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Dehumanization And Exploitation: A Comparative Analysis Of Racism, Fetishization, And Colorism In Bessie Head's *A Collector Of Treasures* And Jordan Peele's *Get Out*

Khushi Kirandeep

MASTER OF ARTS

(Roll No: 23/SMEH/MA(ENG)/007)

Under the Supervision of

Dr. Kajal Chaudhary

Assistant Professor, Department of English, SMEH

MRIIRS, Sector-43, Surajkund-Delhi Road, Faridabad – 121004

ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to explore the intersection of Bessie Head's work '*A Collector of Treasures*', and Jordan Peele's movie '*Get Out*' are deeply interwoven through their exploration of racism, oppression, and the struggle for individuality within oppressive social structures. Both works highlight the pervasive impact of racial and gender-based discrimination, portraying how Black individuals especially women struggle for autonomy. In the text '*A Collector of Treasures*', Head presents the dire situation of women in African society, focusing on oppressive gender roles and the violence both mental and physical inflicted on women seeking independence, and their individuality. Similarly, In '*Get Out*', the movie exposes the deep-rooted evil practices of racial exploitation, with the protagonist, Chris, experiencing modern-day enslavement under the guise of liberal acceptance. The Themes of colorism and dehumanization manifest in both works, with '*Get Out*' critiquing the society's fetishization of Black bodies, while Head explores how beauty standards are mechanized against women. Furthermore, both the text and the cinematic adaptation examines the exploitation of sexuality as addressed by Head how men abandon their responsibilities while making women suffer, '*Get Out*' presents the use of interracial relationships as a tool for control and manipulation in contemporary times. Eventually, both the narratives criticize the societal structures that entrap Black individuals, emphasizing their fight for liberation. By intertwining these themes, '*Collector of Treasures*' and '*Get Out*' serve as powerful commentaries on the enduring struggles against racial and gender-based oppression.

Keywords: Black Bodies, Colorism, Exploitation, Dehumanization, Discrimination, Fetishization,

Introduction

Dehumanization the term in itself refers to the degradation and the procedure of stripping individuals or groups of their humanity, dignity, and individuality based on certain cultural or physical traits, etc, ("Dehumanization"). In the context of Western slavery and colonization, this term appeared to act as a central tool which was used to justify the inhumane and brutal systems of control and power. The enslaved Africans were oftenly viewed as property, not people which were to be bought, sold, manipulated and treated as commodities to be serving, punished, or discarded. Colonized colonies natives were similarly portrayed as "barbaric" or "uncivilized" to rationalize European domination and to soothe their superiority complex.

The term Exploitation refers to the mistreatment and taking unfair advantage of people, often for labor, resources, or wealth particularly those in the regions of Europe and North America which were built on the backs of exploited labor from enslaved Africans and colonized people ("Exploitation"). Through slavery, generations of Black people were manipulated into forced labor under inhumane conditions for no pay, while the colonized nations were mined for their natural resources and the colonizers were forced into labor systems that enriched colonial rulers.

Fetishization is the act of diminishing an individual, objectifying them of desire based on certain specific traits, often in racialized or exoticized terms ("Fetishization"). Western colonial narratives frequently fetishized non-European bodies, especially women, depicting them as hypersexual, mysterious, or dangerous.

Black, Asian, and Indigenous women were often objectified in literature, art, and later in media, projecting the idea that their value lays primarily in their exoticism and sexual availability. This form of dehumanization persists even today in beauty standards, media portrayals, leaving behind a legacy of colonial sexual politics.

Colorism this term refers to the preferential treatment of people with lighter skin tones within communities of color and society majorly. It is a direct product of white supremacist thinking introduced and enforced during colonization and slavery ("Colorism"). The Lighter-skinned individuals often mistreat the mixed-race children of the enslaved women. In the colonized societies, European beauty standards were imposed, leading to long-lasting internal biases where lighter skin was associated with beauty, intelligence, and status leading to become the symbol of superiority over the other. This has had a deep impact on media representation which presents a very biased narrative, employment opportunities, and self-image within many communities even in the contemporary times.

In Bessie Head's short story *A Collector of Treasures* and Jordan Peele's 2017 American Psychological Horror film *Get Out*, the themes of commodification, manipulation, exploitation and the dehumanizing acts of racism, fetishization, and deception in love. In both the literary work and the cinematic work on critical analysis it is learned that the background and underlying theme is of the colonial mindset, deception in love, racism and colorism. There is the depiction of the various ways in which black bodies are objectified, consumed, and marginalized within systems of racial inequality, for their sexuality, their strength, genetic makeup, etc. revealing how in both explicit and subtle forms of oppression views the experiences of Black people in the oppressive society.

"She was reared by her uncle, a selfish man who treated her like a servant and refused to educate her after six years" (Head 91).

Head's novel shows how colonialism and cultural alienation can strip away the humanity of African people. Characters like Dikeledi deal with personal and societal challenges because of the way colonial views see African cultures as less than. Dikeledi's fight with his identity highlights how these external pressures can lead him to feel less valuable, causing him to feel disconnected from himself. The story illustrates how colonial forces and societal norms take away people's true cultural identities, leaving them as mere stereotypes or products.

The book talks about how colonial and post-colonial economies take advantage of African resources and its people. Characters often find themselves trapped in a cycle of relying on these systems. The main character's fixation on collecting treasures represents how cultural artifacts are treated as just items to be bought and sold, losing their true meaning along the way.

Peele's *Get Out* really shows how dehumanization happens through the "Sunken Place", where Black people are silenced and controlled, losing their sense of self. The story focuses on taking Black brains and putting them into white bodies, which is about as dehumanizing as it gets—turning people into just parts instead of human beings. The white characters are obsessed with the physical traits and talents of Black people, feeding into stereotypes and seeing them as objects for admiration or exploitation. The coagula procedure is a clear example of how Black bodies are used for scientific and aesthetic reasons, reminding us of past abuses like medical experimentation.

A Collector of Treasures, Bessie Head continues to explore the effects of the colonial and postcolonial violence on Black South African women, focusing on the struggles of women who, have been subjected to the harshest forms of exploitation, be it sexual, mental or emotional. They are struggling for their Independence, restricted by the foundations of a wife and a mother, fighting for their freedom and individuality while being restricted into being the "treasures" of their masculine counterparts. "She was the collector of such treasures" (Head 96).

The story presents an image of an emotional and physically abused women's life which is being commodified by patriarchal structures that leave them trapped in the cycles of exploitation on loop.

Head's protagonist, Dikeledi navigates the brutal legacy of systemic racism and colorism, seeks the agency for upliftment and empowerment, yet the commodification of Black bodies remains a compelling force in her world.

The narrative explains that the colonial invasion did no favours to benefit Women's condition.

"There were really only two kinds of men in the society.

The one kind created such misery and chaos that he could be broadly damned as evil" (Head 94).

In the movie *Get Out*, Peele examines the covert racism that lurks beneath the surface of liberal, affluent American society, where Black bodies are fetishized and commodified for the benefit of white supremacy without any ounce of remorse for their actions. The film's protagonist, Chris, is subjected to a grotesque and nightmarish ritual where his physical form becomes a commodity, appropriated by white characters who are obsessed with acquiring the physicality and attributes of Black people.

They want him for his Strength, and his sexuality, this process of "body-snatching" is rooted in both literal and figurative exploitation that is faced by the Black people's bodies which are bounded to be fetishized for their perceived physical advantages, while their humanity and access to human values is denied, forgotten and snatched in the process.

The subtle yet pervasive colorism in the film further amplifies the distinctions between Black characters, with lighter-skinned characters being afforded more privilege than darker-skinned ones. The idea is explored the when A healthy black man is lured into a strange cult by his beloved where they force him to undergo a procedure to transfer a white person's mind into his young, healthy body as they did with other innocent black men in the past. Carrying out the notion and narrative that a white man's life matters more than the lives of innocent black individuals. The Protagonists journey for his survival against the psychotic family of accidental values shows the struggle for freedom in modern hindsight.

Both the literary and cinematic work blends to be a perfect example of pain and trauma from Literature and Historical Perspectives. The text *A Collector of Treasures* and the movie *Get Out* reveals the painful, destructive and oppressive forces of racism and the ways in which Black bodies, particularly women's bodies, are commodified and exploited by those in power. They emphasize the intersection of racism, fetishization, and colorism, depicting how these forms of oppression function to maintain control over Black bodies by manipulating them forcing control over them.

Through these works, Head and Peele poignantly comment on the personal, psychological, emotional and

societal toll of living in a world that treats Black bodies as objects to be used, manipulated possessed, controlled and discarded inhumanly. Both the literary and cinematic works have a central theme to the brutal past that still haunts them to the present time. It doesn't help that the narrative is heavily biased towards one and criticises the other. Culture and practices even religion of one is greater than the other. Civilization and civilian honour and privilege is entitled to one and suffering for the other.

Both the works centers with the themes of colorism, the preferential treatment of lighter- skinned individuals within their own racial groups dominating the narrative of the society. In *A Collector of Treasures*, there is a clear depiction of how the different skin tones and classes are treated, leading to the complexities of intra-racial prejudice. Both the literary and cinematic works have a central theme to the brutal past that still haunts them to the present time. *Get Out* similarly critiques the theme of colorism, through the character depiction of Georgina, a light- skinned Black woman who is forced into serving the desires of the white characters as superior race, thus reinforcing the hierarchical divisions within the Black communities.

Head looks at racism by focusing on colonialism and how it makes people feel alienated. The main character, Dike, wrestles with his identity and faces rejection from society because of his race and culture. Head shows how the impacts of colonialism keep racial discrimination alive and create feelings of inferiority in individuals. Peele shows racism as a deep-rooted issue, especially through the *Sunken Place*, which represents how Black people are often used and dehumanized under the mask of being progressive. The movie illustrates hidden racism, highlighting how Black individuals are exploited while pretending to be on their side.

Dikeledi's attraction to foreign cultures takes on a form of fetishization, which can come off as exoticism. His interest in cultures that aren't his own can sometimes lead to viewing those cultures as less than. Peele makes this idea clear with the "*Sunken Place*", where Black bodies are turned into commodities. The obsession white characters have with Black people's talents and features strips them of their individuality, reducing them to mere objects for others to admire or take advantage of. The text talks about colorism, especially in African societies after colonial rule, where having lighter skin is often seen as a sign of privilege.

The characters show how society favors lighter skin, creating divisions even among people of the same race. The impact of colorism comes through in how Black characters are portrayed and the emphasis on their looks. The white characters' fixation on a specific Black look highlights their own biases, suggesting that lighter skin or particular features are seen as more attractive. *Get Out* also tackles colorism, especially through the character Georgina, a light-skinned Black woman who is caught up in the desires of white characters, showcasing the power dynamics in Black communities.

Both works explore racism in different ways. Head looks at how it affects people on a personal and cultural level in a post-colonial context, while Peele points out systemic and hidden racism in today's America. Fetishization is present in both, showing how Black bodies are objectified.

Head's book talks about this through cultural views, while Peele's film makes it very real by showing how bodies are treated as products. Colorism also plays a role in both, showing how skin tone can impact social status and how people see each other within racial groups.

Both stories show how dehumanization takes away someone's ability to make choices. In Head's work, it happens through cultural alienation and personal struggles, while in Peele's, it's shown through violence and tech control.

Exploitation comes from dehumanization, whether it's through colonialism or today's social practices, making it clear that racial hierarchies mostly help those in power while hurting marginalized people. Both narratives take a hard look at the social and systemic issues that allow this to happen, stressing how important it is to resist and stay aware.

Dehumanization and exploitation come up a lot in books and movies, showing how power can strip away personal dignity and turn people into objects. Bessie Head's *A Collector of Treasures* and Jordan Peele's *Get Out* are great examples of this, set in different times and places—like post-colonial Africa and modern America. Looking at these works helps us see how racial and cultural hierarchies play a part in dehumanization and exploitation, and how people either fight back or end up being victims.

Head's *A Collector of Treasures* and Peele's *Get Out* offer great ways to look at how people are treated poorly and taken advantage of in different situations. Head focuses on the deep-seated cultural issues from colonial times, while Peele points out how modern systems and tech contribute to this exploitation. Both works highlight how racial oppression keeps showing up in various forms, and they push us to think

critically about the social systems that overlook and misuse people.

Both pieces take a hard look at how society treats Black people and their identities. Head focuses on the stereotypes that are thrown around, while Peele shows how Black bodies are often objectified and exploited. They both recognize that colorism plays a big role in keeping racial divides in place. Head's story looks at how different skin tones create social hierarchies, and Peele's film shows how colorism affects relationships within Black communities and society as a whole. Both works point out that racism is built into our systems and runs deep. Head highlights the lasting impact of racial classifications from colonial times, while Peele's film brings to life the modern-day exploitation and commercialization of Black culture. On the basics, both *A Collector of Treasures* and *Get Out* depicts the exploitation that arises from racism, fetishization and dehumanization, projecting how the corrupt power structures distort individuals' identities and reduce them to mere tools which are exploited for the benefit of the dominant group.

By merging the personal and the societal, both works create a stark commentary on how racialized exploitation affects individuals and communities, linking the emotional and mental toll of these experiences across different eras. Both works focus on colorism, showing how people with lighter skin often get better treatment in their own racial groups. In *A Collector of Treasures*, we see the different ways skin tones and social classes affect how people are treated, which highlights the issue of prejudice within the race.

Both the book and the film deal with a painful past that still influences the present. Head's *A Collector of Treasures* and Peele's *Get Out* tackle different aspects of racism, showing cultural, systemic, and personal angles.

Things like fetishization and colorism play a role in keeping racial hierarchies in place and dehumanizing people. Even with different stories and styles, the main problems of racial inequality are still there.

At their core, both *A Collector of Treasures* and *Get Out* address the exploitation that racism creates, showing how it leads to objectification and dehumanization. They highlight how these power structures can twist people's identities, reducing them to tools for the benefit of the dominant group. By connecting personal experiences with social issues, both works shed light on the emotional and mental struggles that come from such exploitation.

Conclusion

To conclude Bessie Head's *A Collector of Treasures* and the movie by Peele *Get Out* both delve into the themes of fetishization, exploitation, racism, dehumanization, discrimination, and colorism, exposing the inhumane injustices faced by the Black individuals. While Head's short story works in the settings of the post-colonial Botswana and the movie *Get Out* explores the issue of contemporary racism in America, offering powerful and unbiased critiques of how oppression works across different contexts. In *A Collector of Treasures*, Dikeledi's story reveals the personal and systemic exploitation, manipulation of women in a patriarchal society. Trapped in poverty having partnered up with an abusive husband, she is forced to trade intimacy for financial support, symbolizing the dehumanizing toll of gendered and racial oppression. Similarly, *Get Out* uses horror to depict the modern manifestations of racism and exploitation, especially focusing on the fetishization and commodification of the Black bodies. The film critiques the horrendous ways in which occidental supremacy operates through subtle and overt forms of dehumanization, where Black individuals are reduced to objects of desire and control often masked as admiration for them or for their cultural or physical traits. Bessie Head's *A Collector of Treasures* and Jordan Peele's *Get Out* both dig into themes like race, power, and how society treats people. Head's story takes place in post-colonial Africa and looks at issues like internalized racism and cultural identity. On the other hand, Peele's film deals with modern racial issues in the U.S., including the fetishization of race and systemic racism. By looking at these two works side by side, we can see how racism shows up and gets passed on in different settings.

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