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**Doing 'Good', Maintaining Dignity:
The effects of apartheid on ethical choices studied via contemporary South African fiction**

National borders form the official divide between peoples of different cultures and speakers of different languages. Nevertheless since cultures and languages are not static but amorphous and fluctuating, they seep through the borders without permits and modify and mutually enrich the cultures of the neighbouring societies. These ideally positive processes can be observed in European countries.

In Africa however a mere glimpse at the map of the continent evokes questions about the origins of its national borders. Some African countries have been drawn literally with a ruler without any consideration for the diversity of the people inhabiting the area. As a result many have turbulent and entangled histories. The Republic of South Africa is no exception and in this paper I will try to illuminate on the specificities of the effects of the recent past on this diverse multicultural society.

There have been many infamous attempts of social engineering throughout history (e.g. Third Reich), Apartheid in South Africa being one of the most recent examples. The confinement of peoples within certain areas - 'homelands' - along with legal racial segregation ceased to be enforced in South Africa over a decade ago. However apartheid left a legacy of divisions, cultural, economic and social gaps, mistrust, feelings of anger and guilt, which haunt relentlessly as shadows, to use the analogy from David Medalie's recently published novel *The Shadows Follows*¹.

In this paper I study Damon Galgut's novel *The Good Doctor*² with a specific focus on the disruptions (or 'disjoints of time' in the Derrida-ean sense³) as direct and/or indirect consequences of apartheid policies in analogy with the current challenges of a transitional society in the multicultural South Africa. I intend to offer a working theory on how in the recent past of South Africa it was impossible to maintain dignity due to the socio-political structure. How 'being good' was in some cases impossible and the shadows of the past still often render it impossible, this is exemplified by the actions of the Doctor Frank Eloff one of the main protagonists in *The Good Doctor*. Contemporary South African fiction in many ways explores the different ways of looking at the past, and helps us understand present social dynamics.

¹ David Medalie. *The Shadow Follows*. Johannesburg: Picador, 2006.

² Damon Galgut. *The Good Doctor*. London: Atlantic Books, 2003.

³ Jacques Derrida. *Spectres of Marx*. New York: Routledge, 1994 (in English).