "unity of all things" (God, men and nature as inseparable things) and the conception of life and death as "simple changes in the endless existence" became more consistent as she had to deal with the loss of her beloved baby sister. In a much-quoted passage, she explains in a letter to John T. Lloyd, a minister in Port Elizabeth, the meaning of that moment:

> I think I first had this feeling with regard to death clearly when my favourite little sister died when I was nine years old. I slept with her little body until it was buried, and after that I used to sit for hours by her grave, and it was impossible for me then, as it is impossible for me now, to accept the ordinary doctrine that she was living somewhere without a body. I felt then, and have always felt since when I have been brought face to face with death, that it is [in] a larger doctrine than that, [that] joy and beauty must be sought. I used to love the birds and animals and inanimate nature better after she was dead; the whole of existence seemed to me more beautiful because it had brought forth and taken back to itself such a beautiful thing as she was to me. Can you understand the feeling?[21]

The solution for Schreiner's mental puzzle came through scientific discourse:

> When at fourteen or fifteen I began to study physical science, this agonizing disorganization ended for me. I was like a child walking about with one half of a puzzle in its hand, into which nothing will fit: then I found the other half; and it fitted. Since then religion has been to me the one unending joy.[22]

[21]To John T. Lloyd, 29 October 1892 - Olive Schreiner: J.T. Lloyd MSC 26/2.5.1, lines 75-88.
[22]To John T. Lloyd, 29 October 1892 - Olive Schreiner: J.T. Lloyd MSC 26/2.5.1, lines 41-45.

By combining scientific rationalism to her mystical experiences and spiritual perceptions, Schreiner finds a response to her questions and creates her own religion, what Berkman calls a "self-styled theism" (Berkman 45). In Schreiner's particular theism, asserts Berkman, "the dichotomous universe of her Christian upbringing and the 'awful universe' of her adolescent and adult scepticism yield to a vision of an integrated and neutral, if still not benevolent, cosmos" (58).

The shift from religious to scientific influence probably started with her reading of Herbert Spencer's *First Principles,* which was lent to her by a 'stranger' she met at the age of sixteen.[23] Schreiner compares the effect of that book on her to "when Christianity burst on the dark Roman world". Before reading it, she claims, she was in a "complete, blank atheism. [She] did not even believe in [her] own nature, in any right or wrong, or certainty".[24] Spencer's book reasserted her feelings on the unity of all things, which had started with Ellie's death. As she explained to Betty Molteno, one of her closest South African friends: "When I was sixteen and doubted everything, his *First Principles* showed me the unity of existence; but it was in an intellectual aid, which I myself had to transmute into spiritual bread".[25]

Nevertheless, it was to Stuart Mill that Schreiner was "conscious of owing a profound and unending debt"[26] to her 'moral and spiritual growth', considering his *Logic*, "the book which has had most effect on [her] spiritual life".[27] Spencer and Mill inspired and encouraged Schreiner in her search for truth, which became visible in her curiosity towards scientific matters. For Schreiner the "mere reading of scientific books" was worth, for it would awaken in people both "the feeling that truth is before all things" and "a kind of love for things in their naked simplicity".[28]

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[23]The stranger was Willie Bertram, "the son of another missionary who was working as a magistrate's clerk in the Cape Colony legal system". He was "unusual in speaking openly about his 'freethinking', his questioning on the ideas and beliefs of Christianity" (Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman* 19).

[24] To Havelock Ellis, 28 March 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1a-iii - lines 30-32.

[25]To Betty Molteno, 24 May 1895 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold2/1895/4 - lines 38-42.

[26]To John T. Lloyd, 29 October 1892 - Olive Schreiner: J.T. Lloyd MSC - line 96.

[27]To Betty Molteno, 24 May 1895 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold2/1895/4 – lines 21-22.

[28]To Havelock Ellis, 2 May 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1a-vi – lines 77-80.

At the age of ten, Schreiner wrote in her first notebook: "all great truths have first seen the light, [and] the foundation of all great works have been laid, in solitude and silence; whether it were in the hearts of great cities or the solitude of everlasting mountains".[29] These words seem to anticipate what would become a constant scene in her life to come. In reading First and Scott's biography, one ends up with the impression that the predominant pattern of Schreiner's life was that of isolation and solitude, which she had pictured at the age of ten.

We are tempted to view this pattern as a negative sign in her trajectory and regard her as a tragic lonely figure. However, in people's recollections of and comments on Schreiner, adjectives such as 'vivacious', 'energetic', 'good-humoured', 'magnetic', and 'hypnotic' appear continuously.[30] This, in a way, contradicts her usual depiction as an eternally suffering lonely individual. Although Schreiner's letters abound with complaints about feeling lonely, revealing a somewhat melancholic character, there are also many spirited passages, showing her optimistic, humorous and light-hearted nature, which proves that her ups and downs were just a trait common to any human being responding to specific circumstances.

Like most artists, Schreiner not only needed, but she searched for solitude and silence in order to work. In January 1887, while in Switzerland recovering from an emotional breakdown, she writes to Havelock Ellis: "I long for solitude, absolute solitude, where there shall be no living soul, scarcely an animal".[31] Three years later, in Africa, she would write that although she longed for his companionship, she was "very well and happy here in [her] solitude".[32] Schreiner's sense of loneliness also seemed to be affected by the climate and the landscape. "Solitude with sunshine is heaven; in the dark it is hell",[33] she would say. It seems that under South African skies, her isolation assumed something of a noble positive feeling and being in contact with the 'dear old wild nature' is often described as 'glorious', 'delightful', strengthening.

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[29]Quoted in First and Scott (53).

[30] See letters of Mary Brown (Glimpse 16), Emily Hobhouse (Glimpse 27) in the OSLOP website https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?page=252; see also Vera Buchanan-Gould's account of people's impression on Schreiner (1949: 54, 196).

[31]To Havelock Ellis, 12 January 1887 - Letters/207, lines 5-7.

[32] To Havelock Ellis, 22 November 1890 - HRC/CAT/OS/4b-viii, line 7.

[33]To Havelock Ellis, 30 December 1886 - Letters/206, line 6.

Although Schreiner is usually depicted as a secluded person, she also cherished human contact and sociability. During the time she lived in England in the 1880s, she made acquaintances with many representatives of the political and cultural life of the metropolis, including William Gladstone and his daughter Mary Gladstone Drew, Charles Dilke, Emilia Dilke, Robert Browning, George Moore, Helen Taylor, Oscar Wilde, Keir Hardie, Francis Harris, W.T. Stead, Eleanor Marx, Havellock Ellis, Edward Carpenter and Karl Pearson. ('I Just Express My Views & Leave them to Work' 680). Some of those persons became her lifelong correspondents and friends. After the success of her first novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, she achieved world-wide fame overnight and became a well-known figure in English intellectual circles, attending social meetings and taking part in discussion groups such as the Fellowship of the New Life and the Men and Women's Club. "Seeing people", she wrote to a friend, "is the one thing that gives me rest, and saves me from thinking too much".[34]

Even when she lived in remote places in South Africa, her engagement in political affairs and her prolific correspondence with friends and family members dismisses the idea of her complete and continuous isolation. As Stanley points out, this movement between sociability and solitude and the particular activities deriving from them was consistent with the way Schreiner lived, for "each seems to have been necessary for her at different points in time" (*Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman* 30). An 1890 letter to her British friend W. T. Stead, for example, makes clear Schreiner's determination and need to alternate moments of social interaction and privacy to work:

> I am very grateful to any one who wishes to see me, but I have come out to Africa entirely that I might be alone, & gone through the bitter agony of parting with the human beings I love best in the world in England, that I might come to Africa for several years to work […]

[34]To Betty Molteno, 14 June 1897 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold4/1897/13, lines 23-25.

> When my work is done, I shall rejoice so to welcome all good friends all over the world, but now I think I am right in trying to work.[35]

Again, in 1891 she emphasizes her need for quietness: "I am well. I am working. If only I can have quiet & no visitors I shall get all the work off my brain in a year or a year & a half. Then I can return to the other active sort of work".[36] Around this time, Schreiner felt she had all she needed to "make her cup of happiness full": the karoo and work.[37] A year later, though, her longing for company would be expressed in another letter to Stead: "Life in South Africa is very solitary for a woman. It may be & is good for ones work. But there are times when one longs to rub ones brains up against another 'human's'".[38] By the end of her life, while living alone in England, Schreiner herself concluded that "absolute solitude [was not] healthy for any human creature" for "men need to talk just as they need to eat".[39]

Whether in solitude or socializing, from early childhood to adolescence, through womanhood and maturity, Schreiner struggled not so much to be accepted but to ascertain her-*self* and maintain the integrity of what was considered by many an awkward personality, even if that meant personal suffering and loss. In 1906, in a letter to John X. Merriman, a prominent South African politician, Schreiner defined herself in relation to her unchangeable principles:

> I was a republican, a feeler of the injustice of women's position, an opponent of all hereditary rights to govern others, a believer in the primary moral importance of defending the weak, animals or men, against injustice and oppression when I

[35]To W. T. Stead, between March/December 1890 - T120 (M722): W.T. Stead Papers/6- pages 58-61, lines 19-23/34-36.
[36]To W. T. Stead,4 February 1891- T120 (M722): W.T. Stead Papers/10- pages 72-3, lines 10-12.
[37]To W. T. Stead, 15 March 1891 - T120 (M722): W.T. Stead Papers/12- pages 76-9, lines 29 -39. Karoo is a semi-desert region, typical of South African landscape, where Schreiner lived in her childhood.
[38]To W. T. Stead – March 1892 - T120 (M722): W.T. Stead Papers/54- pages 209-214, lines 73-75.
[39]To S.C. ('Cron') Cronwright-Schreiner, 14 November 1919 - Olive Schreiner: Extracts of Letters to Cronwright-Schreiner MSC 26/2.16/525.

> was ten, just as I am today and must be when I'm eighty unless I sell my soul.[40]

What distinguished Schreiner since an early age was her inquiring nature, her unconventional ideas and her creative imagination. As a baby, her mother described her as "still self-willed and impetuous, needing much patient firmness".[41] As Schreiner grew older, she was constantly seen absorbed in her own thoughts, walking up and down, talking to herself. Soon she was to realize that her peculiar behavior and her assumed freethinking would pose a heavy load on her, setting her apart from people in general and, worse, from people she loved. In a letter to Havelock Ellis, she recalled sadly the change in her older brother Theo's attitude towards her when she 'began to think': "when I was a child I used to worship him, and love him so. When I was ten and began to be a free-thinker he drifted away from me. He hasn't cared for me much since because Christianity makes his whole life".[42]

The price Schreiner had to pay for her intellectual autonomy may be measured by yet another example of intolerance towards her religious views. Erilda Cawood, a friend Schreiner admired and loved, and in whose house she had worked as a governess, explains in a letter that she no longer loved Schreiner, whom she had loved "at times with an almost idolatrous love" because, as a freethinker – "an awful soul-destroying thing" – Schreiner was "God's enemy". Thus, Mrs. Cawood and her children had to choose between Schreiner and God, since they could not love both at the same time.[43] Despite the deep sense of rejection that this letter might have aroused in Schreiner, it did not alter her convictions. Her short humble answer revealed a noble heart and a coherent attitude:

> We cannot help love's going, any more than we can help its coming; and when it is gone, it is better to say so. For myself, I have always liked you not for anything you were to me, but what you were in yourself, and I feel to you as I have

[40]To John X. Merriman, 26 February 1907 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/1907:16, lines 13-18.
[41]Rebecca Schreiner (nee Lyndall) to Catherine ('Katie') Schreiner (later Findlay); late 1857; Essential Schreiner – Glimpses of Olive 8 https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?page=252
[42]To Havelock Ellis, 10 July 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1b-I, lines 44-47.
[43]First and Scott (78).

> felt from the beginning. Therefore, believe me to remain, if not your friend, one who loves you.[44]

Schreiner's freethinking is outstanding because it sprang naturally out of the individual perceptions of an uneducated young girl brought up in closed religious communities, usually isolated geographically and intellectually. Even if she had been raised in England, where the debate between science and religion had inspired a number of older intellectuals towards alternative views and from which she could have drawn some reference, Schreiner would still have been "triply stigmatized: she was an adolescent, she was a girl and she had had almost no formal education" (First and Scott 56). Nevertheless, it was exactly the peculiarities of Schreiner's upbringing and her mystical experiences as a child that fostered her own independent freethinking. Berkman states that, differently from most Victorian materialist and idealist philosophers, who conceived the universe either through the lenses of matter or mind, Schreiner believed in a "cosmic integration of material and spiritual phenomena" (44), insisting that "both objective and subjective modes of understanding, scientific and mystical enquiry, rational and subconscious" (45) methods to achieve truth were legitimate.

The account of Schreiner's moves from place to place during her lifetime is dizzying. Until she left South Africa for England in 1881, at the age of 26, Schreiner had lived in at least 16 different places. In England, the same pattern is repeated. Through her letters, we learn of her constant search for and shifts of dwellings that would best suit her asthmatic condition so she would be able to work. Until 1889, when she returned to South Africa, she also travelled through the European Continent and lived temporarily in Montreux (Switerland), Alassio (Italy) and Mentone (France). Back in her native land, the endless quest for a nice 'little room' continued and, even after getting married in 1894, she would not find a definite place to settle, moving according to health, work and financial demands. In her last seven years in England, from 1913 to 1920, the difficulty to settle down somewhere and travel around the European Continent was aggravated by her German surname and her perceived link with England's enemy in the First World War[45].

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[44]To Erida Cawoood, 29 September 1879- Life/1- lines 12-21.

[45] See letter to Alice Greene, 24 November 1915 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box6/Fold1/July-Dec1915/42

This rootlessness, in material terms, that Schreiner experienced throughout her life seems to mirror her supposed isolation. However, the lack of earthly, material connection does not seem to affect her because, inwardly, in a different level, she felt rooted to a whole greater integrated universe. Ironically, this "sense of cosmic belonging" is, according to Berkman, what set her apart from the "spiritual homelessness of most freethinkers" (65) of her time, consolidating her outsider status, even among her intellectual peers.

First and Scott conclude that, throughout her nomadic life, Schreiner was always an outcast, haunted by a persistent sense of exclusion and marginality and permanently undergoing a real experience of rootlessness within her family, the English, the Afrikaners/Boers, the African natives, and even among her friends. This supposed condition of being always on the margin, of apparently belonging nowhere is what I consider the kernel of Schreiner's complex identity. Writing about people's response to Schreiner's peculiar personality, Emily Hobhouse, a British social reformer and one of Schreiner's acquaintances, accurately touches on this very point, stressing the complexity of her character:

> Since her [Schreiner's] death many criticisms of her life and work have circulated all true in parts but all strangely erring. Few understood the enigmatic character of her genius. Perhaps it was not understandable. English critics have attempted to compress her into the European mould and judge her so, forgetting she was South African born and bred and belonged to the vast spaces and simple life of the veld, and was subject to its strange influences. South Africans, I think try to judge her by their standards alone, forgetting that her mind and spirit had burst all frontiers and racial bonds and embraced the world.[46]

Schreiner's peculiar 'in-between' position, or multiple positions, may be the answer for her permanent marginal status and an essential trait of her identity, or identities, within the colonial context. Stuart Hall's definition of identities as "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" ('Cultural Identity and Diaspora' 102) leads us to think

[46]Olive Schreiner`s Letters Online Project – Glimpses of Olive 27.

about Schreiner's varied positions as an outsider. First, as the daughter of white missionaries who believed that their children should be raised "beyond the reach of the native influence" (First and Scott 44), Schreiner was placed apart from a people she was taught to despise. Also, as a white English settler, she was expected to maintain a certain distance and differentiate herself from the natives and the rustic Afrikaners/Boers, whom she learned to consider as inferior races. As an English South African, her colonial origins distinguished her in the metropolis. As a woman, Schreiner's position somehow matched that of the colonized natives, as both had to fight against their own sense of inner colonization to overcome feelings of victimization. Finally, as a liberal 'returned colonialist South African',[47] who positioned with the natives against racist and imperialist policies, she placed herself apart from most members of the dominant white colonial society. Living in the historical moment when the colonial experience in South Africa and the discourses of othering were at their height, Schreiner was positioned by and positioned herself within that context according to her principles, admitting thus multiple identities. In this regard, her complex colonial English South African status deserves attention.

Schreiner's connection with the South Africa of her days[48] was primarily with its nature, its landscape, while her identification with England was built mainly through her mother's influence. When she left Africa, "without a tear",[49] in 1881, her identification with her native land was so frail that she believed she would never "return to [that]

[47]The term is drawn from a letter to Mary Sauer dated 24 March 1891, in which Schreiner tells she is writing an article entitled "A returned Colonialist view of South Africa". This and other articles were published posthumously as *Thoughts on South Africa*. (Olive Schreiner: Mary Sauer MSC 26/2.11.18).

[48]Primarily, we have to bear in mind that what we call South Africa today was in process of formation in Schreiner's days. She was born when the struggle for possession over the Southern Africa lands was mostly between Boers and British, since African Chiefdoms had been nearly all exterminated by then. Schreiner grew up and lived within a territory divided between Boer Republics (Orange Free State and Transvaal) and British Colonies (Cape and Natal) and some territories still occupied by natives. Therefore, whenever South Africa is mentioned in this thesis, I will be referring to the way it was shaped in that period, which lasted until 1910 when the union of the four settler states took place, and South Africa as we know now was established.

[49]To Havelock Ellis, 16 November 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/3a-x,line 30.

country unless [her] health [gave] way again".[50] After three years in England, Schreiner painfully realizes that the "one fixed unchanging dream"[51] of her life was at risk due to the incompatibility between the English climate and her health conditions. The perspective of leaving England forever and going back to Africa, at that moment, meant death for her and confirmed her idea of "a striving and a striving and an ending in nothing"[52] presented in her novel *The Story of an African Farm*.

However, her view on South Africa would change throughout her stay in England in the 1880s. During this period, despite (or maybe because of) being physically far from the native land, her affective attachment with it intensified. Consequently, her sense of identity became blurred. Berkman claims that she

> begun to view herself as binational and transnational; that is, she felt kinship with certain aspects of English life absent in South Africa and vice-versa. In many ways she came to admire England's intellectual and political openness and to revel in the like-mindedness and sophistication of her radical comrades. She missed this ferment and radicalism when she returned to South Africa. Conversely, while in England she craved the evocative sensual qualities of South Africa's scenery, its cultural and racial diversity, the simple and unpretentious manners of its Boer and African population. Given this ambivalence about both England and South Africa, she eschewed a single national identity and preferred to designate herself a "citizen of the world". (37)

Schreiner's personal letters reveal that her identification with South Africa, primarily more sensuous, gradually becomes more emotional and political, while her ties with England, though also established through affection are mostly intellectual. "Our South African sky", she claims, gives one the "sense of perfect freedom and wild

[50]To Catherine ('Katie') Findlay nee Schreiner, 5 January 1881 - Olive Schreiner: Katie Findlay MSC 26/1.14.20, lines 17-18.
[51]To Havelock Ellis, 16 November 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/3a-x, lines 32.
[52]To Havelock Ellis, 16 November 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/3a-x, lines 34.

exhilaration".[53] Under that sky, in the "wild, barren karoo", walking among the "kopjes"[54], Schreiner feels well, strong and happy. What attracts her in South African nature is "this wild, untamed life with 'the will to live' still strong and untamed in it […] It makes the old strength come back into ones heart".[55] Her intense connection with African nature explains the dream of her life: "to possess a large old fashioned tent waggon of [her] own, and go travelling about".[56] At a certain point she admits: "I am afraid I am not a very civilized person, I like life and work in the velt and the open air so much better than between four walls".[57] No wonder Schreiner would miss such 'wilderness' when she lived in the 'civilized' England, where her spontaneous attitudes, her free laughs and talk, her careless ways of dressing ('loose shapeless clothes', no veil and no gloves)[58] would contrast with middle-class English conventions and highlight her colonial status. In England, Schreiner would long for her "old hill life"[59] and constantly complain about spatial constraints: "It's so hard to think shut up in a room".[60] She was aware that there were beautiful places in England, like Miller's Dale, but "it is the English 'beautiful'", she would say, "not ours".[61] In her poetic description of the South African landscape in *Thoughts on South Africa,* she asserts:

> […] there is nothing measured, small nor petty there. Instead, there is a 'so much' for which the

[53] To Havelock Ellis, 28 March 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1a-iii, lines 16-17.

[54] *Karoo* means the white sandy plains in some parts of South Africa; *kopje* is a small hillock.

[55]To Edward Carpenter, 25 December 1892 - Edward Carpenter 359/59, lines 18-20.

[56]To Minnie or Mimmie Murray nee Parkes, 30 August 1909 - Olive Schreiner: Mimmie Murray 2001.24/38, lines 24-25.

[57]To Minnie or Mimmie Murray nee Parkes, 30 August 1909 - Olive Schreiner: Mimmie Murray 2001.24/38, lines 28-30.

[58] First and Scott, 161.

[59]To Havelock Ellis, 10 July 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1b-I, line 30.

[60]To Havelock Ellis, 16 March 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1a-ii, lines 29-30.

[61]To Havelock Ellis, 5 August 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/2a-iv lines 10-11. In this same letter Schreiner tells about the first and only place in England, Cat & Fiddle, which gave her the same feeling she felt in Africa: "that sense of solitude even though there are many people near you".

> South African yearns when he leaves his native land", [that even]
>
> Amid the arts of Florence and Venice, the civilizations of London and Paris, in crowded drawing-rooms, surrounded by all that wealth, culture and human fellowship can give, there comes back to us the remembrance of still Karoo nights, when we stood alone under the stars, and of white breezy plains, where we rode, and we return. Europe cannot satisfy us. (50)

When she returns to South Africa in 1889, she realises she "could never love the nature in Europe"[62] as she loved the African and she understands "why that English life was such a death to [her], shut out from the sun and mountains and planes that had made all [her] life before [she] went there".[63]

On the other hand, in England, among like-minded people, Schreiner felt completely at home. There, she could be "surrounded with men and women to whom [one could] talk freely on all matters and be understood".[64] What she missed most in South Africa was intellectual companionship, which she tried to fulfil through her personal letters: "Oh Havelock I have tried so to like the people here, you don't know how terrible they are! Fancy a whole nation of lower middle-class people".[65] Her difficulty in identifying intellectually with South Africans lead her to believe that it would be impossible to make a single friend even if she lived there for fifty years.[66] To Edward Carpenter she writes: "There are no people that think or care about social or impersonal subjects in this country, that I've found. It's so funny to find a whole nation of philistines without the other element at all".[67] Besides, the poor intellectual life, the precarious material conditions and the difficulty in accessing cultural items, such as newspapers, magazines and books in South Africa represented a great disadvantage in relation to the metropolis.

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[62]To Havelock Ellis, 13 May 1890 - HRC/CAT/OS/4b-xii, line 61.
[63]To Edward Carpenter, 20 July 1890 - Edward Carpenter 359/50, lines 16-18.
[64]To Betty Molteno, 14 June 1897 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold4/1897/13, lines 22-23.
[65]To Havelock Ellis, 14 May 1890 - HRC/CAT/OS/4b-xiii, lines 16-18.
[66]To Havelock Ellis,15 April 1890 - Letters/396, lines 7-8.
[67]To Edward Carpenter, 23 May 1892 - Edward Carpenter 359/55, lines 16-19.

It is hard for us today to imagine Schreiner, then a worldly famous writer, living as she did for long periods, in remote places completely deprived of any material comfort. In a letter to her brother's wife, Frances Schreiner, she describes one of the many places she lived in: "We have one little room on the outskirts of the town where we live in true fore-trekker style, sleeping, writing and living all in the one room".[68] Nevertheless, she did not seem to mind this lack of material facilities (in this sense, she was a true socialist). What mostly disturbed her were the difficulties in cultural accessibility: "I've not any books at all here, and only see a newspaper once a week,"[69] she writes to Edward Carpenter in April of 1890. Thirty years later, after returning to South Africa for the last time, she would make the same complaint to Betty Molteno: "I have never seen a magazine since I came here"[70] (she had been there for three months). Schreiner considered England her 'home'. In one of the articles in *Thoughts on South Africa*, she expresses her own feelings towards England/Europe explaining how this identification with her mother's land, built upon tradition, might be difficult for an outsider to understand:

> Europe and its life are to us, from our earliest years, the ideal and mysterious, with which we have yet some real and practical tie. No European who was not grown up in the Colony, being born of pure European parentage, can understand the full force of this Mother tradition. Like the odour of an unknown plant or flower it must be experienced to be comprehended. (71)

For Schreiner, European descendants in South Africa still mingled their consciousness of national identity with that of their parents, mainly because of language: "Nowhere on earth's surface are English-speaking men so consciously Anglo-Saxon as in the new lands they have planted, you may forget in England that you are an Englishman; you can never forget it in Africa" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 80). Schreiner repeatedly refers to England as her 'mother land',

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[68]To Frances ('Fan') Schreiner nee Reitz, 14 October 1907 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box3/Fold6/1907/27 lines 25-27.

[69]To Edward Carpenter, 19 April 1890 - Edward Carpenter 359/49, line 39.

[70]To Betty Molteno, 10 November 1920 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box7/Fold4/Mar-Dec1920/35, lines 35-36.

but her definition of ‘a man’s native land’, as a place that “has shaped all his experiences; […] has lain as the background to all his consciousness; […] has modified his sensations and emotions” (27), leaves no room to doubt the importance of South Africa in forming her identity.

Throughout Schreiner’s writing, it is possible to trace her two-fold position in relation to England and South Africa. In *An English South African View of the Situation* (1899), an article written in an attempt to stop the Anglo-Boer War, Schreiner exposes her view as an African-born English, who loves equally both South Africa and England. She assumes her bi-national identity and claims that those in the same ‘unique position’ are imbued with a special function, that of, whatever the cost, “making our voices heard and taking our share in the life of our two nations, at their MOST CRITICAL JUNCTURE” (7).

In that article, Schreiner expresses passionately and in detail the impersonal and personal aspects that bind her to both nations. After exposing her feelings towards South Africa, she questions: “Is it strange that, when the TIME OF STRESS AND DANGER come to our land, we realize what, perhaps, we were but dimly conscious of before, that we are Africans, that for this land and people we could live – if need be we could die? (*An English South African View of the Situation* 10)

In relation to England, besides the intellectual ties, Schreiner refers to the “network of tender bonds” (*An English South African View of the Situation* 12) that is formed in those who lived there temporarily and, certainly recalling her own experience, concludes:

> We are South Africans, but intellectual sympathies, habits, personal emotions, have made us strike deep roots across the sea. And when the thoughts flashes on us, we may not walk the old streets again or press the old hands, pain rises which those only know whose hearts are divided between two lands. We are South Africans, but we are not South Africans only - we are Englishmen also. (15)

Schreiner’s ambivalent feelings do not seem to pose a problem for her, since they are not excluding but complementary. However, this double felling will be somehow tested and remolded, as she acquires more knowledge about both lands. Some months before the outbreak of the English-Boer War (October of 1899), for example, Schreiner

metaphorically explains, in a letter to Alfred Milner, then Governor of the Cape Colony and a prime agitator for the war, her liminal position in relation to South Africa and England in that specific historical moment:

> Can you understand my position - it is that of many others? We are like a man born in a log cabin, who afterwards goes to live in a palace, & all his affections & interest centre in the palace. But one day he finds the ~~the~~ palace is beginning to oppress the cabin, & then he says, "I belong to the cabin." – but he loves the palace still.[71]

Schreiner's views on England and South Africa become more accurate as she experiences life in both places. As a result of that experience, we can notice a change in her positioning regarding the places that formed her identity. In 1892 she writes: "And so it comes to pass that we still call Europe 'home'; though when we go there we may find nothing to bear witness of the fact, but a few broken headstones in a country churchyard – yet the land is ours!" ('The Political Situation' 72). A footnote to this passage, added in 1906, reveals Schreiner's deception with England, certainly due to political matters. It says: "This I wrote in 1892. I could not write it now" (72). Her attachment to England, at that time, was seriously shaken. Her disillusionment with the British policies during and after the Anglo-Boer War leads her to declare her break with the land she so much loved: "England is dead to me".[72] In that same year, 1906, in a letter to her friend Caroline Murray, she displays a mature view of both Europe and South Africa, which hints at her perceptions of the disparity between the metropolis and the colony.

> [South Africa] is not a country in which one can simply live and enjoy life, as in Europe. Europe is like a great splendid drawing room, where you feel as if you were meant to sit down and rest and look at all the pretty things; South Africa always seems to me like a great fine bare kitchen where

[71]Milner Papers, dep. 209, ff. 278-280, lines 23-27.
[72]Quoted from Berkman (114): "Speech (in the form of a letter) on the Boer War at the Somerset East Women's Meeting, 12th October 1900," SCCSS Letters, App. C, 378-85, esp. 380.

> one feels one must work or there is no reason for one's being there.[73]

When Schreiner returns to South Africa in 1889, after living in Europe for nearly nine years, she finds her 'reason for being there'. By getting more and more involved in South African political affairs, she does her share of work by discussing and trying to influence powerful people in relation to important issues such as the Anglo-Boer War, the unification process and the labour and Native questions. Her commitment to her native land grew at the same extent as her disappointment with British conservative and imperialist policy in the Colony. Her immersion in South African politics was to result once again in estranged relations with some members of her family, reiterating her outcast condition. Nevertheless, Schreiner would not give up her determination to strive for what she considered to be right.

Schreiner's choice as a child to stand by the less favoured would accompany her throughout maturity and pave the way for her life-long concerns and struggles: "You know my nature I'm always with the under dog, not with the top dog. When people are very big & successful (or causes either) I don't feel very interest in them. They don't need me".[74]

Her option for the 'underdog' would shape her analysis and criticism on women's economic dependence; her opposition to British imperialism and its reprehensible policies; her perception that capitalism and the exploitation of labour, mainly black people's labour, went hand-in-hand; her support for the Native's cause; her championing of pacifism and conscientious objection. In all of Schreiner's works, either fictional or theoretical, as well as in her personal and public letters, we can trace that old determination of hers and we are assured that the integrity of her character, which she was so conscious of, was kept intact to the end, making her one of the greatest women of her time.

In 1914, in a sorrowful letter to her husband, she wrote: "It is funny why I have always to be out of everything. The day will never come when I can be in the stream. Something in my nature prevents it I suppose".[75] As early as 1884, Schreiner knew that her nature was 'to be

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[73]To Caroline Murray nee Molteno, 30 October 1906 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box3/Fold5/1906/26, lines 31-36.

[74]To Jan Smuts, 1918 - Smuts A1/204/148.

[75]To S.C. Cronwright, November 1914 - Olive Schreiner: Extracts of Letters to Cronwright-Schreiner MSC 26/2.16/516, lines 1-3.

kopach'. As she explained Havelock Ellis, 'kopach' was "a Cape Dutch word which means that when you turn a horse's head to one side of the road its bound to go and see what's on the other".[76] Surely, Schreiner's tendency to look at 'the other side' and see what was absent or unnoticed by others placed her constantly against the stream. This feature, which in her own time might have turned her into an outcast, made all the difference, transforming her into a truly outstanding 'citizen of the world', a woman who surpassed the boundaries of time and space.

Although it is impossible to make a 'true and faithful picture' of Schreiner in its entirety, this chapter was an attempt to show at least a small portion of her complex character. In the next chapter, I will focus on Schreiner's work and her engagement in politics, showing some of her activities both as a creative writer and as a political activist.

[76]To Havelock Ellis, 30 May 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1a-xv, lines 9-12.

CHAPTER III

The Creative Writer and the Political Activist

> In all creative or productive minds there are different phases & I believe they have to pass through these phases, exactly as certain insects have on their way to maturity […]There is the receptive state when like the caterpillar, we eat & eat & eat […] & then it begins to get uneasy & doesn't want to eat any more, tries ~~curl~~ to & can't, & then it curls up & becomes a chrysalis? It seems to be dead, it doesn't move, it doesn't grow, it takes nothing in from outside - & then at last out comes the butterfly.
>
> I have, & I have at last come to understand that at the times when I am growing very rapidly & absorbing I must not expect myself to do creative ~~or artistic~~ work, & that when my mind is working on itself I cannot absorb, largely. The two moods are in antithesis. […] What fills one with astonishment is that you <u>do</u> to some extent carry on both processes at the same time! You <u>do</u> produce original work & absorbe […]
>
> Things that are going to be always caterpillars don't need the rest, but those that have got to make butterflies do. I've tried to explain this caterpillar & phases ~~truth~~ ^view^ to several people, but unproductive minds never understand it. Yet its a great truth.[77]

As seen in the previous chapter, the time Schreiner lived in Europe, mostly in England, brought her closer to her origins. In the months that precede her journey back, she shares with W. T. Stead her plans regarding her future activities: "I am returning to Africa in August. And may then send you a series of letters on the Cape politics & affairs ?given as they appear to a Colonist after ?about 8 years absence.

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[77] To Karl Pearson, July 1886 - Karl Pearson 840/4/3/34-39.

I will perhaps re-visit the Diamond Fields, & go on to the Gold Fields & further north yet, ^if I can manage it^".[78] And again: "When I'm in Africa I want to write some short articles describing it; & the relation of the Dutch & English races &c. Shall I ~~le~~ send them you". [79] As it often occurs to people who spend some years far from their native land, when Schreiner returns to South Africa she starts to look at it with new eyes, regarding its nature, people and problems with "an added interest" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 13). In the 23 years that followed Schreiner's return, her writing and activities would be shaped by this new gaze towards her native land and by her attempts at understanding and intervening in the problems she acknowledged.

In this chapter, I will examine Schreiner's life and work, mainly between 1889 and 1913, a period that marks her return to South Africa and her engagement in the political events that would seal the future of South Africa as a nation, focusing mostly on her campaign against British imperialist policies and her ideas concerning the Native Question. I will try to trace Schreiner's moves from 'abstract thought' to 'objective life', drawing on her writing (both her fictional and theoretical texts, as well as her personal letters) and her political activities. In this sense, I will cross the boundaries of the public and private spheres, moving around the events that marked Schreiner's lifetime and her written production to understand their connection and the way Schreiner strove to bridge them.

Soon after returning to South Africa in October 1889, Schreiner underwent a major shift in her manner of living, which, according to Stanley, "turned [her] away from subjectivity and towards objectivity and the external world" (Stanley, 'A Returned South African' 21). Such a change was to be perceptible not only in her epistolary and in her writing practices in general, but also in her practical attitudes and in "her inter-personal and her political relationships", throughout the rest of her life[80] (22). In a letter to Havelock Ellis from the 25 April 1890,

[78] To W. T. Stead, between January and March 1889 - T120 (M722): W.T. Stead Papers/1- pages 39-41.

[79] To W. T. Stead, between June and August 1889 - T120 (M722): W.T. Stead Papers/3- pages 45-6.

[80]Stanley ('A Returned South African') points as a rhetorical evidence of this changing attitude in Schreiner's writing the use of "various bracketing devices", such as 'the distanced third person singular 'one'", and phrases such as "But great is silence", to hint at some personal important event going on in her life which she preferred not to comment.

Schreiner enlightens this move in her life. Her explanation echoes a letter written four years before to Karl Pearson[81] (see epigraph), in which she symbolically describes the way that creative and productive minds, like hers, worked. I believe that in leaving England, Schreiner left behind a receptive 'caterpillar and chrysalis phase' of absorption into abstract thought, to start a new active and objective 'butterfly' stage in South Africa.

> It is so strange after these years of physical agony to be free again. But some how just now I feel more fit for practical work travelling, climbing mountains &c I seem to drink in the external world through every little pore. Never before, never when I was a child, have I been able to live such an objective life, a life in which I feel not the least wish to give out to express, seem conscious of nothing but an alpowerful desire to drink in through my senses. I look & look at the skies & the bushes & the men & the material things as if I was just new born, & was learning to know them. I suppose it is after these long, long years buried in abstract thought, in a way which even you have not understood, that I turn with such a keen kind of ~~refle~~ relish to the external world. It's no use fighting against it whether it be good & great or not. I must be as I am. Oh how my eyes love to look at the world & feed on it. I have the same kind of feeling to objective things that a person has to ^solid^ food who has been ill for months & begins to eat again, it is something quite different from ordinary hunger. My nature craves it…[82]

The eagerness to look at 'the external world' and learn from 'objective things' that Schreiner felt at that moment was first employed in the production of a series of articles originally entitled Stray Thoughts

[81] The statistician, polymath intellectual and founder of the Men and Women's Club whom Schreiner supposedly fell in love with by the mid 1880's.

[82] Letter to Havelock Ellis from 25/04/1890 – ref. HRC/UNCAT/OS-135.

on South Africa by a Returned South African.[83] These essays, mostly written between 1890-1893 (Stanley, 'A Returned South African' 26), appeared primarily in various international journals and magazines, being published in book form only posthumously, in 1923, as *Thoughts on South Africa.*[84] In the first chapter of the book, Schreiner explains that a certain "distance is essential for a keen, salient survey" (28) in order to understand and judge one's native land since 'habit and custom' may blind one to do so. On the other hand, she also believes that one can only achieve a 'sympathetic subjective knowledge' of a land when "born in it, or brought into long-continued, close, personal contact with it" (29). She claims to possess this 'two-fold position' of being both 'an outsider and a lover' of South Africa. This "liminal social position" (Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman* 66) confers her the authority to write so consciously and comprehensively about her native land.

In the introduction of *Thoughts on South Africa*, she announces that "the little book" is not "a history, a homily nor a political brochure", but "simply what one South African at the end of the nineteenth century *thought*, and *felt* with regard to his native land […] its people, its problems and its scenery" (14, emphasis added). She claims: "[I]t is nothing more than this; but it is also nothing less" (14). For Schreiner, the fact of being "a purely personal document" (14) does not diminish the value and interest of the book. On the contrary, its merit lies exactly in the sincerity and autonomy of its author's impressions, though they may not always be correct. This appreciation of the personal view concerning a public subject brings forth a reflexion on the consistence of subjective texts as historical documents. She was aware that her *Thoughts on South Africa* (and by extension her feelings) was different from Dr.Theal's (a famous historian of her time) *History of South*

[83]In March 1991, Schreiner refers to these articles as "A returned Colonialist view of South Africa" in a letter to her friend Mary. Olive Schreiner: Mary Sauer MSC 26/2.11.18.

[84]The first essay was published in the *Fortnightly Review*,in 1891, as stated in the OSLP on a note in a letter of OS to Emilia Dilkeform 17 March 1891. Letter ref.Emilia Dilke Add. 43908, f.189. They also appeared in the *Nineteenth Century*, *Cosmopolis*, *The Cosmopolitan* and Review of Reviews from 1891 to 1900. Difficulties related to the South African War (1899-1902), a dispute with an American publisher and Schreiner's ill-health prevented an intended publication in book form in 1896.

Africa; nonetheless, it was equally important and valuable.[85] Relatedly, Schreiner's personal letters, especially those addressed to South African politicians, with comments, analysis and often with pertinent advice on issues of public interest, are an inexhaustible source of material for understanding the historical context and events of colonial South Africa. They are

> […] an unparalleled resource for investigating colonialism under transition, feminism and socialism, prostitution, marriage, changing understandings of 'race' and capital, imperialism in southern Africa, the South African War, women's franchise campaigns, 'race' and labour issues, international feminist networks, pacifism and war economies, political and economic change in South Africa post WW1, and much more".[86]

In this regard, Schreiner's impressions, opinions and feelings towards a collective subject through a personal means promote the debate about the blurred boundaries between public and private matters and raise the question about the validity of some types of personal texts – such as letters, diaries and testimonies – as historical documents.

For Stanley ('A Returned South African'), "public and private interpenetrated" in Schreiner's letters and essays. The "letter-likeness" of many of Schreiner's political essays, compared to the "non letter-likeness of her actual letters" is a feature, emphasised by Stanley, which disrupts the conventional view of public and private writing. For example, Schreiner usually personalizes her essays by inserting biographical information, while her personal letters present argumentative analysis and exposition of ideas commonly found in theoretical texts. In 're-reading' Schreiner's letters to Karl Pearson, Dampier states that "her letters in fact trouble any simple binary notions

[85]In 1892, her editor considers the possibility of her writing a book about South Africa History to be part of a series of stories of the Nations. On that occasion, she suggests him to contact "Mr Theal, the great authority on South Africa History", since she had "too a large book of [her] own about South Africa in *quite another style* to bring out"**.** (Emphasis added – Letter to T. Fisher Unwin from 25 September 1892 -HRC/OliveSchreinerUncatLetters/OS-TFisherUnwin/19.

[86]https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?page=295.

of public and private" (45). Thus the need of recognising the 'intertwining of their public and private aspects' besides considering them in their entirety (not only through selective extracts) and as part of a wider corpus of extant letters, in order to have a more complex interpretation of them. Adding to this, Stanley emphasizes that Schreiner's letters should not be viewed separately from the 'different kinds of activities she engaged', as merely a commentary on or description of them, but rather as a constituent part of her whole life ('A Returned South African' 42). Their performative character, i.e., something as "part of social action and 'do things' (Stanley and Dampier, '*I Trust That Our Brief Acquaintance May Ripen into Sincere Friendship'* 6), confers them an extra significance as historical documents. Therefore, when dealing with Schreiner's letters, we have to take all that into consideration, as well as the cultural, historical and political context in which they were written.

Schreiner was appalled at the idea of having her life written down by a biographer. She always asked her correspondents to burn her letters and sometimes she would even ask them to send her letters back, so she herself could destroy them. According to Stanley ('A Returned South African' 20), by the time she died, around 20,000 letters were probably extant and maybe about 15,000 were destroyed by 'Schreiner's estranged husband', Samuel (Cron) Cronwright-Schreiner, after completing his wife's biography, *The Life of Olive Schreiner* (1924) and his collection of *The Letters of Olive Schreiner* (1924). Apart from Cronwright's, there are two other published collections of Schreiner's letters: Richard Rive's *Olive Schreiner's Letters* (1987) and Claire Draznin's *My Other Self: The Letters of Olive Schreiner and Havelock Ellis 1884-1920* (1992). Besides presenting "seriously deficient version, many in a drastically shortened or bowdlerized form, containing multiple inaccuracies", Stanley asserts, "only about 800-900 of the approximately 5000 now extant letters are available in published form in these collections" ('A Returned South African' 8). Therefore, in this doctoral research, I decided to resort exclusively to The Olive Schreiner Letters Online,[87] an internet site where nearly 5,000 extant letters are available just as Schreiner wrote them, and thus free from editing interference.

[87] https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?page=295

If, on one hand, the publication of Schreiner's extant letters might have destroyed "the sacredness of life",[88] as she so much feared, on the other, it is only through them that we now can become acquainted with her inmost thoughts on public matters and confirm her outstanding, though unexplored, participation in the history of South Africa. Ironically, it was perhaps this 'horrible habit', in Schreiner's view, of publishing the letters of a dead person that kept, to some extent, the sacredness of her own life, for it allowed readers a hundred years later to know her better and understand her ideas more thoroughly than the reading of her fictional and theoretical work alone would permit. Moreover, Schreiner's published letters fosters a connection, which she herself felt in relation to ancient artists, linking not only the artist/author, but mainly the person Schreiner, with her readers of future generations, who may feel, as I have, that they were personally addressed.

According to Berkman, one of the issues Schreiner had to confront in her life long process of self-definition was to find a "viable career that could combine her ambitions to write fiction and to heal political and social woes" (10). As early as 1884, Schreiner had 'made up her mind': "scribbling will be my only work in life".[89] Inwardly she expected that her stories would somehow raise people's awareness for social maladies and hopefully provoke some kind of social reform. At times, though, Schreiner did not seem fully convinced that her work as a creative writer alone would suffice to reach people's minds to yield any change. Throughout her life, she would wonder about the effects of her writing on people. Her uncertainties regarding her intellectual production, in a way, reflected her urge to connect them with practical activities.

During the years she lived in England in the 1880's, her acquaintance with many British intellectuals led Schreiner to engage in several social and political works, mostly related to the Woman's Question, her main concern at that time. Her involvement with groups such as the Progressive Association, the Fellowship of the New Life and

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[88] Letter to Mary Sauer [Levine Collection - Sauer/4] - "I'm always so afraid if I died people might get hold of my letters & publish them! I see If I've destroyed them myself no one can. I think that habit of publishing all ones letters when one is dead so horrible because it destroys all the sacredness of life" https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?page=327. In this letter to Mary Sauer from 1891 Schreiner asks her friend to return some letters she had sent, if they still existed, so she herself could destroy them.

[89] To Havelock Ellis, 2 May 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1a-vi, lines 29-30.

especially the Men and Women's Club motivated her to take a more practical stand. In a letter to Ellis, she mentions her liking of the 'New Life', "specially the clause on the necessity of combining physical and mental labour".[90] In order to gather data for a survey on women and sexuality, for instance, Schreiner interviewed prostitutes, sometimes assisting them even financially (Berkman 35). A strong defender of women's economic independence and female suffrage, she also researched on anthropology, biology and history to complement her studies and strengthen her arguments. As an enthusiastic supporter of the labour movements she followed the "triumphs of British workers, most notably the historic dock strike in London's East End" (Berkman 35) in the late 1880s, though more as an observer than as a militant.

By the late 1880's, Schreiner's divide between her role as a creative writer and as a political activist seems to have reached a summit, and is expressed in her ambivalent remarks to Havelock Ellis. At first, she defends the man of the study over the man of deeds defining his reclusion as both his 'weakness and his strength'. But after some time she accuses Ellis's absolute absence of enthusiasm for action saying: "[i]n time of revolution & war you will never be found, ~~you~~ will never be in the market place".[91] Apparently, she agrees with Ellis's and Pearson's opinion that she is "fool and wicked" for leaving her work to "rush out wildly" and "fight the enemies of Freedom" in Trafalgar Square or to "run about after prostitutes." However, she finally seems to realize the value of both her practical and intellectual nature: "I know that there is a little to be said in favour of the practical side of my nature, but ~~but~~ side of my nature that ^is like yours is the most^^valuable, & the one with which my work is done .[92] We conclude from her own words that she could not detach her praxis from her writing, and consequently, what seemed incompatible at first sight was, in fact, complementary.

Later on, she understands that there must be a balance between action and mental work: "[…] when I sit here at night writing I serve the prostitute ^much^ more than when I took her in from the streets & laid her in my bed, & sat up all night watching her sunken face in terror &

[90]To Havelock Ellis, 2 May 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1a-vi.
[91]To Havelock Ellis, 25 January 1888 - HRC/CAT/OS/4a-viii HRC/OS/FRAGHRC/CAT/OS/NFPcc lines 30-31
[92]To Havelock Ellis, 25 January 1888 -HRC/CAT/OS/4a-viii HRC/OS/FRAGHRC/CAT/OS/NFPcc lines 42-48. In fact, her words are somehow confusing and we are not sure whether she is really praising or ironically condemning Ellis lethargic nature.

agony."[93] This blending of practical and intellectual work is visible in Schreiner's written production and activities during the 1890s, when she rediscovers South Africa and gets involved in its intense and decisive political scenario. The physical detachment she had experienced for nearly ten years, when living in Europe, engenders an emotional and political identification with her native land that would reveal itself in her attitudes as 'a returned South African'. She becomes more interested in South African histories and affairs and makes plans to travel to the interior of the country.[94]

In that period, besides her prolific letter writing to friends and public figures dealing from private domestic problems to public national issues, Schreiner produces some creative writing, mostly short stories collected in *Dreams* (1890) and *Dream Life and Real Life* (1893), and a number of theoretical works around South African matters, ranging from social theory to political analysis. These include the articles composing her *Thoughts on South Africa*; the tract on *The Political Situation* (1896), written jointly with her husband; *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), an allegorical novella mixing facts and fiction. Around the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), Schreiner publishes the anti-war pamphlet *An English South African's View of the Situation* (1899).

While living temporarily under martial law, she writes anti-war public letters to be read at peace congresses and women's protest meetings. During this period, she redirects her concerns to the woman's question and to her creative writing, working on her novel *From Man to Man* and on her feminist theoretical work *Woman and Labour*. After the war, her interest and involvement with South African politics returns

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[93]Letter to Karl Pearson, 11 November 1890 - Karl Pearson 840/4/5/10-16 - University College London Library, Special Collections, UCL, London.

[94]In March 1890, she writes to HavellockEllis: "Next year I am going up in the interior if I don't go to Europe; & which is very doubtful. I am slowly maturing my plans, getting letters of introduction to travellerstraider& others…" (HRC/CAT/OS-4b-xivHRC/CAT/OS-4b-xvii). That same year in July she mentions to W.T.Stead: "I hope soon after Xmas to start on my journey to Lake ?N'garmi& the Zambesi, & am trying to get all my work done first" (T120 (M722): W.T. Stead Papers/8- pages 66-9 & 227). And to Edward Carpenter: "…I am still working up steadily towards my trip to the interior, gaining exact information as to what to take" (Edward Carpenter 359/50). In November 1890, she writes Karl Pearson: "…the middle of next year I shall be starting to spend some years in the interior of Africa. I am learning Kaffir which is the key-language, so that I shall be able to study the people" (Karl Pearson 840/4/5/10-16).

and her focus becomes the unification process of the four settler colonies and its implied consequences. Schreiner then writes "Closer Union"[95] (1909) in an attempt to convince the delegates of the National Convention, in charge of the draft of the new constitution, of the dangers of uniting South Africa under a centralized government rather than a Federative system.

Developing her theoretical ideas in a cross-genre way, i.e., through her novels, allegories, political essays, theoretical treatises and through her letter writing, Schreiner's "was not a conventional academic voice even when writing most theoretically" (Stanley, Dampier and Salter, *Olive Schreiner Globalising Social Inquiry* 658). According to Stanley, Dampier and Salter, the main concerns of Schreiner's social theory produced between the late 1880's and 1913 was the imperialist phase of capitalism. She concentrated on

> […] the ways in which local/global were being reconfigured in the changing relationship between colony and imperial metropolis; the savagery of capitalism's imperialist incarnation in extending its reach; the remaking of the city as an international site of financial, communication, labour and other flows; and the imperial presence as a supra-power across different widely-separated colonial territories. (*Olive Schreiner Globalising Social Inquiry* 657)

For Liz Stanley, Schreiner's 'South African writings', mostly produced in this period, are outstanding because she wrote them "as direct political interventions in a society that excluded women from its

[95]*Closer Union* is a public letter written in October 1908 in reply to some questions posed by the editor of the journal *Transvaal Leader*. In London it appeared in 1909 and the publisher's note alerts that: "The opinion of a South African authority of such high repute as Olive Schreiner cannot fail to be of interest at this time, and it will be seen that on several capital matters (the Native Question, Federation, the Seat of Government, to mention the principal) her views differ from the draft Constitution. And wise as that is, and widely as it has been praised, there is still time and room for beneficial alteration in the respects mentioned. The fate of the native question alone involves the fate of South Africa, possibly the fate of the British Empire; and it is before all things imperative that the rights and liberties of the native shall be fully safeguarded" . http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/view?docId=VAB7036

political life" (*Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman* 67). Stanley also emphasizes the prophetic feature of Schreiner's analysis stressing the accuracy of her predictions regarding economic, racial and social matters for the future of South Africa. Likewise, Anne McClintock considers Schreiner's special distinction in developing an 'extraordinary foresight of African politics' in her texts. Yet, she claims, "despite the brilliance of her political essays, they remain by far the most neglected aspect of all her writing – a neglect stemming no doubt from the very ethnocentrism and racism she attempted to challenge" (293).

Concerning *Thoughts on South Africa*, for example, although the overall tone is a clear defence of the Boers, five from eight chapters are dedicated to them, the thread that connects the essays concerns "race and Schreiner's conception of it as something entirely plastic and socially constructed" (Stanley, 'A Returned South African' 23). In those essays, Schreiner's deep interest for the diversity of South African population is evident and so is her concern with what she considered the main problem of South Africa: how to achieve unity within difference. Or, as she puts it: "How, from our political states and our discordant races, can a great, healthy, united, organized nation be formed?"[96] (*Thoughts on South Africa* 62). In the introduction to the first intended publication, written in 1901, she regrets not being able, due to her bad health, to carry out her plans and write in detail what she thought and felt about "our English folk in Africa, and above all of our Natives and their problems and difficulties" (14). A chapter on "The Englishman", apparently never revised and written in a hurry, according to her husband's foreword, was added to the 1923 edition. Unfortunately, the proposed chapter on the Native Races was never written. However, in the chapter 'The Problem of Slavery', Schreiner does a quite good ethnographic work describing in detail the native peoples that inhabited South Africa before the white men arrived. Besides, she examines thoroughly the negative results of the mixture of races under degrading

[96](Schreiner 1923, p.62). We have to bear in mind that by the time Schreiner wrote this article, in the early 1890's, South Africa was composed of two Afrikaner republics – the South African Republic and the Orange Free State (later renamed as Transvaal and Orange River Colony) – and the two British Colonies of Cape and Natal. Thus, it was far from the 'united' nation it was supposed to become with the Union of these four settler states in 1910.

conditions, such as slavery and sexual exploitation by white men over black women.[97]

Schreiner's genuine interest for the natives is already expressed in 1892, in a letter to her editor Fisher T. Unwin, commenting that a volume on the native races of South Africa would be most interesting if added to his intended series on stories of the Nations.[98] Although Schreiner did not leave one massive piece of work concerning exclusively the native races, we can trace her thoughts and positioning on this matter throughout her intellectual work and her practical activities. In fact, Schreiner realises soon after her return: "the sad side of our life in Africa is the native question".[99] Throughout her life, that opinion will be strengthened and she will try to convince her readers and correspondents of the necessity to deal with it in a wise and just manner.

By collecting some examples of Schreiner's views and position on race matters in her writings (novels, allegories, articles, public and private letters), we can understand how she gradually underwent a

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[97]This issue was one of Schreiner's main concerns. In 1911, she gets involved in the General Missionary Commission's investigation into the so-called 'black peril', in which white women were allegedly under threat from violent sexual assaults by black males. Schreiner's feeling towards this topic is expressed in a letter to the missionary James Henderson: "My feeling of course is that peril which has long over shadowed this country, is one which exists for all dark skinned women at the hands of white men." (26 December 1911- General Missionary Commission, Folder 25: Letters to Mr. J. Henderson MS 14, 847/2 - lines 14-16)

[98]HRC/Olive Schreiner Uncat Letters/OS - TFisherUnwin/19. On that occasion, she suggests the name of Mr Theal, "without doubt the ablest and best authority on South African matters", to write the volume. Fifteen years later her opinion about him would change radically, as the following excerpt from a letter to her husband from October 1907 shows:

"I've read the volumes of ~~Thealt~~ ^Theall^ since I came here. How utterly he has changed this edition since he got in tow with Rhodes& the Bond! He has the face to say people may wonder at the changes he has made but he has entirely changed his opinion! A funny thing for a man to do who has been making a study of South African history all his life! He used to be a great friend of the native; now he even attempts to defend slavery. It is very sickening. There is nothing I think a man might more wisely pray every night than that he may never change & modify his views ?for policy & not in the search for truth". Schreiner, Olive: Extracts of Letters to Cronwright-Schreiner MSC 26/2.16/421

[99]To Edward Carpenter, 25 December 1892 - Edward Carpenter 359/59, line 51-52

process of awareness and change in her feelings and attitudes towards the 'dark races' and their shameful situation. Schreiner's curiosity for the original Africans is attested by Mrs. Ethel Hermon, whose recollections remind the fifteen-year-old author's authentic interest for the kaffir stories and her sympathy for the natives "whom she appeared to understand well" (Buchanan-Gould 196).

An interesting episode in Schreiner's private life, which reveals, even if in a superficial way, her quotidian relation with members of the native races, is her temporary 'adoption' of a young Kaffir boy. On the 10th of June 1904, she comments in her letters to her friend Alice Greene and her sister-in-law Frances Schreiner about her "little Kaffir boy" being 'sweet', 'very good' and 'quite a baby', that is, much younger than 13, as she had been informed. A week later, she writes Edward Carpenter and we learn more about the story of the boy and her growing sympathy for him:

> My little Kaffir boy is so nice. He was sentenced for four years for killing a goat. He has served two in the Reformatory & I have got him for two. He is only a baby, & so sweet & dear. I am feeding him up: he is awfully thin. I am so fond of Kaffirs, there's a kind of natural affinity between me & them.[100]

She continues along the year 1904, referring to her 'little Kaffir boy' always in an affectionate tone. The familiarity with this boy made Schreiner sensible to his qualities and confirmed her idea that knowledge is the key to achieve truth and heal most social wounds such as prejudice, as her words to Betty Molteno suggest: "My little Kaffir remains a good & sweet as ever; he has a strange complex little nature. Curiously sensitive. The more I know Kaffirs the less I am able to understand where their inferiority comes in".[101] Her enhanced knowledge confirms her assumptions about the constructed inferiority of the Kaffirs and simultaneously provokes a rethinking in some cultural concepts, such as beauty. As a result, her assessment of the boy's appearance changes and she starts seeing him with her new internal

[100]To Edward Carpenter, June 1904 – Olive Schreiner: Edward Carpenter SMD 30/32/c, lines 27-31.
[101]To Betty Molteno, 24 Nov. 1904 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box3/Fold3/1904/54, lines 57-60

eyes: “My little Kaffir boy gets sweeter & sweeter. To me he’s beginning to get quite beautiful though I know he is n’t really beautiful”.[102] In later correspondence, she refers to the boy by his name, Gobalie, and it is clear by her comments that, together with her meerkats and dog, the boy becomes part of her world in that period of her life: “the meerkats & Gobalie & I make our own little world, & I keep a nice fire & we sit in front of it. This new little room is so nice & warm & I am so happy in it”.[103]

In 1907, she tries to find a position for the boy, now a teenager, in the farm of a friend’s (Caroline Murray) brother. She praises him as ‘the cleverest & quickest boy at working’ she had ever seen, but she could do nothing for him should he get ‘dagger and smoke’. She believes that “with a kind strong master, if he were not allowed to get dagger he might yet do well”.[104] Besides hinting at the limitations of a ‘female master’ within a gendered society (the boy was ‘not afraid of a woman’), Schreiner’s concern with the future of her Kaffir boy also unveils the unfortunate fate of most young natives in colonial South Africa. Doomed to acquire the white man’s vices (smoking and alcohol) and exposed to violent situations, many of them ended up dead at an early age.

Schreiner’s ‘natural affinity’ or empathy with the ‘dark races’ is also shown in a letter to her sister Ettie, in which she regrets the death of a “dear old half daft nigger”. After returning from a long visit to Europe/England in 1897, she found out that the man who “was always so good & did little jobs for [them], & slept among the rocks on the Koppje behind the house, & never did any harm to anyone” had died in prison. The man’s probable innocence aroused in Schreiner that old feeling of disgust before injustice and she deplored: “The world is so terrible, the people who commit the great & awful crimes are rich &

[102] To Alice Greene, 14 Out. 1904 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box3/Fold3/1904/50, lines 30-32

[103] To Betty Molteno, 1 July 1905 -Olive Schreiner BC16/Box3/Fold4/1905/2, lines 27-29. By this time, Schreiner wass living in Hanover and spent some periods alone while her husband travelled on work.

[104] To Caroline Murray, 9 Dec 1907 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box3/Fold6/1907/33 (Lines 29-30). Through the date we learn that the boy stayed with Schreiner longer than the intended period of two years.

honoured & the poor & weak crushed. You don't know all that little hole of his in the ground means to me".[105]

Apart from her personal involvement with members of the 'dark races', revealed in her interaction not only with domestic servants but also with intellectual black leaders,[106] Schreiner's unrest about the future of native races in South Africa is expressed in her personal letters from an earlier period. By the end of 1892, she shares with Edward Carpenter her indignation about the limited perspective for black people in the white dominant South African/Cape society:

> [...] Edward, you don't know how bad things are in this land; we flog our niggers to death, & wealth as the only possible end & aim in life, is more recognized here than, I think, in any country in the world. I don't mean that there aren't classes who don't feel so in every country, but then there are other classes, here there are not. It's funny to be in a land which is all philistines! Good, nice, respectable philistines, but still nothing else. There are other individuals, but no other class. There are money making whites, & down-trodden blacks, & nothing between. And things will have to be so much worse here before they can be better […][107]

Schreiner's acknowledgement of two exclusive classes, the 'money-making whites' and 'the down-trodden blacks', will evolve to a formulation of the perverse policies that bind one another. As Albert Memmi does much later, Schreiner already realizes the economic element that creates a wicked interdependence between colonizer and colonized, and shrewdly sees what the latter have become to the former.

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[105]To Henrietta ('Ettie') Schreiner, September 1897 - Schreiner-Hemming Family BC 1080 A1.7/184 (lines 9-12)

[106]Though there is little extant proof of her relationships with black leaders, such as Salomon Plaatje, John TengoJabavu, Abdullah Abdurahman and Mohandas Gandhi, there is evidence that she had much contact with them. For full account of that, see Stanley & Dampier's article '*I Trust That Our Brief Acquaintance May Ripen into Sincere Friendship'*.

[107]To Edward Carpenter, 23 November 1892 - Edward Carpenter 359/58**, l**ines 8-17.

In *Closer Union* (1909),[108]she claims that the Bantus, the largest portion of the dark native population, "are the makers of our wealth, the great basic rock on which our state is founded – our vast labouring class". Therefore, she argues:

> not only can we not exterminate him—but, we cannot even transport him, because we want him! We desire him (…). We want more and always more of him – to labour in our mines, to build our railways, to work in our fields, to perform our domestic labours, and to buy our goods. (43-44)

What Schreiner perceives in her analysis, Memmi concludes nearly fifty years later: "Colonization is, above all, economic and political exploitation. If the colonized is eliminated, the colony becomes a country like any other, and who then will be exploited? Along with the colonized, colonization would disappear, and so would the colonizer" (193)

Schreiner saw the intrinsic connection between class and race issues, implied in the Labour and the Native Questions, very early. Already in 1895, in her considerations in *The Political Situation* (1896), she defines the Native Question as "[…] being indeed only the Labour Question of Europe complicated by a difference of race and colour between the employing and propertied, and the employed and poorer classes" (109). She then recognizes two distinct attitudes in relation to the treatment of the Native Labouring Class,

> […] one held by the Retrogressive Party in this country regards the Native as only to be tolerated in consideration of the amount of manual labour which can be extracted from him; and desires to obtain the largest amount of labour at the cheapest rate possible; and rigidly resists all endeavours to put him on an equality with the white man in the eye of the law. The other attitude, which I hold must inevitably be that of every truly progressive individual in this country, is that which regards

[108]In this text, she defends the federative system as the best option for unifying the four settler colonies of South Africa and points the Native Question, one of the matters affecting Union, as 'the root question in SA ', claiming that "as is our wisdom in dealing with it, so will be our future " (42).

> the Native, though an alien in race and colour and differing fundamentally from ourselves in many respects, yet as an individual to whom we are under certain obligations: it forces on us the conviction that our superior intelligence and culture render it obligatory upon us to consider his welfare; and to carry out such measures, not as shall make him merely more useful to ourselves, but such as shall tend also to raise him in the scale of existence, and bind him to ourselves in a kindlier fellowship. (109-111)

Paula M. Krebs argues in her article "Olive Schreiner's Racialization of South Africa" (1997) that in considering Africans only as a political category, as 'the working class of the new South Africa', Schreiner ends up excluding them from the concept of nation: "a nation of one white race in a land of many African races" (427). However, for Schreiner the concepts of nation and land are inseparable. For her, land is what united the diverse peoples of South Africa, what defined their national identity. Krebs asserts that in her attempt at shaping a South African cultural identity, Schreiner uses the discourses of evolution and socialism in an incompatible way to account for the concept of race, and in doing so, she "is incapable of envisioning a truly multi-racial or non-racial future for South Africa" (428). In Krebs's view, Schreiner resorts to social Darwinism to account for the Boers, who, mingled with Britons, would eventually be absorbed to form a 'strong white breed' and thus be erased as a 'national and cultural identity' (434). As for the Africans, Krebs claims that Schreiner retains their importance as the working force for the future of the nation without actually incorporating them. However, Krebs herself provides the explanation for Schreiner's strategy: "[She] pulls out the evolutionary references only where necessary to deflect opposition to the political point" (436).

Schreiner knew she had to appeal "to the lowest motives of self-interest" (*Closer Union* 51) in her defence of the natives; thus she stresses both their economic importance and the whites' sense of safety. In *Closer Union*, Schreiner argues that if the Africans were reduced to a 'mere engine of labour', deprived of any civil and political rights, then the whites would have a serious reason to fear for the future of South Africa. She then asks: "Are we to spend all our national existence with a large, dark shadow looming always in the background – a shadow-which-we-fear?" (51).

Schreiner claims that only if the population of South Africa remained united and under healthy and fair conditions of life, they could feel safe and fear no foreign foe. Therefore, she demands: "As long as nine-tenths of our community have no permanent stake in the land, and no right or share in the government, can we ever feel safe? Can we ever know peace?" (*Closer Union* 52). Besides, she calls attention to 'a far more subtle and inevitable form of evil', the 'Nemesis effect', which "should follow the subjection and use, purely for purposes of their own, of any race by another which lives among them" (53). In a prophetic tone, she concludes: "[I]n the end, the subjected people write their features on the face of the conquerors" (53). Although in her writings she does not address more emphatically black people's resistance against white oppression, some years later she acknowledges with satisfaction to a friend that the natives "are slowly awakening".[109] In a certain sense, Schreiner predicts the natural liberation movements that, in the not so far future, would characterize the decolonization process:

> A class or a sex or race refused in a so-called democratic state under 20th century conditions the right to take its share in in [sic] the government of the state will ultimately be driven the lamentable use of force, and answer repression with resistance which must shake society to its foundations.[110]

Schreiner was so deeply immersed in the colonial drama, that she could see then what we perhaps are incapable of seeing now, that, apart from their economic value, at that stage, there was little or no 'social salvation' for the colonized. As Memmi puts it, "[j]ust as the colonized would not be saved from his condition by religious assimilation, he would not be permitted to rise above his social status to join the colonizer group" (117). Because she knew that the natives were condemned to be just the working class within the framework of colonization, Schreiner could only assuage their sentence seeing them as

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[109]To Edward Carpenter, 24 April 1912 - Olive Schreiner: Edward Carpenter SMD 30/32/l, lines 32-34"Things are going very badly in our political world; the one little bit of brightness I see is that the natives are slowly awakening. But the white men are determined on a great native war."

[110]To John X. Merriman, 20 July 1913 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/1913:134, lines 22-26.

a political category, and as such, advocate their civil and political rights as a possible way to foster some social equality within the groups that would form the future nation.

In Schreiner's view, the population of South Africa consisted of the two varieties of the white race, the vast dark native population composed of Bantus, plus "a few expiring yellow varieties of African races, and a small but important number of half-castes", as well as a minor portion of Asiatics. She believed that the 'South African nation of the future' would be built "out of [that] great heterogeneous mass of humans" (*Closer Union* 42-43). However, she insisted, "the main weight of duty of social reconstruction" rested on "the small and for the moment the absolutely dominant white aristocracy" (48). Schreiner envisioned two distinct paths regarding the native question:

> If by entering on a long and difficult course of strictly just and humane treatment, as between man and man, we can bind our dark races to us through their sense of justice and gratitude; if we, as a dominant class, realise that the true wealth of a nation is the health, happiness, intelligence, and content of every man and woman born within its borders; if we do not fail to realise that the true crown of honour on the head of a dominant class is that it leads and teaches, not uses and crushes; if, as the years pass, we can point with pride to our native peoples as the most enlightened and the most free, the most devoted to the welfare of its native land of all African races; if our labouring class can in the end be made to compare favourably with that of all other countries; and if for the men of genius or capacity who are born among them there be left open a free path, to take their share in the higher duties of life and citizenship, their talents expended for the welfare of the community and not suppressed to become its subterraneous and disruptive forces; if we can make our State as dear to them, as the matrix in which they find shelter for healthy life and development, as it is to us; then I think the future of South Africa promises greatness and strength.

Her prediction of the political, social and racial drama that would follow if the wrong path was taken by the ruling class is deplored as something too dreadful to be witnessed:

> But if we fail in this?—If, blinded by the gain of the moment, we see nothing in our dark man but a vast engine of labour; if to us he is not man, but only a tool; if dispossessed entirely of the land for which he now shows that large aptitude for peasant proprietorship for the lack of which among their masses many great nations are decaying; if we force him permanently in his millions into the locations and compounds and slums of our cities, obtaining his labour cheaper, but to lose what the wealth of five Rands could not return to us; if, uninstructed in the highest forms of labour, without the rights of citizenship, his own social organisation broken up, without our having aided him to participate in our own; if, unbound to us by gratitude and sympathy, and alien to us in blood and colour, we reduce this vast mass to the condition of a great seething, ignorant proletariat—then I would rather draw a veil over the future of this land. (48-50)

It should not be so difficult for us today – supposedly more advanced in race matters, but still watching scenes of social and racial intolerance everyday through our daily news – to understand why miscegenation was such a difficult subject for Schreiner. Her farsighted mind enabled her to envision the collapsing of 'the walls dividing continents' and to predict the interaction of European, Asiatic and African people. The problem, which the twentieth century would have to solve, she anticipated, would be

> […] the accomplishment of this interaction of distinct human varieties on the largest and most beneficent lines, making for the development of humanity as a whole, and carried out in a manner consonant with modern ideals and modern social wants. (*Closer Union* 45)

In this matter, Schreiner thought South Africa had a special and unique role:

> We in South Africa are one of the first peoples in the modern world, and under the new moral and material conditions of civilisation, to be brought face to face with this problem in its acutest form. On our power to solve it regally and heroically depends our greatness. If it be possible for us out of our great complex body of humanity (its parts possibly remaining racially distinct for centuries) to raise up a free, intelligent, harmonious nation, each part acting with and for the benefit of the others, then we shall have played a part as great as that of any nation in the world's record. (46)

Even now, in the early twenty-first century, when fortunately miscegenation is no more a taboo, but a common feature of most societies, we have not yet been able to solve the problem Schreiner so wisely detected in her own time, we have not fully accomplished the 'harmonious interaction of distinct human varieties'. Schreiner urged South Africa to solve it, but she could not advocate miscegenation as a solution, for as Krebs points out, "if she had argued for a South Africa in which all races interbred, she would have lost political credibility in both South Africa and Britain" (429). Certainly, at that time it would be too much, even for her 'progressive Victorian mind', to go that further. If she treated the natives as a racial category, instead of a political one, and considered miscegenation as a form of including them in a national identity, she could lose the battle she was fighting for, i.e., to raise their social welfare. If she did so, Schreiner feared to make the situation for the natives even worse. As she warns her sister Ettie, who was also engaged in writing on the Native Question:

> Do take care what you write, my darling. Remember it is not always ink one dips one's pen in; it may be <u>blood</u> in a country like South Africa. The <u>majority</u> of the people English & Dutch in this country want Closer Union because it will enable them to crush (to wipe out as an English Eastern Province farmer said to me) the natives. Every thing one says or does which rouses them into action injures the native, & may help to bring nearer that day when seas of blood will flow. A Johannesburg man wrote to me the other day that we must hasten on the <u>Closer Union</u>, because native is growing more educated & intelligent

> every day, & if we do not crush him now, we may not be able to do it at all, &c. These things must never be written of publically…You know the great saying "No cause was ever yet ruined, except by its own defenders." I don't mean don't write beloved, but be care-ful.[111]

Schreiner was very careful with 'what' and 'how' she spoke and wrote in defence of the natives, because she was aware that the effect could be reverted. After the second Anglo-Boer war, she knew that the conditions for the natives had been aggravated and she had to be extremely cautious with her words. In 1905, she writes to Edward Carpenter:

> Before us here looms a terrible thing, a great desolating native war, in which Boers & British will combine to wipe out the black man's freedom, ^take^ his land, his franchise, where he has it, as in the Cape Colony & gain cheep labour. The Boer has not got the teeth of the Englishmen out of his flesh when he turns around to join him in tearing the ~~the~~ dark man to pieces. And one cannot speak - because one fears by even whispering under one's breathe of what one sees approaching that one may bring it nearer![112]

Regarding miscegenation, Schreiner disclosed her position in a letter to Jan Smuts some years before:

> With regard to the native the four later articles of the series will explain it as they all deal more or less with it. All I would ask now, is, why you should think it a necessary corollary that, if the dark & light races do not cross in blood there must of necessity be hatred & bitterness between them? I hold (of course I may be mistaken) that so unlike are the ~~black~~ dark & white races in this country, that were they equals in education & in social

[111] *To Henrietta ('Ettie') Schreiner m. Stakesby Lewis (1891), January 1904* - Schreiner-Hemming Family BC 1080 A1.7/72, lines 3-20.
[112] To Edward Carpenter, 26 October 1905 -Edward Carpenter 359/90, lines 32 – 39.

> rights, & were they absolutely mingled together politically, in the matter of marriage the white would still prefer the white & the black the black, & fusion would go on very slowly. It is exactly because of the terrible chasm which in the minds of many men divides them from the dark races that the mixture of bloods in its least desirable form goes on. It was not when the native races were free & richly endowed with social and political rights, that the great fusion took place, & I believe that exactly in proportion as we raise & educate the native races ^& endow them with social and political rights^ such fusion will become rare. Where it does occur, it will be as the result of a vast affection and sympathy, & will so lose its worst features.[113]

Schreiner's attempt to convince Smuts that promoting social equality between blacks and whites would not necessarily lead to miscegenation does not mean that she is against the 'mixture of bloods'. She surely is, as she explains in "The Problem of Slavery", one of the articles in *Thoughts on South Africa*, if it happens in a degrading form, i.e., based on the sexual exploitation of black women by white men, resulting in a large half-caste population, usually discriminated by society and "not in harmony within himself" (127). As she writes to James Henderson, by the time of the 'black peril' investigation:

> One who lives in a great railway camp like de Aar is simply overpowered by the evil & degrading attitude of white men towards dark women. I do hope the Christian Churches will speak out, in no doubtful manner, on the truth that it is not honourable legal marriage between the races that degrades both, but the reckless & degrading ~~illegal~~ immoral relations between white men &

[113]To Jan Smuts, 1 July 1896 - Smuts A1/186/73 – lines 6-24The articles she refers to are the Thoughts on South Africa ones. Smuts was one of the most prominent figures in South African history and by 1896 had just started his public career.

> dark women. One dare not bring a decent black or coloured girl into this place.[114]

Reminding that such practice was common in the past and present she rebukes: "It is not the black man's sin that is staining our African sunshine […]; it is the white man's degradation. What the Boer began the Englishman finishes" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 141). Her aim in dissociating the racial (miscegenation) from the political (natives' rights) issue in dealing with the native question seems a wise strategy to influence her conservative audience. Considering the radicalism with which the subject of miscegenation was treated at that time, not only in South Africa, but elsewhere, we can understand why she was so cautious when dealing with it. As she writes in *Thoughts on South Africa*,

> Each society, as each age, has its own peculiar decalogue, applicable to its own peculiar conditions. For South Africa there are certain commandments little heard of in Europe, because the conditions of life raise no occasion for them, but which loom large in the list of social duties in this land. The first of these would appear to be – *Keep your breeds pure!* (146)

Therefore, I do not see why Schreiner's consideration of the Africans as a political, rather than a racial category, is incompatible with their incorporation as part of the nation. I believe that, in Schreiner's view, the miscegenation among blacks and whites was not a prerequisite for the Africans to be part of a South African national identity. She envisioned a nation where the different races would interact, although the interaction she conceived was social rather than racial. She dreamt of a nation formed by diversified peoples, not necessarily miscigenated, but living peacefully in a new South Africa. In the story "Eighteen-Ninety-Nine", a dialogue between a grandmother and her grandson echoes Schreiner's personal dream:

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[114]To James Henderson, 15 July 1912 - General Missionary Commission, Folder 25: Letters to Mr. J. Henderson MS 14, 847/4.

> Another day she said: "This land will be a great land one day with one people from the sea to the north – but we shall not live to see it."
>
> He said to her: "But how can that be when we are all of different races?"
>
> She said: "The land will make us one. Were not our fathers of more than one race?" (*Stories, Dreams and Allegories* 33)

Despite being incapable of proposing real miscegenation, she does so metaphorically, as this beautiful passage in *Thoughts on South Africa* shows. Here the empathy with the dark races and the fusion between black and white is complete at last:

> There are times to-day, riding across the plains in the direction of Hottentot Holland, when the vision of these creatures [running away salves] creeping across the veld in search of freedom comes suddenly to one; and a curious feeling arises. We are not in that band that rides booted and spurred across the plain, looking out to right and left and talking loud. We are in the little group cowering behind the milk bushes; we are looking up with furtive, bloodshot eyes, to see how the masters ride! We – we – are there; we are no more conscious of our identity with the dominant race. Over a million years of diverse evolution white man clasp dark again – and we are one, as we cower behind the bushes; the black and the white. (120)

From her return in 1889 until 1913, when she sails to England again (where she lives until 1920), Schreiner manifests her unrest with the de-humanizing treatment inflicted by the British imperialist policies on the 'dark races' of South Africa. Her connection with Cape politicians, facilitated by her brother Will, then a prominent political figure himself, puts her into the wiles of South African politics. She starts attending parliamentary debates in Cape Town and, although prevented by her gender to take any government career, she gradually assumes a position of influence among male politicians. Through her (in)direct interventions Schreiner becomes, as Stanley and Dampier

claim, "a feminist protagonist in a masculine political landscape" ('I Just Express My Views' 677).

As Schreiner's interest for the Native Question grows, as well as her perception of its intrinsic link to the Labour Question, so does her involvement with South African politics, as her epistolary activity can attest. Among her political (white) correspondents are prominent historical figures such as Cecil Rhodes, Jan Smuts, Alfred Milner, John X. Merriman, Francois Stephanus Malan, Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr, James Rose Innes, Johannes W. Saur and her brother William P. Schreiner. In many episodes, such as the enactment of retrogressive legislation like the Franchise and Ballot Act (1892), the Glen Grey Act (1894) and the Native's Land Bill (1913), the Jameson Raid (1895/6), the second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), the Draft South Africa Act (1909), just to mention the most important, Schreiner (in)directly intervenes through her personal letters by giving the people involved advice or simply by exposing her view of the situation in the hope of exerting some positive influence.

Her indirect private political activism can be testified through her letters. In 1895, she writes to her friend Betty Molteno: "Merriman has made a splendid stand. […] Innes, dear old Innes, God bless him! has made a good stand too, but I wish he & Merriman were not divided. I am doing what little, very little it is, I can do to bring them together".[115] And again in 1900: "Merriman & Sauer I feel I might influence, because old Sauer has a heart, but Hofmeyr I can do nothing with…"[116] Schreiner's activism, however, was frequently effected through persistent little actions. The best way to make allies to her cause was, in Schreiner's view, to do "private work, getting individuals of influence to try & see things in a generous and pure spirit",[117] as she suggests her sister Ettie, in a letter from January 1904. Up to 1909, she still believes in the positive effect of 'private work' on behalf of the natives' cause: "It seems to me that most of our work just now must be ^more or less^

[115]To Betty Molteno, 24 May 1895- Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold2/1895/4, lines 7-11.
[116]To Betty Molteno, 17 June 1900 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box2/Fold3/1900/34, lines 19-20.
[117]To Henrietta ('Ettie') Schreiner m. Stakesby Lewis (1891), January 1904- Schreiner-Hemming Family BC 1080 A1.7/72, lines 14-18.

private work on the native question. I have I have written to ^J.H.^Hofmeyer General Smuts, FS Malan&c".[118]

Schreiner also exerted her political activism in a more implicit way, as when she intercedes by promoting the connection between like-minded people. An example of this is her letter to journalist John Mackenzie, asking for collaboration, on behalf of the editor of "a new paper in Cape Town, which is to represent,[…] the true liberal cause in South Africa, on the native question, taxation, & in opposition to the capitalist party, including Rhodes".[119]

Schreiner uses her status as a world famous writer not only to enlighten the public in general concerning race matters, through her published writings, but also to persuade politicians, through her letters, to take a less retrograde stand, alerting them to the wicked consequences of their unfair and racist attitudes and their wrong decisions. The excerpt from a letter to John X. Merriman from the 25th of May1896, written shortly after the Jameson Raid (December 1895-January 1896), is just one good example. First, she sets the problem:

> There are two & only two questions in South Africa, the native question, & the question Shall the whole land fall into the hands of a knot of Capitalists. The Dutch & English question, as you have yourself said, is nothing - in fifty years it will not be. But the native question & the capitalist question ^are in^ their infancy now, will loom right over the land in fifty years time, & unless some mighty change set in, will deluge the land with blood.[120]

Then she advises:

> We who hold that rank confers duties, that a course of stern unremitting justice is demanded from us towards the native, & that only in as far as we are able to raise him & bind him to ourselves

[118]To Henrietta ('Ettie') Schreiner m. Stakesby Lewis (1891), February 1909 - Schreiner-Hemming Family BC 1080 A1.7/73, lines 4-6.
[119]To John Mackenzie, 12 March 1898 - John Mackenzie A75/8/2779, lines 9-12.
[120]To John X. Merriman, 25 May 1896 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/71/4/2, lines 14-20.

> with indissoluble bonds of sympathy & gratitude, can the future of South Africa be anything but an earthly Hell: - we who hold this have no right to let anything divide us. (lines 22-27)

Finally, she emphatically recommends: "Neither you nor Sauer can ever ultimately work with the bond!"

Since her return to South Africa, and in spite of her personal suffering, Schreiner never exempted herself from empathizing with the natives' affliction and acting on their behalf. By the end of 1895, the year she lost her baby daughter,[121] followed by a series of miscarriages, she writes to a friend commenting in distress about the deployment of retrogressive legislation and its wicked consequences for the natives:

> I have walked out of the Cape Parliament, which stands just over the way, where ~~strop~~ debates were going on & in which the most talented & wealthy Englishmen in the world were voting for the Strop Bills (a bill for flogging native servants, which if passed would make their condition not very much better than that of slaves), & in which personal ambitions & the greed for wealth & power showed at every turn.[122]

In August of that same year, Schreiner's husband, S. C. Cronwright reads a paper, written jointly by the couple, at the Town Hall in Kimberly, exposing the political situation in the Cape Colony.[123] The authors express their concern with the 'Retrogressive Movement' – for them, a result from the union of the Monopolists with the 'Retrogressive Element in the Bond Party' – predominant in the political scenario at that period, presenting its causes and possible solutions for stopping its growth. They see the movement – and Rhodes as its main representative – as responsible for the enactment of recent backward legislation, which clearly favoured the small privileged portion of society, the white colonists, to the detriment of the great majority of poor whites and natives. The aftermath of that 'unnatural marriage' or

[121]Her daughter died some hours after birth on April 30th.

[122]To W.T. Stead, between September and December 1895- T120 (M722): W.T. Stead Papers/63- pages 243-246, lines 27-32.

[123]The paper entitled 'The Political Situation' was published in 1896, in London, by T. Fisher Unwin.

wicked coalition, in Schreiner's view, was thus: "the Retrogressive Party supporting the Monopolist in carrying out measures in which he has no interest or concern, and the Monopolist assisting the Retrogressive Party in setting upon the Statute-book measures which are repugnant to his own common sense and shrewd modern outlook" ('The Political Situation' 42).

Among the retrogressive measures implemented, Schreiner condemns the Franchise & Ballot Act (1892), which raised the franchise qualification from £25 to £75 per annum, restricting the larger part of the population of natives, coloured and poor whites the right to vote. She also criticizes the Glen Grey Act (1894), which limited land ownership by natives and imposed taxation that would force them into the labour market. She censures the Flogging Bill, which legalized "corporal punishment for the smallest offences towards master or mistress on the part of household or other servants" ('The Political Situation' 12). She reproaches the taxation on primary products, such as wheat, flour and meat, instead of taxing luxury items, such as diamonds and inferior intoxicating liquors. Finally, she rebukes the Haarhoff's Bill, which controlled the movement of the natives, through the imposition of passes, clearly anticipating the segregationist policy adopted years later during apartheid.

The main target of Schreiner's criticism, though, is the facility with which the speculators and monopolists, alien elements in South Africa society, seem to be taking possession and control of South Africa's "[…] public lands, […] minerals, […] precious stones, and even […] public works" ('The Political Situation' 14), and "grasp[ing] adjacent territories still uninhabited by the white men" (15). Her description of the speculators and monopolists matches Memmi's definition of the 'colonizer who accepts' colonization, the one who agrees "to be a non-legitimate privileged person, that is, a usurper" (96) and whose main and sole aim is to explore and profit from the colony. Schreiner writes, in a clear reference to the Chartered Company shareholders: "not only are these men not South Africans by birth, which would in itself matter nothing, but in the majority of cases they are men who regard South Africa merely as a field for the making of wealth and the furthering of their own designs" ('The Political Situation' 34-35). According to her, those imperialists, in their violent agency for power and control, would oppose the original Dutch and English colonists, who she regards as unpretentious settlers coming pacifically to a new land to cultivate it and live a new life.

This view corroborates Schreiner's somewhat romantic concept of colonization as a 'gradual and natural development', with the Boers 'moving northwards' and the English "building up their villages, founding their educational institutions and establishing a liberal and progressive government" ('The Political Situation' 28-29). In this sense, she clearly makes a distinction between colonialism and imperialism:

> Colonisation by the British people is not the same thing as colonisation under the Chartered Company. The first is supposed to have as its object the development of the people it takes under its rule, and the planting of a free and untrammelled branch of the Anglo-Saxon race upon the land; the aim of the Chartered Company is to make wealth out of land and people. (73-74)

What Schreiner resents most, however, is the deterioration of public life by the Monopolist Party. In her view, "giving political power to enormously wealthy individuals is corroding […] public life, till the principle that everyman has his price and can be squared, if you can only find his figure, is becoming an established dogma" ('The Political Situation' 43-44).

The year 1896 seems to have been crucial regarding Schreiner's involvement with the Native Question. As early as January, she alerts W. T. Stead, a prominent British journalist and an admirer of Rhodes, to the worrying situation of the natives in SA and Rhodes part in it: "What do you say to this state of things out ~~out~~ here – this murderous attack on the Transvall by the Chartered forces??"[124]It is also to W. T. Stead, that she confesses, six years earlier, her "curious & almost painfully intense interest in the man [Rhodes] & his career" and predictably regrets his downfall:

> I am so afraid of his [Rhodes] making a mistake, as he would do, I think, if he accepted the Prime Ministership of this Colony, as there is some talk of his doing. I don't see how he can play the hand of the Chartered Company & the hand of the Colony at the same time, & I should so regret his putting himself in a position in which he was

[124]To W.T. Stead, 4 January 1896 - T120 (M722): W.T. Stead Papers/11- pages 74-5 & 249-250, lines 11-12.

> obliged to be false to the interest of one or the other.[125]

As Schreiner's fears materializes, her admiration for Rhodes's energy and intelligence gives place to a fierce public opposition towards his ideas and deeds. She shares with her friend Betty Molteno, her dismay at the activities of the Chartered Company, controlled by Rhodes and his associates, towards the natives:

> No, I don't distress my self about things. I seem to have no feeling left. Hardly about anything. The way they are hounding the Mashonas for what they call murder, - i.e. for killing people in time of war - is to me far more terrible than anything that is happening in the Colony. But I feel I am powerless. The English people are given up to their lust for gold & ^Empire & there is nothing left to appeal to^.[126]

The Chartered Company genocidal response to the Ndebele and Shona uprising in 1896 fills Schreiner's mind so thoroughly that she conceives and writes a novella about the topic in a few days:

> The first four days we were here we did nothing but bathe & walk about bare foot on the sand, but the other morning I woke, & as I opened my eyes there was an allegory full fledged in my mind! A sort of allegory story about Matabele land. So I've been writing hard ever since.[127]

This is how Schreiner produces *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897) (henceforth mentioned as *Trooper Peter*), an allegorical novella, in which she presents factive devices[128] as a way to

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[125]To W.T. Stead,12 July 1890 - T120 (M722): W.T. Stead Papers/8- pages 66-9 & 227-8, lines 22-27.

[126]To Betty Molteno - 18 July 1896 - BC16/Box1/Fold3/1896/21, lines 4-9.

[127]To Betty Molteno, 20 August 1896 – Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold3/1896/24, lines 14-17.

[128]Stanley and Dampier ('She wrote Peter Halket') point to 'two dominant factive devices' in *Peter Trooper*: the photograph, which appeared on the first edition, of the hanging tree with three supposed rebels, still suspended, who had

make the story more convincing and effective. Although considered now a minor literary work, in a certain sense, *Trooper Peter* can be seen as an emblem of the combination of Schreiner's creative power and her political activism. As Stanley claims: "Trooper Peter Halket, with her other fictional writing, is as much a component of Schreiner's analytic and political project as her analytical and political writings, with their use of a range of fictive devices, are components within her creative activities".[129]

Since her private work of persuading South African politicians through her personal letters does not reach the intended result, it seems that Schreiner finds a last target to appeal to: public opinion. By resorting to her creative power, she would reach a broader public scope. Indeed, she has a specific audience in mind when she writes her novella. Her aim is the misinformed British people who think "that the English are being cruelly oppressed & ill-treated by the Boers & that in wiping out the Dutch they are taking the side of the weak & the oppressed", as she writes to her brother:

> Now it is to this public, which really is the great British public apart from the speculators & military men on the one hand, & apart from the ignorant jingos of the street on the other, that my little book [Trooper Peter] is addressed. […] It is for them & not at all for the South African public ~~th~~ (who would not understand it) that the book is written. They must know where the injustice & oppression really lies, & turn <u>down</u> their thumbs at the right moment.[130]

Written at a key moment of British imperial expansionism, *Trooper Peter* caused much polemic, and retaliation on the part of Schreiner's family members, because it not only accuses Rhodes as morally and directly responsible for the genocide in Matabeleland and Mashonaland, but also because it includes Jesus Christ as a character to

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been hanged by Rhodes' Chartered Company; and the name of Rhodes, mentioned several times, as directly responsible for the murderous events.

[129] Stanley 2000, p. 205. In this article, Stanley also examines the implications of Schreiner's use of the allegorical genre.

[130] To Will Schreiner, December 1896 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold3/1896/36

attest for its accusations (Stanley, 'Encountering the Imperial and Colonial Past' 198).

However, with *Trooper Peter*, Schreiner wants more than just denounce her aversion with the events going on in the natives' lands. Her allegory is not only a tale about the bloody repression of the Ndebele and Shona uprising by the Chartered Company men and British imperial troops. It is not simply an explanation that the killing of whites by the Africans was a reaction to the Chartered Company rule and its unacceptable native policy of corporal punishment, land expropriation, and forced labour of men (Stanley, 'Encountering the Imperial and Colonial Past' 72), and that the natives' reaction was followed by white retaliation, which included massacres, rapes and the burning of 'kraals'[131] and fields. *Trooper Peter* is, above all, a denunciation of the way capitalists were taking hold of South Africa with the connivance of an indifferent and hypocritical Christian society. Schreiner's "analytic concern with the relationship between capital, financial speculation and territorial expansionism" ('Encountering the Imperial and Colonial Past' 205), developed in her political writings, is also present in *Trooper Peter*. As early as 1892, she describes to an English socialist friend how the growing appropriation by the monopolists is happening in South Africa:

> You can have no idea reading the paper at Home, where it will seem moderate & simple enough, what a storm it has raised in this country. You know what wildly excited socialist orators say that capitalism is in England & America; - well, that's what it realy is here. You can't picture anything worse! You don'tknow what capitalism is in England. You've never seen a hord of men sweep down on a country, & take possession of every thing!!lands, mines, public works, Government, - everything! And we are so powerless. We are just like a tiny fly caught by the hindlegs in a huge spiders web. It's no use.[132]

It is the hideous consequences of such deterioration of South African society, promoted by the monopolists and speculators, which she explores in *Trooper Peter.*

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[131] Enclosed space where cattle or sheep is kept at night.

[132]To Edward Carpenter, 1892 - Edward Carpenter 359/60, lines 18-26.

The story describes the trajectory of a simple young English man, Peter Halket, who, like many others, comes to the colony in search of wealth. After all, he thinks, "[a]ll men made money when they came to South Africa, – Barney Barnato, Rhodes" (*Trooper Peter* 4). He ends up working for Rhodes's Chartered Company believing that, when his time as volunteer finished

> he would have a large piece of land given him, and the Mashonas and Matabeles would have all their land taken away from them in time, and the Chartered Company would pass a law that they had to work for the white men, and he, Peter Halket, would make them work for him. He would make money. (4)

While working in the campaign, supressing rebellions in Matabeleland and Mashonaland, Peter gets lost from his troop. During the night he spends on the dark and silent 'veldt', his thoughts lead him from warm family recollections in England to visions of the atrocities he has witnessed and committed as a trooper in South Africa. The argument used to justify the contradiction between his pure childhood in his homeland and his murderous behaviour as an adult in the colony implies a subtle irony: "[I]t was all so different in England from South Africa. You couldn't be expected to do the same sort of things here as there" (*Trooper Peter* 5). We feel that Schreiner's intention here is to call her readers attention to the universality of moral precepts and to question why people should behave differently in England and in South Africa.

Trooper Peter's racist ideology is ratified by his degrading attitudes towards black people. For him, black women are disposable objects: "The whites you've got to support, but the niggers support you! And when you've done with them you can just get rid of them" (6); while black men are mere beasts of burden: "We don't come out here to work; it's all very well in England but we've come here to make money, and how are we to make it, unless you get niggers to work for you, or start a Syndicate?" (9). Peter's views start collapsing as a stranger, who the readers immediately identify as Jesus Christ in person, appears and unsettles his convictions. In a didactic dialogue, the stranger makes Peter see to whom really belong the lands they are fighting for: "Who gave the land to the men and women of England?", so they would give the Chartered Company to dispose of? "And who gave her [England] the

people, the living flesh and blood, that she might give them away, into the hands of others?" (10). Slowly, the stranger convinces Peter that the supposed native rebels are just resisting an unjust rule imposed by a foreigner in their own land.

As Peter is converted and asks to be part of the stranger's company, he receives a mission. He should take a message to England, to the white population of South Africa and to one man, specifically, which is, in fact, Schreiner's own message to her readers and to Cecil Rhodes. He should speak to 'the wise men, the women, the working men and women of England' to raise their consciousness to the oppression and suffering caused by greedy men in South Africa, endorsed by the British government/society, calling those people for action. To the white men and women of South Africa, Boers and English, the message is that they should remain united and watch for the real danger, the speculators, represented by vultures, who would conspire to put ones against the others. Finally, Rhodes, should rethink about his options in life, and be reminded that "it is never too late for the soul of a man" (18). After that night on the kopje, Peter Halket is described as a changed man, preaching for a brotherhood between black and white men and alleging that the natives were only fighting for their country and for freedom. When he asks his troop Captain to release a black prisoner, he receives order to guard the man and shoot him the next morning. Instead of obeying the Captain, Halket frees the man, and for that, he is murdered. The evidence points to the murderous Captain, but the troopers, a Colonial and an Englishman, who had been previously talking about standing or not by Peter Halket, decide that "[i]f it's no use talking while a man is alive, it's no use talking when he is dead!" (26).

The allegory *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* is clearly a reflection and a denunciation on the silence that turns supposedly innocent people guilty, because they become accomplices of the atrocities perpetrated by imperialist policies. The silence, resulting from people's mere convenience and lethargy, or obtained through personal favours or money, is shown in the dialogue between the Colonial and the Englishman troopers as a common practice in that period:

> "You're not going to be such a fool as to step in, are you?" said the Colonial… "It doesn't pay. I've made up my mind never to speak whatever happens. What's the good? Suppose one were to make a complaint now about this affair with

> Halket, if he's made to shoot the nigger against his will; what would come of it? There'd be a dozen fellows here squared to say what the headquarters wanted…" (23).

Schreiner was aware of the corruption that corroded the political life in the Colony. In a letter to a friend, she comments on how such a system worked and mentions the events she approached in *Trooper Peter,* lamenting her impotence before the facts:

> One man was told by Cornwall himself that Rhodes agent had given him a list of names of men he was to try & remove from the voters lists; but no one could come forward in court & give the evidence they gave us as it would ruin them. It is not for nothing one feels so sad as one drives through Kimberley streets. I suppose there are few places on earth where Europeans live where freedom is so dead as here. But all that happens in the Colony seems to me such a small thing compared with what has gone on in Mashona & Matabele land. Did I tell you of the educated Christian Kaffir who came to see us the other day? I fancy I did. He had been up in Matabele-land talking to the chiefs and indunas there. I asked him what they gave as their reason for fighting. He said, "They say they fought for death." I asked what he meant; & he said that they had never any hope of conquering the white men or driving him out, but their treatment was such that death was the one thing they desired. The Chartered Company are trying to drive them down into the fever swamps to live where they all must die by inches. Ah my dear friend, it is these things that are so terrible to me. I Sometimes feel ashamed to look at a black man. But we can but each live out our little life, doing the best we can with the little fragment of strength that is given us.[133]

[133]To Betty Molteno, 16 December 1897 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold4/1897/25, lines 24-64.

Relying on 'the little fragment of strength' she still had, Schreiner continued doing the best she could, fighting for her ideals through pen and paper. Her "dread that Rhodes & his backers in high circles at home ~~whi~~ [would] yet plunge South Africa in war"[134], expressed in a letter to Merriman in June 1896, became real. In the late 1890's, her battle would be for peace between English and Boers. In June1899, she writes the anti-war pamphlet, *An English South African View of the Situation*, hoping to "open the eyes of the English public to the true condition of affairs a little",[135] since she believed that "[t]he ignorance of people in Europe as to the true state of affairs" in South Africa was "one of [the] great sources of danger & difficulty".[136] However, her text is aimed at Alfred Milner, then High Commissioner for South Africa and a strong supporter of war. She confesses to her brother Will that the article "was written under terrible stress", that she "sat up three nights running till morning to get it done so that send Milner an advanced copy, to read in the train".[137] She sends Milner the article, begging him to read it and 'consider whether no truth lies in it",[138] to which he answers 'very cordial personally', but 'not mentioning politics'.

Schreiner was aware that the war in question was more than an ethnic conflict between English and Boers disputing a territory. What was at stake in that fight, she knew, was the future of South Africa as a capitalist nation and the consequent crushing of the natives, as she explains to Smuts:

> […] the freedom & independence of the Transvaal has for me a much more serious meaning. I look upon the Free State & the Transvaal as the two last little sluice-gates we have left keeping out the flood of Capitalism which would otherwise sweep in & overwhelm South Africa.[139]

And to her brother Will:

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[134]To J. X. Merriman, 29 June 1896 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/71/4/3.
[135]To J. Smuts, 19 May 1899 - Smuts A1/186/76.
[136]To J.H. Hofmeyr, 3 June 1899 - J.H. Hofmeyr MSB 8/Box9/1, lines 23-24.
[137]To Will Schreiner, 30 May 1899 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box2/Fold1/Jan-June1899/2, lines 5-9.
[138]To A. Milner, 30 May 1899 - Milner Papers, dep. 209, ff. 278-280- line 10.
[139]To J. Smuts, 23 January 1899 - Smuts A1/186/75, lines 38-42.

> Ultimately we have nothing to fight the capitalists with but the guns & forts of the Transvaal. […] If the English government once gains control of the Transvaal in a military sense, as she now has control of the Colony; it seems to me South Africa may, ~~all~~ & almost must fall entirely into the hands of the Capitalists.[140]

Again to her brother Will, Schreiner expresses her belief that the victory of the English/capitalists implied a throwback regarding native policies:

> All my friends (liberals) from home write saying there cannot be war. But for us there is a worse possibility than war, that of slowly falling into the hands of the speculators. We have about 15 years steady uphill pull against the capitalists. Then in about 50 though we shall not be here to see it will come up the great native question & we shall reap as we have sown.[141]

After the war, Schreiner embraces the Native Question even more intensely since she realises, as she had wisely predicted, that the white minority were joining forces 'to crush the natives', turning them into the 'under-dog' of the moment:

> It is the Boer who is top dog now. All my thoughts & anxieties have long passed awayfrom him. My only fear now is, in how far he is going to help in pushing on war & slaughtering natives. Of course it is not going to be all on one side; when the whites have goaded the natives into rising there will be more than one Isandlwana![142]

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[140]To Will Schreiner,14 September 1899 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box2/Fold2/July.

[141]To William Philip ('Will') Schreiner, 26 July 1899 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box2/Fold2/July-Dec1899/11, lines 20-28.

[142]To Betty Molteno, 8 May 1906 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box3/Fold5/1906/7 - lines 21-26. Isandlwana was the first battle in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, in which the technologically superior armed British, were overwhelmed by the

In August 1907, she writes to Merriman: "The only really big question we have before us now is the native question & in that I fear I shall find myself one day in a minority of one".[143] By the end of the 1900's, Schreiner's concerns will be focused on two events directly linked to the Native Question: the activities around the Union of South Africa, especially the Draft of South Africa Act and the Natal Zulu uprisings of 1906. About the latter, she comments on a letter to Bob Muirhead, in May 1906: "What is really filling all my thoughts is Natal, & the Natives, on whom they are trying to force war. But I can't write about it".[144] Nearly a year later, she writes to Edward Carpenter: "The different white governments here are going to bring on a terrific native war here within the next few years! They will likely bring on a small one in Natal next May. There is no one here to defend the native because it doesn't pay".[145] In fact, by mid 1906, the natives' resistance against the harsh policies imposed by the British colonial rule culminated in the Bambatha Rebellion, which resulted in the loss of 4000 Zulus and 30 white people[146]. Two years later Schreiner was apprehensive with the trial of the Zulu King, Dinizulu, accused of treason and defended by her brother Will. Her view about the case was expressed in a letter to an English friend:

> All my thoughts & interests are just now centred on the Dinuzulu Trial in Natal […] It will be a terrible mis-carriage of justice if he is not brought in innocent; for not only his own people but all the natives if South Africa know he was innocent, but that it was he & he alone who prevent a general ~~a~~ rising when the Natalians began their wicked little game, he simply would not let his people move. If he is brought in guilty every scrap

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poorly armed Zulus. The defeat was a deep shock to British prestige in the 19th century.

[143] '*Olive Schreiner to John X. Merriman, 2 August 1907)* – John X. Merriman MSC 15/1907:91, lines 39-41.

[144] To Robert Franklin ('Bob') Muirhead, 8 May 1906 - MacFarlane-Muirhead/18

[145] To Edward Carpenter, 9 February 1907 - Edward Carpenter 359/92.

[146] http://www.sahistory.org.za/aftermath-bhambatha-rebellion-1906

> of faith in English justice will die, & I don't know what will happen.[147]

During the process of unification of South Africa Schreiner acts in both the public and the private spheres writing articles in newspapers to reach public opinion and personal letters to influence leading politicians. She writes to Smuts and Malan – "the two men I look forward to doing great work for South Africa when we old figures have passed away"[148] – exhorting them to take a more enlightened path towards native policies. To Malan, a supporter of Union, she appeals: "It goes to my heart to think that you & I should be wide as the poles apart in this matter. The really great South African will not be a man who stands for this or that party, or race, or sect, or language – but for all."[149] Likewise, to Smuts, then deeply involved in drafting the basis for the unification of South Africa, she also emphasises the duties of white rulers towards the natives, repeating the same argument she had once used with Milner:

> I tried to prove to him [Milner] that from the moment when he accepted a high position of rule to this country his right to act as a mere party man was gone. That not only to the Englishmen but to every Boer and every little Kaffir child to every old Hottentot walking in the veld, he owes a duty. Our duty stretches as far as our power of benefiting our fellow creatures goes. It doesn't end till that ends. And from the man of wide powers, from him much is expected. [150]

As the negotiations for the Draft of South Africa Act unfold, Schreiner confirms the real intentions behind the deals: to aggravate even more the condition of the 'darker races'. Feeling that "[t]his closer Union movement [here] is really a plan on the part of the two white races to combine so as to wipe out the natives more easily, & take away

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[147] To Robert Franklin ('Bob') Muirhead, 16 November 1908 - MacFarlane-Muirhead/21, lines 10-19. Dinuzulu was convicted and sentenced to four years imprisonment. Then released and banished to the Transvaal.
[148]To Jan Smuts, 1 December 1908 - Smuts A1/191/53.
[149]To F. S. Malan, 28 December 1908 - Olive Schreiner: F.S. Malan 1000/3 – lines 12-14.
[150]To Jan Smuts, 30 December 1908 - Smuts A1/191/58 – lines 14-19.

the Franchise from them who have it",[151] Schreiner becomes more combative and embittered. That is the mood of her accusative letter to Malan, in January 1909:

> The problems of Dutch & English have for me quite vanished away from the practical horizon in South Africa now. The problem that is rising before us is that of the combination of the capitalist-classes, land-owning & mine-owning, against the rest of the community; & ^an^ ignorant, blind, land-thirsty, gold-thirsty native policy; which will plunge South Africa into war & bitterness, compared ^with^ which the Boer War was nothing. In the picture of Jameson walking with his arm round the neck of his fellow "Conventioner" of Africander blood, I see an omen of evil. It is not love that is uniting you all - it is greed. Cheap land, cheap labour, cheap mines, exploit the nigger - that is the bond that is uniting you![152]

Her brother Will was deeply involved in both events (the negotiations around the Union of South Africa and the trial of the Zulu King) and Schreiner writes him frequently at this period for support and encouragement. In one of such occasions, she reveals her disappointment and contempt at South African politicians:

> That scene in the house yesterday, was without any exception the most contemptible from the broad human stand-point I have ever seen in my life, which has been pretty long & varied. It seemed as though the curse of the serpent had fallen on them all – "on thy belly shall thou crawl & dust shalt thou eat." I hardly know what was the most awful thing Jamesons face, so much worse than it ever used to be, ~~with~~ even that with an uncomfortable leer on it, – or dear old Malan looking like a lost soul. – for he has a soul & a

[151]To Robert Franklin ('Bob') Muirhead, 16 November 1908 - MacFarlane-Muirhead/21, lines 20-22.
[152]To Francois Stephanus ('FS') Malan, 6 January 1909 - Olive Schreiner: F.S. Malan 1000/7, lines 105-115.

> noble one! And as they squirmed & lied, & each one giving the other away, & all gave away principle, all the while there was Abdurahman's drawn dark intellectual face looking down at them. Men selling their souls & the future – & fate watching them. One sees strange things from that gallery!
>
> Dear you seemed to me in great distress. You don't know how my heart went out to your old bowed head. Fight on dear, quite alone. Any man can fight in a company, & for reward – only a great man fights quite alone. The terrible thing in life is that just at the moment when it is all important one should stand with freshness & courage, one's spirit is utterly worn out. When I went out of the house I met Charles Molteno. He said you were quite right in your view but ~~you were~~ ^he was^ going to vote against your amendment because it "wasn't practical." You know I just felt so depressed, I went out to Sea Point on the train, I couldn't come back to the house. All those men on the Convention know, that the real force hurrying them on is crush the native – cheap labour – new mines – the native territories.
>
> Good bye, dear. Have no fear that if one holds by what is right no loss & no loneliness matter.[153]

Will (William Philip) Schreiner was one of the main targets in Schreiner's slow and persistent work of influencing powerful people in favour of the natives' cause. Her confession to him (in 1896) that, "only by a stern & continual effort [she seeks] to regard the native as a man & a brother",[154] indicates her own process of change. However, it may also imply a strategic means of persuasion. In a letter to Betty Molteno from September 1897, we learn how this strategy works: "My dear brother seems becoming much more liberal on the native question. But I never

[153]To William Philip ('Will') Schreiner, 9 April 1909 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box4/Fold2/1909/20, lines 5-34.
[154]Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold3/1896/36, lines 54-55.

argue with him. Seeds grow quickest under ground".[155] Schreiner seemed to choose the right words and the right moment to exert her influence, doing it slowly and subtly, as she tells again Betty Molteno three years later (June 1900): "I have written two long letters to my brother. I don't argue with him. I just express my views & leave them to work. That's the best way with him".[156]

Schreiner's influence on her brother, in political terms, is acknowledged by Will's biographer, Eric Walker, who states that "it was no light matter for him to go against her", since he regarded her as "a kind of detached and most eloquent conscience" (Stanley and Dampier, 'I Just Express My Views' 683). Although it is difficult to provide incontestable evidence of Schreiner's influence on her brother, the fact is that he became more liberal in his views regarding race matters and moved politically in the direction that she advised him to do in her letters to him (685). Her words to Malan, in 1909, attest for her brother's changing views: "My dear old brother is only finding his true direction near the end of his life - you must find yours now".[157] Indeed, William Schreiner grew so deeply involved in race affairs that, in 1908, he refused a place on the National Convention set up to prepare the Union of South Africa to dedicate himself to the defence of the Zulu King, Dinuzulu, on his trial for trumped up charges brought by the imperial government. He also played a key role defending the non-racial Cape franchise and taking the 'black delegation' to London in 1909 to protest against the Draft South Africa Act, known as the Schreiner mission. From 1910 to 1914, Will Schreiner became one of the four senators in the Union Parliament nominated to protect the native interests.[158]

One of the distinguishing traits of Olive Schreiner's political interventions when dealing with people she might influence is her refusal to argue with them. Schreiner used to make a clear distinction between personal and impersonal matters, considering "such a huge crime, such a dreadfully wicked thing when people allow their personal views on impersonal matters to be influenced by there personal relations

[155]Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold4/1897/17, lines 16-17.
[156]Olive Schreiner BC16/Box2/Fold3/1900/34, lines 33-35.
[157]To F.S. Malan, 10 July 1909 - Olive Schreiner: F.S. Malan 1000/8, lines 35-36.
[158]The OSLO Project - https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?view=personae&entry=71.

to persons",[159] or worst, by money. This explains why she sometimes abstained herself from discussing certain public subjects in personal terms. A letter to her mother from May 1896, when she mentions her arguments for opposing Rhodes, is enlightening in showing her decision to avoid confrontation with people who do not share her opinions on public matters, especially those she loves and admires. "Would it not, my dear little Mother, be much better to drop all references direct or indirect with regard to politics between us?", she pleads and justifies:

> During the last fifteen years, both in England and here, my work and my interest in life have been mainly political, yet I do not think six times, I have, in all these years, mentioned politics to you, because I felt you were not sympathetic to my view; and I believe that where, with regard to either religion or politics, parents and children, or even brothers and sisters, are not agreed, they should avoid these subjects. I have held this all my life. The tender love existing between mother and child and brother and sister need surely never be ruffled by these things.[160]

This behaviour of avoiding confrontation may be pointed as a flaw in Schreiner's character. Nevertheless, this attitude seemed to be strategically planned whenever she intended to effect some political influence. Thus, she never argued with her brother Will. However, despite her fraternal love for him, should he go against her views on the native question, she would become his political opponent, as she confesses to her friend Betty Molteno: "I love my brother Will […] but if he continues to take the stand he has taken on the native question I couldn't desire that he should take a lead in public life, I am bound to be on the side of the men who oppose him".[161]

Schreiner's initial relation with Rhodes seems to have been shaped by the same principle: her belief in the dissociation between personal and impersonal matters. In a letter to him, Schreiner asks, in a

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[159]To Betty Molteno – May 1896 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold3/1896/14.
[160]'Olive Schreiner to Rebecca Schreiner nee Lyndall, May 1896, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription'Life/4, lines 4-13.
[161]To Betty Molteno – May1896 – OliveSchreinerBC16/Box1/Fold3/1896/14, lines 18-23.

somewhat embarrassed tone, for a private meeting, adding: “You are the only man in South Africa I would ask to come & see me, because I think you are large enough to take me impersonally”.[162] Soon after meeting him, she acknowledges in a letter to her brother Will that she likes Rhodes best of any other person in South Africa. However, she is becoming aware of their political differences: “If I were in public life I should have to fight Rhodes at every step but the man is big”.[163] As the depiction of Rhodes as “the ideal of human greatness” fades away and Schreiner finally perceives his real character and ambitions, their friendly relation is interrupted and she starts acting publicly as his opponent.

Nevertheless, Schreiner also believes that personal ‘antipathies and wrongs’ should be overcome if greater matters were at stake.[164] Therefore, even disagreeing with Rhodes (or because of that) she would continue writing him with the specific intent of alerting him for the course he was taking and in the hope of changing that, as she tells her mother:

> As long as he [Rhodes] and I talked of books and scenery, we were very happy, but, when he began on politics and social questions, I found out to my astonishment that he had been misrepresented to me; especially when we got on the Native Question, we ended by having a big fight, and Rhodes getting very angry. All our subsequent meetings were of the same kind.
>
> I think Rhodes liked me for the same reason that I liked him, because of his life and energy, but we never once met without a royal fight. I have copies of all the letters I ever wrote him, and they

[162]Rhodes Papers, MSS. Afr. s. 228, C27 (142) 12, lines 19-21.
[163]Olive William Philip ('Will') Schreiner- 9 October 1892 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold1/1892/15, lines 80-81.
[164]“How-ever great be our personal antipathies & our personal wrongs, there are some matters so great that in their light all personal divisions should fade away”. To John X. Merriman, 25 May 1896 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/71/4/2, lines 28-30.

> are one long passionate endeavour to save him from what seemed to me the downward course.[165]

Unfortunately, only two of those letters she wrote to Rhodes are extant.

Although avoiding personal confrontation, Schreiner's insistence in corresponding with people she disagreed with confirms that her aim at persuading them for the benefit of the causes she defended was greater than her personal antipathies for them. In fact, as Stanley and Dampier ('I Trust That Our Brief Acquaintance') point out, Schreiner engaged more intensely in epistolary activity with people whom she had 'serious political differences' rather than with people who shared her political ideas. That, in a way, explains the absence of letters to black leaders whom Schreiner surely related, like Salomon Plaatje, John Tengo Jabavu, Abdullah Abdurahman, and Mohandas Gandhi. Although there are many references to them in her letters to other people, there are only two extant letters from her to two of them: one to Abdurahman and one to Ghandi. On the other hand, her letters to John X. Merriman, Jan Smuts, A. Milner and F.S. Malan, who really held the power to effect any change and whose views differed from hers in a number of subjects, are prolific and numerous.

Her last extant letter to Smuts, written less than two months before her death, is amazing in its awareness regarding the native policy being effected at that moment and its relation with the future of South Africa. The excerpt below shows how Schreiner was still concerned with the causes she had been fighting all her life, acknowledging the Native Question, as "not only South Africa's great question, but the world's great question".

> Dear Jan
>
> I began this but wasn't able to finish it a week ago. Yesterday I read of the troubles in Port Elizabeth. I wish I knew you were taking as broad & sane a view on our native problem as you took on many European points when you were there. The next few years are going to determine the whole future of South Africa in 30 or 40 years time. As we sow we shall reap. We may crush the

[165]To Rebecca Schreiner nee Lyndall, May 1896 - 'Life/4, lines 89-98.

> mass of our fellows in South Africa today, as Russia did for generations, but today the serf is in the Palace & where is the Czar?
>
> […] Jan dear, you are having your last throw; throw it right this time. You are such a wonderfully brilliant & gifted man, & yet there are sometimes things which a simple child might see which you don't! You see close at hand - but you don't see far enough.
>
> […] This is the 20th century; the past is past never to return, even in South Africa. The day of princes, & Bosses~~, of~~ is gone forever: one must meet the incoming tide & rise on it, or be swept away ^forever.^ [166]

Unfortunately, the politicians Schreiner tried to influence usually did not comply with her advice, and the consequences attest for her predictions, but they certainly recognized her shrewdness about political matters.[167] The explanation for the disregard of Schreiner's significance in South Africa's politics/history by her contemporaries, as well as later scholars and critics, may be found in the entry for her portrait in W. T. Stead's book *Notables of Britain: An Album of Portraits and Autographs* from 1897. It says: "the most remarkable woman of South Africa [...]; a brilliant writer; a vehement but somewhat Utopian politician".[168]Considered just a 'philosophic freethinker', Schreiner was not taken as seriously as she certainly would have been if she were a man. Despite being doomed to a second-rate status, a sort of supporting role in South African politics, she could see farther than most politicians. Her personal mission, she felt, was to alert them for what they could not see, as she insists to Smuts in 1918:

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[166]To Jan Smuts, 19 October 1920 - Smuts A1/207/185, lines 21-63.

[167]Berkman provides some examples of Schreiner' contemporaries views on her importance as a political activist. She also states that among later scholars and critics, though there are exceptions, she has been mostly ignored, being referred only briefly and superficially (101).

[168]This information is in the 'notation' of the letter to W. T. Stead, from July 1897 - T120 (M722): W.T. Stead Papers/43- pages 177-180

> I know you will laugh to yourself & say, "A little old woman lying on a sofa, seeing no one & reading, fancies she sees more than we great men in the midst of affairs!" But don't you know when two clever people are playing chess, & a chance on-looker comes in he sees at a glance what the men absorbed in the game don't? But what's the use of talking. [169]

Barred, as a woman, from formal, official political institutions such as the parliament and the franchise, Schreiner used her writing of social theory, fiction or personal letters as a political platform, a means of voicing her opinions and of exerting whatever influential discursive power she might possess.

Schreiner alternated her political activities with her creative writing, usually dedicating herself to the latter when her disappointment and discouragement with the former were too intense. The following extracts, sent to friends in the post Anglo-Boer war period, confirm that. In July 1905, she writes to Betty Molteno: "Politically there is much bitter feeling too. It's all so mean & small. I just try to forget it all. I am revising my novel […]".[170] In October of that same year, she repeats to John X. Merriman: "South African politics & public matters are to me simply heart breaking at the present time, & I am trying to forget them in revising one of my old novels that I wrote many years ago".[171] However, although she tried to separate 'fact from fiction', she could not disentangle one from the other. Thus, she would insert her own political ideas in her novels, even if they did not quite fit in: "The subject of the decay & death of nature & empires has so interested me all my life that I have brought in a whole chapter in it in my big novel - which doesn't sound promising for the novel! - but it really had to come in, because the woman in the book was so interested in it".[172] The novel in question is *From Man to Man,* and the 'woman in the book', Rebekah, serves as a spokesperson for Schreiner's feminist, anti-

[169]To J. Smuts, Monday 1918 - Smuts A1/204/147, lines 16-20.
[170]To Betty Molteno, 1 July 1905 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box3/Fold4/1905/24, lines 16-18.
[171]To John X. Merriman, 31 October 1905 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/1905:199, lines 55-57.
[172]To John X. Merriman, 26 February 1907 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/1907:16, lines 51-55.

imperialist and anti-racist ideas. Indeed, Schreiner's political activities and her creative writings were so closely intertwined that it is impossible to consider one without including the other.

Either through fictional or factive texts, Schreiner's role, both as a creative writer and as a political activist, was exerted through her words. In this sense, Schreiner could absolve herself, for she 'spoke the word which weighed on her'.[173] As she playfully warned Smuts: "Do not be angry with your little auntie: that what she says, she must say".[174] Schreiner used her words to spread a message of justice, freedom, equality and love. By doing so, she expected to be sowing the seeds for a better world.

[173]This quote refers to a passage in *Closer Union* where Schreiner writes: "To-day we in South Africa stand at the parting of the ways; and there is no man and no woman, however small and without influence their voice may be, and though themselves devoid of citizen rights, who, believing that the future of South Africa depends on our taking in this matter the higher and more difficult path, can absolve them to themselves, if they do not speak the word which weighs on them." (54-55).

[174]To Jan Smuts, 21 December 1908 - Smuts A1/191/57. This letter was originally written in a mixture of Ducth and Tall and translated by the OSLO Project. The sentence quoted being: "Wees nietkwaad ŧ voorjou~~w~~ kleinetante: die wat zÿmoetzegt, die moetzÿzegt", lines 11-12.

CHAPTER IV

Writing for Change: Sowing the Seeds for a Better World

> Yes, dear life is small & inexplicable if we take only our own individual lives, they are not a whole they mean nothing. How shall one explain all the crushed out hope, the suppressed emotions, the little value or use of our own lives, until we are able to see in them nothing but tiny parts of a great whole which is being worked out beautifully in ways we cannot understand. No human being lives alone, we are just parts of the great human race which slowly age by age is ?unfolding itself, & from the low, poor savage state reaching slowly the condition in which the far thinking deep feeling man or woman are possible. Of my own life I never think as anything but that which in an infinitesimal way may help the men & women who come after me; humanity grows better just by the little tiny better & better, in each individual who makes it. And after all love & knowledge in themselves are ends. Just to have loved something, just to know & reason & think make life worth living.[175]

In a letter to Karl Pearson from October 1886, Olive Schreiner propounds:

> Three things seem to me to have taken the place of the old powers that moved society. Science has taken the place of Theology, the press has taken the place of the ruler ~~& the preacher~~ (to a large & always growing larger extent) & fiction has taken the place which painting & the drama occupied in other ages, especially the middle ages. These are the three living powers of our age, whose rule is only beginning. Let us see to it, if it is our aim to

[175]To Mary Sauer, between Jan. Feb. 1891 - [Ronald Levine Collection, Johannesburg] Archive Ref 1 [Levine Collection Sauer/2] https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?page=327

> influence humanity ^we must do it through these means^.[176]

By the time she wrote that letter, Schreiner already knew that she could exert one of these powers of influencing people. Through her work as a creative writer, she tried to use that power and launch ideas that would contribute to a better society. She was also aware that her contribution was but a tiny portion of a greater ceaseless movement, which included thinkers and writers from the past and the future.

Schreiner acknowledged the importance of literature in fashioning "[t]hat complexus of knowledge and thought, with its resulting modes of action and feeling, which for the want of a better term we are accustomed to call 'the spirit of the age'" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 93). For her, the writer was, more than any other person, conscious of "the part played by literature in creating this unity in the civilized world" (95), connecting people and ideas from diverse places and cultural backgrounds. She believed that:

> Perhaps to the modern writer alone is that "human solidarity", transcending all bounds of nation and race […] not merely an idea, but a solid and practical reality. His kindred are not only those dwelling in the same house with him, but that band of men and women all the world over of whatever race or colour in whom his thoughts is germinating […] [H]is readers are his people, and all literary peoples his fellow-countrymen. (96)

In this last chapter, I will examine Schreiner's part in weaving that 'human solidarity' by looking into the way she throws her words like seeds to be germinated in the minds of her readers, irrespective of nation, race, and time, as a way to help humanity in its slow path towards development. I will show that, by doing so, Schreiner advanced some of the issues developed by postcolonial theorists.

According to Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, the rise of Literature and English studies in the academy in nineteenth-century Britain is not a coincidence. They argue that "the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded form a single ideological climate and that the

[176]To Karl Pearson, 25 October 1886 - Karl Pearson 840/4/3/102-110 - lines 14-21.

development of the one is intrinsically bound up with the development of the other" (*The Empire Writes Back* 3). For Gauri Viswanathan, English literature was seen by English colonial administrators as an ally "to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education" (*apud* Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* 3).

Edward Said views the novel as a cultural form "immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, preferences, and experiences" (*Culture and Imperialism* xii). Likewise, Schreiner already advanced that "the spirit of the age […] is created by the action of speech and mainly of opinion ossified and rendered permanent, portable, in the shape of literature" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 93), while the novel replaced "other forms ^of art^ in carrying to the hearts of the people the truths (or untruths!) of the Age".[177] For Said, "stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history" (*Culture and Imperialism* xii). This may explain why George Lamming considers the discovery of the novel by West Indians – the novel as a "way of investigating and projecting the inner experiences of the West Indian community" (16) as the third most important event in the British Caribbean history.[178] In Said's view, "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging," connects culture and imperialism in an accessory way, turning culture into an accomplice of imperialism. In this sense, he argues, although the utmost imperialist interest is land possession, the issues over its ownership, use and profit were often "reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative" (xiii).

Nevertheless, in the same way that the idea of western supremacy was constructed through narrative, it was also through 'the power to narrate' that such ideology could be dismantled and consciousness about the inequalities and injustices of colonialism/imperialism could be raised. Said states that "the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection" and that "many Europeans and

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[177]Letter to Karl Pearson, 25 October 1886 - Karl Pearson 840/4/3/102 -110 - 30-31.

[178] The first event is the discovery of the archipelago itself and the second "the abolition of slavery and the arrival of the East – India and China – in the Caribbean Sea" (Lamming 16).

Americans were also stirred by these stories and their protagonists, and they too fought for new narratives of equality and human community" (*Culture and Imperialism* xiii). Thus, by modifying and subverting the traditional colonial discourse or simply by changing the perspective and writing through the point of view of the colonized, postcolonial fiction writers have also developed a new narrative of resistance and change.

Once the damage of colonialism/imperialism has been effected and the "pre-colonial cultural purity can never be fully recovered" (Tiffin 95) due to the inevitable hybridization resulting from the colonial encounter, what remains to postcolonial writers is to question in a subversive way the ethnocentric European discourse that maintained such policy and engage in counter-discursive practices. According to Helen Tiffin, "post-colonial counter-discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified 'local'".[179] Tiffin's statement refers to modern works, which 'write back' to canonical texts. Therefore, in analyzing Schreiner's writings, we have to take into account that, if such 'counter-discursive' strategies were used, it was not in a retrospective mode, but in real time perspective, since she was both a witness and a protagonist of the colonial encounter and was immersed and subjected to the dominant discourse. As Ann McClintock reminds us, Schreiner was

> unusually well positioned to testify -- as she did in her novels, essays, political writings and activism – to the major tumults of her time : the discovery of precious minerals in South Africa, the crises of late-Victorian industrialism, the socialist and feminist upheavals of the fin de siècle, the Anglo-Boer War and the great European conflagration of World War I. (259)

It certainly has a quite different weight and effect being removed from the context, a position we presently hold, to analyze and judge the

[179] Tiffin's statement refers to works, like Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Samuel Selvon's *Moses Ascending* and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, which not only 'write back' to "an English canonical text, but to the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds" (98).

facts, and the ideology that fueled them, from a distant point in time and space. Considering colonialism, one can surely have a much clearer view now, some hundred years later, of the despicable reasons and profound negative consequences of such enterprise. However, for those who lived at the heat of the moment, things may not have been so evident and simple. Schreiner seems to have been aware of this difficulty. In the introduction of *Woman and Labour*, she addresses the men and women of future generations, writing:

> You will look back at us with astonishment! You will wonder at passionate struggles that accomplished so little; at the, to you, obvious paths to attain our ends which we did not take; at the intolerable evils before which it will seem to you we sat down passive; at the great truths staring us in the face, which we failed to see; at the truths we grasped at, but could never get our fingers round. (23)

Although Schreiner might have written these words thinking about the woman's question, the fact is that gender, class and race issues were intermingled in her social theories and she treated them with the same aim of fostering social equality and justice. Therefore, her words may be applied to all the struggles she engaged in throughout her life.

Edward Said hints at how British and French people in the 1860's perceived colonialism. Incapable of viewing their colonies "with a sense of their separate sovereignty" (*Culture and Imperialism* xxiv), because imbued with Eurocentric ideology and a steadfast sense of superiority, those European colonizers accepted the colonizing activities as natural and disregarded any attempt, on the natives' part, to do or say "anything that might perhaps contradict, challenge, or otherwise disrupt the prevailing discourse" (xxiv). Although Schreiner was subjected to the same principles that molded white European colonizers in South Africa and was educated to believe and follow the same precepts, she started to doubt, from an early age, the assumptions which supported such ideology. As she became more conscious, she gradually rejected and tried to demolish those beliefs, even at the risk of inflicting on herself a constant and painful intellectual self-exile.

Schreiner's process of change can be traced back in the introduction to *Thoughts on South Africa*, where she admits to having "started in life with as much insular prejudice and racial pride as it is

given to any citizen who has never left the little Northern Island to possess". (15). Recalling her childhood, she tells her readers about "one of her earliest memories", which, seen out of context, would definitely define her as an extreme racist, not only against the natives but also against the Boers. In this recollection she remembers pretending to be Queen Victoria and possessing the entire world:

> That being the case, I ordered all the black people in South Africa to be collected and put into the desert of Sahara, and a wall built across Africa shutting it off; I then ordained that any black person returning south of that line should have his head cut off. I did not wish to make slaves of them, but I wished to put them where I need never see them, because I considered them ugly. I do not remember planning that Dutch South Africans should be put across the wall, but my objection to them was only a little less. (15-16)

This episode is also reproduced in *From Man to Man*. There Rebekah tells her sons how she was prejudiced as a child and instructs them not to be so. Probably a description of Schreiner's own experience, Rebekah tells how she started to empathize with the dark races at the age of seven, as she heard stories of Kaffir women suffering and dying, and realised the human feelings that connects all races:

> "And so you see", she said, "as I grew older and older I got to see that it wasn't the color or the shape of the jaw or the cleverness that mattered; that if men and women could love very much and feel such great pain that their hearts broke, and if when they thought they were wronged they were glad to die, and that for others they could face death without fear […] then they were mine and I was theirs, and the wall I had built across Africa had slowly to fall down". (417)

Schreiner's objection to natives as a child clearly reveals a naïve argument: she wished to segregate the blacks not for evil purposes of exploitation but because she was unable to deal with differences; putting them apart would prevent her seeing what she could not identify with. Relatedly, as a child, Schreiner remembers wondering about God's

unfair criteria in making the English so much superior to all other races. As an adult, she concludes that the experiences of her early childhood show "what the most fully developed jingoism means" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 17). Schreiner's confession only confirms how strongly the principles of the ruling class molded people's minds in the colonial situation, determining their behavior. Later she becomes aware that her feelings as a child were not the result of a conscious and systematic training or instruction but of a subliminal ideology that pervaded the whole society.

> I cannot remember being exactly instructed in these matters by any one, rather, I suppose, I imbibed my views as boys coming to a town where there are two rival schools imbibe a prejudice towards the boys of the other school, without ever being definitely instructed on the matter. I cannot remember a time when I was not profoundly convinced of the superiority of the English, their government and their manners, over all other peoples. (1923b: 15)

Thus, as a child, Schreiner unconsciously developed what Memmi calls "colonial racism": "[a] mixture of behaviors and reflexes acquired and practiced since very early childhood, established and measured by education" and "so spontaneously incorporated in even the most trivial acts and words, that it seems to constitute one of the fundamental patterns of colonialist personality" (114). It took a long time until Schreiner detached herself from that pattern and became a dissonant voice among her own people. Passages scattered throughout her writings prove how her views towards peoples and politics changed as she gained knowledge about them. As she writes in 1901: "Later on, my feelings for the Boer changed, as did, later yet, my feelings towards the native races; but this was not the result of any training, but simply of an increased knowledge" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 17).

Shohat and Stam claim that "as regimes of truth, discourses are encased in institutional structures that exclude specific voices, aesthetics, and representations" (18). In the colonial context, Memmi observes that "[t]he colonialists are perpetually explaining, justifying and maintaining (by words as well as deeds) the place and fate of their silent partners in the colonial drama" (114). For Mary Louise Pratt, "[t]he essentializing discursive power is impervious until those who are seen are also listened to" (153). Thus, in order to be listened, 'the silent

partners in the colonial drama', that is, the excluded voices of the subalterns, must speak. If, as Spivak (111) concludes, the 'subaltern cannot speak', how will this problem be solved? How will the discourses become free from "encased institutional structures" to be appropriated by all voices? How will the discursive power stop being 'impervious' and become less biased and more righteous? Should someone speak for the excluded voices and present alternative truths?

Although the speaking for somebody else poses a serious question on the validity of representation, this is what those who have the power to narrate have been doing throughout history. This is what Schreiner also did, to some extent, in her texts, both fictional and theoretical. What should be considered, then, is whether this 'speaking in the name of others' is invalid because it is not truly representative or, instead, it is a fair possibility because it fills a lack of representation by providing another alternative. Concerning Schreiner's writings, I believe that, in presenting a point of view other than the dominant discourse, though not originally that of the subaltern, she offered a new perspective, which could be reflected upon and considered to, hopefully, provoke some positive change in people's opinions and attitudes.

In 1905, Schreiner is presented with *The Souls of Black Folk,* a book by Willliam Edward Burghardt Du Bois, a black American writer and activist. She is enthralled by his story and writes to Edward Carpenter and John X. Merriman recommending it and commenting how deeply impressed and touched she felt by the book. In an incredible insight of self-awareness, she raises the question on the authenticity of representation in Du Bois's text and the lack of a genuine voice in her own writing.

> If you've not read it you must get it & read it at once. Perhaps it can't be to any you just what it is to me who for years & years have longed, "Oh that one man of dark blood would rise, who would express, not what he feels it polite & wise to say to white people, but who ~~whould~~ would say what he feels." Uncle Tom's Cabin or poor little Peter Halket are all very well; but you are always met with the remark, "Yes thats how you paint the nigger, but he's not realy like that, you put your own thoughts & feeling into him, & fancy he feels as a white man, but he doesn't." - & what can one

> answer. But this book from the heart of a black man can surely not be ~~*unreadable*~~ met so.[180]

In the literature section of a site on South Africa, Schreiner appears under the heading: Truly South African Voices. In a very brief text, we are informed that her first novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) is "generally considered to be the founding text of South African Literature", and that although it is "still a key text in the formation of a truly South African voice", it "has been criticized for its silence with regard to the black African presence in South Africa."[181] Anne MacClintock states that while "[i]n her more mature political writing and activism, Schreiner was unusual in her anti-racism and sympathy for black people, yet in her fiction Africans are, more often than not, forbidding ciphers" (268). McClintock makes an interesting analysis about the ambiguity of black women in Schreiner's fiction. She claims that in an attempt at redeeming the idea of the white mother, and in particular, of her own mother, Schreiner transfers to her African women characters a punitive and authoritative power exerted within the household to maintain the cult of white domesticity, while denying them "the agency beyond their subservience" (270). Relatedly, McClintock points that Schreiner elides the problem of child-slave labour, represented by Griet – a Khoikhoi servant girl exchanged by her drunken mother for a pair of old shoes and a bottle of wine – in the novel *From Man to Man*, and the exploitation of African women into domestic labour in white women households. For McClintock, the elision of black women in Schreiner's fiction "fractures [her] monism and her yearning for a universal feminism" (273).

It can be argued though, that the absence of black characters in Schreiner's fiction, apart from some servants with no names or identity, mirrors the situation of the natives in a period when they were hardly regarded as humans. For First and Scott, "that was the point about the colonial condition: Africans were kept so far outside white society that that [their absence in Schreiner's novels] in itself was a statement about it" (97). Indeed, in Schreiner's fiction, the presence, or rather the absence, of black characters is in tune with the colonial narrative, and it is regrettable that she did not go beyond her contemporaries in that respect. Nevertheless, in *From Man to Man*, a novel which deals

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[180]To Eduard Carpenter, 26 October 1905 - Edward Carpenter 359/90 - lines 13-23.

[181]http://www.southafrica.info/about/arts/923826.htm#.Vh5hxflVikoOlive.

primarily with marriage and prostitution, Schreiner intentionally raises some questions about race relations in South African colonial society. In a letter to her brother Will from June 1908 Schreiner comments on the inclusion of this topic:

> The colour question comes in quite naturally there, because one of the centre points of the story is that the wife has adopted & brings up as her own among the legitimate children a little half-coloured child who is her husbands by a coloured servant. He never suspects the child is his till the end of the book, when he attacks his wife with bringing up a coloured child with his white children. You will of course see how this opens up the whole question of our relation to the ~~*unreadable*~~ ^darker^ races, & the attitude which says 'they are here for <u>our</u> interest for our <u>pleasure</u>, & to hell with them when they aren't that!' If only I could live to finish that book, I would feel satisfied, though it was perfect failure.[182]

The colour question is addressed explicitly in the novel by the main character, Rebekah, who tells her children a story about racism. Her aim is to warn them about their unfair prejudice towards the so-called 'inferior races', personified by their half-sister Satjie. Through Rebekah's voice, Schreiner unveils how racism is construed to justify and maintain the colonial system. If we consider Schreiner's work as the product of personal experiences or as an extension of her beliefs, then the allegorical tale Rebekah tells is revealing in terms of the evolution in Schreiner's views about native peoples. It is also enlightening in showing her elaboration of 'self' and 'other'. By shifting these two categories in the tale, placing the white dominant Europeans as the subordinate class in relation to an alien race, Schreiner challenges the established pattern forcing her readers to envision new alternatives to the social order and to reflect upon the legitimacy of colonial domination.

The story Rebekah tells is a dream she sometimes has about a "strange, terrible, new race of people" coming "perhaps from the nearest

[182]Letter to Will Schreiner, June 1908 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box4/Fold1/1908/37 - lines 28-39.

star" to dominate the people on Earth. In describing their methods of domination, Schreiner reproduces the same pattern used by white Europeans over the natives in Africa. She mocks the supposed European superiority by describing the aliens' reaction to their knowledge and beliefs.

> Also, because their [the alien's] knowledge was different from ours [European people/colonizers], their laws and their ways of life were different. Things we had thought right they called wrong. They laughed at the things we believed, and called us ignorant and superstitious savages. […] They didn't feel sorry for us because we were ignorant; they only laughed at our books and our pictures and all that we made and did. They thought our bodies uglier than theirs, though we thought we were just as beautiful. They would not ride in the same airships with us nor breathe the same currents of air; they called us "The Inferior Races". (1923a: 400)

Regarding their appearance, Schreiner emphasizes the Arian feature of the aliens, making them as "white as driven snow" and with golden hair. Overall, she tells, they were like humans, except that they had an enhanced knowledge in every field: architecture, technology, transportation, communication, medicine, clothing and food. This is how Rebekah describes them: "They were human; but there was this difference between them and us – that, of many things, they *knew* what we did not, and could do things we could not" (1923a: 397). The attested superior knowledge of the aliens over the subject races in the tale could be interpreted as a confirmation of European supremacy over the indigenous peoples, and thus, as an (in)direct justification for the white colonizers' dominance. Nevertheless, Schreiner finds a way to disregard such knowledge as more valuable than the indigenes' 'primitive' customs and learning by simply placing it under the scrutiny and evaluation of a system supposedly even more superior. In laying the different 'knowledges' – the aliens', the Europeans' and the natives' – side by side, Schreiner relativizes or decolonizes the established system of truth imposed by the dominant discourse of the imperial centre. She accomplishes that by ironically exposing the usual derogatory reaction of Europeans towards the natives' culture, while simultaneously

mocking the white colonizers' self- appraisal of western civilized manners. About the food, for example, Rebekah says:

> The bloody flesh of our fellow creatures which we (white people) feed on, the roots we dig out of the ground too, the milk drawn out of the bodies of other living beasts, they (the aliens) thought as horrible and unclean as we think the grubs and entrails on which the Bushmen feed. (1923a: 399)

About the clothes:

> …the skins of dead creatures…, the feathers of birds and dead birds…, the shreds of hair and wool from animals backs, the threads from the insides of little worms, the torn decayed fiber of plants that we beat into clothes and are so proud to carry about everywhere on our bodies and think others savages if they have not got them – they thought disgusting […]. They thought our clothes and the way we hid our bodies from light and air uncleanly; and they turned their heads from us, as we turn our heads from natives dressed in skins and rubbed with fats. (1923a: 399)

About religion/customs:

> They jeered at us when we put water on the foreheads of little babies to save them, and laughed when some of us said bread and wine could be changed into blood and meat because a man spoke a few words over them, just as we laugh at the kaffir witch doctors who mumble over bones and make charms. (1923a: 400)

By playing an alterity game, Schreiner simultaneously dislocates and embraces the differences, revealing an attitude of acceptance towards cultural diversity that places her apart from the majority of her contemporaries, who, ratifying Montaigne's famous claim, would think

barbarian "everything that is not in use in [their] own country"[183] or culture.

However, Schreiner still presents some lapses of Eurocentrism, as when she compares the musical instruments of the three peoples:

> They had beautiful and wonderful things we have not even dreamed of – musical instruments more wonderful and sweet than ours, as our organs and violins are better than the gora-gorras which the Bushmen and Hottentots play on. (1923a: 400)

Likewise, her protective attitude towards the oppressed, explicit in her belief that natives should be pitied and needed help, having a lot to learn from Europeans, is a reflection of this Eurocentric view: "They didn't feel sorry for us because we were ignorant" (1923a: 400); "[…] they did nothing to teach us their wisdom and make us grasp their freedom" (1923a: 402). It seems that although Schreiner consciously favoured pluralism, recognizing other people's cultural codes and expression, and strived to spread this mode of thinking, she was still unconsciously entrapped by Eurocentrism.

Nevertheless, her attitude should be considered in a more complex way. Schreiner's protectionism towards the 'darker races' might be a vestige of that wicked ideology that fostered her racism as a child or simply as the result of her Christian upbringing and her will to heal social wounds. Finally, it could also imply Schreiner's views on human progress and her belief in the need to promote the development of individuals as a way to achieve the improvement of the human race as a whole. As she states in a letter to Will: "Over all one believes that the race on earth makes its way slowly upwards, till we have brought up all our rears in every land, & freedom & peace will be possible. I do not know how one would go on fighting but for that larger faith".[184]

Thus, although ambiguous in some points, the real target of Schreiner's criticism in the allegory inserted in *From Man to Man* is the politics of colonialism and the white colonizer, who despite boasting superiority, does not contribute to the development of those he considers inferior, and shows no civilized manner in his exploitative attitudes

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[183] MONTAIGNE, Michel de. Of cannibals. Available at: http://essays.quotidiana.org/montaigne/cannibals/. Accessed on 20th Oct. 2015

[184] To Will Schreiner, 26 July 1899 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box2/Fold2/July-Dec1899/11 - lines 25-28.

towards the natives. Schreiner's intent, naïve or shallow as it may seem, is to promote the natives' improvement as human beings, and their consequent empowerment, by incorporating the positive aspects of European culture without necessarily losing their own. It is on this basis, that she suggests to Betty Molteno, in 1909, to "try to help educate in the deepest sense the Kaffir women",[185] to open for them new possibilities. Likewise, she insists to James Henderson, a Presbyterian missionary, that education is the solution for the native question.[186]

The outcome Schreiner presents in her tale replicates the natives' dilemma towards their fate after colonization: either to fight and die or to adapt to a new reality. The wisest of the colonized in Rebekah's dream said: "We will not fight their weapons, only to die! Neither will we fade away. This world also is our home. We also are men. We will not die. We will grasp the new life, and live!" (*From Man to Man* 402). Although Schreiner envisions a slightly new route for the natives – "[…] we did not despair; and we did not despise ourselves. We learned all the terrible white-faced strangers had to teach […]" – she also acknowledges the harsh reality imposed on them: "[…] and we worked for them. We worked – and we worked – and we worked – and we waited – and we waited – and we waited –" (402-403). That is how Rebekah's dream ends, but Schreiner's dream – the unity of the diverse peoples of South Africa – would continue throughout her life.

Schreiner praised diversity and conceived the future of South Africa with each element of the population maintaining its individuality while working to build a just and humane great nation. In response to a letter from Merriman, in which he comments on her paper on the Bushmen, Schreiner envisions an ecological solution that would not only protect wildlife, fauna and flora, but also preserve the natives as closely as possible to their original state. Schreiner's suggestion was to become a common practice, in the following decades, through the creation of national parks, nature and game reserves worldwide:

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[185]To Betty Molteno, 1909 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box4/Fold2/1909/15 - line 7-8.

[186]In a letter to James Henderson dated from the 25th April 1913 she writes: "To me the solution of your native question is Education, Education, Education! […]There are some points touching the education of native women on which I should much like to have your opinion, but am not now able to write".
Archive name [Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown]
Archive Ref 1 [Cory, PR 3777/1]

> I don't know why the Bushman must die: they have kept alive a variety of the original wild cattle of Europe in a certain Park in England! There is no reason the Bushman should perish, if a millionaire bought ~~*unreadable*~~ up thirty or forty large farms, fenced them, & stocked them with wild beast, or rather let them simply run, & left the Bushman at peace in the territory, not trying to civilize them. It certainly won't be done, but it certainly might be.[187]

Schreiner was not an adept of cultural assimilation. In the same way that she found a "sorrowful sight" the attempt of some Boers at mimicking the Englishman, (1923b: 20), she also praised black people, like E. K. Soga,[188] in their manifestation of racial pride: "That is why I admire E.K. Soga so. His mother was a ~~Kaffir wo~~ Scotch woman; but he always calls himself a 'Kaffir'& never tries to pass himself off as a pure white man. It is strange how many of the leading & most successful men in South Africa have dark blood!!!!!"[189] Thus, I believe that her patronizing attitudes towards the natives was not an attempt at promoting acculturation but a form of improving their material conditions so that a less discriminatory and a more harmonious relationship between the diverse races in South Africa could emerge. In *Closer Union*, Schreiner claims that what South Africa needed in that period of Unification was a man (since a woman in that position would be unconceivable at that time!) with certain qualities "to be the leader of a great heterogeneous people" (56). This man, she claims, should

> realise to the full the difficulties the dark man faces when, his old ideals and order of life suddenly uprooted, he is thrown face to face with a foreign civilisation which he must grasp and rise to, or under which he must sink; and he will seek by every means in his power to help him bridge the transition without losing his native virtues. (57)

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[187]John X. Merriman, 29 June 1896 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/71/4/3, lines 55-61.

[188]Allan Kirkland Soga was the son of Tiyo Soga, a Xhosa missionary and translator of the Bible, and Janet Burnside, a Scotswoman.

[189]Olive Schreiner: Mimmie Murray 2001.24/38 - lines 41-45.

One of the distinguishing features of Schreiner's allegory in *From Man to Man* is her awareness of the damage of the white colonizer's ideology on the natives' self-image, which results from a process of 'inner colonization', i.e., the internalization of the dominant culture by the colonized. Anticipating Memmi's elaboration of the psychological impact of the colonial discourse on the minds of the colonized, Schreiner reveals in her tale how the power of words functioned to undermine the natives' belief in their own capacities and values. To explain to her son why the people on earth did not fight against the aliens, Rebekah describes the same process to which natives were submitted under the European colonizer rule:

> […] We could not fight them – we could only die. And sometimes, if by a strange chance we managed to take the life of one or two of their men, they called us murderers – but our dead lay in heaps. Thousands of the bravest of us fell so; whole nations were swept away from the earth and were forgotten. We could only fight to die.

But to some of us a much more terrible thing happened. We did not try to fight and were not killed suddenly; a more awful fate overtook us.

> Because they despised *us*, we began to despise *ourselves*!
>
> If you pull up a tree suddenly by the roots and throw it down on the ground with all its roots exposed (the roots through which it has sucked its life for so many years), for a little while the leaves may keep green and the sap run up the stem; but by and by the leaves will wither, and the tree dies. Even if you try to transplant it and stick it up carelessly in a bit of ground, if you do not spread out the roots in the new earth and press down the ground on them and give it much water for a time – it dies.
>
> So, when they took from us all our old laws and our old customs, when they told us all we had thought right was wrong and all we had known

> foolishness – and when they made us believe them; when they did nothing to teach us their wisdom and make us grasp their freedom – then we despised ourselves; and so we died.
>
> We did not die suddenly; we faded and faded as the leaves fade on an uprooted tree and grow browner and browner till they drop off and are blown hither and thither by the wind, till you see them no more. So we died by millions. And the strange white people said: 'See they are an inferior race; they melt away before us! (401-402)

This long passage illustrates Stam and Shohat's argument that "racism usually comes 'in the wake' of concrete oppressions" (18) since it describes the way in which the colonized are robbed of their natural and cultural richness to be later accused of being incapable and inferior by the colonizer. Memmi describes this process in his portrayal of the colonial situation with its main protagonists, the colonizer and the colonized. According to Memmi, through the ideology of the governing class, the colonizer legitimates his position as the complete master, while the colonized accepts his role as a slave or oppressed creature (14). The mythical portrait of the latter as an inferior and needy class, produced by the colonialist and for his own benefit, is eventually incorporated by the colonized sealing his own despicable image. This is exactly what Rebekah's tale is about. The relation between the two protagonist groups of the colonial situation, according to Memmi, chained them "into an implacable dependence, [which] molded their respective characters and dictated their conduct" (15). The colonized, he states, can assume two different positions: either to assimilate or to revolt against the colonial situation. The attempt at assimilation, through self-denial and imitation, is a way the colonized found to be accepted. The opposite attitude, that of refusing the colonizer after being rejected by him for so long, implies a process of self-discovery in which the colonized will try to recover his self and his dignity before becoming free.

In her writings about the native question, Schreiner does not seem to favour either of the two positions. Instead, she envisions a third alternative for the colonized: the conjunction of his own and the alien's culture for the benefit of both. She praises the natives' social

organization, their traditions and knowledge,[190] condemning the colonizer's attempt to undervalue and change their culture, but she also believes that western concepts such as wisdom, justice and freedom must be provided by the enlightened white Europeans and incorporated into the native's lives (as if they lacked these concepts in their own culture). As Berkman points out, Schreiner "contended that dual sensitivity to cultural diversity and democratic progress was not an impossible ideal" (105).

This apparently incoherent attitude may be used by those who accuse Schreiner of being racist and overlooking colonialism (Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman* 156), but it may reveal, instead, a realistic view of colonialism as an inevitable historical event and an acute perception of the hybridism that would progressively follow and pervade all the peoples and places affected by it. For Schreiner, it would be inconceivable, considering the peculiarities of South African colonialism, to take a radical stance and propose the return of the white colonizers and their descendants to their original

[190]Schreiner extolls particularly the Bantu people with their "proud reserve, and an intensely self-conscious and reflective mental attitude" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 110).About their language, she claims to be "of a perfect construction, lending itself largely to figurative and poetical forms, yet capable of giving great precision to exact thought" (110). "At the time of the arrival of the white man", she explains in *Thoughts on SA*, "all these Bantu peoples were organized (as they still are today wherever unbroken by the white man's power) into tribes, under chieftains to whom the whole people owed an absolute devotion, but who were largely aided in their deliberations by the older and leading men. They were in a state of civilization apparently much higher than that of the Britons at the time of the Roman Conquest, and more resembling that of the Saxons before the first introduction of Christianity. They had well-built round or square houses, kept sheep, goats, and cattle; their skin clothing and shields were often shaped with high art; and they had a complex agriculture, rich in grains and vegetables; they made serviceable and ornamental pottery, smelted iron, and their weapons and hoes were of marvellous workmanship, when the rude nature of their tools is considered. Their social feeling was, as it is at the present day when not destroyed by contact with Europeans, almost abnormally developed. The devotion of the tribe to its chief, and of the tribesmen to each other, and the intensity of their family feeling, can hardly be understood by those who have not lived among them" (112). "Their etiquette in ordinary social life, before they have come in contact with the lower phases of civilization, seems often based on a higher sense of honour than that which governs the ordinary relations of Europeans"(113-114).

countries,[191] as Gandhi did when fighting for India's independence. As she had once realized as a child, some things "could not be altered or reshaped" and the colonization of South Africa was one of them. It simply could not be undone. Given the circumstances, she suggests, "the story could take its course in no other direction than that in which it did!" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 153).

In a period when race distinctions were used as a justification to promote peoples' severance, Schreiner defined South Africans as "a more or less homogeneous blend of heterogeneous social particles in different stages of development and of cohesion with one another, underlying and overlaying each other like the varying strata of confused geological formations" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 51). According to this perspective, any attempt at diminishing the gap between the different stages of development among the races that formed South Africa meant for Schreiner, a positive solution. The real bond that unites all South Africans, Schreiner states, is *"our mixture of races itself*" (61). In a methodical manner, she invites her readers to visualize the main elements that formed the South African population (the aboriginal native races, the earliest Europeans represented by the Boer or Dutch Huguenots, the English and other European descendants – and even the Portuguese) represented on a racial map by different colours. Her conclusion is that "the colours are intermingled everywhere, like the tints in a well-shot Turkey carpet. They cannot be separated" (52). Schreiner presciently asserts that accepting this condition of unity within diversity was the first step to solve the internal difficulties and the only possible way for South Africa to become a truly harmonized nation.[192]

The problem created by the colonization process, and aggravated by other factors, such as the importation of slaves and foreign laboring classes, at different points in South African history, imposed the coexistence of diverse races disputing and finally living in the same space. This problem had, in Schreiner's view, only one possible solution: the acceptance that no dividing line should be drawn through the races that constituted the South African population. She warns: "If the South Africa of the future is to remain eaten internally by race

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[191]The closest that Schreiner did in that direction is in a letter to an English friend written after the Anglo-Boer War, in which she expresses her indignation saying that those who lost the war "know perfectly well that [..] England will someday go out bag & baggage". To Edward Carpenter, 17 June 1904 - Olive Schreiner: Edward Carpenter SMD 30/32/c

[192]Interestingly the motto of South Africa today is "Unity in Diversity".

hatreds […] our doom is sealed" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 63). Schreiner knew that the "blending had gone too far" – "in our households, in our families, in our very persons we are mingled" (59) and that any attempt of dividing the races into separate territories was ridiculous and physically impossible to attain. As a practical example of that impossibility, and of the high level of racial mixing, Schreiner describes a typical Cape household:

> The father of the household is an Englishman; The mother a so-called Boer, of half Dutch half French blood, with a French name; the children are of the three nationalities; the governess is a German; the cook is a Half-caste, partly Boer and partly the descendant of the old slaves; the housemaid is a Half-caste, part Hottentot, and whose father was perhaps an English soldier; the little nurse girl is a Hottentot; the boy who cleans the boots and waits, a Kaffir, and the groom is a Basuto. This household is a type of thousands of others to be found everywhere in South Africa". (60)

Schreiner strives to spread the idea that "South Africa unity is not the dream of the visionary [nor] the forecast of genius" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 61). She is sure that some form of 'organic unity' is possible because "there is a sense in which all South Africans are one" (60).

Considering the other protagonist group of the colonial situation – the colonizer – it can unfold, according to Memmi, into two categories: the colonialist, that who "seeks to legitimize colonization" (17) and the "benevolent colonizer", the one who condemns colonization (18). While the former believed to be carrying 'the white man's burden', the latter had to choose between two alternatives: either leave the colony or remain in it, assuming a position that would place him as a traitor under the eyes of his compatriots. If he stayed, claims Memmi, he would live "under the sign of a contradiction" since he would continue taking part and benefitting from the privileges, that he condemned (19). Moreover, even if he did not feel guilty, as an individual, of the injustices of the colonial system, "he share[d] a collective responsibility" (20) for being a member of the dominant group.

Although Schreiner was a native white colonial, and not the newcomer colonizer, to whom Memmi's description refers to, she presented much of the 'benevolent' colonizer's profile. Her ambiguous remarks about the natives[193], at the same time condescending and emancipating, and her view of colonization as both destructive and beneficial reflected the contradiction that afflicted the so-called benevolent colonizer. Besides, Schreiner's sense of 'collective responsibility' for the iniquities of the colonial system is a constant concern in her letters to white politicians, whose duties towards the dark races she often highlights. I suspect that, by championing the dis-empowered through her writing and political activism, she found a means to cope with her feelings of personal guilt and social responsibility.

Schreiner believed that the effect of present deeds would be mostly felt by the following generations. In 1896, she expressed her concern on that matter to her friend Betty Molteno: "Why should poor innocent folk still unborn pay for the evil deeds of men living now!"[194] In her letters to politicians she constantly used the 'sow and reap' metaphor to emphasize her arguments and remind them of the connection between past, present and future. Her letter to John X. Merriman from 1897 is such an example: "The men to come after us will reap the fruits of our 'native policy', as we today in a smaller fashion are reaping the fruits of the 'Dutch Policy' of sixty years ago". [195] Again, to her brother Will in 1899 she says: "We have about 15 years steady uphill pull against the capitalists. Then in about 50 though we shall not be here to see it will come up the great native question & we shall reap as we have sown".[196] Likewise, in her last letter to Jan Smuts just two months before her death, referring to the native question, she warns: "As we sow we shall reap". [197]

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[193]Although Schreiner fought against the concept of inferior races, she sometimes contradicted herself in her writings: "They [the Hottentots] are the eternal children of the human race" (*Thoughts on South Africa* 107)/ "…and the Bushman, being what he was, a little human in embryo…" (152) "…this little half-developed child of South Africa (153).

[194]To Betty Molteno, 18 July 1896 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold3/1896/21 - lines 12-14.

[195]To John X. Merriman, 3 April 1897 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/1897:17 - lines 70-73.

[196]To William Philip ('Will') Schreiner, 26 July 1899 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box2/Fold2/July-Dec1899/11 - lines 22-25.

[197]To Jan Smuts, 19 October 1920 - Smuts A1/207/185 - lines 25-26.

Schreiner condemned the wrong doings of individuals driven by self-interest, greed, money or power. However, she also praised acts of self-sacrifice, which would benefit the collectivity in a future time. She was an adept of such principle herself. Like the protagonist in search of the bird of Truth in her allegory *The Hunter* (1890), she also wandered alone "into the Land of Absolute Negation and Denial",[198] suffering with solitude and ostracism just to pave the way for those who would come next. The final passage of this allegorical tale symbolizes Schreiner's own endeavours in that direction:

> "I have sought", he said, "for long years I have laboured; but I have not found her. I have not rested, I have not repined, and I have not seen her; now my strength is gone. Where I lie down worn out other men will stand, young and fresh. By the steps that I have cut they will climb; by the stairs that I have built they will mount. They will never know the name of the man who made them. At the clumsy work they will laugh; when the stones roll they will curse me. But they will mount, and on my work; they will climb, and by my stair! They will find her, and through me! And no man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself".[199]

This view of humanity being interconnected through time also illustrates a passage in *Trooper Peter*, where a preacher "small of stature and small of voice" (12) explains to his wife, who cannot understand an act of self-sacrifice "for people that are not born" (1897: 14), the bond that links men from all ages. "What are they to you?" she asks her husband, "[y]ou will be dust, and lying in your grave, before that time comes" (14). His answer reproduces Schreiner's belief in an interconnection between past, present and future:

> […] shall I feel no bond binding me to the men to come, and desire no good or beauty for them – I ,who am what I am, and enjoy what I enjoy, because for countless ages in the past men have lived and labored, who lived not for themselves

[198]In The Project Gutenberg EBook of Dreams - http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1439.
[199]Ibid.

> alone, and counted no costs? Would the great statue, the great poem, the great reform ever be accomplished, if men counted the cost and created for their lives alone? (14)

Despite her allegedly pessimistic personality and of usually considering that things would be really bad before they would get better, the despondent Schreiner would still keep her faith and hope as fuel for her activism, as she expresses in a letter to Merriman from February 1907:

> I am now as an old Boer would express it "full up to my throat" with South Africa. I have not lost my faith in the glorious forward march which humanity is still going to take upon earth; for "I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs" - but here in South Africa we are the crest of a wave & there will be an awful sweep down wards before we mount on the other side; - hideous native wars, injustice & greed riding rampant, - with always the protesting few of course. Do not think I am despairing over human life & things generall; I am more full of hope than ever; but just as I saw in England in 88 that there was a long terrible downward dip before us, so I see it here today.[200]

Schreiner often viewed the far future with positive eyes because she believed that humanity naturally moved towards higher social development. Her belief that her work, even if incomplete, would add in some way to that development, gave her a sensation of completeness.

> Such a great peace comes to one when one fixes oneself on one large object so. "And if one dies?" - Yes, then others will take up our work, where the pen drops from our fingers another man will be found to pick it up & finish the line & the book; the gold we have seen another man who comes after will see too, & he will pick it up & give it to the world, if we have not time. Truth is

[200]To John X. Merriman, 26 February 1907 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/1907:16 - lines 37-47.

> not a dream, not a chimera, she is always there, those who come upon the same road will find her where we have found her. We are not alone as we sometimes feel in our agony, we are all working into each others hands, & the steps are thick behind us on the road on which we wander wondering if we have lost our way.[201]

Ten years later, in a letter to Merriman, Schreiner alludes to a passage in Plato which refers to those who fight alone and in vain for good causes to reinforce her idea that "by each man doing his tiny best in his tiny place, humanity does grow slowly & slowly onwards".[202]

Schreiner's love for humanity and her sense of belonging to an integrated universe nurtured her optimistic thoughts. Like the preacher's in *Trooper Peter,* she also believed that

> […] no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. You cannot tell me not to love the men who shall be after me; a soft voice within me, I know not what, cries out ever. 'Live for them as for your own children'. When in the circle of my own small life all is dark, and I despair, hope springs up in me when I remember that something nobler and fairer may spring up in the spot where I now stand. (14)

It is this hope that nourishes Schreiner's will to change the world by changing people's minds through her words and her work as a sower of new ideas. Berkman views Schreiner's optimism as her 'lifeline', though it somehow clashed with her unresolved conflicts and concludes that both "she and we benefited from her optimism, whatever its cost, for it enabled the treatises and fiction that have inspired subsequent generations of critics of South African capitalism and racism" (235).

I. Hofmayer criticizes Schreiner for fostering a "tenuous optimism that justice, equality and rightness of the liberal democracy would come to triumph via the operation of the 'enlightened' liberal remnant of the English community" (*apud* Ogede 252). For Hofmayer,

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[201]To karl Pearson,July 1886 - Karl Pearson 840/4/3/34-39 - lines 74-84.
[202]To John X. Merriman, 17 December 1897 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/71/4/5 - National Library of South Africa, Special Collections, Cape Town - lines 49-51

the inconsistence between Schreiner's hope and the resulting repressive colonial state into which South Africa became shows the weaknesses in her thinking. However, Ode Ogede contests Hofmayer's verdict arguing that "the strength of Schreiner's ideas does not lie in the scientific exactitude of her theories; rather, it resides in her optimism as it is reflected in the independent and determined figure of the artist/thinker enshrined in the character of her hero, Waldo" (252). Ogede claims that artist/thinker figures like Waldo appear in works of later African writers, such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wolé Sóyiñká, and Ayi Kwei Armah. He identifies in these characters the same objective: "they are tender individuals who seek to use their gifts to unsettle the established, oppressive regimes in their respective societies" (252).

Interestingly, Ogede's description of such characters, in my view, applies perfectly to the artist/thinker Olive Schreiner. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that Waldo and Lyndal, the main characters in *The Story of an African Farm*, are considered Schreiner's counterparts. Schreiner once wrote Ellis how she felt regarding her characters, whom she called 'my people':[203]

> Rebekah is me I don't know which is which any more; but Bertie is me, & Drummond is me, & all is me, only not Veronica & Mrs. Drummond (except a little!). Sometimes I really don't know whether I am I; or I am one of the others.[204]

Schreiner surely used her characters to deliver her message and she was sensible about her target audience. She knew who she was addressing when she wrote, and she would negotiate with her publishers the different prices of her books according to the public she wanted to reach. Thus, *Trooper Peter Halket* was directed at the mis-informed British public, while *The Story of an African Farm* was published for the working class at one shilling, so that "poor boys like Waldo could buy a copy and feel they were not alone",[205] and *Dreams* was intended "To all

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[203]"I can't have Bertie & Rebekah die. They are as much to me as ever Waldo or Lyndall were. You don't know how real my people are to me." 'Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis, 11 July 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1b-ii - lines 42-44.

[204]To Havelock Ellis, 25 January 1888 - HRC/CAT/OS/4a-viiiHRC/OS/FRAGHRC/CAT/OS/NFPcc - lines 58-62.

[205]To T. F. Unwin, 26 September 1892 - HRC/OliveSchreinerUncatLetters/OSTFisherUnwin/20 - lines 35-36.

Capitalists Millionaires & Middle-men – in England & America, & all high & mighty persons".[206]

Whether working-men or millionaires, Schreiner's intended readers were English speakers; therefore, English was her literary language. Although Schreiner was familiar with Cape Dutch, due to the years she worked as a teacher for Boer families, this language does not appear in her fiction apart from some sparse vocabulary and expressions, whose meanings are provided in glossaries, and with a specific intention. Likewise, even though Schreiner was an admirer of native languages and tried to learn Kaffir at a certain time in her life,[207] the indigenous' languages are mostly ignored in her fiction, since the few native characters portrayed in her stories speak their masters' languages, either English or Afrikaner. Although no other language, apart from English, is seriously represented in Schreiner's creative writing, Berkman asserts that "Kaffir and Boer speech, including folk tales and songs" (229), served as a basis for her lyric writing style. I wonder whether this lyricism, stemming from the rhythms of the oral tradition of native languages, could not be viewed as a feature of postcolonial aesthetic[208] present in Schreiner's writing.

In her linguistic analysis of *The Story of an African Farm*, Margaret Lenta states that what lacks in Schreiner's text is "the infiltration of English by another language" (158), seen by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (*The Empire Writes Back*) as part of the postcolonial writing process. Indeed, Schreiner does not apply the textual strategies described by Ashcroft et al. to deal with the complexities of using the colonizer's language to express the experience of colonialism, in the same way that later postcolonial writers might have done. She certainly does not use the strategy of 'abrogation'; on the contrary, she seems to regard English as a privileged language. However, to a certain extent, she uses the process of 'appropriation' in her fictional writing[209].

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[206]To T. F. Unwin, 26 September 1892 - HRC/OliveSchreinerUncatLetters/OSTFisherUnwin/20 -.lines 44-46.

[207]In 1890, she tells Karl Pearson that she is learning the Kaffir language in order to study the people. (Karl Pearson 840/4/5/10-16).

[208]See Elleke Boehmer's analysis of the contentious and much avoided concept of postcolonial aesthetic in her essay "A postcolonial aesthetic: repeating upon the present".

[209] The strategies of appropriation and abrogation were previously discussed in the theoretical chapter.

One of those methods of appropriation concerns the position of postcolonial writers as the first interpreters, since they stand in an interpretative space between two cultures. By using the tools of one culture to express the experience of another, they write as "the archetypal ethnographer", addressing two audiences and facing two directions (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* 60). In the text, such interpretative function is provided by "editorial intrusions, such as the footnote, the glossary, and the explanatory preface" (61). A clear example of such 'editorial intrusion' in Schreiner's writing is the preface included in the second edition of *The Story of an African Farm*, where she clearly embodies the 'archetypal ethnographer'. There, she thanks her metropolitan public and critics for the positive reaction towards a subject "far removed from the round of English daily life" and thus "lack[ing] the charm that hangs about the ideal representation of familiar things". She also alerts them about the content of her "little book". In response to a 'kind' critic, who expected to find "a history of wild adventure; of cattle driven into the inaccessible "kranzes" by Bushmen; of 'encounters with ravening lions, and hair-breadth escapes", she retorts: "such works are best written in Piccadilly or in the Strand" where "the gifts of the creative imagination untrammeled by contact with any fact, may spread their wings".

In her preface, Schreiner makes clear her concern with the two distinct cultures or worlds in which she, her book and her readers are inserted. She knows she cannot fulfill the metropolitan readers' desire for the exotic because her experience in the colony is a very different one and she wants to remain faithful to it. Thus, she opts for portraying "the scenes among which [she has] grown" and in order to do so she has to "squeeze the colour from [her] brush, and dip it into the grey pigments around [her]". This brief explanatory preface exposes the contrasting realities of the metropolis and the colony, which colonizer and colonized had to face in the colonial context. But it goes further. The gap between the imperial centre and the periphery, acknowledged by Schreiner in her preface, and made evident, for example, in the description of the South African landscape, reveals the limitations of expressing the experience of colonialism through the canonical Eurocentric discourse.

Schreiner explains that the method she chose to write her novel is different from the predictable 'stage method', which gives the readers a sense of 'satisfaction and completeness'. Hers is "the method of the life we all lead" where

> […] nothing can be prophesied. There is a strange coming and going of feet. Men appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes the man who would fit it does not return. When the curtain falls no one is ready. When the footlights are brightest they are blown out; and what the name of the play is no one knows. (*From Man to Man* preface)

Although she knows that "[t]he canons of criticism that bear upon the one cut cruelly upon the other" (*From Man to Man* preface) she defends the method which she believes is best suited to portray the scenes and facts that she experienced as a colonial South African. Schreiner's unconventional style in *The Story of an African Farm*, with a fragmented time structure and the insertion of two allegorical chapters, disrupts the traditional Eurocentric narrative of the realist novel of late nineteenth-century.[210] Moreover, as First and Scott point out, the 'apparently formless' style of Schreiner's first novel, in fact indicates an anticipation of Virginia Woolf's method, through the exploration of the characters' (un)consciousness (92).

The incompatibility between the colonial and the metropolitan discourse is also effected through glossing, another strategy of appropriation which Schreiner uses in her novels. For Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (*The Empire Writes Back*), the translation of words exposes the reality of cultural distance, implicit in the gap between the word and its referent. In *The Story of an African Farm*, Schreiner employs this strategy by providing a glossary to clarify the meaning of many Dutch and colonial words for her non-colonial readers, such as karroo, kraal, kappje, kopje, bultong, nachtmaal, meiboss, meerkat, mealies, etc. In *From Man to Man* such unknown words appear as

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[210]See Dominic Davies's and Patricia Murphy's analysis of TSAF as a novel that breaks with the conventional linear narrative of nineteenth century fiction. Murphy argues that "through its many irregularities", perceived in the novel's timely interruptions, language and syntax, "it both questions and unsettles the social construction of gender that governed behavior at the end of the century" (1) besides problematizing "Victorian discourses on a subject – time – that was an obsessive concern during the period" (1).
In his analysis of Schreiner's depiction of SA landscape in TSAF, Davies asserts that "[t]he text produces a discursive space that is embedded within the colonial landscape and from which […] resistance to metropolitan discourses of patriarchy and empire can emerge" (29-30).

footnotes: ‘stoep’ (13), ‘cock-o-veet (19), ting-ting kie (54), geloofie (58), avondbloem (64-88), snysels (69), nam-nams (84), plumbago (85), riems (109), bobotie (207), sosatie (296), fricadel (308), vastrap and velskoens (339), assegai (415), krans (440). A number of these words are related to the landscape and the realm of the natural world, such as plants, flowers and animals. Others are concerned with cultural aspects, such as food, objects or clothing.

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, code-switching (e.g. standard English, pidgin, dialect Creole forms) is **“**perhaps the most common method of inscribing alterity by the process of appropriation” (*The Empire Writes Back* 72). Code-switching may represent the disparity of discourse between classes, but in postcolonial texts the issue of class goes beyond the economic scope, having also racial and cultural implications. By using the code-switching technique in her texts, Schreiner reveals how these “social and economic hierarchies produced by colonialism” (76) functioned in South African colonial society. In *From Man to Man* the switch from English to (low) Cape-Dutch is used mainly to distinguish the servant-master language, but it also serves to unveil their strained relation. The meaning of the Cape-Dutch sentences, which would be incomprehensible for English-speaking readers, are given either in footnotes or parenthesis. For example, the translation of “O ja, God! Wat zalonsnouzeg?” is in the footnote: “Oh yes, God! What shall we now say?” (*From Man to Man* 3). Other translations are provided in parenthesis as in: “Sy’s ‘n snaaks se kind” said old Ayah. (She is a strange child!”) (36); “*Diss ‘n snaaks se kind*” she muttered (“’Tis a strange child”) (43). The sentence “Wat wiljijhé?” (279) is spoken in a defiant tone by a black servant girl towards her white mistress, who had just discovered that the girl is pregnant by her husband. In a footnote, Schreiner provides the meaning – “What do you want?” – explaining the offensive implications of the use of the pronoun ‘jij’, used in Cape Dutch, “the only language of the colored people of the West” (279). This word, says the note, “is the most extreme insult when applied to a superior. It is used only to children or servants. Even equals avoid its use as much as possible” (279). Thus, the tension around the complex class and racial relation between black servant and white master in colonial South Africa is revealed here through language.

In analysing the literary language used in *The Story of An African Farm*, Margaret Lenta states:

> Schreiner presents a society in microcosm in which she acknowledges three languages, Cape

> Dutch, English and Xhosa. She is clear that the Cape Dutch spoken on Karoo farms is a low-status language, and can only be allocated to low-status characters. The Xhosa which some of the farm labourers are likely to speak remains unrepresentable to her as it would be incomprehensible to her readers. It is not however the multilingual nature of this society that is represented in the speech of the characters, but their author's intentions for them. (159)

In relation to "low Cape Dutch", spoken in the novel by narrow-minded farmers like Tant Sannie, Lenta claims that Schreiner had anything but comic purpose in its representation. Indeed, in a letter to Philip Kent[211], Schreiner comments on her distress in trying to keep the humour of Tant Sannie's language when transposing it into English:

> I have got into perfect despair over Tant' Sannie sometimes – the almost impossibility of translating the low humorous Dutch into English, without losing the humour, & so having nothing but the coarseness left. I have not always succeeded. In fact, I believe low Cape Dutch cannot be translated into any language under the sun.[212]

In opposition, the three main characters, Lyndall, Waldo and Em, who are intelligent and enlightened, are according to Lenta, (unconvincingly) articulate in English to accommodate their roles as "spokespersons of nineteenth century thought" (161). Lenta claims that *The Story of an African Farm* is "not linguistically realistic" because the readers are induced to believe that three uneducated children are articulate enough in English to absorb and discuss "the ideas of John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer" (161). However, if we recall Schreiner's own experience as a girl, raised in remote areas and educated only informally by her mother, removed from the material

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[211]Philip Kent was a literary man who wrote a very positive review of *The Story of an African Farm* in the Life magazine in February 1883, and with whom Schreiner corresponded to discuss literary and publication matters.

[212]Philip Kent, 26 May 1883 - HRC/OliveSchreinerUncatLetters/OS-PhilipKent/7 - lines 39-44.

sources of knowledge, and yet becoming a world famous writer with sophisticated ideas about nearly any subject, we might think that her characters were not that unrealistic in linguistic terms. Indeed, Schreiner once comments in a letter to Havelock Ellis: "when people say it is unnatural for people placed as Lyndall & Waldo to have such thoughts & feelings; I laugh to myself".[213] After all, Schreiner's realism is mostly drawn from her own genuine experiences. As one of her characters say, "[a]ll that a man has seen and known and felt, all that lies within him, is, so to speak, the substance out of which his imagination has to work, the bricks laid before it from which it can select for his work."[214]

Although in her novels Schreiner preferred a realistic approach, in real life the dreamy personality of the artist prevailed, as shown in her words to a friend: "I've always known people must fly, some day, just as there must be perfect love & fellowship on earth sometime. Our dreams are prophetic because we are part of life".[215] Her dream regarding a new relationship between men and women is expressed to another friend much earlier: "I see always more & more the possible regeneration of the race in that new union ^of friendship^ between man & woman: it must & will come at last, our dreams are not delusions but the forerunners of the reality".[216] Indeed, Schreiner viewed the artist as a dreamer who could foresee the future, as she expresses through Mr. Drummond in *From Man to Man:*

> In after ages, men will have wings; how they will get the force to move them, or so to fasten them on that they will move freely, we cannot say. One day the men of science will realize the poet's dream, that dream – 'So it is!' – which he would not and could not be shaken out of. The creative artist does not so much recall the life of the race; he paints its future, just as he often does his own. It can't be explained! (451)

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[213] To Havelock Ellis, 21 July 1884 - HRC/CAT/OS/1b-vi – lines 29-30.

[214]This quote is taken from a long passage in the last chapter of *From Man to Man* (1926) in which Rebekah and Mr. Drummond discuss art and the creative process (p. 449).

[215]Olive Schreiner to Edward Carpenter, 31 January 1911 - Edward Carpenter 359/95, lines 58-60.

[216]To Karl Pearson, 23 June 1886 - Karl Pearson 840/4/2/90-91 - lines 16-19.

Schreiner's cherished dreams were also present in her fiction: dreams of peace among peoples, of equal opportunities for men and women, of social justice for people of any race and class, of freedom and love for all. In a long passage in *From Man to Man*, in which the main character Rebekah 'discusses with herself' some philosophical questions, Schreiner explores the idea that only through the interaction of the whole society any advancement to the human race would be possible. In Rebekah's words: "Permanent human advance must be united advance!" (166). Schreiner's socialist dream of an ideal society, for example, could only become true if dreamt (and put into practice!) collectively:

> The man who dreams to-day that the seeking of material good for himself alone is an evil, who persistently shares all he has with his fellows, is not necessarily a fool dreaming of that which never has been or will be; he is simply dreaming of that which will be perfectly attainable when the dream dominates his fellows and all give and share. Working it alone, it fails, because the individual is part of an organism which cannot reach its full unfolding quite alone (*From Man to Man* 168).[217]

Schreiner's dreams for a better world were purposefully explored in her writings as a way to benefit and inspire her readers to become agents of change. In her letters, she sometimes comments on her desire that her writings would somehow help people by reaching their hearts and stimulating their positive attitudes. As she confesses to Ellis, it comforts her to think that the novel she is writing will help other people: "it will help to make men more tender to women, because they will understand them better; it will help to make some women more tender to others; it will comfort some women by showing them that others have felt as they do".[218]

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[217]Although it does not sound quite academic, I could not avoid thinking that Schreiner's message is very similar to that immortalized by John Lennon's song *Imagine* many decades later, which in turn, leads me to ponder about Schreiner's integrationist theory linking humanity through all ages.

[218]*To Havelock Ellis, 11 July 1884* -HRC/CAT/OS/1b-ii - lines 60-64. Here she was referring to *From Man to Man*, a novel she seems to have written throughout her life and left unfinished.

In fact, it was this kind of empathy that a Lancashire working woman felt when reading 'over and over' some parts of *The Story of an African Farm*: "I think there's hundreds of women that feels like that but can't speak it, but *she* [Lyndall] could speak what we feel" (*apud* First and Scott 121).[219] Schreiner felt particularly pleased when her readers' feedback confirmed her intentions: "I got a wonderfully interesting letter today from a Half Caste – (a Mulatto) who is studying in Edinburgh. He comes from the West Indies. I am never satisfied with anything I write till the ~~persents~~ persons I write of say, 'Yes, that is true, you have showed us our own hearts'."[220] The reaction of Schreiner's readers leads us back to the problem of representation. Their positive feedback, in my view, somehow validates Schreiner's act of speaking in the name of at least some segments of society, such as women, working-class people and half-castes.

Schreiner evaluates the scope of her own writings when discussing the power of the novel with Karl Pearson:

> From the Queen to the servant girl & Smith & Sons news boys everyone reads the novel & is touched by it. Its vice & its virtue, its frivolity & its ideals, all the life of our age is incarnate in its fiction, & reacts on the people. Let me take my own tiny experience. An un-taught girl, working ten hours a day, having no time for thought or writing, but a few in the middle of the night, writes a little story like "An African Farm"; a book wanting in ~~*unreadable*~~ many respects, & altogether young & crude, & full of faults; a book that was written altogether for myself, when there seemed no possible ~~purpose~~ chance that I should ever come to England or publish it. Yet, I have got scores, almost hundreds of letters about it from all classes of people, from an Earl's son to a dressmaker in Bond St, & from a coal-heaver to a poet. One of the last letters I have had was from Pearsall Smith the American Millionaire & Lecturer: saying that it had helped largely in his

[219] The quote refers to a recollection of Mrs. Brown, one of Schreiner's best friend.

[220] To Betty Molteno, 28 August 1896 - Olive Schreiner BC16/Box1/Fold3/1896/25 University of Cape Town, Manuscripts & Archives, Cape Town - lines 8-12.

> giving up Christianity & the work he had been engaged in for thirty years. Now if a work of art so childish & full of faults, simply by right of a certain truth to nature that is in it can have so great a power, what of a great work of art?[221]

The awareness that the novel could exert 'such a great power' made Schreiner use it as a means to denounce and lessen injustice and oppression. Her persistent dedication to the causes she championed may be compared to the image of the old woman and her daughter-in-law in "Nineteen Ninety-Nine" (a short story in *Stories, Dreams and Allegories*). Surpassing their pain for their dead husbands, sons and grandson during the war, they still had strength to sow the seeds of pumpkins and *mealies*, thinking of the people who would need food if the war took too long.

As a sower of ideas, Schreiner expected that one day her words would germinate in people's minds and produce noble and generous attitudes. She was wise enough to recognize that her words, like the seeds "that were to lie in the dank, dark, earth, and rot there, seemingly, to die" (*Stories, Dreams and Allegories* 49) would take time to germinate and ripen to be harvested, and that sometimes silence would be required.

> Yes I entirely agree with you that the more things in general are left to themselves just now ^in South Africa^ & the slower they move the healthier & sounder will be our growth as a nation. This is not a country which can be safely hurried. The Chinese is perhaps the only question calling for immediate action, though many others larger & even more vital call for deep persistent thought. Good friends from England understand South Africa so little they are always urging one one on to write & speak not understanding that this is our time for silence. When you have planted seed you can do nothing but harm by at

[221]To Karl Pearson, 25 October 1886 - Karl Pearson 840/4/3/102-110 - lines 37-56.

> once beginning to hoe & rake over it. You must give it time to lie still & germinate.[222]

Schreiner suspected that her writings would be best understood by people in the future. Therefore, she continuously addressed readers of generations to come. After studying Schreiner's work with a certain depth and being deeply touched by her words and ideas I can firmly assert – as one of those readers she possibly had in mind a hundred years ago – that the seeds she sowed then have found fertile ground in my mind and my soul.

[222]To John X. Merriman, 10 January 1906 - John X. Merriman MSC 15/1906:12 - lines 48-58.

FINAL REMARKS

> No human soul is so lonely as it feels itself, because no man is merely an individual but is a part of the great body of life; the thoughts he thinks are part of humanity's thoughts, the visions he sees are part of humanity's vision; the artist is only an eye in the great human body, seeing for those who shares his life: somewhere, sometime, his own exist. (Schreiner, *From Man to Man* 456)

Postcolonial theory has been the target of much academic debate. Leela Gandhi, for example, questions the validity of postcolonialism claiming that "[d]espite its good intentions [it] continues to render non-Western knowledge and culture as 'other' in relation to the normative 'self' of Western epistemology and rationality" (x). For her, although the inclusion of unheard voices from the non-western world promoted by postcolonial theory has contributed to enlarge the 'disciplinary boundaries' within the Anglo-American humanities academy, their marginal status in relation to the West still prevails.

Nevertheless, some positive criticism highlights the importance of this field of study, as pointed out by Rukundwa and van Aarde in their article "The Formation of Postcolonial Theory". For them, postcolonial theory "allows people emerging from socio-political and economic domination to reclaim their negotiating space for equity" (1190). Without declaring war on the past, they conclude, postcolonial theory "challenges the consequences of the past that are exploitative", raising people's self-consciousness "to build a new society where liberty and equity prevail" (1190). This, in my view, is the great contribution of postcolonialism, despite its contradictions and complexities. Postcolonial theory may not thoroughly attend to the claims of subaltern voices and may still reproduce the concerns of western epistemology and interests. However, I believe that it represents an advance for bringing the hitherto unheard voices to the focus of the debate and for fostering a reflection about the shapes that the experience of colonialism has assumed in our conflicting postmodern world.

After analyzing Schreiner's writings, I suggest that the features that characterize postcolonialism as a political discourse are equally present both in her attitudes and in her texts. Schreiner's involvement in political matters, as well as the ideas deployed in her theoretical and

fictional texts, resonate in Rukundwa and van Aarde's definition of postcolonial theory as "a means of defiance by which any exploitative and discriminative practices, regardless of time and space, can be challenged" (1171). As Ode Ogede claims, Schreiner was courageous enough to defend ideas that clashed with the prevailing ideology of her time and society (252).

I suspect that what Schreiner determined as her part in the universe, in that vision she had as a child, in a way places her in the colonial context as a 'benevolent colonizer'. She decided from an early age to stand by the suffering, the oppressed, the ones in need of help - the 'underdog'. In this sense, she empathized and supported diverse groups of people, at different stages in her life: prostitutes and trade unionists, while in England in the 1880's; Indian and Chinese workers with no political rights in South Africa, in the 1890's and 1900's; the Boers before and during the Anglo-Boer war, from 1899 to1902; South African natives because of the unjust and vicious treatment by the white colonizer, since she returned from England in 1889 until her death; women and their limited possibilities for action, due to their financial dependent condition upon men, throughout her life.

Like Memmi's benevolent colonizer, who launched "an undeclared conflict with his own people" (65) for his ambiguous conduct, Schreiner also had to face her compatriots' and some of her relatives' disapproval and contempt for her anti-imperialist and anti-racist attitude. Her weapons were pen and paper; her ammunition, her words. Through her texts, fictional or theoretical, and her letters, she exposed and denounced what she thought was wrong; she courageously accused powerful people by their names and positioned herself against the ruling economic and political system; she tried to raise her readers' and correspondents' consciousness by calling them for action and appealing to their direct responsibility in the future welfare of the nation.

In analyzing Schreiner's feminist analytics of globalization, Stanley, Dampier and Salter claim that she advanced many concepts now connected to "a global form of inquiry" (672). In their view, Schreiner's social theorizing presents many of the features which are the focus of social theorists of the present: "financial flows, global cities, the diminished national state, and the changing dynamics of gender within these, among them" (671). However, they claim, Schreiner's analysis acquires a stronger ethical and political weight because it encompasses challenge and change. She challenges the powers that

produce negative social changes by identifying and accusing them publically (either generally, as 'capitalism, imperialism, autocracy, warfare, the competing supra-states', or individually, as Rhodes, the Chartered Company) and, by doing so, she hopes to transform the world. In their conclusion, Stanley et al. acknowledge that:

> Her work promoted knowledge from the margins, the imperial periphery, and concerned the local and grounded; it was involved in non-territorial networks that transcended national and international boundaries, it developed analytical and publishing agendas which determinedly crossed disciplinary, academic and popular, boundaries; and it rejected an elitist hierarchy of social theory over other analytical and political agendas, seeking instead allegiances across these divisions too. (673-674)

Such a conclusion corroborates my suspicion that Schreiner was indeed an early postcolonial voice. Schreiner raised issues that are incontestably linked with the problems we face today. Anne MacLintock also confirms the South African writer's contemporaneity, recognizing that:

> By exploring with the utmost passion and integrity what it meant to be both colonized and colonizer in a Victorian and African world, Schreiner pushed some of the critical contradictions of imperialism to their limits and allows us thereby to explore some of the abiding conflicts of race and gender, power and resistance that haunt our time. (259-260)

Perhaps the reason why Schreiner's political view and writing have been undermined, both in her time and afterwards, lies among other reasons in the fact that she was a woman.[223] As Vera Buchanan-Gould laments, although Schreiner had "all the qualities that might have made a great national or spiritual leader: courage, drive, vision, intelligence, and magnetism […] the mere accident of sex,

[223] Rukundwa and van Aarde make a connection between postcolonial and feminist discourse pointing to the way women's anti-imperial struggle has been undermined.

circumstances and times confined [her] to murky boarding house rooms" (237).

Increasingly, in the last decades, Schreiner's writings have been positively reassessed and her place in the history of South Africa has been slowly reconsidered. The number of scholars is growing who, like Ogede, recognize Schreiner's resistance writing and her historical importance as "central to any effort to understand literature's contribution to the struggle for a free South Africa" (251). In their conclusion of Schreiner's life and work, First and Scott recognize the 'gigantic leaps' that she took "away from religion into freethinking; away from colonial racism and segregationist white politics to advocacy of the African cause; out of the suffocating limits imposed upon women and into the exploration of female psychology sexuality" (339). Nevertheless, they still consider her "social science […] too nervously evolutionist; her analysis of South Africa intuitive and unsystematic" (339).

Apart from the avowed shallowness of Schreiner's analysis, the failures in her assessment and the contradictions in her attitudes regarding certain topics at specific moments, which some critics insist in highlighting, what remains when we study her work more deeply is the image of a woman ahead of her time, a courageous forerunner of ideas and attitudes, which often placed her against the stream.

Thus, I believe that the limitations attributed to Schreiner's writings do not diminish their social and historical value. Moreover, considering what we know today about the context in which Schreiner lived, it seems unfair of some critics to be so rigorous as to emphasize her failures more than her achievements.[224] All the physical, political and social restraints imposed by her condition as a colonial South African woman at the turn of the nineteenth century leads me to suspect that Schreiner did more than any woman in her position could and would have done. Following Berkman's example, with this work I tried to "repair the imbalance" (4) done by many biographers and critics who created a negative image of Schreiner by stressing her personal life rather than her ideas. In a way, I am vindicating Schreiner's place as an

[224]Liz Stanley is one of the few critics who does exactly the opposite in reconsidering Schreiner's social theory, focusing "on what Schreiner accomplished rather than what she failed to do". (Stanley, *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman* 145)

important (free)thinker who has not been justly recognized as a lucid social and political theorist by the canonical discourse.

An accurate summary of Schreiner, as a person and a writer, is provided by Anne McClintock:

> Schreiner's life and writings were crisscrossed by contradiction. Solitary by temperament, she hobnobbed with celebrities. Hungering for recognition, she shrank from the publicity when it came. Insisting on women's right to sexual pleasure, she suffered torments in confronting her own urgent desires. At odds with her imperial world, she was at times the most colonial of writers. Startlingly advanced in her anti-racism and political analysis, she could fall on occasion into the most familiar racial stereotypes. Revering monogamy, she waited until she was in her forties to marry. After she found "the perfect man", she chose to spend most of her married life apart from her husband. Haunted by longing for a home, she wandered from continent to continent, farm to city, unable to settle. She was a political radical yet aligned with no party. A belligerent pacifist, she supported the Boers in their armed struggle against the British and the African National Congress when it emerged in 1912. (259-260)

Such a description, if seen through a negative critical lens, may serve to undermine Schreiner's work. For me, it highlights, instead, the richness and complexity of a woman artist and thinker, who was above all, a human being. Her uncertainties, failures, inconsistencies, contradictions were, in my view, the aspects that made her personality so intricate and fascinating and her work so advanced and significant.

To finish my work, I chose to use Schreiner's own words, drawn from a passage in *From Man to Man*, which I think describes her life and work more faithfully:

> […] but life is so terribly difficult. Men say it is so hard to do the right. I have never found that. The moment one knows what is right, I do it; it is easy to do it; the difficulty is to find what *is* right! There are such absolutely conflicting ideals; the ideal of absolute submission and endurance of

> wrong towards oneself – the ideal of noble resistance to all injustice and wrong, even when done to oneself – the ideal of the absolute devotion to the smaller, always present, call of life – and the ideal of a devotion to the larger aims sweeping all before it – all are beautiful. The agony of life is not the choice between good and evil, but between two evils or two goods! (459)

This study about Olive Schreiner leads me to believe that she was able to accomplish, to a greater or lesser extent, all those conflicting ideals, both in her life and in her writings.

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APPENDIX 1 - Olive Schreiner's Chronology

- **1855** – 24 March, born Olive Emilie Albertina Schreiner, the ninth of twelve children from an English mother, Rebecca Lyndall, and a German protestant missionary father, Gottlob Schreiner, at Wittebergen Mission Station, a district of Cape Colony, in South Africa
- **1861** – Family moves to Healdtown.
- **1865** – Suffers traumatic death of her little sister Ellie.
- **1867** – Moves to Cradock to live with older siblings (Theo and Ettie) due to family insolvency.
- **1870/1873** – Becomes a freethinker; stops attending church; lives with relatives and family friends; works informally as governess for Zadoc Robinson's family in Dordrecht, where she begins to read widely (Spencer's *First Principles*, Darwin's *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, Carl Vogt's *Lectures on Man*, H. T. Buckle's *History of Civilization* in England and the works of Stuart Mill); meets Julius Gau with whom a short engagement is obscurely broken; first signs of asthmatic condition appear.
- **1874/1881** – Works as governess in various Boer households (five posts in seven years) mostly on farms in the Cradock region. Within this period reads Emerson and writes *Undine* and *Thorn Kloof* (later *The Story of An African Farm)*; begins *Saints and Sinners* (early version of *From Man to Man*).
- **1881** – Sails to England to train as a nurse; gives up nursing training after becoming ill.
- **1883** – The *Story of an African Farm* published under the pseudonym Ralph Iron by Chapman and Hall.
- **1881/1889** – During this period meets many British intellectuals such as Eleanor Marx, Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, Karl Pearson, George Moore and Bryan Donkin (who unsuccessfully proposed marriage), and others; attends radical groups such as the Fellowship of the New Life, joins the Men and Women's Club, researches about prostitution, travels to Europe and lives in Italy to recuperate from physical and emotional stress.
- **1889** – Sails back to South Africa on 11 October; asthma now chronic.

- **1890** – *Dreams* published; through her younger brother Will meets Cecil Rhodes and a number of prominent political figures in Cape Town (John X. Merriman, James R. Innes, J.W. Sauer); writes articles on South Africa published in various newspapers and collected posthumously as *Thoughts on South Africa*.
- **1892** – Breaks with Cecil Rhodes; meets future husband Samuel Cron Cronwright, six years younger than her.
- **1893** – Travels briefly to England; *Dream Life and Real Life* published.
- **1894** – Marries Cronwright who adopts her surname becoming Cronwright–Schreiner; they live at his farm near Cradock but are forced to move to Kimberly due to her asthma.
- **1895** – Birth and death of only daughter on 30 April; until 1900 has six or seven miscarriages.
- **1896** – Following the Jameson's unsuccessful Raid episode (an attempt to invade the Transvaal orchestrated by Rhodes) writes *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* to denounce Rhodes' politics*; The Political Situation* published.
- **1897** – Sails to England with Cronwright. *Trooper Peter* published.
- **1899** – **1902** – Second Anglo–Boer War; house in Johannesburg looted and manuscript of *Woman and Labour* destroyed. *An English South African's View of the Situation* published.
- **1900** – Lives in Hannover under martial law being a supporter of the pro–Boer cause.
- **1901** – Writes the short story '*Eighteen–Ninety–Nine'*.
- **1907** – Moves to De Aar where she lives for the next six years. Spends much time in Cape Town over next few years; heavily involved in Cape Women's Enfranchisement League.
- **1908** – Engages in the debate about South African Union, defending black enfranchisement and a federalist structure/constitution; begins to concentrate on the relationship between capital, labour and race (the native question).
- **1909** – *Closer Union* published; contact with Gandhi's Satyagraha movement; vice–president of the Women's enfranchisement League.
- **1910** – 13 May – Union of South Africa (Cape Colony, Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State): white controlled, self–governing British dominion under Louis Botha.
- **1911** – *Woman and Labour* published.
- **1913 –** Resigns as vice–president of the Cape Women's Enfranchisement League for its failure to include black women's

rights/votes in its demands; marriage under stress; sails to England in December and enjoys a reception of 150 people held in her honour at the Lyceum in Piccadilly.

- **1914** – Travels to the Continent in search of treatment for her asthma; in Germany when World War I breaks out.
- **1915/1916** – In England, campaigns against war and writes about conscientious objection and pacifism ('*Who Knocks at the Door?'* and *'The Dawn of Civilization'*).
- **1920** – Cronwright sails to England to visit her in July after six years separation; in August she travels back to South Africa where she dies on 10 December at Wynberg, Cape town.

> "Olive Schreiner died late on 10 December or in the early hours of 11 December 1920, while reading; her glasses were on, a book had fallen from her hands, and the candle had burned out". (https://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?view=collections&colid=41&letterid=1)

- **1921** - 13 August reinterred at Buffels Kop, Cradock (in the Karoo) with the remains of her daughter and her pet dog Neta.

APPENDIX 2 – Olive Schreiner's Photo Gallery

With her husband Samuel Cron-Cronwright and her dog Neta.

Last picture, taken in 1920.

How little place & power look when one approaches the end of the journey. Nothing matters but the knowledge that in however small a way one has always fought against human injustice & oppression. (Letter to John X. Merriman, 20 July 1913 – John X. Merriman MSC 15/1913:134- lines 13-16)