

Review Article

Pathways to a Robust Multiracial Democracy: The Varying Perspectives of Nadine Gordimer in the House Gun and Get a Life

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Abstract: This paper is centred on fictionalized examples drawn from Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun* and *Get a Life* and exposes the author's solutions to the major challenges threatening the consolidation of South Africa's multiracial democracy. It explores how the 'new' nation can strengthen its democratic identity amid persistent socio-economic and political emanating from the legacies of apartheid. What distinguishes this discussion is its deliberate racial dimension: it examines how a former fervent anti-apartheid white writer articulates strategies that could assist the ANC-led leadership (government controlled by the African National Congress, ANC) in fostering national unity after decades of struggle against apartheid. It argues that the solutions must be broad-based rooted in national consciousness, and guided by principles of both individual and collective commitment to values that sustain post-apartheid nationhood. Ultimately, the attainment of a robust multiracial democracy is achievable if citizens cultivate awareness and responsibility - first at the individual level, then collectively - while the ANC-led government reinforces the public sphere and tackles pressing national issues through concrete and pragmatic action. The discussions engage with some key postcolonial concepts such as the Centre/Margin dynamic, Self/Other binary, hybridity, transformative resistance, and new historicism's emphasis on referentiality.

Keywords: Post-Apartheid, National Consciousness, Individual and Collective Commitment, Nation (Hood).

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INTRODUCTION

A critical reading of Gordimer's *The House Gun* and *Get a Life* shows that both individual and collective commitments are central to the eradication of most, if not all, of the socio-political challenges confronting contemporary South Africa. It is therefore essential to contextualize the notion of commitment which is pivotal to the reconstruction of post-apartheid South Africa. In this light, the significance of 'commitment' in a nation's wellbeing - particularly in the case of post-apartheid South Africa - is informed by Steven Friedman's (2008) conception of the real meaning of democracy in the African context. Indeed, Friedman contends that:

[...] understanding of democracy locates collective action by citizens at the core of the democratic project because it is through collective action that citizens both achieve and sustain democracy. Democratic broadening and deepening depends on the degree to which ever greater numbers of citizens enjoy the

capacity to act increasingly effectively in concert to hold power-holders to account. (p.5)

According to the analyst, the success of any democracy hinges on the collective commitment of citizens whose actions reinforce the democratic principles that sustain nationhood. Thus, their collective action enables the entrenchment of democratic values, creating a conducive environment for national prosperity by imposing a high degree of accountability on those in power. At this juncture, it can be argued that the individual and collective commitment of white liberal South Africans would be indispensable attitudes for addressing the socio-political challenges facing post-apartheid South Africa. Therefore, contemporary South Africa can consolidate its cherished ideal of a strong multiracial democracy if a spirit of national consciousness - rooted in a genuine commitment to the nation's wellbeing - is cultivated among all South Africans, especially the liberal white population.

Fictional examples drawn from the selected novels justify the claim that the long-sought ideal of nationhood is attainable if, from the public sphere, South Africans embrace individual and collective awareness and commitment, and if, from the political sphere, the government fully assumes and strengthens its responsibility to the people. When these conditions are met, South Africa's contemporary democracy would begin to experience the post-apartheid era not merely as a historical moment, but as an ongoing political ideal. It is worth noting that *post-apartheid*, beyond referring to a historical period, also represents a socio-political ideal that signifies a transformative change in attitudes across the former racial divide that endured for four decades. In fact, Anne-Marie Singh's (2008) indicates that:

'Post-apartheid' does not so much refer to the end of apartheid and the beginning of a new liberal democratic era. It did not begin with the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in February 1990 or with the first democratic elections in April 1994. Instead, 'post-apartheid' is [...] the emergence of new ways of thinking about how to organize and administer political, economic and everyday life. (p.4)

In essence, the significance of 'post-apartheid' extends well beyond the formal end of the apartheid system and the advent of multiracial democracy, the release of Nelson Mandela, or the country's first democratic elections - even though all of these events form the foundation of South Africa's current socio-economic and political evolution. To Singh's (2008), the successful consolidation of these achievements depends on the development of "[...] new ways of thinking about how to organize and administer [the current] political, economic and everyday life" (p.4). Her perspective on sustaining the gains of post-apartheid era aligns with Gordimer's fictionally suggested solutions to the myriad challenges hindering the consolidation of the 'new' South African nation and, by extension, its nationhood.

National Consciousness and the Liminality of Racial Tension

To understand the pertinence of the broad-based solutions to the major challenges facing the country, it is necessary to contextualize the broad historical meaning of post-apartheid. According to Nicholls, "the term Post-Apartheid signals a certain liminality, that of the ever-receding end of the old regime within which the new dispensation can never entirely realise itself as such" (p.4). In Nicholls' view, post-apartheid, which etymologically denotes the period following the end of apartheid, equally reflects the current socio-political climate of South Africa - one still profoundly shaped by the enduring legacy of apartheid that continues to looms large in the consciousness of its citizens. In reality, although post-apartheid represents a formal break from the apartheid past, it remains dominated by deep-seated attitudinal challenges that undermine the nation-building efforts of the new democratic leadership. Consequently,

the ideals of equality, unity, and progress for which the nation struggled remain only partially realized. This is largely because the emerging multiracial nation exists against the backdrop of a constantly resurfacing apartheid legacy - one that persists as a continuum difficult to eradicate. Within this context Singh's (2008) proposes that the advent of post-apartheid and its historical implications should signify "[...] new ways of thinking about how to organize and administer [the current] political, economic and everyday life" (p.4). Building on Nicholls' (1999) observation and Singh's (2008) recommendations, one notes that the fictional solutions evidenced in Gordimer's novels under review are particularly significant, as they chart pathways toward a strong democracy, consistent with her long-standing activism in the struggle against apartheid. Thus, the newly adopted attitudes toward the sensitive issue of race relations by fictional white (liberal) South Africans are construed as a significant response to this perennial problem embedded within the South African imaginary.

The racial question and its implications in the collective memory of South Africans constitute an area where Gordimer's proposed solutions become essential, since racism can undermine the country's reconstruction process. This is evidenced by the focus on the reactions of white South Africans - particularly the white liberals - who need to demonstrate a proactive sense of responsibility towards the realities of contemporary South Africa. Against the background of apartheid's racism and its legacy, the collective commitment of white liberal South Africans represents the will to uphold their civic responsibility in the ongoing reconstruction process, which requires reconciliation among all South Africans. In essence, the persistence of racial tension - evident in the attitudes of some white liberals - can be mitigated if white South Africans actively embrace and uphold values that underpin their new nation, founded on reconciliation between the black and white populations as well as among the various racial groups that make up the society. At this juncture, it is important to note that the racial question, embedded in apartheid policy, was the main reason the ANC fought for nearly forty years against successive Afrikaner regimes that institutionalized racialism as a governance philosophy in 1948 (O'Reilly, 2001, p.40). Therefore, eliminating the resurgence of racist tendencies in the social sphere would mark the beginning of true nationhood - an achievement that depends on the commitment of all citizens, regardless of racial, ethnic, or political affiliation, to uphold the unifying bond among South Africans. Yul Derek Davids (2010) holds:

[...] South Africa's democratic Constitution is characterised by a range of independent watchdog agencies and commissions all guaranteeing citizens political and socio-economic rights. However, a constitution, relatively well-run elections and stable elected representative institutions are not sufficient as enablers of democracy. Sustainable and

consolidated democracies require people who are willing to support, defend and sustain it. (p.68)

Within the context of attitudes indispensable to the eradication of the country's major challenges, Singh's (2008) conception of 'post-apartheid' as both a historical epoch and a political ideal converges with Davids' (2010) emphasis on South Africans' commitment to upholding the positive values necessary for the consolidation of multiracial democracy. In this light, the racial legacy that threatens this aspiration can be eradicated if all South Africans - particularly segments of the white population - demonstrate a genuine determination to support, defend, and sustain the reconciliatory foundations of the post-apartheid nation as an accomplished political dispensation.

The above-mentioned views of Singh (2008) and Davids (2010) are reflected in examples drawn from Gordimer (1999) where one notices that the negative repercussions of the legacy of racial chauvinism can be expunged entirely if white liberals, and white South Africans as a whole, recognize the benefits of the country's unity in diversity, especially given its image as a multiracial society. This is exemplified through the story of the Lindgard family, who are confronted with the imminent imprisonment of their son, Duncan. It is against this backdrop that the reactions of Harald and Claudia develop into a medium of exposition of solutions to the issue of racial divisions in South Africa. In Harald's case, as in his wife's, Duncan's crime prompts a shift in his sense of commitment and responsibility towards the welfare of the new South Africa. This renewed commitment is symbolized by Harald's act of sharing communion with the poor from across the country's racial spectrum. The significance of this gesture can only be fully appreciated when one considers the narrator's description of the multiracial congregation:

The nameless congregation was of all gradations of colour and feature. Paper-white old ladies from pensioners' rooms and adolescent girls with mussel-shell eyes and cheeks smoothly brown as acorns, thin black men lost in charity hand-me-downs, women in heavy-breasted church black, young men of the streets with Afro-heads [...] He took his turn behind a man the age of his son who breathed the odour of last night's drinking and scratched at a felted scalp. He took the wine-moistened Host as did this man blessed in Creation with what not long ago had been an affliction, under the law's malediction of a mixture of both skins, the suffering of black, and the apostasy of white. (p.87)

The depiction of the congregation constructs a symbolic representation of a multiracial South Africa in which blacks and whites, both young and old, coexist and interact as citizens endowed with equal rights before the

law. Hence, Harald's decision to associate himself with this congregation, rather than with that of the liberal whites in his suburban town house, is therefore profoundly symbolic. Indeed, his change in religious affiliation signifies a transformative awakening brought about by Duncan's crime and its ramifications, which compel him to confront the new socio-political realities of a nation he can no longer feign indifference toward, as was characteristic of his attitude during the apartheid era. Through Duncan's transgression, Harald attains a heightened consciousness of his belonging to a broader South African community - particularly to his suffering compatriots whose pain and yearning for assistance mirror those of his son, and by extension, his own. This renewed awareness underpin his shift in loyalty and moral orientation, which is concretised when he identifies with the plight of the suffering blacks, symbolised by the man with whom he shares "[...] the wine-moistened Host [...]" (Gordimer, 1999, p.87). Harald's act of partaking of the same cup of wine at Mass with a poor black man is imbued with deep symbolic significance, given the centrality of communion in the Catholic doctrine as an emblem of unity and reconciliation. This gesture may thus be interpreted as a symbolic affirmation of the indivisible humanity of all South Africans, transcending the racial divisions that once structured the nation's social order. It further epitomises Harald's spiritual and ethical solidarity with the suffering of his compatriots - those for whom Christ, as symbolised through the Eucharist, sacrificed his life. Ultimately, Harald's act reflects his acknowledgment of the shared humanity uniting black, coloured, and white South Africans as God's creation. Within this framework, his renewed commitment to the post-apartheid ideal of racial equality emerges as a defining marker of his moral and ideological transformation.

In fact, the eradication of attitudes associated with the lingering legacy of racism within the white community, particularly among the white liberal population, begins with this group cultivating genuine proximity to the black community - the segment of society most afflicted by the structural poverty engendered by four decades of apartheid-induced deprivation (Lowe, 1997; O'Reilly, 2001; Frueh, 2003). The need for an active ethically grounded participation of the white population in the moral and socio-political reconstruction of post-apartheid South Africa finds symbolic expression in Harald, whose perception of his son's crime and its repercussions upon both the family and the self as a tragic misfortune initiates a profound process of moral introspection. This ironic awareness propels him toward an identification with those historically relegated to the peripheries of the apartheid order - the poor, dispossessed, and socially invisible. Harald's turn towards the marginalised thus constitutes more than a gesture of empathy. It signifies an ontological and moral reorientation that challenges the inherited boundaries of race and class. In essence, his identification with the underprivileged, long excluded

from the social and economic privileges of white South Africa, marks a symbolic crossing of what Bhabha (1994) might call a liminal threshold – a space where identities are renegotiated and new forms of subjectivity can emerge (pp. 4-5, 36-38). Therefore, his decision to join a multiracial congregation of impoverished South Africans for communion on a Sunday morning operates as a performative act of reconciliation and solidarity. The ritual of communion, set within a cathedral located in a poor Johannesburg neighbourhood, transcends its liturgical function to become a metaphor for national healing, collective atonement, and moral regeneration. In this light, Harald's gesture embodies Gordimer's broader vision of post-apartheid transformation as a process of ethical reconstitution, where private conscience intersects with public responsibility. Actually, the cathedral becomes a liminal space of encounter where the historical fractures of race, class, and privilege are momentarily bridged, and where the possibility of a truly inclusive national identity begins to take shape. In this dynamic, Harald's symbolic movement from segregated comfort of white suburbia to the communal solidarity of the marginalised, illustrates the moral trajectory necessary for South Africa's ongoing project of reconciliation and democratic renewal:

[...] where the business district unravelled out into blind-front clubs where drugs are peddled, and stale-smelling hotels rented rooms by the hour. In the congregation there was no-one who would recognise him with sympathetic smiles of greeting he would have to meet at the suburban church in the parish of the town house [...]. (Gordimer, 1999, p.87)

The misfortune that Harald, like Claudia, links to Duncan's crime lies at the core of his new sense of solidarity with those he sees as sharing similar hardships rooted in the legacy of apartheid. His son's fate obliges him to identify with the country's poor and marginalised, symbolised by the neighbourhood where he chooses to receive communion. This act reflects Harald's growing awareness and responsibility, marked by his decision to distance himself from his white liberal peers who only pretend to share his pain, just as they once feigned sympathy with blacks suffering under apartheid. In fact, Harald's estrangement from the liberal white community stems from his realisation that their passivity toward blacks' welfare - of which he was once a part - has not spared him from the consequences of a past he failed to challenge.

This symbolic transformation evident in Harald's outlook towards national affairs constitutes a pivotal dimension of Gordimer's ethical vision for post-apartheid renewal. Concretely, his redefined moral agency, which functions as a prescriptive paradigm for the white liberal conscience, reflects Hannah Arendt's view, as reiterated by Bhabha (2003), that "we are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves

mutually equal rights" (p.169). For Arendt, equality is not a natural condition but a performative act of ethical responsibility enacted within the social collective. Consequently, Harald's reconnection with the symbolic space of the cathedral and its marginalised neighbourhood therefore signifies the emergence of a post-apartheid subjectivity entrenched in solidarity, moral accountability, and civic reawakening within a reconstituted democratic order.

Like her husband Harald, Claudia equally embodies the new form of positive attitude that white liberal South Africans need to adopt in order to promote reconciliation and unity among the country's different racial groups. Her active involvement in advancing South Africa's hybridised blend of multiracial and multicultural values becomes evident through her interaction with a black man during the party organised at Motsamai's residence. This moment of cross-cultural harmony, which both characters symbolise, is vividly captured when the narrator describes their dance. The symbolic nature of their response to the rhythms of the 1960s reflects how South Africans from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds can transcend lingering tensions and work collectively towards a united and mutually beneficial nation. This idea is further emphasised by the narrator's observation:

Claudia had been found by a man who came from a different experience in every other way but this one: the music, its expression in body and feet, of the sixties, it didn't matter where he had performed its rituals in shebeens and yards, and she had carried them out in student union halls, they assumed the form of an assertion of life that was hidden in each. (Gordimer, 1999, p.175)

What is significant about the narrator's description of the characters' response to the rhythms of the 1960s lies in the symbolism that one may attach to such a historical epoch in South Africa's past and its impact on both the present and the future. The 1960s marked a period of intense and systematic racial discrimination against blacks South Africans, upheld by the apartheid regime's philosophy of racial and cultural superiority which kept the two racial groups strictly apart, (Frueh, 2003; O'Reilly, 2001; Lowe, 1997; Waldmeir, 1997). It is against this historical background that the response of Claudia and the black man to the same musical rhythms - now in a post-apartheid era - acquires profound symbolic importance. In fact, drawing on Singh's (2008, p.4) conception of post-apartheid as a political ideal, the harmony and unity expressed in their collective response to the music of that historically inhumane period is a powerful reflection of the collapse of the racial and cultural barriers once enforced by the apartheid state. Essentially, the rhythms of the past to which they now dance to in contemporary South Africa embodies the shared values that define the nation's multiracial identity, where former racial and cultural

divisions have lost their relevance. More importantly, it reflects the cross-cultural interaction and fusion that form the cornerstone of South Africa's democratic multiracialism – an ideal symbolically captured in the political imagery of the “rainbow nation” (Tutu, 2000).

This unity must be sustained by all citizens, with the whites - and white liberals in particular – expected to play a vital role. The narrator reinforces this argument when he notes that Harald “[...] followed the familiar, forgotten twists and pauses of her body, the skilful angles of her feet in response to her partner's as if the arms and thighs and feet of the man were his own. Where is the past. Obliterated by the present [...]” (Gordimer, 1999, p.175). Harald's psychological participation in his wife's and the black man's performance signifies the emerging unity of purpose between blacks and whites. At this point, Motsamai's house and his invitation to Duncan's parents acquire symbolic importance, representing spaces of cross-cultural interaction that should characterize the new South Africa. His gesture seeks to bring blacks and whites - represented by his black friends and Duncan's parents – into recognition of their shared humanity as members of one nation. Against this backdrop, and within the post-apartheid image of South Africa as a “rainbow nation,” Claudia's and the man's harmonious response to the rhythms of the past illustrates, in Bhabha's (1993) terms, the hybridised social, cultural, and political identity of the new nation.

Similarly, Harald and Claudia's newly assumed responsibility toward the affairs of the post-apartheid society may be viewed as a confirmation of Charles Taylor's concept of cultural identity, which constitutes the cornerstone of minority groups within any nation. Taylor's perspective on a nation's trajectory to the attainment of nationhood finds both expression and relevance within the post-apartheid context that Gordimer (1999) portrays, particularly where Taylor underscores “[...] the importance of ‘recognition’ as a central issue in the creation of a just society” (Bhabha, 2003, p. 165). According to Taylor, ‘recognition’ refers to citizens' awareness of their individual and collective responsibility toward the common good of the nation. When citizens cultivate such a sense of commitment to the well-being of their society, they actively contribute to the promotion of social justice, which in turn guarantees peace and prosperity, both of which are indispensable components of nationhood. Thus, within the context of post-apartheid South Africa, ‘recognition’ implies the willingness of white liberals to acknowledge their belonging to the broader political community alongside the black majority and, consequently, to assume responsibility for promoting social justice that would ensure prosperity for all, thereby consolidating the foundations of nationhood.

So far, the discussion on the proposed solution to the racial question in Gordimer (1999) has focused on

the symbolic impact of Duncan's crime on the worldview of white liberals, as represented by the Lindgard family. The significance of Duncan's crime and fate, as the focal point of his parents' dedication to the new social and political order, may appear to overshadow the equally symbolic role played by Motsamai's devotion to Duncan as his client in that transformative process. Like Duncan's crime, Motsamai also occupies the central position in the Lindgards' sudden and profound awareness of their responsibilities toward the new demands of a society undergoing reconstruction.

The role Motsamai plays in drawing out the Lindgards out of the cocoon of white liberal passivity - which had long sustained racial stereotypes that constrained black South Africans – is grounded in the relevance of “[...] the importance of ‘recognition’ as a central issue in the creation of a just society” (Bhabha, 2003, p. 165). Aware that peaceful coexistence is possible only through mutual commitment to national progress, Motsamai invites the Lindgards to the gathering at his home. This invitation functions as a forum for a cross-cultural contact and interaction, fostering mutual understanding and coexistence between the Lindgards and his black family and friends. Motsamai's gesture reflects the personal commitment of black South African determined to challenge the racial stereotypes entrenched in the whites' collective consciousness by decades apartheid rule. What may seem like a simple gesture “[...] establishing the confidence of human feeling, some sort of give-and-take, with the family of the life to be defended, even while retaining professional objectivity” (Gordimer, 1999, p.163) - acquires symbolic significance in contemporary South Africa, still marked by lingering racial tensions. His home thus becomes a contact zone that enables the cross-cultural exchange indispensable to the nation-building process.

In essence, the significance of this invitation - set against the broader efforts to dismantle lingering racist tendencies in the new nation - lies in its role as a symbolic new beginning in encouraging blacks and whites to recognise one another as equal citizens of post-apartheid South Africa. Its function as an act of conscious-raising is particularly pertinent for white liberals such as the Lindgard family, more so than for Motsamai's black guests, given that, symbolically “This white couple didn't have the resilience that blacks have acquired in all their generations of being people in trouble by the nature of their skin” (Gordimer, 1999, p.163). Motsamai's intention is to cultivate a sense of mutual concern anchored in Duncan's predicament, especially since white liberals, including the Lindgards, have historically been insulated by the privileges associated with their racial affiliation with the former regime and have therefore never faced the pressures of such precarious circumstances. It is within this context of mutual exchange between the Lindgards, their host, and his friends that the impact of Motsamai's effort

becomes evident, most notably when Claudia symbolically dances with the black man, as previously discussed.

At this point, Motsamai's endeavour reflects Renan's assertion that "a nation's existence is, a daily plebiscite, just as an individual's existence is a perpetual affirmation of life" (Bhabha, 1995, p.19). Thus, a nation such as post-apartheid South Africa exists only when its citizens continuously negotiate the terms of their co-existence, as demonstrated by Motsamai's effort to establish a meaningful relationship with his client's parents. His intention to cultivate an atmosphere of mutual trust and reciprocal understanding highlights the necessity for black and white South Africans to engage in ongoing negotiations about living together within the current political dispensation. Furthermore, the attitudes of Motsamai, Harald and Cluadia – understood as affirmation of the 'rainbow' identity – corroborate Boyce's (1999) view that "nationhood is achieved within a state when the citizens of that particular country perceive themselves as belonging to a specific territory, actively identify themselves with the state institutions, and feel a sense of shared values" (p.236). Their conduct thus demonstrate an emerging consciousness among both white liberals and black South Africans regarding their shared belonging to a post-apartheid dispensation built on the ideal of non-racialism. This awareness is evident in their attitudes, which reflect a clear commitment to embracing contemporary socio-political values grounded in reconciliation and multiracial democracy.

Comparable to the Lindgards' momentous transformation is the experience of the Bannermans, whose visit to Mexico profoundly alters their previously limited worldview on race. Lyndsay and Andrian Bannerman, who undertake a touristic trip to Mexico, undergo a significant shift in perspective as a result of the insight they gain into the universality of the human race during their stay in a nation that is, like South Africa, markedly multiracial. Their visit to a photographic exhibition depicting the diverse racial groups that constitute Mexican society prompts a sudden awareness of the interconnectedness of racial communities – not only in Mexico, but in South Africa as well. This moment of self-realisation, emerging from their exposure to such compelling representations of racial plurality, is vividly articulated by the narrator, who observes that:

[...] they stood unable to leave the exhibition
[...] amusedly pointing to each other [...] look
how that one's exactly like so-and-so, that one
definitely tells that so- and-so has Japanese
blood somewhere. And what about us, mmh?
Each born of the Western European type that
had been two or three generations in Africa;
isn't there likely to be some mutations, detail of
feature or flesh that records entry of a black
strain, not just the evolutionary effect of climate
and elements of nouriture. And the juxta-
presence of other strains, Malays, Indians,

Chinese, all come to Africa over generations.
(Gordimer, 2006, p.108)

The symbolic force of this experience lies in its psychological impact on the characters' self-awareness as liberal whites who had never fully grasped the significance of black South Africans' struggle against apartheid. The knowledge they acquire while viewing the photographs of the diverse racial groups that constitute Mexico is crucial, for they come to recognise that Mexico's model of racial plurality is not fundamentally different from South Africa's. The couple suddenly become aware of the fluidity of the racial categorisation in Mexico – a fluidity produced by centuries of interracial mixing that render any notion of racial 'purity' largely speculative. What is most significant about this newly acquired understanding is the parallel they draw between the Mexican experience and South Africa's multiracial context, which form part of their cultural and historical roots. Through this comparison, the couple realise that they – and, by extension, other white South Africans – cannot assume the purity of their racial lineage, given that South Africa's long postcolonial history is that of contact and interactions among whites, the indigenous black population, and various European and Asian groups who settled in the region. The presence of multiple racial communities, particularly those originating from Europe and Asia, suggests the likelihood of genetic and cultural exchanges over time. This history of intergroup contact – which undermines the racial nationalism that underpinned apartheid ideology and whose legacy continue to resonate in the post-apartheid period – is documented in the works of Batten (1951); Sagay and Wilson (1978); and Omar-cooper (1994).

Therefore, the utopian belief in racial superiority – whether white or otherwise – rests on an illusory foundation, especially given the likelihood of genetic intermixture among the country's racial groups. This symbolism of the Bannermans' encounter with the Mexican example is evident when the narrator observes that, following this revelation, "They must take a new good look at the face of the other in the nakedness of a shared bathroom, when he's exposed, freshly shaven, and make-up has been cream-off her public image" (Gordimer, 2006, p.108). This experience compels a reassessment of the foundations of their long-held belief in the purity and superiority of their race, particularly in relation to black South Africans. Thus, the visit to Mexico exerts a significant psychological impact on the characters, offering an opportunity for self-examination in light of the new socio-political ethos of democratic, multiracial South Africa. This subtle but profound shift in their self-awareness emerges from their recognition of the essential oneness of humanity and, more specifically, of the diverse racial groups constituting the new South Africa.

In fact, the Bannermans' new self-awareness affirms R. Miles' argument regarding the socio-political irrelevance of racial categorisation since:

The fact that only certain physical characteristics are signified to define 'races' in specific circumstances indicates that we are investigating not a given, natural division of the world's population but the application of historically and culturally specific meanings to the totality of human physiological variation [...] 'races' are socially imagined rather than biological realities. (qtd in Loomba, 1998, p.121)

Like R. Miles, the Bannermans come to recognise that race is a construct shaped by historically and socially conditioned worldviews, often reinforced by perceived physiological differences among groups within a given society. Consequently, they realise that the racial categorisation of South Africans – promoted by successive apartheid regimes and sustained in its aftermath – was, and, remains, unnecessary.

To close up the discussion on the legacy of racial and cultural chauvinism, one can discern a clear continuity in Gordimer's position in both novels under examination. She maintains that the racial obstacles to national reconstruction can be addressed only if white – particularly liberal – South Africans, first recognise the debilitating effects of racism on national cohesion and commit themselves to its eradication. Such commitment is essential, for the freedoms they seek to enjoy depend on the democratic values of non-racism. Such a call for responsibility equally extends to the broader social challenges that stem from decades of apartheid-era deprivation imposed on the black majority.

Awareness and Commitment as Prerequisites in Overcoming Social Barriers

Widespread violence is a major challenge arising from the legacy of apartheid which continue to hinder the country's nation-building process. As identified in Gordimer (1999), the issue can be mitigated if South Africans, especially white citizens, adopt more responsible social attitudes. This group need to acknowledge that crime in the country is not perpetrated solely by black South Africans and that its consequences threaten both familial stability unit and national cohesion. This position is reflected in the symbolic impact of Duncan's misfortune on his parents. Metaphorically, his crime becomes a gravitational centre that shapes the lives of those around him, especially his parents, through whom one decipher the potential ways of addressing this pervasive national problem.

The symbolic impact of Duncan's crime is reflected in Harald's deepened commitment to the challenges facing the new South Africa, particularly the problem of violent crimes. This is demonstrated through the parallel the narrator draws between Harald's

attendance at mass in the cathedral and his act of waiting for his wife in the court where Duncan is to be tried for murder. Within this framework, Harald becomes increasingly aware of the pervasive issue of violence in the country, recognising that his son – like the sons of the men with whom he worships – is implicated in this troubling reality. This new awareness is embedded in the link the narrator establishes between the two institutions when she observes:

The queer sense Harald had had while he waited for Claudia in the secular cathedral of the court's foyer of being one among the fathers of thieves and murderers was now confirmed. The instinct to go and worship in the cathedral among people from the streets, which had seemed a way of avoiding sympathy of his suburban peers, had been the taking of his rightful place with these most bowed to misfortune. (Gordimer, 1999, p.127)

The subtle analogy embedded in the description of Harald's transformation reinforces the symbolic function of Duncan's crime as a call to the white liberals – represented by Harald – who have long remained passive in their commitment to the nation's welfare. By identifying with the marginalised groups described by the narrator, Harald is the central figure through whom the author urges greater civic responsibility from white liberals. This symbolic role becomes evident when one considers the narrator's assertion that Harald's presence both in the courtroom and at the cathedral signifies his acceptance of his rightful responsibility toward the welfare of the new South Africa still burdened by crime, racial legacies, and poverty.

The symbolic impact of Duncan's crime on Harald parallels Claudia's sudden self-realisation of her responsibility toward the nation under reconstruction. In Claudia's case, the narrator notes that it is through her son's crime and subsequent arrest that she comes to understand that she "[...] is not the only woman with a son in prison. Since this afternoon she has understood that she is no longer the one who doles out comfort or its placebos for others' disasters, herself safe, untouchable, in another class" (Gordimer, 1999, p.17). Her son's predicament awakens Claudia to the realities of a country plagued by violent crime. Duncan's act of violence against his friend, which leads to his detention, symbolically exposes her to the post-apartheid culture of violence, in which her son has become a participant. The significance of the narrator's observation lies in the fact that she, like many liberal whites, had long insulated herself behind secure, fenced homes, detached from the violence experienced by black South Africans under apartheid. Thus, her family's misfortune serves as a catalyst, compelling her to confront the realities of the nation beyond the sheltered life of a liberal white South African. This symbolic dimension of her son's crime is particularly significant when it compels her to visit Duncan in prison, where, like Harald, she gains

awareness of the classless and raceless nature of violent crime in post-apartheid South Africa.

In addition to addressing the problem of crime, Gordimer (1999) equally outlines the solutions to the major health challenges confronting contemporary South Africa. She is concerned with white liberals who need to participate actively in efforts to address national crises such as the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country. As with the issue of crime and violence, Claudia is central to the author's position. Through her involvement in collective attempts to confront the country's major health problems – challenges that disproportionately affect black communities – Claudia embodies the moral awakening Gordimer seeks to depict. Claudia's transformation is partly prompted by her son's misfortune, itself linked to the lingering legacy of apartheid's culture of violence (historically documented in Lowe 1997; Waldmire, 1999; O'Reilly, 2001; Frueh 2003). She realises that her previous practice of merely treating the sick was insufficient, especially given that she could have contributed more meaningfully to addressing the structural causes of suffering during apartheid. Her earlier activism, had it been directed more decisively, might have strengthened the ANC's struggle against oppressive governance. In the post-apartheid era, Claudia's decision to become an engaged participant in national affairs emerges from the awareness gained through her family's crisis. She comes to understand that being a law-abiding citizen is not enough in a society where the majority continue to face preventable hardships she has the capacity to help resolve. This renewed sense of responsibility explains her commitment to assisting Motsamai's son in pursuing a career in medicine. Claudia's shift in perspective, catalysed by Duncan's misfortune, is especially evident in the narrator's description of her interactions with the lawyer's son, "Claudia's expression [changed] with her generous frown of energy; probably about to suggest that the boy come to her clinic put on a white coat, lend a hand where it can be useful and try out for himself what the practice of medicine should mean in service to the people and the country" (Gordimer, 1999, p.170). The depiction of Claudia's transformation clearly illustrates the new, participatory sense of responsibility she assumes toward the welfare of the country. Her invitation to the boy symbolises a meaningful contribution to the construction of the new nation, especially as it affords him the opportunity to pursue training that will equip him to meet South Africa's pressing health needs. Claudia's initiative is particularly significant because it seeks to foster an interest in medicine among black youths in a country severely affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other diseases, where medical professionals – especially within black communities – remain in short supply. More broadly, her effort exemplifies the need for collaborative engagement between whites and blacks in addressing the nation's ongoing health challenges.

The Claudia's efforts can be read as a confirmation of the lesson Anthony Appiah (2003) recalls learning from his father, who taught him that "the notion of leaving somewhere better than you found it was a larger part of what my father understood by citizenship. It wasn't just a matter of belonging to a community; it was a matter of taking responsibility with that Community for its destiny" (p.189). In this light, Claudia's renewed commitment – set against her earlier passivity during the most oppressive years of apartheid – signals her growing awareness of her responsibilities within the new nation. Indeed, the narrator's portrayal of the Lindgards' emerging sense of obligation toward post-apartheid challenges reveals:

...Gordimer's contribution to the current debate on reconciliation in the new South Africa is the insight that the prospects for the integration of liberal whites are imperilled by deeply ingrained habits. If the prison-yard that encloses Duncan will endure for seven years at most, his parents serve a probable life term in the impregnable walls of their insularity. And, significantly, it is through Duncan that a positive pattern of remorse and even restitution is indicated. (Diala, 2004, p.55)

Therefore, Duncan's crime becomes central to Gordimer's depiction of the indispensable responsibility that white South African liberals must assume toward a new nation seeking solutions to persistent problems of crimes, violence, public health, and the enduring racial tensions inherited from apartheid. Harald and Claudia, as white liberals, come to recognise their own responsibility towards the emerging nation precisely because they, too, have become entangled in the lingering culture of racially-induced violence – an apartheid legacy that continues to generate other forms of crimes with far-reaching consequences for the wider society.

If Claudia's newly adopted sense of responsibility toward the country emerges solely from her son's crime, Lyndsay's commitment is the culmination of several influences: her experience in Mexico, her son's hazardous health condition, and the loneliness she feels after Andrian deserts her. In fact, Lyndsay's dedication to supporting the country's victimized AIDS patients – symbolised by the little black girl she adopts – originate primarily from her Mexican experience, although Charlene Damons' significant role in her transformation cannot be ignored. It is Charlene's plight, as coloured social worker at an orphanage of abandoned children living with AIDS that draws Lyndsay into the struggle to defend the rights of AIDS victims. The connection between Lyndsay and Charlene begins when the latter serves as a key witness in a case concerning her brother-in-law, who is dismissed by his employer because he is an AIDS victim. As Charlene tells Paul Bannerman " [...] I've just been a witness in that big case, you know, my brother-in-law who was kicked out of his firm, his job [...] because he's got AIDS

[...] the trade union made a case to defend him and Mrs Bannerman was the chief lawyer” (Gordimer, 2006, p.142). This seemingly minor encounter later assumes symbolic weight when Charlene describes her work at the orphanage to Lyndsay. The two women grow close through their shared commitment to assisting the less privileged, and their partnership – representing two defenders of the freedom and dignity of disadvantaged black South Africans - deepens when Charlene begins taking Lyndsay to the orphanage. It is through this developing affinity that Lyndsay’s concern for the victims of the country’s most severe crises becomes concrete action, culminating in her decision to adopt the little black girl who contracted AIDS as a result of rape.

The combined impact of Lyndsay’s Mexican experience, her son’s fragile health, and her subsequent loneliness foster in her a need to identify with other marginalised South Africans, particularly those stigmatised by AIDS. This identification is most symbolic in her decision to take Klara – the AIDS-infected black child she adopts – alongside her grandchild to the zoo. Their presence as a racially mixed family publicly challenges lingering social barriers and quietly asserts the possibility of intimate interracial coexistence despite the ongoing threat of the AIDS pandemic. The narrator underscores this symbolic gesture by noting that observers “[...] smile at the little scene assuaging pleasantly their guilt of the past when the zoo was closed to blacks except on one day a week and black and white children did not chant together” (Gordimer, 2006, p.155). At another level, Lyndsay’s adoption of Klara also serves as a critique of the stigma surrounding AIDS, offering a model of compassionate responsibility and encouraging South Africans not to abandon relatives or community members affected by the disease.

These fictional examples show that the social constructs and binaries that continue to hinder nation-building can be overcome if South Africans realise the irrelevance of such stereotypes, which still shape social cohesion and interracial relations. These suggested remedies align with Anthony Appiah’s (2003) view that “The notion of leaving somewhere better than you found it was larger part of what my father understood by citizenship. It wasn’t just a matter of belonging in a community; it was a matter of taking responsibility with that community for its destiny” (p.189). In this light, Lyndsay’s benevolence toward the black girl, Klara, and Claudia’s effort to guide Motsamai’s son toward an interest in medicine function as symbolic gestures of responsibility toward the wellbeing of a nation historically shaped by discrimination. By defending the rights of patients who are doubly victimised by both the AIDS pandemic and the stigma it carries, and by encouraging a professional path in medical care in a country severely affected by HIV/AIDS, Lyndsay and Claudia each demonstrate a commitment to supporting victims of AIDS-related discrimination and contributing

to improve healthcare – acts that embody a form of citizenship grounded in positive responsibility.

At this juncture, it can be argued that Claudia’s and Lyndsay’s respective commitments to the wellbeing of post-apartheid South Africa reflect the views of Smith and Lindeman (1951), who contend that:

The first function [of a democracy and an individual in a democracy] would be to see that no human beings remain for long detached from some friendly functional group. To be ‘lost’ physically means to be socially out of touch. To be ‘saved’ means to ‘belong’: to have duties to perform, to know how to perform them, and to have somebody to care whether they are properly performed. The first religious function in a democracy is illustrated in the care of orphan children, in the rehabilitation of criminals, in the re-establishment of people otherwise so unfortunate as temporarily to be isolated from their most promising small group. The man without a friendly group to sustain him cannot be a good citizen in a democracy; for it is this living experience of intimate brotherhood, needing no further justification than its own felt intrinsic value, from which alone can be derived the vision of good that, when projected on a larger scale, forms the objective for which democracy works. (pp. 27-28)

By adopting the vulnerable black girl, Klara, and by encouraging Motsamai’s son to develop an interest in medical care, both Lyndsay and Claudia fulfil the responsibilities expected of individuals committed to sustaining the core values of a democracy such as South Africa’s. In other words, given the political responsibility that the new South Africa already assumes toward its citizens - including Lyndsay and Claudia – they, in turn, must show concern for the country’s AIDS victims and patients suffering from other illnesses. Through such engagement, they remain socially attuned to the needs of their nation and affirm their place as integral participants in the broader objectives that this emerging democracy represents.

So far, the fictionally delineated responses to the social challenges threatening South Africa’s nation-building project have centred on the need for the white liberal community to become actively involved in the affairs of the country. The responses suggest that the repercussions of apartheid’s enduring culture of gun violence, the passivity of white liberals in the face of injustice, and the persistent HIV/AIDS and other health crises can be significantly reduced if this group joins the majority black population in working to eliminate the harmful effects these issues pose to the country’s socio-political development. For this awareness to yield meaningful result, it must be supported by collective effort from all South Africans, with the ANC-led government

playing a major role in strengthening the public sphere essential for consolidating a multiracial democracy.

The Leadership's Commitment to Democratic Values

Concretely, the achievement of a robust and mutually beneficial multiracial democracy in South Africa requires the full commitment of the political leadership to uphold democratic values capable of advancing nationhood. To realise this vision, the ANC-led government must reinforce basic liberties and freedoms, promote responsible citizenship from within its ranks and among the wider population, establish effective channels of communication between citizens and the state, and prioritise welfare over the private financial interests of influential members.

Regarding political obligations, the ANC-led government must promote a healthier society, a goal that depends on strengthening public moral responsibility. Gordimer (2006) highlights this dimension of governance through the narrator's exposure of Andrian Bannerman's thoughts. While waiting for his daughter-in-law in a restaurant, Andrian wonders what will happen to her job at the advertising agency now that the government has banned the broadcast of alcohol-related advertisements across national media. His concern reveals the tension between economic interests and the state's commitment to regulating harmful influences. The narrator underscores this when Andrian reflects on how advert agencies will cope with the loss of revenue once generated by lucrative beer promotions: "[...] how did the industry expect to make up, for instance, for the loss of exposure it could offer now that beer promotion for the huge sports-events market was banned by the government: this must be a headache for the agencies?," (p. 45). What ultimately emerges is the constructive logic behind the government's decision. By prohibiting the circulation of advertisements that normalize or glamourize excessive drinking, the ANC-led government seeks to instil a more socially responsible moral code among a population vulnerable to alcoholism.

In addition, it is indispensable for the new leadership to cultivate a robust public sphere by establishing effective channels of communication with citizens. In this context, the talk-show programme functions as a crucial forum for dialogue between the government and the public on matters of national importance. As a relatively new development in the country's media landscape, its central purpose is to reinforce democratic principles essential to South Africa's reconstruction. According to the narrator, the programme enables citizens to voice their ideas on issues that concern both their personal realities and, more importantly, the nation's collective welfare. The significance of this platform – made possible by the emergence of multiracial democracy – is evident in its broad audience, which includes Harald, one of its most committed listeners. His interest stems from his son's

precarious situation, which hinges on parliamentary deliberations about the future of the death penalty – a recurring topic on the programme. The narrator highlights the programme's relevance when noting that Harald, as a faithful listener:

[...] had come upon the middle of one of the phone-in programmes on subjects of public preoccupation, from abortion to supermarket prices and culling of elephants, which are the circuses provided by democracy so that those who have bread but are aware that it is not true that anybody can (as opposed to 'may') become president have the opportunity and recognition at least of hearing his or her own voicing of opinions and frustrations aloud to the populace. The callers are [...] sometimes calling up deep impulses that lie beneath conformation to the ethos of their time and place. The Death Penalty: this was what talk-show democracy was open about to these eager citizens, this night. (Gordimer, 1999, p.240)

The talk-show functions as an interactive forum that enables citizens to contribute to both to the nation-building process and the consolidation of South Africa's multiracial democracy. In this sense, it becomes a key platform for creating public awareness and fostering a sense of nationhood, as listeners voice their opinions and critiques on social, economic, and political issues shaping post-apartheid South Africa. The programme therefore serves as a channel through which citizens engage one another on matters concerning their welfare, and as a forum that allows them to address concerns to the government for redress. By operating as a two-way communication system among the populace and between citizens and the state, the talk-show helps mobilise national commitment towards the nation-building project through public debate on issues of national interest. Its impact is particularly evident when it draws Harald into its discussions – especially on the contentious question of the legitimacy of the death penalty inherited from apartheid, a policy that ultimately affect his own son. From a political perspective, the programme thus illustrates the presence of an active public sphere in South Africa, one whose role in sustaining democratic values is central, as it conveys the urgent needs and expectations of the very citizens for whom the country's democratic order exists.

In fact, the need of the leadership to uphold democratic values is equally central to the actions of the team of ecologists led by Thapelo and Paul Bannerman, who oppose the government's environmentally destructive development projects. Their collective determination reflect an effort to hold the government accountable for a project that, although developmental in intention, would produce harmful environmental consequences and ultimately undermine the wellbeing of South Africans. To the narrator, the significance of the ecologists' resistance lies in their commitment to

preserving the country's ecosystem and safeguarding the welfare of its citizens. The pertinence of Thapelo's and Paul's struggle is evident through the narrator's analogy comparing the government's plans to a farmer's use of pesticides: while intended to boost production, such actions can cause long-term ecological damage. In this light, the narrator suggests that Thapelo and Paul act out of the awareness of humanity's responsibility towards the environment, given that:

[...] the work that informs their understanding of the world and their place as agents within it, from the perspective that everyone, like it or not, admit it or not, acts upon the world in some way. Spray a weed-killer on this lawn and the Hoopoe delicately thrusting the tailor's needle of its beak, after insects in the grass, imbibes poison. That's the philosophy of conservation from which Paul is approaching the great issues in a draft petition of an environmentalist coalition to the State President [...]. (Gordimer, 2006, p.83)

From the standpoint of ecologists such as Paul Bannerman and Thapelo, the government's development projects are comparable to the misguided actions of a farmer who uses pesticides to eliminate pests and increase production, despite the environmental harm such chemicals inflict – particularly on the soil. Thus, the commitment of the team of ecologists is driven by the unsettling realisation that, however well-intentioned the government's plans may appear, their long-term environmental consequences – and ultimately, their impact on South Africans – are far more alarming. It is on the basis of this awareness that Paul Bannerman and Thapelo undertake to mobilise public opposition to the government's plans, as seen when Paul urges Thapelo to rally the support of:

[...] the Amadiba, my brother, they're living on the Wild Coast, five communities, not so? Go for them. From the plan you've shown me, the route of the highway plunges right through people's houses and fields, straight over their mealies. Staple food. What about the Amadiba Tribal Trust? Need to make them shout. Loudly [...] Rally the traditional leaders; the government has to hear them; you know it's policy, government's having to recognise right now all kinds of questions on land distribution rights. (Gordimer, 2006, p.85)

The ecologists' decision to appeal to the political leadership's principle of freedom, liberty and the respect of the Constitution – foundations of South Africa's multiracial democracy - constitutes a call for the government to uphold its republican responsibilities toward citizens who would be the most affected by the proposed projects. This is why Paul and his team seek to mobilise the traditional leaders and the Amadiba Tribal Trust against a development initiative that threatens to destroy their sources of livelihood and potentially

displace them from their ancestral land. Notably, their collective efforts prove effective when the government eventually suspends the projects:

[...] Minister of Environmental Affairs, Van Schalkwyk, has set aside [...] a decision made a year before this month [...] to construct the Pondoland Wild Coast toll road. And the Minister of Minerals and Energy, she's announced that the pebble-bed nuclear reactor is halted. 'Pending further environmental assessment' [...] Final licence of destruction must never be admitted, granted. (Gordimer, 2006, pp.186-87)

The government's decision to halt the investment ventures demonstrates the effectiveness of the concerted efforts made by the team of ecologists, tribal organisations, and traditional leaders. The government's decision further reflects its commitment to safeguarding the welfare of citizens in the regions that would have suffered the environmental consequences of these developments.

From a purely political standpoint, these examples of collective action demonstrated by the team of ecologists - alongside the individual commitment displayed by Harald, Claudia, and Lyndsay discussed earlier - reflects Friedman's (2008) view of democracy from an African perspective, which places collective action at the centre of democratic practice. The parallel between these examples and the critic's argument becomes evident when he contends that:

[...] understanding of democracy locates collective action by citizens at the core of the democratic project because it is through collective action that citizens both achieve and sustain democracy. Democratic broadening and deepening depends on the degree to which ever greater numbers of citizens enjoy the capacity to act increasingly effectively in concert to hold power-holders to account. (p.5)

According to Friedman, democracy is constituted by - and sustained through - the collective commitment of citizens, who are central to the functioning of democracy, particularly South Africa's atypical multiracial democracy. The consolidation of such a democracy therefore depends on the collective actions and responsibilities of its citizens, exercised for the common good and expressed through holding leaders to account. In this light, the collective efforts of the ecologists, as well as the individual commitments of Harald, Claudia, and Lyndsay, function as mechanisms for holding the country's leadership accountable so as to preserve South Africa's evolving multiracial democratic landscape.

In sum, the fictional examples examined in this discussion, underscore the positive role of national consciousness - rooted in both individual and collective

commitment - in fostering South Africa's socio-political cohesion and progress. Her emphasis on the contributions of white South Africans, particularly white liberals, to the achievement of the political ideal of nationhood achievable through the collective engagement of all citizens is especially striking. The analysis of the attitudes, reactions, and outlook of the white liberals, in particular, ultimately reveals the author's constructive suggestions regarding how this targeted group can contribute to the success of the country's multiracial democracy, and how the ANC-led government can continue to consolidate a united, multiracial nation.

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