

The Reflection Of Apartheid Trauma In Nadine Gordimer's Novels

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Abstract

The globe has been afflicted for ages. Almost every nation has suffered tragic events and emotions during this period. Among these nations, the black ones appear to have endured the most severe catastrophes. However, South Africans have been the most pitiful and unfortunate among these black nations. The country's misery began with the introduction of white colonists in 1652. Since then, the tyranny and persecution of indigenous peoples by white European colonists and settlers have increased. A few centuries ago, these indigenous people were removed from the territories they had inherited from their ancestors. They were not permitted to have equal rights with white people or to share public spaces with them. The natives resisted European settlers' racial and colonial policies, which segregated them from all living places; yet, they could not prevail, even assuming control in 1994. (post)colonial dominating white powers continue to exclude and victimize these people with violence, subjecting them to substandard treatment. As a white scholar and author of European descent, Nadine Gordimer witnessed the oppression and torture of European colonizers against indigenous South Africans. In her works, she depicts the racial discrimination performed by white people who think themselves to be in a superior position to black people. This study examines how Gordimer has portrayed black South Africans' anguish due to racial policies. This will help clarify and communicate indigenous people's accurate and painful histories in colonized countries.

Keywords: Apartheid, tyranny, Black South African, discrimination, colonial policies

Introduction

Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer is a renowned white South African writer. Gordimer is the spokesman for her people and a believer in the humanistic side of humanity. She received her Nobel Prize in 1991. Her existence contributes to racism and deprivation among the populace. Gordimer strives to reveal the various facets of societal requirements and issues. Being a writer, the words of her works give her a face and a place with what she depicts. She believes that being born a white South African has placed her in fatal isolation and that the only thing she can bring out is the horrible brutality toward blacks. The extensive background knowledge of South Africa enables a writer like Gordimer to communicate precisely what her country's condition is and

comprehend the actual suffering of the black population. Most black and white writers of South Africa and the African continent leave their homelands as exiles or of their own volition.

In contrast, just a handful of writers remain in their homelands and expose their country's suffering. Gordimer is one such author who resides in her native South Africa and uses her writing to evoke vivid images of black people and their true predicament. She neither goes into exile nor leaves her nation voluntarily. She faces the difficulty of isolation within the white community as a minority white woman in the black consciousness and a political activist for blacks. By touring through every region of her country, Gordimer is one of the most influential protest fiction writers in South Africa; she conveys the firsthand, genuine experience of the tyranny of the locals in all fields, including political, social, and cultural.

South Africa is a country where communication has aided oppression, and history has been deliberately fabricated to maintain white supremacy. Under the apartheid government, minority whites effectively controlled South Africa.

Gordimer was among the white minorities who hated the mistreatment of blacks by whites. She vehemently objected to the violence in her writings. Through her six decades of writing, Gordimer, as a writer and human being, conveyed the genuine agony of the people and her helplessness at an earlier time while not having experienced the actual misery of the blacks.

In actuality, she may be the only author who is not merely sympathetic but completely empathic, as she analyses the psychological agony of her characters rather than their physical suffering. Through her characters and writings, she attempts to shed light on bigotry. Her stories are filled with an abundance of historical, political, and social events that capture the true mood of her nation. The characters struggle in the dualistic condition between private and public life, self and other, black and white. This makes the characters more genuine than fictional and universal.

Literature's psychoanalytic clarification might be a beloved investigation of human motivation and behavior. The psychological application of Helen Shaw from Gordimer's first novel, *The Lying Days*, is the primary topic of this article. In her novels, Nadine Gordimer reveals more individuals than stereotypes. When the characters encounter violence and witness the suffering of their fellow humans, they experience trauma and undergo a significant life transformation.

The first novel by Gordimer, *The Lying Days*, was written during one of South African history's most politically crucial periods. Even though it was published in 1953, it was likely written about 1948, when the National Party (formed primarily of Afrikaners) came to power and started a regime of ruthless racial oppression for the cause of preserving racial purity. This was when apartheid laws were enacted and entrenched in South Africa. The Nationalist Party began its rule by passing a series of parliamentary acts designed to establish an age of political exclusions and ruthless repression. Gordimer's writing concentrates on the white family's politics and is founded

on these realities and relationships. In South Africa, white settlement and colonization were predominantly masculine endeavors, and the family reflects the patriarchal condition of settler groups and national politics. It investigates not only the politics of the family but also its ties with the larger social and political systems. Faced with this legalization, the ANC, the foremost African opposition movement, promptly mobilized against apartheid. It began advocating for non-whites voting rights through nonviolent means and activities. White liberals were caught in the crossfire between the National Party and the oppositional African Congress, with no actual power, influence, or authority on either side. White liberals discovered themselves in a dire predicament. If they joined the fight against apartheid, they would lose order, stability, and privileges and be susceptible to incrimination.

In contrast, if they joined the system, they would become part of its oppressive forces. Active liberals who resisted apartheid were persecuted by the authorities and silenced or pushed into exile. Therefore, liberalism was weakened and sidelined in politics and found its strength and vitality in the works of English-speaking liberal authors such as Paton, Coetzee, and Gordimer. Early novels by Gordimer are situated within the background of this period and its complex racial and oppositional politics. Gordimer's connection to the truth of South African life and politics was not merely to record and investigate it on a mimetic level but also to reimagine reality via fiction. Language and imagination enable Gordimer to modify reality. Her writing illustrates the oppressions of apartheid, changes in society, and the perspectives of many types of liberals, while simultaneously transcending these realities to a different universe with the potential for various human interactions. To combat colonial and apartheid ideals and to construct a new identity for her nation, Gordimer positions her works within a liberal framework.

On an ideological level, this enables her to reorganize and activate liberalism to the point of radicalism to make it a potent creed in the fight against apartheid and liberate the individual and society from its scourge. In addition, she portrays liberalism as a means of constructing a new identity for her heroes and a new social framework for South Africa by explaining its components,, such as justice, equality, individual liberty, and logic. Such liberal values are integrated into the discourses of her novels to demolish the identity imposed on South African society by colonization and apartheid. By highlighting the 'inclusivity' of liberalism, she enables it to stand up to the 'exclusivity' of apartheid and African nationalism. In actuality, this makes liberalism appear to be an ideology of compromise that stands between two extremes: Afrikaner nationalism and African nationalism. In Gordimer's writings, it functions as a natural solution to South Africa's racial strife and as a melting pot for all of her society's ideological and ethnic conflicts. In this regard, Jan Mohamed notes: While writing and educating herself, Nadine Gordimer underwent a major psychic rupture, which she refers to as a "second birth" - she uncovered the "great South African lie." The realization that white society was attempting to conceal the simple fact that blacks were people led her to realize that her South African identity had to be formed through the resolution of the black/white dichotomy, that the two races had to be united under a central, definitive

experience of black-and-white as people with undifferentiated claims to live, regardless of any other factors — skin, language, or culture — that might differentiate them from one another. Such a revelation is in and of itself a progressive liberal revelation, and it is reflected in Gordimer's novels, in which the author attempts to create a consciousness in her liberal white protagonists that non-whites are people and that the system tries to conceal this fact from them to be free to oppress them. She also works on the consciences of her white liberal characters to instill a sense of guilt and tragedy, suggesting that they are part of the oppressive powers of apartheid and that their ancestors were responsible for the destruction of South Africa's culture, land, and people. In addition, she informs her liberal characters that their family politics are part of the oppressive politics of apartheid, so they must rebel against them and strive to connect with South Africa via commitment and the fight against colonialism and apartheid. Such a revelation also enables her to give her protagonists and society a non-racial identity. In her first work, *The Lying Days*, she captures these social and political shifts. The first novel by Gordimer, *The Lying Days*, chronicles the major historical events of 1950. In 1948, the National Party took control of South Africa and instituted the apartheid regime, which curtailed the rights of black people. The voting rights of Indians and Coloreds were revoked in 1949, and the African National Congress (ANC) issued the Programme of Action, which called for boycotts, strikes, and civil disobedience.

The Mixed Marriages Act outlawed mixed marriages and criminalized sexual interactions between consenting adults of various skin tones in the same year. The Population Registration and Race Classification Act of 1950 mandated that every citizen be registered according to their racial classification. The Group Areas Act of 1950 required separate residential and commercial zones for whites, African-Americans, and Asians. The Bantu Authorities Act disbanded the Natives' Representative Council in 1951 to provide a foundation for ethnic governance in the black reserves or homelands. In 1952, the long-standing Pass rules were strengthened, making it illegal for blacks to offer their labor on a free market and labeling the unemployed as vagrants. The same year, the Native Laws Amendment Act restricted blacks' rights to reside in urban areas and evicted native owners from their ancestral lands. The objectives of the Defiance Campaign, based on Gandhian ideas of civil disobedience, strikes, boycotts, and staying at home, were national liberation and political independence. In 1953, United Party dissidents founded the Liberal Party, advocating a non-racial but qualified franchise for blacks. Left-leaning whites founded the Congress of Democrats in solidarity with the African National Congress. The Separate Amenities Act was introduced in the same year. The Public Safety Act gave the government the authority to declare authoritarian states of emergency. These significant historical events are reflected in the chronology of her first work.

The Conservationist marks Gordimer's return to South Africa. Again, she chooses a male protagonist, Mehring, who is unlike any of her other protagonists. This novel has a much broader scope than *The Late Bourgeois World*, yet in both works, Gordimer aims to describe the lifestyle of a particular stratum of white Johannesburg society. Mehring, a forty-nine-year-old industrialist

and investor is a member of multiple boards. Mehring, who has no other name, is admired and respected by everyone in his business and social circles, but it is evident that his existence lacks fundamental significance. He is deeply committed to nothing, including no ideology, nation, or social class, no sport, and no individual. He is the complete antithesis of Colonel Bray.

Mehring has a substantial surplus of funds. On a whim, he purchases a farm only twenty-five miles from the city. A man of his status and fortune is expected to own a farm, as it will give him a sense of connection with the earth. However, the property complicates Mehring's life. He cannot simply enjoy possession; he must work to make the farm productive. He will exercise conservation by repairing buildings, repairing fences, and clearing firebreaks. The farm consumes significantly more of his time and thoughts than he anticipated. Nothing about the farm's soil, climate, or black residents and employees can be taken for granted. Invariably, something unexpected and undesirable occurs.

A body is discovered on the premises. The man is black; therefore, the white police officers are unconcerned. Mehring anticipates they will remove the body and conduct an investigation, but neither action is taken. On Mehring's land, the unidentified body rests in a shallow, unmarked grave. The sight of the corpse in the third pasture disturbs both Mehring and his black employees, but Mehring is never inspired to take action.

The majority of the novel is Mehring's stream of consciousness. In addition to the body of the black man, Mehring frequently recalls the woman with whom he has been having an affair. An attractive white liberal whose husband is conducting a linguistic study in Australia, she is attracted to Mehring due to his authority; she dares to mock him and make light of that power. She believes that the whites' hegemony in South Africa is ending, but she is a dilettante. She desires to leave the country if she gets into an issue with the authorities due to her associations with blacks. She asks Mehring to utilize his contacts so she can escape, and she establishes herself in London. Mehring, though, continues to consider her after her departure.

The relationship between Mehring and this woman has been purely superficial; when she is absent, he thinks about her but does not truly miss her. Also external are his ties with his colleagues and their families. Because these relationships are so ineffective, he no longer desires their invitations or concern. On the few occasions he gets his son's company per year, he has no genuine desire to overcome their differences. Like his lover, his kid does not believe apartheid and white supremacy can last for an extended period. The son has scorn for everything his father stands for. He departs South Africa to join his mother in New York instead of doing his military obligation. In his self-imposed seclusion, Mehring spends more time on his farm. Despite himself, as he and his black foreman, Jacobus, talk about regular farm business and deal with calamities caused by drought, fire, and flooding, Mehring develops a growing respect for Jacobus.

Mehring spends New Year's Eve on the farm by himself. As the new year approaches, he travels across his moonlit field and rests his bottle against the wall of a stone outbuilding without a roof. He had a pleasant talk with old Jacobus. They discuss their children, the farm, and the animals. They are pretty jovial. They are compatible. Jacobus is not present, however. For Mehring, such a straightforward conversation with a black man is unreal.

In the story's final chapter, floods bring the unidentified body from the third pasture to the surface. Under the leadership of Jacobus, the black laborers construct a casket, allowing the man to receive a decent burial. In the meantime, Mehring is involved in another of his anonymous sexual sessions. He may be slain. Where will he be buried if he is murdered? Who are the genuine proprietors of the land he holds title to? Gordimer implies that the unidentified black man has a stronger claim to the ground than Mehring. Mehring and his kind will perish in disgrace. Their claim to South African territory is so shaky that their bodies do not warrant burial.

Gordimer is challenged to maintain the reader's interest in Mehring's activities, as he is not particularly likable. His activities will eventually include his black employees as he spends more time on the farm. Gordimer seizes the opportunity to depict the community's way of life in depth. Several of them develop into minor characters with depth. Gordimer juxtaposes the flow of active life in the black community with Mehring's isolation and decadence, thus preventing the novel from being completely repulsive.

Furthermore, in the opening lines of his article "The Political Unconscious," Fredrick Jameson famously argues, "Always historicize!" (pp1822) In an interview, Gordimer concurs that literature reveals more of history than any historian. The novels describe the account of any country better than the history books, and her stories bring forth more historical events than any other author. Fredric Jameson's concept of three horizons or concentric circles of interpretation; "the political happenings as a form of chronicle, the writer, places it in a record of subsequent happenings in a fictitious environment, built as a plot by some unique voice." The social as the battle, or the birth of our understanding of it as a conflict, is what Jameson refers to as "ideologies," which are the worldviews espoused by different antagonistic classes. This novel by Gordimer highlights her works' historical, social, political, and psychological elements.

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