Living in the Interregnum: A Study of Select Fictional Narratives of Nadine Gordimer

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DECLARATION

As required under the University Ordinance OA-19.8 (v), I hereby declare that the thesis entitled, **Living in the Interregnum: A Study of Select Fictional Narratives of Nadine Gordimer** is the outcome of my own research undertaken under the guidance of **Dr. A. Rafael Fernandes,** Associate Professor of English, Department of English, Goa University. All the sources used in the course of this work have been duly acknowledged in the thesis. This work has not previously formed the basis of any award of Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship or other similar titles to me, by this or any other University.

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CERTIFICATE

In fulfillment of the provision of the Goa University Ordinance OA-19.8 (viii), I hereby certify that the thesis titled **Living in the Interregnum: A Study of Select Fictional Narratives of Nadine Gordimer** submitted by Mrs. Geetha Shastri Sripad Bhat for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is the record of her own work done under my guidance and further that it has not formed the basis of any award of Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship or other similar titles to her.

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Still I Rise

Out of the huts of history's shame, I rise

Up from the past that's rooted in pain, I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide

Welling and swelling I bear in the tide

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear, I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear, I rise

Bringing in the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise…. I rise…. I rise

--------Maya Angelou

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INTRODUCTION

Some are born to sweet delight, some are born to endless night

—William Blake

1.1 Historical Background

Africa—the Dark Continent, mysterious to some, romantic to the others, often inviting to explore its depths has nevertheless been a continent vastly exploited, subjugated and trodden upon. A glance at the history of Africa highlights the fact that colonialism radically changed its destiny forever.

The first phase of the modern period in Africa, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o sees it, is the stage of colonial conquest. He describes this stage in the following words:

> Economic and political institutions are moulded on those of the metropolitan power. The aim is to create the good docile native –a willing source of raw material and cheap labour. And if he is not willing? One can always rely on the police and the army to do a little pacification. So that through fear of the Bible or the sword the native at first acts as if he accepts the situation…. The native is a clean slate on which anything can be scribbled. (*Homecoming* 55)

Ngugi points out that the motive behind colonisation was to get cheap labour and economic resources for the mother country. The conquest not only took place by the use of arms but also by the spread of Christian faith by the Church. He goes on to point out the differences between French and

British methods of colonisation: “France went further than Britain: she wanted so to scribble on the slate that all the black surface would be covered with the white chalk of French culture" (*Homecoming* 55).

Initially, the Dutch, German, French, Portuguese and British colonisers established centres of trade as early as the seventeenth century which resulted in exploitation of the people and economic resources. Instances of slave trade were rampant. While speaking about the devastating impact of colonisation on Africa’s economy, Joshua Dwayne Settles observes:

> To the British, French and German, the primary colonising nations, the individual needs of their colonial subjects were not important. Instead the desire to “vertically integrate” the colonies of Europe by controlling production from start to finish became the overriding goal of colonial agents…. Colonialism completed the process of fully integrating Africa into the world economic system. (182)

Gradually, there was a decline in the slave trade due to the initiative taken by Britain. However, Africa was still looked upon as a continent which abounded in adventures for the explorers. These explorers also acted as agents for their rich philanthropist masters by collecting information about availability of resources, markets etc. They identified trade routes, located manpower, set up plantations with cash crops to benefit European economy and navigated rivers exploring for new markets. Steam engines and hulled boats, medical advances to quell malaria and invention of breech loading rifles and percussion caps incorporated into cartridges gave the colonisers an edge over the natives and helped explore the continent to their advantage.

The commercialization of land in Africa also led to many of the natives becoming landless labourers. Women and children were forced to get into the production system which laid the foundation for work and gender roles in Africa. The commercialisation also sounded the death-knell for the growth of local crops and produce of the natives. The once self- sufficient economy was made to rely heavily on imports from Europe and forced the demise of the African industry. Thus, the development of Africa was severely retarded by colonialism.

South Africa in particular, moved through various stages of history. In 1488, the Portuguese under the leadership of Bartholomeu Dias sailed by the coast of South Africa and discovered the tip of Africa and went on to name it as the Cape of Good Hope. They did not have their colonies there. Later, the Dutch East India Company came to the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 with the intention of setting up a staging post from wherein the Dutch ships could replenish their supplies and continue on their journey. They were led by General Jan Van Riebeeck. The Dutch settled in this area and became farmers known as the Burghers. The ethnic group which descended from these settlers were popularly known as Afrikaners. By 1700, the Cape Town population swelled with coloureds who were the progeny of the Dutch-settlers, and Khoikhoi tribals. These mixed races of people were known as Griqua people who later migrated north to form Griqualand.

In Cape Town, the settlers spoke Dutch and expanded their territory by fighting with Xhosa and Khoikhoi tribes. Soon, the Dutch felt threatened due to the advent of the British colonisers who brought along with them vast numbers of people willing to settle in South Africa. Cape Town was taken over subsequently by the British colonisers who also tried to impose English language and culture upon the Dutch. The British colonisers abolished slavery as a consequence of which the Dutch

found it difficult to manage their farms without labour. By 1834, the Dutch left Cape Town and migrated and settled in regions by the river Vaal. Zululand regions were captured by the British after a prolonged war with the Zulus known as the Battle of Isandlwana of 1879. Further, with the aim of expanding their territories, the British followed the Dutch to Vaal and wanted to annexe it. This resulted in the First Boer War of 1880 leading to the defeat of the British who conceded the territory to the Dutch. However, in 1889 the Second Boer War was fought wherein the Dutch were defeated and the territory annexed was called the Orange State. Finally, after annexing the territories the British announced that these territories including Cape Colony, Transvaal, Natal and the Orange Free State would be known as the Union of South Africa. It came into existence on 31 May 1910. Thus began the rule of constitutional monarchy in South Africa with a British general representing the monarch of Britain. The main feature of this new colonial regime was the denial of voting rights to the blacks in their own land. In 1912, the African National Congress (ANC) came into existence which was originally known as South African Native National Congress (SANNC). It was formed to counter the growing colonisation of South Africa. The British colonisers brought about The Natives Land Act of 1913 which allowed only 8% of South Africa's land to be occupied by blacks. Hence, 90% of the land was in the possession of 20% of the white populace.

In 1924 the National Party came to power in coalition with the Labour Party. They supported Afrikaner interests and wanted separate development for the two white groups. The segregationist and discriminatory laws continued even after the World Wars. In 1948 the National Party won the general elections. The National Party's victory marked the end of power-sharing between the Afrikaners and the British. The National Party immediately brought about the policy of apartheid to

secure their interests. They passed the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act in 1949 followed by the Immorality Act in 1950. These acts forbade marriages and sexual relations between people of different races and deemed it a punishable offence which merited imprisonment. The Population Legislation Act of 1950 divided the people of South Africa into four clear-cut racial categories. They were classified into the categories of White, Coloured, Black and Asian. The classification was based on the habits, manners, appearances and education of people. Racial discrimination became a part of the agenda of the ruling white government. They also brought into effect the Group Areas Act in 1950. It restricted entry of blacks into areas reserved for the whites. The blacks had to carry passes with them. Only those blacks working as sweepers, housemaids or gardeners were given entry into such areas. Their spouses and other family members were not given access to their living quarters. In 1953, Dr Hendrick Verwoerd, Minister for Native Affairs introduced the Bantu Education Act. Defending the Act he said, "There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour…What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice?" ("Bantu")

In 1958, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd became the Prime Minister of South Africa. He is said to be the "Architect of Apartheid". He brought about the implementation of The Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act (1959) thus paving the way for creation of ten Bantu homelands also known as Bantustans. The legislation prevented the blacks from unifying against the government as they were confined to the allotted regions. The blacks were given citizenship of Bantustans and had no role to play in the national political scenario.

It was in the 1960s that the White government's plan of 'Grand Apartheid' was executed. The emphasis was on territorial separation of blacks and whites. This

move resulted in a spate of protests by black communities across South Africa. Civil liberties were suspended and blacks were arrested and detained with no trial whatsoever. On 21 March 1960, the Pan-Africanist Congress—a political party supporting freedom for the blacks in South Africa— organised a peaceful protest at Sharpeville in the Transvaal where 300 unarmed protestors had gathered. The police opened fire on them killing 69 and injuring more than 180 of them. The government then banned the African National Party led by Nelson Mandela and the Pan-Africanist Congress and continued with its merciless subjugation of the people of the land. The apartheid resistance in the country had been influenced by the pacifist ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi and the protest had been largely peaceful from the 1940s to 60s. But post 1960s, it took a violent turn as Nelson Mandela, leader of the African National Congress decided to change his tactics and use violence and sabotage as his weapons of freedom struggle. Hence, on 16 December 1961, the armed wing of the African National Congress—Umkhonto we Sizwe—meaning "Spear of the Nation" was born.

The scenario in South Africa worsened with the introduction of The Homeland Citizens Act of 1970 which uprooted the blacks from urban areas and sent them to live elsewhere. This measure resulted in widespread protests and groups like Black Consciousness were formed by blacks to offer resistance to such laws. Steve Biko was the leader of this group. He also led the South African Students Organisation (SASO) and went on to form the Black People's Convention (BPC) in 1972. He was arrested for his acts and on 12 September 1977, died while in police custody. This was the culmination of sorts of the Soweto Uprising (June 1976).The Soweto Uprising—also known as 16 June Uprising— referred to a series of protests led by high school students in South Africa in response to the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in local schools. The Bantu Education Act was a means of ensuring

inferior standard of education to the natives so that they could not be on par with the whites. It also ensured that the whites got an endless supply of servants who would do small jobs and menial chores as they failed to get the best that education could offer. An estimated 20,000 students took part in the protests. They met with fierce police brutality and about 176 protestors lost their lives. This unrest could not be quelled for more than a year and they continued to resist and defy the government thus becoming a perennial source of nuisance to the apartheid government. Hence, the government not only declared a state of Emergency but also went ahead and banned the anti-apartheid parties like the African National Congress, Pan-Africanist Congress and the Communist Party of South Africa. The brutality with which the Soweto uprising was quelled grabbed the attention of people all over the world. While the UN Security Council voted to impose a mandatory embargo on the sale of arms to South Africa, the U.K and the U.S imposed economic sanctions against the nation. Faced with stiff opposition to apartheid, Pieter Botha, the Prime Minister of South Africa tried to abolish the Pass laws and lift the ban on interracial marriages. However, he failed to make an impact and had to step down in 1989. F.W.de Klerk who took over, repealed the Population Registration Act. The armed struggle, civil unrest, sanctions—both cultural and economic by nations of the world— and growing pressure from the anti-apartheid movement finally led to Nelson Mandela's release in 1990. Mandela had been incarcerated for twenty-seven long years in a bid to diminish his spirit and stop him from leading his people towards liberation. In June 1991, the anti-apartheid laws were repealed and the first democratic elections were held in 1994. A coalition government was formed by the elected representatives of the African National Party, National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party. Nelson Mandela was elected as the first President of liberated South Africa on 27 April 1994.

1.2 Literary Background

History of world literature unambiguously asserts that literature as an institution cannot remain immune to the forces of history. The momentous changes in history transform the landscape of literature with remarkable vigour. One could convincingly state that modern African literature is the epitome of history's ability to transform and create literature with new motifs, desires and aspirations. In the wake of colonisation, Africa's historical narrative took a dramatic turn. Africa was compelled to become a helpless and mute witness to the spectacle of subjugation and exploitation. The writers of this period, however, rose to the occasion and convincingly foregrounded their palpable dissent as well as the collective sentiments of their generation in their writings. Therefore, the representation of the complex dynamics of colonial experience—collective suffering and trauma, displacement, anger, frustration and nostalgia— occupied the centre stage of modern African literature. Of course, African literature has a rich history of its own which goes back to hundreds of years. The earliest known literature of Africa is Oral Literature also known as Orature which was in the form of prose as well as verse. The prose form celebrated mythology or history of their nations whereas the poetry mainly consisted of love songs, children's songs, ritual verse, riddles and proverbs. These poetic and prose narratives which celebrate local myths, history and tradition are found across all major South African languages like Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Pedi, Tswana, Venda, SiSwati, Tsonga and Ndebele.

From Nineteenth century onwards, we see the gradual arrival of writings in Afrikaans, Portuguese and English produced by the colonial settlers. For instance, in the late nineteenth century Rider Haggard who was fascinated by the South African landscape and indigenous culture wrote his first novel *King Solomon's Mines* (1886)

followed by *Allan Quartermain* and *She* in 1887. Ian Mackean says that the colonial heroes were romanticised and the natives were reduced to the role of servants or portrayed as dangerous savages in Rider Haggard's novels (304). One of the first South African novels to be written in English was a farm novel by Olive Schreiner titled *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) which supposedly heralded the arrival of feminism in African fiction. Guy Butler regarded it as "the first work of imaginative power in South African literature" (Heywood 87). Another important writer was Sarah Gertrude Millin whose novel *God's Stepchildren* (1924) gained worldwide fame. The novel highlighted the devastating consequences of miscegenation in South Africa. This was followed by another hugely successful novel by Alan Paton[1] titled *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) which went on to become a popular prescribed text in American classrooms. The publication of the novel coincided with the Nationalists coming to power in 1948. *Cry, the Beloved Country* " …put South Africa on the map of international politics by making visible to the western audiences the effects of racial prejudice and the oppression of the black people" (Mackean 307). It created global awareness about the horrendous effects of apartheid and the miseries that stemmed from its practice.

In the first half of the twentieth century, epics largely dominated black male writing: historical novels such as Sol T. Plaatje's *Mhudi: An Epic of South African Native Life a Hundred Years Ago* (1930), Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (trans. 1925), and epic plays including those of H.I.E. Dhlomo, or heroic epic poetry such as the work of Mazizi Kunene. These texts "evince black African patriarchy in its traditional form, with men in authority, often as warriors or kings, and women as background figures of dependency, and/or mothers of the nation". ("South African History").Solomon Thekiso Plaatje's *Mhudi* is an epic story which traces the history of Tswana people

and their encounters with the Zulus who were led by the great Shaka. It also weaves their encounters with the whites who moved into the interiors in a bid for conquest. Plaatje is said to be the founding father of modern Black literature in South Africa. H.I.E Dhlomo wrote several plays and a poem of considerable length titled 'The Valley of a Thousand Hills' in 1941. Through his works, Dhlomo advocated the wisdom of using indigenous knowledge in solving modern problems. In the early 1930s, there was a difference of opinion between Dhlomo and B.W.Vilakazi on whether African literature should be written in African or other European languages. Dhlomo felt that African writers who wrote in English reached a broader public whereas Vilakazi opined that the African cosmological system could not be constructed in a work of art by using the same language through which the destruction of the same cosmological world was mediated (Nkosi, *Tasks* 23).

In the 1950s the African National Congress along with its allies started a massive Defiance Campaign as a protest against the practice of apartheid. The Freedom Charter, the document of anti-racist movement was drafted which angered the Nationalist government. They tried to contain the movement with massive treason trials and severe punishment. The protests continued through the magazine named *Drum* whose main contributions came in the form of articles by black writers. "It [*Drum*] depicted a vibrant urban black culture for the first time—a world of jazz, shebeens (illegal drinking dens) and flamboyant gangsters (tsotsis)" (Mackean 308). *Drum* became a medium of expression for the writings of the urban blacks who wrote stories and satires, fiction and essays which not only reflected the situation in South Africa but also depicted the brutal suppression caused due to racist and apartheid policies of the government in power. Lewis Nkosi, Arthur Maimane, Peter Clarke, James Matthews, Richard Rive, Jordon Ngubane and Casey Motsisi were the

prominent writers associated with the *Drum* Magazine. It was against decades of suppression and exploitation by the colonisers that the writers in South Africa voiced their protests.

Black writers such as Lewis Nkosi wrote novels like *Mating Birds*, *Underground People* and *Mandela's Ego*. Nkosi stated that literature of South Africa is a product of "conflict between the white conquerors and conquered black, between white masters and black servants, between the village and the city" (*Tasks* 76). Another important writer was Alex la Guma. He was a Marxist and also a prominent leader of the African National Congress. In the 1960s the State of Emergency was declared and political parties like the African National Congress and Pan-Africanist Congress were banned. Nelson Mandela was arrested and black writers like Alex la Guma were exiled. Guma's works were made available in South Africa only after the ban was lifted in 1990. His novel *A Walk in the Night* (1962) reveals the life of slum-dwellers and the crimes that circumstances force them to commit whereas his other novel *In the Fog of the Season's End* (1972) tells us about the blacks' struggle for freedom. Black women too created their imprint in the literary world. Miriam Tlali was the first black woman to publish a novel *Muriel at Metropolitan* in 1975. Summarizing the importance of black writing and distinguishing it from all other forms of writing Lewis Nkosi observes:

> Alienation, the war against diminution of pleasure, which ultimately implies diminution of personality, the quest for orgiastic forms of self-expression against the warm pressures of a suffocating bureaucracy; these are some of the elements which distinguish black South African writing from both its local white counterpart and that of black Africa in the north. (*Tasks* 82)

Also, the contribution of dramatists like Athol Fugard[2] and Zakes Mda[3] is noteworthy in the landscape of South African literature. Fugard is well-known for his political plays which aggressively oppose apartheid. He has also written novels besides being an actor and director. His famous play *Master Harold and the Boys* is about race relations. Zakes Mda is a playwright, poet and novelist. His noted novels are *Ways of Dying* and *The Heart of Redness*. *The Heart of Redness* was recognised by the international community and Mda was bestowed with the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2001. It was immediately prescribed as a text across schools in South Africa. His play *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* has enthralled the audiences in theatres around South Africa.

After World War II, as Africans began demanding their independence, more African writers' works were published. African Literature now foregrounded the themes of liberation and exile as many nations in Africa gained their liberation between 1950s and 1960s.Writers hailing from Western Africa like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ousmane Sembene, Kofi Awooner, Agostinho Neto,Tchicaya u Tam'si, Camera Laye, Mongo Beti, Ben Okri, and Ferdinand Oyono together with writers from Eastern Africa like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Okot p'Bitek, and Jacques Rabémananjara produced poetry, short stories, novels, essays and plays. Chinua Achebe attained fame with the publication of his two seminal novels—*Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. He focused on the theme of reclamation of the past in his works. Achebe felt that:

> …African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry, and, above all, they had

> dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must regain. (Nkosi, *Tasks* 33)

Achebe aimed to project the restoration of dignity and respect for Africa's culture and traditions in his novels. Lewis Nkosi referring to Achebe's novels felt that "…the writer is concerned mainly with the rendering and elaboration of a certain cultural ethos which might explain his people's attitudes to events of central importance to the development of African society…" (*Tasks* 31). Achebe's novels helped people of the world to understand the African traditions and customs which in turn made them recognise the uniqueness of Africa. Like Achebe, the other writers too mainly wrote in European languages, the same themes got reflected in their novels as the conditions of the times were the same. They wrote about the clash between native and colonial cultures, ill effects of colonisation, richness of their cultural heritage and dreams of the continent's independent future.

The 1960s also witnessed a peak in Afrikaans literature. Writers like Breyten Breytenbach, Andre Brink, Jan Rabie, Etienne Leroux wrote and published their works in Afrikaans and were highly critical of the policies of the South African government. Breytenbach was arrested during the liberation movement in the 1970s and his prison memoir *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* was published in 1996. He also wrote poetry while in prison and it was published in English titled *Judas Eye* (1998).

South African writers are, by and large, preoccupied with the narration of their complex socio-political reality in their writings. The burning issue of apartheid has prominently figured in their entire corpus of writings. Nadine Gordimer is the leading figure among these writers. Other prominent writers such as Es'kia Mphahlele,

Bessie Head, Dennis Brutus, J.M.Coetzee, and Miriam Tlali "… reflect in varying degrees in their writings the experience of living in a racially segregated society" (*The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*).

Of course, all the South African writers do not belong to a homogenous group. Martin Trump in his essay "The Short Fiction of Nadine Gordimer" refers to the distinction made between white and black writers by Achmat Dangor. Achmat Dangor, a black writer differentiates between what he called a "privileged" style of writing and ghetto writing in South Africa. Gordimer, Ahmed Essop and Alan Paton are examples of the former whereas writers like Dangor, Mbulelo Mzamane, Mtutuzeli Matshoba and Njabulo Ndebele are ghetto writers (343).

South African English writing has produced Nobel Laureates like Nadine Gordimer and John Maxwell Coetzee. White writers like Gordimer too pitched in during the fifties by contributing stories and novels which strongly protested against the treatment meted out to the blacks by the white regime. Highlighting the importance of her contribution, Ian Mackean notes that, "… her many novels and short stories articulated key issues for White South Africans sympathetic to the plight of disenfranchised blacks, as well as providing for the outside world a devastating picture of what it was like to live under Apartheid" (309). Her novels *A World of Strangers* (1958), *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and *July's People* (1981) which openly critiqued the apartheid regime were consequently banned for years. J. M. Coetzee was her contemporary South African novelist. His *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999) made him gain international fame and recognition. Coetzee writes about the history of South Africa and the power struggles between the disempowered blacks and of the minority white establishment.

Both the novels won the Booker Prize in 1983 and 1999 respectively, and his novel *Disgrace* earned him the coveted Commonwealth Writers Prize in the year 2000. His other well-known novels are *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *Age of Iron* (1990). He also became the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 2003. He was awarded the Order of Mapungubwe by the South African government in 2005.

However, if there is one writer from South Africa who is head and shoulders above others, it is undoubtedly Nadine Gordimer who could be rightly termed as the conscience keeper of modern South Africa.

1.3 Life of Nadine Gordimer

Nadine Gordimer was born on 20 November 1923 at Springs, Transvaal, a gold-mining town east of Johannesburg. Her parents were Isidore Gordimer, a Jewish immigrant watchmaker from Latvia and Hannah "Nan" (Myers) Gordimer, from London.

Though born into a Jewish family, Nadine Gordimer was brought up in a secular environment. In her early years she went to Convent of our Lady of Mercy at Springs but her schooling was cut short as her mother pulled her out of school convinced that Nadine had a weak heart and ought to stay at home. This, however, did not deter Nadine who being isolated from children of her age plunged into reading and writing. She sought refuge from her loneliness in her local library. Famous literary works by Proust, Chekov and Dostoevsky influenced her greatly and she developed a love for reading and literature. She wrote her first story at the tender age of nine and by the age of thirteen had published her story in the children's section of the *Sunday Express,* a Johannesburg weekly newspaper. When she was fifteen years old, her story "Come Again Tomorrow" was published in *Forum*, a liberal South

Africa magazine. Later, Gordimer put together many of the published stories and brought out a collection titled *Face to Face* in 1949. Gordimer understood the plight of her father, who was himself a refugee in Tsarist Russia. She accepted the fact that she would be a Jew forever with no religious belief. She believed that being a Jew was akin to being a black. "It's something inside you, in your blood and in your bones" (Pimstone and Shain). In an interview given to Jannika Hurwitt in 1979-80, Gordimer identified herself as an atheist, but added: "I think I have a basically religious temperament, perhaps even a profoundly religious one"(83). Her mother was a kind and sympathetic woman who led by example and had even started a crèche to take care of black children. Hence, Gordimer developed empathy towards suppressed blacks and wanted to help them achieve justice.

In 1948, Gordimer joined the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and was exposed to cosmopolitan life which also enabled her to interact with the blacks at Sophiatown, a predominantly black township. Her friendship with a black activist Bettie du Toit helped her to understand the plight of blacks. In addition, Gordimer was also able to identify her mission in life—to eliminate apartheid in South Africa and help blacks to regain their land. Hence, Gordimer left the University after a year without completing her degree and settled down in Johannesburg and continued to contribute articles to South African magazines. In addition to writing, she also taught and lectured in various schools in the United States during the 1960s and 70s. Gordimer's first marriage to Gerald Gavron, a local dentist in 1949 with whom she had a daughter Oriane lasted just three years. In 1954, she married Reinhold Cassirer, a highly respected art dealer from Germany and they lived happily together until his death in 2001. Their son Hugo was born in 1955 and he went on to

become a filmmaker in New York, with whom Gordimer collaborated on at least two documentaries.

Gordimer was against segregation and developed strong political opposition to apartheid. The arrest of her best friend, Bettie du Toit in 1960 in the wake of the Sharpeville Massacre prompted her to join the anti-apartheid movement. Gordimer consequently became a member of the African National Congress—a move which was not looked upon favourably by the ruling white government. She supported Nelson Mandela and his armed struggle to achieve liberation for South Africa. "Over time, she revealed that she had been far from passive when politics touched her personally. She passed messages; his friends, including high-ranking figures, who were trying to elude the police; and secretly drove others to the border. All these actions appear in her fiction carried out by characters much braver than she portrayed herself to be" (Verongos). In fact, she also helped to edit Mandela's famous speech "I Am Prepared to Die" given from a defendant's dock on 20 April 1964 at the Rivona Trial. Nelson Mandela is said to have read her novels smuggled into prison and, when he was released in 1990, she was one of the first persons he wanted to see. Gordimer was also a close friend of Mandela's attorneys Bram Fischer and George Bizos and her novel *Burger's Daughter* is said to be written as a coded homage to Bram Fischer which was subsequently banned by the government. Later on she went on to become a member of South Africa's Anti-Censorship Action Group.

Christopher S Wren makes the following observations about Gordimer's uncompromising attitude and temperament:

> Gordimer's activism was not limited to the struggle against apartheid. She resisted censorship and state control of information, and fostered the literary arts. She refused to let her work be aired by the South African

> Broadcasting Corporation because it was controlled by the apartheid government. (“Nadine Gordimer”)

Moreover, we see that her works also reflect and mirror the changes taking place in South Africa. The major themes of her novels and short stories have always been exile, moral and racial issues and alienation. She takes us on a journey of South Africa—steeped in oppressive racism to the changes resulting in freedom followed by a turbulent democracy. Gordimer’s writings are characterised by a lucid, well-regulated and unsentimental style which presents the sweeping canvas of South African society where blacks have been impacted by the institutionalised racial discrimination and oppression. Hence, it has been rightly noted that:

> Her stories concern the devastating effects of apartheid on the lives of South Africans—the constant tension between personal isolation and the commitment to social justice, the numbness caused by the unwillingness to accept apartheid, the inability to change it, and the refusal of exile.(Pimstone and Shain.)

While many writers chose to leave South Africa and go away to other countries, Gordimer never considered leaving her country as an option.

Her first novel *The Lying Days* was published in 1953. It was followed by thirteen more novels, numerous short stories and other works of non-fiction. Her works have been translated into thirty-one languages. She was conferred with fifteen honorary doctorates and was honoured with the title of Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. She was the first South African and the seventh woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Therefore, she was rightly considered as “the doyenne of South African letters” (nobel.se/literature). Gordimer was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1991

for her corpus of literature inclusive of novels and more than two hundred short stories through which she provided a very sensitive and acute analysis of the South African society. She was recognized as a woman "who through her magnificent epic writing has – in the words of Alfred Nobel – been of very great benefit to humanity" (Nobelprize.org).

She was also the recipient of prestigious literary awards in South Africa, Britain, France, Italy, Germany and the United States of America. These included a number of annual CNA Literary Awards in South Africa, the W.H. Smith Literary Award, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, the Booker Prize and the Grand Aigle d'Or. She was a frequent contributor to prestigious publications such as the *New York Review of Books* and *The New Yorker* and has been the subject of leading studies by literary scholars. This is proved by the fact that more than ten books are devoted to her works apart from close to two hundred critical essays. Gordimer has also provided a lot of support to individual writers. She was the founding member of Congress of South African writers and active in South African letters and international literary organisations. She was also the Vice-President of International PEN.

In the post-apartheid 1990s and the twenty-first century, Gordimer was active in the HIV/AIDS movement, addressing a significant public health crisis in South Africa. In 2004, she organized about twenty major writers to contribute short fiction for *Telling Tales*, a fundraising book for South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign which lobbies for government funding for HIV/AIDS prevention and care (wikipedia.org).

Gordimer died in her sleep at the ripe old age of ninety at Johannesburg on 13 July 2014.

1.4 Gordimer's Novels and Short Stories: A Brief Introduction

Gordimer has created a stunning collection of novels and short stories during her lifetime spanning ninety summers. It is a daunting oeuvre which mainly encompasses narratives pertaining to unjust and inhuman practice of apartheid in South Africa and the suppression of the human rights of the blacks. The compendium of her works incorporates varied areas like South African history, travelogues, autobiography, political pamphlets in addition to the wide spectrum of novels and short stories.

Referring to her first collection of short stories titled *Face to Face* which reveals the psychological consequences of a racially divided society, Tony Morphet states that her early fiction attempted: "To escape from the narrow, mean-spirited, and bigoted world of the whites of the small mining towns to find, in personal individual terms, a freedom for the self. This early perspective was extended, as fiction developed its full range into the search for a freedom for all the confined and oppressed" (55).

Though initially Gordimer dealt with the subject of exploration of self in her early novels, she moved on to explore the means of obtaining freedom for the oppressed blacks in her later fiction. She committed herself to seeking justice for the people whose land was forcefully taken away from them and fought against racial discrimination. This became the underlying theme of her fiction.

Her foray into the world of novels began with the penning of her first novel *The Lying Days* (1953).The novel was based largely on the author's own life and depicted a white girl, Helen, and her growing disaffection towards the narrow-mindlessness of a small-town life. The novel tells the story of its protagonist Helen Shaw who lives in the confines of a small mining town called Atherton. She tries to break away from the control of her parents and lead an independent life. The story also highlights the practice of apartheid and Helen's personal striving to see that the blacks are not discriminated.

A World of Strangers (1958) was published five years after the arrival of *The Lying Days.* In this novel, the protagonist Toby Hood, an Oxford graduate leaves London and travels to Johannesburg to become a publisher's agent. The novel opens with his sentence, "I hate the faces of the peasants" (7). This is reflective of Toby's indifferent attitude and lack of empathy specifically towards the blacks. However, during the year he spends at Johannesburg, he comes to grips with the shocking horror of apartheid being practised in South Africa and also befriends and becomes extremely close to a dashing but embittered black man by the name of Steven Sitole. Toby's disgust regarding apartheid intensifies when his typist Miss McCann decides to quit because of his association with black men. He is also asked to vacate the apartment occupied by him because his landlord does not like him entertaining kaffirs in his building. Thus, this novel brings to the fore the evils of apartheid practised in South Africa wherein Steven's sense of independence finally ends in a tragedy. It is a tale of bitterness and division at its best.

Occasion for Loving (1963) is concerned with the "line in a statute book" –a reference to South Africa's cruel racial law. In the story an illicit love affair between a black man and a white woman ends bitterly. Tom Stilwell, a University professor

invites his friends Boaz Davis and his wife Ann to stay with them at their Johannesburg home. Boaz Davis is an ethno-musicologist who has come to South Africa to study African instruments. Ann Davis meets Gideon Shibalo, a talented painter who happens to be a black married man. Ann Davis gets involved in a relationship with him. For Ann Davis, her affair with Gideon Shibalo comes as a welcome change from her routine life and offers some sort of excitement. The liberal white woman Mrs Jessie Stilwell is a reluctant hostess to the law-breaking lovers. Boaz, the cuckold, is on the side of the struggling South African black majority, and Ann plays with two men's emotions. At the end of the novel Ann leaves the country stealthily with her husband Boaz being afraid of the law and seeing no future with her scandalous relationship with Gideon. Gideon Shibalo is left totally disillusioned and heartbroken by Ann.

Gordimer was proactive in her approach to life and issues and believed in achieving solutions by joining the movement instead of being a critical outsider. Hence, in spite of her differences with the policies pursued by African National Congress she joined the party and offered critical support to it in addition to exhibiting solidarity with its charismatic leader Nelson Mandela. The dangers of being involved in political activity and the apathy of the white middle class towards it are finely brought out in her novel titled *The Late Bourgeois World (1966)*. This novel depicts Nelson Mandela's decision to quit peaceful and passive methods of resistance and to switch over to armed revolution and sabotage to achieve freedom for his nation.

A Guest of Honour (1971) is another novel where Gordimer's protagonists face social, political and moral problems when the victorious liberation front breaks up. The protagonist of the novel Evelyn James Bray is invited by the President of a

newly liberated African nation for his Installation ceremony and the celebrations thereafter. Bray had helped liberate this country. The earlier colonial government had expelled Bray for his activism. Bray plans to attend the ceremony and return. However, there is a curious turn of events wherein President Adamson Mweta pressurizes Bray to stay on. He even creates a special post for Bray in the form of special education advisor at Gala. Bray gives his consent and stays on. The novel also describes the crisis that the country goes through after it is liberated –internal strife and fights amongst rival groups culminating in violence and political disorder. Sadly, at the end of the novel, Bray gets killed by a rebel group in a case of mistaken identity. It speaks about the problems arising out of the birth of New Africa wherein idealism and goodwill are overcome by brutality and corruption similar to the colonial rule. The nuances of government policies and trade union politics are well wrought in this novel. The novel also won the coveted James Tait Black Memorial Prize.

The Conservationist (1974) is said to be Gordimer's densest and most poetical novel which went on to win the much coveted Booker Prize in 1974. The story is about Mehring, a white rich businessman turned dilettante farmer, an Afrikaaner who is a self-styled conservationist. Mehring is a rich businessman who owns a four hundred acre farm at Johannesburg. His ownership of the farm is metaphorically regarded as the control that the whites and Afrikaners held over the land which belonged to the blacks. The story revolves around the sudden discovery of the body of a black in Mehring's farm which disturbs him and it is given a hurried burial by the authorities in the farm itself. The story goes on to narrate the tale of Mehring who loses his land and degenerates at the end of the novel. Therefore, *The Conservationist* is said to be a novel which visualises blacks reclaiming power by repossessing their lands. The novel is a precursor to *July's People* which was published in 1981. The

overhauling of power by the blacks figures prominently in this novel and is brought to the fore through the character of July.

Burger's Daughter (1979) is "a coded homage" to Abraham Fischer, a communist lawyer who was sentenced to life in prison and whose name was not to be mentioned as it was forbidden by the authorities. The novel intricately portrays the travails of Rosa Burger who faces the consequences of her parents' martyrdom for their political ideals and is also a silent witness to the suffering caused by the imposition of inhuman apartheid laws on the people. She is torn by conflicts and is confused whether she must live there and continue her struggle to achieve independence or migrate abroad for better future. Rosa Burger's personal quest to break away from her parents' ideologies and seek independence also runs parallel to the thread of liberation movement in the novel. Rosa leaves South Africa and explores her interests and potential as an individual but is reminded of her commitment to the liberation struggle by her black brother Baasie which leaves her with a troubled conscience. Hence, she is seen to return to South Africa to continue with her mission of obtaining justice for the blacks. The novel is not only a reflection of the official lies and facades put up by the government in power in South Africa but also about Gordimer's insight and intuition to expose and unravel them. *Burger's Daughter* was one of her several novels to be banned and she immediately issued a pamphlet protesting the censorship which was titled *What Happened to Burger's Daughter.*

July's People (1981) is a parable of the future depicting a transformation in South African political landscape and the nation's eventual walk to freedom where the blacks would be reinstated as the rightful owners of their own land. The novel envisages a bloody revolution which brings about not only freedom for the blacks but also a reversal of roles in the society. Maureen and Bamford Smales have employed a

black servant named July. However, with the onset of the bloody revolution, they are forced to flee for their lives along with their three children. It is July who comes to their aid and gives them refuge in his home and protects them. The Smales now experience the life led by the blacks and find it difficult to adjust. With the blacks being portrayed as masters, the banning of this novel by the White government did not come as a surprise. It was considered to be racist and patronizing and hence was removed from the school reading list by the provincial education department at Gauteng. Gordimer's earlier novel *The Conservationist* (1974) visualised in a subtle manner the reclaiming of the land by the blacks in South Africa and the overthrow of the white government. However, *July's People* was more revolutionary and overt with respect to the theme of the blacks gaining possession of their land.

A Sport of Nature (1987) has as its heroine an intelligent and sensual girl named Hillela who runs away from an idyllic childhood to prove her sexuality. Hillela is an embodiment of liberal ideas. She is acutely aware of her sexuality but is unashamed of it. She falls in love with a black activist named Whaila Kgomani and marries him. She dreams of having 'a rainbow family' with him. Hillela gives birth to a daughter who is as dark-skinned as her father and is named Nomzamo after Mandela's wife. Tragically, Kgomani gets murdered but Hillela moves on with her life. She gains power through political and sexual alliances and soon wins the favour of General Reuel who is a black. He marries her and later on becomes the President of his country. The novel not only portrays the sojourn of Hillela but also envisions the liberation of South Africa.

My Son's Story (1990) is about how individual fates are linked with choices forced upon them by an inhuman ideology. The novel's central character is Sonny who belongs to a mixed race. Sonny gets drawn into political struggle, loses his job

as a school teacher and is also imprisoned. While in prison Sonny meets a human rights activist Hannah. Soon, friendship turns into love and they have an affair despite the laws of apartheid being in place. This relationship destroys his family. His son Will is disillusioned while his daughter Baby and his wife Aila seek solace from the distress by turning towards militant activism. While Hannah leaves on a foreign assignment, Sonny loses the trust of his people and is left lonely at the end of the novel.

Vera Stark, a woman of great intelligence and feelings is the protagonist of *None to Accompany Me* (1994). She is disturbed by the fact that her husband Bennet loves her greatly but is indifferent to the world surrounding him. He refuses to commit to a cause and has an attitude of general apathy to everything happening around him. When Vera is drawn into struggle for liberation, Bennet remains passive and distant. The irony lies in the fact that she is not happy with her loving and doting husband and gradually becomes closer to her black colleagues than her husband. Vera finally comes to the conclusion that she can become a genuine human being only by moving away from her loving husband Bennet.

The House Gun (1998) is a moving story from a liberated South Africa. It's a story of how a white murderer is defended by a black lawyer on whom the parents of the murderer depend for survival while struggling to find meaning in their lives. It strongly brings to the fore the rise of violence in the world with guns being a part of each and every white household often leading to tragic consequences. The novel also reflects the changing sexual relationships with the introduction of characters whose sexual orientation is different and brings out the complicated relationships of gays. *The House Gun* is a story of violence and quest for new forms of freedom in South Africa.

The Pickup (2001) is a novel which won the 2002 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Best Book from Africa. It's a story of love, displacement and alienation where the white heroine Julie Summers falls in love with a mechanic who is an illegal Arab immigrant called Abdu. She accepts his family and adopts his culture and even moves into his unnamed homeland. Julie accepts his culture though she finds it different and adjusts to his people and culture easily. While Abdu consistently attempts to transgress his culture and accept the culture of the whites, Julie's efforts to integrate into his culture come as a surprise to the readers. While Abdu finally breaks free and goes to the U.S, Julie Summers chooses to live with his joint family back home having found her meaning in life and peace through her decision.

Get a Life (2005) has as its protagonist Paul Bannerman who is an environmental activist. He is diagnosed with thyroid cancer and has to undergo radiation therapy which leaves him radioactive for a long period of time. He is quarantined and lives in isolation at his parents' home. The prolonged period of quarantine provides them with ample time for a lot of thinking and reflections. Their philosophical deliberations on the ways of the world eventually transform their lives as a whole.

The fragmented character of South Africa is finely brought out in the novel *No Time Like the Present* (2012). This novel is located in the post-liberation South Africa and it succeeds in capturing the political complexities of its times. Steve and Jabulile are lovers who carry out a clandestine affair in a country where racist laws explicitly forbid sexual relations between the whites and the blacks. Both Steve and Jabulile fight against apartheid. The free Africa sees Steve going on to become a lecturer in the University and Jabulile becomes a lawyer. They get married and become parents

to children born in freedom. But soon harsh realities catch up and they consider leaving the country they once fought to liberate.

Gordimer is also a prolific writer of short stories. Her first collection of stories, *Face to Face* (1949), was published in Johannesburg by Silver Leaf Books. Her first story published in *The New Yorker* was "A Watcher of the Dead" (9 June, 1951). Gordimer's first collection of stories to be published in the United States was *The Soft Voice of the Serpent and Other Stories* **(**1952). This collection was followed by many others, including *Six Feet of the Country* (1956), *Friday's Footprint and Other Stories* (1960), *Not for Publication and Other Stories* (1965), *A Soldier's Embrace* (1980), *Crimes of Conscience* (1991), *Loot and Other Stories* **(**2003) and *beethoven was one-sixteenth black and other stories* (2007). She has published numerous literary reviews and other essays and short pieces, usually dealing with the culture and politics of South Africa. Her collections of essays include *The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing* (1973), *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics, and Places* (1988), *Writing and Being* (1995) and *Living in Hope and History: Notes from Our Century* (1999). Gordimer also contributed to and edited *Telling Tales* (2004), a collection of twenty-one short stories by world-renowned authors.

1.5 Critical Works of Nadine Gordimer

In addition to a vast collection of novels and short stories she has also written critical essays which have been much acclaimed in the literary world for their political passion and ideological fervour. Her essays figuring in various collections like *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places, Writing and Being, The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing and Living in the Interregnum* and *Living in*

Hope and History: Notes from our Century have been much appreciated and widely quoted as well. The importance of Gordimer's critical works has been brought out by Ntongela Masilela who declares "That the critical work of Nadine Gordimer from *The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing* (1973) to *Living in Hope and History: Notes from our Century* (1999) would be the most astute and pertinent in charting the cultural and literary morbidity of the interregnum period is unsurprising" (*English in Africa*18)

Gordimer's essays stand alongside her novels and stories as clear testimony to her willingness to bring forward the issues of her time and society and be a witness to the politics that has defined her time and space. These critical essays also tell us about her opinion of black writers in South Africa and their contribution to the struggle against racial discrimination and attempts made to achieve liberation. She clearly underlines a writer's responsibility towards society and the hardships faced by the writers in countries which are not free wherein their works are censored or banned undermining their freedom of expression. Gordimer's essays also argue that a writer's task is a tough and challenging one and many a time exile and imprisonment are the only rewards that he gets for fulfilling his social responsibility. She also reveals her sadness at not being totally accepted in her own country because she was a white woman, though her cause was the same as that of the blacks. In her early essay **"**Where do Whites Fit In**?**"(1959) she clearly articulates her views on the place of a writer in South Africa: "I myself fluctuate between the desire to be gone—to find a society for myself where my white skin will have no bearing on my place in the community—and a terrible, obstinate and fearful desire to stay" (Coetzee, "Nadine Gordimer" 386).

Her commitment towards the blacks is brought out in her well-known essay "Living in the Interregnum" (1983). In this critical essay, Gordimer analyses the relationship between the blacks and whites during the period of apartheid in South Africa. She not only foresees blacks establishing their rights over their land but also the problems that would ensue in its wake. She borrowed the term "interregnum" from the renowned Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci who once famously declared while talking about his own world: "The old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms" ("Living"). Through the term "interregnum" Gordimer explains the state of affairs in South Africa where the old oppressive order was on the decline and the new government yet to be born. This interregnum lasted for three decades after the banning of the political parties and ended with the ushering in of democracy and victory for the blacks in the general elections of 1994.

Gordimer begins her essay by highlighting that the colonisers exploited South Africa and legalised apartheid which according to her was "the ugliest creation of man" (www.nybooks.com). According to her, "The interregnum is not only between two social orders but between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined" ("Living").The interregnum period was marked by uncertainty and resistance on the part of both—the white colonisers and the blacks.

Gordimer speaks of the willingness of a section of liberal whites who desire to contribute towards emancipation of blacks in South Africa. She states:

> …there is a segment preoccupied, in the interregnum, neither by plans to run away from nor merely by ways to survive physically and economically in the black state that is coming…. I cannot give you numbers for this segment, but

> in measure of some sort of faith in the possibility of structuring society humanly, in the possession of skills and intellect to devote to this end, there is something to offer the future. (“Living”)

Gordimer says that it does not refer to skills or intellect alone but something nobler—offering ‘oneself’ for the cause of liberation. She plans to do so mainly through her writings and acknowledges herself as “A white; a dissident white; a white writer”. By doing so, she aims to expose the institution of apartheid in South Africa and its evils which are little known to the outside world. She firmly states:

> Now I am going to break the inhibition or destroy the privilege of privacy, whichever way you look at it. I have to offer you myself as my most closely observed specimen from the interregnum; yet I remain a writer, not a public speaker: nothing I say here will be as true as my fiction. (“Living”)

In this essay, she speaks of her desire to stay in South Africa and to be a part of the design to provide a future for the blacks of South Africa. Gordimer makes her most personal declaration saying, “There are two absolutes in my life. One is that racism is evil....The other is that a writer is a being in whose sensibility is fused…the duality of the inwardness and outside world, and he must never be asked to sunder this union”. Being committed to the struggle against apartheid and for the liberation of the blacks, Gordimer strongly asserts that her allegiance is to “values that are beyond history. I shall never give them up” (“Living”).

Gordimer adds with a sense of despair that despite the sacrifices made by liberal whites towards the cause of liberation, they fail to be accepted by the blacks. The blacks look upon them with suspicion and do not see the differences between the

colonisers and liberals. She quotes Bishop Desmond Tutu who clearly exhibited his scepticism towards liberal whites:

> Whites unfortunately have the habit of taking over and usurping the leadership and taking the crucial decisions, largely, I suppose, because of the head start they had in education and experience of this kind. The point is that however much they want to identify with blacks it is an existential fact… that they have not really been victims of this baneful oppression and exploitation. It is a divide that can't be crossed and that must give blacks a primacy in determining the course and goal of the struggle. Whites must be willing to follow. ("Living")

Though the blacks openly declare that they do not need the help of whites during the liberation struggle and thereafter, Gordimer is unsure of their capacity to resolve all the problems after liberation. She believes so because "…there are contradictions within the black liberation struggle itself, based not only, as would be expected, on the opposing ideological alignments of the world outside, but on the moral confusion of claims—on land, on peoples—from the pre-colonial past…" ("Living").

Gordimer also believes that a work of art should retain its essence and should not just be a medium of reflecting the problems in society. If a black writer writes only about his anger and resentment against the colonisers, then, his literary work would simply be an agitprop. Agitprop would make the black writer deviate from mastering his art or even change its nature to create new norms. Gordimer believed that a writer should present "the truth as he sees it" and that it would be a problem if the writer gave in to "conformity to an orthodoxy of opposition". She did not consider

it appropriate to harp on the stereotypical "jargon of struggle" which she found very much present in the works of the South African black writers. She called this type of literary work agitprop or "a phony sub-art" and asked writers to abstain from it.

The essay ends with a penetrative analysis of the merits and demerits of Capitalism and Socialism. Gordimer appeals for a new economic system which would be far more effective than the prevailing ones across the world. She concludes:

> In the interregnum in which we co-exist, the American left—disillusioned by the failure of communism—needs to muster with the democratic left of the third world—living evidence of the failure of capitalism—the cosmic obstinacy to believe in and work toward the possibility of an alternative left, a democracy without the economic and military terror which exists, at present, in both left and right regimes. If we cannot, the possibility of real social democracy will die out, for our age, and who knows when, after what even bloodier age, it will be rediscovered. ("Living" 21-7)

This highly thought-provoking essay is therefore acclaimed as one of the best critical works of Gordimer.

In another essay *"*The Essential Gesture: Writers and Responsibility*"* Gordimer says:

> Roland Barthes wrote that language is a corpus of prescriptions and habits common to all the writers of a period. He also wrote that a writer's 'enterprise'--his work -- is his essential gesture as a social being. Between these two statements I have found my subject, which is their tension

> and connection: the writer's responsibility….From the corpus of language, within that guild shared with fellow writers, the writer fashions his enterprise, which then becomes his 'essential gesture as a social being'. ("Essential" 3-4)

Gordimer strongly believed that a writer should be a spokesperson for the oppressed and must reveal the conditions of her time or country. If not, she fails in her duty towards society. According to her, a writer can be part of the struggle towards a cause through her works if she is unable to get into the struggle herself. As she puts it, "…this is the kind of demand that responsibility for the social significance of being a writer exacts: a double demand, the first from the oppressed, to act as spokesperson for them, the second, from the state, to take punishment for that act" ("Essential" 4). Gordimer designates such writers as "cultural workers". These cultural workers fulfil a social responsibility. She praises the contribution of black writers of Africa like Dhlomo, Plaatje, Mofolo, Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Jack Mapanje who involved themselves in showcasing the struggle for freedom of their countries. She also highlights the contributions of black writers from South Africa such as Alex la Guma, Jeremy Cronin, Mongane Wally Serote, Breyten Breytenbach, Dennis Brutus and Jaki Seroke who were imprisoned for their activities involving freedom struggle and also for their writings reflecting the evils of racism and apartheid.

Similarly, white writers Breyten Breytenbach and Jeremy Cronin were tried and imprisoned for upholding the cause of the blacks' struggle for freedom. This was the result of trying to be "more than a writer" and trying to transform the society through writings. Gordimer argues that "[T]he transformation of experience remains the writer's basic essential gesture; the lifting out of a limited category something that

reveals its full meaning and significance only when the writer's imagination has expanded it" ("Essential" 18).

Being very clear about her responsibility as a writer, Gordimer wrote without fear or favour and made the world turn to and focus on the plight of South Africa—its inhuman and cruel system of apartheid and its segregationist laws and practice of racism— by donning the role of a "cultural worker".

Gordimer's Nobel Prize acceptance speech titled *"*Writing and Being*"* is remarkable in terms of clarity of vision. It begins by highlighting the importance of the "word" that can generally be extended to written works of literature. She says:

> We spend our lives attempting to interpret through the word the readings we take in the societies, the world of which we are part. It is in this sense, this inextricable, ineffable participation, that writing is always and at once an exploration of self and of the world; of individual and collective being. (nobelprize.org)

Further, she says that a writer's work cannot be "deconstructed" as it is out of grasp of consistency since it grapples with myriad experiences of life. For her, life itself is "aleatory" being shaped by different circumstances and levels of consciousness. Hence it is futile to apply different literary theories to come to grips with the text of the author. She further argues that:

> There is no pure state of being, and it follows that there is no pure text, 'real' text, totally incorporating the aleatory. It surely cannot be reached by any critical methodology, however interesting the attempt. To deconstruct a text is in a way a contradiction, since to deconstruct it is to make another construction out of the pieces… (nobelprize.org)

She speaks of her forays into the world of writing and of the influences which moulded her into becoming the fearless writer and the champion for the cause of blacks that she turned out to be. She categorically declares that she could become a writer because she was privileged enough to have access to the library which was beyond the reach of the blacks. Her early consciousness of racism was brought to the fore by the day to day incidents that she witnessed around her where the whites dominated and ill-treated the blacks. Gradually, she developed her own view regarding what a writer's responsibilities should be and was greatly inspired by the thoughts of Camus and Marquez. She says: "So Camus called for 'Courage in and talent in one's work.' And Marquez redefined tender fiction thus: The best way a writer can serve a revolution is to write as well as he can" (nobelprize.org).

These beliefs, according to Gordimer, help a writer to create his works of art keeping in mind social responsibilities and enable him to write within a defined historical and social context. Living in a country where writers were censored and controversial issues were forbidden from being written, Gordimer realised that the task of a writer was risky and one had to be prepared for imprisonment or exile. Yet, she was undaunted and continued her sojourn in the literary field.

Gordimer continues to explore the freedom of the writer and speaks of Salman Rushdie's forced exile in the wake of fatwa issued against him and condemns such acts. She argues that such acts are "acts against humanity". She concludes the essay by declaring that "The writer is of service to humankind only insofar as the writer uses the word even against his or her own loyalties, trusts the state of being, as it is revealed, to hold somewhere in its complexity filaments of the cord of truth..."(nobelprize.org).

Gordimer also published another critical work titled *The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing* in 1973. This book introduced the English reading public to the important but little-known works by black writers. It deals extensively with the works of African writers from Thomas Mofolo to Peter Abrahams and again from Chinua Achebe to Ngugi wa Thiong'o. This book was the outcome of her association with the *Drum* writers of Sophiatown and her involvement in the Sophiatown Renaissance when she was living in Johannesburg. She mingled with black writers like Henry Nxumalo, Bloke Modisane, Lewis Nkosi, Todd Matshikiza and Zeke Mphahlele and also embraced their cause.

Another well-known work by Gordimer is *Living in Hope and History* (1999). In this book, she has recorded her observations about apartheid and also her experience as a member of the African National Congress. It is an extraordinary collection of essays and articles produced across four decades of her illustrious literary career that also includes her Nobel Prize Lecture of 1991.

Gordimer was a writer who could predict the changes that would take place in South Africa. She boldly expressed her views in her works of fiction and non-fiction which made Anna Akhmatova speak of Gordimer as "a visitor from the future". J.M Coetzee agrees with her fully saying that it is a stature that she has created for herself by year after year of close listening and intense work: silence and cunning without exile (Coetzee, *Doubling* 387).

Gordimer has impacted the field of literature with her works which throw light upon the issues plaguing her country and society, causing awareness globally and garnering sympathy and support for the cause of the blacks and freedom of South Africa. She made the injustice of the apartheid practised in South Africa and its terrible outcome known to the world at large and played an active role in creating

awareness and helped mount pressure to end it. Therefore Ntongela Masilela pays rich tributes to her saying "… Gordimer was undertaking the monumental transformation of the concept of the African Intellectual into that of Public Intellectual" (17-39). Known to be a fearless writer, never succumbing to pressure and resisting exile she created some of the finest works in literature subscribing to the view that a writer writes not only to create a work of art but also to fulfil social responsibilities. Gordimer succinctly sums up a writer's mission in the following words: "Any writer of any worth at all hopes to play only a pocket-torch of light - and rarely, through genius, a sudden flambeau - into the bloody yet beautiful labyrinth of human experience, of being" (nobelprize.org).

1.6 Critical Works on Nadine Gordimer

Gordimer is an author who has been the object of critical scrutiny for her vast literary compendium created during the apartheid era in South Africa. Many have done significant research on her fiction resulting in the publication of various works and critical essays.

The Later Fiction of Nadine Gordimer (1993) edited by Bruce King, has brought together fifteen essays by famous critics. King analyses the connection between sexual and political revolution taking place in South Africa. Kathrin Wagner has analysed how Gordimer's attachment to Africa finds an expression in her characters' response to the landscape. The land according to Gordimer holds potential for redemption and regenerative political commitment towards Africa so far as the whites in South Africa are concerned. Michael Wade has evaluated the repression and denial of her Jewishness in her fiction. He concludes that Gordimer spent her time trying to get black experience into her psyche and for most part of her career, always

trying to suppress her Jewishness through repression and denial. Karen Lazar analysed whether Gordimer subscribed to feminism despite declaring 'feminism as a piffling' (213-27). In his essay titled "Nobody's Children: Families in Gordimer's Later Novels" John Cooke traces the role of domineering parents in Gordimer's fiction and the numerous ways in which the children try to escape from the grip of parents. Another interesting analysis in the book is made by Rowland Smith who in his article, "Black and White in Grey: Irony and Judgement in Gordimer's Fiction" has examined the use of irony in Gordimer's works.

Another important work is Christopher Heywood's *A History of South African Literature*. It is important as it is the first critical study of South African Literature from pre-colonial times to the present. In his mega work Heywood discusses over 100 authors and selected works which is also inclusive of Gordimer's fiction. A detailed analysis of Gordimer's works is done in the section of his book titled 'Novels and Stories after 1960'.

Ileana Dimitriu argues in her essay titled "Post Colonising Gordimer: The Ethics of 'Beyond' and Significant Peripheries in the Recent Fiction" that Gordimer "looks beyond the local to cognate socio-cultural paradigms at other margins of the world" (160). She particularly focuses on Gordimer's new tendencies in her collection of critical essays titled *Living in Hope and History: Notes from Our Century* (1999). Dimitriu says that Gordimer has gone beyond national and geographical frontiers and tried to understand globalisation of culture. She is appreciative of the fact that Gordimer encourages cultural exchanges and mixing of various cultures besides visualising the idea of world literature.

Tamar M. Copeland in her thesis titled, *White Women in South Africa: An Inferior Gender within a Superior Race* has taken up the fictional works of Olive Schreiner and Nadine Gordimer for her study. She opines that the white women in their fiction belong to a superior race but are deprived of their privileges and rights in comparison to men. So these women characters search for a higher level of consciousness and the experience of discovering their spiritual, emotional and intellectual resources.

Dorothy Driver makes an in-depth scrutiny of the politicisation of women in the fiction of Gordimer. In her well-known essay titled "Nadine Gordimer: The Politicisation of Women", Driver explores the relation between sexism and racism and how Gordimer uses sexuality both as a concept and device. Driver observes:

> If she [Gordimer] draws on sexuality as a common bond between men and women, she draws on gender identity as a common bond between women; she also explores through sexuality the notion of a private life, so complex a concept in South African society, and she is able to set up a reverberating metaphorical relation between sexism and racism that has important implications regarding her political stance. (jstor.org)

Confronting the Challenges of Political, Social and Cultural Milieu: An Insight into the Select Novels of Nadine Gordimer by Janatha Kumari makes an attempt to analyse the radical changes that took place in South Africa from the past to the present. It also traces the impact of historical events on Gordimer's fiction besides highlighting the dehumanizing effects of apartheid on the society.

Isidore Diala draws our attention to the influence that Nelson Mandela had on Gordimer which is one of the issues discussed in his article titled "Nadine Gordimer:

the Mandela Myth and Black Empowerment in Post-Apartheid South Africa." Diala examines the works of Gordimer with special emphasis on the 'Myth of Mandela as the Saviour'. He explores how Gordimer consistently seeks to illuminate the circumstances that nurtured this myth in both her fictional and on-fictional works. Diala refers to Gordimer's three post-apartheid novels – *None to Accompany Me* (1994), *The House Gun* (1998) and the *Pick Up* (2001). He particularly analyses the novella *None to Accompany Me* and brings out the references—both oblique and direct—to Nelson Mandela's leadership and his anxiety about his possible successors. (135-54).

Uma Gowrishankar in her work titled *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: The Question of Race* argues that Gordimer has used the narrative discourse in her novels just to subvert the political discourse of the State. Besides discussing the effects of interracial relationships, micropolitics of the body and effects of State's intrusion into the private lives of the people she has also stated the need to decolonise the mind of its thought structures based on race.

Most of the critics have focused on the non-fictional writings of Gordimer and her novels. Gordimer's short stories in comparison have not been analysed to the extent that her novels have been. However, Mary West takes up the task of examining selected short stories of Gordimer where she reveals the suffering of white women in South Africa as they are " locked in a space of anguish" (77-91). In her article titled " Portraits in Miniature: White English-Speaking South African Women in Selected Short Stories by Nadine Gordimer" West takes up three short stories— " Enemies", " Comrades" and " Karma". She depicts the ambivalence confronted by white women who feel uneasy and alienated in South Africa.

Another noteworthy work of criticism pertaining to Gordimer's short stories is "The Short Fiction of Nadine Gordimer" by Martin Trump. The article is an analysis of the women characters in Gordimer's stories with special emphasis on the place of women in the society. He takes up stories and examines whether white women in South African society were dominated and silenced by their men. He draws parallels between black and white women and compares their status in society (jstor.org).

Rob Nixon, an eminent critic in his essay titled "Nadine Gordimer" has made an insightful study of her novels and short stories spanning across decades paralleling the political revolution in South Africa. He exhibits a great deal of admiration for her commitment towards blacks and specifically for her emancipatory agenda which played a significant role in uprooting apartheid in South Africa (10).

However, none of the critical works and essays discussed above makes a holistic analysis of Gordimer's novels and short stories in terms of their predominant motifs and thematic predispositions. These works tend to focus on a particular aspect of her writings at the expense of a few other significant issues. At the centre of her fictional enterprise lies a unique vision of historical reality glossed over by most of the critical works and essays. Gordimer's nuanced vision of the turbulent history of South Africa encapsulated in the multi-dimensional corpus of her novels as well as short stories foregrounds questions pertaining to race, gender and violence. These vital aspects which are seamlessly integrated into her vast fictional narratives are indeed the focus of this study.

1.7 Aims and Objectives

Nadine Gordimer was a white writer who took up the cause of the liberation of blacks in South Africa. She was looked upon with suspicion by the blacks for doing

so and was treated like a pariah by the white government in South Africa. Some of her works like *A World of Strangers, Late Bourgeois World, Burger's Daughter* and *July's People* were banned by the government. The study aims at analysing how Gordimer—a part of white establishment—explores the complex dynamics of race, gender and violence through her fiction. It also tries to analyse the extent to which Gordimer is successful in representing the struggle and the lives of the blacks—her 'racial' other—in her fictional writings.

The study adopts the theory and methodology of cultural studies while coming to grips with the works of Gordimer. Cultural studies emphasises the materiality of human history and its evolution through the creation of structures of power and domination. Cultural studies has expanded its theoretical space by co-opting other theories like Marxism, Feminism, Post-structuralism, Postcolonialism and so on. Therefore, by and large, the study while examining the issues of race, gender and violence makes an attempt to conduct an historical inquiry broadly premised on cultural studies. The chapter-specific details are as follows:

- The theories of the origin of race up to the present have been taken up in the chapter on race and Gordimer's view of the problem of race in South Africa has been examined against the backdrop of these theories.
- To help understand Gordimer's position with regard to gender in her fictional works, various theories of Feminism and Gender Studies have been discussed in detail. The theoretical framework facilitates an analysis of her fiction and also locates the influence of some of the theories which have gone into the making of her works despite her claims of shunning feminism and proclaiming herself to be only a humanist.

- Trauma Studies and theories on the origin of violence have been included in the study. These theories have helped to analyse the kinds of violence that are found in Gordimer's fiction and the reasons for the acts of violence perpetrated upon the blacks of South Africa.

  The present study will critically examine the following fictional works of Gordimer written during the time of apartheid in South Africa.

  Novels

  The Lying Days (1954), *Occasion for Loving* (1963), *Burger's Daughter* (1979), *July's People (1981), A Sport of Nature* (1987), *My Son's Story* (1990), *None to Accompany Me* (1994).

  Collections of Short Stories

  Jump and other stories (1991), *Loot and Other Stories* (2003), *beethoven was one-sixteenth black and other stories* (2007), *Life Times: Stories, 1952-2007* (2010).

Gordimer was a living witness to the changes that South Africa went through from the period of colonisation to liberation. The study includes the works produced by Gordimer which underscores this period broadly termed—the 'interregnum period.' The term 'interregnum' refers to the period between the reigns of two regimes—the colonial rule of the whites marked by the Grand Apartheid and the coalition government with a non-white majority led by Nelson Mandela coming to power in South Africa in 1994. Hence, the study includes select novels and short stories written by Gordimer between the imposition of Apartheid and Liberation i.e. from 1948 to 1994.

1.8 Plan of the Thesis

The principal objective of the thesis is to examine the seminal issues related to race, gender and violence in the select novels and short stories of Nadine Gordimer. It also makes an attempt to historicize the creative as well as the critical practice of Gordimer against the background of the history of South Africa.

The first chapter being introductory in nature offers an overview of Gordimer's historical, literary and biographical background in addition to a brief discussion of works by and on Gordimer.

The second chapter takes up for analysis the complex issue of race in Gordimer. At the very outset, this chapter examines the theoretical and ideological import behind the concept of 'race' and then proceeds to look at how Gordimer's fiction comes to grips with the racial issues as well as the dynamics of inter-racial relationship in South Africa.

The third chapter on the other hand is devoted to the study of issues related to gender and sexuality in Gordimer's fiction. Even though Gordimer never declared herself to be a feminist, her vast body of works enables the reader to arrive at her views on gender and sexuality.

The fourth chapter focuses on Gordimer's perspectives on violence. It examines the various kinds of violence seen in her fictional works and analyses the reasons for the occurrence of violence in South Africa.

The fifth and final chapter, in addition to bringing all the loose threads together also makes an attempt to situate Gordimer as a writer produced by a unique history of South Africa which also accounts for her distinctiveness as a writer of the

contemporary era. Gordimer is hailed as a visionary who visualised the land being reverted to the blacks. She also foresaw the problems that a liberated South Africa would confront in the future. It also examines her role as a 'public intellectual'—a mission she consciously embraced by choosing the 'noise' of public life over the 'bliss of solitude'.

CHAPTER II

INTERROGATING RACE

How can you say that those of us, as whites, who imposed racism, who lived by racism, don't know about it? We know about it all right –profoundly. I'd never thought about it in that way before but of course we understand racism. You don't have to be the victim; you can also be the perpetrator.

— Nadine Gordimer

2.1 Theorizing Race

The concept of race has always been a much contested and debated topic for ages. Racism has also been the root cause of suffering of millions of people. The term 'racism' primarily recalls the horrors perpetrated upon the Jews by Hitler and the Nazi establishment. The term, 'Judenrein' or making the nation 'clean of Jews' was formulated in the 1930s. The Nazis believed in the superiority of the Aryan race to which they belonged and perceived the Jewish race to be a threat to them. They thought that miscegenation would contaminate

the purity of their race and hence, saw extermination of Jews as the only way out of the problem. Consequently, millions of Jews perished in the Holocaust during the Second World War. This horrendous act of cruelty is and will always be a blot on the human race.

The practice of racism is not limited to the Nazis alone. Racism has a long history and it has played a vital role in shaping the destiny of mankind as a whole. It has been used as a tool to snatch power as it rests on the belief that a certain race is superior to 'other' races and hence deserves to rule over the people belonging to the

so-called inferior races. Racism has split the populace of the world, spewing intense hatred and leading to acts of destruction and suffering. According to Michael Banton, "There is now a whole family of expressions centred upon the conception of race, including racial discrimination, racial group, racial prejudice, racial segregation and racism; used together they can make up a racial idiom" (*Racial Theories* 2). These expressions are indicative of the human psyche that thrives on maintaining its exclusive status of being superior to others.

There are multiple theories which set out to define the term 'race'. Attempts have been made to construct 'Race' through the study of differences in biological traits. Cultural and psychological angles to the theory of race have also been examined. Ruth Benedict in her book *Race and Racism* asserts that 'race is a classification based on the traits which are hereditary' and it also constitutes 'a scientific field of enquiry' (6).The interesting fact is that there has been no consensus till date regarding the definition and characteristics of racism.

Earlier, people believed in Monogenesis or the single race theory wherein they assumed that all human beings despite their diversity of races were created by God. Accordingly, human beings considered themselves to be the direct descendants of Adam and Eve. They were content in the belief that according to God's plan, there could be no discrimination amongst human beings. But, this discourse became unacceptable during the sixteenth century in the wake of the dawn of the Age of Reason in Europe. This period was marked by social changes and intellectual fervour wherein the quest for knowledge anchored in rationality took over conventional beliefs and practices. People explored the lands beyond and having voyaged far, came across different types of people with their own unique traits and cultures. Soon, there were changes in the way race was analysed due to the growing awareness that people

differed all over the world. Therefore, they could not continue to blindly subscribe to the theory of a single human race. Hence, the theory of Polygenesis seemed to be an answer to the question of race. Polygenesis believed in the multiple and divergent races marked by their own characteristics. This recognition subsequently led the people of Europe to believe in their superiority over others. The difference in cultures made the European explorers brand the people that they came across in such lands as 'savages'. Nevertheless, bearing in mind their noble status as 'civilised' whites, they had to view the brutal and bestial 'savages' that they came across sympathetically. The brutes therefore had to be tamed by the enlightened 'white' man. Elaborating on the historical trajectory of race, Ruth Benedict states the following: "Racism is the dogma [which believes] that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is condemned to congenital superiority. Racism is not, like race, a subject, the content of which can be scientifically investigated. It is, like a religion, a belief which can be studied only historically" (71).

The discourse of Polygenesis enabled among other things to classify the Africans as inferior to the white race. These ignoble brutes were to be civilised by the ennobled white race. They also believed that the inferior races were meant to serve the superior ones and subsequently it legitimised the repugnant practice of slave trade. Anthony J. Barker draws our attention to the observation made by David Hume, a well-known eighteenth century philosopher: "In 1748 David Hume, in a footnote to his essay 'Of National Characters', stated that since, among the races of the world, only the Negro race has never developed any major civilisation, he suspected that Negroes might be 'naturally inferior to the Whites'…" (Banton, *Racial Theories* 25). If the Negroes were uncivilised, then probably they were unintelligent too. Such people were consequently thought to be good to work only as slaves and hence slave trade acquired

legitimacy resulting in suffering and displacement of millions of Africans. The white race highlighted the leaps of advancement made by their civilisation and used it as a touchstone against which the merits of the other civilisations were to be considered. However, Barker critiques this train of thought and convincingly asserts that "… They were black because the African environment had made them so; they were neither natural slaves nor were they especially well-equipped to work in the tropics" (Banton, *Racial Theories* 25). He upheld the idea that the human potential of the Africans should be tapped instead of condemning their race. Similarly, Montesquieu too believed that climate had a role to play in the making the people of different continents different from each other. He stated, "…countries where excess of heat enervates the body, and renders men so slothful and dispirited that nothing but the fear of chastisement can oblige them to perform any laborious duty…" (Banton, *Racial Theories* 24). Due to this reason Montesquieu was against the practice of slavery. He firmly believed that each was adapted to his environment and hence should stay where he was instead of travelling and settling in other lands.

The early sixteenth century saw the influx of blacks to Europe, especially the West Africans who were brought in by the Portuguese, English and Spanish explorers. In 1555, slavery came into existence in England. Having black servants was soon considered to be fashionable in rich aristocratic households. The British established the Royal African Company which legitimized slave trade in the seventeenth century. They needed slaves to work on their sugar plantations in the Caribbean islands. The slaves were ferried across in ships to these islands. Many perished on the course of their journey due to inhuman conditions prevalent on the ship. Those that survived were made to work as slaves or were exchanged for spices or sugar, rum and tobacco which were brought back to England and sold. This lucrative trade generated a huge

quantity of wealth for England transforming it into a supreme colonial power at the global level.

It is believed that the term 'race' entered English language in the early sixteenth century and referred to lineage or breed based on the colour of human skin. Stephen Spencer in his work *Race and Ethnicity* refers to Swedish biologist Carl Linnaeus' classification of four basic colour types in descending order—White Europeans, Red Americans, Yellow Asians and Black Africans. Later on, Linnaeus also linked characters with colour categories thus strengthening the already existing belief in the superiority of certain races. This naturally led to the conviction that, "such traits were fixed and inviolable, and further emphasized the hierarchical and mutually exclusive nature of the 'races'" (45). This classification had a profound impact on the debates connected with races in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The idea that "… 'races' embodied 'a package of fixed physical and mental traits' (Bulmer and Solomos 8) became a key concept in their social and political debates. This line of thought also dominated the fields of science, medicine besides leaving an indelible imprint in the fields of sociology and anthropology.

John Rex in his essay "The Concept of Race in Sociological Theory" speaks of the Deterministic theory which goes a long way in contributing to the arrival of institutional racism. (Bulmer and Solomos 40-41). According to Deterministic theory, genetic inheritance determines an individual's capacity which is unchangeable. Hence, discrimination is justified on the grounds of being incapable as their inferior mindset is an outcome of genetic inheritance. George Mosse in his article titled "Eighteenth Century Foundations" states that "The beginning of the new science of anthropology… was based upon the attempt to determine man's exact place in nature through observation, measurements, and comparisons between groups of men and

animals" (Bulmer and Solomos 40-41). This preoccupation with measurements and comparisons gave birth to new branches of studies like phrenology (reading the skull) and physiognomy (reading the face). Blacks who possessed smaller skulls were designated to be inferior to the members of the white race. In an age dominated by scientific spirit, phrenology and physiognomy seemed to be the best tools to evaluate races. The researchers believed that these physiological factors were responsible for differences in races and intellect thus the idea of racial superiority took shape. These ideas also crept into the writings of that era. For instance, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) clearly outlines the mission of Kurtz. Kurtz, a white man is not only entrusted with the task of bringing back ivory from South Africa but also with making a report for the future guidance of the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. Kurtz assumes a higher moral position and says, "We whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might of a deity'" (59).

The attempt on the part of researchers to theorize and rationalize the differences between people of different races came to be known as scientific racism. British biologist Steven Rose defined scientific racism as "an attempt to use language and some of the techniques of science in support of theories or contentions that particular groups or populations are innately inferior to others in terms of intelligence, 'civilisation' or other socially –defined attitudes" (Rattansi 94). The theories based on the biological traits went on to form the foundation for the pseudo-scientific theories which followed thereafter.

There arose a renewed interest in comparisons between people distributed across the globe and the researchers drew conclusions suited to their interests. In 1815,

a black woman from South Africa named Saartje Bartmaan better known as the Hottentot Venus was exhibited in Europe. Hottentos were the Khoikhoi tribes of South Africa. Saartje was considered to be a freak as compared to white women so was paraded naked so that the people could gaze at her protruding buttocks and genitalia. This was done to ridicule the blacks who were so different from the whites in all respects. They also wanted to prove through the exhibition of her body that black women exuded animal like sexuality and were grossly different from other white women. After her death, an autopsy was performed and her organs were preserved for study. The study of phrenology and physiognomy was also linked to highlight gender differences. Ali Rattansi states in his work *Racism: A Very Short Introduction* that, "… women and the lower races were regarded as being impulsive, emotional, and unable to engage in the abstract reasoning that was the preserve of the white male" (33). This kind of a discourse helped the whites to deny full civic rights and political status to the people of inferior races.

In 1850, Robert Knox brought out his seminal work titled *The Races of Men* which gave an impetus to the discussion of superiority of races in the nineteenth century. Christian Meiners, an anthropologist was certain that the superiority of races was compromised because of miscegenation. Meiners strongly believed in the purity of races and subscribed to the view that there was an inevitable decline in the purity of races due to mixed marriages. This was later upheld and fortified by one of the well-known racial theoreticians of the mid-nineteenth century—a French man known as Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882). In 1854, he published his *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races.* Gobineau believed in the inherent superiority of the noble class and constantly feared its demise through miscegenation. He argued that the populace of the world was divided into White, Black and Yellow races, "each

permanent in its characteristics and affected only by hybridisation" (Rattansi 50).The qualities assigned to each of the races were taken to be permanent. Affirming his faith in the superiority of the Aryan race he stated that, "Such is the lesson of history. It shows that all civilisations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it, provided that this group itself belongs to the most illustrious branch of our species" (Banton, *Racial Theories* 64). Gobineau also strongly denounced the blacks:

> The man of the Black race is the lowest, marked by animality and limited intellect, but possessing great energy, desire and will. His wild sensuality is the mark of inferiority. He is denoted also by the variability of his moods which make him unaware of the distinctions between vice and virtue. He has little concern for the preservation of his own life, or for that of others, and shows a horrific impassiveness towards suffering. (Rattansi 51)

The Whites were the Caucasian, Semitic and Japhetic races while the Blacks were Hamites and Yellows were the Altaic, Mongol, Finnish and Tartar branches. The Whites were rated very high in terms of position and intellect followed by the Yellow race while the Black Negroid race was rated the lowest amongst them. Thus it was assumed that populace of the world could be divided into clear cut compartments of 'race' and could be distinguished by different physical traits. The people of inferior races could be differentiated on the basis of social, cultural and moral traits. So they asserted that race was definitely not about biological differences alone. It spilled over to assessment of character and ethics too. The native failed to fit into their standards and norms and his ethical positions were questioned as they were different from their

own. The whites also failed to understand the distinctiveness of other cultures and focused only on the merits of their own culture.

It was Darwin who toppled the world of existing beliefs through his landmark theory of evolution put forth in 1859. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection obliterated all the differences between races. He dismissed the idea of racial hierarchy by propounding that mankind descended from the apes. Tracing man's ancestry back to the apes made the theories of racial superiority a mockery. Hence, it was unacceptable for those who upheld the theories of superiority of the white race over the others. Consequently, a new theory of Social Darwinism was put forward. An English sociologist named Herbert Spencer (1820-93) was one of the foremost advocates of this theory and was responsible for the coining of the phrase 'survival of the fittest'. He observed that the fittest were the whites who belonged to the superior race and were destined to survive when compared to the blacks who belonged to an inferior race. Social Darwinism also gave rise to racial thinking known as Eugenics. The term 'Eugenics' was coined by Francis Galton in 1883.This concept was widely accepted between 1880s and 1930s in the United States and Europe. Those who upheld Eugenics believed that the superior races were in danger as the inferior ones produced more children. This trend, they feared, would lead to the domination of the inferior races over the others. The solution lay in selective breeding with higher and more intelligent classes producing more children. While tracing the historical trajectory of the theories of race Michael Banton points out that in the earlier times, intellectuals tried to understand the different kinds of people who inhabited the world by classifying them into races and this factor consciously or unconsciously contributed to the process of racemaking (*Racialization* 51). D.T Goldberg has rightly stated that, "Racists are those who explicitly or implicitly ascribe racial characteristics of others

that they take to differ from their own and those they take to be like them. These characteristics may be biological or social' (296).This sense of biological and cultural superiority gradually led to theories of purity of race and blood.

It was Frantz Fanon who contested the basic premises of Eurocentric racial discourse, used by the white man to conquer and dominate the African continent. He tried to create an awakening amongst the people of the world regarding the evils of racism. Fanon encapsulates the magnitude and scale of the domination of Africa by white race in the following words: 'All around me the white man…and there is a white song, a white song. All that whiteness that burns me' (*Black Skin* 86). Fanon exposed the inherent fallacy built into the concept of race by historicising its origin and trajectory. He also highlighted racism's devastating impact on the African people who were sullied and exploited because of belonging to the so called lower race. He was taken aback by the 'seamless dominance of white ideology' and recognised that "whiteness permeated every aspect of the context in which black people found themselves" (*Black Skin* 86). In his path-breaking book titled *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon makes a study of the mind-set of the people belonging to the white race. For the white man who has colonised another nation, the colonised man is seen to be undoubtedly envious and greedy. He observes that the white man scorns the blacks and doubts their intentions:

> The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of ill repute….The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses dreams of possession—all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible.(Bulmer and Solomos 118)

Fanon also brings to our attention the negative portrayal of blacks in the belief system propped up by white man in order to legitimise his control and domination over them. According to him, "The native is declared insensitive to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil" (*Wretched* 119). It must be noted that Fanon was instrumental in contesting as well as debunking the dominant racist ideology. Appreciating the invaluable contribution made by Fanon, Stephen Spencer states:

> Such insights were of profound importance to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and to the politics of resistance to colonialism around the world. Fanon's insight into the experience of metropolitan and colonial racism helped to forge a critical consciousness, exposing the links between racialism and white western culture that present whiteness as a platform of unspoken, invisible superiority. (Spencer 24)

Further, in order to counter the theories of racial supremacy of the whites, a movement of great significance emerged in France known as 'Negritude'. The term 'Negritude' was first coined by the French writer Aime Cesaire in 1939. It became a literary movement of the French speaking African and Caribbean writers against the colonial rule and its policy of cultural assimilation. They were disturbed by the idea that their culture was considered insignificant and worthless. The world wars brought in more disillusionment as they saw no meaning in dying for a cause which was not theirs. Besides, the blacks were not given positions of importance during the wars and were treated with contempt and derision. "They became increasingly aware, through their study of history, of the suffering and humiliation of black people—first under the bondage of slavery and then under colonial rule' (Editors Britannica.com). Leopold

Sedar Senghor and Leon Damas were the prominent faces of the movement. The basic ideas of the discourse of Negritude were:

> …that Africans must look to their own cultural heritage to determine the values and traditions that are most useful in the modern world; that committed writers should use African subject matter and poetic traditions and should excite a desire for political freedom; that Negritude itself encompasses the whole of African cultural, economic, social, and political values; and that, above all, the value and dignity of African traditions and peoples must be asserted. (Editors Britannica.com)

Another movement which shared the idealism and emancipatory agenda of Negritude was Pan-Africanism. The Pan-Africanist Movement aimed to bring together all the people of the African descent and uplift them. At its core, Pan-Africanism is "a belief that African peoples, both on the continent and in the diaspora, share not merely a common history, but a common destiny" ("Pan-Africanism").

Simultaneously, seminal European and American thinkers have foregrounded their own critical paradigms. Richard Dyer's seminal text *White* recognised "…the naturalised invisibility of 'whiteness': Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen' (45). Dyer speaks of the invisible power of whiteness which rules over the other races. It is unseen but definitely felt through the control exerted on the social institutions. The invisible power of whiteness manifests itself in the policies executed by the white governments in colonised nations. It is used to wield power and gain control over the so called other races. No one highlights 'white' as a race; the way 'black' is highlighted. Michael Pickering on the other hand, exposes the underlying

myth about the discourse of race as a marker of difference from a position of invisible white domination. He opines that whiteness is an accepted natural fact and is not set apart like the black race. According to Pickering, the term race is indicative of cultural differences which are designated in an invisible manner by the whites on people of other races by assuming an undesignated position. In contemporary discourse the term 'race' refers to the non-white races that are culturally different from the whites (91).

This belief in the unquestioned supremacy of the white race existed and dominated the policies of the government in the U.S too. The Southern States barred blacks from doing any other work except field labour. They also brought about segregation of the blacks. They were not permitted entry into places of entertainment, colleges, churches and other prominent public institutions nor could they travel using the common means of transport. They had no voting rights either. The pre-requisite to be qualified as a black needed just a drop of black blood in his ancestry. On the other hand, the same rule did not apply in case the person had a drop of white blood in his ancestry. Ali Rattansi notes that:

> The history of US debates and legislation reveals consistent difficulties in defining the black population. A famous 'one drop' rule was adopted in many Southern states, which implied that any black ancestry, however far back, consigned an individual to the wrong side of the white/black divide, determining (disadvantaging) where s/he could live, what kind of work was available, and whether marriage or even relationships could take place with a white partner. One drop of 'white blood' though did not carry the same weight in defining racial status. (7)

Rattansi deftly brings out the double standards involved in the classification of races. He also makes it evident how the whites protected their race and brushed off any traces of miscegenation and claims of blacks having a white amongst their ancestors. David Wellman reiterates the same idea when he says that, "A position is racist when it defends, protects, or enhances social organisation based on racial disadvantage. Racism is determined by the consequences of a sentiment, not its surface qualities… White racism is what white people do to protect the special benefits they gain by the virtue of their skin colour" (76).

Ania Loomba in her seminal work titled *Colonialism/ Post colonialism* historicises the origins and practice of racism. She categorically declares that even "Marx himself recognised colonialism as a brutal precondition for the liberation of these societies" (21). According to Loomba "Racism is not a universal and transcendental phenomenon but rather socially constructed, manifest in historically specific policies shaped by the labour market, ideology, government intervention and political resistance" (21). Marxist thinkers historicise race as a category and argue that it was constructed to enable slavery and it had always been grounded in labour relations (Spencer 107-8). Historically speaking, blacks were taken as slaves to work in sugar plantations and were looked upon as a cheap source of labour. The colonisers also believed that the blacks could work in harsh conditions and climate and therefore, were rightly suited to hard work and slavery.

Loomba further adds that the colonisers also promoted racism as it suited their needs perfectly. The labour class was kept in control because of the divisive policy of racism. "…racism provides a method of dividing and ruling the workforce. Not only does this prevent a collective working-class consciousness from emerging but it also develops functional divisions of labour…. racism is employed to distract attention

away from the divisive actions of the elite by effectively scapegoating a vulnerable group". Thus, they prevented the labour class from forming unions to fight for their rights. Besides, when racism created problems amongst the people belonging to the labour class, it also helped draw attention away from the people who actually promoted it (21).

Almost all theories of race were constructed from the point of view of white colonisers, adventurers and theorists. With the development of feminism there arose an uncertainty as to whether women of different races could share common experiences of their oppressions. The blacks felt that feminist thoughts and theories put forth by the whites could never represent the problems of the black women. Their race and ethnicity brought in different sets of problems which could only be solved by having their own approach to feminism. Hence it gave rise to another branch of feminism known as Black Feminism. Black feminists did not locate their problems in patriarchy alone and realised that unlike women belonging to the white race, they were doubly oppressed and needed to fight against both—patriarchy and racist ideology. It was a harsh truth that “Black women faced multiple oppressions and their identity as an oppressed racial group meant that unity with black men was often more important to them as a bulwark against racism than separation from them as a stand against patriarchy” (Spencer 132). Hence, Black feminism developed by consistently foregrounding the issue of gender and race as well.

Aziz R argues that “White women experience the state (to take one example) as patriarchal, whereas black women experience the state as racist and patriarchal: if the state is racist, it is racist to everyone; it is merely more difficult for the white people to see this, because part of the racism is to treat and promote whiteness as the norm (298).

The lands which were colonised by the whites became fertile grounds where the seeds of racism were sown. When Africa was conquered and colonised, the colonisers immediately assumed a position of superiority and importance and became the rulers of the land. They had now to adopt methods by which they could stay in control and never let go of the power over the land and its people. This gave rise to various forms of racism, the most virulent being institutional racism.

Carmichael and Hamilton in their well-known book on racism titled *Black Powe*r (1968) examine the anatomy of institutional racism. According to them, racism is practised at two levels—individual and institutional. Individual racism relied on 'the active and pervasive operation of anti-black attitudes and practices' whereas institutional racism aimed at dominating and subordinating the blacks by the white rulers (3-5). Speaking of institutional racism, Robert Blauner, an American academic opines that, "The processes that maintain domination–control of whites over non-whites–are built into the major social institutions…Thus there is little need for prejudice as a motivating force (9-10).

Racism was actively practised in colonised nations in many different ways. J S. Furnivall, a Burmese scholar of repute speaks of 'plural societies' which existed in certain colonial nations. It was structured vertically with racial groups having separate powers and rights. The vertical structure had whites at the top followed by commercial middlemen minority and the lowest rung comprised of indigenous people. The categories lacked social and institutional integration (Bulmer and Solomos 60).

Apart from these diverse and contradictory theories on racism, the twenty-first century scholars have theorised another form of racism which continues to be practised in the world across all nations. It is known as 'Racial Microaggressions'. A

group of scholars from the Teachers College, Columbia University came out with this model of racism which has received wide acclaim. According to them “Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 271). Microaggressions include denigrating messages in social media sent to people of color because they belong to a specific racial minority group. They also include subtle changes in body language of white people in the presence of people belonging to other racial communities.

2.2 Tracing the Roots of Racism in South Africa

The history of racial discrimination in South Africa began with its colonisation by European nations. Jan van Riebeeck of the Dutch East India Company founded the first colony at Cape Town in South Africa in 1652. They began as traders but in the year 1657 some of the officials of the Dutch Company were allotted land so that they could settle down and they came to be known as Free Burghers. Gradually, these Free Burghers started moving into the interiors claiming more land. The Khoikhoi and San tribes put up a stiff resistance but were overcome by the mighty Boers. These Boers then formed the nucleus of the white populace in South Africa.

The Burghers who settled needed labourers to work on their farms. The people who belonged to the Khoikhoi and San tribes were already dispossessed of their lands and were now forced to work on lands as slaves which belonged to the Burghers. Slavery thus became important for the functioning of their social and economic institutions as the slaves were employed in both their households and farms. The slaves were defined exclusively on their race. They were black while their owners

were whites. Colonial South Africa was thus structured on racial lines from the beginning of colonisation. Huxley and Haddon argue that such a structure premised on racial divide was indeed a "cloak for selfish economic aims which in their uncloaked nakedness would look ugly enough" (287).

The exploitative system of slavery continued unobstructed till Britain conquered Cape Town in 1806. Britain brought about the Slave Trade Act in 1807 which put an end to the external slave trade. With the Slavery Abolition Act of 1883, slavery came to an end in all the colonies of the British Empire. However, it did not signal the end of racism in South Africa. Racial discrimination which was hitherto covertly practised changed when the National Party came to power in 1948.The National Party made apartheid as their political agenda expressing horrors about the prevalent dangers of *oorstroming* (black swamping). In Afrikaans apartheid simply refers to 'apartness'. But it was not as innocuous as it seemed to be. Apartheid, on paper "…called for the separate development of the different racial groups in South Africa" ("History of Apartheid"). However, the policy of segregation was nothing but a clever political construction of race and was introduced mainly to consolidate white power. Historically speaking, the policy of isolating the blacks is not new and this informal arrangement has existed from the time of colonisation of South Africa. However, with the introduction of apartheid as a government policy, it gained legal status. Anyone breaking the law was now liable for punishment. The whites introduced it as they believed in their privileged status and felt it necessary to be separated from the uncivilised blacks. It was also done by the whites in order to keep control over the vast majority of black hordes to protect themselves as they were a minority. So, the twin factors of greed for power as well as fear of the blacks brought

into existence the notorious policy of apartheid which systematised the institution of racism in South Africa.

When apartheid became a system of institutionalised segregation and discrimination, the blacks retaliated by forming political parties and organisations to combat the evils of apartheid. Nelson Mandela, leader of the African National Congress describes apartheid as "the embodiment of the racialism, repression and inhumanity of all previous white supremacist regimes. To see the real face of apartheid we must look beneath the veil of constitutional formulas, deceptive phrases and playing with words" (190). Apartheid was divided into petty apartheid and grand apartheid. " Petty apartheid referred to visible segregation in South Africa while grand apartheid was used to describe the loss of political and land rights of black South Africans" ("Apartheid South Africa"). The laws which came under the category of petty apartheid were the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Act (1950). Through these laws the government ensured that there would be no sexual relations beyond racial lines. The transgressors were severely punished. Strict vigil was maintained and any incident of miscegenation was taken seriously by the authorities. Despite these draconian Acts, transgressions were not uncommon. While the instances of sexual exploitation of the black women by the white men were conveniently glossed over, the blacks were carefully scrutinized and punished even for minor transgressions.

The reforms which came under the category of grand apartheid aimed at segregating the blacks by uprooting them from their lands. They first introduced the Population Registration Act in 1950. According to this Act, registration of the people based on their race was made mandatory. The people were classified into Whites, Coloured, Blacks, Indians and Asians. Again, under these broad categories there were

subsections too. To quote Ali Rattansi , " The continual expansion of the category of 'coloured' in apartheid South Africa to include , eventually, 'Cape Coloured', 'Cape Malay', ' Griqua', ' Indian', 'Chinese',' 'other Asiatic', and 'other Coloured' is one of the many examples that testify to the absurdities of attempts to provide coherent racial labels (75).

After the people were made to register themselves under the Population Act, the government got an unambiguous picture of the distribution of the people of various races in different regions. They planned their next step in segregation through the Group Areas Act (1950) which was specially enforced in the urban areas. The people after being classified into different races were forcefully moved into areas set aside for them. The plan was for a settlement based on race. The natives found themselves going through identity crisis since they were ousted from their lands and homes as the government grabbed their lands. The white government took hold over rural as well as urban spaces compartmentalising the natives. The blacks had to carry passes in order to enter areas of white settlements. The Pass laws dictated that all blacks working in the areas of white settlements carry passes which contained their identity cards and permissions to be in those areas. By 1952, all the blacks were bound by these laws. They were separated from their families as other members of the family did not have passes to enter. The Group Areas Act ousted more than 100,000 Africans from their homes. They were forced to live in ghettos in miserable conditions devoid of sanitation and other facilities. Apartheid which was a discourse of the white race besides being a political construct harmed the interests of the natives and stripped them of their rights and dignity. Segregation structured their lives and marked their social and political existence. The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 saw to the separate development of areas called Bantustans designated for the people of other races. The

policy of apartheid encouraged the government to create a separate list of Coloured voters. They were quick to transfer the names from the common roll to the Coloured roll through the Separate Representation of Voters Act (1951). In protest against these developments, the African National Congress (ANC) started the Defiance Campaign in the year 1952. It called upon the people to break apartheid laws and court arrest. The leaders of the ANC believed that if thousands courted arrest, it would lead to the collapse of the system of apartheid. They also hoped to draw international support for their cause. Responding to the call given by the ANC, the blacks entered spaces demarcated for the whites leading to the arrest of 8000 people ("History of Apartheid"). Despite the massive protest, the government did not flinch and continued with its policy of apartheid in South Africa. This period also saw the pacifist African National Congress turning to radicalism and violence as peaceful methods to gain liberation had failed. Steve Biko also garnered the blacks into action by whipping up their pride in being blacks and started the Black Consciousness Movement to reclaim their country.

In 1953, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act was passed as a result of which they could demarcate and reserve areas for the whites such as playgrounds, parks, transport, toilets and even the benches in public places. The laws of apartheid besides generating privileges for the whites also protruded into the private lives of the blacks. The blacks were forced to live in a society where surveillance became the keyword. While the Population Registration Act helped the government to classify and segregate the blacks, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act ensured separate means of transport and spaces for the blacks in public places like parks, beaches, clubs, theatres and libraries. Moreover, with an agenda of creating a class of labourers they brought into force the Bantu Education Act which envisaged an educational

system for blacks which was considerably inferior to the education system of the whites. According to Willem Abraham De Klerk, "Bantu education would have to be designed to the special needs and development of the Bantu. It would be in the vernaculars and take full cognizance of the national characteristics of the people it had to serve" (*Puritans* 230-231). This was a clever way of camouflaging apartheid as the government did not want the blacks to be empowered by western system of education that was imparted through the medium of English language. There arose nationwide protests against this discriminative act leading to violence across the nation. The white government unabashedly continued with their racist policies despite growing unrest and protests by the blacks. The apartheid regime then thought that the solution to quell the protests lay in the Bantu Self-Government Act which they passed in 1959. According to this Act, different racial groups in different areas designated as Bantustans could consider it as their 'homelands'. For the creation of these 'homelands' the blacks were displaced from their towns and pushed out to the suburbs. On March 21, 1960 a peaceful protest against the Pass laws at Sharpeville turned out to be tragic. The government resorted to violence killing 69 blacks which came to be infamously designated as The Sharpeville Massacre (1960).

The government also brought about the Black Homeland Citizenship Act in 1970 in continuation with its policy of racial discrimination. This was their master plan of grand apartheid. Through this Act, the blacks would be stripped of the citizenship of South Africa. Instead, they would become citizens of the Bantustans which would be designated as autonomous territories. Each homeland was to develop into a separate nation for different ethnic groups. This meant that demographically the whites were now the majority in South Africa and could rule their own land.

In 1976, the government enforced the clause of teaching in Afrikaans language in schools meant for the blacks. This had been the unexecuted part of the Bantu Education Act (1953). The blacks were already frustrated due to the substandard quality of education provided to them. Learning in Afrikaans language was a great setback to them. Such a move resulted in the Soweto uprising (1976) where many students were killed.

Racial discrimination was continually resisted by the people of different tribes since the beginning of colonisation of South Africa. Later on political parties like the African National Congress, Pan-Africanist Congress, and the Inkatha Freedom Party put up stiff resistance against apartheid and played a significant role in creating global awareness about the evils of apartheid. Every organisation from the grass-roots level chipped in by joining the nationwide movement against apartheid. The Black Consciousness Movement (1969) was one of the significant ones which left its mark on the struggle against racism. It evolved from the activism of the South African Students Organisation (SASO), led by its Founder Stephen Biko who was a medical student in Durban. Biko brings to the fore the core ideals of Black Consciousness movement in the following words:

> Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time. Its essence is the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of oppression-the blackness of their skin-and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. (91-92)

He called upon his fellowmen to accept their identity as black and also be proud of it. According to Biko, it is only through the acceptance of one's identity that one is empowered to fight against the colour bar and injustice of being discriminated. Biko was driven by the idealistic goal of shaping humanity by exorcising the ghost of racism.

The various movements and demonstrations against apartheid finally bore fruit. With outrage pouring in from different corners of the world against the inhuman practice of racism, coupled with stiff resistance from within, the apartheid legislation was finally abolished in 1991. It also paved the way for liberation of South Africa in the year 1994 wherein the era of apartheid came to a grinding halt.

2.3 Gordimer's Depiction of Apartheid and Racism in Her Fiction

Gordimer has been labelled as a prominent 'white' writer in South Africa by the critical establishment. Her fiction is mainly located in the apartheid era. She was a witness to the mayhem committed in the name of apartheid and as a consequence, the problem of racial discrimination made its presence felt in her fiction too. As a writer, Gordimer could not remain silent in the presence of evil of racism. She confronted it head on, by bringing it to the centre stage of her fiction. Well-known writer Alan Paton states: "Even where the estrangement and alienation is greatest, the fact of race is omnipresent. It is the English novel of South Africa that is therefore nearest and truest to South African life. This I take to be the greatest achievement of our English South African literature; not that it deals with race, but that it deals with life" (qtd. in Camillus, *Decolonising* 120). This statement also holds true of Gordimer's fiction which possesses rare sophistication and inimitable articulation. Gordimer's fiction celebrates humanism and denounces the suffering of people and nation caused due to

racist ideology. Her keen sense of observation made her realise that people were treated differently in South Africa and that the blacks were considered unequal to the whites. Her insights into the problems in South Africa came from her acute power of observation. Therefore, her fiction is characterised by brute honesty and bold depiction of characters and situations. Gordimer succinctly sums up her awakening into the world of racial discrimination in the following words:

> But because I was a writer – for it's an early state of being, before a word has been written, not an attribute of being published – I became witness to the unspoken in my society. Very young I entered a dialogue with myself about what was around me; and this took the form of trying for the meaning in what I saw by transforming this into stories based on what were everyday incidents of ordinary life for everyone around me: the sacking of the backyard room of a black servant by police while the white master and mistress of the house looked on unconcerned; later, in my adolescence during the '39-45' War, when I was an aide at a gold mine casualty station, being told by the white intern who was suturing a black miner's gaping head-wound without anaesthetic: 'They don't feel like we do'. ("Witness")

Gordimer lived in Sophiatown for some time during her stint at the university. Living amongst the blacks helped her to understand them and their struggle for liberation. She also became painfully aware as to how the policies of the government based mainly on apartheid put them through unbearable suffering. Examining the impact of living in an apartheid state on Gordimer, Judie Newman observes:

> Despite an implicitly aesthetic creed, Gordimer recognised in 1965 that apartheid has been the crucial experience of her life. In this connection two of

her often reiterated statements speak for themselves: 'If you write honestly about life in South Africa, apartheid damns itself.' 'People like myself have two births, and the second one comes when you break out of the colour bar.'(15)

Though Gordimer had to live through the agony of witnessing the disturbing consequences of apartheid policies on the people, she was also fortunate enough to witness its demise in South Africa during her lifetime. Gordimer being a white author of Jewish origin could have chosen the safe and neutral path that majority of the whites had taken in South Africa. But she did not. Gordimer summarizes the attitude of the whites sarcastically, "We actually *see* blacks differently, which includes *not* seeing" ("Living" 21).

Further, she was not content to be a white bystander and watch the inhuman treatment meted out to the blacks. Her commitment was demonstrated not just through her writings alone, but also through her acts. Therefore she became an activist and supported the blacks in their struggle for liberation. She was courageous enough to shelter many of the leaders of the ANC and also helped them to escape due to which she incurred the wrath of the government for doing so. Hence, Gordimer was different from other white writers in South Africa. Gordimer succinctly declares that she has,

"…no religion, no political dogma—only plenty of doubts about everything except my conviction that the colour bar is wrong and utterly indefensible. Thus I have found the basis of a moral code that is valid for me. Reason and emotion meet in it and perhaps this is as near to faith as I shall ever get."
(Bazin and Seymour, *Conversations* 34-35)

> Her greatest conviction lay in the truth that racism was evil and deserved to be eradicated for the good of humanity.

Albert Memmi differentiates between two types of colonizers saying that while some conformed to the colonial rule, some others refused to be a part of the establishment and rebelled. He opines, "To refuse means either withdrawing physically from those conditions or remaining to fight and change them" (*Coloniser* 63). Gordimer chose to stay without going into exile and fight against the injustice meted out to the blacks through her writings. Despite facing hostility from the government and several of her works being banned she chose not to quit her mission. She firmly believed that, "the writer is also a human being, a citizen, with certain responsibilities towards the society that he or she lives in" (Bazin and Seymour, *Conversations*76-7). Lewis Nkosi while praising Gordimer's commitment states that "Gordimer, Paton, Jacobson, Breytenbach, are also the ones who remind the white public more frequently of the 'many things' to which the white public has closed its mind" (*Tasks* 77).

The inhuman policy of apartheid and the repressive measures adopted to keep the blacks as slaves were the recurring subjects of fiction produced in South Africa during this period by writers such as Alan Paton, Alex La Guma, J. M Coetzee, Lewis Nkosi, Njabulo Ndebele, Bessie Head, Andre Brink and Gordimer. Gordimer's writing was greatly devoted to bringing out the horrors of apartheid. Speaking on the predicament of writers in South Africa, Gordimer says, "…an extraordinary and terrifying intimacy exists between the writer and reader in South Africa. They walk hand in hand through the dark house scarcely knowing what they may discover together about their way of life" ("The Novel" 38). She was a writer who believed in transgressing racism through her writings and her acts. In a society marked by

surveillance, Gordimer countered the surveillance by highlighting the inhuman acts of the white government and the cruel manifestations of apartheid.

Dorothy Driver alludes to the terminology of 'one-eyed literature' which was coined by T.T. Moyana and says that it was precisely such kind of literature that Gordimer aspired to escape from. 'One-eyed literature' subscribed to the views of the world with a racial perspective which Gordimer despised (29-54). In her fiction there is a self-conscious effort to integrate the blacks into the lives of the whites in South Africa. The black boy Baasie for instance, is a part of Burger's household and is referred to as 'black brother' by Rosa in *Burger's Daughter*. In the novel *Occasion for Loving*, the Stilwells are very friendly with the blacks and appreciate their unique and rich heritage. Their guests Boaz and Ann are seen to be appreciative of the blacks and Ann ends up having an affair with the black artist Gideon which the laws explicitly forbade. Further, the novel *July's People* moves a step ahead and portrays the black servant July rising above prejudices and giving shelter to his white masters during the period of insurgency. Miscegenation is common amongst the black and white characters of her fiction. Many characters in her fiction defy the laws of the government and are bold in their actions. The whites are portrayed as liberal in their views and attitude towards the blacks and even extend a helping hand in their fight for liberation. Unsurprisingly, the white government reacted aggressively by banning those novels which portrayed fearlessly such acts of transgression.

Gordimer wrote her first novel *The Lying Days* in 1953 foregrounding the issue of race at the backdrop of South Africa. This novel was the first indication of the kind of literature that Gordimer would churn out in the coming years. The novels and short stories which followed had an echo of this theme. She even depicted the toppling of the white government and the nation being reverted to the blacks in her novels like

July's People and *The Conservationist*. A free and democratic South Africa was what she aspired for—free from the clutches of white rule and apartheid.

Gordimer's *Occasion for Loving* and *Burger's Daughter* are the two major novels taken up for study in this chapter together with three short stories—"Six Feet of the Country", "beethoven was one sixteenth-black" and "What Were you Dreaming?" Both the novels provide deep insights into the problem of racism in South Africa. They reveal as to how apartheid was practised by the white government under various guises. The novels also hold a mirror to the liberal humanist views of Gordimer who acknowledged and cherished the equality as well as diversity of mankind. These novels also shockingly unravel the ways in which institutional racism came to the fore in South Africa and the manner in which the blacks offered resistance to racial laws. They make the reader sit up and take notice as to how a system of codified laws can strip a section of humanity of their rights and dignity and put an end to our belief in innate goodness of man.

However, some critics have questioned the legitimacy of attempt made by white writers regarding their representation of blacks. For instance, Uma Gowrishankar argues that it is impossible for white writers in South Africa to present the complete truth since their consciousness has already been shaped and influenced by colonial ideologies. She says:

> Novel in South Africa could present only half truths and half visions. The divided racist society possessed amputated consciousness. The racist state, by raising walls between the races, succeeded in withholding a comprehensive knowledge of the experiences of the people across the colour line. So the Other became a region that was not fully represented because no amount of

> imagination could fully penetrate it. Since people lived with partial truths, novels, with their absences and silences that could not be filled in, existed as amputated narratives. (36)

Of course, what Uma Gowrishankar posits, is true of all writers across all ages and nations. No writer is able to represent his or her "Other" with conviction and authenticity. Therefore, it is logically acceptable that the white writers are unable to provide a comprehensive view of the 'lived experience' of the blacks. In fact, any issue that a writer deals with, will always be represented according to his or her point of view. Hence, all novels invariably end up as 'amputated' narratives. It is not exclusive to the novels of South Africa and white authors alone. Nevertheless, as far as Gordimer is concerned, her total involvement as a writer committed to the cause of upliftment of blacks and their liberation cannot be completely glossed over. Her fiction is not merely an aesthetic artefact alone. It is in fact a crusade to obtain justice for the blacks and erase the colour line as a whole.

Occasion for Loving is one of Gordimer's major works which takes the reader on a journey through the intricacies of living in an era of apartheid. Moreover, it also exposes the hidden political agenda of the white government to keep the blacks subjugated and powerless. At the beginning of the novel, the family of the Stilwells are seen to be leading a peaceful life in South Africa. Jessie Stilwell works as a secretary to an Association of African musicians and entertainers and does not believe in racial discrimination or in aping European lifestyles. Hence her home has "curtains made of …mammy cloth from West Africa or a …wooden bowl from Swaziland, or a clay pot" (*OL* 8). Her husband Tom Stilwell is a lecturer in history who "…hoped to write–a history of the African subcontinent that would present the Africans as peoples invaded by the white West, rather than as another kind of fauna dealt with by the white

man in his exploration of the world" (9-10). He aims at studying the impact of colonialism that has disrupted the lives of the blacks in South Africa. His views are not racist and he respects the blacks and exhibits liberal attitude.

Before long, their life is disrupted by the arrival of Tom Stilwell's friend Boaz Davis and his beautiful young wife Ann Davis. Boaz is a musicologist who left South Africa ten years ago to obtain training in order to become a composer. He returns because "…Africa could give him what Europe could'nt—a first-hand study of primitive music and primitive instruments" (9). He believes that Europe inhabited by the white race is inauthentic despite being technologically advanced whereas Africa is uncontaminated and pure as exemplified by its pristine and simple music. Boaz, like Tom, is sensitive to the disruption caused by colonisation and is sympathetic towards the blacks. They are a refreshing contrast to the stereotypical whites who shun the blacks and exploit them. On an occasion Ann and Boaz accompany the Stilwells to a mine dance. Mine dances were a weekly ritual in the goldmines of South Africa and were enjoyed by many visitors. This weekly dance ritual was " Touted by the mine owners as a beneficial form of leisure for miners, while also reinforcing the powerful ethnic affiliation and identification designed to keep the diverse migrant workforce divided" ("Photos"). When the Stilwells watch the dance of the natives along with Ann and David Boaz, they are saddened by the lack of originality and beauty in them. They are painfully aware of their role as whites and their contribution to the ruin of the African culture. Even though the native dancers entertained them with their deft manoeuvres, they felt that it was not the real thing nor was the dance spontaneous. The dance according to Boaz was usually part of elaborate ceremonies but here it was in a fragmented state and Tom feels that it is "lifted out of its context" (34). The dance "…meant nothing. There was no death in it; no joy. No war, and no harvest…and it

had no meaning. The watchers had never danced, the dancers had forgotten why they danced. They mummed an ugly splendid savagery, a broken ethos well lost;…"(36). The rich African culture had dances for various occasions which were simply unique. It brought the people together during joys and sorrows and bound them together. The dances were originally not meant to entertain but signified the arrival of key events of their lives and tradition. But in the wake of colonisation, the whites viewed the dance rituals as primitive and unsophisticated heritage of the blacks. At the same time, they found it highly entertaining to watch and hence commercialized it. Most often, ridicule replaced appreciation and hence the dance rituals lost their significance and meaning. Lewis Nkosi sums up the degradation of African culture caused by colonisation in these words: "First there has been a change in the social organisation which has resulted in more emphasis being placed on the individual rather than the communal. Hence the art of communal celebration is being replaced by lonely artistic creation—by an individual vision, so to speak" (Nkosi, *Home* 104). Boaz too is saddened by the fact that the dance forms were changed to please the audience and were now organised for the white people for their entertainment. When he asks Jessie for her opinion regarding the manner in which the mine dances had taken a turn, she brushes it off by saying, "I don't know. You know, the mine boys were not human to me. -Like a cage full of coloured parrots, screeching at the zoo" (*OL*34). As a child, Jessie lived by the racial beliefs in terms of which she was indoctrinated and therefore she feared the blacks as they were projected to be dangerous and barely human. Jessie's psyche is embedded with racial stereotypes which have been infused into her by the white society. She displays the attitude of racial superiority by looking down upon them and refers to them as "coloured parrots screeching." She fails to understand their language or even connect with them remotely in any possible manner. During her childhood,

Jessie had black servants around her house who did chores like rubbing the floors, mowing the lawn or moving the furniture. But what was imprinted on the innocent mind by the adults was that the blacks were to be feared and kept away. She admits that what she often heard about was of, "The black man that I must never be left alone with in the house" (290). Her fears therefore revolved around a black man coming up behind her as she washed her face in the bathroom. The black man was projected as a brute who waited for a chance to sexually exploit white women. This sexual stereotyping of black men was passed on by the whites to the other members of their society. The stereotyping of the blacks is busted by Gordimer who argues that the whites also fantasized about the 'Other'. For instance, Jessie confesses that the very first man of her sexual fantasies was unbelievably a black man. Anoop Nayak in his essay 'White Lives' speaks of this sexual attraction for the 'Other':

> …the Other may return to 'trouble' the subject in unconscious fantasies and unspoken desires. As an act of projection racialization involves spinning a psychic web of sensation—fear, envy, and desire—intricately woven across, and thereby binding, the bodies of racialized Others in a silvery thread of white anxiety. (147-148)

There exists a relationship of attraction and repulsion amongst people of different races. The whites too seem to have unspoken desires and fantasies regarding the opposite race. This complex and problematic relationship is convincingly articulated in the novel through the white characters like Jessie and Boaz.

Jessie grows up into a mature human being and shakes off the image that she had of the blacks during her childhood. She understands them and accepts them for what they are –unique in their own way like the members of the white race. She is now

deeply empathetic and is pained by the loss of the glorious culture and traditions of the blacks as she watches them dance. Her sadness is expressed thus:

> …unspeakable sadness came to Jessie, her body trembled with pain. They sang and danced and trampled the past under their feet. Gone, and one must not wish it back. But gone… The crazed Lear of old Africa rushed to and fro on the tarred arena, and the people clapped. She was clapping, too-her hands were stinging –and her eyes, behind the sunglasses, were filled with heavy, cold tears…They were not tears of sentiment. They came from horror and hollowness. (*OL* 37)

Jessie realizes the impact of colonisation on the natives of South Africa and how the colonisers were responsible for destroying their rich heritage. She is guilt-ridden and hence is moved to tears and suffers great anguish. She also understands the pain of the dancers who put up the show for the benefit of whites. She summarises her response in the following words: "They sang and danced and trampled the past under their feet" (37). Their routine rhythms had lost their sheen and the dances reflected the emptiness that had replaced their meaningful past. The glorious culture of the blacks had met its demise due to subjugation by the whites. More importantly, through the denigration of African culture, the white man enables himself to justify and uphold the superiority of his own culture. Paradoxically, he cannot establish his superior identity without degrading the other. Edward Said effectively puts across the ambivalence built into identity formation during colonisation in the following words:

> "…psychoanalytic studies of race indicate that the process of racialization effects not only those who are subjected to the exigencies of its power but also those who are implicated in the racializing of Others. This process of

> displacement not only constitutes the identity of the Other but also becomes a means of producing one's own identity in relation to these imaginary Others. (qtd. in *Racialization* 147-48)

Gordimer's fictional corpus as a whole demonstrates this ambivalence built into identity formation of the whites as explicated by Said. But the same ambivalence could also give space for transformation and change. Thus, Jessie whose white identity was structured vis-à-vis the black 'Other,' is now able to liberate herself through introspection and rigorous self-examination. Gradually, she acts like the conscience of the white liberals who tend to disapprove of the subjugation of the blacks. Through her liberal views, she tries to establish an identity which differs from that of the brute and merciless whites who are all out to make the blacks suffer in order to achieve their own gains. Jessie, however, seems to echo Gordimer's concern of being a white who unwillingly participates in the process of colonising the blacks and consciously wants to put an end to it.

As the story progresses, Jessie also happens to lay her hands on a novel when on a holiday and summarises her response in the following words: "A novel by a West Indian writer was fine, too; she liked to read about these negroes whose way of life had a familiarity but brought none of the pain with which she was indicted and identified when she read the novels about home" (*OL* 224). Her sense of guilt and pain continues to prevail over every moment of her life and keeps her unhappy and restless as she is unable to flush it out of her psyche.

The thread of racial discrimination continues to run across the novel through various episodes involving different characters. For instance, Tom Stilwell, a professor at the University talks about the Bill that would be presented in the Parliament for

debate wherein the University would be closed to all but the white students. In 1959 the government brought into existence the Extension of University Education Act which specified that the criteria for admission of blacks to the predominantly white universities would be based only on the recommendation of a cabinet minister. The larger plan was to confine the blacks to their homelands and preserve the rule of the minority white government. Through this episode Gordimer has woven into the fabric of her novel the harsh realities of institutional racism. In another episode, Tom enlightens Jessie about the "loyalty" clause which was to be inserted in qualifications for the appointment of staff. He also quotes a student who once openly stated that African and Indian students had never been allowed to take part in sports or social events and that the term 'open university' meant "…accepting the meaner and uglier evasions by which the colour-bar protected itself" (69). The racist white government believed that the blacks were neither capable of attaining higher education nor did they deserve it. The novel employs multiple voices thereby bringing home the seriousness of the problem of apartheid in the novel. The strong voices of black characters in the novel refuse to get muted and they battle out their views with white characters.

The narrative takes a new twist with the introduction of an art teacher, a black named Gideon Shibalo. He is not a stranger to the grand apartheid saga of his country. Gideon says that, "He has never sat in school beside white children or in a bus-stop among white men or women or shared with them any of the other commonplaces of life…" (134).The first time he is invited to a white artist's house to stay the night, ends in disaster. There ensues a noisy quarrel between the white couple as his wife does not brook the idea of having a black man as a guest in her house. This does not dampen Gideon's spirits as bad experiences are balanced by kind acts from the liberal whites. Hence, he is open to friendships across the colour bar if the whites so desired it. Ann

and Boaz meet Gideon and their acquaintance turns into friendship. Gideon is an educated and intelligent black who stands above the rest of his black brothers. He is one of the talented and extraordinary blacks whose paintings were appreciated overseas and he had even won a scholarship to work in Italy. However, his dreams are destroyed as he is not issued a passport by the government. The superiority of the black artist over the whites is unthinkable for them and hence cannot be accepted. Their excuse for denying him a passport is that he is actively involved with the African National Congress which ultimately leaves him deeply disillusioned.

Gradually, similar interests bring Gideon and Ann together. Ann starts moving around with Gideon as she and Len are invited to take their art exhibition to African, Indian and Coloured high schools. Apartheid had compartmentalized education too thus creating separate schools for the students based on their colour and race. Despite the colour bar, very soon their friendship blossoms into a sexual relationship which is strictly forbidden in South Africa. Ann is a balanced woman who knows exactly what she is getting into. The relationship with the black man was her choice. “She was not a woman who could not find a white man, nor was she one of the nuts, hankering for a black man as a shameful sexual aberration” (103). Ann and Gideon Shibalo enjoy each other’s company and frequent boxing matches together. Gradually, Ann realizes that she can make subtle use of her gifts of beauty. “It was a new and amusing variation of their employment to show other men, simply by a companionable silence with Shibalo over a cup of coffee, that she could ignore them for a black man, if she pleased, in addition to all the other incalculables the hazard of her desirableness contained” (114).

Though Ann does not seem to be racially biased towards the blacks and unhesitatingly enters into a relationship with Gideon Shibalo, it appears that she is not totally free from racial prejudices. She sometimes uses Gideon, a black, just to make

other white males jealous. Ann's behaviour proves that she is conscious of the impact of choosing a black man over a white particularly on her close acquaintances among the members of white community. Besides, it demonstrates that the concept of race was deeply entrenched in the collective subconscious of the white community and manifested itself in various ways. Ann is representative of the whites in South Africa who use the blacks as pawns to achieve their goals and aspirations.

The blossoming affair of Gideon and Ann leads to Ann being the main subject of his nude paintings. When Jessie visits his flat she finds many painted canvasses and is surprised to note that in several of the paintings Ann is black. Gideon is under the impression that Ann has become the part of his world as they are in a relationship. One has to note that by portraying Gideon as a gentle and nuanced character, Gordimer has broken the stereotype of 'animal-like sexuality' of black man in this novel. Instead of Gideon hankering after Ann, a reversal is seen in the form of Ann aspiring to get into a relationship with him. There is no coercion either and Ann willingly gets into a sexual relationship with Gideon.

Further, Gideon is able to appreciate Ann's beauty premised on his vision of a perfect woman. This perfect woman that Gideon visualises takes on a black hue. He is unable to overcome the strong influence of aesthetic norms ingrained in him by his black culture and therefore, invariably ends up painting her as a black woman. This behaviour of Gideon succeeds in debunking the myth associated with black men who have been projected as uncivilised brutes lusting after white women due to their glowing skin colour.

E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* also projects the white woman as an object of desire. Dr Aziz, a respected physician is accused of molesting Miss Quested, a

white woman and is imprisoned although he is innocent. The community of the whites mobilize their support to Miss Quested as they strongly believe that the natives lust after white women. Though Dr Aziz is a married man with kids and a respected member of the society, he is unable to escape from the stereotypes associated with the natives in India.

Gordimer has been able to visualize the discourse of race from the point of view of both—the blacks and the whites. It is easy for her to visualize the discourse of race from the point of whites as she herself is one. But her mastery over psyche of both is revealed when she looks at the whites from Gideon's perspective. Gideon does not find all white women attractive or beautiful. He does not possess a hounding desire to have relationships with white women as usually portrayed by the whites. In fact, Gideon is not a novice when it comes to relationships with the white women. He has had several sexual encounters with white women before which he describes as "…short-lived, and like dreams, never emerged into the light of day" (135). It was always the white women who extended a hand of friendship to Gideon rather than him hankering after them. Gideon emphatically states that, "Every contact with whites was touched with intimacy, for even the most casual belonged by definition to the conspiracy against keeping apart" (134). The white skin is not a source of attraction for him but he does not detest it either.

One of the white women with whom Gideon had relationship is a Scotswoman named Callie Snow. She is an organiser and campaigner for civil rights in South Africa and had even been imprisoned briefly for her participation in an agitation against the government. She is described as a woman with a fair skin and hair "…that might have been blonde or already white…" (135). Snow's fair skin appears to be pale to Gideon while her hair reminds him of old women of his own community. He is

unmindful of whether Callie has blonde or white hair and fails to distinguish between them. In the white discourse, fair skin and blond hair are seen as signs of beauty but the same characteristics fail to impress Gideon. Gideon's perception again seems to be prejudiced as he fails to see Callie's beauty as she belongs to a different race. He has a tongue-in-cheek attitude when he expresses his opinion regarding her as, "She could have been any age; his grandmother, for all he knew; an Englishwoman with a skin like that, and blue eyes and no lipstick, might turn out to be anywhere between twenty-five and fifty" (135). With these examples, Gordimer reiterates the truth that the idea of beauty is not universal; rather it is anchored in one's own culture. She is intent on demolishing the myth of black man finding white women attractive and perpetually fantasizing about raping them.

An incident symbolising the general marginalisation of the blacks takes place when some white friends take Gideon to a night club with them which is prohibited by law. When the manager of the club realizes that his customers have brought in a black, he is very much annoyed. "The man's eyes were dead with rage against these arrogant young fools who pretended not to know the vast difference between natives employed to serve or entertain and some educated black bastard sitting himself down like one of themselves, among the members" (155). The bar had dancers and waiters who were blacks and were allowed entry because they were expected to serve the whites. For a white man blinded by the superiority of his own race, Gideon belonging to the elite circle of reputed artists did not matter due to his different skin colour. He refuses to acknowledge Gideon's education and talent focusing primarily on his race and colour.

Patrick Wilmot in *Apartheid and African Liberation: The Grief and the Hope* elaborates on the various modes of discrimination built into apartheid: "Apartheid signifies many things to many people, to some, an object of blind outrage, to others a

system of economic exploitation, to some—a system of racial segregation, to others a political organisation of a European minority to deny the liberty, rights and dignity of the African majority (xi).

Gideon, however, is not intimidated by the racist policies of the white government and refuses to disassociate himself with the whites. Not only does he mingle with the whites but also considers himself as their equal. The same is not true of the whites who are unable to do so since they are habituated to denigrating blacks. Gideon is definitely not some 'Black bastard' (*OL* 190) sitting amongst the whites. He had, as an artist competed against the best white artists and had won a scholarship to go to Italy. Though the white government had denied him a passport, he was held in high esteem as an artist by being viewed as "…the one who was supposed to go to Rome" (141). Gideon feels that it would not matter if he never painted again as he has proved his talent by getting noticed overseas as an artist, his racial identity as a black man notwithstanding.

The racial laws even encroached upon love and relationships in the world of blacks and whites in South Africa. In this surveillance society, law prevails over love and other human emotions. Yet, Ann believes in her personal freedom and unhesitatingly tells her husband Boaz about her relationship with Gideon. She is very casual about the relationship and does not pepper her talk with words like love. According to Ann, "It's just one of these things that happen. Before you realise it…" (*OL*160). Surprisingly, Boaz does not object as he finds comfort in the belief that sheer physical attraction drew Gideon and Ann together. Boaz probably understands his wife Ann's desires and empathizes with her since he is also attracted towards black women. Jessie finds another reason for Boaz tolerating Gideon because "Boaz wants to treat

Gideon like any other man, but he can't because Gideon isn't a man, won't be, can't be, until he's free" (312).

Boaz, being one of the colonisers seems to be ridden with guilt for the plight of blacks in South Africa. Perhaps, his acceptance of Jessie's affair with Gideon is a symbolic act of appeasing his guilty conscience. Jessie, on the other hand feels that Boaz would not have been so tolerant if Ann had to have an affair with a white man. Boaz just feels that Ann's behaviour is equivalent to a child picking daisies as she admits that she does not know what it is all about. He chides her saying, "…You don't tell me it's because he talks to you, or because you admire him, or because he's great in bed, or because you wanted to try a black man-" (160). According to the Stilwells, Boaz' liberal attitude stems from the fact that "…he was once keen on a black girl, he's slept with black women…And Boaz cannot kick a black man in the backside" (179). Nevertheless, whenever Boaz gets drunk he would invariably address Gideon Shibalo as 'Black bastard' (190). Speaking in a drunken state signified what was hidden in the deepest recesses of his mind regarding the blacks. It tore away the veil of deception that sophistication and manners of a white society hid.

Despite his hidden prejudices, Boaz continues to be friendly to Gideon Shibalo thus exhibiting his liberal views. Once, they enter into a discussion regarding the musical instruments of Africa. Boaz is keen on preserving the musical instruments. He questions Gideon, "Once an African acquires all that the white civilisations have learnt about music, can he make use of a tradition that had not reached the same culmination, and perhaps was reaching in another direction?" (171). Boaz is convinced that if an African is taught the fundamentals of western music, he could use it for the advancement of African music. When Boaz speaks of 'all that the white civilisations have learnt of music', he implies that African music has not realised its full potential

like western music and is still primitive. So, according to him western music is the touchstone against which African music can be gauged. Commenting on this attitude of 'cultural privileging of whiteness', Traci C. West writes:

> The white supremacy includes the institutionalized dominant political, cultural and economic power of the white people, as also their disproportionate access to status through the cultural privileging of whiteness. White supremacy incorporates the notion that any one deemed to be white, usually a person of European descent, has worth and value which is inherently superior to that of the people in the society who are not considered to be white.(5)

Though Boaz does not believe in racialism, it exists in his subconscious mind as a result of which he contrasts the sophistication of drums and xylophones against the African talking drums and ox-horn covered with python skin and strung with monkey guts. Gideon however, does not accept Boaz' point of view and argues:

> The whites took away the African past; once we accepted the present from them that was that …. When we accepted the white man's present, of industrialisation and mechanised living, we took on his future at the same time- I mean, we began to go wherever it is he's going. And our past has no continuation with this. So it is lost….You can't share their past; that's why we haven't got one. (*OL* 171)

Gideon makes it very clear that the colonisers destroyed the culture and traditions of Africa which had its own beauty and magnificence. As he sees it, Africa lost its rich heritage and soul when it was dragged into the whirlpool of industrialisation and crass materialism by her colonial masters. He clearly outlines the difference in their races and cultures by saying that their pasts were so different from

each other that they could never be shared or compared. The discussion between Gideon and Boaz has its impact on the surrounding group which includes Ann. A possessive pride overtakes Ann and she becomes aware of the fact that, "Gideon became a black man to her; the black man that everyone pushed away, and that she, she, put her hand out and touched" (172). So, Ann's attraction to Gideon has multiple dimensions. She has accepted him because with this act she wants to assert her autonomy and freedom of action as a woman. More importantly, it is a significant gesture of benevolence towards her black 'other'. She has embraced a black whom everyone has shunned and has thus 'touched' his life in her own way. She never cares to think whether this act was needed by Gideon and if he feels ennobled by his association with the white woman. It is a foregone racialist conclusion that the blacks always covet white women and that they are ever so grateful for the kindness shown to them by the whites.

As the novel progresses, Ann starts spending more time with him and develops a desire to be with him forever. This desire to be in Gideon's company is enhanced probably due to Boaz's long disappearances in his quest for African music. She runs away to escape from the glare of society and keeps changing locations. She finally ends up where Jessie is holidaying with her kids at Isendhla. However, she cannot escape from the focus of the society of whites which constantly places her relationship with Gideon under scrutiny. Boaz worries that Ann may get picked up by the police for having an affair with a black man. He knew very well that:

> A line in a statute book has more authority than the claims of one man's love or another's….takes no account of humanness, that recognises neither love nor respect nor jealousy nor rivalry nor compassion nor hate—nor any human attitude whatever where there are black and white together…all this that was

real and rooted in life was void before the clumsy words that reduced the delicacy and towering complexity of living to a race theory. (246)

The Mixed Marriages Act and similar laws were executed to prevent miscegenation. The transgressors of law were severely punished so that it could act as a deterrent to law breakers. The whites were ever vigilant and reported immediately when the law was broken. Hence, Boaz constantly fears for his wife for having entered into a forbidden territory.

Again, the hypocrisy of the colonial whites is seen in their sexual transgressions with the black women. Boaz for instance, never hesitates to sleep around with black women and exploit them like the other colonisers without drawing attention upon himself. In contrast, Ann's association with a black man immediately becomes the subject of serious gossip. Exploitation of the black women by the colonisers was an accepted reality. The colonisers considered it as a matter of right but these liaisons too were secretive in nature.

Both Gideon and Ann are deliriously happy in their nomadic state. Gideon especially basks in the feeling that she loves and adores him. In this state of bliss he feels that he is no longer the vanquished. No longer is he afraid of the colour barriers that existed or law which forbade such unions. "The black warrior and the white man's derision of him; the savage ruined past and the conqueror's mockery of it; both were dead and he suffered from neither" (283). Such is the delusion that Gideon possesses and he thinks he has broken down the barriers of race.

However, during the course of their travel, they confront frequent episodes of racial discrimination. To give an example, at a garage where they stop Ann orders for a full meal which is promptly delivered to her. But the garage owner feels that it is a

needless expenditure incurred on her part to provide the same to the black man travelling along with her as he could have been given something by the petrol attendant working in the garage. Throughout the novel, Gordimer depicts many such discriminatory episodes with remarkable sensitivity. There is another incident related to Jessie who is holidaying with her kids in a beach town. She goes to a store. The white customers at the store are unhappy about the blacks who are seen on the beaches along with the whites. Their discussion moves in the direction of setting up separate spaces for the blacks. A customer named Mrs Gidley speaks to the assistant who claims that the "…whole beach is full of them" (295). Mrs Gidley subtly remarks: "There has been a suggestion that a part of the beach ought to be set aside for them… but of course, once you make it official, you'll get them coming from other places, and the Indians, too…" (295).The assistant continues the thread of conversation blaming the servants who come for a holiday along with the white households. She disapproves of the black servants having bathing suits "... just like white people". The cultural transformation of the blacks is not looked upon kindly by the whites who expect the blacks to retain their servile and subservient black identity. Mrs Gidley looks down upon them saying, " We get them in here, let me tell you, quite the grand ladies and gentlemen they think they are, talking to you as if they was [sic] white" (295). The whining continues as more people join in to complain about the blacks. A white lady is uncomfortable because the natives are not only dressed in trunks but also stare at her. Another customer at the store grumbles that the blacks are undressing all over, behind the bushes.

The psyche of the liberal whites is unravelled in a conversation between Jessie and Tom. They discuss the colour bar that prevails in South Africa. Jessie states:

> …We don't see black and white and so we all think we behave as decently to one colour face as another. But how can that ever be, so long as there's the possibility that you can escape back into your filthy damn whiteness? How do you know that you will always play fair? There's Boaz –he's so afraid of taking advantage of Gideon's skin that he ends up taking advantage of it anyway by refusing to treat him like any other man. (312)

The invisible power of whiteness into which a white individual can escape into is the focal point of discussion here. There is a possibility that white liberals may not always be fair to the blacks. When such instances occurred, the whites could always seek the asylum of the invisible power of being a white that accounted for special privileges.

The novel comes to an end with Gideon being deprived of his passport. He is unable to travel to England with Ann as he has no passport. Hence, he plans to go to Tanganyika and wait there for Ann. The Stilwells feel sorry for Gideon's plight. Tom sadly avers, "First he couldn't get out on his scholarship because he's black, now he can't stay because she's white. What's the good of us to him? What's the good of our friendship or her love?" (313) But Gideon is oblivious to all issues around him and is seen to be secure and sure of Ann's love for him. He feels that, "She loved him; she did not love him *across* the *colour-bar*: for her the colour-bar did not exist" (309). But there is a sudden twist to the story as Ann rethinks on the issue, finds no future with Gideon and suddenly leaves the country along with her husband Boaz. They do not inform Gideon at all about their departure. He is shocked by this betrayal of Ann and gives up his job and becomes a disillusioned drunken lout. He comes to the conclusion that all whites possess the same racialist attitude and is now sceptical of the self- styled white liberals. When Jessie meets him again, he seems to be much battered and in a

drunken state mumbles, “White bitch--get away” (331).Tom is aware that Gideon has no option but to adapt to the situation. Tom looks at Gideon and assures Jessie, “He’ll be all right. He’ll go back and fight; there’s nothing else” (331). Tom’s statement is very casual and he pretends not to notice Gideon’s pain. He thinks that Gideon’s new-found hatred for the whites will make him join the Liberation Movement with renewed vigour as he has nothing to look forward to in the wake of Ann’s betrayal. Gideon is scarred forever by the abandonment. Love does not survive the racial barriers and the domination of the white race continues to inflict its wounds on the colonised blacks. And therefore the novel ends with Jessie having a guilty frame of mind. She is restless in the knowledge that she has also been a party to the betrayal and has caused immense pain to Gideon. The policy of apartheid had already caused great anguish and suffering to the blacks in South Africa and she being a white had to share the blame. The racial system could not be subverted by the liaison of Gideon and Ann. Hence, according to Jessie, “So long as Gideon did not remember, Jessie could not forget” (332).

The ugly monster of racism destroyed South Africa in many ways and annihilated its glorious past along with its unique customs and traditions. The colonisers were keen on promoting their own culture in order to make the natives civilised. Amongst the colonisers there existed a small section of liberals who disagreed with the treatment meted out to the blacks and were against the apartheid policies of their own government. They sympathised with the blacks and started working for their liberation. They helped the black leaders of political parties in South Africa to plan strategies to topple the ruling white government. Such liberals were immediately marked as the enemies of the State and were imprisoned or forced into exile.

Burger's Daughter tackles the issue of racism which has penetrated the social fabric of South Africa. The novel is a coded homage to Abram Fischer, commonly known as Bram Fischer who was the defending lawyer for Nelson Mandela at his Rivona Trial in 1963. Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment being convicted of sabotage. As a consequence of appearing on behalf of Mandela, Fischer too was falsely implicated on the charges of furthering communism and was sentenced to life imprisonment. *Burger's Daughter* narrates the lived experience of the family of the Burgers initially and then moves on to focus on the life of Rosa, the daughter of Lionel Burger. The novel opens with the Treason Trial of the Afrikaner activist Lionel Burger. During the trial, Burger attacks the racist policies of the government and adds that the Afrikaners and the white people are hypocrites for they "…worship the God of Justice and practise discrimination on the grounds of the colour of the skin; profess the Compassion of the Son of Man, and deny the humanity of the black people they live among" (*BD*19). Lionel Burger is committed to Marxist ideology and believes in a society where people are equal in terms of rights and opportunities. He has faith in Marxist ideology as he thinks that it is the only solution for the problems of South Africa. He has seen the impact of both regressive feudalism and soulless capitalism on the people of the country. He asserts his point of view stating thus:

> The white man had built a society that tried to contain and justify the contradictions of capitalist means of production and feudalist social forms. The resulting devastation I, a privileged young white, had had before my eyes since my birth. Black men, women and children living in the miseries of insecurity, poverty and degradation on the farms that I grew up, and in the "dark satanic mills" of the industry that bought their labour cheap and disqualified them by

their colour from organising themselves or taking part in the successive governments that decreed their lot as eternal inferiors if not their slaves. (20)

Lionel Burger says that the capitalist system did not bring about progress in a nation ridden with racism. It threw them rather, into a bottomless pit of poverty, insecurity and degradation. Based on the colour of skin, the blacks were made to work on low wages and they were also kept out of administration as they were considered unfit for leadership roles. Burger also speaks of the system of law in South Africa which deprived the blacks of a fair trial in the courtroom. The blacks were only tried by white judges and were looked upon with prejudices which arose out of a racial outlook. He fully realised that the judgements passed by them would never be fair to the blacks. So, standing up at his trial, Burger questions the court asking, "… and to this day, the black men who stand trial in this court as I do must ask themselves: why is it no black man has ever had the right of answering, before a black prosecutor, a black judge, to laws in whose drafting and promulgation his own people, the blacks, have had a say?" (21).The answer to the rhetorical question asked by Lionel Burger is obvious. In a country where institutional forms of racism are scrupulously maintained, there could be no privileges given to the blacks. Power could be retained by the whites only by depriving the vast majority of blacks from obtaining positions of power.

Condemning racism, Lionel Burger defends his actions as an activist and concludes his argument strongly, "My covenant is with the victims of apartheid….this court has found me guilty on all counts. If I have ever been certain of anything in my life, it is that I acted according to my conscience on all counts. I would be guilty only if I were innocent of working to destroy racism in my country" (22). He shows no remorse and is proud of what he has done for the blacks. His conscience is clear and he does not admit to having done anything wrong despite the court holding him guilty.

He categorically declares that his life's mission is to destroy racism in his country. He has seen to it that racism is eliminated at the personal level, with his home being thrown open to the blacks and by involving himself in the Movement to procure justice for the blacks. Sadly, his endeavour to end racism results in his imprisonment and consequent death in prison.

His daughter Rosa too has been sensitized against the practices of racism. She grows up with the blacks all around her in her household. She is taught to treat them with respect. She also shares a room and a bed with her black brother Baasie and is very fond of him. Rosa remembers the time of her childhood when she had gone to stay with her relatives. She comes to know that she has been named after her illustrious grandmother Marie Burger who participated in the mass movement for liberation. Rosa recalls her father mentioning that, "…her [Marie Burger] faith in elemental mass movement was the ideal approach in a country where the mass of people were black and the revolutionary elite disproportionately white" (69). Marie Burger influenced her son Lionel Burger greatly and made him believe in the strength of mass movements to obtain justice. She believed that revolutionary whites should join in the struggle along with the blacks. The disproportionate number of the whites as compared to the blacks did not matter; it would still strengthen the Movement of the blacks.

Rosa continues to analyse the impact of colonisation and the exclusive privileges that it brought to them. Though still a child, Rosa is aware of the unbridgeable gap between the blacks and the whites in South Africa. According to her, the whites were "… secure in the sanctions of family, church, law-and all these contained in the ultimate sanction of colour that was maintained without question on the domain, dorp and farm, where she lay. *Peace. Land. Bread*. These they had for

themselves" (69). The colour bar existed all over the land. Keeping the blacks segregated made the whites secure as they believed that the blacks were not to be trusted. By making sure that the colour bar existed in the society they imposed sanctions against the blacks which ensured peace to them. The land had been taken over by the whites anyway and they had the wealth that was extracted from the exploitation of the land and its people.

Gordimer weaves the issue of racism through the fabric of her novel in a very adept manner. As the story unwinds, she brings in episodes of historical events which took place in South Africa. For instance, there is a reference to the Great Miners' Strike (1946) in the novel which also arose due to racial unrest. "The strike was 76,000 black miners genuine and justifiable protest against exploitation and contemptuous disregard of the needs, as workers and human beings, of the 400,000 black men in the industry" (87). The bosses in the mining industry were only whites whereas the vast labour force comprised of blacks. They were made to work for long hours and were paid low wages. The continuous exploitation of the blacks and the inhuman conditions in which they were made to work with no safety measures in place finally led to the strike which was instantly quelled by the white government. Their pleas went unheard and the exploitation continued. Resistance against inhuman treatment and discrimination had been going on right since the dawn of colonisation and it got intensified particularly during apartheid period. The Fifties were marked by passive resistance campaigns followed by the pass-burnings during the sixties. Other prominent resistance campaigns which made global news were the Sharpeville Massacre and the Soweto uprising. The colonial government tried to put an end to these movements without bothering to understand the reasons behind them. The white

government was only interested in dominating, controlling and exploiting the blacks and it was never their intention to listen to their pleas or demands.

Shockingly, Rosa also reveals that even the Communist Party in 1922 had given a call saying, "Workers of the world unite and fight for a white South Africa" (108). Only in the later twenties it rectified its stance under the influence of Lenin who raised serious questions based on national and colonial equations.

Gordimer uses the technique of flashback to foreground the issue of racism time and again in the novel through various characters. The most important among them are Lionel Burger and his daughter Rosa. Gordimer's novel not only discusses the impact of racism on the society of blacks but also dreams of a future for the blacks where they would oust the whites and regain their rights. The flashback technique employed by Gordimer takes us back to the childhood days of Lionel and Rosa that enables the reader realise the ancestry of racism with its roots deeply buried in the past. One such flashback takes place in the novel when Lionel Burger narrates an incident to Rosa that took place in his childhood. He was just fourteen when he came to a boarding school in Johannesburg. He saw torn-up passbooks in the street after a demonstration and understood that these passbooks were only for the natives and not for people like him. There is a growing awareness about the seriousness of the issue when Lionel Burger gets a chance to fight a war; he finds discriminatory racial practice in the army ranks too. In his ex-servicemen legion, he witnessed white veterans along with "… black orderlies and ambulance men who had risked their lives but not been allowed to bear arms" (112). Lionel Burger now understands that the positions in the army are not given on the basis of merit and ability and that race is the main criterion for selection for the higher posts. The worthy blacks, in their capacity as

orderlies and ambulance men had proved their mettle by risking their lives. Yet, sadly, they had failed to fight as soldiers in the war because of racial factor.

Further, an interesting point of view is provided by Gordimer with respect to the perceptions that the whites have regarding blacks. Rosa muses as to how Marisa Kgosana the wife of an activist might be perceived by the whites. " Marisa is a black; near, then, as well, to the white way of using blackness as a way of perceiving a sensual redemption, as romantics do, or of perceiving fears, as racialists do" (132). Rosa is aware that despite the racist bent of mind that exists amongst the colonisers, they also desire black women to fulfil their sexual fantasies. Sexual liaisons were found in plenty amongst them and many black women were sexually exploited by the colonisers. The whites also subscribed to the view that the black men desired white women and were ready to go to any extent to fulfil their desires. Hence, black men were feared and white women and children were warned against associating with them and were kept away from their glares. "In any case, whites are not allowed to go into black townships without a permit…" (136). The blacks were not allowed to enter white townships without a work permit, and so were the whites. But the truth was that both the laws were formulated to benefit and protect the whites from the blacks and ensure that the whites were safe. Ironically, while the white men and women who found blacks sensual ended up fantasising about them, the conservative white establishment experienced recurring nightmares of marauding black men swarming all over their women.

Drowned in the quagmire of race, the whites failed even to acknowledge the blacks who were educationally qualified. They were judged by their colour alone and treated with contempt and indifference. In the novel, the much desired and sought after black woman Marisa Kgosana is painfully aware of her status in colonised South

Africa. She is forced to accept the reality that the society comprises of white minority dominating the black majority. Therefore the whites would choose to ignore her status and treat her as one of the vast multitude of blacks that inhabits the nation. While shopping at a store, she tells Rosa the reason as to why she prefers to pay in cash for her purchases. She states, " …When you are in a hurry it's best to pay cash…If a black produces a cheque book …I only use mine when I am prepared to hang about while they excuse themselves and take it to a-l-l their managers" (135). Marisa is aware that the blacks are not trusted by the whites in any manner. Though she belongs to an affluent class and is the wife of an activist it fails to have any impact. Having a bank account with sufficient cash has not helped to elevate her status in the society ridden with the scourge of apartheid.

The divide between the blacks and the whites was a clear cut one in South Africa. The blacks were forced to live in areas demarcated for them which were known as locations. These locations had hutments with roofs of tin and the blacks lived in conditions of abject poverty. In contrast, the whites had expansive stretches of land and luxurious homes in their possession. Rosa ruminates on her memories of childhood:

> When I was a child I went in and out of the black townships with my mother so often and naturally that I embarrassed Auntie Velma and Uncle Coen, chattering of this when Tony and I lived with them. How many months since I had crossed the divide that opens every time a black leaves a white and goes to his 'place'; the physical divide of clean streets become rutted roads and city centres become veld dumped with twisted metal and a perpetual autumn of blowing paper…. (147)

Rosa speaks of the 'physical divide' where a clear-cut difference is noticed in the living conditions of the coloniser and the colonised. The filthiness of the place which houses the blacks is revealed in the description "perpetual autumn of blowing paper".

There is also a detailed discussion of pseudo -victory over racialism in the novel. Orde Greer, a communist has a discussion with another member of their group namely Fats. The news of inclusion of blacks in the football team which had earlier comprised only of the whites triggers the discussion. Greer feels that it is not a way of ending racism because" … if next year or the year after white soccer clubs play blacks, and take in black members, the soccer players will shout there is no more racism in sport. But everywhere else in this country the black will still be a black. Whatever else he does he'll get black jobs, black education, black houses" (151). James, another black member of the group declares proudly as to how the members of his community have succeeded in making a name for themselves despite being exploited. He says, "You take our tycoons here in Soweto, how many of them got more than Standard Six? They come from the farms and the locations. Their mothers were servants in the backyard. Grocer-boys, milk-boys, garage-boys—" (157). Nevertheless, despite their appreciation for the achievers hailing from their own community, all the blacks in the room like Dhladhla, James, Fats and their companions feel the humiliation of being discriminated against. James continues berating the whites for their predicament: "- Treated like nothings, living worse than dogs, eating dry mealie-meal, not even shoes for your feet in winter-time…today they've got everything they want, man. Businesses, big cars—" (157). There is a mixture of anger and pride in his remarks which was also reflective of the general sentiment of the blacks during the period of colonisation. On the other hand, Orde Greer who is a committed Marxist looks at

racial issue from the angle of class exploitation and wants to know if there is a class of blacks who are ready to be incorporated into the white ruling class. Dhladhla disagrees and says that it will never happen as they no longer trust the whites. He says that the whites continue to exploit them by turning their own people against them. "Race exploitation with the collaboration of blacks themselves. That is why we don't work with whites. All collaboration with whites has always ended in exploitation of blacks-" (157). Gordimer also brings out the anguish of liberal whites who strive for the cause of liberation of blacks but are distrusted and brushed aside by the blacks. Rosa Burger is present during the discussion and Orde Greer wants to make them understand that all the whites are not against the blacks. He argues that some whites have even gone to jail for the sake of blacks. He also highlights the sacrifice made by Rosa's father—Lionel Burger who died in prison trying to get justice for the blacks. A school master present there asks them as to how many can turn their backs on the whites. James Nyaluza who is part of the group can almost predict their reply:

> But they don't realize the racial exclusiveness of the white ruling class' economic and political power is a primary feature of the set-up. If whites are frightened into taking in some members of the black middle class, this is only going to be in an auxiliary and dependant capacity. There wouldn't be perks of political office. Not even a puppet ministry." (159)

The mistrust of liberal whites—who wish to be a part of the liberation movement of the blacks—runs deep in South Africa. The blacks realise that there will be no respite from the racial exclusiveness and that the help extended by the liberals is not going to change the situation by restoring their freedom.

Dhladhla further argues that the situation is still different for a black man vis-à-vis his white counterpart. He questions, " – And where is he? And where am I? when I go into the café to buy bread they give the kaffir yesterday's stale. When he goes for fruit, the kaffir gets the half-rotten stuff the white won't buy. That is black-" (161-2). Unlike Orde Greer, Dhladhla refuses to accept the view that the capitalist system is responsible for their discrimination. He echoes the fundamental argument of the Black Consciousness Movement. He states that:

> We are educating the black to know he is strong and be proud of it. We are going to get rid of the capitalist and the racist system but not as a 'working class'. That's a white nonsense here. The white workers belong to the exploiting class and take part in the suppression of the blacks. The black man is not fighting for equality with the whites. Blackness is the black man refusing to believe the white man's way of life is the best for blacks. (162)

This was the kind of consciousness kindled in the blacks by Steve Biko, leader of the Black Consciousness Movement. The blacks were made to believe in their uniqueness and strengths and were called upon to be proud of their legacy. As put forth by Biko:

> It becomes more necessary to see the truth as it is if you realise that the only vehicle for change are these people who have lost their personality. The first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. (Cornell and Panfilio 145)

Dhladhla puts up his point of view stating that the working class is not a homogenous group, always being divided into black and white factions. The white workers exploit the blacks by working against them along with their bosses. This leads to inequality amongst the workers and containment of the blacks. The influence of Biko's ideology on Dhladhla is seen when Dhladhla also makes it clear that they are no longer interested in being equal to the whites and that they do not look up to the white man's lifestyle as the ideal one. Rather, they believe that the way of life of the blacks is rich and unique and worthy of being preserved and cherished.

Dhladhla also points out that the blacks have every right to come together just as the whites do. The hypocrisy of the whites is exposed by him.: " White liberals run around telling blacks it's immoral to unite as blacks, we're all human beings, it's just too bad there's white racism, we just need to get together…Whites don't credit us with the intelligence to know what we want! We don't need their solutions" (*BD* 162). He further adds, " – Our liberation cannot be divorced from black consciousness because we cannot be conscious of ourselves and at the same time remain slaves" (163).

At the end of the novel when Orde Greer is put on trial for activities against the white government, a young man observes:

> Apartheid is the dirtiest social swindle the world has ever known—and you want to fight it according to the rules of patriotism and honesty and decency evolved for societies where everyone has something worth protecting from betrayal. These virtues, these precious 'standards' of yours—they're just another swindle, here, don't you see? The blacks haven't been allowed into your schools, your clubs, your army for god's sake, so what do the rules mean?

> Whose rules? You say you're against white supremacy—then you can't confine your conscience to moral finesse only whites can afford. (349)

Gordimer also devotes the last section of the novel to create awareness about the Soweto Massacre which took place on 16 June 1976. When the government imposed an inferior standard of education upon the Bantus, protests erupted all over beginning from Soweto and spread across the country. The pamphlet distributed by the Soweto Students Representative Council is inserted into the novel by Gordimer. This is one of the means by which she reaches out to the readers—highlighting the deaths caused by the uprising and the cruel methods used by the white government to squash it. The pamphlet clearly reveals the motive of the ruling government to discredit the blacks and impede the black students' struggle and achievements. Thus Gordimer makes use of the power of narrative—by cleverly intertwining the real and historical with the imaginary—in order to drive home her consistent adversarial view on the racial discourse which in fact, runs through the entire corpus of her fictional writings as a whole.

The strand of racism runs criss-cross in her short stories too. In the short story 'Six Feet of the Country', Lerice and her husband own a farm. They employ black workers to work on their farm—a practice followed by all land-owning whites in South Africa. They admit that their "relationship with the blacks is almost feudal" (*Life Times* 20). They possess a liberal attitude and live without any tension with their black workers. This is a stark contrast to the attitude of other whites. The following piece of conversation underlines white man's distrust and fear of his back 'other': "When Johannesburg people speak of 'tension''….They mean the guns under the white man's pillows and the burglar bars on the white men's windows. They mean those strange moments on city pavements when a black man won't stand aside for a

white man" (20). The whites live in constant fear of attack by the blacks. They anticipate violence and hence sleep restlessly with guns under their pillows and burglar bars across their windows. Gordimer projects racial tension to be the centre of the problem. The hermeneutics of suspicion of the 'other' built into the racial discourse ultimately results in racial tension. The Manichean divide of white/black, good/ evil, civilised/ uncivilised dominates the racial discourse of the whites. If the whites are virtuous, the blacks must be filled with vices. They define themselves and construct their superior identity in terms of their inferior racial 'other'. In the story, Lerice and her husband behave as feudal lords but with a difference as they are able to treat their black workers in a compassionate manner. One of the black workers on the farm is Petrus. One night Petrus seeks the help of his master as he faces a terrible crisis. Petrus' black brother comes from Rhodesia walking all the way, seeking employment. His entry to the land is illegal and he possesses no papers or work permits. Petrus, naturally being afraid keeps his presence a secret as he could be punished for sheltering his brother. Unfortunately, the long trek from Rhodesia takes its toll on his brother's health and he dies due to pneumonia in Petrus' house. The authorities have to be notified. They conduct post mortem and dispose of the body without informing the family.

In a land colonised by the whites, the blacks sadly lose their dignity and basic human rights. The fact that Petrus' brother's body is not handed over to the family for burial is proof of the arrogant and insensitive behaviour of the whites. The death of a black is trivialised and treated with contempt. Again, in *Burger's Daughter*, Lionel Burger's body was not handed over due to political reasons wherein they deprived him of a decent funeral. But denying access to the body of Petrus' brother is a case of sheer indifference and apathy on the part of the authorities. However, in both cases it leads

to violation of rights and dignity of the individuals. Petrus wants his brother's body back and is asked to pay twenty pounds for it. This instance of demanding money from the family which is steeped in sorrow at the loss of their kin speaks volumes for the autocratic and high-handed behaviour of the colonisers and the manner in which they treated the blacks. Petrus manages to raise the required amount through the contribution made by his black brothers. His old father arrives from Rhodesia for the funeral. They get the body in an enclosed coffin which to the father seems to be unduly heavy. They stop to check and find that the body that lies within is of another black man and not Petrus' brother. The authorities swindled them of their money. Though Lerice and her husband are outraged at the behaviour of the authorities, they are unable to help. Petrus' brother's body becomes untraceable. Finally, feeling sorry for the poor father who had travelled all the way from Rhodesia, Lerice gives him an old coat to protect himself from cold. That was all that they could do. They are helpless in a country where apartheid is the mainstay of policies of the country and life in general. Though the coat protects Petrus' father from cold, it cannot protect him and his family from the cold and inhuman treatment meted out to them by the colonisers. The shocking absence of humanity towards the blacks is seen in the statement, "There are so many black faces-surely one will do. He had no identity in the world anyway" (*LT* 29). Commenting on such a grotesque reality Lewis Gordon posits that "in anti-black societies, to be black is to be without a face" (qtd. in Cornell and Panfilio, *Symbolic Forms*126).

In another classic short story titled 'beethoven was one-sixteenth black' from the collection of stories by the same name, Gordimer portrays a futuristic South Africa dominated by the blacks. The story culminates in the desire of whites to subvert the black-dominated regime. The story became controversial as it depicted a futuristic

utopia wherein the blacks would regain their power in South Africa. The short story is all about politics and power which delves into the psyche of the white coloniser who is desperate to retain power at any cost:

"Once there were blacks wanting to be white

Now there are whites wanting to be black

It's the same secret". (*beethoven* 3)

Frederick Morris, the protagonist of the short story is an academician who teaches biology. He had been an activist during the era of apartheid and had drawn cartoons depicting 'the regime's leaders as ghoulish murderers' and had also joined the protesting groups and pasted the cartoons on the walls of the city. He is a witness to the changing times where the power to rule is reclaimed by the blacks. Morris also begins to understand that the blacks no longer need support of whites like him and that "The past is valid only in relation to whether the present recognises it" (7). Witnessing the changes taking place in South Africa gives Morris great satisfaction as he has been an activist helping the blacks in their struggle for liberation. Through this short story, Gordimer underscores the inevitability of change happening in the course of history and gives hope that anything is possible because " History's never over; any more than biology, functioning within every being" (4).

In her characteristic style, Gordimer makes use of flashback technique to compare and contrast the transformation from the apartheid era to one of liberation. Morris' great-grandfather Walter Benjamin Morris had been to South Africa years before. He was working for a diamond mine at Kimberly as a prospector. The mines were mini power-sites where the white owners of mines wielded power over the black

workers and profited from their sweat and blood. The black women too were sexually exploited by the owners and other white workers in the mine. Frederick says that his great-grandfather must have been no stranger to the exploitative narratives of the whites.

Gordimer analyses the psyche of the blacks during this period and says that probably they desired to belong to the white race as they realised that they enjoyed privileges and power which were beyond their reach. But gradually the nation undergoes a sea-change in the politics of power as the blacks succeed in toppling the white ruling class. They become masters of their own land. The policies of apartheid are now abolished and the blacks no longer feel inferior. The changes are seen and felt. The apartheid government had followed a divisive policy and had segregated the blacks. They were deprived of opportunities of higher education and were given inferior standard of education through the passing of the Bantu Education Act (1953). The blacks were also prohibited from obtaining admission in the best Universities and had to obtain it from the Universities meant exclusively for the blacks. Now, with the subversion of power, the University gets transformed from a white intellectuals' club to a non-racial institution with black majority.

Simultaneously, the privileges of the whites are withdrawn and they are reduced to the same state as what the blacks had been to during the apartheid era. Now the whites also go through the same kind of agony and frustration as the blacks once did. The colour bar disappears and a reversal is seen. The blacks are now superior in their land and form the majority whereas the whites feel inferior and helpless. The dominating and pompous whites who once looked down upon the black race are now eager to be a part of the black establishment. Frederick's great-grandfather too is quick to respond: "The man whose eyes, whose energy of form remain open to you under

glass from generations since he lived five years here, staked his claim One-sixteenth" (11). The whites look forward to the swapping of roles as the blacks regain power. The Manichean divide dissolves as the whites now want to have the black DNA. They want to reclaim their ancestry and trace it to that of the blacks. "beethoven was one-sixteenth black" is replete with sarcasm and irony. It is a stinging commentary on mankind's greed for power as reflected in the tragicomic effort by the disempowered whites to join the bandwagon of black race. "The standard of privilege changes with each regime. Isn't it a try at privilege Yes? One up towards the ruling class and whatever it may happen to be. One sixteenth" (beethoven 15).The story ends with an ironic observation on the role reversal in the power structure: "Once there were blacks, poor devils, wanting to claim white. Now there's a white poor devil, wanting to claim black. It's the same secret" (15-16).

'What Were You Dreaming?' is another evocative short story which deals with the experience of a coloured boy who hitchhikes to his town. He works in Pietersburg and is travelling home. He is given a lift by a white couple who like many of the characters in Gordimer's novel are liberal and friendly towards the people of other races. The boy exhibits great caution while speaking to the couple as he seems to be well aware of the attitude of the whites towards the Coloured races and blacks. He knows that the blacks are not usually given a lift by the whites for fear of being robbed or stabbed to death. He is smart enough to understand the psyche of the whites and tries to speak in a manner which might please them. He tries to prove that the people who belong to the Coloured race are not as lowly as the blacks. He says "And I'm careful what I say; I tell them about blacks, how too many people spoil it for us, they robbing and killing, you can't blame white people" (*Jump* 214).

By making the Coloured boy as the protagonist of the short story, Gordimer makes an attempt to draw our attention on the hierarchical nature of racial structure in South Africa wherein the whites and blacks occupy the top and bottom rung respectively and the others in between. It is seen that the Coloured boy who considers himself superior to his black counterparts, describes thievery and murder as the characteristics of the lowly blacks. He hides the information about his brother serving a prison sentence for "… assault and intent to do bodily harm" (215). The man in the car is confused at the way the boy speaks of fellow blacks. The white Englishman is a visitor to South Africa and is unaware of the apartheid policies of the government. So he is taken aback seeing the manner in which the boy demeans the blacks since he mistakenly believes that the boy is one of them. However, the woman quickly explains that the boy is not a black but Cape Coloured thus exposing the shades of colour bar which prominently exists in South Africa. The white woman comes to know that he was born in Wynberg in Cape Town and she quickly updates her companion about the shifting of all the blacks and coloured people from the place. Once the boy realises that her sympathies lie with the blacks he opens up more. The woman talks about the government policies which make the blacks suffer and he adds to the details. He says "I say how it's not fair we had to leave Wynberg and go to the Flats. I tell her we got sicknesses-she say what kind, is it unhealthy there? And I don't have to think what, I just say it's *bad*, *bad* …" (216). Through this conversation, Gordimer aptly brings out the consequences of the policies of apartheid. She further continues to explore it through the explanations given by the white woman. The man is a total stranger to The Group Areas Act, Resettlement Act and Orderly Movement and Settlement of Black Persons Act which formed the stronghold of the apartheid policies of the government. She tries to make him understand by explaining it in simple terms:

> She has translated these statute-book euphemisms: people as moveable goods. People packed onto trucks along with their stoves and beds while front-end loaders scoop away their homes into rubble. People dumped somewhere else. Always somewhere else. People as the figures, decimal points and multiplying zero-zero-zeros into which individual lives- Black Persons Orderly-Moved,-Effluxed,-Grouped-coagulate and compute. (219)

The woman is filled with remorse and is ashamed of the way the blacks have been treated by the whites in South Africa. Being one of the whites, she too is filled with guilt for the manner in which her race treats the 'Other'.

Continuing with the discussion, the man enquires about the kind of facilities provided for the blacks after being ousted from their homes. She goes on to reveal the shocking effects of the government policies of segregation. She explains: "Depends. A tent, to begin with. And maybe basic materials to build themselves a shack. Perhaps a one-room prefab. Always a tin toilet set down in the veld, if nothing else" (221). She adds that the Coloureds are given better facilities than the blacks. The shifting of blacks is done with the purpose of land grabbing by the whites as they want to build factories or houses where the blacks once lived. The boy is finally dropped off and also generously given a two-rand note. The woman makes this contribution to him knowing well that she too is accountable for the misery of the natives of South Africa. This act of giving him money eases her conscience a bit though it does not help in closing the gap between the white colonisers and the colonised blacks and Coloured people.

Thus, race emerges as a central character in Gordimer's fiction. She dissects racism built into the mindscape of South Africa with clinical precision. With

remarkable power of observation, Gordimer exposes the dark and ugly underbelly of racism in South Africa. Her fiction having spanned the apartheid era reflects successfully the tensions and conflicts that constantly ensued between the colonisers and the colonised until liberation. It shows how the blacks were politically and socially incapacitated due to the policies of the white government which consolidated its power based on apartheid. On the whole, by foregrounding race Gordimer's fiction demonstrates that literature sustains its soul only if it dares to confront the inconvenient truths of life.

Chapter III

INTERROGATING GENDER

I raise up my voice—not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back

— Malala Yousafzai

3.1 **The Landscape of Feminism and Gender Studies**

This chapter makes an attempt to analyse gender issues in the works of Nadine Gordimer. It also aims at examining the role of 'agency' in her fictional narratives and the extent to which the female characters— both whites and blacks—are able to live freely and achieve self-fulfilment in life. Gender issues have been the cynosure of all feminist critics and women writers for a very long time. Many women writers of fiction have focused on the seminal issue of gender irrespective of the country that they belong to or the kind of feminism they subscribe to. While some have subtly raised the problems created by gender disparity in their fictional works, others have crusaded strongly against it through the medium of their works. Hence, it is but natural to look for the presence of feminist motifs in the works of Gordimer. It is also necessary to engage with the feminist philosophy formulated over decades in order to locate its presence in Gordimer's fiction. The primary reason for engaging in this kind of study is because Gordimer's fiction spans the era when various movements in feminism took birth and spread across the world influencing a large number of women writers and their works. Surprisingly, Gordimer has refused to be associated with feminism by professing her allegiance to humanism which makes it a challenging task to trace the presence of feminism in her works of fiction. Her first novel *The Lying*

Days was published in the year 1953 when the feminist movement was at its initial stage. Her last novel was published in 2012. During this period, she has been a witness to the sea change that took place in the feminist movement. Gordimer's career as a novelist runs parallel to the rise and consolidation of feminist movement. It is imperative therefore, to explore whether feminist motifs and gender issues found their way into her fictional narratives.

The feminist movement arose in response to centuries of subjugation of women by patriarchal ideology. Women had no equal rights and were deprived of education and other opportunities extended to men. Elaborating on the general condition of women across history, Betty Friedan opines that "women were living a lie, embracing a life that constrained and distorted their full potential" (Bowden and Mummery 13). Hence, dissatisfaction grew by leaps and bounds and by the middle of the twentieth century, women's struggle for independence and rights intensified across the globe. They fought for political rights and it gradually led to the rise of various feminist groups and also various branches of feminist philosophy. The two significant classics of the early twentieth century which heralded the arrival of feminist movement were Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949).

In her seminal works, specifically in *A Room of One's Own,* Virginia Woolf puts forth the necessity of financial independence and security for a woman to prosper in life and fulfil her ambitions. She also stresses on the need for one's own space for a woman to develop her talents and personality. As a novelist, Woolf is able to perceive literary criticism as a male bastion and therefore highlights the necessity of creating an alternative feminist literary critical discourse.

Following the trend of Virginia Woolf, Simone Beauvoir also highlights the role played by the society in keeping women suppressed. In her well-known book *The Second Sex* (1949) Simone Beauvoir comes out with her oft-quoted and celebrated utterance: “one is not born, but becomes a woman... it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature” (301). She argues that men and women are born equal, but the society brings in gender discrimination by giving importance to males. She highlights the social and cultural construction of female subject premised on patriarchal ideology. This assertion of Simone Beauvoir laid a solid theoretical foundation for feminist theory and movement.

Many women writers were inspired by Beauvoir’s ideas and went on to formulate their own discourses on feminism. The feminists also interpreted and re-interpreted the existing feminist paradigms as a result of which feminist movement accommodated multiple and divergent perspectives.

In France, feminists like Annie Leclerc, Marguerite Duras, Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous were deeply influenced by the ideas of Jaques Lacan and Jaques Derrida and participated in advancing the notion of l’ecriture or feminine writing. They rejected the phallocentric discourse and propounded a feminine writing that would issue from the unconscious, the body, from a radically reconceived subjectivity. The significance of “body” is complex and far-reaching, since it specifically refers to the female body which has been subject to repression and exploitation by male-centred discourses.

Apart from France, in the United States too, feminist movement gained momentum as a number of important feminine texts were produced around 1960s. Betty Friedan pioneered the movement with her outstanding work *The Feminine*

Mystique (1963) in which she focuses on the plight of American women trapped in their private and domestic life being unable to pursue public careers. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* **(**1969), foregrounds gender rather than class as the primary category of historical analysis. Millet's book deals with female sexuality and representation of women in literature. She argues that patriarchy is a political institution which aims at subordination of women. Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own* (1977) traces three phases of women's writing beginning with a 'feminine' phase (1840-1880) where women writers imitated male models, a 'feminist' phase (1880-1920) which saw the male models and values being challenged and the 'female' phase (from 1920's) where women started advocating their own perspectives (Habib, *HLC* 670). Noteworthy contributions were also made by feminist writers like Shulamith Firestone, Germaine Greer and Mary Ellman with an objective of creating awareness of women's rights.

British feminists, by and large, have explored the possible connection between feminism and Marxism. Juliet Mitchell, in her pivotal work *Women's Estate* (1971) examines patriarchy in terms of Marxist categories of production and psychoanalytic theories of gender as well. (Habib, *HLC* 671) Another reputed feminist critic Michele Barrett in her seminal text *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* (1980) focuses on three important concepts— patriarchy, reproduction and ideology. According to Barrett, the most significant elements of oppression of women under capitalism are "the economic organization of households and its accompanying familial ideology, the division of labour and relations of production, the educational system and the operations of the state, as well as processes of creation and recreation of gendered subjects (40-41). In a patriarchal society, the father becomes a bread winner whereas the mother looks after the family. Her family chores and raising

children which bring in no money are labelled unproductive and worthless. Therefore, feminists tend to argue that emancipation of women is possible only by having paid jobs and careers like men. The need for women's engagement in public spheres of paid work and politics would according to Friedan "…allow them to see that the "feminine mystique"—with its requirements for sexual passivity, submission to male domination, and fulfilment in homemaking and motherhood—is no more than a giant ruse that prevents them from achieving freedom of choice, self-determination and dignity in an equal partnership with men" (Bowden and Mummery 15).

Understanding feminism from black and minority perspectives also gained currency in the1970s. Black feminists emphasise the necessity of foregrounding race in gender debates. They contest efforts made by 'white' feminists to universalise feminine experience by arguing that a woman's experience is always history-specific. Feminist texts like Barbara Smith's *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism* (1977) and Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) have highlighted the role played by colonialism and racism in marginalising black women. Underscoring the uniqueness of black feminism, Chris Barker states:

> They [Black feminists] have argued that colonialism and racism have structured power relationships between black and white women, defining women as white. Gender intersects with race, ethnicity and nationality to produce different experiences of what it is to be a woman. In postcolonial context women carry the double burden of being colonised by imperial powers and subordinated by colonial and native men. (292)

Gayatri Spivak, another noted feminist critic focuses on the marginalisation of women under colonial rule. She highlights the manner in which women in colonised

nations were forced to suffer from double tyranny of exploitation by males as well as their colonial masters. Commenting on the marginalisation of the female 'subaltern' during colonial rule, Spivak states: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. . ." (5). Spivak feels that the women in colonised nations are doubly oppressed and deprived of rights besides being denied a presence of one's own.

Despite their divergent perspectives and viewpoints, all feminists are unanimous in their belief that patriarchy is the root cause of women's problems across the world. More importantly, they subscribe to the view that marriage is a symbol of patriarchy and that the raison d'être of the institution of marriage is to legalise the rights of men over women. Domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse of women are consequences of such unions legalised through marriage. Referring to patriarchy D. Ackermann says, "The legal, economic and social system validates and enforces the sovereignty of the male head of the family over its other members. These members, in classical patriarchal systems, were the wives, children servants and slaves. Today, patriarchy describes the male-dominated world that we live in" (95). Patriarchy deprives a woman of her freedom of expression and rights and makes her subservient to man in actions and deeds. Traci C. West strongly believes that, "Patriarchy is a systematic devaluation of the worth and value of women" (5).The ubiquitous presence of patriarchy could even be traced in language and literature. In the 1980s feminist Dale Spender developed the idea that language is 'masculine'. In her book *Man Made Language* (1981), she argues that language is an instrument through which patriarchy finds expression (Barry 121).

Another area which is closely linked with feminist theory is known as Gender Studies. Gender Studies is inclusive of gay and lesbian discourse and Queer Theory in

addition to feminist studies. In her book *Sex, Gender and Society* Ann Oakley draws a distinction between "sex" and "gender": "Sex" is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. "Gender", however, is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into "masculine" and "feminine" (16). According to Oakley, "sex" referred to differences in the bodies of the male and female while "gender" was socially determined and varied across societies, cultures and histories.

Gender equality activists support the rights of women and also uphold the freedom of gays and lesbians. Gender Studies "…examines the oppressive history of gays, lesbians, and other erotic groups, the formation and representation of gender, as well as gender as a category of analysis of literature and culture, and the intersection of gender with divisions of race, class and color" (Habib, *MLC* 137). Further, lesbian and gay studies focus on personal freedom and sexual liberation from the restrictive social norms. The activists' motive is to make gay and lesbian relationships legitimate and acceptable in society wherein only heterosexual relationships are considered to be right. They also aim at providing more meaningful relationships between women and create space for them so that dominant heterosexual practices and patriarchy lose their status and importance in society.

Gender theorists also highlight some of the social practices and institutions which tend to challenge, disrupt and undermine the hegemony of patriarchy. For instance, some of the African tribal communities follow the practice of 'brideswealth' which refers to a system of "transfer of wealth at marriage that establishes legal rights over sexual access, services and offspring. The woman also gets legal rights and protection from abuse". Polygyny accounts for 20% of the marriages in South Africa. Apart from brideswealth, there also existed an institution of marriage between women

themselves which closely resemble lesbian marriages of the contemporary times. "Woman and woman marriage gave the institution of 'female husbands' which subverts dichotomous gender categories and rigid gender roles". Further, the merits of the different traditions of the Africans are elaborately discussed as follows:

> The African institutions of polygyny, same-sex marriage, and levirate (a brother or son takes the place of a diseased husband and inherits his wife) represent a creative subversion of orthodox European assumptions that the "natural" family is constituted simply by a union between a man and a woman. In other words, the flexibility in marriage practice accommodates the diversity of sexuality that also includes problems of infertility and impotence. Consequently, marriage practice relates to the values of gendered, structured community and gendered kinship …. (Essed et al. 364-65)

Some advocates of lesbianism known as Radicalesbians uphold lesbianism as the purest form of feminism and argue that woman could be free only by associating herself with other women, thus averting exploitation and tyranny of male domination. Adrienne Rich, Bonnie Zimmerman, Jill Johnston, Monique Wittig and Luce Irigaray are its proponents. Judith Keegan Gardiner in her essay, "Mind mother: Psychoanalysis and Feminism" summarizes the point of view of Adrienne Rich. According to Gardiner, Rich celebrates the power of mother's love and sees all women as originally and potentially lesbian because all women first love their mothers. She also describes lesbian relationships as invested with the intensity and ambivalence of the mother-daughter bond (134). Adrienne Rich traces the root cause of all the problems confronted by women to the acceptance of 'heterosexuality' as the only natural form of desire and sexual relations. As she sees it, compulsory

heterosexuality is the main mechanism underlying and maintaining male dominance in a patriarchal sexual economy (Bowden and Mummery 76).

Queer Theory, a vital component of gender studies emerged in the 1990s which clearly emphasized the centrality of sexuality in the formation of identity rather than gender. David Halperin, an American theorist opines that "Queer" is supposed to represent "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant", it is an "identity without an essence" (Bowden and Mummery 90). Judith Butler's path-breaking work *Gender Trouble* (1990) saw all gender as cultural performance. Butler argues that the woman plays the stereotyped role given to her by the male dominated society limiting herself to being an obedient and dutiful daughter, sister, wife and mother. It is the cultural ethos which propagates the performance. She deconstructs the category of 'woman' and propagates that disrupting repetitive performance is the key to break gender norms. Michel Foucault too asserts that biological determinism has no role to play while establishing gender identities. Chris Barker aptly summarizes the essence of Foucault's idea of gender in the following words: "Gender is historically and culturally specific, subject to radical discontinuities over time and across space…we are gendered through the power of regulated and regulatory discourses" (301). On the whole, gender theorists challenge our assumptions regarding the 'fixed' nature of gender identity. They posit that gender is a historically variable category, always in a state of flux regulated and controlled by discursive norms.

3.2 Locating Gordimer's Fiction against the Backdrop of Feminism

Feminist movement took shape and spread across the globe during the time when Gordimer was actively engaged in writing her fiction. Gordimer, however,

maintained scrupulous distance from the movement. She did not profess her interest in any of the issues of feminism as she believed in the equality and unity of human beings. She subscribed to an idealistic brand of humanism which visualised mankind in its pure, primordial essence free from the shackles created from the differences premised on gender, class and race. A cursory examination of Gordimer's statements regarding women's writings shows that she was against feminism and believed in the tenets of conventional liberal humanism. She also refused to accept that male writers differed from female writers as she believed that writers were intellectual androgynous beings. In her 'Introduction' to *Selected Stories* she states: "I question the existence of the specific solitude of the woman-as-intellectual when that woman is a writer, because when it comes to their essential faculty as writers, all writers are androgynous beings ("Essential" 113).

However, given the fact that the vast compendium of Gordimer's work was created during this period, it would be easy to presume that she too must have covertly been influenced by the feminist movement. One could also search for feminist ideologies that underscore her fictional narratives. Yet, it is a challenge to situate Gordimer' work within the framework of feminism mainly because she openly denounced being a feminist and went on to declare that feminism was "a piffling". She felt that the white man and white woman have much more in common than the white woman and the black woman. Therefore, loyalty to one's sex was secondary to the loyalty of one's race which as a consequence made Women's Liberation a farce in South Africa. In 1984 Gordimer stated:

> It's a bit ridiculous when you see white girls at the university campaigning for Women's Liberation because they're kicked out of some fraternity-type club ... who cares? A black woman has got things to worry about much more serious

than these piffling issues. White women have the vote; no black, male or female, has. White women have many more basic rights than black women. (Gordimer, "Conversations" 3-31)

In Gordimer's world, race is the primary category of historical investigation which is at variance with the mainstream feminist discourse premised solely on the axis of gender. Gordimer argues that white women have nothing in common with black women and that black women seem to have a different set of problems as compared to white women. This argument aligns itself closely with that of the black feminists who refused to believe in the universality of women's problems. In her fiction, Gordimer compares and contrasts the living conditions, rights and freedom of the black women which differ largely from the issues faced by white women in South Africa. Her sympathies lie with the black women whom she finds to be doubly exploited by their men and the colonisers. She voices her apprehension in her fiction and speaks of the necessity to understand their specific needs in order to be uplifted. In general terms, this concern seems to be a reflection of her liberal humanist views. They, in fact run parallel to the tenets of black feminism which had its roots in the oppressive history of black women in the United States. In South Africa, gender relations were also tied down to colonialism and were reflected in the world of both the blacks and whites. The social institutions of the white settlers differed from that of the indigenous blacks. Gordimer's writing is rooted in the realities of colonial relationships of race, gender and sexuality. Her fiction embodies her liberal views and upholds the need for justice and freedom for the blacks in South Africa. Her perspectives align mainly with the discourses of Postcolonialism and Black feminism which consider race as a prime category of historical investigation. Moreover, by

creating gay and lesbian characters in her later fiction, she lends legitimacy to their sexual identity.

Though Gordimer's humane concern for blacks is reflected in her fictional works, critics like Judie Newman question her portrayal of blacks and her depiction of the liberation struggle in South Africa as well. Newman strongly feels that Gordimer's portrayal of the blacks cannot be authentic as she writes from the perspective of a white woman. Newman argues that "… despite Gordimer's frequent contention that any feminist activity must remain subsidiary to the struggle against apartheid, she may be perceived as doubly marginalised in South Africa, as a white and as a woman" (17). In a nation colonised by the whites, it was true that the white writers' acts were looked upon with suspicion and never wholeheartedly accepted by the blacks. This was because most of the white writers stood afar and never involved themselves in the struggle for liberation of the blacks. But Gordimer had the courage to confront the dilemma of living in a society where colonialism, racism and patriarchy affected public and private lives.

Gordimer's portrayal of gender is unique. She clearly differentiates between the lives led by the black and white women and records their differences with minute details. Her white heroines are strong women who refuse to be undermined and are out to achieve their goals fearlessly. However, her black female characters are submissive, passive and docile. Through the portrayal of black women in her narratives, Gordimer draws the reader's attention to gender issues in South Africa overdetermined by racism. The most significant aspect of Gordimer's fiction is her analysis of gender through the prism of race.

Interestingly, the protagonists of most of her novels are white women who support the cause of liberation of South Africa. We rarely come across black women protagonists who are capable of organising, motivating or leading others towards liberation. This made the critics doubt her understanding of black women and their problems. It also raised the question regarding the capability of white fiction writers to portray realistically the condition of the blacks and their struggle in South Africa. However, a peek into South African history by and large reveals the absence of women in the liberation movement. The highly patriarchal society of the blacks restrained women from coming out of their homes and entering the public space dominated by men.

Again, Gordimer never wanted her fiction—product of creative imagination—to be reduced to empirically-verifiable historical document. If she did, her fiction would lose its status as a work of art. She clarifies her position regarding this issue in her essay "The Essential Gesture" in the following words: "The problems of my country did not set me writing; on the contrary, it was learning to write that sent me falling, falling through the surface of the South African way of life" (26). It was her love for writing which made her understand the South African way of life with all its vicissitudes and contradictions, not vice-versa. Gordimer was convinced that her fiction was not only a work of art but also a medium to make people understand the problems and bring about a change in the society. Understandably, in a nation where apartheid laws were supreme she had limited access to the society of the blacks. The laws restrained her from interacting fully with the blacks. Perhaps, this factor could be the reason behind the limited portrayal of black women in her fiction. Yet Gordimer's effort to highlight their problems and struggles is commendable. Gordimer confesses that: "For myself, I have created black characters in my fiction: Whether I have done

successfully or not is for the reader to decide. What's certain is that there is no representation of our social reality without that strange area of our lives in which we have knowledge of one another" ("Living" 21-7).

She contests the view of some writers who believe that, "…the white writer does not share the *total* living conditions of blacks, therefore he must not write about them" ("Living"). Gordimer, on the other hand argues that the world came to know about the blacks as early as 1920s only because of white writers like William Plomer and Sarah Gertrude Millin. She replies to her critics who questioned her authenticity of representation of black women in categorical terms:

> I reply that there are whole areas of human experience, in work situations—on farms, in factories, in the city, for example—where black and white have been observing one another and interacting for nearly 350 years. I challenge my challenger to deny that there are things we know about each other that are never spoken, but are there to be written—and received with the amazement and consternation, on both sides, of having been found out ("Living" 21-7).

It goes without saying that it is mainly due to Gordimer's depiction of black women characters in her fiction that the readers are able to glean an insight into the lives led by them. The strategy of contrast used by her in her fiction enables one to understand the chasm that separated the lives of blacks and whites in South Africa. However, Tamar M. Copeland contends that the women characters in Gordimer's fiction are indeed undifferentiated:

> Gordimer's women believe that their life-role pertains to the definition that society has dictated. Yet, unlike Schreiner's characters, they accept these terms without question. South African society still limits these women by stressing

> the necessity of marriage and motherhood. Although many choose options outside marriage, they never escape the unrelenting pressure to lead a conventional life. More often than not they subside to this pressure and live their life as expected, in isolation from a unique and personally defined sense of self. (34)

According to Copeland, Gordimer has painted both her black and white female characters with the same brush and at the end they all succumb to societal pressures and lead a conventional life. However, a close examination of women characters in Gordimer's fiction enables us to see how differently her black and white characters are delineated. Of course, women across the globe inhabit social space dominated by patriarchy which hinders their freedom. But, what finally counts is the extent to which women have been able to break free from the straightjacket imposed by patriarchy and lead dignified lives based on their choices. In Gordimer's fiction, all white women are able to achieve it while black women cannot. This lack of ability to transform one's destiny is the significant feature of the black women characters of Gordimer's fiction and sets them apart from white female protagonists. Very few black women characters are able to achieve some sense of freedom. A large majority of them are victims of social conventions and succumb to pressures of the society they live in.

In contrast, Gordimer has portrayed white women in South Africa as free and independent characters who are liberated and fulfil their life's aspirations and dreams. The white female characters attempt to transgress social and cultural boundaries. They are not cowed down by patriarchy nor are they vehicles of creating progeny. Their sexual freedom is guaranteed and we find many of them having affairs without any guilt while still being bound to the institution of marriage itself. Many of the white

women protagonists empathize with the blacks, fight on their behalf and are even prepared to go to prison for the noble cause of their liberation. They are bold and independent, ready to live in the moment without a care in the world and do not generally attach themselves to men. They move on in life without regrets. On the other hand, black women are voiceless creatures who suffer silently without protest. In general, they do not participate in the struggle for liberation and are seen to be content doing household chores and bearing children. They wallow in poverty and are least interested in personal growth. Besides, they are dependent on their husbands for survival and exhibit an indifferent attitude to the larger socio-political issues surrounding them. Their men take on many wives which they do not question but accept it as the exclusive privilege of men. Thus, the black women in South Africa are projected as silent victims being doubly subjugated – by their own men as well as the colonisers.

In the opinion of Karen Lazar, "Gordimer has never set herself up as a systematic foe to feminism. There are occasions when she displays a high degree of sympathy for women and indignation against her social position" (216). Gordimer may not have been a professed feminist but was empathetic towards the pain and misery of black women. She was self-conscious of her privileges as a white woman. She knew how the black women suffered being stripped of the same.

Further, as a writer, she subscribed to the unassailable principle of gender equality. For instance, in her short story titled "Dreaming of the Dead" the protagonist Susan Sontag comes back from the dead and speaks about the liberation of women and role reversal of power. Sontag questions social norms premised on "what was between the legs" (*beethoven* 36). By making Susan Sontag—a reputed feminist thinker and writer—the protagonist of her short story, she symbolically endorses the

agenda of feminism and underlines the need of women's rights and liberation. Sontag also speaks of Muslim women in burkhas terming it as "The black rag's iron curtain" (36). She further adds that these Muslim women are content to stay within their burkhas as they realise that in their harsh world they would have to compete with men economically, politically and psychologically. The 'black rag' inhibits their foray into the world beyond and is also reflective of the way they are treated by their men. Gordimer's concern for women is reflected in her anguish that the Muslim women do not want to change the way they are since they are happy to restrict themselves within their burkhas which further inhibit their access to the outside world by acting like an 'iron curtain'.

Sontag also touches upon the topic of heterosexuality and speaks of the injustice meted out to gays everywhere. The gays were prohibited from serving in the army in many countries. Deeply saddened by the refusal of rights for the gays and lesbians across the world Sontag makes a scathing remark saying that they were 'unfit even to be slaughtered' (*beethoven* 37).

Gordimer felt that the gays and lesbians too deserved equal rights in society as she considered it their prerogative to decide about their sexual preferences. It was not the duty of the society to judge them or look down upon them. Her fiction also delineates gay and lesbian characters who are portrayed as normal and emotionally sound human beings. For instance, Vera Stark, in *None to Accompany Me* loathes her daughter being a lesbian initially, but she moves on to accept it at the end of the story. The lesbian couple goes on to adopt a black baby which becomes acceptable to her mother Vera Stark too. *House Gun* is an intriguing novel of the relationship between gays and revolves round their love and jealousy leading to the murder of one of the members of the group. Gordimer's later fiction finds her comfortably portraying the

lives of lesbians and gays without branding the topic as a taboo. It also shows that Gordimer was open to new and changing dynamics of human relationship and was liberal in her treatment of such issues.

3.3 Black Women in Gordimer's Fiction—Narratives of Exploitation

The dark truth of colonial exploitation of black women finds its way into the novels and short stories of Nadine Gordimer. Having no other means of survival, black women were forced to work in white households and were repeatedly exploited. Further, they were also sexually exploited by rich prospectors and mine owners when they worked in mining areas. The short story by Gordimer titled "beethoven was one-sixteenth black" is reflective of such exploitation. In the story, Frederick Morris' great-grandfather Walter Benjamin Morris goes to Kimberley as a diamond mine prospector. During his stay in the mining town, he supposedly has sexual relations with many black women. He exploits black women by the virtue of his power as a white prospector. His great-grandson Frederick Morris too, is no different from his grandfather and has a good look at the girls of different skin colours when he goes to the playground. Looking at them, he wonders as to who might be chosen for sex by the prospectors, "The lucky ones (favoured by prospectors?) Warm honey- coloured, the others dingy between black and white, as if determined by an under exposed photograph" (*beethoven*13). The black woman in South Africa is treated as an object of sexual gratification who meekly gives in to the desires of the predatory white male. In Gordimer's fiction, one does not come across a single instance of protest from black women while being subjected to physical and emotional abuse. The probable reason for the conspicuous silence of the black women was the system of laws which overwhelmingly favoured the whites. The blacks knew that it was impossible to get justice thus making them silent sufferers. Moreover, clandestine affairs were the

vogue of the times despite the laws overtly forbidding mixed marriages and physical relationship between blacks and whites. The thread of sexual abuse of the black women by the colonisers is continuously present in Gordimer's fiction. In another short story "Town and Country Lovers", Paulus Eysendyck is the son of a white farmer while Thebedi is the daughter of black farm workers. The difference in their skin colours does not prevent Paulus and Thebedi from becoming close friends in their childhood. These childhood friends turn into lovers when they grow up. They meet secretly first at the river bank and then at the farm house when Paulus' parents are away from home. Paulus is attracted to Thebedi more than to other white girls:

> The school girls he went swimming with at dams or pools on neighbouring farms wore bikinis but the sight of their dazzling bellies and thighs in the sunlight had never made him feel what he felt now, when the girl came up the bank and sat beside him, the drops of water beading off her dark legs the only points of light in the earth-smelling, deep shade. (*LT* 280)

Paulus symbolises the desire of the white man for black women. He treats black women as sexualised objects. He is the embodiment of colonial might and exploitation. Initially, it appears to be the satiation of lust as his sexual desires are fulfilled through his clandestine meetings with Thebedi. But the relationship ends there as Paulus knows very well that he has ventured into a forbidden territory. Thebedi too, being very submissive, has no further expectations. When Paulus moves away, she does not find it unusual as it was the norm during the colonial times. So, she accepts a proposal from a black man named Njabulo and gets married to him and carries on with her life without regrets even though she has been sexually abused by Paulus. Just after two months of their marriage Thebedi gives birth to a baby which is fair-skinned. The fact that she gives birth just two months after her marriage does not

come as a surprise to the family members since it is an accepted norm in black community. “There was no disgrace in that; among her people it is customary for a young man to make sure, before marriage, that the chosen girl is not barren…” (282). Ironically, in the society of whites, having a child out of wedlock is accepted as the right of a liberated woman but in case of blacks it is a test of fertility that the woman has to go through. In a patriarchal black community, a woman’s worth is measured in terms of her ability to give birth to children and she is considered useless if she cannot bear children. The males would never accept it as their inability to father a child and are given the licence and the rights to test a woman’s worth. The baby born to Thebedi is naturally accepted as Njabulo’s child. Njabulo however, knows that the baby born with a fair skin is definitely not his child but is large-hearted enough to accept the baby. But, when Paulus comes to know of it, he reacts emotionally and despairs:

> He struggled for a moment with a grimace of tears, anger and self-pity. She could not put out her hand to him. He said, ‘You haven’t been near the house with it?’ She shook her head… ‘Don’t take it out. Stay inside. Can’t you take it away somewhere. You must give it to someone-’ She moved to the door with him. He said, “I’ll see what I will do. I don’t know.’ And then he said: ‘I feel like killing myself.’ (283- 84)

Paulus has a cruel bent of mind. Though he feels like killing himself initially, he does not do so. A few days later Paulus returns to her cottage, spends some time alone with the baby and the next day the baby is found dead. Thebedi is silent and does not grieve as she is shocked beyond belief by his cruel act. The baby is buried but the police get a wind of it and turn up at the farm:

> The police came and dug up the grave and took away the dead baby. Someone…one of the labourers? their women?—had reported that the baby was almost white, that, strong and healthy, it has died suddenly after a visit by the farmer's son. Pathological tests on the infant showed intestinal damage not always consistent with death by natural causes. (285)

Paulus is charged with murder. Initially, Thebedi accuses him of killing her baby but withdraws her accusation in the court a year later leading to Paulus' acquittal. Thebedi never takes the initiative to protest against the heinous murder of her infant by Paulus. She is not interested in obtaining justice as she knows that it is elusive to blacks. Hence, she just chooses to move on and survive. This evocative short story foregrounds the predicament of black female who is at the receiving end of the dominant white alpha male.

A clear contrast is seen in the novel *A Sport of Nature*. If Paulus could never openly accept his relationship with a black girl, Hillela in contrast goes on proudly to marry a black man. The story focuses on a white lady who is able to accept a black man as her husband. Hillela, the white female protagonist of the novel marries the black leader Whaila Kgomani as she falls in love with him. She is unmindful of the colour of his skin. When she realises that she is carrying his child, she says: "I love not knowing what it will be. What colour it is, already, here inside me. Our colour" (*Sport* 227). She further goes on to defy the colour barriers and declares that she would accept her child whatever be the colour of its skin, "A category that doesn't exist: she would invent it. There are Hotnots and half-castes, two-coffee-one-milk, touch-of-the-tar-brush, pure white, black is beautiful—but a creature made of love, without a label; that's a freak." (227). Again, it is Hillela who makes a choice of marrying a black man and bearing his child without being coerced into the

relationship. She chooses to traverse across colour barriers and is joyful when she gives birth to a child who turns out to be as black as her father and names her Nomzamo after Nelson Mandela's wife.

What makes Hillela so different from Thebedi is her ability to transform her destiny. Hillela has the courage to choose her life partner defying the social barriers of race and colour. She accepts her child proudly but in contrast, Thebedi chooses to remain silent when she is sexually exploited by Paulus and also when her baby is murdered by him. She is unable to decide what she wants in life and cannot stand up for her rights in the court though she has a chance to get Paulus arrested for murder.

The history of whites has, down the ages, shown its women defying patriarchy and fighting for their freedom and rights whereas women are seen to be passive and voiceless in the history of the blacks. Once again, the issue of race takes precedence over gender while determining divergent trajectories of histories of blacks and whites.

Gordimer succeeds in coming to grips with 'black' experience despite remaining 'absent' from their world. She candidly writes: "The blacks were not "my people" because all through my childhood and adolescence they had scarcely entered my consciousness. I had been absent. Absent from them. Could one, in fact, make the claim, "my country" if one could not also say "my people"?" ("The Other World" 81) The dilemma of Gordimer regarding her initial inability to understand the lives led by blacks and their psyche is reflected in her first novel *The Lying Days* (1953). Helen, the white protagonist of the novel sums up her conundrum in the following statement:

> "…native women are always far more gay or far more serious than white women, so one mustn't try to visualise their moods from one's experience of

> Europeans. They sing and shout in the street over nothing, and they are solemn under the weight of some task we shouldn't even feel. There was no way of knowing, no way of knowing….I had an almost physical sensation of being a stranger in what I had always taken unthinkingly as the familiarity of home, I felt myself among strangers; I had grown up, all my life among strangers: the Africans, whose language in my ears had been like the barking of dogs or cries of birds." (*Lying Days*185)

Given the limited nature of her interaction with blacks, Gordimer could only see black women as an 'undifferentiated mass'. Though she had some close friends like Bettie du Toit, the multitude of black women remained strangers to her 'whose language in my ears had been like the barking of dogs or cries of birds' (185). Andrew Vogel Ettin, making a critical study of Gordimer's fiction observes:

> There are certain experiences of white life that it's very unlikely that any black writer would know enough of to write convincingly and the same applies, only more so, to white writers. But that doesn't mean that I believe that white writers can't create black characters; and that black writers can't do the same with the whites. (15)

Ettin feels that both black writers and white writers can transcend their racial barriers and create realistic characters of the opposite race in their fiction. A close reading of Gordimer's fiction reveals that her black male characters are deftly portrayed with a lot of detail. Her black female characters on the other hand lack individual traits and tend to remain uniformly passive. Again, compared to their black counterparts, her white female characters are replete with energy and drive. The reason why her black female characters remain mute and passive is due to the

conspicuous absence of ‘agency’ in their lives determined by the intricacies of race and gender.

Agency is the capacity for self-determination and self-transformation. It refers to an individual’s ability to transform his or her life through perseverance and determination history notwithstanding. For a woman, it also means empowerment—through control over her body and life. It is principally about her ability to act against suppression effectively so as to bring about a positive change in her life as a whole. Historically, women never had the rights and privileges that men had. They neither had access to public sphere, education and employment nor were they equal to men. Hence, feminists make analysis of agency as an integral part of their historical investigation of women’s experience. They believe that agency is, “tied to the idea that individuals are able to make their own decisions and that when they do so they are not unduly coerced or otherwise under someone’s else’s control or influence” (Bowden and Mummery 125). Agency makes all the difference in a given circumstance and has the ability to change the situation based on the potential of the individual to act. A lot of contrasting viewpoints about the nature and power of agency prevail. Foucault was sceptical of human agency’s ability to transform the lives and destiny of individuals in view of the overwhelming presence of power-structures surrounding as well as determining individuals in a given socio-historical context. However, Giddens contests Foucault’s sceptical perspective on the power of human agency by foregrounding the concept of ‘duality of structure’ ascribing importance to both agency and social determination in shaping an individual’s life (Barker 239).

Chris Barker points out that the concept of agency has commonly been associated with the notions of freedom, free will, action, creativity, originality and the

very possibility of change through the action of free agents (240). But no individual is totally free as he is bound by the norms of society that he lives in. Therefore, agency becomes a socially constituted capacity to act.

A very interesting view regarding agency in the third world countries has been put forward by Indian feminist Uma Narayan. She states: "Feminist criticism of and resistance to oppressive conditions and associated calls for women's agency can be read as lack of respect for traditional culture and its associated practices. In other words, some people may read such moves as cultural disloyalty based on inauthentic westernization" (Bowden and Mummery 137). Narayan feels that it is tough to fight against cultural oppression wherein traditions like child marriage, arranged marriage and the practice of dowry are well entrenched. Any attempt to initiate reforms in such areas is undermined on the ground that they violate the sanctity of Indian culture. Therefore, feminist movements have failed to take roots in India and other third world nations. The women in such nations are unwilling to give up their cultural practices thus making it one of the primary reasons for their lack of agency to transform themselves.

Interestingly, Gordimer's black women do not seem to have the ability as well as inclination to fight against their subjugation where patriarchy is the norm. While her white characters rebel against the system and protest against acts of oppression, in contrast, black women characters seem to accept and go along with the traditional and cultural demands of patriarchy. Her white female characters are round characters, encounter challenging and complex human situations and exhibit varied and nuanced emotions. But, Gordimer's 'broad-brush' approach to her black characters just transforms them into an undifferentiated and oppressed mass waiting to be liberated. Her fiction is found to be lacking when it comes to developing black female

characters. While her white heroines are portrayed with a lot of finesse leaving a lasting impression on the readers, sadly, almost all her black female characters fade away unnoticed.

Cora Kaplan, a feminist critic argues that "… the subjectivity of women of other classes and races and with different sexual orientations can never be 'objectively' or 'authentically' represented in literary texts by the white, heterosexual, middle-class woman writer, however sympathetically she invents or describes such women in her narrative" (162). Gayatri Spivak goes to the extent of declaring that it is an impossible feat for even the members of ethnic groups to represent the views of the entire group. If one did so, it would result in the views being subjective and coloured by racial prejudices. She also felt that the subaltern groups were too heterogeneous to be represented by a single individual (Spencer 158).

This once again raises a question regarding the representation of blacks in the fiction of Gordimer and the extent to which she has been successful in her attempt. If we go by what Spivak says, we have to concede that Gordimer, an elite white female writer cannot represent the blacks. Yet, her writings reflect by and large her intention of bringing to light the deplorable and pathetic realities confronted by black women in South Africa. While it is true that Gordimer's works portray the black women as passive and voiceless, it is also true that they go a long way in drawing our attention and sympathy to their cause. She makes them visible through her writings, giving voice to the voiceless as it were. Gordimer strongly believes that a writer should be a spokesperson for the oppressed and must reveal the conditions of her times. If not, the writer fails in her duty towards society. Commenting on writer's predicament during troubled times, Gordimer observes: "…this is the kind of demand that responsibility for the social significance of being a writer exacts: a double demand, the first from the

oppressed, to act as spokesperson for them, the second, from the state, to take punishment for that act" ("Essential" 4).

Gordimer exhibits remarkable insights particularly when she portrays the entrenched patriarchy within South African black communities. In Gordimer's fiction white female protagonists do not conform to patriarchy and are able to rise above it whereas black women are seen to adhere to it submissively. Sydney Janet Kaplan tries to analyse the reasons behind the way in which women characters are created by female authors. Exploring the reasons behind specific characterisation, Kaplan states that "…studies of the images of women in the works of female authors might also concentrate on the ways in which such images reveal women's oppression, or on how an author's own absorption of patriarchal values might cause her to create female characters who fulfil society's stereotypes of women" (S. Kaplan 8). Kaplan feels that the kinds of oppression that women suffer from can be represented through the female characters in fictional works. On the other hand, the female characters can also be the extension of author herself, sharing her ethical zeal and worldview. Like Gordimer, most of her white female protagonists are free individuals, capable of independent thinking and judgement. For Gordimer, the patriarchal values were non-existent as her childhood was spent under the guidance of her dominating mother whose influence was more far-reaching than that of her father.

Of course, the black woman never occupies centre stage as the protagonist of Gordimer's fiction. Instead, Gordimer has ingeniously sketched with great care the silent lives led by the black women always controlled by the male counterparts of their family and manipulated by their white masters as well. By doing so, she has evocatively brought to the fore their deplorable state. Gordimer's black male characters speak about their women with disrespect and consider them useful only in

their role as child bearers. The women stay in their hutments and are in a constant state of abnegation. They neither know of their rights and privileges nor do they make an attempt to know about how they can lead fulfilling, dignified lives. Their conduct and morals are laid down by the code of patriarchy. Being denied basic necessities of life, education and access to knowledge, they are impoverished and ignorant. They bear children and attend to dull chores and aim at pleasing their men. They do not care about social or national cause and just focus on their survival and that of their families. They survive only by speaking the language of silence.

July's People foregrounds several gender issues with vivid details. The story unfolds during a violent and terrifying Soweto uprising in South Africa. Maureen Smales, her husband Bam and their three young children are taken by their black servant July to his village and are given refuge. Taking only bare essentials, the family leaves behind their life in the familiar surroundings of the white South African suburbs and follows July to hopeful safety. The story sees a reversal of roles wherein July who is their servant becomes their provider and protector by giving them refuge. Though still polite and caring, July wrests power from the Smales and gains possession of their 'bakkie' or jeep. He indulges in quarrels with them on trivial issues. His behaviour comes as a rude shock to the Smales who are taken aback by his transformation. Smales' wife Maureen who is an independent woman is unable to put up with the new role reversal and dependency and runs away abandoning her family in exchange for her freedom and identity. Bam Smales becomes a symbol of the whites losing power in South Africa. He finally succumbs to the dictates of July and his people. The meek and obedient servant July, in contrast, metamorphoses into a patriarch once he is on his own home ground. It is when July comes back to his village that the reader gets an insight into the lives led by black women in general.

The plight of women of his household is reflected in their 'closed faces' and silences. July introduces Maureen to his wife:

> July presented her to his wife. A small, black-black, closed face, and huge hams on which the woman rested on the earth floor among cushions, turning this way and that as she took a tin kettle from the wisp of hearth ashes to pour tea, silently, over the mug an old lady held, and adjusted the feeding-bottle in the hands of a child past the age of weaning whose eyes were turned up in sleep on her own lap. (*July's People* 19)

The portrayal of July's wife's black's face as 'closed face' is symbolic of the invisibility of black women in the traditional black society. The closed faces of the black women also symbolise their hidden suffering in a society dominated by men. After preparing tea, his wife pours tea 'silently'. In black communities of South Africa, women are both invisible and voiceless. Their predicament is the direct fallout of the overarching presence of patriarchy in African black communities. The black women's failure to be recognised as important members who contribute to the well-being of the family is seen when July refuses to introduce them by name considering it as an unimportant act. To a black male, female individuality has no place in his order of things. For him, names are not emblematic of individuality and uniqueness. While males distinguish themselves by their names, females are dismissed by using a collective term 'family'. This would seem highly absurd to Maureen Hetherington who valued her identity and individuality. July's introduction of his family to the Smales is non-specific, "There were several others, young women and half-grown girls, in the hut. His sister, wife's sister-in-law, one of his daughters; he introduced them with a collective sweep in terms of kinship and not by name" (20). This by itself

signals the loss of identity of black women who are relegated to the domestic status and considered unimportant by their men.

July does not feel that it is important to inform his family before bringing Maureen and Bam Smales to his village. In the society of blacks, male dictum is carried out as command. July brings in the Smales to his village out of his own free-will and disregards the opinion of his women. He asks his mother to vacate her hut for them. He also orders his wife to get the hut ready for the Smales to move in. Both the women do so obediently and without argument. Though they grumble about the necessity of bringing the family of Smales to his village, they fall in line and do as commanded. Again, July cuts short any protests by them, saying arrogantly that "— If I say go, they must go. If I say they can stay…so they stay" (99).The very fact that he can get things done without seeking concurrence from his family is clearly indicative of the role of women in his family. July is the sole decision maker and thrusts his decisions and opinions on the hapless family members.

The black male in South Africa perceives woman as one who is confined to home space. The woman on her part is totally dependent on the male for survival and gets relegated to fringe status due to her material conditions. He considers himself as the provider of the family which also gives him power over them. For instance, when July takes their clothes for wash, Maureen out of kindness offers to pay his wife for the chore. But July is shocked at the proposal and refuses to accept her offer by declaring that it is after all women's job to wash clothes which hardly merits financial compensation. Well-known feminist literary critic Michele Barrett has summarized the position of the female in a patriarchal society in the following words: 'Thus the meaning of gender in patriarchal ideology is 'not simply "difference", but….division, oppression, inequality, interiorized inferiority for women' (112-113). Women in

general have been forcefully restricted to doing domestic chores resulting in making them feel inferior. This feeling is accentuated by the socio-cultural norms and practices as a result of which the black women do not make an attempt to bring about changes in their lives. This tendency actually promotes the continued domination of the males who refuse to be empathetic towards their women. For instance, when July brings in chopped wood for the Smales, Bam feels uncomfortable and tells July that he can chop wood himself. But July states categorically: "—The women bring the wood. You see all the time, the women are doing it" (*July's People* 72).

The man in the African society firmly establishes his role as the head of the family as he is the sole bread winner of the family. We rarely come across instances where there is role reversal which is otherwise commonly found in the society of the whites. In the western society, one sees shared responsibility in bringing up the children. The man in the society of the blacks plays a pivotal role in financially sustaining the family and therefore, he gains higher position of importance in the family. July's uneducated wife knows no realm outside the boundaries of her home. Neither does she dare to explore the avenues available outside. Being pushed to subservience, she does not believe in taking risks or accepting challenges. For his wife, nothing else matters and everything pales into insignificance when compared to the survival of her family. An evocative expression made by Mary Wollstonecraft regarding the condition of women of her generation aptly encapsulates the plight of black women in Gordimer's novels: 'immured in their families, groping in the dark' (C. Kaplan 155). The darkness that surrounds them is one of ignorance which denies them the ability to reflect and throw light on their predicament.

Perhaps one of the most lasting and impressive images of the difference between the status of black and the white woman is found in the description of

Maureen's childhood days. When Maureen was a child, she had a black servant named Lydia. Gordimer exposes the deprived opportunities for the blacks in a subtle manner: "The black woman chews gum, too; her woollen cap is over one ear and she carries on her head a school case amateurishly stencilled in blue, MAUREEN HETHERINGTON" (*July's People* 37). While Maureen is privileged enough to get education, her servant Lydia has to content herself by carrying Maureen's school case on her head.

The ignorance of black women is contrasted with the conscious and enlightened outlook of white women. Maureen is knowledgeable and keen to learn about the socio-political events taking place around her. She keeps herself informed at all times whether in her own house or in July's hut. It is stated that Bam "kept the radio near and at the hours when news bulletins were read she would appear from wherever she might be" (30). In contrast, when July tells his mother and wife about the spreading violence which killed the whites, they are surprised as they are ignorant about what is going on in their country which includes the struggle for liberation, ongoing violence and so on. Neither do they seem to care. Their struggle for survival supersedes the abstract ideals of patriotism and liberation.

Deprivation of education for black women also seems to be a part of the agenda of patriarchy to maintain status quo in the society. Further, black women are not only ignorant of the ongoing issues in their country but are also projected as ignorant by their own men who consider themselves more knowledgeable and intelligent than their women. July's wife Martha gives herbal concoction for Royce, Maureen's son, who is sick. Martha has taken care of her own children with the concoction which has proved beneficial. However, July refuses to acknowledge the treasure house of local knowledge that native women possess, built over generations.

July gets annoyed and says: "—what do they know these farm women? They believe anything" (74).

July has been a servant in the white household for many years and has been influenced by the culture and ideologies of whites. It appears that he looks up to their cultural values and accepts that their knowledge is superior to his own. This makes him look down upon his ancient and rich heritage with all the wisdom that it possessed. Thus he projects black women's knowledge gained by years of wisdom as ignorance and exhibits his contempt of women of his own land and race.

The black women of South Africa are depicted as lonely and deprived in Gordimer's fiction. The women have passively accepted the reality that their men would always be sole breadwinners of their families. Besides, the Pass laws also constrained the wives from accompanying their husbands to the areas and towns restricted to the whites. Passes were issued only to the blacks who were employed in those areas and not to their families. While the black men resorted to having a second wife in those areas, it was their women left behind in the villages who felt the pangs of loneliness and despair. The loneliness of the black women whose husbands have gone away to the cities for work is reflected in Martha's habit of talking to him even in his absence. This habit was the outcome of his long absences from home: "her conversations with him provided question and response out of her own broodings" (99). It is, in a way, her way of coping with her loneliness. Many of the women of child-bearing age had husbands working in faraway cities. Their lives revolved round waiting for their husbands' letters as well as money. July, like other men never shared experiences of his life in the city so Martha could not clear her doubts regarding the places he had been in. So Martha just accepted her lot and resorted to silence. She focused only on how the money sent home would help her family to survive. So the

expectation of both July's mother and his wife from life was simple: "The sun rises, the moon sets; the money must come, the man must go" (100).

It is a stark contrast to the liberated condition of a white woman who enjoys her freedom and rights. She is in no way compelled to put up with the dictates of her male partner as she is not financially dependent on him. If she is unhappy in her relationship with her husband, she quits and moves on seeking happiness. For instance, in *July's People*, Maureen, the white female is fully aware of her rights and what she wants from life. It is not dictated by the whims of her husband Bam. In contrast to black women who wait endlessly for just a letter of communication from their husbands or for their homecoming, one finds Maureen living in a huge house with her husband and children enjoying the luxuries and comforts of life. Her wishes are fulfilled immediately and no imaginary conversations fill her days due to lack of companionship.

Further, when Maureen stays with July's family, she finds herself displaced totally. She feels alienated and realizes that "She was already not what she was" (35). Maureen's strong sense of identity is under siege in strange surroundings and she senses and understands what she is going through. She looks towards finding solutions to her problems. At the end of the story, Maureen wants to free herself even at the cost of abandoning her husband and kids because she wants a life for herself and a better future. In Gordimer's fiction, the mother-child bond which is a strong factor in black families is conspicuous by its absence when it comes to white mothers. Hence, "She runs: trusting herself with all the suppressed trust of a lifetime, alert, like a solitary animal at the season when animals neither seek a mate nor take care of the young, existing only for their lone survival…" (195). She enters the water "like some member of a baptismal sect to be borne again" and wades to the other side (194).

Thus, the white female protagonist has a chance of metaphorical rebirth and she chooses to do so having the agency to get out of the dull and dismal life whereas July's wife and mother continue to suffer in the system handed down to them over the ages.

The complete absence of interracial interactions in South Africa between the blacks and the whites is clearly brought out in the novel when July's wife narrates her first meeting with Maureen: "The white woman's hand, when she stood there and offered it—the first time, touching white skin" (26). But this kind of hesitation does not exist among her white female protagonists who are attracted towards black men. While July's wife is in awe of holding Maureen's hand, the white females are seen to consider relationships with black men as normal. In Gordimer's fiction, it is observed that white females are an extension of Gordimer's female self—liberated and friendly toward the blacks. For instance, Maureen and Lydia are very close and share secrets of childhood. Maureen's daughter Gina becomes very close to a black girl named Nyiko and carries a black baby with her all the time. Gina is happy to be amongst the blacks and loves their babies and does not discriminate or even show disgust for their colour.

Gordimer continues to bring out the marginalisation and silent suffering of black women poignantly in her short stories too. One such story in her book titled *Jump and other Stories* is "Amnesty". The narrator of the story is a young black woman whose fiancé has been away in the town for nine years. The young man and the woman are not named. They represent the vast multitude of anonymous blacks in South Africa. Initially, the young man works for a construction company. He gradually gets into political activism and also gets involved in the liberation movement which leads to his arrest and subsequent imprisonment on Robben Island.

The liberation movement takes a toll on their lives and leaves his fiancée in a lonely state. Due to her forced separation from her fiancé she takes refuge in the silence of nature perpetually waiting for him to return. During his imprisonment in Robben Island, the young man's fiancée gives birth to a baby girl who grows up without experiencing the love of her father. After two years, the young man's parents and his fiancée manage to save enough to visit him on Robben Island. But unfortunately, due to their ignorance, they are unable to see him as they have not applied for a visitation permit prior to their visit. After travelling a long way and coming up to the point of taking a ferry to the island, they are refused permission to see him and lose their hard earned money in the process. Being caught in an agonising predicament, the young woman reproaches herself, "[…] we on the farms don't know about these things. It was as he said; our ignorance is the way we are kept down, this ignorance must go" (*Jump* 251). Again, ignorance of the masses is what pins them down to a pitiable condition. If they need to free themselves from ignorance, they need to attain good education. However, the white government has no inclination to do so as they intend to rule taking advantage of the ignorance of the blacks. The black men too, on their part, do nothing to provide education to their women thus ensuring that the vicious circle of ignorance continues.

After five years, the young man who is detained on Robben Island is released. His comrades visit him at the farm and his fiancée listens to their discussions pertaining to politics but remains silent due to her ignorance. When she is pregnant again, it is considered just as a 'women's business' (255). Her only useful role seems to be that of a child-bearer whose offspring would one day belong "to a new country" (256). The woman feels isolated and lost due to her ignorance about political developments. The black man on the other hand, places his political commitment

above everything else wherein it encroaches upon even their private space and conversations. She reveals, “I can see it is important, more important than anything we could ever have to say to each other when we are alone” (255). It is unfortunate that she does not get to spend her time with him for years at a stretch and when she does get to be with him, his mind is occupied with thoughts that distract his attention. The couple are not able to enjoy each other’s company resulting in great disappointment for her. At the end of the story, the man seems to be more and more involved politically, and spends time away from the young woman leaving her miserable and lonely. “I am sitting here where I came often when he was on the Island. I came to get away from the others, to wait by myself” (257). She is disappointed and left waiting for the unknown future. The story ends with the same note as it has begun. The woman’s life seems to be bleak as she waits endlessly to find her peace and happiness. As articulated by her, “[…] I’m waiting. Waiting for him to come back. Waiting. Waiting to come back home” (257).

In both the narratives—*July’s People* and “Amnesty”—the black women are trapped by their ignorance. They have no idea about the world that they live in being forcefully confined to their homes. As admitted by the narrator in the story ‘Amnesty’, “But I have never seen the sea except to colour it in blue at school, and I couldn’t imagine a piece of earth surrounded by it. I could only think of a cake of dung, dropped by the cattle, floating in a pool of rain-water they’d crossed …” (249). Her imagination is limited due to inadequate opportunities for education and travel and therefore, she can only imagine the land and sea merely as ‘a cake of dung… floating in a pool of rain water’.

Rob Nixon convincingly argues that even though Gordimer's black female characters lack the vitality and robustness of their white counterparts, she portrays the relationship between black men and white women imbued with 'sexual chemistry':

> Gordimer's inability to generate resonant black female characters stems in part from the composition of the interracial circles in which she moved: black women were poorly represented among the bohemians, intellectuals, political leaders, and other professional classes. Moreover, Gordimer's insistence on sexual chemistry as a crucial catalyst for interracial communication meant that, in autobiographical terms, she accrued the confidence to portray black men to a degree that she never achieved with black women. (10)

In Gordimer's world, it is always a white woman falling in love or having a relationship with a black man as she finds him attractive. On the other hand, the predatory instinct of white male which looks upon black female as a sexualised object prevents white man from establishing healthy relationship with black woman. His liaison with black woman ends up being scandalous and does not last beyond the fulfilment of physical desires. Moreover, the kind of nuanced understanding shown by the white female protagonists towards their black male counterparts is completely absent in the case of white male characters vis-à-vis black female characters. In other words, the relationship between white male and black female is always characterised by domination and exploitation.

In addition, black women in the novels of Gordimer are content to remain in the background unseen and unheard. We find a few exceptions like Marisa Kgosana in *Burger's Daughter* or Aila in *My Son's Story* who make an attempt to change their destiny. Nevertheless, these characters achieve marginal success in their endeavours

and fade away into obscurity unlike the white women protagonists of her fictional narratives. Marisa Kgosana is the wife of an ANC activist and is well connected too. Despite her consistent efforts, she is unable to rise beyond the colour bar and obtain the privileges accorded to white women in her country. Similarly, Aila comes out of her shell and joins the Movement but it is Helen, the white female who dominates the narrative. She influences Sonny more than his wife Aila. Being unable to achieve their goals, both Marisa and Aila end up being frustrated.

In Gordimer's fiction, the white women characters are guided by their liberal humanist spirit. They consistently raise their voice against racial discrimination. They extend a helping hand to the blacks to fight against injustice and are even prepared to go to prison for the sake of procuring justice for the blacks. One such white female is Rosa, the protagonist of *Burger's Daughter*.

Rosa is a fourteen year old girl who seems to be influenced by her parents' who have been involved in the struggle for liberation of the blacks in South Africa. Her home is a welcome destination for blacks as well as liberal whites and serves as a meeting point for planning out strategies for liberation struggle. Rosa talks about her father's influence during her formative years:

> __ If Lionel and my mother… if the concepts of our life, our relationships, we children accepted from them were those of Marx and Lenin, they'd already become natural and personal by the time they reached me. D' you see? It was all on the same level at which you—I—children learn to eat with a knife and fork, go to church if their parents do, use the forms of address by which the parents' attitudes—respect, disapproval, envy, whatever—towards people are expressed. I was the same as every other kid. (*BD* 46)

Rosa is no different from other minor children who are dependent on their parents. Rosa, being just fourteen years of age is incapable of taking control of her own life. She idolises her parents, does what she is instructed without analysing it. Rosa's is unable to decide what she wants for herself probably because she is too young. She respects her father's wishes and is even ready to be engaged to her father's friend Noel de Witt who is imprisoned. She is allotted the task of passing secret messages on the pretext of being his fiancée. This helped Noel to receive smuggled notes and coded letters (*BD* 132). However, after the death of her parents, she shakes off the liberal ideas ingrained into her consciousness by them and gradually forgets the commitment of her family towards liberation of the blacks. She also leaves her country and does not wish to come back again. Conversely, at the end of the novel she is seen to return to South Africa and fight for the same cause again but the reason is different. She is no longer bound by the dictates of the past. Rather, her black brother Baasie is primarily responsible for her decision to get drawn again into the liberation struggle of South Africa. The journey of Rosa from a fourteen year old to a grown woman is fascinating. She has matured into an independent and conscientious individual. Though she wished to stay away from the liberation struggle, she chooses to come back to it and is content to be imprisoned. Besides being a woman liberal in her thought and action, Rosa is also portrayed as a woman who refuses to be trapped by love. She is a strong woman who does not need any man to complete her life nor does she attach great importance to the institution of marriage. Her sexual relationships are simple and uncomplicated acts of physical gratification which she fulfils from time to time without getting emotionally involved. For instance, she comes into contact with Conrad who is doing a post-graduate thesis on Italian literature and working on Wednesdays and weekends as a bookie's clerk at the

race course. Soon, they become friends and move on to become lovers. But Rosa refuses to get emotionally involved with Conrad or even consider their relationship as one filled with love. Rather, it is restricted merely to an intense physical relationship. Speaking of her relationship with Conrad she says, "It hasn't happened even when I thought I was in love—and we couldn't ever have been in love" (11).

Rosa's sexual relationship with Conrad is warm and casual without any expectations or commitments. Rosa does not mind him bringing in another woman who gives him Spanish lessons and all three of them share the place without any animosity. Rosa is a free-thinking and independent woman who is free to enter into and get out of relationships as she wishes. She extends the same liberty to the men she gets involved with. She is neither possessive of Conrad nor jealous of his relationships with other women. For instance, "Conrad went off some evenings for Spanish lessons and sometimes came back with the girl who taught him. Those nights he spent in the living room; Rosa, going to work in the morning, stepped round the two of them rumpled among the old cushions and kaross on the floor like children overcome by sleep in the middle of a game" (35). Rosa is a mature woman who values not only her freedom but that of the ones she loves too.

All the white protagonists in Gordimer's fiction are broad-minded. Their men have the freedom to choose their relationships and so have the women. But, as far as blacks are concerned, their women are forced to accept the relationships that their husbands are involved in. In South Africa, it is the black men who enjoy sexual freedom which is denied to black women. Whereas, amongst the whites, the women too have equal sexual freedom as males do. For instance, in the novel *A Sport of Nature* Whaila Kgomani marries Hillela despite having wife and kids. July, in *July's People* is in a relationship with a woman when he is employed in the city. Further, in

the short story ‘Mission Statement’ General Gladwell Shadrack Chabruma wants to take on a white woman named Roberta Blayne as his wife so that he could proudly flaunt her as he is ashamed of his uneducated black wife. Again, in *My Son’s Story* a Coloured man named Sonny has an affair Helen who is an activist and a white lawyer. He gets into a relationship despite having a loving wife and children which causes a lot of unhappiness in his family. The blacks are seen to be in secret relationships with white women whereas white women are open about their relationships with black men and are unashamed of their decisions to have sexual liaisons with them.

Further, while the white women exercise their freedom of choice pertaining to sexual relationships, the black women are at times pushed into flesh trade in order to survive. “Outside the bottle store next door the derelict black women who were always there, not professionals but ready to trade the alleyway use of their unsteady bodies in fair exchange for drink, pleaded with muzzy black building workers”(*BD* 26). Again, in comparison, the white protagonists never seem to reach this stage of indulging in flesh trade however desperate their situation might be. For instance, in the novel *A Sport of Nature*, the white protagonist Hillela is taken by her lover to a place called Tamarisk and abandoned. She is then seen on the beach with no other possessions. Then, an Afrikaner woman by the name of Christa Zeederburg sees her and “the big safety-pin that held together the waistband of the girl’s jeans above a broken zipper…” (*Sport* 161) and decides to help her out. Yet, Hillela is dignified and calm. In contrast, the black women in *Burger’s Daughter* are depicted as “quarrelling drunk women…. parenthetic to their wrangling. One swayed and staggered her blouse like a grey burst sausage and a blanket hitched around her waist in place of a skirt” (*BD* 26).

The pathetic state of the nameless mass of the black women continues with no leader or solution in sight. Hillela is also in a desperate situation but unlike black women does not end up losing her dignity. She is helped by an Afrikaner woman who gives her shelter. Soon, Hillela takes charge of herself and moves on in life successfully. While Hillela is able to change her life and sail through tough circumstances, the black women are not entitled to choose a life of dignity amidst poverty, frequently being forced into flesh trade for survival.

Again, in *Burger's Daughter*, the only black woman who attracts attention is Marisa Kgosana. She is a beautiful black woman who has a husband locked away on Robben Island and who takes on many lovers without inhibition. However, Marisa Kgosana does not achieve anything. Neither does she contribute to the liberation struggle. Historically, the role of black women in politics was marginal or non-existent being limited to protests and agitations against pass laws, rapes and so on. Rosa, for instance, talks about "The black ladies' fear of drawing attention as agitators…." (*BD* 203) The fiction of Gordimer is replete with instances wherein black women are reduced to the level of silent and passive spectators of the general drama of their turbulent history.

The theme of marginalisation of black women is further dealt with in the short story "Mission Statement" (*Loot and other stories*). Roberta Blayne, a white woman from England works for an international aid agency and is posted in Africa. Her mission is to procure aid to the third-world countries. While on her mission, she meets General Gladwell Shadrack Chabruma, Deputy-Director in the Department of Land Affairs. After being acquainted for a while, they become lovers. The General expresses his desire to marry Roberta but she reserves her decision and does not commit immediately. While the General is of the opinion that he can take on many

wives, Roberta is against the idea of destroying his marriage by being his second wife as it would be unfair to the first wife. Roberta Blayne is self-conscious of her identity as a white for she belonged to a family who oppressed the blacks for decades. Her grandfather owned a mine and ran it like a slave plantation. He regularly sent a man to the town to fetch a case of whisky and the servant would walk to the town starting on Monday and would be back on Friday. This act of cruelty amounting to exploitation was an accepted practice by the colonisers and due to this reason Roberta carries the burden of guilt into her personal relationships too. She is ashamed of her grandfather's act. Though Roberta is initially ready to marry the General who is a black, she changes her mind later as she does not wish to hurt his wife. Roberta accepts that "love affairs are a cul de sac on the marriage map" (*Loot* 66). Again, the decision is taken by her as she does not want to be a part of the system which exploited the blacks. Also, she does not want to deprive his African wife of her legitimate husband by marrying him. While Roberta has the power to do so, sadly his African wife is not given a choice and is forced to accept her husband's will if he chooses to marry again and bring home a second wife. For a black man, a wife is just an object to be possessed and made use of. She can never aspire to be his friend and partner. A statement made by one of the minor characters makes this issue very clear: "That's Gladwell's wife. Must have married her very young and apart from producing a brood …she's sure no asset in furthering his career now" (*Loot* 53). The identity of a black woman once again is restricted to being a good wife and mother.

Black women's sense of identity and self-fulfilment is tied down to their ability to produce children. White women on the other hand do not judge their position in society in terms of their ability to raise families by having babies. They stand apart from black women in terms of their achievements and independence.

Black women feel worthless and are also looked down upon unless they produce babies for their husbands. They gain acceptance and legitimacy in their families only by producing babies.

Feminists argue that reproductive rights are a core part of women's rights over their own bodies. They have the "power to make informed choices about one's own fertility, child bearing, child rearing, gynaecologic health, and sexual activity" and also the "resources to carry out such decisions safely and effectively" (Bowden and Mummery 65). However, in the black communities of South Africa, the cultural and social ideals of maternity force motherhood upon women and consequently their bodies take a toll as they are forced to give birth to many children or risk being devalued.

The reproductive rights which a white woman is able to exercise for herself is highlighted in Gordimer's short story titled 'Karma' from *Loot and other stories*. The protagonist Karen is a white woman who is unable to conceive and the couple decides to go to the sperm bank. Once they reach the place, Karen feels guilty of accepting a white man's sperm as Karen's husband has seen "The torturers who held people's heads under water, strung them up by their hands, shot a child as he approached; …" (*Loot* 209). Karen is a white female who is liberal in her views and stands for the subjugated black community. She and her husband do not want to be a part of the system which inflicted violence and unleashed terror on the blacks in their own land. And yet they are unwilling to accept the sperm of a black man too: "If the anonymous drop contains a black's DNA, genes? It would bring to life again in Karen's body, our bodies as one, something of those whose heads were held under water, who were strung up by the hands, a child who was shot" (209). Hence, they are unable to decide whether to go in for the sperm of an oppressive white male or oppressed black as they

are both unwilling to be a part of the history of the exploiters and the exploited in South Africa. They wonder what it would be like if they go ahead with the idea of accepting the sperm from the sperm bank: "what in the DNA, the genes, could begin to surface from the past?" (209). Hence, Karen aborts the idea of conceiving through a sperm bank and prefers to remain childless. Karen is not forced by her husband to have a child and he leaves it to her will. Unlike her black counterparts, she does not find her identity tied down to becoming a mother. When she chooses to remain childless, her decision in no way comes in the way of her self-esteem. More importantly, the story highlights the fact that Karen, the white female is able to exercise her right to remain childless which is sadly denied to black women in South Africa.

Some feminists believe in the centrality of mother-child bond and place it even above heterosexual relations. By doing so, they assert the importance and uniqueness of motherhood. Judith Keegan Gardiner in her essay "Mind Mother: Psychoanalysis and Feminism" talks about the bond that exists between mother and child. She states that "a woman's desire for a baby is to some extent compensatory to her dissatisfaction with her heterosexual relations" and that "women seek this intimacy by re-creating with their babies the symbiotic bonds they first enjoyed with their mothers" (134). However, this does not seem to be the case with the white women protagonists portrayed in Gordimer's fiction. Her white protagonists do not seek self-fulfilment and contentment in terms of becoming mothers. They choose instead to rely on their abilities to achieve recognition and success in their lives which is totally divorced from the discourse of motherhood.

It is interesting to note that no woman in Gordimer's fiction desires babies in order to recreate the legendary bond that exists between mother and child—be it a

black or a white woman. Mother-child bond seems to be absent in the world of blacks too since it is hardly the focus of Gordimer's fictional narratives. The black women are undoubtedly components of large families and have many children. Black women are just compelled to prove their usefulness and worth by bearing children. It is indeed a choice thrust on them, as it were. As far as the female white characters are concerned, they remain indifferent to the question of motherhood. For instance, in her first novel *The Lying Days* its protagonist Helen goes to the University at Johannesburg and finds an accommodation in the house of John and Jenny who are parents to an infant. However, the baby in her presence does not stir her maternal instinct to the extent of bonding with it. She says, "I never had cared for babies and I did not feel constrained to admire this one; even this small freedom appealed to me" (*Lying Days*199). Helen breaks loose from the discourse of motherhood—an integral component of the institution of marriage entrenched in patriarchy—since she values her freedom more. Her self-worth is neither tied down to the process of bearing children nor does she regard it as an accomplishment in life.

Again, in *None to Accompany Me,* its protagonist Vera Stark's daughter Annick is deprived of motherly love and care as Vera has no time for her daughter. Vera is too preoccupied with her own life and career and is unable to give time or love to her daughter. Later on, she learns that her daughter Annick has become a lesbian. Vera is greatly shocked and blames herself for it. She feels guilty of the fact that she never tried to bond with her daughter. "Vera overcomes the urge to touch her daughter, place a hand on her cheek, and trace her features. It's as if over thirty years she has missed the times to do so, she has always been looking elsewhere, turned away, while the girl grew and changed and moved into another self" (*NAM* 157). On learning that her daughter has become a lesbian Vera connects it with her being

uncaring towards her daughter at a time when she needed her attention and guidance. She articulates her dilemma and pain in the following words:

> The seventeen-year-old schoolgirl alone in the kitchen over those textbooks she used to cover with fancy paper and stickers of film stars. She looks up from the conventional wisdom of adults she's been taught, for parents their children come before everything and all others—her mother walks in warm from the body of another man. Fucked out". (164)

Vera is the quintessential example of white female characters inhabiting the fictional world of Gordimer. These characters are extremely individualistic, passionately pursuing happiness and freedom even to the extent of excluding their families and children. So, the mother-child bond seems to be non-existent in the world of white women.

This factor is illustrated in another short story titled 'Karma' wherein a white Russian woman named Elena is taken to Italy and forced to marry a butcher. She becomes pregnant and her euphoric husband spares no effort to take good care of her and keep her happy. Initially, Elena is very happy on learning that she would soon be a mother. However, a visit to the slaughterhouse changes her attitude towards life. Elena is shocked to see the animals barred in the building, waiting to be butchered. The sight of helpless animals makes her realise that she too is trapped in the prison house of marriage where her feelings do not count. She does not wish be like the animals which her husband has fattened for slaughter. Her sense of horror of being trapped in marriage is brought out in the following words:

> …she is swollen with such horror, her body feels the iron bars enclosing her, the bars are before her eyes, she cannot turn about, escape to the house. She

> does not know where it comes from, this knowledge—happening to her—of how it is for them, beasts born dumb as a human being can be made dumbly unable to free itself. (*NAM* 231)

Though Elena has been pampered by her husband and showered upon with gifts and comforts, she feels suffocated by his generosity due to the fact that she has lost her freedom. Hence, out of anguish and disgust she chooses to abort the baby and return to her country shunning her marital life. Being the wife of a rich butcher, Elena could have led a comfortable life, but she chooses to come back to the life of poverty. Irrespective of their social and economic status, Gordimer's white female characters exhibit their unwavering faith in freedom and autonomy of action.

The independent and individualistic spirit of white females is again brought out in another novel *A Sport of Nature*. The main protagonist is Hillela, a spirited girl who leads the escapades in the school and also develops relationship with a coloured boy named Don for which she is asked to leave the school. Her aunts—Olga and Paulina—are contrasting personalities. Olga is like any other colonial white woman in South Africa—self-absorbed and selfish, ready to leave the country when crisis arises whereas Pauline is a white woman who works for the upliftment of the blacks and tries to alleviate their suffering. She is even ready to sacrifice her holiday in order to help the blacks. Hillela chooses to lead her life in her own terms. She unashamedly has sexual relations with her young cousin Sasha which shocks the entire family. When Sasha's mother Pauline finds Hillela in bed with her son, she is outraged beyond measure and tells her husband, "—Love, then, incest, going on who knows how long" (*Sport* 117).

After her affair with her cousin Sasha which enrages the entire household, she meets a free-lance journalist Andrew Rey and leaves South Africa and is next seen at Tamarisk Beach abandoned by her lover. Undaunted by this setback, Hillela moves on and enters into a relationship with a black leader Whaila Kgomani and gets pregnant. She does not marry him out of compulsion but does so because she loves him. Soon, a child is born who is as dark-skinned as her father. Hillela joyfully accepts the child and names her Nomzamo after Nelson Mandela's wife.

Hillela dreams of having a 'rainbow family' of her own as she was a child who was abandoned by her own mother and never experienced the joys of family life. She is overjoyed to find herself pregnant with their second child. Sadly, when her husband Whaila Kgomani is shot dead at his own home it signifies the end of the dreams of a 'rainbow family'.

The sudden death of her husband leaves her shattered so much so that she loses her unborn baby. As put across by her:

> The baby rejected life, wrenching itself from the body it was anchored in. It loosed with it the waters of grief: the longing of the body the man would never enter, the untouched breasts, empty vagina, empty clothes in the cupboard, rooms without a voice: desertion. What am I without him? And if, without him I am nothing, what was I? The loving gone, the African family of rainbow-coloured children gone…. (272)

But once again, as the story progresses, Hillela is seen to recover and regain control over her life. Subsequently, Hillela shifts to America and her child though dark-skinned does not suffer the fate of other black women who have no identity in South Africa but is lucky enough to carve a niche of her own. Nomzamo is one of the

fortunate ones to escape the fate of being a nameless black woman in South Africa with an uncertain future. It is only due to her 'white' mother's decision to relocate to America, the dark-skinned child is ensured of decent education and secure future as well.

Hillela realises the futility of raising big families in the poverty-stricken black communities of South Africa. She states:

> The real family, how they smell.The real rainbow family. The real rainbow family stinks. The dried liquid of dysentery streaks the legs of babies and old men and the women smell of their monthly blood. They smell of the lack of water. They smell of lack of food. They smell of bodies blown up by the expanding gases of their corpses' innards, lying in the bush in the sun…. (317)

Poverty as well as deprivation of black women is brought out in stark expressions like 'dried liquid dysentery streaks the legs of the babies', and 'women smell of menstrual blood' (317). The spectacular and radiant colours of rainbow are absent in their world. For a white like Hillela, a rainbow family just meant a family filled with joy and happiness. In contrast, for a black woman a rainbow family signifies only misery and unhappiness.

Apart from Hillela, other white female characters like her mother and aunt are also independent and in full control of their lives. Hillela's aunt Pauline is determined to bring up her daughter Carole to be like her without any prejudices towards the blacks. As she tells Hillela "…..you know in this house I take full responsibility for bringing you up without any colour- feeling, any colour consciousness" (53). Hillela's mother Ruth is also strong-willed and is described as a woman who "…fell in love with a wailing *fado*, she wanted passion and tragedy, not domesticity" (57). Hence,

she gave up her husband and child and eloped. She has no pangs of guilt and tells the man whom she loves her philosophy of life: " What's the use of trying to change other people's lives if you don't get a chance to live the only one you're going to have…….I've had a husband, I've given birth . So what does it mean? These things were done to me. But with *you* I do things" (61). Ruth has a very strong overpowering sense of individuality. She is the embodiment of freedom and is ready to abandon her husband and child to enjoy it. She chooses to make the best of the life and refuses to get trapped by the restrictive social norms and is able to rise above them.

In Gordimer's fictional narratives, the white heroines are projected as liberal and broad-minded who are ready to embrace blacks without any hesitation. They are quick to take up the cause of blacks and join their liberation movement. In *None to Accompany Me* we come across Vera Stark who is a lawyer by profession. Vera is not interested in making money as a lawyer by taking up insurance claims or divorce cases. While talking to her husband Bennet Stark she says: "I don't want to fight their insurance claims when they lose their jewellery and Mercedes. Or dig their dirt in their divorces" (*NCM* 20). Instead, Vera chooses to work as a legal advisor at a Foundation with the intention of procuring justice to the blacks. It gives her a greater sense of satisfaction. She has clarity of vision and purpose regarding her personal and public life:

> She went to work at the Foundation, not out of the white guilt people talked about, but out of the need to take up, to balance on her own two feet the time and place to which, by birth, she understood she had no choice but to belong. This need must have been growing unheeded-seed shat by a bird and germinating, sprouting beside a cultivated tree – climbing the branches of passionate domesticity. (20-21)

On the personal front, Vera who is already married falls in love with another man named Bennet Stark. She divorces her husband and marries Bennet Stark. Nevertheless, her relationship with Bennet Stark does not stop her from having sexual relationships with other men as she believes in absolute freedom.

Otto Abarbanel who comes to the Foundation to film a documentary on its work is attracted towards Vera Stark. She too finds herself being attracted towards him and she decides to enter into a sexual relationship with him. She defends her act: "If Ben had taught her that the possibilities of eroticism were beyond experiences with one man, then this meant that the total experience of lovemaking did not end with him" (61). Vera is bold enough to assert her independence and never hesitates to break the stereotypes like 'good wife' or 'caring mother'. As she sees it, she is the sole custodian of her body and she can use it in whichever way she pleases. For instance, she returns home after an act of passionate lovemaking with Otto Abarbanel: "…what happened in the three hours' interim was something that concerned her alone, her sexuality, a private constant in her being, a characteristic like the colour of her eyes, the shape of a nose, the nature of a personal spirit that never could belong to anyone other than the self" (62-63). She strongly believes that only she has total and complete rights over her body and self. It is up to her to choose whom she wants to have sexual relationships with. Marriage is not bondage either in terms of social commitment or sexual loyalties. Nor does Vera Stark consider herself as promiscuous. The wedding vows are limited to being together and enjoying each other's company. There is no loss of freedom on any front. Like Rosa in *Burger's Daughter* who gives her lover Conrad total freedom in his relationships, Vera too does not control Ben's life either. They love and respect each other.

The assertion of personal freedom in terms of sexual choices is seen in a few other characters too. Vera's daughter Annick or Annie as she is fondly called is a doctor by profession. Vera discovers that Annick is a lesbian and has found a partner in Lou. This sexual choice of her daughter comes as a shock to Vera initially. She confronts her daughter and tries to reason it out with her. Vera speaks of the merits of heterosexual relationship and considers it as the socially accepted norm to be followed. Vera says:

> -Yes. I love men. I mean exactly what I'm saying: how can there be love-making without the penis. I don't care what subtleties of feeling you achieve with all those caresses—and when you caress the other partner you're really caressing yourself, aren't you, because you are producing in her, you say, exactly what you yourself experience—after all that, you end up without that marvellous entry, that astonishing phenomenon of a man's body that transforms itself and that you can take it in. You can't tell me there is anything like it! There's nothing like it, no closeness like it. The pleasure, the orgasms– yes, you may produce them just as well, you'll say, between two women. But with the penis inside you, it's just not the pleasure—it's the being no longer alone. You exchange the burdens of self. You're another creature.-(158-159)

Vera Stark is only speaking of the sexual pleasure that a man can provide a woman with. She never speaks of a woman's dependence on man emotionally or financially. She just asserts that sexual acts are both pleasant and fulfilling for women with men than with those of the same sex. This, however, is rejected by her daughter Annie who retorts: "- You really have the same view as Dad, for him that thing's also the essential, because *he has it*, he can't bear to think of any woman rejecting what's

gained for him the treasure of his life, you, you-" (160). Annie too affirms her freedom of choice and continues to have Lou as her partner.

Vera continues with her work of helping the blacks who needed someone to stand by them and help them get justice. She is guided by the idealistic motive of helping them and therefore, works with passion and commitment towards the cause of black empowerment. Gradually, she finds happiness in life not by sexual relationships but by her commitment towards upholding the cause of the blacks. Hence, she loses interest in her husband Ben who is very passive and disinterested in her cause. Vera is troubled by the fact that Ben is indifferent to the violence inflicted on blacks by his own people. Vera "could not see the violence at the roadside as evidence of her meaning in his life. She could not share the experience with him on those terms. She was not responsible for his existence, no, no, it was not entered to in the mountains, it could not *be* anywhere. *What to do with that love*" (200). Vera cannot be satisfied by Ben's love alone unless he shares her passion and idealism. She leaves Ben who concedes that their marriage is a failure and Ben goes to live with his son. Vera is unperturbed and philosophises: "Everyone ends up moving alone towards the self" (306). She realises that life is a journey by every individual to realise the potential of one's self and that the quest has to be done alone. More importantly, she believes in leading her life in her own terms. When her daughter Annie asks Vera the reason for their estrangement in spite of her father loving her passionately, she replies: "To find out about my life. The truth. In the end. That's all" (312).

On the whole, Gordimer has examined gender through the prism of race. In her world, gender issues are overdetermined by the seminal category of race. The divergent trajectories in the behaviour and action of her white and black female characters are premised on their racial differences. The differences are primarily due

to the vast gap in the material conditions of the whites and the blacks. While the white women have access to education which moulds their thoughts and empowers them intellectually even to the extent of challenging patriarchy, the black women are denied education and other opportunities and hence trapped in the mire of traditions and beliefs which drags them down.

Gordimer has authentically portrayed the conditions in which the black women live. As a writer she looked around her world and truthfully recorded what she saw. She was a witness to the sordid narrative of history wherein the black woman was doubly colonised by the colonial as well as patriarchal ideology. The white woman imbued with 'agency' was able to assert her autonomy or challenge patriarchy with conviction and vigour but her black counterpart could not do so, sadly because she was at the receiving end of history. Gordimer's vast corpus of novels and short stories is a testimony to this truth.

CHAPTER IV

INTERROGATING VIOLENCE

What then did you expect when you unbound the gag that had muted those black mouths? That they would chant your praises? Did you think that when those heads that our fathers had forcibly bowed down to the ground were raised again, you would find adoration in their eyes?

—Jean Paul Sartre

4.1 History of Violence

History of human civilization is littered with uncountable episodes of violence. In fact, violence perpetrated upon the 'other' predicated on the axes of race, ethnicity, religion and gender has defined the nature and character of human civilization. Empires have been built as well as annihilated through the principal instrument of violence—war. Besides, even modern nation states have consistently institutionalised and rationalised acts of violence premised on the principles of justice and democracy.

Therefore, the discourse of violence has emerged as a seminal issue which has been vastly explored by writers all over the world. Great writers are preoccupied with the issue of violence as it has been a recurring phenomenon during all periods of human history. The term 'violence' was earlier considered to be a feature of barbaric society where crude methods of torture were used to inflict suffering on their own kind as well as others. Civilised people considered peaceful co-existence in society to be their forte. However, with the passage of time, the so called 'civilised' societies were also found to be guilty of propagating violence across the globe. Violence has

been defined and understood in multiple ways.The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence as "the intentional use of power or physical force, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation" (WHO). In its definition, the World Health Organisation has specified only physical violence causing bodily harm.Willem Schinkel also attributes physical qualities to violence and states: “Violence has its roots in a concept of force, hence the primary dictionary definitions of violence: 'the exercise of (physical) force' (19). However, the act of violence cannot be simplified by equating it with physical force alone. Violence has now come to mean acts—both physical and mental—that cause suffering. Meenakshi analyses the extent and depth of violence as follows:

> One can exhibit violence in physical, Psychological, or sexual form or simply by neglecting someone to the point of deprivation. The extent of violence ranges from self, to family and friends, to community and the largest expression is the entire war situation between and/or within the nations. Violence has affected civilizations. It is evident from the historical facts that wars that are the epitome of violence have ruined millions of lives. Those who resort to violence justify their action by citing various reasons but in the end it is only the personal perception that leads to such kind of behaviour. (“Short Essay”)

According to her, violence can range from harming oneself to inflicting it on a very large scale on mankind in the form of war. Amartya Sen analyses the reasons for warring against other factions and nations and argues that “… sectarian glorification translates easily into similar celebrations of the imagined honour of dying, while

killing others, for many different types of collectivities, not just nation and citizenship, but also religion, race, community, or the newly popular but deeply befuddling category now called “civilisation” (4).

Psychologists are trying to find reasons for man’s inability to curb the urge to hurt members of his own species.While some thinkers have condemned violence, there are others who have found it to be a necessary evil. Again, while acts of violence are generally not condoned, the acts of violence by the State however, are deemed a necessity to maintain law and order in the society. The State may use torture and inhuman methods under the pretext of maintaining peace.

Besides, there is also a need to look at violence arising out of gender abuse and domestic violence. Where patriarchy is the ultimate decree, female rights are glossed over and any attempt on the part of the female to assert herself may lead to incidents of physical and mental abuse by the male thus subjecting her into forced silence.

In addition, colonisation of many countries of the world also led to the exploitation of natives by the colonisers. Suppressed by the imperialist regime, they were unable to protest against crimes committed against them and had to suffer the ignominy in silence. Further, when a particular class or race is oppressed and put to unbearable suffering, they rise in rebellion to shake off the shackles of domination which may lead to violent acts resulting in bloodshed and loss of precious lives. The prevalence of racism in nations across the globe disrupts harmony and acts as a prominent factor responsible for sparking off violence in society.

A writer, who is part of the society, cannot look the other way when violence defines her lived experience and she has no alternative but articulate and explore it in

her writings. Gordimer's fiction too grapples with the issue of violence which has been the prominent feature of South Africa specifically during apartheid period. This chapter makes an attempt to come to grips with the discourse of violence in the context of Gordimer's fictional narratives. It also make a study of the times that Gordimer lived in and the kinds of violence that she projected in her works of fiction in an attempt to mirror the problematic reality of South Africa. Gordimer has explored the complex dynamics of violence against the backdrop of South Africa with remarkable sensitivity. The chapter also makes an attempt to examine the kinds of violence found in Gordimer's fiction, reasons for violence in South Africa, the psyche of individuals inflicting violence and also the people who are its victims.

4.2 History of Violence in South Africa

The imposition of European colonial rule on the African societies brought about a lot of changes in quick succession. In fact, it was the speed with which change occurred that marks the colonial period apart from earlier periods in South Africa. Some tribes like the Khoikhoi could not withstand the colonial powers and disintegrated within a matter of decades. However, other tribes resisted the forces of colonial intrusion, slavery and forced labour for a long period leading to frequent episodes of violence ("History"). Therefore, the power struggles between the coloniser and the colonised led to antagonism and hostility. Frantz Fanon says that, "The development of violence among the colonised people will be proportionate to the violence exercised by the threatened colonial regime" (*Wretched* 88). When the colonial rulers use violence as an instrument of subjugation it leads to higher incidences of violence by the colonised. Fanon goes on to add that the native is ready for violence as he understands that it is the only weapon available for him for survival.

Violence in South Africa took a giant leap in the seventeenth century when the English and the Dutch got firmly entrenched in South Africa. Their encounter with the natives was interspersed with frequent episodes of violence. The tribes put up a stiff resistance when their lands were taken over by the colonisers. The resistance by the natives was squashed with the might of bayonets and guns. The discovery of diamonds in the regions in 1900 resulted in an English invasion leading to the Boer War between the English and the Dutch. A spate of wars to gain supremacy forced the Dutch to move away and establish the Orange Free State and Transvaal. In the nineteenth century, the tension between liberal thought and colonial ideology became particularly acute in Europe as the domination of European imperial nations over the rest of the world reached its zenith. Ironically, in the same period when most political philosophers began to defend the principles of liberty and equality, the same individuals still defended the legitimacy of colonialism and imperialism. One way of reconciling those apparently opposed principles was the argument known as the "civilizing mission," which suggested that a temporary period of political dependence or tutelage was necessary in order for the "uncivilized" societies to advance to the point where they were capable of sustaining liberal institutions and self-government (Kohn).

Though the 'civilised' whites took upon themselves the task of civilising the so called 'barbarians', they also resorted to methods which dehumanized the native people of the colonized nations. Aime Cesaire, one of the founders of the negritude movement argues that colonisation "dehumanises even the most civilised man; …that the coloniser, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal"(13). Having developed a

condescending attitude, the coloniser refuses to acknowledge the colonised as a human being. The civilizing mission is however highly despicable as the means used to achieve the end is through violence. In the process of taming the native, the coloniser uses violence as an instrument of subjugation thus transforming himself into a beast.

In South Africa, racist practices crept in when the colonial rulers decided to segregate the blacks through a series of reforms in law. In 1913 the government brought about the Natives Land Act wherein only 8% of the South Africa was earmarked for black occupancy. This act legalised racial discrimination. J.M. Coetzee opines that when the Afrikaner party came to power in 1948, they "…began to sever political and cultural ties with Europe; as apartheid began to be implemented, moral ties were severed too; and from being the dubious colonial children of a far-off motherland, white South Africans graduated to uneasy possession of their own, less and less transigent internal colony" (*White Writing* 11). The Natives Land Act was followed by the Homeland Citizens Act in 1970 which established 'homelands' or 'reserves' for the natives, forcefully displacing thousands of blacks leading to discontent amongst the blacks. Strong resistance to apartheid policies by blacks compelled the colonisers to use violence as an instrument of state policy. The colonisers as well as the colonised were bent on proving themselves right and to add to their problem, their relationship was based on suspicion and hostility. The colonial rulers justified the use of violence on the grounds of maintaining the law and order in the State. The policemen and soldiers were the ones who saw to the enforcement of law which made Fanon state emphatically, "…he [law enforcer] is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native" (*Wretched* 38). Being the agents of the government, the policemen and soldiers are the symbol of intimidation

and brute force. Hence the liberation struggle is replete with recurring episodes of violence.

The 1950s was the decade in which the African National Congress and its alliance partners launched the massive Defiance Campaign—a huge, peaceful challenge to white supremacy. It was the decade in which the Freedom Charter—the central document of the anti-racist movement—was drafted on the basis of suggestions received from all over the nation. Further, it was the decade in which the apartheid regime responded with massive treason trials for those who defied it ("South African Literature" 307-8). Apartheid became the focal point of violent conflicts and also the militarisation of South African society.

In the early 1960s the apartheid regime in South Africa banned political organisations like the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress besides jailing the leader of the ANC Nelson Mandela and sending others into exile. Further, 16 June 1976 witnessed the Soweto Uprising which was the consequence of imposing Afrikaans as the official medium of instruction in schools leading to nationwide protests. Students boycotted schools and joined protesting groups. As many as 176 blacks lost their lives. The Black Consciousness Movement (BC) led by Steve Biko also gained prominence during this period. BC advocated an affirmation of black cultural values and racial solidarity in the face of state oppression. Steve Biko affirmed that black is beautiful and wanted the blacks to cherish their uniqueness. With Steve Biko gaining popularity amongst the masses, and his movement Black Consciousness gaining ground in South Africa, the white government felt threatened and consequently arrested Biko. He underwent torture in jail and died due to head injuries on 12 September 1977. Biko's death signifies the onset of institutional violence legitimised by the ruling white government in South Africa.

The liberation movement gained momentum when writers joined the struggle and inspired the people through their writings. The black writers' contribution is significant as they instilled courage and patriotism through their writings. The role played by the black writers is aptly summarized by Christopher Heywood:

> Literature became a vehicle to promote the political ideals of anti-Apartheid popular movements. Many of these productions were designed to mobilise audiences against state policies, and the genres of drama and poetry were utilised for their immediacy of impact. Couched in graphic language designed to arouse the emotions of listeners, their poems were often performed at political rallies. (311)

Literature thus became a medium for articulating people's resentments and dreams. To some extent, it was also responsible for the spread of violence during the liberation struggle as it gave a call to people to break free from the colonial rule. South African writers wrote both in their native tongue and in English focusing exclusively on the theme of politics of racial discrimination. Hence, "During apartheid, it was almost impossible to untangle the politics of writing in South Africa from the politics of resistance; whether in the form of protest poetry, the prison memoir or novel, writing in and of itself was considered an act of defiance. Writers were encouraged to deploy their pen as a weapon against oppression …." (*Feminism, Literature* 164). The government constantly misled the world on the conditions prevalent in South Africa and meticulously hid all its atrocities. It was mainly through the writings that the magnitude of state-sponsored violence was brought to the notice of the entire world.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, anti-apartheid resistance within the nation took the form of passive resistance—a peaceful form of agitation anchored in the principle of non-violence advocated by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi used the method of 'Sathyagraha' or peaceful opposition to acquire justice. He believed that violence was not the solution to problems which could be settled by means of dialogue between aggrieved parties. Hence, Gandhi was against the use of physical violence as a means to an end. In South Africa, Gandhi was a pivotal influence on the masses as well as the leaders. He was idolised as he fought to eliminate racism and secure the rights of the blacks. The black leaders like Nelson Mandela were greatly influenced by Gandhi and therefore continued to protest and offer resistance in a peaceful manner against the atrocities committed against them by the ruling white government. But, after the March 1960 massacre of 69 peaceful demonstrators at Sharpeville and the subsequent declaration of a State of Emergency and the banning of anti-apartheid parties including the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and the Communist Party of South Africa, the national resistance transformed itself into armed struggle and underground activity. The armed wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe (abbreviation MK, meaning Spear of the Nation) gained moral legitimacy for resorting to violence on the grounds of justice and freedom. "We have seen that it is the intuition of the colonized masses that their liberation must, and can only, be achieved by force" (*Wretched* 73). From the 1960s to 1989, MK carried out numerous acts of sabotage and attacks on military and police personnel (wiki.org).

Violence was then thought to be the only way out as peaceful methods had failed to achieve the desired aim of liberation. Violence and counter-violence saw bloodshed and untold suffering. Fanon too concedes that violence is the only way out of the so called 'Manichean delirium' created by colonialism (*Post-Colonial*

Literatures 76). The term ‘Manichean delirium’ refers to series of binary opposites like white/black, superior/inferior, good/bad, moral/immoral etc. between the whites and the blacks respectively. There is violence built into the ideology of racism and consequently “…that same violence will be claimed by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into forbidden quarters” (*Wretched* 40).

In the mid-1980s police and the army death squads were actively involved in the massacre of activists and dissidents. By mid-1987 the Human Rights Commission knew of at least 140 political assassinations in South Africa while about 200 people died at the hands of South African agents in neighbouring states (wiki.org). There might have been many more deaths which were not recorded as strict censorship prevented journalists from reporting, filming or photographing such incidents. The government ran its own covert disinformation programme that provided distorted accounts of the extrajudicial killings. There emerge shocking allegations in the book *The Lost Boys of Bird Island* co-authored by Minnie and journalist Chris Steyn against Magnus Mallan who was the defence minister during this period. It is conclusively proved that he was responsible for “…setting up death squads and sanctioning military raids on neighbouring states as he fought to maintain white-supremacist rule in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s” (Chothia bbc.com). He is also accused of sexual exploitation being part of a “paedophile ring which raped boys--mostly of mixed race – during “fishing excursions” on Bird Island…” (Chothia). The State also promoted attacks by vigilante groups on those who were against apartheid. The attacks were then falsely attributed by the government to "black-on-black" or factional violence within the communities.

After a prolonged bitter struggle, the African National Congress led by Nelson Mandela came to power in South Africa in 1994 heralding the dawn of a new era untainted by apartheid. Dennis Walder has observed that " The elections of April 1994 which followed, were conducted remarkably peacefully , but the transition from white minority rule to a non-racial, democratic state in South Africa remains a time of trauma, confusion and violence…"(153).

4.3 Theorising Violence

Violence has been a constant factor in human race. This has led to multiple theories of violence and the reasons for its occurrence have been explored from every possible angle. Fanon writes on the evils of colonial rule and examines how it perpetrates violence. Fanon believes that "colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (*Wretched* 61). He feels that there is a redemptive quality in the violent banishing of oppressors from the homeland that more diplomatic and negotiated solutions do not allow. The natives of a colonized state are subdued by the language and culture of the colonial power. Fanon describes his own experience as a colonised individual:

> I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema ... I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects ... I took myself far off from my own presence ... What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? (*Black Skin* 25)

Fanon felt that being forced to assimilate a strange culture was an act of violence causing inexplicable trauma and suffering and also resulting in a split in the natives' personality. To give up one's own culture forcefully was equivalent to an amputation or excision leading to mental assault and violence.

Gayatri Spivak has also analysed violence in the context of colonialism. She speaks of the colonisers treating the colonised as the 'other' and argues that "The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity" ("Subaltern Speak?" 24-25). Here, Gayatri Spivak unambiguously states that treating people of another race as 'other' amounts to an act of violence. This 'epistemic violence' is a well-planned project to undermine the importance of other races colonised by the European nations. Assertion of superiority of their race and culture over the other races and cultures also amounts to violence. The colonised are not only deprived of their own sense of identity but also forced to take upon themselves the pseudo-identity and values of the imperialist regime. This leads to loss of identity, self-esteem and psychological trauma of the natives. They feel victimized and violated. The colonised are forced to accept the imperial culture and therefore Gayatri Spivak asserts that 'epistemic violence' is always built into the colonial project.

Another important theory of violence has been put forward by Rene Girard, a well-known critic and philosopher. His theory is not confined to the analysis of violence in colonial and postcolonial societies alone. It is indeed applicable to all societies across the civilized world. Girard believes that violence is the product of 'mimetic desire'. It resembles the idea put forward by Plato who felt that man had a

great ability to imitate. This unique capacity to mimic others served as a fundamental mechanism of learning. Girard, however, highlights the difference between his idea of mimetic desire and Plato's concept of mimesis. According to Girard, most thinking devoted to imitation pays little attention to the fact that we also imitate other people's desires, and depending on how this happens, it may lead to conflicts and rivalries. If people imitate each other's desires, they may end up desiring the very same things. If they desire the same things, they may end up becoming rivals as they reach for the same objects. Girard distinguishes between 'imitation' and 'mimesis'. The former is usually understood as the positive aspect of reproducing someone else's behavior, whereas the latter usually implies the negative aspect of rivalry. ("Rene Girard"). Since man has the desire to mimic other people's desires, a kind of rivalry is created which provides a fertile ground for violence. Having the same desires makes individuals compete with each other leading to acts of violence. An outline of Girard's theory is given below:

> Rene Girard's Mimetic Theory is based on the principle that human beings are mimetic creatures. We imitate what we see in others. In fact, our desires are not actually our own, but desires we have copied from others. The more we imitate each other, the more alike we become. Increasingly, we vie for the same desires and we become rivals…Distinctions between individuals are blurred as they mirror each other. The boundaries between individuals which keep order, begin to disintegrate. Increased rivalry creates increased violence and the blurred boundaries threaten to destabilize the social fabric. ("Rene Girard Mimetic")

Girard also highlights the role played by mimetic desire in fostering human civilization and culture: “If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish….” Thus, Girard argues that what we desire is always 'mediated' by other people. Desire, in this sense, is contagious—it is capable of being 'caught” by others. (“Mimesis Violence”).Violence too is a form of desire—an impulse to inflict pain on others. Hence, it can be surmised that violence begets violence as people imitate what others do eventually leading to endless cycles of violence in a given social context.

It is clear that mimetic rivalry is an incubator and accelerator of human violence. Mimetic forces need external checks in order to prevent contagious spasms of violence. The societal checks are in the form of police, political system, propriety and manners which have entrenched themselves for a long period in human history. Mimetic desire sustains and promotes violence which needs to be curbed. Girard also puts forth the idea of ‘scapegoat’ wherein a person is victimized and held responsible for an imaginary crime. The violence of “all against all” is replaced by the more economical violence of “all against one”. The social vectors all become aligned, commonly focusing on a single victim who is subsequently eliminated. (“What is Mimetic”)

The discourse of institutional violence, on the other hand has been discussed in Willem Schinkel’s *Aspects of Violence* wherein he says:“To begin with, the appropriation by the state of a huge potential of violence has had enormous violent effects in the form of colonization and world wars…. Paradoxically, the state has become both the most potentially 'violent' modern institution....” (31-32)

The State makes laws in order to govern the people. It also creates governing bodies to see to the execution of the laws. When the laws are not obeyed or when people refuse to accept laws made by the government, the authoritative body tries to enforce the laws by means of coercion. The State indulges in violent acts like detaining people without trial, punishment and torture in the process of enforcing the law. The State, however, refuses to consider these acts of forceful coercion as violence but deems it as a necessity for the sake of good governance. Violence has always been and will always be a part of the State's policy of enforcement of laws. Further, enforcement of law and violence appear to go hand in hand. The violence that is the by-product of this enforcement is given a legitimate status. In South Africa, during the struggle for Liberation, thousands of blacks lost their lives as they were arrested and incarcerated in prisons without any reason. Many languished there till their eventual death while others like Steve Biko were cruelly tortured to death. Enforcement of laws is almost always laced with violence. It existed even prior to the time of colonisation and continues to exist even in democratic nations where the rulers are elected by the people themselves.

The inherent trait of being violent and destructive has stayed deep within man. The twentieth century itself witnessed two major World Wars. The modern State has resorted to large scale militarization and a huge build-up of nuclear armaments and weapons of mass destruction. So violence seems to have reared up its ugly head in the guise of nationalism amongst the so called 'civilised' people. While colonisation led to the concentration of violence in a particular colonised territory, the modern State has legitimised violence by using it as an instrument of state policy.

Silence is always tied down to the discourse of violence. Silence is the only weapon of the weak and dispossessed. Of course, silence of the victim does not

indicate approval and acceptance of oppression and violence. It could be the only possible mode of opposing violence adopted by the oppressed. In South Africa, silence of the colonised people did not spell approval of the policies of the government. It did not even mean consent. Rather, silence signified fear. The repressed were forced into silence as speech invited swift retribution. The dissenters were cruelly dealt with and imprisoned or put to death. Again, during liberation struggle, many voices of protest were silenced due to fear. Hence, silence being the outcome of repression can be considered as a product of violence. Further, when a person is forced to speak or testify against his will it results in an act of violence thus making him a victim. Forcing a person to speak against his will is mental assault. Both physical and mental tortures cause pain and the experiences can leave a person scarred for life. Ulf Olsson makes a few pertinent observations on the relationship between speech and violence by foregrounding the views of Roland Barthes:

> If language is decisive in forming human beings into subjects, and that is the basic aspect of my concept of 'spoken violence', this violent character of the forming is the second: speech forces speech, as questions force answers. One implication of Barthes' view is that we speak not because we choose to, but because we are forced, by speech directed to us, to answer. With Barthes, the question as such is a form of power exercise, since it necessarily generates an answer; if not, the question is only rhetoric, an empty demonstration of power. Barthes points to the 'terrorism' of the question, since 'a power is implied in every question'. (17)

In South Africa, during the period of apartheid and its preceding years, repressive silence was the norm. It is true that many took part in the armed struggle and were active members of political parties like the ANC, Pan-Africanist Congress

and the radical wing of the African National Congress known as Umkhonto we Sizwe. But it is also true that a large number of blacks in South Africa were silent witnesses to the struggle. The reasons ranged from fear to being ignorant about the ongoing struggle.

Violence results in varieties of responses. Violence may trigger counter-violence or it may lead to unspeakable silence on the part of powerless victims. But, silence is also a potent instrument of countering violence. Olsson explains the way silence speaks:

> ….at least to some degree, the evaluation of silence, its significance, depends upon the situation in which it occurs, or in which it sounds: silence in an intimate dialogue does not emit the same signal as silence does in a police interrogation. Forced silence is not to be mistaken for intentional silence, and neither is speech: forced speech is not the same as voluntary speech. Silence always speaks, otherwise we would not notice it. (164)

Silence takes on different meanings depending on situations. Between people who understand each other, words may be deemed an unnecessary tool of communication. Many a time, silence could be intentional. If a person does not want to reveal a bitter truth, then he seeks refuge in the world of silence instead of causing pain to others by speaking it out. But these silences are in no way connected to violence. The act of being silent is considered to be the product of violence only when silence as a condition is forced upon the human being by a coercive force like the police or the State. In such an environment the individual is forced to remain silent thus putting up with injustice meted out to him. The other side of this repressive act of violence is when the individual is subjected to such torture that he is forced to break

out of the mould of silence and make confessions of acts not committed by him or which are unknown to him.

There is another important argument related to violence. When a person is subjected to physical torture, it destroys his ability to communicate. Torture reduces man to the state of an animal who can produce painful sounds and cries but not speech. Torture, thus, helps in extracting confessions which may be compelled. However, in the process violence dehumanises individuals by destroying their ability to think and emote. Ulf Olsson sums up Elaine Scarry's views on torture as follows:

> Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate recession to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned. Torture is a way of producing a speaking subject, but it always does that through desubjectification: by 'unmaking' the subject. Torture deforms confession, but more than that, it deforms language when performing its violence on the speaking body, making language itself violent and, frequently, only violent. (125-26)

Further, torture and confession are inter-related. A subject is forced to speak and accept lies as truth only because he is tortured. In South Africa, the government detained many blacks based on the suspicion that they were indulging in anti-white activities. In order to punish them for their 'deeds', they were tortured and confessions were extracted forcefully after which they were either imprisoned or put to death. Michael Foucault has stated that confession and torture are 'dark twins'. Right since the Middle Ages, writes Foucault, "torture has accompanied confession as a 'shadow', pushing it out of and further from its hiding places in the soul or in the body.

However, torture generates not only confession, but also, and paradoxically, its opposite, silence, the refusal to confess – and to speak" (Olsson125-26).

Again, gender-centric violence too accounts for suffering of women in society. Silence is also connected with repressive patriarchal norms in society. Shoshana Felman considers silence to be another consequence of repression and violence in a patriarchal society. When women do not speak out for themselves and are forced to remain silent, it is because men want to represent them and speak for them as women are considered incapable of speech. Felman observes: "What, in a general manner, does 'speech in the name of' mean? Is it not a precise repetition of the oppressive gesture of *representation,* by means of which, throughout the history of logos, man has reduced the woman to the status of a silent and subordinate subject to something inherently *spoken for*? To 'speak in the name of', to 'speak *for*' could thus mean, once again, to appropriate and to silence" (58).

Further, Mieke Bal in her essay 'The Violence of Gender' speaks of gender being 'inherently violent.' She declares: "Something that is imposed without being inevitable—without being "natural" is subject to violence" (532). The stereotyping of the male and the female restrict them to the characteristics attributed to them and they are forced to behave in a way that the society expects of them. While the female is supposed to be shy and demure, the male is defined as bold, aggressive, violent and free. The forceful imposition of restrictive gender norms results in psychological trauma as the society rejects those who try to break free of the stereotypes.

Investigating into the root cause of violence in the world, Elaine Scarry argues that violence towards people of other nations, religions, ethnicities and races is due to the failure to see and recognise them as human beings, "The action of injury occurs

precisely because we have trouble believing in the reality of other persons".

Specifically, she is of the opinion that injuring another person is only possible when we do not fully see or recognize that person. To *know* another person is to be incapable of injuring them. Violence against another person is then both caused by and indicates a failure to fully imagine the other as a real person (Weiner 43).

There is another interesting angle to the discourse of violence. It is believed that self-harm or suicide is also deeply connected with violence. For instance, Meenakshi argues that suicide is nothing but self-violence:

> Self violence is best described as self assault or committing suicide. When the person finds it hard to do any significant changes in the external environment and alter the external stimuli, he tends to harm himself. Lack of confidence and a general feeling of inferiority are the contributing factors behind this kind of behaviour. In other cases, individual tries to take command of the situation and directs his anger towards his partner or other family members. (preservearticles.com)

People commit suicide because they are unable to change the existing adverse conditions, resulting in their decision to end life. Charles H. Haywood examines the reason for the increase in the rate of suicide in the U.S.A and he states that "Suicide is an act of violence preceded in many disturbed individuals by feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and alienation…" (mobile.nytimes.com).

Thus, the discourse of violence has been the subject of endless debates and deliberations among philosophers and writers as well. Gordimer, who lived through the dark apartheid period, was a bystander watching the horror of violence unfolding before her. As a committed writer, she recorded her account of violence as an

eyewitness in her fiction. Therefore, she designates her writing as ‘witness literature’. This expression prominently figures in her famous Nobel Laureate lecture “Witness: The Inward Testimony” in which she speaks of the writer’s role as a historical witness to the spectacle of violence and oppression. She emphasizes the importance of witness literature in the following words: “If witness literature is to find its place, take on a task in relation to the enormity of what is happening in acts of destruction and their aftermath, it is in the tensions of sensibility, the intense awareness, the antennae of receptivity to the lives among which writers experience their own as a source of their art” (mea.gov.in). Witness literature as Gordimer professed, was a platform to expose the inhuman cruelty and violence that existed and was practised during the period of the Interregnum. By foregrounding violence in her fiction Gordimer not only demonstrates her commitment as a writer but also propounds the centrality of empathy and compassion in human life.

4.4 Violence in Gordimer’s Fiction

The violence portrayed in the fiction of Gordimer can be classified under various heads by which it manifests itself. This chapter examines the entire spectrum of violence depicted in Gordimer’s fiction under four distinct categories: racial violence, institutional violence, gender-centric violence and violence during the liberation movement. The way Gordimer narrates violence is far from subtle. The descriptions are graphic and make the readers sit up and take notice of the grim realities of the era of apartheid in South Africa.

Gordimer’s collection of short stories titled *Jump and other stories* is a minor masterpiece of incomparable impact. In her short story “Keeping Fit” Gordimer sketches the horrifying experience of an unnamed white male who is out on a fitness

run early in the morning. The route that he follows takes him towards the areas where blacks live. The blacks have been violently shunted out of their homes and areas which belonged to them earlier to make space for the white settlements. When he nears the area where the blacks live in shanties, he is suddenly caught in a violent mob which wields deadly weapons and is chasing a man. He is carried along with them against his will. The following sentence encapsulates his sense of horror in reaction to the spectacle of violence: "They were bellowing in a language he didn't need to understand in order to understand, the stink of adrenaline sweat was coming from the furnace within them" (*Jump* 232). Soon the crowd catches up with the man they have been chasing and " the man went down under the chants and blows of a club with a gnarled knob as big as a child's head, the butcher's knife plunged, the pointed wires dug, the body writhed away like a chopped worm. On the oil stains of the tarmac blood was superimposing another spill" (233). The terrified white man manages to escape from the furious mob and runs mindlessly towards the shanties of the blacks in order to escape. To his amazement, the white man is given shelter by a kind black woman. She believes that the police are behind the act of violence but the white man tells her that he knows it is not so as he has read the newspapers. The gravity of the situation is impressed upon him by the black woman who scorns him saying, "– You read about it! ...Every night, we don't know. They come or they don't come-" (234). The blacks' lives are filled with uncertainty and fear which the whites fail to comprehend or empathise with. The whites are firmly cocooned in their safe havens and are blissfully oblivious to the problems of the "Other". Gordimer has in a very subtle manner succeeded in making the reader realize that in the world of blacks occurrences of violence and death are common. In contrast, the whites are horrified when they come across occasional episodes of violence. The whites too seem to be far

removed from the reality that exists in South Africa. Their rendezvous with violence seems to be confined to the news that they read in the newspapers about such episodes. The black woman also impresses upon him the idea that violence is unleashed by the State through police. She also fears for her young son's life as he is in the Youth—an organisation made of angry black youth "… who burned government appointees' houses, stoned buses, boycotted schools" (235). Thus violence begets violence.

After waiting for some period of time, the generous black woman sends her son to survey the scene and see if it is safe for the white man to leave. The white man on his way back home after the episode mulls: "He had read the papers, for all he knew it could have been Inkatha murdering someone from the ANC, it could have been people from the street committees she said the boy belonged to, out to get a local councillor regarded as a government stooge, it could have been the ANC people avenging themselves on a police informer" (239). When her son returns and declares it safe enough, the white man leaves and on his run back home he is caught up by his own reflections:

> They came over, at him, not after him, no but making him join them. At first he didn't know it, but he was racing with them after blood, after the one who was to lie dying in the road. That's what it really means to be caught up, not knowing what you are doing, not to be able to stop, say no!-that awful unimagined state has been with you all the time."(238)

The idea of being 'caught up, not knowing what you are doing, not being able to stop' is exactly what the theory of mimetic violence puts across as the reason for unleashing of mob violence. The desire to mimic others deprives man of rationality

and reason and he becomes a part of the mob. The white man now probably feels that he was also a part of the system which unleashed violence on the blacks and feels helpless and guilty for not being able to stop violence and bloodshed. He leaves with a troubled conscience having been acquainted with the family of a generous and large-hearted black woman. He understands that unlike the way the whites treated the blacks she treated him with dignity and care and bid goodbye with the words "God bless you" (238). He ponders about the undignified life that the blacks were forced to live in their shanty towns, deprived of basic needs and compares it, in turn, to the luxurious life led by him and his family. He also understands that being a white, he is a part of the system which is responsible for their depravation and suffering. He once again feels trapped and helpless like the bird in his drain. He wants to get out but he knows that he is already a prisoner in the system which defines itself only through violence.

Gordimer's fiction is replete with incidents that bring out violence in its different manifestations. *Jump and other stories* contains another short story titled 'Jump' which depicts a futuristic scenario wherein the whites want to reconsolidate their power that they are on the verge of losing to the blacks. Hence, a counter-revolution is planned. This effort on their part leads to endless episodes of violence in the society at large.

The man in-charge of wreaking havoc on the lives of the blacks by the most violent means is given a tape through which he is indoctrinated. He listens to the tape: "A great crescendo comes in waves from the speaker provided with the tape player: to win the war, stabilize by destabilization, set up a regime of peace and justice" (15).The irony lies in the fact that they plan to obtain peace and justice by unleashing

violence in the society. This move is justified by the whites on the basis of their conviction that the blacks are incapable of ruling their own land.

In order to achieve the task of destabilising the black rule, the white man is assigned the job of blowing up trains, planting explosives and killing the villagers. The agitated black people ask the white man who is on a destructive mission: " How could you associate yourself with the murderous horde that burns down hospitals, cuts off the ears of villagers, blows up trains full of innocent workers going home to their huts, rapes children and forces women at gunpoint to kill their husbands and eat their flesh?"(32). The simple black folks are unable to comprehend the rationale behind these heinous acts, and are at a loss to understand the extent of harm that one human being can inflict upon another by foregoing rationality.

Gradually the white man realises the horrifying consequences of his act. He sees terrified girls as young as twelve or thirteen who were brought in to satisfy men who had received military training. He also sees " ….the bright stare of the beggared city, city turned inside out, no shelter there for life, the old men propped up against the empty facades to die, the orphaned children running in packs round the rubbish dumps, the men without ears and women with a stump where there was an arm…" (20). The recurring graphic visuals of the deeds committed by him and the scene of the twelve year old child who is forced to satisfy the sexual urges of the Commander continue to haunt him and he contemplates jumping down from the sixth floor of his apartment to put an end his misery.

David B. Morris highlights the role of writers in bringing out the intricate dilemmas and conflictual emotions of individuals through the characters that they create in their fiction. According to him, "Writers can open up the interior or private

life of a character in ways often difficult or impossible outside of texts, revealing a personal side of affliction that we rarely see. Moreover, they can infuse the voices of suffering with an unusual power to move and compel attention" (31). In this short narrative, Gordimer has finely brought out the inner turmoil of the white man who indulges in violent and destructive acts. While it seems that the white man has accomplished his destructive mission satisfyingly, in reality he suffers from guilt for what he has done and finds life not worthy of living anymore. Violence, ultimately, seems to have undone him, as it were.

The next story in the collection titled 'Once Upon a Time' also projects the world of violence. It is about a young white couple who occupy a house which displays a notification in bold letters: 'YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED'. They represent the whites in South Africa who feel terribly insecure about the blacks who surround them. Their neighbourhood is a replica of the suburbia in which the whites live always in dread of the blacks. Therefore, at his wife's behest he installs electronically controlled gates, burglar alarms and yet they do not feel safe. The height of the compound wall is increased and they literally wall themselves in for security. Reports of intrusion, unrest and robbery continue to flow in making the young couple unnerved about their safety. They scout for safety devices to ward off intruders and finally come across a firm known as Dragon's Teeth – The People for Total Security. They buy a device from them which would prevent intruders from entering their premises. The barricade is described as follows:

> Placed the length of walls, it consisted of a continuous coil of stiff and shining metal serrated into jagged blades, so that there would be no way of climbing over it and no way through its tunnel without getting entangled in its fangs.

There would be no way out, only a struggle getting bloodier and bloodier, a deeper and sharper hooking and tearing of flesh".(29)

Thus, the device assured a painful and bloodied end for any intruder who dared to climb over the walls. However, the story has a tragic twist. It ends in an anti -climax where the mischievous child of the couple climbs the wall with the help of a ladder. Shockingly, he gets entangled in the razor teeth of the security device. The device knows no distinction between the blacks and the whites and destroys anyone attempting to transgress it. The parents' nightmare begins as they realise that their child has been the victim of the security device installed by them. They are a witness to the tragedy that unfolds before them as their child is badly mangled by the sharp razors of the steel trap. The story ends with the following tragic note: "…the bleeding mass of the little boy was hacked out of the security coil with saws, wire-cutters, choppers, and they carried it--the man, the wife, the hysterical trusted housemaid and the weeping gardener – into the house" (30).This poignant story by Gordimer stands as a metaphor for absurd violence in the world and also depicts the huge racial divide that existed in South Africa during the period of apartheid. The walls and the barricades existed not just physically but also in the minds of the colonisers.

"The Ultimate Safari" is another significant short story which paints with a lot of finesse different shades of violence. It is about violence caused due to forced displacement. In the story, a town is torched by the so called 'bandits' forcing its residents to flee for their lives. The grandparents along with their young grandchildren are put to severe test of survival as they have to cross the Kruger Park and go to another place to chalk out plans for their survival. They had to "move like animals among animals, away from the roads, away from the white people's camps" (37) in

order to escape unnoticed. Gordimer narrates the tale of woe and suffering through the point of view of a little girl. This nameless child is the symbol of victims of violence and displacement found in large numbers across the nation. The story unerringly states that acts of violence, by and large, impact the innocent children depriving them of decent childhood and secure future. The little girl in the story narrates her tale of unimaginable suffering as she and other family members trudge across Kruger Park in order to survive. Forced to flee, her baby brothers have to be carried by the old grandparents across the wilderness of Kruger Park. Gordimer narrates with brutal honesty the travails that the family is put through. The violence depicted here is subtle and covert. Violence manifests itself in the meaningless and absurd suffering of people caused due to their forced displacement. The children are stripped of means of survival and are forced to go hungry. It is heart-wrenching to observe the children go through such hardships. The little girl narrates her traumatic experience in these words:

> We followed the animals to where they drank. When they had gone, we went to their water-holes. We were never thirsty without finding water, but the animals ate, ate all the time. Whenever you saw them eating, grass, trees, roots. There was nothing for us. The mealies were finished. The only food we could eat was what the baboons ate, dry little figs full of ants that grow along the branches of trees at the rivers. It was hard to be like the animals. (38)

The young hungry child has no choice but remain hungry and thirsty until something comes in her way. She sadly finds that the animals lead a much better life than the blacks. The contrast is clearly brought out by the little child when she utters with despair: "…the animals ate, ate all the time" (38). The animals in the wild seem to have a better chance of survival as compared to the fleeing blacks who are in a

pitiful state. The child also recounts how a hungry woman wanted to go across to the camps where the people lived and ask for food from the dustbins. The campers in that area were whites but the woman was so hungry that she did not mind resorting to begging by compromising her self-respect. Hence, this story narrates the travails of the people being deprived of the right and dignity to lead their lives in their own land.

As the story progresses, the grandfather of the kids gives up midway and moves away into the tall elephant grass of Kruger Park never to be found again. The grandfather deserved to live a good life, relax and be happy in the company of his family and grandchildren during his old age. Unfortunately, he is forced to take the extreme step of committing suicide in order to avoid being a burden to others. Crushed by hunger and ill-health the family along with the rest of the group tumbles into a camp and stays there. It becomes their home. The grandmother emphatically asserts to the white woman who came to interview her that she would never want to go back home since "There is nothing. No home" (46).There is no hope for the future too. Many characters in Gordimer's fiction are seen to be having suicidal tendencies. They commit acts of violence on themselves assertively and intend to harm themselves. However, some of these characters commit such acts being coerced by the State to do so while others do so due to helplessness and alienation caused by suffering thrust upon them mercilessly. Intense harassment by the State machinery prods them towards ending their lives. Suicide is often said to be rage which has turned within. Sheer helplessness can make a person take the extreme measure of inflicting harm on self. As stated by the protagonist of *Burger's Daughter*, "It's well known that people who commit suicide, the most solitary of all acts, are addressing someone" (*BD* 11). So the suicides abetted by the State machinery are also a way of

sending a strong message about the unacceptable manner in which the State functions and its impact on the lives of common people.

Many of Gordimer's short stories and novels reveal the machinations of the human mind which is capable of indulging in violent acts without remorse. For instance, Vera, the protagonist of the story "Some Are Born to Sweet Delight" is caught up in a romantic relationship with a foreigner named Rad who is a lodger at their home. Vera is a young filing clerk who is drawn towards the lodger. Rad manipulates the situation and works his way into her home as well as her heart. Charmed by Rad, Vera becomes sexually involved with him. She never tries to find out his background but places implicit trust in him despite the fact that her parents are unhappy about it. Soon, she discovers that she is pregnant and Rad graciously offers to marry her claiming that he loves her. Being an innocent girl, Vera is unable to fathom the deep meaning of his statement when he says: " – Because I've chosen you.-" (*Jump* 82). Vera now becomes ecstatic and starts planning for their marriage. He wants Vera to visit his family as it is their tradition that the bride should meet his parents and makes arrangement for her visit abroad. However, while parting at the airport he gives her a gift of plastic toys to be delivered to his sister. The seemingly intense love story takes a violent turn at the end. The plane blows up mid-air over the sea as Rad has planted a bomb in the plastic toys meant to be delivered to his sister. Vera loses her life along with the unborn baby inside her. The narrative which progresses as a love story takes a dramatic turn at the end. The reader finds it impossible to believe that the love game was actually a part of the plot to use Vera as a means to an end –a vehicle of destruction. Here, the act of violence is shockingly palpable and exposes the cruel streak in human psyche.

The story “Teraloyna” too continues with the depiction of violence. Gordimer makes use of symbolism to draw parallels to the conditions that exist in South Africa. “Teraloyna” is symbolic of the brutal violence inflicted by the colonisers on the colonised. In the story, Teraloyna is an imaginary island inhabited by population of cats. The parallel between the killing of cats by the army of whites in the narrative and killing of protestors in South Africa is unmistakably present in the short story. An indirect reference is made to the Soweto uprising wherein the government cracked down on the protestors, many of whom were children, leading to the brutal mass murder of many innocent protesting kids. Gordimer’s description of Teraloyna is charged with symbolism:

> When a certain black carpenter draws a splinter from under his nail, the bubble of blood that comes after it is Teraloyna. And when a certain young white man, drafted into military service straight from school, throws a canister of tear-gas into a schoolyard full of black children and is hit on the cheek by a cast stone, the broken capillaries ooze Teraloyna lifeblood. (104)

Teraloyna is a metaphor for South Africa. The Teraloyna blood which oozes from the capillaries is the life blood of the South Africans under the brutal colonial rule. Gordimer also indirectly draws our attention on the situation in South Africa that is in a state of turmoil as the blacks agitate to regain possession of their land. The government thinks of establishing peace through military intervention:

> The army would be the obvious choice, but another sort of State of Emergency exists in the mainland country and all troops are required to man the borders, take part in pre-emptive raids across them, and install themselves with tear-gas, dogs, and guns in the vast areas where the blacks live. Every young

> recruit is needed: there are boycotts, strikes, stay-at-homes, refusals to pay rent, all of which bring blacks into the streets with stones and home-product petrol bombs and sometimes grenades and AK-47's that have somehow been smuggled past the troops on the borders. (106)

The whites have taken upon themselves the responsibility of teaching a lesson to the protesting blacks. Lives of the blacks are no longer valuable. Violence crosses all limits resulting in chaos and disorder:

> Under command and sometimes out of panic, they have shot chanting black schoolchildren, black mourners dispersing from those children's funerals, black rioters fleeing, black men and women who happened to go out for a pint of milk or a packet of cigarettes and crossed the path of an army patrol in the streets. Pick them off. They're all black. There is no time –to distinguish the bystanders from the revolutionaries. (106)

Further, acts of violence do not always take the form of physical abuse and destruction. It can also be realised through a silent subject who is forced to remain silent out of fear in response to the strategies of violence and intimidation employed by the oppressor. Compelling the individual to silence through the threat of violence causes unwarranted suffering and inflicts irreparable damage to his self-esteem. Gordimer has used many silent subjects in her narratives. Their silence speaks volumes about the exploitation and suffering that define and direct their lives.

Another short story by Gordimer "The Moment before the Gun Went Off" is all about how silence speaks loudly in response to violence. In fact the introductory lines of the short story describe an incident of violence:

> Marais Van de Vyver shot one of his farm labourers, dead. An accident, there are accidents with guns everyday of the week –children playing a fatal game with a father's revolver in the cities where guns are domestic objects, nowadays, hunting mishaps like this one, in the country-but these won't be reported all over the world. (*Jump* 111)

This statement underlines the growing incidents of violence in societies all around the world. The world at large is insecure and feels the need to assure itself against acts of violence. Therefore, people tend to buy guns under the pretext of self-protection. This is paradoxical as guns are weapons of destruction and can safeguard the interests of its possessor only by harming another. Gordimer makes a strong statement about violence creeping into the households in the form of guns. The presence of such weapons leads to its use and misuse which either way ends up in violence and bloodshed. One such instance occurs in the short story when Marais Van de Vyver takes Lucas—one of his farmhands— on a hunting mission. Hunting itself is a violent act as the animals are cruelly gunned down for the pleasure of man. Lucas was standing up and travelling in the bakkie with a loaded gun sitting upright on the front seat. When the vehicle goes over a pot-hole, the jolt fires the rifle making the bullet pierce the roof and enter Lucas' brain by the way of the throat leading to his instant death. Incidents of this kind were common in South Africa and the whites who indulged in such acts were protected by the State. It did not get publicity since it was hushed up instantly. When blacks working for their white masters got killed, it was always covered up as an accident. However, in this short story the gun accidentally goes off killing Lucas but no one really believes that it happened as narrated by Van de Vyver.

Marais Van de Vyver arranges for a decent funeral knowing well that an elaborate funeral meant a lot to the blacks. At the funeral Lucas' mother, "…says nothing, does nothing. She does not look up; she does not look at Van de Vyver, whose gun went off in the truck, she stares at the grave. Nothing will make her look up; there need be no fear that she will look up; at him" (116). It seems to be a mystery as to why Lucas' mother avoids Van de Vyver and refuses to look up at him. At the end of the narrative it is revealed in a shocking anti-climax that, "The young black callously shot through the negligence of the white man was not the farmer's boy; he was his son" (117). The reader then realises with a sense of shock that Van de Vyvers has accidentally killed his own son who is born out of the illegitimate liaison with the black woman. Both Van de Vyvers and Lucas' mother are unable to grieve over their loss. The enforcement of the Immorality Act made such relationships between the blacks and whites illegitimate and also a punishable offence in South Africa. The black women were sexually abused by the whites for their sensual gratification in every possible manner. They were unable to voice their protest. They chose to remain as silent victims because they were painfully aware of the fact that justice would never prevail as the whites made up the judiciary in their land. In the story, the mother of Lucas has to bear her sorrow silently besides carrying the burden of the knowledge that she has been exploited by Van de Myers. Her silence symbolises victimhood and also signifies violence built into the narrative of sexual exploitation of countless number of black women by the colonisers.

The aftermath of the Soweto Uprising saw Gordimer create a classic in *Burger's Daughter* (1979). In this novel, she carefully brought to the fore the burning issues of the time—apartheid, the rise of black consciousness, the brutality of the police and the repressive policies of the government which dehumanized the blacks.

Burger's Daughter also gives us graphic details of violence and torture meted out to the helpless blacks and other dissenters by the ruling dispensation. Against the backdrop of *Burger's Daughter*, it is worth mentioning Juan E. Mendes' opinion on torture. In his Foreword to *Phenomena of Torture Readings and Commentary* Mendes states:

> Of all human rights violations, torture is the most universally condemned and repudiated. The prohibition on torture is so widely shared across cultures and ideologies that there is little room for disagreement about the fact that physical and psychological abuse, when committed in a wide-spread or systematic manner, constitutes a crime against humanity, akin to genocide and war crimes in that the world community has pledged to prevent its occurrence and prosecute and punish those who perpetrate it. [xii]

According to Mendes, physical and psychological abuse is a crime against humanity. He likens it to such terrible war crimes as genocide. The novel *Burger's Daughter* is a testimony to the appalling torture—both physical and mental—that the blacks and dissenters were put through during the interregnum period. The Soweto killings and the Sharpeville massacre details recorded in the novel give grim picture of the suffering of the natives of the country during the colonial rule. The novel gives the world a horrendous picture of mass killings, violent revolution, suppression of the revolutionaries and the inhuman methods of torture employed during the apartheid regime.

In the novel, Lionel Burger who campaigns against human rights violations as well as for the liberation of the blacks is arrested and charged for treason. On trial, Lionel Burger explains the reason as to why he became an activist "… when as a

medical student tormented not by the suffering I saw around me in hospitals, but by the subjection and humiliation of human beings in daily life I had seen around me all my life—a subjection and humiliation of live people in which, by my silence and political inactivity I myself took part…." (*BD*19) Lionel Burger strongly feels that if one witnesses injustice meted out to another, yet chooses the path of silence, then, he too is complicit in the system that is responsible for such deeds. Many a time, there prevails deep silence on the part of the victims of injustice as they are helpless and therefore 'voiceless'. However, according to Lionel Burger, the 'silence' of the subject who watches violence being perpetrated on the other amounts to the subject being a passive promoter of violence. Silence does not give solace to Lionel Burger. Rather, he is deeply troubled and tormented by the events unfolding around him. Therefore, Burger is forced to break his silence and take up the cause of the masses of suffering blacks in his nation. Knowing well the consequences of his decision, Burger chooses to embrace active politics for the sake of empowering the blacks in South Africa. He makes a choice of 'healing' not just the physical bodies in pain as a doctor does, but also liberating them from the pain of subjugation inflicted upon them by the colonial rulers. The vast majority of whites in South Africa are indifferent to the sufferings of the blacks but a small section of conscientious whites like the Burger family prove to be an exception.

Rosa Burger, the daughter of Lionel Burger describes the indifference of the whites to the suffering of the blacks as 'sickness'. She states, "A sickness not to be able to ignore that condition of a healthy, ordinary life: other people's suffering" (69). The white liberals are unable to turn a blind eye to the acts of their own fellowmen. They realise the contradiction which is put forth in the words of Lionel Burger: "I am talking of the contradiction that my people—the Afrikaner people—and the white

people in general in our country, worship the God of Justice and practise discrimination on grounds of the colour of skin; profess the compassion of the Son of Man, and deny the humanity of the black people they live among" (19).

Rosa recalls the gruesome details of horror of Sharpeville Massacre narrated by her father's aide Sipho Moekena which has left a permanent impression on her mind. "Sipho said how when the police were loading the dead into the vans he had to ask them to take the brains as well-the brains of a man with a smashed head spilled and they left him in the road…I heard how Sipho said they sent a black policeman to pick up the brains with a shovel.-" (39).

After Lionel Burger comes to know of the Sharpeville Massacre he leaves his house immediately at midnight to obtain sworn statements from the witnesses. The reason for his prompt action is because "…it was urgent to go out and get sworn statements from witnesses so that if there was going to be an enquiry what really happened would come out, it wouldn't just be a State cover-up…." (39). The State also took immense pains in devising methods of torture to extract information from the people who were detained even leading to their painful deaths. The novel brings before the reader the gruesome details of torture:

> The entire ingenuity from thumb-screw and rack to electric shock, the infinite variety and gradation of suffering, by lash, by fear, by hunger, by solitary confinement-the camps, concentration, labour, resettlement, the Siberias of snow or sun, the lives of Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki, Kathrada, Kgosana, gull-picked on the Island, Lionel propped wasting to his skull between two warders, the deaths by questioning , bodies fallen from the height of John Vorster Square, deaths by dehydration, babies degutted by enteritis in 'places'

of banishment, the lights beating all night on the faces of those in the cells. (211)

The novel presents before us suffering of black people from all walks of life—leaders like Mandela, Sisulu and Kgosana who were illegally detained, innocent children who died of enteritis and dehydration due to lack of hygiene and medical care, unexplained deaths in prison, the unaccounted accidental deaths of people who fell from the top of the John Vorster Square and so on. Rosa also sees the transformation that her father Lionel Burger goes through after being imprisoned and tortured by the State. Rosa remembers how dynamic her father was before he was imprisoned. Lionel Burger was once a symbol of vivacity and energy when he addressed the crowds. Rosa while glancing through family album says that the photo of her father "…shows him, neck thick with muscular excitement, grinning energy, speaking to a crowd not shown but whose presence is in his eyes" (113). Rosa however registers the change her father has undergone during the period of trial due to coercion and torture in the prison. She states that "…he was getting the look on those faces in old photographs from the concentration camps, the motionless aspect, shouldered there between two warders that accompanied him, of someone who lets himself be presented, identified" (113). For Rosa, he looked like a prisoner from the Nazi concentration camps bereft of identity and zest, being reduced to a pale shadow of his former self. Gordimer has likened the tortures inflicted on the detainees and prisoners in South Africa by invoking the image of Nazi concentration camps. She also succeeds in bringing out the extent and ruthlessness with which the crimes against humanity were committed by the government in South Africa.

Malcolm D. Evans and Rod Morgan in their article "Preventing Torture" observe that the authoritarian State makes clever use of torture and violence on its subjects in order to maintain status quo:

> Indeed, the most potent threat in the hands of the contemporary torturer is that: "No one will hear you cry. No one knows that you are here. No one cares whether you live or die. No one will ever know."-a threat that the power of a secretive state can all too often make true. In states employing terror as a systematic instrument of political power, the reputation that particular police locations may have, and the fate of those who enter them, may become an integral part of the process of terror. (41)

When torture is employed as a regular tool of the State, it results in breaking down the individual's will and resolve, thus leaving him in perpetual fear of more tortures to be inflicted on him. The sheer terror of excruciating pain caused by torture can make a person cringe and give in. Torture as a tactical weapon acts as a deterrent in silencing the other stakeholders. The victim on the other hand gets no reprieve and suffers the ignominy silently as there is no route of escape.

Gordimer gives us a peek into history which has left a trail of violence in South Africa. Though the government kept the details of death and cruelty meted out to the blacks hidden from the eyes of the world, it could not prevent Gordimer from exposing its dark underbelly on the global stage. By doing so, Gordimer gained the ire of the government but, nonetheless, she bravely carried on her crusade against the inhuman treatment of the blacks. Such authentic historical details have been ingeniously integrated into the novel in the form of Rosa's recollection of past events:

> After all the Dingaan's Day demonstrations (1929), J.B. Marks declared Africa belongs to us', a white man shouted 'You lie' and shot Mofutsanyana dead on the platform, 700 blacks arrested; 1930, young Nkosi stabbed to death…all the passive resistance campaigns of the Fifties, the pass- burnings of the Sixties; after all the police assaults, arrests; after Sharpeville; after the trials, detentions, the house arrests, the deaths by torture in prison, the sentences lived through and the sentences being endured while life endures. (*BD* 108)

In *Burger's Daughter* Gordimer reconstructs the turbulent history of the violence-ridden nation and also examines the reasons behind the recurring spectacle of violence. The policies of apartheid appear to be the primary reason behind such acts of violence. When these policies are questioned by the blacks, the government retaliates in a violent manner triggering a spate of counter-violence. The poignancy of the expression '… the sentences lived through and the sentences being endured while life endures' tells the readers as to how suffering is the common thread that binds the existence of all the blacks in South Africa together– the ones in prison and the other ones out of prison too. Despondency and despair is the subtext of this entire narrative of violence.

Gordimer also makes us aware of as how the State manipulated the lives of prisoners and fabricated the reports as part of their disinformation strategy. One such instance is regarding the death of Baasie's father Vulindlela in prison. Rosa tells Conrad: "I don't know where Baasie is but his father was found dead in a cell after eight months in detention. The police said he hanged himself with his trousers" (140). Everyone knew Vulindlela as a tough and dedicated activist of the Movement. They could never accept that such a man could think of ending his life by hanging himself

using his trousers while in prison. The report of Vulindlela's death was fabricated to hide the methods of torture employed by the police against the 'enemies' of the State. Gordimer adds new dimension to her art of realism in fiction by actually inserting a pamphlet which was distributed by the Soweto Students Representative Council. It was issued after the Soweto Massacre which narrated in detail the suspicious deaths. Details of Hector Peterson a black child, 13 yrs old, killed by the government officials on16th June 1976 at Soweto; death of Mabelane who attempted to escape from John Vorster Square by jumping through the 10th floor window and ended his life to avoid answering some questions emerge. The mystery of suicide of one of their learned scientists at Tshazibane is also referred to in the pamphlet (358).

The report given by the police was highly suspicious in nature. For instance, it referred to the thirteen-year-old jumping out of the 10th floor window to avoid answering questions or a scientist committing suicide without any apparent reason. It appeared that these two might have been killed for refusing to divulge information to the authorities regarding the leaders of the Uprising and were subsequently projected as cases of suicide. As stated by the Soweto Students Representative Council, "We suspect that somebody somewhere knows something about this 'suicide'"… For how long will our people persue (sic) with these 'suicide attempt' and 'successful suicides' (358).

Again, when Rosa's father Lionel Burger dies in prison due to torture and neglect, the State acts like a dictator and refuses to hand over the body to the relatives."The prison authorities did not consent to a private funeral arranged by relatives. His life sentence was served but the State claimed his body" (32). Lionel Burger has no grave and hence his admirers as well as his daughter are unable to pay

their homage at his grave. The State stripped him of his rights and dignity not only in life but also in death.

Lionel Burger was one such white revolutionary who made a sincere attempt to secure justice for the blacks. His entire family sacrificed their lives for the cause of the blacks. Therefore, Gordimer projects Burger family as a meeting point wherein two divided races are symbolically brought together. Throughout her life, it is absurd and senseless violence that shakes Rosa's conscience a great deal. One day for instance, on her way back home, Rosa sees a donkey being flogged by a man. She states:

> I didn't see the whip. I saw agony. Agony that came from some terrible centre seized within the group of donkey, cart, driver and people behind him. They made a single object that contracted against itself in the desperation of a hideous final energy. Not seeing the whip, I saw infliction of pain broken away from the will that creates it; broken loose, a force existing of itself, ravishment without the ravisher, torture without the torturer, rampage, pure cruelty gone beyond control of the humans who have spent thousands of years devising it. (211)

Rosa thinks of stopping the man from whipping the donkey. But, the man is black. Rosa reflects upon the situation that she has encountered: "Yet the suffering-while I saw it was the sum of suffering to me. I didn't do anything. I let him beat the donkey. The man was a black. So a kind of vanity counted for more than feeling; I couldn't bear to see myself-her-Rosa Burger-as one of those whites who care more for animals than people. Since I've been free. I'm free to become one (212). Rosa goes through a great dilemma whether to get involved or not. She realizes that since she

enjoys her freedom being a white woman, she is put in a position where she can speak on behalf of the mute animals and prove to be a compassionate human being. This seems to hypocritical to her as she wants to free the animal from suffering but belongs to a race that is responsible for the suffering of the blacks. She cannot speak for an animal in pain as she is also one of those who have inflicted greater pain on another human being.

The scene of the flogging of the donkey in *Burger's Daughter* reminds us of a similar scene in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. In this novel, its protagonist Raskolnikov has a dream in which he is transported to his childhood days and his town of birth. While he is moving about the market place he comes across a group of drunken louts who start flogging a mare for their own pleasure and entertainment. The peasant who owns the mare also starts flogging it as it is unable to draw the cart containing seven people. Mikolka the peasant encourages the people to flog the mare as it is unable to gallop. He goads them on saying, "Get in, all get in…she will draw you all. I'll beat her to death! And he thrashed and thrashed at the mare, beside himself with fury (87). Raskolnikov watches with horror as the mare is flogged to death. The main difference in the scenes of violence in *Burger's Daughter* and *Crime and Punishment* is that the former depicts violence arising out of frustration caused by poverty whereas the latter is due to obtaining pleasure out of the act of cruelty.

In South Africa, the whites continued to exist in this manner oblivious to the sufferings of the blacks and the tortures inflicted upon them. Ariel Dorfman in his Foreword, "The Tyranny of Terror: Is Torture Inevitable in our Century and Beyond?" speaks of the impact of torture on individuals who are its passive witnesses:

> Torture is, of course, a crime committed against a body. It is also a crime committed against the imagination. Or rather, it presupposes, it requires, it craves the abrogation of our capacity to imagine others' suffering, dehumanising them so much that their pain is not our pain….Torture also corrupts the whole social fabric because it prescribes a silencing of what has been happening between those two bodies,…Torture obliges us to be deaf and blind and mute. Or we could not go on living. With that incessant awareness of the incessant horror, we could not go on living. (8-9)

Dorfman's analysis of how torture renders one deaf, mute and blind seems to be true in the case of Rosa who moves on despite witnessing an act of violence. Rosa's description of violence meted out on the hapless animal and its suffering thereafter is a metaphor for the cruel treatment that was meted out to the blacks by the whites in South Africa. Rosa drives home the point that the whites in South Africa are unable to act and stop the violence and become just silent spectators of tragedy enacted before them. "With that incessant awareness of the incessant horror, we could not go on living". Torn by guilt and helplessness Rosa decides to leave South Africa.

Violence—or counter-violence to be specific—emerged as the major tool of liberation movement in South Africa particularly in later years. The spate of violence unleashed by the South African regime made the black political parties rethink on their Gandhian method of passive resistance used for decades. The members of The African National Congress under the leadership of Nelson Mandela decided to change tactics and resort to violent means in order to liberate their native land from the rule of the whites. Gordimer, who was an ardent admirer and supporter of Nelson Mandela argues in favour of the need for violent methods to achieve liberation. Through the

protagonist Lionel Burger the court is told of the reason as to why he upheld armed struggle:

> …the tactic to which the banned Congress leaders turned in the creation of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the Spear of the Nation-turned to after three hundred years of repression by white guns and laws, after half a century of white indifference to blacks reasonably formulated, legitimate aspirations …the last resort short of certain bloodshed to which a desperate people turned as a mean of drawing attention after everything else had been ignored. (22)

Thus Gordimer categorically declares that three hundred years of repression has pushed the blacks towards violence. Violence was the last resort as every other peaceful means of acquiring justice had failed. The whites were terribly indifferent to the plight of the blacks and hence could be drawn out of their apathy only by violence and bloodshed.

The novel *A Sport of Nature* gives us an insight into the circumstances responsible for the transformation of the ANC from a peaceful party to one which resorted to violence as a necessary evil in order to achieve liberation. Gordimer explores the reasons behind the use of violence in the quest of liberation by the blacks and parties like the African National Congress headed by a pacifist like Mandela. These reasons are brought to the fore through the discussion which takes place between a couple Joe and Paulina who are supporters of the cause of the black liberation movement. Nelson Mandela announced the birth of the radical wing of his party known as Umkhonto we Sizwe after all attempts to have a peaceful dialogue with the white government had failed to resolve the conflict. As stated by the lawyer Joe in the novel, it was supposed to be "Controlled, symbolic violence—that's the

business of Umkhonto. ANC doesn't change; it retains its principles-" (85). This was what the whites in South Africa assumed about the military wing created by Nelson Mandela. Joe's wife Pauline believed that buildings were to be targeted and there would be no loss of life. But her husband Joe argues that "Controlled violence is a sanitized term for killing. Killing anyone who gets in the way of your symbolic target. Including your own people, if a bomb blows up in their own hands. Yourself. Killing is killing. Violence is pain and death-" (88).

The novel gives an account of the Sharpeville Massacre and its aftermath. The blacks protest peacefully, burning their passes and showing defiance to authority which robbed them of their rights. The government's response to such boycotts and acts of disobedience is on expected lines. The State's brutal methods are put across by Gordimer in these words: "Close black dots of newsprint cohered into the shout as it left an open mouth and the death-kick of bullets that flung bodies into a last gesture at life" (32). The protesting peaceful crowd could have been dispelled using peaceful means but the authorities resort to violence. Thus, the liberation movement is replete with episodes of violence as it conclusively proves the saying that 'violence begets violence'. Further, at the Resettlement Headquarters it was decided to relocate blacks, Indians and people of mixed origins from the white settlement areas. The Bantu Affairs Commissioners offices also decided '…for how long and in what capacity black people could live and work in the city" (136). This led to nationwide protests once again and the blacks attacked the places owned by the white administration, railway carriages owned by the State and also private property and buildings. It is observed that "Most were hit by incendiary bombs. It was long before the Underground organisations were to have limpet mines, SAM missiles and AK 47s; these bombs were homemade, with petrol bought in cans from any service station"

(136). In response, the police resorted to methods like "…beatings, applications of electric shocks, disorientation by extended denial of sleep…" (143).

The liberation struggle witnessed hundreds of deaths caused by both the warring races. It was unavoidable as the white government could not come to any agreement regarding handing over the reins of the government peacefully to the blacks. The political parties continued to wage their war against the government with the help of some liberated whites supporting their cause. Hillela's cousin Sasha is one of the whites who serves a prison sentence for supporting the cause of the blacks. He learns of his father Joe's death who was also a crusader for the rights of the blacks. Sasha feels that, "The death of his father was part of the deaths all around him. A country where the dead breed more dead…" (*Sport* 424). The government continued with its use of violence to suppress the activities and rebellions of the blacks but with the blacks' liberation movement garnering support worldwide it became impossible for the government and the law-enforcing agencies like the police to stop them by using force. As stated in the novel: " The police shot into the three thousand as they had shot before, year after year, as they were shooting day after day, hopelessly killing, unable to keep back the living who kept coming on and on, endlessly replacing the dead" (424).

My Son's Story is a unique novel. It foregrounds all four types of violence found in Gordimer's fiction: State-centric institutional violence, race-centric violence, gender-centric violence and violence as the fallout of liberation struggle. The plot of the novel revolves around liberation struggle in South Africa. The narrator of the story is Will, the son of a school teacher named Sonny who is also an activist in the Movement. Will tells us the story of his family's disintegration due to his father's affair with a white woman named Hannah Plowman. The contrasting narratives of

Hannah and Sonny intersperse in the novel signifying the changes taking place in South Africa. Dean Flower comments on this unique method of narration employed by Gordimer:

> It's a brilliant device: the novel becomes not a series of internal monologues, but the effort of the family's most articulate victim to conjecture, to comprehend, what really happened to them all. It turns a bleak ending into one that suggests how social as well as personal redemption may lie in acts of selflessness, empathy and forgiveness. Writing the novel was such an art. (322-23)

The novel unravels the world of blacks and dramatizes how they resorted to violence in order to secure liberation from the white rule. Besides, it recounts the story of Sonny and his close-knit family and its eventual disintegration due to his illegal affair with a white woman called Hannah which becomes a turning point in the lives of his wife and daughter. Through two black women characters—Aila and Baby, Sonny's wife and daughter respectively—Gordimer performs the anatomy of gender-centric violence with vivid imagination and clarity. Gordimer seems to suggest that violence is built into patriarchy causing a great deal of suffering and pain to the woman who participates in it as wife or daughter.

As the story begins, there is a description of Aila whom Sonny takes as his wife. Aila is a character who speaks through the language of silence. Aila is described as a woman of great beauty but her silence becomes the subject matter of discussion amongst people. "Aila was so quiet it was irritably felt by others that her beauty was undeserved" (*MSS* 7). However, it was Sonny who correctly interpreted her silence as a mode of disapproval: "Sonny was the one who knew what it was she rejected in the

only way possible for someone like her: by silence" (7). This couple seem to be ve ry much in love and are happy as compared to the other families of the blacks who are described as:

> … the drunken violent ones, some of our neighbours whose ugly lives came reverberating through our walls, and whose kids ran to our house out of fear of what was being revealed to them. Sometimes a woman would ask my father to 'speak to' her husband. I hung around my father, climbing on the back of his old armchair or leaning against his legs when strangers were there and understanding snatches of what was being said: the man had beaten her, he was drunk every night, he was going to lose his job with the builder. (18)

Sonny and Aila, however, start moving away from each other when Sonny comes into contact with a Human Rights Activist Hannah. Sonny gets imprisoned for his involvement in the Movement. He seems to feel that Hannah is the only person who understands him and that Aila is just good enough to be a dutiful housewife and mother due to her limited exposure and education. After Sonny goes to prison the distance grows between him and Aila. "The silences between Aila and him that were so comfortable, natural in their closeness, at home, were now a real silence without communication of any kind (48). Sonny is unable to connect with his wife as he looks down upon her as a simple woman who did not know anything of the liberation struggle but was content to be at home taking care of simple household duties. This naturally leads to long gaps of silence and they are unable to share their views and experiences as they used to do so before. The silence of Aila, which initially was a part of her personality and attitude now changes into one which she is forced to maintain because of mental trauma. She is tortured by the fact that her husband Sonny has found a lover in Hannah but is unable to do anything about it. Her inability to

oppose her husband's clandestine relationship or change her situation ends up in a mammoth torturous silence.

It is Hannah who sends a message while he is in prison. It reads as "Happy for battle" (55) which brings them together as individuals with a common cause and understanding. Soon, they start moving together and enter into a sexual relationship too. His son, the narrator of the story sees them coming out of the theatre together and is immediately concerned for his simple loving mother besides being shocked at his father's act of betrayal. He too becomes a silent spectator. The son chooses to remain silent fearing the pain that his mother would experience if she comes to know of the affair. Due to his inability to intervene to change the situation, his life is now transformed into a journey of silent torture. Aila and her children are shell-shocked into silence by the act of betrayal on the part of Sonny. Gradually Hannah starts visiting Sonny's home and Aila notices the closeness between them but remains silent due to her inability to protest. Her silence underlines the fact that black women are relegated to the background by the dominating men in their society. The institution of patriarchy suppresses independent acts and thoughts of women thus rendering them into silent subjects. Aila has been taught to be loyal and obedient to her husband. In contrast, Sonny proves his charm and virility by courting two women and is even proud of it. He does not feel guilty about his act. As stated by his son, "The old bull still owns his cows, he's still capable of serving his harem, my mother and his blonde (95).

The family seems to carry on pretending that all is well. However, things take a nasty turn with Sonny's daughter Baby slashing her wrists and trying to kill herself. The son understands that though he had tried to hide his father's affair from the family, it was known to them for too long and as a result, "Baby took drugs, that her

great liveliness was deep unhappiness" (61). Baby cuts her wrists due to her anger and frustration at her father's liaison with Hannah. She is aware of her mother's helplessness and the sorrow of knowing the truth runs so deep that she is filled with a longing to destroy herself and end her suffering.

As his bond with Hannah deepens, Sonny starts neglecting his family. The shocking act of slashing of her wrists by his beloved daughter Baby does not move him and he is interested in knowing if the slashing of wrists would leave scars. The scars that he inflicted on his daughter are indeed psychological and embedded deeply into her psyche. Baby is so disgusted by his act of taking Hannah as a lover that she finally leaves her home to join the military outfit in search of a purpose to survive and find some meaning in life. Baby is a mute witness to her father's acts like her mother. Sonny's act of betrayal is indeed violent in nature since it causes suffering and irreparable damage to the members of his family. It scarred their minds and wounded their souls permanently. "He remembered the only thing he had found to say to Aila: Will there be scars? Now she believes, she does, she does, he has made his daughter into a revolutionary, sent her into exile, to live in a camp, never to come home, perhaps to die even if she didn't bleed to death the other time" (124).

This incident distances Sonny more from Aila and he blames her silence for it. "What had Aila done to assuage his anguish at Baby's attempt to end her life before it had begun? Nothing. Silence. Silence upon the other silence……Aila could do nothing for him. He could do nothing for Aila" (137). Sonny, being a male, fails to understand Aila's pain as a woman as he selfishly focuses on satisfying his carnal desires. Their years of understanding and love seem to dissipate into thin air with the entry of Hannah into their lives. He also does not realise that he is the underlying cause of Baby's suicidal attempt nor does he try to reason it out with his daughter. He

never makes his daughter feel secure nor does he assure her of his support during difficult times. Baby is left with a feeling that she has no one to turn to in the family which finally makes her to move away from her home. Sadly, Aila is blamed for not easing his pain at his daughter's act of attempting suicide and he just brushes it away so easily by saying, "…Aila could do nothing for him"(137).

Further, Aila is also deeply disillusioned by Sonny's deception and indifference towards his family. She too, like her daughter Baby, finds no purpose in her life and goes on to indulge in terrorist activities and joins the liberation movement leading to her arrest. The docile housewife who could not counter the psychologically-violent deed of her husband finds a way out of her frustration and helplessness by becoming a part of the violent military wing of the African National Congress known as Umkhonto we Sizwe. During her trial, even Sonny is unable to comprehend the charges levelled against his wife whom he thought was unfit to be a part of the liberation movement:

> The charges included terrorism and furthering the aims of a banned organisation. Aila was accused of being a member of something called the Transvaal Implementation Machinery, responsible for acts of terror in the region, and connected to a high command named Ams Sebokeng. She was alleged to have acted as a courier between Umkhonto we Sizwe in the neighbouring countries and a cell in Johannesburg area, to have attended meetings where missions for the placing of explosives were planned, and to have concealed terrorist arms on rented property where she resided illegally. (233)

Finally, when on bail, Aila leaves the country never to return. The ruptured relationship between Sonny and Aila signifies the presence of violence built into patriarchy. He exhibits absolute insensitivity and apathy towards the suffering and pain of his wife and daughter. Sonny also symbolises male power which operates by reducing female to the fringe status. Sonny's treatment of his wife and daughter is the testament of this reality.

Besides, the novel dramatises episodes of violence stemming from racism. It also narrates incidents of violence related to liberation movement. Sonny, the simple school teacher is dragged into liberation struggle in the wake of Soweto uprising. Sonny narrates the mindless killings of protesting young children with a sense of horror: "… by the time another small boy, running with a crowd of older school children towards the police, was shot dead, and a newspaper photographer's picture of his body, carried by another child, became the pieta` of suffering happening everywhere across the veld where the real blacks were" (25). The disturbing images continue throughout the novel and the guile of the government is brought out in the words of the Comrade who wonders whether "…is it much different from the truck appearing innocently to be carrying its load of cold drinks, that attracted our children into the street and gave the fascists who were hidden with their guns behind the crates a chance to shoot our children down…" (192). The State too, acting as the enforcement machinery of law and order was guilty of promoting heedless violence in the nation. Sonny speaks of the shooting down and killing of nine young men and goes on to point out how blacks were not allowed to grieve during funerals as the government kept a vigil over the crowd. The police monitored the funerals of the blacks whom they had shot and the people who attended the funerals had to be wary of the police who could fire at them at any point of time. "Before them were mounted

police and soldiers with automatic shotguns and R4 rifles, standing legs planted apart…the yellow armoured vans, the clumsy brown armoured cars the blacks dub zoomorphically 'Hippos', the stolid figures with the power of death in their hand were ranged like the toys of war children set up" (104). Sonny describes the police as an authority having power over both life and death and to whom the lives of the blacks meant nothing. The State government in its bid to keep law and order situation under control had stationed the police around the black settlements which created an atmosphere of mistrust resulting in sporadic incidents of violence. "They were half – crouched, their rifles and shotguns pointing down straight at this body, the body of the gathering. The police…has been camped on the township soccer fields for weeks. There was no getting away from them. They were life; and death. They had shot the nine young men lying in the graves where the earth had not yet settled" (110-111).

The trigger-happy police close down on the peaceful mob and start firing without provocation and it results in the death of a young black youth."There was a shot like all other shots: this time a young man fell face-down in the path of Sonny, Hannah and Father Mayekiso…Blood came glistening through the black fibrous mat of his hair and, as she moved him, ran, obliterating the slogan on his trade-union T-shirt *An Injury To One Is An Injury To All"* (*117*). The crowd is shocked beyond measure at this inexplicable display of brute violence. The police continue to bear upon the crowd and Hannah who is a part of the crowd observes the pitiable conditions of the blacks while tackling police brutality: "Even Hannah had never before experienced what the blacks, with their rags kept on their persons as protection against tear-gas as white people carry credit cards, were ready every day. Canisters were exploding at the tail of the crowd; the foul cloud pursued them and a shot—in the air…cracked a whip over them (116). Hannah makes a poignant observation that

the blacks carried rags with them every day as a protection against the tear gas shells which the police used routinely against them. She compares it to the whites carrying their credit cards. This statement underscores the wretched conditions of the blacks in South Africa wherein they are condemned to carry pieces of rags to protect themselves against police brutality. Paradoxically, a powerless black man is forced to confront brute violence only by using a piece of rag as his defence.

Apart from police brutality, the ruling white government also found ways and means to punish the innocent and prove them guilty by framing false charges against them. When the police find some illegal possessions in the shed of Aila's house, it leads to her arrest. When she is produced in the court, the family is shocked by the charges framed against her: "Aila the comrade. Exhibit No 1 in court was an RPG-7 rocket-launcher, two RPG-7 rockets, three RG-42 hand-grenades, two limpet-mines, two FM-57 land-mines, and a length of flowered curtain material" (243). Her son who was a witness when the police had raided their home says, "-The rockets weren't there. That launcher thing. They were never there. They planted them, like they did the other things earlier. I tell you I saw, and they weren't there.-" (248). However, he is left to lament alone as there is no one who is willing to listen to him.

The government in power resorts to unjust ways to keep the people suppressed. It takes refuge in methods of violence and strips the people of their dignity and means of survival. In such situations the blacks react with hostility. Sonny justifies use of violence against the State:

> –Not for me. I never thought I would ever accept violence, even if I didn't have to do it myself…Even if others were to do it for me. I sit in the meeting, I take part in decisions where it's taken for granted counter-violence…our

> violence…has its absolutely necessary role. That's what it's called, a role; it's what I call it. Like in a play; and I'm not playing that particular role but I'm in the cast. (128)

He elaborates on the necessary role that the blacks need to play in order to secure freedom and justice.

Sonny also speaks of the hypocrisy of the people who resort to violence but preach peace to others. He feels that according to some "violence is not the deciding factor as to who is right. When people make violence the ultimate test of who's right and who's wrong, here—you know the argument I mean—"the struggle is no better than the oppression because violence on the part of the oppressed can never be justified' it reduces them to the level of the oppressor and so on…" (127).Yet, none can justify the deaths of the innocent blacks. The precious lives lost during the episodes of violence do not make any sense as they have died for no particular reason or cause. Sonny feels that, "They are senseless deaths, because no amount of killing will mean that the oppression of our people can continue to survive. No violence against us can shoot down the struggle for peace and justice" (114).

Sonny argues that being forced to live in an atmosphere embroiled in violence, the people of South Africa gradually realised the truth that they were not fighting for equality with the whites in their country. The blacks realised that the freedom which had been snatched away from them was more important than equality.

> There came a point, not possible to determine exactly when, at which *equality* became a cry that couldn't be made out, had been misheard or interpreted, turned out to be something else-finer. *Freedom*. That was it. Equality was not

freedom, it had been only the mistaken yearning to become like the very ones feared and hated? Envy was not freedom. (24)

According to Sonny, once the blacks realise the importance of freedom, they will be ready to lay down their lives for the great cause of liberation. With their freedom, they get a dignified life and the right to education for all. They understand the need to agitate and win their freedom as it would enable them to live without fear in their own land instead of fleeing from the police violence which snatched a good part of their lives and deprived them of the right to live in peace and prosperity. Sonny makes this point clear when he tells Hannah: "But the writ's being *rewritten*! That's the point! People have been willing to die now for *that*. We've got to wake up and realize it, if it's to mean feeding and housing and educating our people in freedom! Giving the generations of uprooted people and refugees somewhere to live instead of somewhere to run from" (214). Ironically, for Sonny and million other blacks like him violence becomes the only means of achieving freedom.

Gordimer also portrays routine acts of violence committed by the whites who share the same neighbourhood with the blacks. Sonny chooses to live in a neighbourhood where there are many houses occupied by the whites. The whites are unable to tolerate his presence in their neighbourhood and begin to harass his family. One day, Aila and her son return home only to find that the whites had strangled a cat and hung it on their gate with a message for Aila: "BLACK COMMUNIST BITCH GET OUT OF HERE." (255). This violent act is orchestrated in order to give a message to Aila that they too would suffer the same fate as the cat if they did not vacate their premises. Sonny was right when he said that "words are stones" (32). The racist message was a violent one which shook up the family and caused great pain. The family however, stands strong and ignores the message.

This act on the part of Sonny's family angers the white neighbourhood and one day when the son returns home, he finds that it has been razed to the ground by a petrol bomb flung on it by the whites. Sonny is now determined to stand firm and fight for the liberation of his land and it strengthens his will to fight with all means possible to rid his country of the evil of racism. He speaks of the deaths of the blacks who sacrificed themselves for the cause and is certain that they would rise like the phoenix despite everything. Sonny says, "We can't be burned out, he said, we're that bird, you know, it's called the phoenix, that always rises again from the ashes. Prison won't keep us out. Petrol bombs won't get rid of us. This street-this whole country is ours to live in. Fire won't stop me. And it won't stop you" (274).

The novel ends on a sad note wherein the son writes a poem and sends it to his father who is in prison. The poem does not visualise the end of violence nor does it foresee a change towards peace and goodwill between the blacks and the whites. The poem concludes with the following lines:

Come, lover, comrade, friend, child, bird

Come

I entice you with my crumbs, see-

Dove

Sprig of olive in its beak

Dashes in swift through the bars, breaks its neck

Against stone walls. (277)

The dove which is a symbol of peace flies into the prison through the bars only to break its neck against the stone walls of the prison to die a violent death.

The theme of violence also resonates in J.M Coetzee's fiction. Though Coetzee portrays violence, he does not validate it, but upholds the significance of peaceful co-existence. In contrast, Gordimer argues that violence is essential for achieving liberation in South Africa. She felt that creation of the military wing of the African National Congress known as Umkhonto we Sizwe was much needed after the peaceful methods followed by Nelson Mandela failed to bring about liberation.

Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* is a plea for peace. Its protagonist Michael K works as a gardener in the town of Seapoint. He makes a makeshift barrow to take his ailing mother to her hometown. However, he does not possess a permit to leave the town and cannot wait for one as his mother is very sick. His mother dies on the way and Michael K finds himself in a camp where he is cared for but is unhappy as he has lost his freedom. The camp is run by the colonisers who are kind to the black residents in the camp. Michael K is disinterested in the war neither is he interested in staying in the camp and being taken care of as he only wants to lead his life without any restraints. He hankers after a peaceful life which eludes him consistently.

However, Coetzee's other novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a stark contrast to *Life and Times of Michael K.* In this novel Coetzee portrays how the colonisers feel threatened by the colonised and resort to violence to subdue them. Colonel Joll comes to the Outpost and with the help of his men unleashes violence on the natives who are referred to as 'the barbarians' by the colonisers. They wish to thwart any attempt of rebellion and hence instil fear in the natives through acts of violence. While

Michael K is unharmed and treated well at the camp, the old man and his grandson are beaten up and tortured by Joll's men who are suspicious of all barbarians. The old man succumbs to his injuries while the child is traumatized and refuses to emote or speak. Another girl is also beaten up and ends up with broken ankles besides being almost blinded. The old man's corpse reveals the brutality of Joll's men, "The grey beard is caked with blood. The lips are crushed and drawn back, the teeth are broken. One eye is rolled back, the other eye-socket is a bloody hole" (*Barbarians* 16). Coetzee has highlighted the reason for resorting to violence as follows: "In the torture room unlimited force is exerted upon the physical being of an individual in a twilight of legal illegality, with the purpose, if not of destroying them, then at least of destroying the kernel of resistance within him" (*Doubling* 363). Though Coetzee has shown the ugly, violent face of the colonisers, he has also tried to balance it with the goodness of character of the Magistrate in the novel who takes in the injured girl and tends to her. He finally returns the girl to her people. The Magistrate is filled with remorse for the way his people treat the natives but is helpless and unable to bring about any change. Both Gordimer and Coetzee are highly critical of State-sponsored violence. As far as Gordimer is concerned she seems to validate the violence committed by the blacks against the State. However, Coetzee does not support violence as the means to achieve an end.

Gordimer also makes an attempt to find a way out of this cycle of violence. She feels that it can be done through the understanding created between the whites and the blacks but is not sure if the liberal whites' role in the movement would be accepted by the blacks. As stated in *My Son's Story*:

> The *future* he was living for until the day he died be achieved only by black people with involvement of the small group of white revolutionaries who have

> solved the contradiction between black consciousness and class consciousness, and qualify to make unconditional common cause with the struggle for full liberation, e.g., a national and social revolution. (123)

In her fiction, Gordimer has explored the multi-dimensional aspects of violence against the backdrop of South Africa. Her fiction unravels the unseen dimensions of violence in her nation. More importantly, Gordimer's works also contributed towards bringing about awareness within the nation itself, strengthening the cause of liberation struggle. She also made the people realise the reasons for the outbreak of violence in the country and also vindicated the acts of violence on the part of the blacks. She condemned unnecessary use of violence by the government and gave a clear picture of how the government overreacted in many occasions leading to the loss of innocent lives.

Above all, Gordimer also highlighted how apartheid was a source of violence as blacks protested against the discrimination and inhuman treatment by the whites. The gloomy picture of a race-ridden South Africa where the natives were ousted out of their own lands usurped by the colonial whites is painted masterfully in Gordimer's fiction. Being forced to live in shanty towns, and carry passes to enter into towns where the whites resided, made the blacks terribly unhappy and they retaliated violently. Gordimer is a master narrator who through her idea of 'witness literature' has contributed to a deeper understanding of the mosaic of violence that sustained the colonial rule in South Africa.

Chapter V

Conclusion: Writer as a Public Intellectual

In the dark times
Will there also be singing?
Yes, there will also be singing.
About the dark times.

—Bertolt Brecht

The story of South Africa is a long narrative of colonisation and exploitation. It began with the trade conquests which later on extended to the acquisition of blacks as slaves, besides taking over their land by force. The saga of the blacks was written in tears and blood and the movement for liberation saw failed attempts, violence and bloodshed. The liberation movement was enriched with contributions in the form of writings made by both blacks and white liberals who facilitated igniting the minds and hearts of the people to fight for the liberation of South Africa.

Most of the white writers wrote about the scenic beauty of the landscape and other politically correct issues conveniently circumventing overtly socio-political themes. Nevertheless, there were a few others who jumped into the fray and highlighted the issues that plagued South Africa. Nadine Gordimer was one such white liberal who took on the might of the establishment by foregrounding its hegemonic designs in her aesthetically fine-tuned fictional narratives. She was born and brought up in South Africa and therefore grew up being conscious of all the problems that lay within the nation. Denial of formal school education in fact opened the doors of the mesmerizing world of books to Gordimer who benefitted from it and grew as an individual by absorbing the works of great writers at a very young age.

She thus developed an open-minded outlook and was empathetic towards the plight of the blacks. Being aware that the sufferings of the blacks were caused by her own people i.e. the white colonisers, she ended up with a troubled conscience and a disturbed mind. Rather than being indifferent, Gordimer chose to be proactive and therefore, she became an activist and joined hands with Nelson Mandela who headed the African National Congress party. She orchestrated a two-pronged strategy to aid the blacks in their struggle—activism and through her writings. Her works created a furore in the literary circles and made the world sit up and take notice of the dark underbelly of South Africa. Many of her works were banned but she refused to leave the battlefield and go into exile. The government which had brought about the policy of apartheid in the State in 1948 and used every rule in the law book to harass and segregate the blacks was forced to bow down to the mounting global pressure and finally gave in. The scourge of apartheid came to an end paving the way for general elections which in turn led to Mandela forming his government in the year 1994.

The present study takes into consideration the novels and collections of short stories written by Gordimer during the period of interregnum. 'Interregnum' is a term which is used to denote the period between the reigns of two regimes. The study considers the interregnum period to be the period of transition in South Africa— from the colonial rule of the whites marked by the Grand Apartheid and the coalition government with a non-white majority led by Nelson Mandela coming to power in South Africa in 1994. The anguish and turmoil of the blacks during this period became the subject of literature of the nation. A few select novels and short stories of Gordimer written during this period have been taken up for detailed analysis of race, gender and violence. This study has mainly dealt with her major novels titled *The Lying Days*, *Burger's Daughter*, *July's People*, *Sport of Nature*, *My Son's Story*, *None*

to Accompany Me and *Occasion for Loving.* Among the short story collections, stories from *beethoven was one-sixteenth black and other stories, Jump and other stories, Life Times* and *Loot and Other Stories* have been chosen for the study.

The first chapter is a detailed analysis of the history of South Africa which is of primary importance to understand the themes of race, gender and violence that follow in the later chapters of the thesis. The entry of the Dutch in 1652 initiated the cycle of establishing settlements on the pretext of trade which gradually led to conquests of larger areas of land. This led to the native tribes offering stiff resistance leading to war and bloodshed. There were wars over annexation of the lands between the Dutch and the British too. After two Boer Wars (1880, 1889) fought between the British and the Dutch, Britain finally announced the birth of the Union of South Africa. The conflict of sharing power between them ended with the National Party having Afrikaner interests at the top of their election manifesto coming into power in 1948. While the British played a prominent role in bringing about an end to the practice of slavery, they never made any attempt to put an end to the racist practices in the nation. The first step formally initiated by the British to isolate the blacks had been through the Natives Land Act of 1913 which allowed only 8% of the land to be occupied by the blacks. With the National Party gaining power the situation only worsened as the practice of grand apartheid gained legal status with the execution of apartheid laws. A spate of laws threw the lives of the blacks into a quagmire and they were denied personal freedom and dignity. The Pass laws, Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act enacted in tandem with many such laws made them appear like strangers in their own land.

The continued state of tyranny and atrocities committed by the government on pretext of execution of law and order in the State could only fuel anger, mistrust and

violence on the part of the blacks in South Africa. The physical abuse and psychological trauma of the blacks that ensued after such condemnable and insensitive acts of the government whipped up the fury of writers. The writers—both from the factions of blacks and whites resorted to protest literature to voice out their feelings and highlight the problems in the nation. Gordimer too, refused to conform to the ideologies of the dominant whites and the government. Instead, she chose to celebrate dissent and humanism in a bid to obtain justice and freedom for the blacks. The need for the land to be reverted to the blacks and their perennial struggle to regain their motherland are constant themes running through the texture of her fiction.

The problem of race resonates in Gordimer's fiction. Gordimer does not offer any solutions to the issue of racism. However, she throws open her ideas to the readers who have to conscientiously decide for themselves. The imposition of apartheid in South Africa accentuated the existing racial divide which started from the point of colonisation of the land. With the Grand Apartheid laws having been enforced, any attempt to transgress spaces allotted for the whites became a punishable offence. The agony of the blacks never crept into the works of most white writers in South Africa who chose to depict the blacks with the usual recurring racial stereotypes—lusting after white women besides being dangerous, bestial and uncivilized. However, Gordimer chose to rise above such stereotypes by offering a sophisticated and nuanced depiction of the blacks focusing primarily on their collective anguish, despair, dreams and desires. She launched a caustic attack on the advocates of apartheid and responded strongly to the issue through her works.

Gordimer does not write about the problems of race from the point of view of a white woman. Interestingly, she is able to understand the psyche of the black man which enables her to offer a refreshing view of the problem of race. She uses multiple

voices of both the black and white characters in her fictional narratives who give contrasting views and opinions about the colour bar that exists in South Africa. This enables the readers to draw their own conclusions without her ideas being imposed upon them. Gordimer's narratives make space for multiple voices thus eliminating the need to understand the work only through the blinkers provided by the author. The reader now has multiple perspectives which make more room for analysis and help formulate her own conclusions. Nevertheless, strong moral overtones are found in her fiction.

In her novel *Occasion for Loving*, Gordimer contests the stereotype of the black man who lusts after white women. Instead, it is the white woman Ann Davis who is sexually attracted towards the black artist Gideon Shibalo. Ann Davis' hostess Jessie Stilwell is also seen to be laying the ghosts of her past to rest as she awakens to renewed understanding of the blacks. The novel seems to communicate the view that the blacks—the racial 'other'—need not be seen as individuals evoking suspicion and fear. Rather they are just normal human beings like the whites who are to be treated equally with respect and dignity.

The novel unravels the racial prejudices that enveloped every aspect of life in South Africa. Scant respect was given to educated blacks and Gideon is referred to as an "educated black bastard" (*OL* 155). Gordimer's works are not just about depiction of the dark side of colonisation of South Africa by the whites. She also seeks a radical transformation and redemption for the suffering black majority through her fiction. Her novels have as their protagonists white liberals who strive to strike an understanding with the blacks and help alleviate their sufferings. The troubled psyche of the liberal whites is seen in the manner in which they wish to procure justice to the blacks and treat them as equals. Attempts on the part of white characters to efface the

racial divide that comes as historical baggage along with apartheid are vividly depicted in her fiction. Boaz Davis, Ann's husband shockingly keeps his cool even after learning about his wife's extra-marital affair with Gideon, a black man. Similarly, Jessie Stilwell and Ann Davis are determined to make Gideon feel at home with them.

The cross-racial relations, however, are not without the dark side to it. The white characters in her fiction are not totally absolved of blame or shameful acts. The seemingly broad-minded Boaz too was no exception as he had obtained sexual gratification through many black women. Gordimer thus exposes the hypocrisy of the whites who made laws forbidding union between the blacks and whites but hankered after the blacks surreptitiously. The double standard of the whites who preach but fail to practise is effectively brought out through the characters of Jessie Stilwell, Boaz Davis and Ann Davis. Ann Davis abruptly breaks her relationship with Gideon fearing racial laws and is seen to leave the country along with her husband stealthily. Gideon who had started believing that the colour bar did not exist is deeply disillusioned by this act and he too starts spewing racial abuses. When Jessie Stilwell meets him he shouts, "White bitch-- get away" (*OL* 331). Despite common belief about the inability of white writers to understand blacks, Gordimer enters into the psyche of the black man through the character of Gideon and proves that a white writer can successfully represent the blacks too. She offers a contrasting viewpoint by revealing Gideon's disinterest towards white women. By doing so, Gordimer breaks the stereotype of a black man's sexual fantasies of a white woman. Gideon associates himself only with women who desire him and are sexually attracted towards him. For all other purposes, the characteristic features of a white woman having fair skin or blonde hair—considered symbols of beauty by the whites—did not attract his

attention. In contrast, he considers them ugly like old women and hence treats them with contempt and indifference.

Gordimer also debunks the myth that beauty lay in everything 'white'. In racial theories there is an all pervading importance allotted to whiteness. Gideon is unable to see Ann's beauty through the prism of whiteness. He has to paint her as a black woman to accept her as beautiful in order to fulfil his dreams and desires. Gideon emerges as a black who is firmly grounded in his roots and takes pride in being a black. No one can make him feel inferior because of his colour and he considers himself to be unique. Gordimer thus attempts to break down the idea of superiority assumed by the white race and calls for celebrating the diversity of human race. So Gordimer's fiction foregrounds the fallacy of racial theories which have clear-cut divisions and attitudes assigned to the people belonging to different races. Her fiction assigns great importance to humanity and human values. She wants the readers to understand that there is no blanket term called race under which people behave in a specified manner according to the assumed characteristics attributed to each race.

Further, her novel *Burger's Daughter* is one of the finest examples of realism in fiction. The multiple narrative threads and flashback techniques bring out the problem of racism in the nation strongly and impress upon the people the need to bring about a quick end to the problem of racism. Multiple voices of Lionel Burger, Rosa Burger, Orde Greer and Dhladhla interlace the novel offering varied views and solutions to the pervasive problem of racism in South Africa. Lionel Burger who is on trial for treason critiques the capitalistic system which according to him did not bring progress to South Africa ridden with racism. To him, the solution lay in communism. But interestingly, his daughter Rosa brings out the flaws of communism by referring

to the year 1922 when communist leaders had given a call saying, " Workers of the world unite and fight for a white South Africa" (*BD*108). Realism in the novel is the key to deeper understanding of the political, social and economic conditions which prevailed in the nation during the period of interregnum. Gordimer uses realism and stream of consciousness technique to bring home to the readers the untold and hidden truths of the apartheid regime in South Africa. She does a close reading of political developments and incorporates the details into her fiction. The detailed description of the Great Miners' Strike (1946) is one such example.

Besides, Gordimer has effectively used flashbacks which take the readers back in time and history driving home the reality that degrading racist practices had over the years led to prolonged suffering of blacks in South Africa. For instance, Lionel Burger delves into his early memories while he was listed in the army and reveals that racial discrimination existed in the army too. Similarly, Rosa Burger recollects her childhood days and ruminates, " *Peace. Land. Bread*. These they had for themselves" (169). The silences between the lines reveal a greater truth of what the blacks were deprived of—peace, land and bread.

Further, the inimitable character of a white man named Orde Greer—a veritable communist—comes into conflict with a black activist named Dhladhla while addressing the vexed issue of racism. Dhladhla finds the solution to racism in Black Consciousness propagated by Steve Biko. Biko wanted the blacks to be proud of their colour and race and preserve their culture of blacks. Orde Greer on the other hand is sceptical of any act of tokenism on the part of whites like including blacks in the football team which as he sees it, cannot be an authentic solution to racism. To him it could be through communism alone which would give equal status to all irrespective

of their racial identity. It would otherwise continue and the blacks would still be confined to "…black jobs, black education, black houses" (151).

The short stories "Six Feet of the Country" and "beethoven was one-sixteenth black" offer contrasting perspectives on race. "Six Feet of the Country" highlights the apathy of the whites to the plight of the blacks whereas "beethoven was one-sixteenth black" depicts a Utopian vision wherein there is the reversal of role in South Africa as far as racial equations are concerned. In the former, the struggles of a black man named Petrus to get back his brother's body are narrated with vivid details. It brings out the pathetic condition of the blacks who have been caught in the grip of institutional racism. Petrus is handed over some other black man's body as for the whites all black faces are the same. The feelings of the family and their sorrow at losing their family member do not matter to the authorities.

In "beethoven was one-sixteenth black" Gordimer envisions South Africa being ruled by the blacks. She dissipates the supremacy of the white race through the character of Frederick Morris. Ironically, Frederick Morris, a white man now wishes to claim that he too has black genes and is one of the blacks. He does so in a calculative manner in order to gain rights and privileges in the country now ruled by the blacks. 'One-sixteenth' of the black genes would also suffice to meet the qualification of having black genealogy. Earlier, the blacks longed to have the white genes as the nation was colonised by the whites and apartheid was practised. But after liberation, the apple-cart of white supremacy was toppled which in turn, made the whites lobby aggressively for being identified as blacks. The biting satire in the short story exposes the hypocrisy built into the white man's world.

Gordimer takes a bold stance against racism unmindful of the backlash that she would have to face. “I want to examine not what is forbidden us by censorship — I know that story too well — but to what we are bidden. I want to consider what is expected of us by the dynamic of collective conscience and the will to liberty in various circumstances and places; whether we should respond, and if so, how we do” (“Essential” 6). She was no stranger to her works being banned by the apartheid regime but stood firm in her convictions and produced the finest of what she termed as ‘witness literature’. She depicted with clinical detachment the massively regressive effects of apartheid in her fiction. The apartheid laws entwine themselves into her fiction inconspicuously but impact the readers with remarkable intensity. It is left to the readers to digest the horrors of apartheid and understand that the solution lay in humanism, brotherhood and equality of mankind. Witness literature was a powerful tool with the help of which she was able to foreground the burning issue of racism in her nation.

Gordimer repeatedly reiterated her stance that writers were primarily androgynous beings and that their gender had no impact on the fiction that was produced. Hence, she refused to be drawn into the contemporary feminist polemics, merely calling herself a writer with a humanist vision. Nevertheless, her fiction also grapples with the issue of gender which is entwined with the problem of racial discrimination. For a conscientious writer like her, the issue of gender was secondary to that of race. Gordimer examines gender through the prism of race. All the protagonists of her fiction are white women who are liberal and seem to be the extended selves of the author herself. They are well-rounded characters and well portrayed. Their psychological trauma and aspirations are finely sketched out in her fiction. Gordimer’s white female characters are bestowed with agency—ability of an

individual to transform his/her destiny through vision and action—which empowers them to contest and defy patriarchy. They are also liberal in their attitude towards the blacks and go out of their way to understand and help them. In contrast, the black women who are present in her fiction are marginal characters. They are projected as docile, passive and submissive who accept their ignominy with a sense of fatalism and resignation. They do not seem to contribute to any major changes either personally or politically. They are nameless entities who have dominating husbands and many children wallowing in poverty and loneliness. The black men take on multiple wives and their commands are obeyed without any resistance. There are exceptions like Marisa Kgosana in *Burger's Daughter* and Aila in *None to Accompany Me* who make a feeble attempt to resist and rebel but they fall short of becoming well rounded characters due to the conspicuous absence of energy and vivacity found in white female protagonists. While Marisa Kgosana fades away at the end of the novel without achieving anything, Aila becomes a member of a Liberation unit out of frustration in her life. She is not shown to be idealistic and joining the rebel outfit was just an act of rebellion as her husband Sonny gets into an affair with a white woman named Hannah.

Gordimer's representation of black women was to a certain extent compromised by apartheid laws which came in the way of active interracial interactions. Nevertheless, Gordimer chronicled their lives in her fiction which created awareness of the underlying problems amongst black women in South Africa. Though Gordimer was not a feminist and labelled herself as a humanist she aggressively foregrounded gender issues in her fiction specially focusing on the suffering multitude of black women. "The particular segment of South African society to which I belong, by the colour of my skin whether I like it or not, represents a crisis

that has a particular confession with the western world, to which you I this audience belong" (" Living"). The black women of Africa who were banished into the continent of 'invisibility' by their history, were made visible in Gordimer's writings. By depicting varieties of black female characters—with all their moments of despair and desperation—she gave voice to the voiceless, as it were.

At the time when Black feminism as a movement took strong roots, Gordimer's fiction definitely supplemented the plea that the problems of the black women differed from that of the whites and could not be treated under the large banner of 'feminism' as a whole. One has to understand that the apartheid laws and the policy of segregation besides pass laws which were in place gave Gordimer limited access to areas where the blacks lived. It is commendable that despite restrictions she made it her responsibility to gain access into the lives of the blacks and understand their problems and bring them out in her narratives. What finally counts is her desire to comprehend and highlight the burning issues specifically confronted by black women while most other writers glossed them over.

Gordimer has also dealt with the problem of sexual exploitation of the black women who are oppressed by the colonisers and their own men as well. Thus, Gordimer's black women are doubly colonised—by imperial ideology as well as patriarchy. Her short stories "beethoven was one-sixteenth black" and "Town and Country Lovers" deal with the problem of sexual exploitation by the colonisers. In "Town and Country Lovers" Paulus Eysendyck and Thebedi are childhood friends. However, childhood friendship does not rise above the divisions of race and Paulus not only exploits Thebedi sexually but also goes so far as to murdering the baby which was born out of their union.

Sexual freedom is also tied down to race in Gordimer's fiction. Her white female protagonists are liberated women who are fiercely independent, exercise their rights and speak their minds. In *None to Accompany Me* its white protagonist Vera Stark is the epitome of a liberated woman. Her marital status does not prevent her from having sexual liaisons with Otto Abarbanel who has come to the Foundation to film a documentary on its work. Vera considers that only she possesses sole rights over her body and is free to use it the way she pleases. Due to her enlightened perception of 'self' she is able to lie beside her husband Ben without being ridden by guilt after the sexual act with Otto Abarbanel. In contrast to total freedom which defines the life-world of white women, black women are projected as beings lacking initiative and sexual freedom. Gordimer drives home the truth that woman's predicament has no singular universal solution—often sought by liberal white feminists—since it is always predicated upon other vital factors like class and race.

The loneliness or the metaphoric 'Waiting-for-Godot' condition of the black women whose husbands are compelled to work in cities is also foregrounded in Gordimer's fiction. This phenomenon is the fallout of the apartheid laws which forbid entry to the families of blacks working for their white masters. The Pass laws limit entry into townships to the workers who are forced to leave their families behind. The wives perpetually waste their years waiting for their husbands to return home and are extremely sad and depressed due to their separation and loneliness. Their problems are compounded by lack of education and the resulting ignorance. Unlike women belonging to the white race, they are confined to their hutments and do not have careers to fulfil their dreams and aspirations. Her novel *July's People* and her short story "Amnesty" ably demonstrate the deplorable plight of the black women in South Africa. In "Amnesty" it is an unnamed woman who waits endlessly for her young

man who is involved in the Movement whereas in *July's People*, July's wife Martha and his mother are found to be in a similar situation. The white women in her fiction are affluent and well-educated. Gordimer brings out the contrast between them by juxtaposing white women with their black counterparts. For example, in *July's People* Maureen Smales remembers her childhood days. Her dominant memory of school days is of a black girl named Lydia who used to carry her school case every day to school on her head. Tragically, Lydia goes to school every day only in her capacity as Maureen's servant but is denied access to school education.

Again, it is evident in Gordimer's fiction that patriarchy exists mainly in the society of the blacks. While all the white characters in her fiction are imbued with agency and are fiercely independent, agency is conspicuous by its absence when it comes to the black women characters. In *July's People* Maureen is a direct contrast to July's wife Martha. Maureen is seen to break free of her husband and even her kids at the end of the novel while Martha remains in her hut with her kids obeying the commands of her husband July. Hillela in *A Sport of Nature* has her sexual freedom and moves on in life despite her personal tragedies like losing her husband Whaila Kgomani, a prominent black leader. In contrast, the black wife of Whaila Kgomani ends up lonely and a mute witness to the sequence of things.

Another important issue that is analysed in the present study is the mother-child bond which is given a lot of importance by a few feminists. It is surprising to note that Gordimer does not give any importance to the mother-child bond in her fiction. According to her, having a child or the absence of it does not define a white woman. She is free to choose whether she wants to have a child or not irrespective of her partner's preferences. In the short story "Karma" the protagonist Karen, being childless, seems to be hesitant and indecisive at a sperm bank that she visits. The

reason for her vacillation is that she is not ready to be part of the history of the exploiters or the exploited by choosing the sperm of a white or black male respectively. Hence she abandons the idea of conceiving with the aid of a sperm bank, suppresses her desire to have a child and chooses to remain childless. Her identity is not defined in terms of her motherhood. Rather, she defines herself through fulfilling her aims and ambitions in life completely unencumbered by motherhood. Many of Gordimer's white protagonists choose not to have children and even go in for abortion. For instance, in the continued episode of her story "Karma," Elena, a poor Russian woman finds herself married to a butcher who showers her with wealth. However, she finds herself divested of freedom and feels suffocated. She therefore fails to find joy in her pregnancy and chooses to abort the baby and return to her country where she can live freely. She chooses freedom and poverty over everything else. In contrast, in the society of the blacks the child defines the essence and identity of a black woman. The Shanties in which the blacks live abound with children. They are nameless entities and so are the women. The women are made to feel worthless if they are unable to bear a child and the man marries repeatedly to produce his progeny. The woman is always blamed as infertile if she is unable to produce a child and the man's fertility is taken for granted. But again the details of mother-child bond are absent even in black families. Instead both black women and children are projected as the helpless and clueless victims of the system as a whole.

The truth of the doubly-colonised black women is well wrought through the short stories like "beethoven was one-sixteenth black" and "Town and Country Lovers". The passivity of the women is seen in their inability to protest against the dominance by their own husbands and colonisers. While the white women protest vociferously, the black women accept their fate and suffer in silence.

If Gordimer's white female characters are painted with a fine brush delineating their individual traits and features, the black women are portrayed as an undifferentiated mass without individual characteristics. Nevertheless, Gordimer successfully brings out their travails and sufferings which serves her purpose of being a 'cultural worker' who assiduously shows allegiance to the principles of truth and justice. Gordimer believed that she should be a voice for the oppressed and was prepared to face the consequences too. Hence, her lack of in-depth knowledge of the lives led by the blacks and their women in particular is compensated by her earnest efforts and commitment to the cause of the emancipation of blacks in South Africa.

Though Gordimer does not overtly subscribe to any feminist ideology or thought, her fiction is seen to incorporate a host of feminist motifs particularly while highlighting the predicament of black women. Towards the later part of writing fiction, she infuses her work with characters who are gays and lesbians. She is not judgemental and gives them their space. Her progressive and emancipated vision also calls for integrating them into the society and accepting them for what they are. Annick, Vera Stark's daughter in *None to Accompany Me* goes on to live with her lesbian partner and they even adopt a black infant. *House Gun* revolves round the bold and unconventional theme of relationship of a gay couple.

Further, Gordimer has made known to the world her opinions on the rights and freedom of women in general. In her short story, "Dreaming of the Dead" the protagonist Susan Sontag speaks of the need for liberation of women and a dire need for women to understand their potential and move ahead in life. In this short story, there are observations on Muslim women who are content to be confined to their homes and not exert themselves to achieve excellence or break free from the oppressive traditions which limit their sphere of action. The characters of Rosa in

Burger's Daughter and Hillela in *A Sport of Nature* are role models of liberated women found in Gordimer's fiction.

Gordimer's fiction also dissects the discourse of violence with clinical precision against the backdrop of South Africa. Violence became a part of South African history from the beginning of colonisation itself. Long-drawn wars between the South African tribes and the colonisers caused bloodshed and massive loss of lives. Violence also featured prominently in the struggle for liberation. Initially the political parties followed the Gandhian principles of peace and non-violence. However, when they realised that it was futile, they resorted to violent means to achieve liberation. Gordimer's fiction tracks these changes giving a holistic picture of the bloody historical metamorphosis. The study focuses on four types of violence found in Gordimer's fiction: State-centric institutional violence, race-centric violence, gender-centric violence and violence as the fallout of liberation struggle. She dexterously blends all kinds of violence into her fictional works. The analysis on violence is premised on various discourses of violence such as Gayatri Spivak's theory of 'epistemic violence', Rene Girard's theory of Mimetic Violence and psychological theories exploring suicide. Gayatri Spivak' argues that violence is the result of treating people of other races as inferior. Girard attributes violence to mob mentality wherein people mindlessly mimic others' acts. Violence in South Africa can also be attributed mainly to racial discrimination of blacks which resulted in endless cycles of violence and counter-violence. The liberation movement witnessed countless episodes of violence. Surveillance by government institutions also gave impetus to acts of violence in the name of law and order. The government was also responsible for abetment of suicides as blacks and dissenters resorted to it in order to escape physical and mental torture by the law enforcing agencies of the government.

It is very obvious that gender-centric violence in Gordimer's fiction pertains mainly to the black women in South Africa who live in a society propped up by patriarchy. The white protagonists of her fiction are strongly independent and not submissive to men. They are imbued with the agency to change their lives whereas the black women are submissive and silent and suffer ignominies brought about by the patriarchal system. The white female characters like Rosa in *Burger's Daughter* and Helen in *The Lying Days* are seen to free themselves from patriarchal influences and lead their own lives at the end of the novels. On the other hand, the violence built into patriarchy articulates its vigorous presence particularly in the world of black women.

Gordimer's finest work depicting the various shades of violence is her collection of short stories titled *Jump and other stories.* Through her detailed description, Gordimer has successfully imprinted on the minds of the readers the acts of crime perpetrated on the blacks by the government. The stories "Jump" and "Keeping Fit" demonstrate these atrocities whereas the story "Once Upon a Time" shows how setting up destructive traps for black intruders backfires on the white couple who initiated it. Further, the detailed description of Soweto uprising and killings of innocent children comes to the fore through the short story "Teraloyna." The details of these killings also find a place in *Burger's Daughter* and *A Sport of Nature*. The innocence of children and the cruel plotting minds of the people in power find expression in the novel *My Son's Story*. The novel has disturbing details of children being shot at during the Soweto uprising. There are also disheartening images of young and innocent black children being lured by cold drink laden trucks only to be shot at and killed by the police.

Yet again, in *Burger's Daughter* Gordimer lays bare to the world the methods of torture used by the government which involves thumb-screw racks, electric shock,

physical abuse and mental torture of the prisoners and detainees by the government. It serves as a veritable document of institutional forms of violence practised by the government in South Africa. The non-investigated suicide or murder of prisoners whose "…bodies fallen from the height of John Vorster Square…" (*BD* 211) is highlighted along with the general apathy of the government towards the blacks. Gordimer speaks of the hidden presence of violence behind the general deaths of black people, especially children and infants due to the lack of medical care and other facilities. This unnamed suffering is also attributed to violence caused by the politics of apathy and wilful neglect. Lionel Burger who dies in prison is denied a decent funeral or a grave by the government as they do not want people to worship him after his death. This amounts to violent stripping of rights and dignity of a human being who is deprived of a decent resting place even after his death.

Gordimer was an activist and supported the leaders of the African National Congress in their fight for liberation. Besides her fiery writings, she fearlessly involved herself in the liberation movement by sheltering many of the ANC leaders who were being hunted down and also successfully helped them to escape. Her fictional work *A Sport of Nature* is reflective of her open support to Nelson Mandela and his decision to float a new radical wing of the African Nation Congress known as Umkhonto we Sizwe or Spear of the Nation. Again, her novel, *My Son's Story* has a slogan "Happy for Battle" running throughout her work. It reiterates the need for violence to achieve their goal of liberation. Besides the depiction of ongoing violence in the nation, the novel also examines the psychological angle of violence through the characters of Aila, Baby and Will. The agony caused by the selfish act of Sonny taking on a white woman as a lover is the beginning of the disintegration of the family. The agonised son and daughter pretend ignorance and choose silence over

expressing anger over their father's clandestine relationship. This makes the daughter so distraught that she tries to end her life by slashing her wrists. She subsequently goes on to join the rebel outfit to give vent to her frustration. Sonny's wife Aila also seeks refuge in silence and follows her daughter and joins the rebel outfit in quest of personal redemption and also liberation of the land. In addition, the short story "The Ultimate Safari" depicts violence through the sufferings that children are forced to undergo due to forced displacement. The poignant portrayal of the old grandfather who wanders off into the grasslands to die so that his family can move on without being burdened is a case in point. Gordimer has taken into account the violence which is both palpable and subterranean. Her fiction is not just about the relay of destructive events or chronicling history. She delves into the recesses of the minds of both the blacks and the whites and brings out their agonies effectively. She has explored as well as dissected all aspects of violence in her narratives.

Gordimer has also ably brought to the attention of the readers the historical dimension of violence which came into prominence since the time of colonisation of South Africa. Her fiction resonates time and again with references to violent historical events like Dingaan's Day Demonstrations, Miners' Strike, Soweto uprising, Sharpeville Massacre and many such revolts which were brutally squashed by the government. The ensuing violence and its repercussions on the blacks are brought home to the readers through the observations made by characters like Hannah Plowman in *My Son's Story* who mentions about black people routinely carrying rags to protect themselves against tear-gas in anticipation of police crack-down during large gatherings including funerals. A heart-rending similarity is drawn between the blacks carrying rags in the manner in which whites carry their credit cards. It is a

caustic statement on institutional violence prevalent in South Africa during the interregnum period.

The liberation movement was characterised by frequent episodes of violence and counter-violence leading to death and destruction. It is effectively put across by Sasha in *A Sport of Nature* who describes South Africa as "A country where the dead breed more dead…" (*Sport* 424). Gordimer also speaks of the futility of the government to quell the rebellion through violence as the blacks refused to give up on their struggle for liberation. Gordimer's works are interspersed with accounts of revolts and rebellions which spearheaded the liberation movement in South Africa. Hence, her fiction can therefore be truly considered to be reflective of the conditions in South Africa during the interregnum period. Gordimer made an everlasting imprint on the minds of the people irrespective of whether they were black or white and stood tall as a writer par excellence in the literary world dominated by men. Gordimer succinctly puts across her views on ethicality of writing in the following words:

> Loyalty is an emotion, integrity a conviction adhered to out of moral values. Therefore I speak here not of loyalties but integrities, in my recognition of society's right to make demands on the writer as equal to that of the writer's commitment to his artistic vision; the source of conflict is what demands are made and how they should be met" ("Essential" 7).

Her fiction therefore stands as a testimony of her integrity, adherence to humanism and commitment towards a cause she championed throughout her life—to end apartheid and ensure liberation of South Africa. Gordimer's fiction primarily calls for radical transformation of the South African society. They are also a record of the cultural destruction of South Africa and at the same time an earnest plea for

conserving the unique culture and traditions of the land. The novels *July's People* and *Occasion for Loving* are examples wherein she underscores the cultural clashes and describes the beauty of the South African indigenous culture. Her works reflect the pressing need for equality of people of all races and liberation of women in general and the black women in particular. Her fiction unequivocally states the need to be 'human' and efface the existing barriers of race. As a writer, she exhibited tremendous courage by foregrounding the vital issues of her times. This remarkable trait of Gordimer separates her from her contemporaries. Writing was her way of exploring her society and self which she did with remarkable zeal and passion. Gordimer believed that "In a certain sense a writer is 'selected' by his subject—his subject being the consciousness of his own era".

She endeavoured to bring about changes in the South African society through her writings. Climbing down from the luxury of the metaphoric 'ivory tower'—the abode of creative writers and philosophers—she saw 'ugliness' beneath her feet and never hesitated to make it the centrepiece of her fictional discourse. Being a privileged white woman, writing openly about her own people's morally reprehensive treatment of their racial 'other' was Gordimer's own way of redeeming herself, as it were. John Lye highlights the importance of Gordimer's writings in an era of apartheid in the following words: "…she has seemed its best interpreter of the machinations of apartheid's white minority rule" (3).

Ntongela Masilela pays a glowing tribute to Gordimer by conferring on her the status of a "public intellectual". A public intellectual can be defined as "A well-known, intelligent , learned person whose written works and other social and cultural contributions are recognised not only by academic audiences and readers, but also by many members of society in general" (en.m.wiktionary.org). A public intellectual has

the courage to quarrel with his or her own history beseeching justice for the vanquished and marginalised. By all these counts, Gordimer emerges as the shining example of public intellectual. Gordimer's commendable role in liberation struggle, emancipation of the blacks and also elimination of racial discrimination is acknowledged widely by blacks as well as whites. Her contributions are hailed globally hence she does not merely remain as a writer of fiction but elevates herself to the position of a true and authentic public intellectual.

Notes

1. Alan Paton was an anti-apartheid activist and writer par excellence. His novels *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Too Late the Phalarope* reflect the deep crisis that existed in an apartheid torn South Africa.
2. Athol Fugard is a well-known novelist, actor, playwright and director. He shot into fame by writing political plays opposing the system of apartheid in South Africa.
3. Zakes Mda (Zanemvula Kizito Gatyeni Mda) is a playwright and novelist who wrote about the troubled times in South Africa after colonisation. He also emphasised on the need to preserve the unique culture of blacks which was in danger of becoming extinct due to colonisation.

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