CONFLICT BETWEEN SELF AND OTHERNESS IN SELECTED WRITINGS OF NADINE GORDIMER

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree, or any other credit, in any other university.

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This thesis has been submitted with our approval as University supervisors.

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While this work has benefitted from the input of many I remain solely culpable for any shortcomings it may manifest.
DEDICATION

TO MY PARENTS

Njeri Wa- Mungai and Mungai Wa-Kaburu;

To my brothers and sisters;

without whose immense effort

I could not have seen books

this long,

this far,

this deep.

Finally, the study examines the factors that may influence the possibilities of white-black interaction that supersede the typical bimodal pattern often observed. It is done in an attempt...
ABSTRACT

The problematics of this study hinge primarily on the relationships, in literature, between characters whose interactions are mediated by their colour. The focus is on what happens to the individual within the confines of a value system woven around race and how the overall conception of the self influences his/her perception of those that belong to different racial categories.

The study is specific to the South African situation and analyses the effects of apartheid both as an ideology and system of (mal-)government on human relationships at the individual and collective levels in the spheres of economics, political and social associations. These effects are studied in the dominant black and white groups. The origins of the self-other conflicts are traced with a view to assessing how present interactions between black and white in South Africa adopted as the trope for race, influence character portraits in Nadine Gordimer’s selected short stories.

In this study, Gordimer’s vision for a future post-apartheid and multi-racial South Africa is analysed. The aim is to establish whether as an artist she offers viable alternatives through which South Africans of all shades of colour can surmount the inter-racial antagonism that has been inculcated in them by apartheid. This has necessitated an exploration of the ambivalences inherent in the term "white" since it is the colour that forms the foundation of apartheid as an ideology. Where all issues have to be evaluated vis-a-vis the colour white it is because ‘white’ is the defining point in apartheid South Africa.

Finally the study examines the factors that militate against the possibilities of white-black cooperation that suggest themselves in Gordimer’s selected writings. This is done in an attempt
to assess whether the various races are either willing and eager or reluctant and unprepared for
the challenging process of coming together as a unified society.

The attention of the study is Gordimer’s selected short stories and one of her novels. Where other writers are mentioned, and material other than her short stories cited, their relevance lies in how they help buttress the arguments and sharpen the focus of the present work.
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CHAPTER ONE

COMING TO GRIPS WITH BLACK-WHITE CONFLICTS

1:1 Introduction

This study examines fifteen short stories from three of Nadine Gordimer’s short story collections and her novel July’s People (1981). The short story anthologies are Livingstone’s Companions (1972), A Soldier’s Embrace (1980) and Jump (1991). Of primary concern to the study is how the race question affects her characters and how this experience defines the possibilities for a future multi-racial South Africa. Thus, even though the texts chosen for the study are set in the apartheid era, the study seeks to come up with Gordimer’s vision for a future South Africa.

The study assesses whether Gordimer’s Jewish parentage has influenced her writing in pursuit of answers to the colour question in South Africa. Indeed, the colour question is an issue that appears to greatly influence her writing. This seems to stem from the fact that she is a white writer living and writing in a multi-racial society where the majority of Africans have lived under the burden of Afrikaner domination for several decades. The question of inter-racial relationships therefore manifests itself in her writing. She seems to be searching for a social vision for a society fractured by years of racial antagonism. In a society as rigidly structured as apartheid South Africa, and in an atmosphere of racial animosity, individuals must strive to get out of their cocoons - the self that is defined by colour-and seek to gain an understanding of themselves across race borders (what we are calling otherness/alterity) in a bid to achieve a wholesome view of society in line with the changing South African political landscape.
At a wider scope, conflicts between self and other are in no way limited, or unique, to South Africa. An example of these conflicts is to be found in the experiences and history of blacks in the diaspora, mainly in the United States and the Caribbean.

The African-American experience is informed by a history of slavery, covert racism and the dilemma of identity. With regard to slavery, the African-American was defined by the white American as a servant. Racism sought to establish, in the consciousness of the oppressed African-Americans, the impression that they were less human, not able in any way to measure up to the intellectual abilities of whites. They have had to ask themselves whether they are Americans having lived in the Americas for centuries. Are they Africans, having originally come from Africa? Have African-Americans any relations to/with Europe since some of their forebears came from Europe? More importantly, how are they to reconcile the diverse strands of their history of suffering which define them as a race? All these questions have been raised in the artistic output of black Americans. Mention may be made of the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, works like Wright’s Native Son (1987 ed.), Baldwin’s Notes of a Native Son (1964), Ellison’s Invisible Man (1965), Morrison’s Song of Solomon (1977), Washington’s Up From Slavery (1967), Douglass’ Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass (1960) among others.

Other reactions to the African-American questions have been seen in the formation of black extremist pressure groups such as The Black Panthers. Moderate groups such as Martin Luther’s Civil Rights Movement have also come up. At another level, the African-Americans have sought solutions to their problems in religion resulting in the establishment of churches like Elijah Mohammed’s Nation of Islam.
The picture is not much different in the Caribbean, especially in Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and Haiti. Here are seen problems arising out of slavery, colonialism and the bringing together of people from diverse historical backgrounds. The indigenous Caribs were forced to live with the Spanish, French and, later, British invaders. Furthermore, there were the Africans and Indians who were "imported" to the West Indies as labourers. These were joined by the African ex-slaves who fled as they were being shipped to the United States of America. Like their African - American counterparts, the blacks in the Caribbean have had to ask themselves who they really are. They have sought to define themselves within their mire of cultures and historical experiences.

The black Caribbeans have responded to their situation in various ways. There have been attempts in art to recreate a history that redefines the Caribbean self. In this regard may be cited Reid’s New Day (1978 ed). On the political front, movements such as Marcus Garvey’s Back to Africa were established. In the religious field Rastafarianism, a religious mass movement with echoes of Garvey’s nostalgia for Africa, is a major way in which the poor/lowly in Jamaica have sought to define themselves in relation to the oppressive rich/bourgeoisie other that has subjugated them economically. In Haiti the black Caribbeans have tended to rely on occultic practices like Voodooism for a solution to their problems.

Individuals of diverse backgrounds are seen struggling against social forces, such as slavery, racism and colonialism, that have been the beacons defining them as a people. They do this as they seek to come to terms with their own ‘selfs’ and relate these ‘selfs’ to the other.

The present study recognizes the fact that other South African writers, La Guma and Peter Abrahams for instance, have tackled the 'self-other' conflicts in society. However, the
present study addresses itself to the conflicts arising out of the inter-relationships, or lack of them, between ‘self’ and ‘other’ in South Africa as is depicted in selected writings of Nadine Gordimer.

1.2 Definition of terms

It is imperative to clarify the manner in which some of the terms have been used in the context of this study.

**Apartheid:** The system of government used by the Nationalist Party which held that all the races had to be given room for separate development. This meant, for instance, segregating the diverse races in terms of where they lived, worked and ate. The whites got all the best of this so-called separate development and the irony was that areas set aside for black occupation (also known as Bantustans) never developed. In fact they either stagnated or regressed into dire poverty. The black townships and suburbs on the other hand became crime-infested areas where drinking and illicit sexual relations flourished. Where apartheid was a policy of ‘separate development’ in theory it translated, at the practical level, into unequal development.

**Coloured:** Also known as the mixed race, this group comprised those born of the union between parents of different races, specifically blacks and whites. However, the coloured people were at times the product of sexual relations between whites and Indians or Indians and blacks. All non-whites were treated by apartheid laws as belonging together in the same racial category as blacks. They were loathed by the ‘pure’ whites who saw them as the embodiment of racial miscegenation and, consequently, rootlessness. As such, several laws were created and enforced to discourage any increase in the population of the coloureds. Such laws would include the
"Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949" which outlawed marriages between members of different races and "Immorality Act of 1950" which made sexual relations between whites and non-whites illegal. However, as Clingman has observed:

_the coloured people of South Africa do not necessarily accept their categorisation as a race: this is a strictly legislative and historical term (Clingman 1986: xi)._ 

In a bid to meet the needs of its racist logic apartheid law put the population of the coloured at one and a half million as of 1964.

**Colonial Society:** Even though the Republic of South Africa became independent in 1910, South African society remained a colonial one in practice. For the blacks and coloureds, this independence merely marked their entry into servitude in apartheid South Africa.

**Other:** Being the opposite of 'Self' this means those with whom there are no shared attributes. These may be in terms of colour, culture, class or level of education. These different attributes mean that the individuals belong to different in-groups. The term 'alterity' means the same as 'otherness'. The terms 'self' and 'other' are adopted from Janmohamed (1983:82)

**Post-Apartheid:** This is the period after the abolition of apartheid in South Africa. For historical accountability, it began with the all race elections of April 1994. In these elections even non-white races previously disenfranchised by law were allowed to vote. The predominantly black African National Congress won the polls. Although the process of dismantling apartheid started in 1992, it was not until the mainly Afrikaner Nationalist Party government was ushered out of office in 1994 that apartheid could be said to have come to its end.
Whites: This term is mainly used to refer to the Afrikaners, descendants of the first Dutchmen who landed in South Africa in 1652. However, the term is used here to refer also to the other settler groups from Europe, for instance the Jews, the British and the Portuguese. In this study, the term is used generally to refer to any South African of pink pigmentation.

Self: This term is taken to mean the individual and the way s/he sees and defines her/himself within her/his culture and social environment and the way apartheid laws have defined her/him in terms of colour.

1.3 Literature Review

Looking at available critical works on Gordimer’s writing, it is noticed that while her novels have received a wide range of comments, there is paucity of criticism on her short stories. Indeed, some of the observations are limited to only one or two sentences. For instance Janmohamed (1983) only glosses over two short stories and even then only to the extent that they elucidate the points being made about Gordimer’s novels. Owing to this fact, though the central concern of this study is not on her novels, we have used as our springboard whatever available criticism there is on her novels in order to ground our problem within the broader scope of the criticism of her writings. It is from this point that the study seeks to come up with new input.

Parker, (ed. 1978), analyses Gordimer’s A World of Strangers, Occasion for Loving and The Late Bourgeois World. His study examines how Gordimer seeks to show the white South Africans that they must disabuse themselves of the notion that they are Europeans in Africa. Her writing asserts that the whites must realise that their allegiance is to South Africa
and its history and not to the irrelevant values of bourgeois Europe. However, Parker has not examined either of Gordimer's later novels or any of her short stories. It therefore becomes essential to find out, in line with the objectives of this study, how in Gordimer's short stories and in July's People, the white South Africans can achieve loyalty to their society.

Michael Wade in Parker (ed. 1978), examines Gordimer's A Guest of Honour. He has argued that its message is aimed basically at the western world on the dangers of translocating European, therefore alien, values to a foreign locale-in this case an African country. However, like Parker, Wade has not addressed himself to any of Gordimer's short stories. Neither does he show how the white person can achieve an understanding of the black alterity which s/he must come to terms with in South Africa. This search for an accommodation between the white self and the black other is addressed in this study of Gordimer's selected writings.

The thrust of the study by Peter Nazareth (1978) is that A Guest of Honour is an examination of the issues involved in attempting to decolonize an African country. However, Nazareth does not consider what problems could arise in trying to decolonize South Africa and the conclusions he draws, being based on only one text, are rather limited.

The study by Janmohamed (1983) is by far the most comprehensive analysis of Gordimer's writings we have come across. In the study, which employs Manichean aesthetics, Janmohamed has explored the way in which Gordimer's novels are geared towards destroying the whites' "superiority" in South Africa. The study has focused on the same novels examined by Clingman (1986). It traces, throughout the eight novels, Gordimer's exploration of the liberal consciousness as the enlightened liberals seek to sever the links that bind them to Europe and come to grips with new realities in an African setting.
Janmohamed also examines in detail the structure, language, style and themes of the novels. However, apart from brief mention of a few of Gordimer's short stories, the central concern of his study is with the novels. Also, what Gordimer calls the hopeful question of how inter-racial harmony could be achieved after the revolution depicted in July's People (1980) is not addressed. Indeed this study proceeds from where Janmohamed, in his concluding statements, argues that:

.... Nadine Gordimer's novels speak ...... about the desire for liberation from social bondage ... her fiction courageously and unhesitatingly advocates dismantling (violently if necessary) the society that imprisons blacks as well as their white jailers (Janmohamed 1983:149).

Hence, the study looks at Gordimer's portrayal of both black and white characters in her selected writings and assesses the various ways in which they may emancipate themselves from the bondage of racism.

Ngara (1985) analyses the so-called enlightened liberalism that Gordimer, in The Late Bourgeois World (1966), dismisses because of its apparent contradictions, hypocrisy and follies. Ngara observes that she "portrays the impending disintegration of white bourgeois society in the Republic" (Ngara: 1985:101). He notes that in the novel Gordimer does not suggest what the new social order is to be. In our reading of Gordimer's other novels, it is not clear what new order she exactly advocates. As such, we have attempted to locate what her short stories and one novel offer as concrete alternatives to the existing social order whose collapse she predicts.

Ngara has also accused Gordimer of romanticising the future of mankind without addressing herself to how "the immediate problem of contemporary South Africa might be resolved or what specific direction the country is taking or might take" (Ngara: 1985:103).
While Ngara’s is a general observation, and may even hold for this particular novel, he has not stated whether Gordimer has more down-to-earth and convincing suggestions on what direction a future multi-racial South Africa should take in her other works. Hence, this study has analysed Gordimer’s selected writings with a view to identifying the specific social vision she advocates.

Clingman (1986) is concerned with how history has influenced Gordimer’s writing both as an observer (a writer) and as a participant (a white South African). To this end, his study has focused on the way historical experience has informed eight of Gordimer’s novels, viz: The Lying Days (1953), A World of Strangers (1958), Occasion for Loving (1960), The Late Bourgeois World (1966) A Guest of Honour (1970), The Conservationist (1974), Burger’s Daughter (1979), and July’s People (1981). In this study, Clingman also addresses himself to the fact that Gordimer can never express the full consciousness of the African psyche, no matter how sensitive she might be as an artist. He has observed that "Gordimer quite simply, is not ‘of’ the black South African world ... This basic limitation is also, in a deep sense, an historical one" (Clingman 1986:208). This should not, however, stop us from attempting an analysis of how close Gordimer comes to transcending the ‘basic social limitation’, as an artist, in her portrayal of the life and death struggles of the black characters in her short stories. Although our study is not on how history has influenced Gordimer’s art, we still must ask why Clingman has not subjected Gordimer’s short stories to an examination similar to that he accorded her novels.

In his The Novel Today (1990) Massie has dedicated only one paragraph to Gordimer. Even then he just makes passing remarks on three of Gordimer’s works: The Conservationist,
Burger's Daughter and July's People. Massie's concern here is with style. Obviously, Gordimer's short stories, as the title of Massie's work suggests, fall outside the ambit of his study. Massie has not said anything about the style, structure or themes of the short stories to justify his sweeping observation that Gordimer's work is distinguished:

...by the rich expressiveness of her prose and by her ability to combine political passion with moral discrimination and compassion for those caught in the trap of history. (Massie 1990:31)

We must observe that Massie has not said what Gordimer's "political passion" is or how it guides her art. However, our concern is to explore how Gordimer, as an artist, has responded to the degradation and depredation wreaked by apartheid on both the individual and social institutions by examining the ways in which her characters are drawn to reflect these socio-political and economic circumstances.

We have, therefore, examined Gordimer's short stories to see if she has transcended 'the basic social limitation' as she addresses herself to the plight of her black characters, in a bid to come up with a holistic vision of how a multi-racial South African society could be.

Lung'aho (1993) has examined the way Gordimer presents black characters in the novels written between 1960 and 1990. She has observed that Gordimer, writing from a critical realist perspective, presents sympathetically the black people and their history. This study seeks to assess whether the same sensitive portrayal extends to the black and white characters in Gordimer's selected writings.
1:4 Statement of the Problem

Arising from our literature review, it is evident that a gap exists in the critical attention that Nadine Gordimer’s writing has been accorded. Little critical attention has been focused on how Gordimer depicts the self and other in her works, particularly in her short stories.

Recent developments in South African history, specifically the abolition of apartheid, have necessitated a closer look at the inter-racial relationships in that country. This study examines how Gordimer’s short stories depict the tensions and conflicts that arise between individuals whose view of themselves is defined by the colour of their own skin. The study poses and seeks answers to such questions as: What happens to individuals whose relationships with each other are almost solely defined by the fact of race? How do Gordimer’s white characters, belonging to the ruling class, react to the prospect of losing their privileges in the imminent event of the transition of political power to the blacks? What possibilities does she see for the white presence in a multi-racial, post-apartheid South Africa? These issues are geared towards the broader aim of assessing how, according to Gordimer’s portrayal of her characters, the diverse races can confront the changed social-political realities in South Africa.

Indeed, Gordimer’s own observation in her address to the National Union of South African Students in 1962 help to concretise the problem of this study:

*The greatest single factor in the making of our mores in South Africa was and still is and will be the colour question. Whether it is the old question about what the whites are going to do about the blacks, or the new question of what the blacks are going to do about the whites, or the hopeful question of how to set about letting the whole thing go and living together, is still the question* (Parker 1978:114).

From the foregoing, Gordimer sees the need to grapple with the possibilities open to South
African Society as it seeks to rid itself of the legacy of apartheid.

A definition of the self based on colour results in tensions and conflict within the self. The way the race factor mediates the relationships between self and other in South Africa, based on Gordimer's selected writings, is the problem of this study.

1:5 Rationale for the Study

An examination of the critical works done on Gordimer's writing reveals the fact that very little has been written on her short stories. It is not possible for us to speculate on the reasons behind this paucity. All we can observe here is that her novels seem to provide critics with more systematic material for study than the short stories.

It can also be said that the need for a social vision for post-apartheid South Africa is quite acute now that that society is struggling to heal the wounds inflicted by apartheid. That the artist can play a crucial role in this search for a social vision is predicated upon the assumption that the writer is both a conscience and analyst of society. It is on the basis of this presumption that Ngugi has observed that:

... a writer responds, with his total personality, to the social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of sensitive needle, he registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society (Ngugi 1972:47).

Hence, it becomes imperative for this study to examine how Gordimer, in her selected writings, registers the conflicts imminent in the post-apartheid society and gauge how successfully she depicts the spirit of a changing society. This change, we must note, is not necessarily only in terms of the political and power questions but also, more essentially and centrally, in terms of the issues that affect the core of the human psyche.
Gordimer has observed South African society for nearly five decades. She seems to be by far the most consistent South African writer who has addressed fully the race question and all its ramifications. Hence those areas of her work that have not been explored merit attention. Since Gordimer's short stories seem to have been largely ignored by literary critics, they are studied here with a view to assessing how accurately they depict South African realities.

1:6 Scope and Limitations

In the present study we have not looked at either the entire corpus of Gordimer's writing or all her short stories. Also it has not been possible to collate all that has been written on her novels with what this study has found out about her selected writings.

Five short stories from Livingstone's Companions have been included because they capture aptly the issues affecting the white presence in South Africa. These are "A Third Presence", "Inkalamu's Place", "An Intruder", "Abroad" and "Africa Emergent". From A soldier's Embrace the stories chosen are "A Hunting Accident", "A Soldier's Embrace", "Town and Country Lovers-One", "Town and Country Lovers-Two" and "Oral History." These address themselves to the black South African's dilemma of self-definition. The five stories from Jump contain insights on how self and other can be reconciled in a truly multi-racial society. These are: "My Father Leaves Home", "Some are Born to Sweet Delight", "Comrades", "The Moment Before the Gun Went Off" and "Keeping Fit".

Livingstone's Companions (1972) has been selected for study because it was amongst Gordimer's earliest short story anthologies. The anthology proves itself useful when it comes to gauging how far Gordimer's characters, and her depiction of the self-other conflicts, have
moved since her early writings. A Soldier’s Embrace (1980) has been included because the stories selected from the anthology aptly capture the subject of this study, especially on issues affecting the white presence in South Africa. Jump (1991), being one of Gordimer’s latest works, merits attention since it reflects, more than any of her other works, the imminent Power transition in South African society. July’s People (1981), a novel, is included because it captures very vividly the strident mood of revolution amongst the blacks in the 1980s and helps us illuminate certain issues related to the black’s self-definition. More importantly, this text, more than any other of Gordimer’s other works, predicts certain trends in post-apartheid South Africa which recent historical events in that country seem to confirm.

1:7 Research Assumptions

The following assumptions have guided this research:

- Writers’ social background may be reflected in the characters and social vision depicted in works of art.
- Characters depict changing social realities.

1:8 Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to assess Gordimer’s vision for a post-apartheid South Africa. We assess this on the basis of the fact that a writer can, and does, study society and social trends and guide society’s course by pointing out what lies ahead. The study has therefore attempted to:

- Investigate the problems that face white characters which result from the whites’
privileged position based on colour.

- Examine the black South Africans’ predicament of self definition in apartheid South Africa, as is depicted in Gordimer’s selected writings, and see how they can transcend this problem.
- Discuss the options open to the various races in South Africa as they seek to come to terms with a society freshly emerged from the vagaries of apartheid.
- Assess whether Gordimer has transcended the social limitations that are bound to affect a white person writing about blacks.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

This study has made use of Manichean aesthetics and the psychoanalytic theory. We consider Manichean aesthetics to be the most appropriate approach to the study of colonial literature. Manichean belief holds that nature is characterised by an eternal conflict between light and darkness, good and evil. Webster’s Third Edition of the New International Dictionary defines Manicheism as "a dualistic interpretation of the world dividing it between good and evil." But what is important here is the dichotomisation of society into two polarities of good versus bad, which are diametrically opposed to each other.

Manichean aesthetics begins by first determining what values are opposed to one another. It seeks to manifest the divergence and contradictions of the values in question. Manichean aesthetics, therefore, examines the disparity between the various sets of values, with an emphasis on the incompatibility of the opposed value systems. Where one group seeks to negate, systematically or arbitrarily, the values championed by the other group, the second group looks
for affirmation in its values and thus subverts the negating efforts of the first group. In so doing Manicheanism establishes a value prism through which to examine the socio-political and cultural conflicts within a particular setting.

Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, further sheds light on what Manicheanism entails when he notes that "it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity..." (Fanon 1985: 200). Thus one group sees itself as the embodiment of purity, wisdom, intelligence, and knowledge while the other group is seen as the very essence of contamination, backwardness and every other characteristic that is anti-ethical to what the first group considers virtuous. This leads to the adoption of a high-culture versus low-culture categorisation of social groups.

It is in the same vein that George Hegel argued that:

*Africa proper, as far as history goes back, has remained for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world..... shut up.... enveloped in the dark mantle of night.* (Hutchins 1952:196).

Hegel does not just mean literal darkness. The association between Africa and primitivity is implied when he states that the continent has no historical link to the rest of humanity. Hence, the reader is invited to infer that Africans have no claims to the presumed ‘civilisation’ of the other races. The Europeans felt that the Africans needed to be ‘civilised’ because they were the negation of the virtues that the whites considered to be their sole property.

But a critical look at European history repudiates the Europeans’ claim to higher ‘civilisation’. It is a history replete with records of wars fought by various tribes as they sought to subjugate each other. Cases in point are the battles waged by the German tribes and the Vikings, in the fifth and twelfth centuries respectively, against Britons. The latter were assumed
to be in need of being civilised and their cultural values were seen as being inferior to those of
the conquering tribes.

The French too were also seen as a backward people. About them Algeo, et. al. (1964),
have observed:

... in those days (Circa 1100 A.D.) the French had no learning, art or literature comparable to what was flourishing in England, nor had they ever seen anything comparable, as they themselves were willing to admit, to the products of English artisans: carving, jewelry, tapestry, metalwork and the like. (Algeo, et. al 1964:137)

The point that emerges here is that even among the whites themselves there is dispute as to what constitutes the high values and virtues of civilisation. Consequently, it becomes difficult to see by what logic the Europeans, not being uniformly ‘civilised’, branded the Africans primitive.

Fanon (1985) has made a thorough analysis of colonial Algerian society through the Manichean approach. His concern is to explore the psychology of the colonised Algerians, presumed agents of evil and darkness, against that of the French coloniser who presumed themselves to be the forces of good and light. This Manichean model can be adopted to the South African situation since the focus of our study is on the traumatic effects of apartheid on both the whites and non-whites in a society sharply divided into two on the basis of race.

The Manichean concept of salvation has helped us to appreciate why Manichean aesthetics is especially suited to the study of South African literature. Manicheanism holds that man’s duty is to aid the forces of good/light against the forces of evil/darkness. In the same light, the majority of the white South Africans saw themselves as having been called, according to the Calvinistic doctrine of being God’s ‘elect’, to aid in the suppression of the agents of darkness and thus earn their salvation. In this respect, apartheid shares something with the spirit
of Nazism. It is this mysterious elevation of the whites that has led Janmohamed to observe that:

> the sacred origin of apartheid also firmly insulates the doctrine from human reason because the sufficient reasons of the elevation of the Afrikaner, and the subsequent damnation of the evil African, are not comprehensible to man, but only to God. Thus, however arbitrary, cruel and irrational the apartheid system may seem, it has its own divine meaning which is enacted by the elect. (Janmohamed 1983:81)

Thus, through an appropriation of the Calvinistic ethic of salvation, and a bifurcated interpretation of the world in the Manichean tradition, the Africans have been branded the sons of the biblical Ham while the whites see themselves as the sons of Shem, the overlords.

The psychoanalytic theory is particularly useful when seeking to understand the motivations that make Gordimer's characters behave the way they do. This is more so in a situation such as the South African one where individuals have been forced to conceal their real selves and to act overtly in conformity to/with the expectations and requirements of the apartheid laws and the social callings of the white race. It is this unconscious self which, Terry Eagleton has observed constitutes a 'radical otherness', that we are interrogating. Here we have sought to gain an understanding of who the characters really are and why they relate to one another the way they do. Thus, through the psychoanalytic theory we have gained access to the latent content of the author herself.

### 1:10 Research Methodology

This research, being conceptual, has been done mainly in libraries. We have made use of the Moi Library at Kenyatta University, the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library at the
The primary texts under study have been read and re-read closely followed by an evaluation of what critical works say about the author’s writing. For biographical data on Gordimer, magazine and newspaper articles have been made use of. The author’s personal views about South African issues as contained in books and other sources have also been looked at with the view to locating what her vision for a new South Africa is.

1:11 The Dynamics of Apartheid

It is essential to go beyond the description of apartheid as just a system of deliberate racism based on colour and examine its internal dynamics. The "Race Relations Policy of the National Party", a policy paper of the National Party of South Africa (1948), notes the following about apartheid:

The policy of apartheid (separate development) is a concept historically derived from the experience of the established white population of the country, and in harmony with such Christian principles as justice and equity. It is a policy which sets itself the task of ... fostering the inculcation of national consciousness. (Sorrenson 1976:38)

It is clear from these statements that one of the ways in which apartheid operates is by seeking to champion the survival of the white ruling class. The overriding interest of the apartheid system is, first and foremost, the welfare of the white person. It is this selfish motive of apartheid which has led Boesak to observe that the tragic uniqueness of apartheid "lies in the fact that this system claims to be based on Christian principles "(1984:85). Whatever Christian principles apartheid has sought to champion are Christian only according to a peculiar apartheid logic. Both the Reverend J.D. Vorster and Balthazar Johannes Vorster are quoted as openly
admitting the close links between Nazism and the Christianity of the Afrikaner. In 1942, B.J. Vorster, later to become the South African Prime Minister, declared:

*We stand for Christian Nationalism which is an ally of National Socialism.*

*(Sorrenson 1976:34)*

In this light then, it becomes unclear what the National Party document means when it declares that the apartheid policy sets itself the task of ‘fostering the inculcation of national consciousness.’ Evidently, no "national consciousness" can be achieved where it is only the interests of one group that matter.

Another interesting aspect of apartheid as a policy of government is the master-servant ethic that has been ingrained in South Africans of all races. The phenomenon of slavery has a long history in South Africa. It began soon after the establishment of a Dutch refreshment station at The Cape in 1652. At this time, Africans who were captured by the whites in warfare were forced to become slaves to the white people. In the 1860s, indentured labourers from Asia - comprising the Indians, Chinese and Malay - were also "imported" into the Natal province. This means that the master-slave attitude in South African race relations has a very long history. It is this assumed inferiority of the non-white races, especially the Africans, that is reflected in the National Party blueprint for apartheid of 1948. It states that:

*Bantu education can only be financed according to the cultural level, the economic capacity and requirements of the Bantu people ...* *(Sorrenson 1976:38)*

The assumption is that the cultural level of the ‘Bantu’ people was low and that they did not require any high educational opportunities/training. Accordingly then, Africans’ education would only consist of that basic training which would enable them to be good at menial tasks
in the service of white people. This means that through the apartheid education policy, it was impressed on the Africans’ minds that they were inferior to the whites and that they must always occupy a lower station in life.

Anti-social legislation aimed at oppressing the African population was another vital cornerstone of apartheid. This kind of legislation sought to bar any sort of relationships between the various races. In effect this meant denying the South Africans any common bonds that linked together their humanity. We may cite the "Immorality Act" (1927) which forbade extramarital sexual intercourse between Africans and whites; the "Mixed Marriages Act" (1949) which prohibited any marriages between whites and non-whites; the "Immorality Amendment Act" (1950) which forbade any sexual relations between whites and non-whites. The end result was that South Africans of all races were forced to shut within themselves certain basic human feelings. They were thus kept from realising themselves and their true value as human beings.

Along this line, the whites enacted laws which sought to limit the economic abilities of the Africans. This is well seen in such laws as the Natives Land Act (1913) under which only 7.3 per cent of Union land was reserved for African occupation. The effects of this particular legislation on the African population were two-fold. Firstly, it ensured that the Africans could not carry out any meaningful economic activities on the land reserved for them. It was thus easier for the white population to subjugate an economically vulnerable African population. Secondly, it meant that 'Natives' were forced to migrate 'voluntarily' to the urban areas under white domination where they supplied cheap labour so that they could pay taxes and support their families back home in the Bantustans. The sequel to this forced movement to the towns is obvious. It led to the break up of the African families in the reserves since the menfolk would
be absent for years at a time. As such, men, women and children were deprived of any meaningful experience of family life. In the urban areas, the morality of the Africans suffered. Sheebens sprung up all over where men and women frequently went to intoxicate their brains. Illicit sexual unions cropped up there and the menfolk were forced to forget their commitment to their families in the reserves. On account of the poverty experienced by Africans in the towns, crime levels began rising. These types of laws illustrate well the links between apartheid and Nazism. It is to be noted that Hitler's oppression of the Jews began as a fascist protest against their financial clout. It is along these lines that Boesak has noted that:

\[
\ldots \text{racism is not merely attitudinal but structural \ldots: a system of domination, furnished with social, political and economic structures of domination \ldots racism cannot be understood in individual, personal terms only. It must be understood in its historical perspective and in its structural manifestations (Boesak 1984:102-103)}
\]

For apartheid these structural manifestations of racism hinged primarily on economically emasculating the African population.

Apartheid also thrived on passing draconian, self-serving laws which were aimed at stunting the Africans' drive for self-determination and also persecuting them for rebelling against apartheid. Such laws are: the "Suppression of Communism Act" (1950) under which the opponents of the system were branded communists and banned from political activity; the "Criminal Law Amendment Act" (1953) which outlawed civil disobedience as a protest against any law; the "Unlawful Organisations Act" (1960) under which African political groups like the A.N.C. were banned. Hence, the Africans were increasingly denied any avenues through which they could express their wishes, hopes and fears.

Finally, apartheid laid great premium on violence as a weapon of retaining power. It is
this armed violence which was experienced in the Sharpeville massacre of 1969 and again in the shooting of black school children in Soweto in 1976. It is this aspect of apartheid which has led Boesak to observe that some of apartheid’s unique qualities as a system are:– its inherent violence; its indispensable and inevitable brutality without which it could not survive; its dehumanization and contempt for the black person-hood; its claim that it is based on Christian principles. All these, Boesak correctly observes, lead to ‘tragic alienations and incredible costs in terms of human dignity and human relationships’ (Boesack: 1984:85).

Apartheid, for it to be properly conceptualised, must thus be understood beyond racism. The specific structures that helped in the implementation of that racism must first be understood, the colour question must also not be seen as being peculiar to South Africa. It is a worldwide issue complicated by matters of economics. In the words of William Macmillan:

_The truth is that the South African colour question is only one phase of the world problem which arises from the economic competition of peoples with widely different standards, complicated by social distinctions, intensified by racial misunderstandings and governed by fear._ (Macmillan 1927:12).

What emerges from the foregoing is the fact that apartheid sprung from the conflicts that arose between different cultures. Racism was merely the Trojan horse through which the white South Africans sought, and managed, to control the economic resources of South Africa.

The second chapter of this study examines the alienating effects of apartheid on white characters. The main argument is that the privileges conferred upon the white self on the basis of colour inhibits any understanding of the non-white other.
CHAPTER TWO
PRISONERS OF PRIVILEGE

2.1 Introduction

Any social system, whatever its ideological basis, is designed in such a way that there is always a group that reaps maximum benefits from the social relationships that this ideology defines. The South African Apartheid System, predicated as it was on an ideology of the superiority of the white race, had as its beneficiaries the white people. On its receiving end were all other non-white South Africans including the Indians. In this chapter we seek to see what inhibits the whites from coming to terms with the non-white other.

White South Africans seem to believe that seeking an understanding with the alterity is harmful. Yet, as Pierre Lucien Chaverie has shown, this need not be the case: In a speech given in Marseilles, France, in July 1995, he observed:

*It is a must we recognise the existence of the other, otherwise we foster violence and exclusion... To discover the other, to live with the other, to let myself be changed by the other, does not mean to lose my own identity, to reject my values, but to conceive a humanity that is plural.* (The Daily Nation, November 17, 1996).

From the foregoing, it is evident that by the self getting into contact with the alterity new avenues of human experience may be discovered. New possibilities that enrich both the self and the other could be achieved. Where such contact is not made possible tensions abound within self and alterity where each considers the other in negative terms only. More often than not, such a negative awareness breeds hatred and, consequently, violence towards the other. In this chapter we look at the alienating effects of apartheid on those who benefit most from it. Our argument here is that the social, economic and political privileges of the whites have distorted
their sense of perception as regards their relationships with the non-white other. The five short stories discussed here are from Livingstone's Companions (hereafter referred to as L.C.).

2:2 The Lure of European Values

One thing that emerges about the white characters in the stories chosen for study is their persistent desire, and desperate effort, to remain connected to European values. Not only are these Eurocentric values used to define the white South Africans' place in the scheme of things but also as an index of evaluating how close the other is to the European tradition.

The tragic consequences of this clinging to a Eurocentric definition of the human being are well seen in the story "A Third Presence." Dr. Ferovec flees to South Africa to escape the repression, tyranny and turmoil that gripped Hungary in the counter-revolutionary purges of November 1956. He is a brilliant philosopher but cannot get a professor-ship in any South African university ostensibly because his English is too poor. The real reasons are, firstly, that the whites in power in South Africa do not agree with his philosophical outlook of life. Specifically, they do not seem to agree with his objections to Soviet mis-rule and neo-colonialism in Hungary. The white South Africans are defensive of the Hungarian dictatorship since apartheid is also a process of mismanagement. Secondly, the white South Africans seem to believe that Dr. Ferovec's lack of proficiency in the English language makes him inferior to them. They see him as not belonging to the 'correct' European tradition. His being European does not help him. As such Dr. Ferovec is "imprisoned" within himself in a society that claims to be free. However, Dr. Ferovec lands a teaching post in one of the universities in England and his ideas gain intellectual prominence. The white South Africans change their attitude about
him and now admire him. Rose gains the whites’ adoration because, as Ferovec’s ex-mistress, she "had been close to one of the new philosophers who was currently connected with the intellectual centres of Europe" (L.C:45). What emerges from the foregoing is that the European values that the white South Africans want to align themselves to are fickle, ever-changing and ill-defined. Such values are therefore no real grounds with which the whites should either define themselves or others.

Where Dr. Ferovec’s case is tragic, that of Williamson, the eccentric character in "Inkalamu’s Place", is pathetic because of its ambivalence. Williamson is both a prisoner of English values and a bold risk-taker when it comes to adopting new values.

His attachment to the old English values is aptly captured by his three-storey mud-house with a wide chimney at either end and a flight of steps leading to a portico in the manner of English country-houses. Of the house, the narrator observes:

... Inkalamu Williamson had made this mile-and-a-half-long avenue to his house after the style of the carriage-way in his family estate in England... his memory of that road to the great house was the village boy’s game of imagining himself the owner as he trudged up on an errand. Inkalamu’s style was that of the poor boy who has found himself the situation in which he can play at being the Lordly eccentric, far from aristocrats who would not so much as know he existed, and the jeers of his own kind (L.C. 95-96).

Here, we see the desperate efforts of a man who will do anything to remind himself, and others, that he is part of the English tradition. The futility of seeking to reconstruct the symbolic ‘great house’ is seen in the fact that the ‘ugly structure’ is made of mud and as such its permanence is only temporal. It cannot fit into the present social environment because this is not the place for it. This is seen when the house begins crumbling bit by bit.
This big house acts as a prison both for Inkalamu Williamson and his family. Firstly, the other whites mark Williamson out as "that eccentric character of the territory" (L.C. 99) and, apart from the narrator’s father, they will have nothing to do with him. His search for the English values from his past are responsible for his being cut off from other human contact. Secondly, within this fortress of civilisation, Inkalamu Williamson’s children have no proper place while his African wives have none at all. The narrator notes:

... Inkalamu’s children never took us to the house; it didn’t seem to be their home in the way that our small farm-house was our home... (L.C. 97).

Hence the Inkalamu children remain alone in their own ‘great house’ while the mothers remain, even literally speaking, totally out of this house. The native wives are in no tangible human terms Inkalamu’s equals by virtue of marriage.

Only in one area is Williamson "admirable": where he seeks to adopt African customs by not only being a polygamist but also marrying ‘native’ women. It is this fact which exposes the other whites as being both reactionary and unaccommodating in the sense that they are unable or unwilling to 'cope' with new, local social realities. Even Inkalamu just takes advantage of the blacks’ awe of whites. The other whites shun Williamson because he has some little "courage" to deal with these new realities. The whites’ failures can thus be summed up as their inability to detach themselves from Euro-centric values and their unwillingness to experiment with new African values. Where they attempt to do the latter, something ‘ugly’ emerges since they do not do it genuinely. They do it to satisfy their own eccentric needs in the manner of Williamson.
2.3 The Doctrine of Conformism

White South African society seems to insist upon getting from its members a certain kind of orthodoxy in behaviour and thought. As a result, we see several characters unable to actualise themselves in society not because they are unable but because they are constrained to live by certain shallow social values.

Rose, for instance, in "A Third Presence", is ostracised by her family apparently because she is ugly, unlike her sister Naomi. Rose’s family does not like her because she is self-driven, independent-minded and does all she can, by herself, to improve the quality of her life. Where Naomi savours Ben’s relative wealth, Rose does not hesitate to work hard to support herself and Raymond, her mentally-retarded brother. Of Rose’s determination the narrator notes:

*Rose looked for a better-paid job and hired herself out to a political party as election agent, in addition to her book-keeping… All she had were the backroom tasks of petty business - the drawing up of balance sheets, the analysis of some merchant’s brand of profit and loss… (L.C. 44-45).*

In between working, Rose gets into a number of passionate affairs first with Dr. Ferovec, then Dirk Mosbacher and finally a journalist. In these relationships she gets to lead a richer life than Naomi. Unlike Naomi, Rose gets to understand more about people, what brings them together and what their common interests are, despite their differences. Naomi, on the other hand, just gets old at home, dutifully raising the children, taking care of her mother and being a good wife to Ben. She never gets to do what she likes, unlike Rose, but she must always behave according to how society has prescribed. In these circumstances, her only reaction to Rose’s life is pity. On the family’s feelings for Rose the narrator points out:
her family did not ask her about her life because they feared that it was empty... (L.C. 48).

The irony of this assumption is seen when we consider that outside her marital home Naomi does not seem to have any human contacts. On this ground we can justify Rose's feelings:

She did not speak about it (her life) because she did not want them to know how pathetically limited and meagre the pre-occupations of Naomi's household were. (L.C. 48-49. Brackets mine)

For Rose, who has experienced a lot in her life, Naomi's 'pathetically limited' life can't allow her to really know other people. Hence the accuracy and validity of Rose's question:

But what could Naomi know of the delicate business, the pain and rebuff, the unexpected acceptance and unexplained rejection of approaching the mystery of the individual? (L.C. 50).

Living a life based on such shallow values as she does, Naomi can never have the capability to unlock the 'mystery of the individual.' To her, all human beings are either of her type or different and unacceptable.

It is apparent therefore that the values upon which white South African society bases its life seem to be too simplistic and ever-changing. Towards the end of "A Third Presence", for example, we see Rose adopting a set of values to which is attached the risk of enslavement more or less like the one Naomi has lived under all her life. First, she goes to an expensive plastic surgeon who changes the shape of her 'ugly' nose. After this she has to look for contact lenses and her transformation will be complete. Instead of attempting to acquire a sound understanding of those she interacts with, Rose now seeks to overwhelm them with her newly acquired beauty. She, ironically, now basks in the same values (beauty) by which Naomi was pushed by her
family into marriage. On account of her beauty, Naomi was never allowed to do what she wished but what others thought she ought to do. White values are therefore seen as being shallow and enslaving and white identity appears as something fluid, ever subject to revisions.

2.4 A Kind of Anomy

At times the lack of values, rather than the values espoused by the South African whites, contributes to the whites' narrow perspectives of life. James Seago, in "An Intruder", amply illustrates this. He is a bachelor who has divorced several wives, mingles with high society, whose "photograph was often on the Social page" (L.C. 86) and who seems in every way a hedonist. He lives solely for pleasure. Yet, where he would be expected to handle issues seriously, his flippancy is not only alarming but also notorious. For instance, he walks up to Mrs Clegg, Marie's mother, and announces, quite casually, "you know, I've been making love to her..." (L.C. 87). He handles the issue of his marriage to Marie with an attitude that borders on recklessness. After postponing it on a number of occasions he just walks into Marie's home one morning and they are married. The whole manner in which he treats Marie, petting her, making her the object and subject of his selfish opinions, suggests that to him she is just a plaything. It is therefore quite in keeping with his character when one night he wakes up and scatters Marie's undergarments, toilet items and gowns in the house before dousing them with liquor. In so doing he registers his contempt for Marie, whom he should love. It is as if he is jeering at her. At a deeper level, this contempt is directed at his own self and the uselessness of what he holds to be his values.

The irony is that such lowly human beings like James Seago are taken to be good people
since they have so successfully cut a false, positive image of themselves. Marie’s mother thinks that Seago’s "frankness was endearingly admirable" (L.C. 88). She forms this opinion because, in her perception:

... he was so attractive - so charming, so considerate of Marie and her... there was something touching about this man, whose place was in a dinner jacket among the smart set... (L.C. 86)

Mrs Clegg seems to overtrust the impression created by the self and dictates of etiquette instead of looking beneath the image so projected. Hence, it is her own lack of clear values, apart from her obsession with white upper-class manners, that leads Mrs. Clegg to entrust her daughter to the deceitful James Seago.

2.5 Underlining White Difference

Related to the absence of strong values is the deliberate effort by whites to emphasize the imagined difference between them and non-white South Africans. This we see, for example, in Williamson in the story 'Inkalamu’s Place’. He constructs the out-of-place-looking mud storey house not just to remind himself of his English connection but also to show that he is different from those in his immediate environment. The point he wants to put across is that he is of a higher social status. As such he struggles to incorporate into the ‘great house’ all the trappings from the English civilisation. Hence, the narrator remarks:

And here I was in Inkalamu Williamson’s famous bathroom, the mark of his civilization, and the marvel of the district... (L.C. 99).

When the bathroom is taken as symbolising cleanliness, Williamson’s search for puritanism is seen. Yet this ‘pure’ whiteness is seen as unachievable. He must seek a genuine merger of both
white and black values. In Williamson, we see an individual striving to underline the difference between himself and others by aspiring to what he considers a higher, civilised culture.

There is again a conscious effort by white people to inculcate this sense of difference even in their children. This is seen in the way Williamson treats his children in the presence of the narrator and her brothers who are white. About this treatment the narrator notes:

> He gave us sweets while those of his children who had slipped inside stood in the background. We did not feel awkward, eating in front of them, for they were all shades of brown and yellow brown, quite different from Inkalamu and my father and us (L.C. 97).

The narrator has already internalised the 'fact' that because Inkalamu’s children are not white, it is natural for them to be treated differently. It must be noted that it is actually Inkalamu who creates an other in his children. Hence the narrator’s reference to the children slipping into the house and being in the background since they have no rightful claim for a space in the big house. In this way then we see the birth of the 'us-they' ethic through which the whites define their relationships with the different other.

### 2.6 The Superiority Complex

Closely in line with the us-they ethic of white society is their assumed, unspoken superiority complex. This is seen, for example, in the way Rose’s family, in the story "A Third Presence", thinks of her boyfriend Dirk Mosbacher.

> The family never saw Dirk Mosbacher but no doubt they got to hear about him, remote as they were from the life Rose was living now. They certainly would have heard that poor Rose was being sponged on by another misfit - at least ten years younger than herself, this time, and an Afrikaner, into the bargain (L.C. 46).
The Rosovsky family, being Jews, think that it is below their status to mix with Afrikaners who they deem to be low-bred. Ironically, in Europe the Jews were themselves not regarded as pure whites. To this end, we see Naomi trying to make a match between Rose and a distant relative of her husband’s who, in Naomi’s mind, was "at least a decent Jew" (L.C. 47). The assumption is that a non-jew is not worth associating with. The irony here is that this same line of argument was used against the Jews by the Nazi during the pogroms in Europe in the 1930s.

The painful effects of this superiority complex are seen in the story "Abroad" Mannie Swemmer, an Afrikaner, decides to travel up north into Zambia to see his two sons, Willie and Thys. He likes to think of himself as a man of progressive values and who can get along with decent human beings. His visit coincides with the Zambian independence celebrations, and he cannot find a room in any of the hotels. Finally, he gets some space to share with an Indian and his reaction is:

you say from Delhi-India?... you mean an Indian Chappie? (L.C. 76).

The tone here suggests some rising horror in Swemmer that he should have to share a room with an Indian. He seems to think that in the natural scheme of things he can only share a room with a white man. The irony is that in the end it is the Indian who locks Swemmer out and thus racial prejudice is turned at its practitioner. What Swemmer does not seem to realise is that he cannot avoid living with non-whites so long as he is in independent Zambia. What emerges, on the whole, is the fact that to a large extent white South Africans remain rooted in reactionary values and perceptions of humanity. It is these values that act as a barrier to whites’ achievement of a more real and meaningful understanding both of themselves and the 'other'
across the colour line.

2.7 White as the Centre

From the stories under study, the fact of the whites’ self-centredness also emerges. Often this individualistic perception of themselves as the centre of everything is borne of instinct and at times out of training.

Instinctive self-centredness is illustrated by Naomi in the story "A Third Presence". She has internalised the perception of herself as the very centre of her universe and all other people, her sister Rose included, are only important in so far as they enhance the former’s position in this universe. It is this self-centred perception of herself and others which leads her to wonder about Rose’s journalist friend:

No one would have expected Rose to bring him home to the family; what on earth would they have to say to Rose’s friend? (L.C. 51).

We see Naomi deliberately cutting herself off from her sister and her friends. She leaves no room for possible sharing. On her sister’s selfishness, Rose observes:

Since she was a child she had known nothing but extensions of herself and her own interest, with her parents and her husband she shared the blood of her children, and the milk the children imbibed from her body was assumed as a guarantee of their identity with her (L.C. 50).

In this case then, we see that Rose has no place in the scheme of her sister’s life. In Naomi is seen a deliberate unwillingness to accept even those who, culturally and racially, may belong to the same group with her.

Where Naomi’s ego-centricity is instinctive, Swemmer’s is achieved out of a cold calculation. Swemmer, in the story "Abroad", has not really experienced a salubrious family
life, his wife having died and he having had to bring up his two sons alone. Even the sons are no consolation to him because as soon as they are sixteen they leave their father behind and venture into Zambia. It is this fact that has worked upon Swemmer to the extent that he sees himself, now, as a solitary survivor. He casually wonders about himself, "but for someone like him, well, what did he have to worry about except himself?" (L.C. 67). It is this non-chalance about other people's interests which leads Swemmer to treat people dismissively and near-contemptuously when he goes to Zambia. It is Swemmer's self-centredness that leads him, at first, to object to sharing a room with an Indian businessman. However, the naked aggression with which Swemmer encroaches onto other people's space is seen when the Indian locks him out and he is relocated to the Africans' room. After his initial protest at what he considers denigration, he tries to make the best out of a bad situation.

When Willie had left him, he pulled down the bedding off the best looking bed to have a good look at the sheets, opened the window, and then, working away at it with a grunt that was almost a giggle, managed to drive the rusty bolt home across the door. (L.C. 84).

Swemmer is delighted to take over someone else's rightful space and claim it as his own. All this is borne of the deliberate refusal to accept the fact that others too have the right to their space.

It is also evident that the relationships between the white people and others, especially the blacks, are mediated by a combination of the drive to protect the white persons' self-interest and their own fear of the black alterity. This can be seen in the story "Africa Emergent." The narrator, a white architect, is involved in the affairs of a white students' voluntary services organisation which specialises in constructing classrooms for blacks in the rural areas of South
Africa. However, for the main character this service is not rendered out of selflessness: On the contrary, as the narrator's case shows, the white 'volunteers' do not believe in giving free service. The narrator believes that the responsibility of building classrooms for black children lies with the government and that it is not in order for him to help the government do its work. By his own admission, he got involved with black people for other reasons:

*I began mixing with blacks out of what is known as an outraged sense of justice, plus strong curiosity, when I was a student* (L.C. 222).

The narrator is not motivated by any strong belief in the rightness of his actions. Rather, even if his interaction with the blacks is the product of "an outraged sense of justice," it is a reaction to what his own, not the blacks', concept(s) of justice should be. It is the novelty of mixing and sleeping in the same dwellings with people he perceives to be different, to satisfy his curiosity, that leads him to interact with blacks. In this regard, the narrator is hesitant to talk about the plight of his black 'friend' lest the South African Special Branch takes notice of him. It is the protection of his own self that is uppermost in the narrator's mind rather than the pursuit of justice. What enhances the contradiction here is the narrator's inability to clearly define the exact nature of the relationships he finds himself in. He notes:

*but that's something else you won't understand: everything is ambiguous, here. We hardly know by now what we can do and what we can't do; it's difficult to say, goaded in on oneself by laws and doubts and rebellion and caution and-not least-self disgust, what is or is not a friendship* (L.C. 222).

The narrator's relationship to his black friend is therefore characterised by non-concrete values and, as such, the loyalty to this friendship is not quite firm.

From the time the unnamed "he" comes back from the United States, after Elias' death,
the narrator's relationship to the former is governed solely by fear. This is illustrated by the incidence where the narrator lends some money to his black friend. He agrees to lend the money only because he has heard rumours that the black man is a police spy. He hopes the money will stop the black man informing about the narrator's dealings with black South Africans. This 'friendship' then becomes a co-existence based on the need to protect one's interests and is regulated by the fear of the black alterity which is distrusted as dangerous.

2.8 A False Liberalism

The white South Africans appear to be particularly partisan towards protecting the interests of only those who share their ideals or values. This is seen especially in regard to those whites who believe in liberalism. The narrator notes about the liberals' interest in black prisoners:

*If people are humble, or of no particular interest to the small world of white liberals, they are sometimes in detention for many months before this is known... (L.C. 236).*

Hence, the hypocrisy inherent in liberalism as a political belief is revealed. Where all human beings are, at the level of the political ideal, assumed to be equal, only those whose activities are in furtherance of liberal goals receive the support of white liberals. In this case, the self-serving nature of white liberalism in South Africa, despite its pretensions at humanism, is elaborated. The author is thus questioning the relevance of the bourgeoisie values of the European humanist tradition, from which liberalism springs, to the South African context.
2.9 **White Rootlessness**

In the stories under study, there is on the white people’s part an engulfing sense of rootlessness which combines with the individual’s lack of belonging. Their affinities to the rest of the human mass, both white and black, are at best loose and at worst non-existent.

In Swemmer, in the story "Abroad", this rootlessness translates into a pervasive desire to get away to the north. A journey motif dominates his thoughts and vocabulary. Where he physically drifts out of South Africa into Northern Rhodesia, he is demonstrating the sense of not-belonging so deep-seated in him. This is indeed the way in which his feelings can be interpreted:

> ... he felt something from the past that he had forgotten entirely, although he talked about it often: The jubilant lightness of moving on... a new person discovered among new faces. He felt as if he had been travelling forever and could go on forever (L.C. 69).

In fact, Swemmer’s life throughout the story is just a process of continued movement. This becomes even more significant given the fact that he has no family - even at the literal level - since his wife is dead and his sons have abandoned him. The fact of this restless movement therefore becomes symptomatic and symbolic of the lack of strong attachment to any strong human bond.

Willie elaborates rootlessness at a deeper level because his life involves rejection. Like his father and brother, he has moved into Northern Rhodesia "to have a look around." However, in five years of looking around, he has not made anything of himself, drifting as he does between jobs. Given that he has no dependants, it may be understandable that as a person, he does not have a very strong motivation to make anything of his life. This apparent purpose-
lessness translates into apathy and then outright rejection when he meets his father in Lusaka. When his father expresses delight at having got into Zambia ("At last he was in"), and his hope that he would get a room in one of the hotels, Willie tells him:

> It's no use to try, you'll never get in... you will never get in, man, dad. You do not know-you won't get a room in this place. (L.C. 72).

When Swemmer suggests that he could put up with Willie at his friend’s house, Willie categorically refuses saying that there is no room for Swemmer. Evidently, Willies’s responses to his father have more to do with the lack of acceptance rather than the shortage of space. He is in effect telling Swemmer that he cannot find a sense of belonging in Northern Rhodesia. He is unconsciously locking his father out of his life because Swemmer is infringing on his desire to be alone. This is, ironically, the desire that Willie is expressing when he observes that black hawkers do not leave people alone. This isolationist tendency thereby contributes to his rootlessness.

This isolationism, being alone in a world where one does not belong, is also seen in Marie in the story "An Intruder". This fact is firmly established in the very first sentence of the story.

> Someone had brought her along; she sat looking out of the noisy party in the nightclub like a bushbaby between trees. (L.C. 85)

In Marie’s being there is a pervasive sense of not belonging, not being attached, to the kind of life going on around her. She does not feel in her rightful place. Where Marie wants to address herself seriously to the issues affecting her marriage, Seago, her husband, wants to carry on in his near-juvenile hedonism. He wants to root her within his values but she refuses. Hence, Marie has to contend with being locked up within herself in a marriage which obviously does
not satisfy her. If Seago was rooted in any values then he would not keep switching marriage partners like he does. Marie’s feelings of isolation are seen when, thinking about the house’s relative security, she observes that "no one could get in; he and she were alone together" (LC. 88). This captures her inner feelings of isolation and, even if she does not realise it then, her being imprisoned together with a husband whose values she does not share.

It is the same sense of not-belonging that is symbolised by the big house for Williamson’s children in the story "Inkalamu’s Place." Though it is their father’s house, Williamson’s children do not feel in any way that the big house is their home. It is at once something inevitable in their lives and at the same time something whose essence is totally lost to them. It is a place where they watch their father pay attention to white men and their children but for them it is like a cage into which Inkalamu allows them like pets. In fact, the alienation of Inkalamu’s children is quite tragic caught as they are in the cross-fire between two cultures: they have African mothers and an English father. They cannot therefore claim to belong to one race or tradition while rejecting the other. They are thus treated as having no rightful place on account of their colour. They are locked out of white schools and the settlers’ club. In effect then, they cannot claim to belong to any one of their two racial groups. This leaves them at the very periphery of active social contacts.

2.10 White ‘Omniscience’ and Mistrust of the Black Other

Another of the whites’ failure is their calculated mistrust of, especially, black folk and their assumed knowledge of human beings even when it is clear that they know next to nothing about them. Manie Swemmer, in the story "Abroad", exemplifies this distrust of the black
alterity. He loses some money in a bar and Thompson Gwebo, out of honesty, returns it to the former. On the surface he appears pleased with such a gesture of honesty. His thoughts however are different and full of incredulity: "... you did not expect such honesty of a native, it was really something to be encouraged..." (L.C. 79). In effect, Swemmer is implying that it is unnatural for a black person to have such a virtue as honesty. He cannot recognise the worth of good qualities when he interacts with those who are different from him. What he forgets, quite conveniently, is that it is not inherent, or obvious, for white people to be 'good' just on account of their skin colour. A good example of this is Swemmer's own son, Willie. He has had so many opportunities by virtue of the fact that he is a white man yet, instead of using these chances available to him, he has chosen the life of a drifter. In the end, he does not even have a place he can call his own. Thompson Gwebo has productively exploited whatever openings have come his way, has acquired a university education from Willie's own South Africa, and, back in Zambia, he has made something of himself. In spite of such achievements, Swemmer still persists in his arrogant and patronising mistrust of Gwebo.

The white community especially, in the story "Africa Emergent", is portrayed as a most distrustful lot. Just because "he", the narrator's black friend, does not fit into the whites' conception of a 'good' African, he is assumed to be a police spy. After all, whites do not expect Africans to be able to move freely in and out of South Africa, have steady well-paying jobs or build good houses. The whites who know him can only give him one option:

There is only one way for a man like that to prove himself, so far as we are concerned: he must be in prison (L.C. 235).

It is this suspicion which eventually drives the narrator's black friend away from his white acquaintances. Finally, when "he" is detained, his white 'friends' cannot but feel their guilt as
evidenced by the narrator’s self-deprecatory observations:

_But as I say, we know where he is now; inside. In solitary most of the time... And so we white friends can purge ourselves of the shame of rumours. We can be pure again. We are satisfied at last. He is in prison. He has proved himself, hasn’t he? (L.C. 236)._

The narrator’s black friend has indeed proved his innocence and in the process he has also helped to reveal the white South Africans’ lack of trust in those they consider to be ‘friends’.

White people’s distrust is also enhanced by their limited knowledge of the Africans. This is illustrated by the shock with which the narrator in "Africa Emergent" reacts to Elias’ disclosure of the fact that he had undergone the rites of tribal circumcision in the bush. The narrator had never thought that Africans could still practise their traditions in the present restrictive circumstances. He muses:

_I knew Elias only in the self that he had presented at my 'place’ (L.C. 231)._

It is therefore apparent that the whites just see the surface of the black other without realising that beneath this appearance lies a complexity of values, beliefs and attitudes.

2.11 Conclusion

In this chapter we have analysed the impediments that militate against white people’s achievement of a broader understanding both of themselves and the black other. This lack of a proper appreciation of the alterity in South African society is largely a result of social values that do not address themselves to the need to incorporate those who do not share the whites’ culture. This weakness is to be found at both the individual and collective social levels. The
net effect of this is that the whole of white society becomes, as a group, the object of black people's antagonism. Since the whites are limited in their self-understanding as individuals, they cannot come to terms with the fact of black difference. Weak cultural values become, for the whites, the very basis of their alienation from and by the black other which constitutes the rest of the society. Any relations between the white self and the black other are based on the stereotypical views they have of each other.

The focus of the third chapter is on how the black other is seen from the white's view. Also, it analyses in what ways the blacks see themselves and what they do about their lowly position in society.
CHAPTER THREE
PORTRAITS OF THE BLACK OTHER

3.1.0 Introduction

In this chapter, we explore the various ways in which black characters have been portrayed in Gordimer's selected short stories. We investigate this on the basis of the differences in the social mores of blacks and whites. Since these two racial groups have different codes of social behaviour, it is legitimate to assess how they view each other. However, our focus is on the way black otherness is perceived by the whites. We also examine the blacks' perception of the self and how they deal with the dilemma of their position. All the stories have been taken from A Soldier's Embrace (1980) and hereafter abbreviated as A.S.E.

The stories are chosen on the basis of how appropriately they capture images of black life and the way whites react to the portraits that emerge. These are: "A Soldier's Embrace", "A Hunting Accident", "Town and Country Lovers - One", "Town and Country Lovers - Two" and "Oral History".

3.2.1 Black Monstrosity and Gullibility

Available evidence suggests that the white characters view black otherness in two broad perspectives: negatively and positively. Most of the whites view blacks in the first sense while only a small number perceives the blacks in the latter way. In the minds of the whites, there is the underlying assumption that the blacks harbour within themselves the germ of 'bad' behaviour. Blacks are seen as being responsible for all that is anti-social according to white
"A Soldier's Embrace" illustrates the way the blacks are seen as terrible irresponsible monsters. A ceasefire has just been announced, in an unnamed African country, and everyone is in a celebrating mood. The white lawyer’s wife is caught in a crowd of soldiers and two of them, one black, the other white, hug her in the festive spirit of the time. On her reaction, it is noted:

She had not kissed on the mouth, she had not sought anonymous lips and tongues in the licence of festival. Yet she had kissed… It was deliberate, if a swift impulse. She had distinctly made the move (A.S.E. 11)

For the lawyer’s wife this is an innocent response, although a certain sexual thrill is detected. Yet according to the newspaper, she should not have kissed the black soldier since in different circumstances he, naturally, "would have raped her" (A.S.E. 11). This perception of the black as a rapist is rampant amongst the whites and has been amply buttressed in the newspapers, owned by whites. The black is therefore a creature to be feared and kept at a distance. The irony, however, is that for economic purposes, the black can never be kept at a distance. They are both consumers and sources of labour for the white-owned capitalist machine.

However, there is an interesting irony to this image of the black male as a rapist as seen in the story "A Hunting Accident". Christine is a white woman who has gone visiting a family friend, Ratau, a chief’s son. Ratau is the product of both his African and western upbringing; while he is an African by birth, he has been successfully inculturated into western culture. This is what she thinks of Ratau:

... Ratau was so attractive, so unselfconsciously male in his natural assumption of what she had been taught, at her progressive
school, was the conditioned male role of killer (A.S.E. 58).

Here, a definite sexual thrill is noted and Ratau's manly qualities, in Christine's mind, seem to make him more suitable as a leader. He, for Christine, becomes the black sex symbol. However, she does not overtly express any attention towards Ratau. Ironically the white women find themselves attracted to the black stud that their white community generally considers to be a beastly other. What emerges from this is the fact that the whites only have a stereotypical perception of the black other.

The story "A Soldier's Embrace", on the other hand, demonstrates the whites' view of the blacks as irresponsible people. In the whites' minds all black people, be they the freedom fighters or the unemployed hangabouts, are out to reap where they have not sown. The narrative voice notes about this anarchy:

> Shops were being looted by the unemployed and loafers... who felt the new regime should entitle them to take what they dared not before... the struggle with the looters changed character as supporters of the Party's rival political factions joined in with the thieves against the police. (A.S.E. 19)

The blacks here are portrayed as people who want to get things without working for them. They are thus cast in the mould of thieves who take from those (whites) who have toiled hard to succeed. By linking these idlers to the black political party, the implication is that in white peoples' minds, the black regime is seen as abetting crime. At a deeper level, doubts are cast over the inability of the blacks to govern. They are seen as being out to wreak havoc on the white community, the 'other.' Nevertheless, going beyond the text, post-colonial societies elsewhere seem to validate the whites view about the emergent black regimes being kleptocratic and havens for thievish, corrupt opportunists.
In line with the foregoing, there is quite a vast number of whites who see blacks as gullible people who will easily believe anything. This is the attitude that underlines the actions of the whites who do not flee the country after the ceasefire in the story "A Soldier's Embrace."

The diehard racists leave the country but the cunning ones remain:

Many white people who had lived contentedly, without questioning its actions, under the colonial government, now expressed an enthusiastic intention to help build a nation... (A.S.E. 2).

These whites have realised that they must switch their loyalties if they are to be safe. Thus, their apparent support for the new black regime is just a survival tactic. It is obvious that they expect the black 'other' not to see through these lies. The butcher in the story graphically demonstrates the finer aspects of this white assumption that blacks can be made to believe anything. He has previously had an all-white clientele but now that things have changed, he has to look for a way of maintaining his economic status. "I don't mind blacks," he declares. "Makes no difference to me who you are so long as you are honest" (ASE. 12-13). Yet he is not being honest with himself and it is clear that his heart is with whoever he eats from. About the butcher the narrator further notes:

Next to a chart showing a beast mapped according to the cuts of meat it provided, he had hung a picture of the most important leader of the freedom fighters, expected to be first president. People like the butcher turned out with their babies clutching pennants when the leader drove through the towns from the airport (A.S.E. 13)

Thus, whoever is in power, be they black or white, can be used, by people like the butcher, as sources of sustenance. It does not matter whoever is in power. The whites seem to have caught up with the realities of capitalism where exploitation is a method of surviving in the game.
3.2.2 White Condescension Towards Blacks

The conflicts between the white self and the black other plunge to deeper levels when the whites persist in patronising the blacks and taking the existence of the blacks for granted as demonstrated in the story "Town and Country Lovers-One". Dr. Franz-Joseph von Leinsdorf is a geologist, a lonely man who, in the pursuit of his professional ambitions, has no social attachments by way of marriage. It is in these circumstances that he meets a coloured girl cashier in the supermarket. It is apparent that the girl makes calculated moves to capture his attention in the hope that she could have a fulfilling relationship with him. She thus begins from a position of innocence. On his part, Dr. Leinsdorf seems to picture the girl cashier in the stereotypical mode of the unhelpful, half-literate worker who has no sense of duty. It is from such a mindset that he speaks to the girl "... in the kindly tone of assumption used for an obliging underling..." (ASE 76) when she proffers to assist him purchase razor blades. Even when it is fairly obvious that the girl has helped him out of her own wish to do so, Dr. Leinsdorf insists on giving her a twenty cent tip. This is an indication that for him the non-whites are meant to be servants. He does not see them as people who may genuinely want to reach out for friendship but rather as people whose labours must be compensated in monetary terms.

That Dr. Leinsdorf sees the girl cashier as a servant is seen in the kind of tasks that he arranges to have her undertake: doing his shopping (for which he pays her with chocolate) grinding coffee beans, making coffee, cooking and sewing for him. He thinks that:

.. the work she did was undemanding of any real response from her intelligence, requiring little mental or physical effort and therefore unrewarding... (ASE 80).
In other words Dr. Leinsdorf is saying that being a non-white, she performs her manual tasks well, just as is expected of people in her racial category. He is also implying that he is somehow better equipped than she is on account of colour, to meet the demands of intellectually-challenging work.

It is also evident that the self-other conflict between whites and blacks comes about when the former treat the latter as ignoramuses, who must be taught patiently. This is seen where Dr. Leinsdorf is explaining to the girl cashier the difference between the coffee she takes and that which he takes:

_He laughed, instructive: That’s not coffee, that’s a synthetic flavouring. In my country we drink only real coffee, fresh, from the beans - you smell how good it is as it’s being ground? (A.S.E. 78)_

The tone here is condescending, that of a superior talking to a person who is mentally inferior and unexposed. It is along these lines that Dr. Leinsdorf’s reference to ‘my country’ is made.

This patronising attitude by the whites towards the blacks is also seen in the story "Oral History". The white soldier is trying to explain to the village chief why the freedom fighters should not be sheltered by the villagers. They are killers, he says who are only bent on destroying property and killing people for no good reason. Yet the white soldier does not even ask the chief why the freedom fighters get the villagers’ support. He adopts the hurt tone of one whose benevolence has been ruthlessly affronted by the blacks. "They will kill you,....' he warns. "I'm telling you. You'll see what they do" (ASE 138). Thus the white soldier, treating his black audience as a bunch of children to be chided, completes painting a very dark image of the blacks. They are regarded as savages, to be feared for their wanton desire to create havoc.

This white patronage of the black is at times taken to ridiculous levels. When the chief
reports to the white soldier the presence of freedom fighters in the village, the reward he gets is a half-empty bottle of brandy. For the drink he pays a terrible price as members of his family are killed when the village is bombed. The white soldier has 'rewarded' the chief just as he would a baby and then turned round to kill the very people who he had predicted would be murdered by the freedom fighters. This means that as long as there are whites who would want to patronise the blacks the white-black, self-other conflict will persist.

3:2:3 White Opportunism

In the stories under study, there are certain whites in whose minds the desire to take advantage of blacks is uppermost. This is most evident in the area of sexual relationships between blacks and whites.

Dr. Leinsdorf, in the story "Town and Country Lovers - One", a fairly well-informed person, gets into a sexual union with a coloured girl. For the girl this is just a normal man-woman relationship even though she is aware of the wider social implications of such an affair. Dr. Leinsdorf, fully conscious of the fact that such a relationship cannot go far, does not do anything to discourage the girl from her attempts to get into a relationship with him. In fact he encourages her at first by inviting her to his flat and later by making her his errand-girl. Yet this would not matter much but for his own admission that he considers the coloured girl so socially inferior that he would never marry her. This is on account of the fact that he is the grandson of a baroness, a cultured man who "... accepts social distinctions between people but didn't think they should be legally imposed" (ASE 84). Finally he admits:

*Even in my own country it's difficult for a person form a higher class to marry one from a lower class* (S.E.:84).
What emerges here is the image of a snob who does not have the conviction to hold his values high. His actions have nothing to do with the fact that he is a cultured man of royal ancestry. Rather they have been shaped by his own moral deficiencies as a person and also by (mis)judging issues through racist white standards. In the end it all goes back to how whites see non-whites, the other, in South Africa as low-bred and therefore inferior in all ways. Dr. Leinsdorf cannot bring his white self to appreciate the black/coloured other in terms of such shared human attributes like love. It is this refusal to appreciate the black alterity that gives him the ability to carry out his unbridled opportunistic schemes.

The actions of Paulus, in the story "Town and Country Lovers-Two", are perhaps even more callous than those of Dr. Leinsdorf. He has had some warm feelings for a black girl, Thebedi, since they were children. This was convenient then since their friendship was shielded by the innocence of childhood. Not even the strong racial biases amongst the adults could have stopped black and white children from playing together. Now fifteen, he makes the black girl pregnant and the real trouble begins when he learns that though married, Thebedi has given birth to his very child. While he has in the past worked so hard to ensure that their sexual relationship remains a secret, it now becomes a public fact. Apparently, the reason for doing this has been to protect his place amongst the white community. However, the real reason is that he is afraid of the shame that will befall him if/when it is discovered that he has been having an affair with a black woman on his father's farm. It is along these lines that his reaction to the news of his child's birth can be understood:

*And then he said: "I feel like killing myself."* (ASE 91)

He is ashamed of both Thebedi and himself. It therefore becomes evident that he had earlier
suppressed his shame towards Thebedi just to get a feel of what it was like to make love to a black girl. After all, he has had the opportunity to meet and make love to white girls from whom he could have chosen one for a socially 'acceptable' relationship, a fact that leads to his present anger and self-pity at having done what he knew he should not have done in the first place. He had seen in Thebedi a willing victim whose low social status he took advantage of by giving her trinkets. It is such opportunism which has prevented Paulus from understanding what the needs of the black other are. As a result the black girl suffers a considerable deal of humiliation and pain when Paulus murders her daughter. This does not in any way help eliminate the self-other mistrust between whites and blacks. In fact this mistrust is perpetuated by such unfeeling acts.

3.2.4 The "Us-They"-Class Perception of Society

Amongst the white characters in the stories under study there are two broad categories as regards their view of the black other. The first category, which is the dominant one, is that comprising the conservative elements who want absolutely nothing to do with the black alterity. The second group is made up of those whites who subscribe to liberalism as an ideology.

Paulus' father in the story "Town and Country Lovers-Two" demonstrates vividly the deliberate refusal to seek a meeting point with the black other. For him, the fact that his son has been linked to a black woman is a mortal blow to his pride. It implies for him an association with scum and thus with deep indignation he remarks, "I will try and carry on as best I can to hold up my head in the district" (ASE 93). In his view white being linked to black in the murder case against Paulus has soiled his (Eyešendyek's) name and ruined his standing in
white society. Paulus' father wants nothing to do with the black other.

However, the tenuous nature of colour as a basis of taking such a hardline stance as in the case of Paulus' father is demonstrated in "Towns and Country Lovers-Two." The meeting in the "whites-only" lift between the girl-cashier and the white woman illustrates the fundamental irony of whites' perception of the different other. The girl cashier is coloured, which means she is still regarded by the whites as a black. However, she is light-skinned but the white woman does not notice that she is per the apartheid definition, black. It is obvious that her reaction would have been quite different had she known that the girl cashier was not white. This on the whole goes to illustrate that there is no concrete or tangible basis on which whiteness - and the values attendant to it - can be defined. Therefore the white's (mis) treatment of black alterity cannot find justification in colour as nobody can be sure what 'white' is.

Quite unlike the white woman in the foregoing example, but with an attitude buoyed by hypocrisy, Dr. Leinsdorf, in the story "Town and Country Lovers-One", helps illustrate the "us-they" ethic amongst whites. He is a German native to Austria. That he is a German is not a fact that the narrative voice accidentally refers to, especially in the South African context of racism as a policy of governance. Nazism and apartheid, insisting on the need for having a 'pure' white race, are historically linked. This concept of the 'superiority' of the white race seems to be etched in Dr. Leinsdorf's subconscious. Hence, when Dr. Leinsdorf is dealing with the coloured cashier girl he has already presumed that she is not only inferior to him but also different. The narrative voice confirms this:

*He wondered if he should give her a twenty-cent piece for her trouble-ten cents would be right for a black ... It was difficult to know how to treat these people in this country to know what they expected* (ASE 77).
In his mind, it is already established that he is dealing with a servant who has to be encouraged to execute her labours by being tipped. Clearly, he does not consider her an equal and the mere fact that she comes from 'this country,' that she is one of 'these people,' means to him that she is different. While this may be so in terms of cultural attributes, it does not mean that because the girl is different she is automatically inferior to Dr. Leinsdorf. However, this 'us-they' perception of the black other is seen to spring from an erroneous premise.

However, there are those whites who do not subscribe to these extremist views of the black other. An example of this is to be found in the story "A Soldier's Embrace". The liberal-minded whites do make attempts to strike a balance between the white self and the black other. Indeed it is along these lines that the lawyer's wife sees two soldiers (one black, the other white), who kiss her during the ceasefire celebrations:

An accolade, one side a white cheek, the other a black. The white one she kissed on the left cheek, the black one on the right cheek, as if these were two sides of one face (ASE 109.)

The lawyer's wife has an integrated perception of society, admitting the necessity of blacks and whites to co-exist, hence the image of a white-black face. Her neighbours, professionals and university professors, are also liberals.

However, liberalism seems to be composed of pieces as incongruous as the preposterous phenomenon of a black-white face cited in the foregoing. Liberalism, per se, seems to contain some irreconcilable strands. For example, the lawyer's wife rationalises the butcher's having fled the country on the assumption that as an extortionist the blacks would have hunted him down. As far as she is concerned she and her husband can live comfortably in the country
because they have been 'good' to blacks. Yet they also leave the country when the lawyer is offered a position in a highly reputed law firm in another African country. The lawyer is lured by the prospects of fame which have so easily come his way. He can make a name, and career, defending political prisoners. In this he is like his former neighbour the butcher. He has made capital out of the political convictions of others while he himself has never voiced any. He has defended prisoners of conscience not because he is a liberal but because he is a lawyer. Realising that the chief source of his income (black political prisoners) has dried up with the change of government, he has to cast his net elsewhere. Though he does not admit it, this is the real reason he emigrates to... "that country still ruled by a white minority" (ASE 20). He is in the real sense worse than the butcher because while the latter does not cover up his greed for profit, the lawyer hides under the mantle of liberalism. Liberalism is thus portrayed as a self-serving, hypocritical ideology. The white self cannot come to terms with the black other on the basis of such opportunistic ideologies.

3.3.0 Black Perception of the Self

Blacks' perception of themselves in the South African context is by no means anonymous. Their view of themselves is shaped as much by their contact with the white world as it is by their interaction amongst themselves. Nevertheless, the black’s view of themselves gravitates towards two broad fronts. One group does not seem to either understand the dynamics of racialism or know what to do about it. The other group understands well the mechanics of power play but again its reaction is diverse. While some seek to achieve a common good for all, the rest are self-seekers jostling to get where the whites formerly used to be.
Apparently, opportunism in apartheid South Africa is a survival game in which both blacks and whites indulge. White opportunism has already been discussed, as demonstrated by the butcher, in the story "A Soldier's Embrace". However, there is a glimpse of how blacks react to the opportunism practised by blacks in the same story as illustrated by Father Mulumbua. He is a black priest "...who has shouted freedom when it was dangerous to do so, and gone to prison several times for it..." (ASE 11). He thus represents those who actively rallied the masses in the slums in support for the struggle against apartheid. He is now discussing political developments with the white lawyer and his wife. Of his reaction the narrative voice observes:

The priest who came from the black slum that had always been known simply by that anonymous term did not respond with any sort of glee: His reserve implied it was easy to celebrate; there were people who shouted freedom too loud all of a sudden?" (ASE 11).

The implication here is that amongst the populace there are supporters of the previous oppressive regime who now find it convenient to rally their energy behind the new black government. A note of bitterness can be detected in Father Mulumbua. He, and others like him, suffered for freedom yet now that things have changed he has been shunted from the mainstream. Opportunists have quickly stepped in to make a kill.

Black opportunists have made capital of the new state of affairs in several ways. There are those who, being in the right place at the right time, have acquired themselves positions on the ruling Interim Council (ASE 11). The aim is to safeguard, and inherit the interests of the departed ruling class. This category understands what power is all about and have positioned themselves strategically to acquire the most benefits out of it.
Another category amongst the blacks is comprised of those who are just driven and used by others. This group is made up of the less well-informed, the "unemployed and loafers" (ASE 19) who react to the new changes through some primitive survival instincts. They are the people who see the new situation as giving them the licence to get quickly what they could never have hoped to get previously. Their view of the transition of power from blacks to whites is short-term and governed by immediate considerations, hence the looting (ASE 19) and pillaging of white property (ASE 13).

Still amongst this group are those who harbour narrow self-interests based on tribalism. The tribal politicians, who never took part in the agitation for freedom, see an opportunity to benefit from the windfall that has blown their way. It is such narrow ethnic, political ambitions which lead to blacks exacting revenge on the former white rulers. A lot of in-fighting also takes place amongst the blacks in the various political parties. The black 'camp' is thus in itself split.

3.3.1 Black Elites and 'Lords'

The eviction of the whites from power implies an attendant new way of looking at things. Where the focus was the colour white, the accent now is on the black colour. This is demonstrated by an all-consuming black racialism at the university in the story "A Soldier's Embrace." The students demand the expulsion of white professors who are seen to have been servants of the white regime. These students aim at pushing for Africanisation. Tragically, there are those who, like the young political science professor, are unjustly caught in this shift from white domination to Africanisation. The professor apparently knows his job and the fact that those pushing for Africanisation do not consider his ability hints at blanket racism. In place
of the departed white chauvinists there is now a new breed of black elite racists. This is ironical due to the fact that these blacks are learned and have themselves been the victims of racism. They would thus be expected to analyse and understand better the ramifications of racism vis-a-vis emergent statehood. The clamour for Africanisation is thus seen as a guise for racist revenge directed at those perceived as belonging to the enemy camp regardless of whether or not they deserve such (mis)treatment.

On the other hand, the new breed of black 'Lords' fits in very well into the shoes of the former white rulers. The most vivid example of this shift is Chipande. As a young boy, the 'tall, cocky, casual' Chipande had been articled to the liberal white lawyer and fast picked up political ideas. The picture painted of him then by the narrative voice is one of a poor boy ("...a boy from the slummiest part of the quarter..." [ASE 14]), humble and willing to work hard to gain a foothold in life. With the coming of power to the blacks, he is now 'confidential secretary' to the future president. It is with this in mind that it becomes possible to interpret meaningfully the narrative voice's description of the 'new' Chipande:

... Chipande had an office in the former colonial secretariat. There he had a secretary of his own; he wasn't easy to reach... he had a beard and had adopted the muslim cap favoured by political circles in exile... (ASE 14.)

There is indeed nothing wrong with having an office where the colonial masters had sat. There is also nothing wrong with having a lot of work to do or adopting Muslim attire. Nevertheless, in this particular context, Chipande is all wrong because he begins behaving like the white lords who have been ejected from power. His inaccessibility sets him apart from the common lot, the ordinary people, who also played a central role in kicking the whites from power. Instead of the positive transformation expected with his adoption of the Muslim skull-cap, Chipande is
negatively transformed into being a small, black lord, alienating himself from friends. Yet
without these friends he would not be where he presently is. Chipande even becomes uppity as
is seen when he eventually goes to the lawyer’s house:

*He had the distracted, insistent friendliness of one who has no time
to re-establish intimacy...* (ASE 15).

He explains that *"he should not have been there even now; he had official business waiting..."* (ASE 15). What he is saying is that in the new scheme of things, white friends like the lawyer
and his wife do not matter anymore. They have been used and maintaining any relationships
with them now is not only functionally pointless but also time-wasting. Official business is seen
as being more important even while it is clear, through the glimpses the narrative voice affords
the reader, that such business just means elbowing one’s way towards the centre of power. The
black self has finally adopted the characteristics of the white other and becomes consumed in the
struggle to dominate the other - black and white alike. Here then the definition of the ‘other’
shifts focus and now includes the blacks and whites outside the corridors of power.

Ratau, in *"A Hunting Accident"*, is in a significant way a complementary part to the
emergent black ruling class. He is the son of a paramount chief but he has had the benefit of
attending universities in America and England. These two factors are crucial in that they are
a good index through which to gauge how far Ratau has departed from his distinctly African self
and acquired another self which is clearly that of a white otherness. That he is the son of a
paramount chief means that he holds the claim to some legitimate traditional authority. This
would imply that he is entrusted with guarding values that are African and furthering the
interests of the same. However, his western education undermines his traditional authority since
he adopts distinctly bourgeois mannerisms. He is depicted, for example, as a pleasure lover and
one who is prone to womanising. There is nothing wrong with this hedonism but the way Ratau observes to the letter English etiquette marks him out as belonging to the bourgeois class. He observes meticulously the rules regarding how game is to be shot, by whom and when the host should shoot. All this sounds absurd especially coming from an African in Africa. Nevertheless, it goes to show how Ratau has been alienated from his African ‘self’ and has adopted the spirit of the completely different other. Therefore the conflict between the self and the other can also be seen at the individuals level. Ratau, like Chipande in "A Soldier’s Embrace" belongs to the bourgeois class tied together by wealth and education and which has only recently assumed political power.

3.3.2 Fear, Subservience and Obsession

When the black self is confronted with the white other its reactions are predominantly fear of that white otherness, to cringe to its authority and finally to become obsessed with whiteness. In all the blacks who react in these ways, the common factors are poverty, lack of formal education (thus unexposed/unenlightened) and they belong to the oppressed labouring class.

The coloured girl in "Town and Country Lovers-One" is at first cowed when she comes face to face with the trappings of the white world, an awesome world she has never been into. The narrative voice observes:

*Her eyes went over everything in the flat although her body tried to conceal its sense of being out of place by remaining as still as possible, holding its contours in the chair offered her as a stranger’s coat is set aside and remains exactly as left until the owner takes it up to go (ASE 77-78).*
It is clear that when confronted with the unknown, unexpected white other, the girl's self cringes since matters of the white world follow an ethos peculiar to that world, and a code unknown to her.

The coloured girl's fear of the police is even more telling since her's is a reaction to the white other that she knows. She cuts the image of a hunted animal, petrified by the knowledge of what awaits capture. Instinctively, she knows that she can not elude capture. Uppermost in her mind is the fear of the cruelty that must be meted on her. She is also afraid of public scrutiny, fully conscious of the fact that the white other will already have prejudged her as being guilty of immoral practices. Indeed the kind of examination she undergoes at the police station is not only an insult to her womanhood but is also a means of humiliating her. She thus fears, with ample justification, the terror that the three white policemen represent. It is the terror arising from laws created by a white other oblivious to the universal human need for emotional fulfilment. Thus, the comical figure that the girl poses in a man's underwear in the district surgeon's office may be read as the narrative voice jeering at the follies of white laws. This picture invokes pity at the idiocy of the whole situation.

Fear as a reaction of the blacks to the white world can also be seen in Thebedi in the story "Town and Country Lovers-Two". She is fully conscious of the fact that due to sheer white prejudice, she is not supposed to be associating romantically with a white boy. She is afraid that her own people may brand her an immoral person should they discover this affair. Hence, Thebedi has to lie to both her parents and peers for fear of being found out. This fear is thus seen as being inhibitive to the achievement of any genuine understanding between the black self and the white other. Perhaps Thebedi, if she knew Paulus more meaningfully as a person,
would not have trusted him in the first place. On his part, Paulus, being aware of the facts as they stand, uses Thebedi's fear to abuse her. As a consequence of fear the white self visits pain on the black other.

Black subservience to the white other is seen in the coloured girl in the story "Town and Country Lovers-One". The girl panders to each and every one of Dr. Leinsdorf's whims since to her he is the unknown, revered white other. She is too obliging, running on whatever errand the geologist wishes. Yet if this was all there would be nothing wrong. What aggravates the situation is the coloured girl's wishful thinking whose substance denotes a servant's mentality:

While she sat on the type-writer she thought how one day she would type notes for him, as well as making coffee the way he liked it, and taking him inside her body without saying anything, and sitting (even if only through the empty streets of quiet sundays) beside him in his car, like a wife. (ASE 81).

Of course, this is mere fantasy whose likelihood of fulfilment is non-existent taking into consideration Dr. Leinsdorf's attitude towards the girl. The pity of it all is that she can afford to think of even her body in such casual and passive terms. She sees herself as self destined to meet the desires of the "superior" white other.

Along the same lines, the chief and his people in the story "Oral History" portray a considerable degree of subservience. The prevalent unreasonable belief in, and fear of, the other leads to a tragic self-effacement. The chief, for example, believes everything the white soldier tells him on the necessity to collaborate with the white government. He seems to believe that the destiny of his people depends on the actions of the whites. He is like a child obeying a superior. Instead of rallying his people to fight for freedom he encourages them to drown in traditional beer. Ironically the same whites in the end determine the destiny of the chief and his
subjects, though not in any way that the chief could have imagined. Even when there is no conceivable reason for him to play traitor, the chief reports the presence of black guerrillas in his village. The village is consequently bombarded out of existence and many lives are lost. To the shock of this, the chief reacts by committing suicide. In this way is seen the tragic folly of the black self playing humble servant to the master/white other.

Closely related to the foregoing, there are blacks who seem obsessed with the colour white. This is seen in the story "Oral History". In the village of Dilolo, the narrative voice notes, "there's always been one house like a white man's house..." (ASE 134). This is in distinct contrast to the mud, reed-thatch houses in the village. To the chief, who owns this house with white walls, it is a symbol of a 'progressive' identification with what is in his mind the superior, white other. However, the villagers also have their ways of aspiring to the white other. In their church compound flies a white flag and mourning women colour their faces white. Evidently, there is no good reason why the colour of mourning or worship is white amongst these villagers. This could be interpreted as indicating that the white other is seen as a mysterious phenomenon and hence the link between the colour white, worship and death. It stands for a force which could unleash both good (in worship) and evil (as in death). This black obsession with whiteness may therefore indicate how deeply the white other has pervaded into the black self's subconscious.

In all this, the only redeeming character is the coloured girl in "Town-and Country Lovers-One". As already pointed out in the foregoing, the girl has her own weaknesses which militate against her coming to a better understanding of the white other. She is the only character, in the stories studied, who asserts herself and claims her right to be treated by the
white other as a human being. Her refusing to take the "Goods" lift, on her way to Dr. Leinsdorf's place, may have been due to excitement. However by taking the "Whites Only" lift she is subconsciously staking her claim to the right to be treated equally. The most admirable point in her depiction is when she refuses a tip from the geologist: "she was smiling, for the first time, in the dignity of refusing a tip" (ASE 77). Though it is true that she has manifested a servant's mentality elsewhere in the story, the coloured girl here emerges as the lone voice refusing to be down-graded. Here the black self finds a platform to demand humane treatment from the white other.

3.3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the image of the blacks as seen both by the whites and as the blacks see themselves. The objective has been to establish whether or not the blacks view themselves in any significantly different manner from the way the whites see them. We have also assessed to what extent the blacks are aware of their dilemma of existence.

Our findings are that amongst the whites, there is no real desire to achieve a genuine understanding of the black other. Even where, at the superficial level, the whites seem to be reaching out towards the blacks there are vested interests underlying such gestures. Indeed, the black other, as seen by the white self, is a creature to be used and dumped when no longer useful.

On the other hand, very few of the blacks seem to understand how they are being made use of by the white other. There are fewer still who are able to do anything towards asserting their dignity as human beings. Most of the blacks seem overwhelmed by the sheer existence of
the 'other' in society. Also, the black self does not appear interested in achieving an accommodation of the white other. Most of the blacks are in fact vengeful and bitter individuals who, if they are not already westernised in thought and deed, do not seem to understand what their being African is all about. As such, the black-white/self-other conflict continues even when there is no more oppression of blacks by whites. None of the two races seems ready or willing to work towards a genuine integration of the self and other. In the next chapter we examine the possibilities of reconciling the self and the other as Gordimer explores changing South African socio-political realities. Gordimer's vision for a multi-racial society not based on colour is also analysed.
4.0 Introduction

When looking at the prospects for the future of South Africa, two shades of opinion dominate. We may take, for instance, the extreme stance of General Jan Smuts in 1945:

*There are certain things about which all South Africans are agreed... The first is that it is a fixed policy to maintain white supremacy in South Africa.* (Mbeki 1973:23)

This view is obviously non-accommodationist, seeking as it does to carve a permanent and inviolable niche for the whites in South African society. It is a view supported by extremist groups like Eugene Terre' Blanche’s armed Afrikaner Resistance Movement and hardline conservative politicians like Dr. Andries Treuchnit. Extremist views also exist in the black camp, notably those of the Azania People’s Organization (AZAPO) which does not see any possibility of striking an accommodation with the whites.

On the other hand there is what may be called the integrationist perspective regarding the South African future. This spirit of racial reconciliation and the belief in a humanely shared society is captured in Bishop Desmond Tutu’s words, forty years after those of Jan Smuts cited in the foregoing:

*We want to have a new kind of South Africa, where we all, black and white can walk together... into the glorious future... opening up before us...* (Leach 1986 :50).

Though other races are not represented overtly in this wish, they are included in the sense that
by implication South African society is made up of those born of the union between white and black, white and Indian amongst others. Yet, Tutu being a man of the church, these words may be taken as just being his wish and prayer for a divinely-shaped world.

This chapter explores how, from the artist’s secular point of view, Nadine Gordimer’s writing suggests possibilities through which the self-other conflicts could be transcended. For this task five short stories from *Jump* (1991) have been studied. These are "My Father Leaves Home", "Some Are Born to Sweet Delight", "Comrades", "The Moment Before the Gun Went off" and "Keeping Fit". Gordimer’s depiction of the possibilities open to South Africa are discussed with a focus on *July’s People*. In order to autheticate Gordimer’s depiction of social realities, her social vision is assessed alongside that of other South African writers.

To read, and interpret, meaningfully any writing from South Africa, one must of necessity take into consideration three points. First, that South Africa as a social-geographical entity implies the carrying over of values from Europe and super-imposing them on the cultural life of the native people. In the short stories studied the historical link between Europe and South Africa, and the way it defines the self is crucial. Secondly, whatever issue one is looking at-be it political, economic or purely social - a discourse of "othering" cannot be avoided since the colour question has had a bearing on all facets of South African life. Hence at any one time, the writer or critic of South African literature is confronted with a text whose language either includes the voice of the self only, represents a slanted view of the other or never convincingly manages to strike a balance between the self and the other. In a society fractured on the basis of colour, the writer must have the ability to imagine what the voice of the other could be. Thirdly, even in obviously slanted texts, like Alan Paton’s *Cry Beloved Country*, one notices
the desire, on the writer’s part, to go beyond the legacy handed down through racism and grope for a situation where the worth of being human (of both self and other) does not depend on colour.

The relevance of the fore-going to Gordimer’s writing is seen where, for lack of an option, she presents the black other from an outsider’s perspective since, no matter how sympathetic she may be to this black other, she can never put herself in the shoes of non-white people. With regard to the existence of blacks and whites, Gordimer writes with her eye cast towards the future. To this end her writing has transcendental tendencies.

4.1 The Pitfalls of a Superiority Complex

The main character in the story "My Father Leaves Home" leaves his home in 'Eastern Europe' (a possible reference to the Lithuanian region) at the age of thirteen and settles in South Africa. What seems to be coming through here is the fact that even in the event of change it is desirous that there be a continuity so that the individual is able to have a real sense of awareness of who s/he is. Such a continuum is maintained, in the main character’s case, by the reference to the fact that he is a watch-maker. This is the trope that points at time, thus establishing the link between the old life/Europe and the future/South Africa. In this way divergent traditions are historically joined and to understand any of them would, henceforth, require an evaluation of each in terms of the other.

The problem for the watch-maker, when he gets to South Africa, is two-fold. Firstly his sense of time becomes disoriented. The narrative voice notes of the time/season markers are described thus:

_The moon on its back.... the moon in the Southern Hemisphere lies_
the wrong way round. The sun still rises in the east and sets in the west but the one other certainty to be counted on, that the same sky that covers the village covers the whole earth, is gone. What greater confirmation of how far away; as you look up, on the first night. (Jump: 61).

It is the position of the moon and how far north the sun goes that has in the past been used by the watch-maker to differentiate time/seasons. Hence the disorientation here comes out of his own inability to reconcile the practices in his previous life to the new South African environment. In fact the suggestion is that it is Europe which has failed to keep time with Africa, not Africa with Europe. For the watch-maker to fit in he must adapt to new sensibilities.

Secondly, it dawns on him that the colour white distinguishes him from the black people he meets:

_In this, their own country, they were migrants from their homes, like him... so straight away he knew that if he was poor and alone at least he was white, he spoke... from the ranks of the commanders to the commanded: the first indication of who he was, now._ (Jump:62).

Where his colour had not helped him amongst the whites in Europe, the watch-maker capitalises on it to dominate the black other. He actively and voluntarily exploits the blacks' need for watches. In his selfishness there is no way the watch-maker can come to a real understanding of what black otherness is all about.

It is this superiority complex that is played out in more ironic terms by the white jogger in the story "Keeping Fit". He has, in his morning jog, strayed into the black squatters' camp where he comes into head-on contact with a mob baying for the blood of an African. As a black woman saves the white jogger from imminent harm these are the thoughts coursing through his
mind:

A white man! He felt himself only to be a white man, no other identity, no other way to be known: to pull aside a sack and say, I'm in brokerage, give his name, his bona fide address - that was nothing, these qualifications of his existence meant nothing (Jump: 233).

The irony here is that even in the face of such acute danger, the white jogger does not seem to grasp the enormity of the situation. His whiteness, so to speak, cannot help him. Neither can any of those values that are deemed important in the white world. To ensure that he survives in this world, Gordimer seems to be suggesting, the white jogger must bring himself to the level of appreciating the realities of the black world. Indeed the man seems to be moving towards such a perception when he seems to trust the ability of the black other to be, and do, good. Hence:

He had a momentary loss of control, wanting to collapse against the woman, clutch her used big body under her apron and take the shield of her warmth against his trembling (Jump: 234).

The possibility is thus established that the white self can find security in the black other. Though the white jogger may also be seeing the big black woman in a stereotyped mode as provider of sexual pleasure, at a deeper level it is suggested that he - a white - finds maternal warmth in this black woman. It is an expression of how basic human nature is not only attainable but also desirable.

4.2 Redefining the Individual

In Gordimer's short stories, the need to outgrow prohibitive traditions is also suggested. For instance, it is a gesture of vanity for the Jewish watch-maker in "My Father Leaves Home"
to marry an English woman. The implications here are far-reaching. Firstly, the man wants to be seen to maintain links with what, in his mind, he considers the grand English empire. Secondly he wants to find meaning in values which, tragically, he does not have or believe in. Examples are his singing ballads written by Tennyson and his attempt to be a Mason. The tragedy is seen when "the English wife played the piano and the children sang round her but he didn’t sing" (Jump:63). He is actually cast out of the very traditions to which he craves to belong.

Vera, in "Some Are Born to Sweet Delight", bravely seeks to bridge the artificially created gap between the socially accepted codes of behaviour and what is deemed alien, thus unacceptable. From Vera’s point of view, Rad, a foreigner of Arabic origins, is as good a man as any to be her boyfriend. She appears to have realised - unlike her mother and father - that the fact of difference can and does enhance the quality of human relationships and does not necessarily retract any goodness out of them. Vera’s parents, on their part, cannot see the situation along these lines. The fact that Rad is not South African, let alone being of Arabic extraction, is enough to make them see him as never deserving equal treatment with the white self. This translates into apathy not only towards him but also towards Vera:

_The silence between her and her parents grew; her mother was like a cheerful bird whose cage had been covered_ (Jump:78).

Prejudice against the other not only translates into the distancing of individuals who would otherwise belong to the same in-group but also has detrimental effects on the self. Vera’s mother loses her happiness, temporarily. The irony here is that the self-same Rad who is at first seen as the source of woe turns out to be everybody’s source of pride. Vera’s is clearly a transformation: "Everything was changed" (Jump: 80). The effect of Vera’s marriage to Rad on Vera’s parents is even more dramatic:
For her mother, too, a son-in-law who was not one of their kind became a distinction rather than a shame... Even the commissionaire (Vera’s father) felt confident enough to tell one of his gentlemen at the club that his daughter was getting married, but first about to go abroad to meet the young man’s parents. (Jump:85. Brackets mine)

Hence, individuals who had never even thought of the infinite possibilities that could occur from the self coming into contact with the other are overwhelmed by the results. Here then the author seems to be depicting the richness that could be added into social relationships when self and other are allowed to engage beyond the confines of inhibitive traditions. Indeed, it is Vera herself who dramatises this most vividly. Concerning the way she managed to merge into Rad’s group of foreigners, and left her own friends behind, it is noted:

Their greetings, the way they looked at her, made her feel that he had told them about her, after all, and she was happy... if she had moved on, from the pub, the disco, the parents, she was accepted, belonged somewhere else (Jump:81).

Hence, Vera is able to realise herself better, and manages to find happiness, by going out of what social convention, based on class and race, would recommend.

The tendency to define the individual according to certain rigid perceptions is further demonstrated by the case of Marais Van der Vyver - leading farmer, regional party leader and commandant of the local security commando. He is a man elevated on a pedestal. He is seen as occupying a privileged position. It is this position that is responsible for many, especially the journalists, misinterpreting his motives when he accidentally shoots his black farmhand. Most of his accusers seem unable to understand the incident as what it is, an accident. It could have happened to anyone, only that this time it happened to a black person. Those who accuse Marais of white "brutality against workers" conveniently ignore the fact that Marais and the black boy
were friends. In their narrow-minded, colour-mediated world views, there exists absolutely no possibility that something human could have bound the two together. In their minds there exists the fear that going beyond the "knowledge" that they already have about the other will mean a weakening of this false knowledge or belief. There is thus a subconscious attempt, on the part of those accusing Marais not to break down the barriers responsible for the creation of racial stereotypes.

The narrative voice captures the agony going on in Marais’ mind thus:

...none of those Americans and English, and none of those people at home who want to destroy the white man’s power will believe him. And how they will sneer when he even says of the farm boy... 'He was my friend...’ Those city and overseas people don’t know it’s true... friends are not only your own white people, like yourself, you take into your house, pray with in church and work on the party committee. But how can those others know that? They don’t want to know it (Jump:112).

What is being expressed here is the possibility that even amongst white people there are those who feel the need to reach out to the black other and achieve an understanding on the basis of a shared humanity. The narrative voice also articulates the fact that the refusal to accept a white-black friendship as existing between Marais and the dead boy is the product of self-imposed blindness, the refusal to let the mind see what lies beneath the skin. The American and English are alluded to for their part in having contributed to this blindness. Slave-trade, in which the English actively participated, was a practice that saw the African as sub-human. The Jim Crow practices in the U.S.A. operated from a similarly warped rationale that held the African (other) as non-human, only a few stages removed from the ape.

It is therefore impossible for those who reason along such lines to appreciate the genuineness of Marais’ grief: "He was shaking ... Van der Vyver wept. He sobbed, snot running..."
onto his hands, like a dirty kid" (Jump: 113). They forget, or opt not to see, that Marais too is a human being at heart. Through Marais, Gordimer seems to say that no self-other understanding can be achieved if the society persists in defining the human person in terms of rigid social-political structures. Such structures describe the individual in terms of what he is not rather than what he is.

4.3 Beyond the Limitations of Space

Matters of physical space are seen to occupy a vital place in Gordimer's short stories examined in this study. The reader is confronted by physical barriers that seek to demarcate boundaries between the self and the other. However, in almost all of these instances, the writer seems to create ways in which these physical barriers can be brought down.

The story "Keeping Fit" illustrates in a very specific way this search for a self-other merger. The white jogger only begins to acquire a conscious awareness of what the black other is all about when he literally crosses the road and gets behind the fence that hides away the blacks shanties.

He has to come to terms with the black space: "over there behind the fence, a place which itself has come about defying context, plan, definition..." (Jump:231). This suggests that for the white self there is no option but to try and understand that which is different from the white environment, that defies the order that the white self would so much want to create. This defiance is again seen in the fact that: "...in places the metal fence had collapsed under the pressure of shelters that leant against it..." (Jump: 231). The suggestion here is on the need to bring down artificially created social barriers.

The urgent necessity of the self merging with the other is dramatised when the white
jogger, in fleeing from the frenzied mob, runs deeper and deeper into the heart of the black squatter camp:

The fence was down... he was on the wrong side. The road was no longer the sure boundary between the place and his suburb. It was the barrier that prevented him from getting away from the wrong-side. (Jump:233).

The fence coming down is symbolic of the social structures that must be demolished for the white/black (self/other) to achieve a real understanding with each other. Only then will it be unnecessary for people to be described as being 'on the wrong side'.

Where the case of the white jogger crossing over into the black squatter camp represents an option that one may take even in times of peace, the mob’s crossing the road into the white suburb is not optional. Rather it demonstrates the inevitability of the fences, the roads and any other barriers between the self and other coming down. Indeed, the incident presents in a very real way what may happen if a self-other accommodation is not arrived at peacefully. The mob now misdirects its rage at one of their own. It is perfectly possible that one day this anger may be violently turned at the white other. The road will therefore have to be crossed one way or the other.

That the self must make an attempt to broaden his/her world view beyond the limits of present and constrictive social structures is demonstrated by the black woman’s shack in "Keeping Fit." Even the hovel’s physical dimensions are oppressive:

Its intimacy pressed around him, a mould in which his dimensions were redefined. He took up space where the space allowed each resident must be scrupulously confined and observed. (Jump: 235).

For the white jogger the experience has been an eye-opener. Where he has been used to the luxury of vast space(s) and ample facilities he can now appreciate what the needs of the black
other are. He comes face to face with poverty and may now begin to understand how, by controlling all the resources and confining the black other to camps, the white self contributes to the black people's poverty and turns them into beasts baying for human blood. For one with a mind broader than that of the white jogger, it is possible to see what could be done to avoid the situation where the other is reduced to the level of a deprived animal. Ironically the white jogger's natural reaction is to tip the black woman for saving his life. This betrays his dominant master (white-self) - servant (black-other) mentality.

This broadening of understanding is not one-way. The black self must also show a willingness to embrace the white other. The black woman's family react with varying degrees of indifference to the white man they consider a "threat." They are at once bewildered, hostile, ashamed and curious. The white other has invaded their space. "You must keep away from here," the black woman tells the white jogger. "What do you want to come near this place for?" (Jump:236). The black woman is giving voice to the blacks' short-term view of how to achieve, if not peace, the false security of distancing one-self from reality. The pitiful consequences of withdrawal from the other are captured thus:

He shook hands with the old man, thanking him, thanking them all, effusively - no response, as he included the children, the son and daughter - hearing his own voice as if he were talking to himself. (Jump:237).

This shows how years of forced separation of the black self from the white other have robbed the former of the ability to see the latter as human. The silence of the black family signals, not the refusal but, their inability to communicate with the white other. In such a situation, if the self and other never get to communicate, both white and black may end up in a situation such as that imaged by the trapped bird. They will all "just wait... to die" (Jump: 242) in a vicious
cycle of bloodletting.

4.4 The Dangers of Being Ignorant

Many of the re/actions of the white self are based on two broad assumptions. Firstly, on the assumption that the whites are privy to certain knowledge that only they can have. Secondly, they presume that the black other is a savage monstrosity always intent on unleashing terror of untold dimensions upon the white self. The two assumptions give rise to two key "facts" that dominate white experience. The first is that black people need to be educated while the second is that the psyche of the white self is always preoccupied by fear.

In Mrs Hattie Telford, in the story "Comrades", is played out a long ironic process at the end of which she is exposed as being in dire need of learning. Her credentials are "impressive"; she is a white member of the Committee on People's Education. Obviously, the term 'people' is just an oblique reference to the blacks, for "they were the people to be educated" (Jump:91). In her mind the black Youth Congress members from Harrismith were people who knew nothing and had come to the conference to be imparted with knowledge by those high "up on the platform". Her wondering "How did they get here?" may be taken, at the figurative level, as an attempt to understand how both black and white came to having all the racial problems that exist between them. The discourse of othering is evident in the pronoun 'they' in the question. Yet if anything is obvious it is the fact of her pretence at being knowledgeable about race relations. Mrs Telford is the wrong person to claim expertise in such matters. The narrative voice notes that in her mind she felt that the conference had made her "both excited and left her over-exposed, open and vulnerable" (Jump:92). To this she would prefer "the depraved luxury of solitude and quiet in which she would be restored... to the
familiar limits of her own being" (Jump:92). Here is a person who feels at her best when she is alone yet she can go and tell others how to build a better, non-racial society by getting to mix and be together. She doesn’t seem to know very well herself whether it is the introvert or the outgoing type of person that can create understanding between the races. Again her needs are different from those of the black other. This is forcefully illustrated by the irony that at the end of the conference she wants a drink where the black youths need food. "They were hungry. Not for iced whisky and feet up" (Jump:93). Mrs Telford is clearly in no position to 'educate' people whose needs she does not know.

Mrs Telford lives in such an opulent world that to the black youths it must appear to be the stuff of which dreams are made. The blacks get to see, first hand, the spoils of white privilege:

...her dining room. It was a room in confident taste that could afford to be spare: bare floorboards, matching golden wooden ceiling, antique black chandelier, reed blinds instead of stuffy curtains. An African wooden sculpture represented a Lion marvelously released from its matrix in the grain of a Mukwa tree-trunk (Jump:95).

These items may not imply wealth but, given the obvious fact that wealth can only be understood in relative terms, to the black youths Mrs. Telford must be living a vulgar lifestyle. They are so used to cramped dwellings that they are unable to come to terms with the fact that there was "a room where apparently people only eat, do not cook, do not sleep" (Jump:95). Mrs Telford cannot thus understand how, in their case, the blacks eat, cook and sleep in the same room. It is the same Mrs. Telford, 'People Educator', who does not know, or understand, what it is to have to boycott school - if one is black-due to both poverty and the need to express a political point. She does not know what it is to be detained.
"She would know, she should have known..." (Jump:95), the narrative voice jeeringly observes, but the crux of the matter is that she does not know anything about the black alterity. What she may know is the lifestyle of white people, for instance white children being on the cricket team or going on tour in Europe during the school holidays. The equality she seeks for all is phoney or else she would not have the black maid waiting on her. To her then, she who cannot see the reality that stares her into the face, all things about black life "...are on the same level of impact, phenomena undifferentiated, undecipherable" (Jump:96). It is she who must begin her education by being able to interpret what the realities of the black other mean. Platform rhetoric aside, knowing the facts will begin when those on the platform climb down and interact with those they seek to educate.

Where Mrs Telford's ignorance is the product of lack of exposure, that of the white jogger in "Keeping Fit" comes from being over-exposed. He 'knows' about black-on-black violence not because he has seen it previously but because he reads about it in the papers. He now knows about the hard reality of slum life per chance; he happened to be there when events just dragged him to "the wrong side of the road." He and his fellow whites, for instance Mrs. Telford, can only have a theoretical 'knowledge' about the black other until such a time as they will move out of their cosy little worlds and actively engage with the blacks.

In a very significant way white ignorance, based on both exposure and the lack of it, is responsible for the fear with which whites live. Two episodes demonstrate this. Mrs Hattie Telford, in "Comrades", has her car all wired up with electronic gadgets, security devices to keep her from being attacked by blacks. The 'security' arrangements in the story "The moment Before the Gun went off" are even more elaborate. Mr. Van der Vyver has a high barbed security fence round his farmhouse and garden. Aerials have been fitted onto all his vehicles...
and all the farm houses keep twenty-four hour radio contact. From the whites’ perspective, this is easily explained:

*It has already happened that infiltrators from over the border have mined remote farm roads, killing white farmers and their families out on their own property for a Sunday picnic* (Jump: 115).

Paranoia pervades the minds of the whites and what the narrative voice does not say is that the "infiltrators from over the border" are blacks. Even 'good' whites like Van der Vyver and Mrs. Telford know that there is a terrible misunderstanding between whites and blacks, one which would cause the latter to kill the former quite readily. Yet, even in the face of such knowledge, the whites do not make any meaningful attempts to resolve such disputes.

The security systems are no great deterrent as the whites get killed anyway. What seems to be the suggestion here is that the white self needs to sit down and dialogue with the black other. Shutting him out, like a dangerous prowler on the loose, simply will not do. Only at such a time as both races can sit together and enjoy the same economic opportunities will the necessity of installing electronic security gadgets be lost. The self and the other must begin speaking with a view to addressing the problems that confound their common destiny. That is the real security.

4.5 Which way South Africa?

One of the most remarkable aspects about Gordimer’s writing is her ability to sustain the verve with which she pursues certain issues. The search for answers related to questions of space is a case in point. All along Gordimer, in her writings, seeks to prompt the readers towards asking themselves "whose legitimate space is the geographical entity called South Africa?" This question, in our view, forms an illumination point from which *July’s People* may
be read and interpreted.

The relevance of the spatial leit-motif is seen when we consider the setting of the novel. Again Gordimer comes up with a totally new way of looking at the space problem(s). It is worth noting that here the author departs from the conventional way in which black and white peoples’ problems are explored by other authors. The scene is not the urban centres where the blacks are mostly either servants or criminals in the streets and sheebens while their white lords live in exclusive estates. The setting of July’s People is bush country, six hundred kilometers away from Johannesburg. Here the authority rests in the Africans’ hands and the Smales family are but dependants. Their very survival, in a very literal manner, depends on the goodwill of the villagers. In this case all perceptions of the self that this white family has previously held have to be reviewed vis-a-vis their present circumstances. It is along these lines that July is seen:

"The decently-paid and contented servant, living in their yard since they had married... turned out to be the chosen one in whose hands their lives were to be held; frog prince, saviour, July (July’s People: 9)."

This ’miraculous’ transformation of July from servant to saviour is a pleasant surprise, especially for Maureen since in the previous white order of things, it was July who depended on the white family to survive in town. Even the other blacks, for instance July’s wife and mother, who have never been in white people’s homes seem to understand the helplessness of the white folk. Invariably the questions uppermost in their minds are, "Why do they come here? Why to us? "(July’s People: 18). The assumption underpinning these questions is that whites do not need blacks; they are seen as the other encroaching onto territory that belongs strictly to the black self. This obviously stems from their limited world-view, believing as they do that whites are
invincible. July is aware that they are not as he knows what the dynamics of the civil war are. He understands that it is all about the struggle for power.

The struggle for power is played out very spiritedly by July on the one hand and the Smales family on the other. The object of possession is Bamford's yellow car, a very convenient item. It is known, without it being said, that whoever has it has the ability to reconnect, when the civil war is over, to/with Johannesburg. For July it is a symbol of privilege as he can show off his driving to the villagers. At a deeper level, he wants to show the villagers that he has conquered the white other they fear so much. If he does not fetch supplies for them they will perish. For Bamford and Maureen, the loss of the car to July means dispossession of the ability to take control of their lives. Notes the narrative voice when July claims the bakkie:

*Pride, comfort of possession was making him forget by whose losses possession had come about* (July's People: 94).

For Maureen it becomes impossible for her to picture herself in a position of dependence. The traditional master-servant roles have been subverted and even though July pretends to serve, he is really the one on top of things.

The question of cross-cultural understanding in South African space comes up when July's People is considered as providing a meeting point between the urban elite and the rural folk, the clash between "the suburb and the wilderness" in Maureen's words. It is actually a search where the white self has to come to terms with the beacons in the lives of the black other. The white family seems to adapt well to the realities of 'bush life.' Bamford is able- even in the tension borne of uncertainty - to savour the delights of the countryside by going hunting, fishing and so on. The children - Royce, Victor and Gina Smales - integrate themselves to the black children's lifestyle, clearly delighting in doing things they would never have done in the
city. Though Maureen seems to take on well to the habits of the village, the tensions within her and the constant verbal-psychological duels with Bamford disorient her. She cannot identify completely with the other she finds in the African village. Most of the times she is locked up within herself, lost in contemplating what was, what is and what will possibly be. The effort she exerts in these mental wanderings leaves her drained; she loses vital energy that could have been used to deal with the predicaments of the present. As a result she is naturally more prone to getting irritated by small issues, for example when July protests her reference to his mistress in town. It is little wonder that when the helicopter lands in the village Maureen dashes towards it in the hope that she can be rescued from what she considers a trap. Unlike the rest of her family she has failed to come to terms with the black other and hence she has not allowed herself to learn the full depths of her endurance in a foreign locale. Her running towards the plane is thus a flight back to the supposed security of the white self that she assumes to know.

Gordimer also questions the moral authority of the white self to lord it over the black other. The view being propounded, it appears, is that the black other is legitimately entitled to fight back against repression. The apartheid regime is likened to the regimes of the "Amins, Bokassas and Mobutus" (July's People: 8). Parallels are also drawn between apartheid and those oppressive systems in former colonies like Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia and Mozambique. The reference to the Cuban revolutionaries lends weight to the view that the author points towards the use of force as a necessary means in the overthrow of tyranny in South Africa. What this implies is that the oppressed could be said to belong to a collective self-whatever the skin colour - while all oppressors belong to a collective other. This is the attitude underlying the narrative voice when the question is asked: "Us and them. Who is us, now, and who them?" (July's People: 17). Where the two antagonistic forces are unable to come to
dialogue on account of the oppressor’s intransigence the oppressed have both the moral duty and right to take up arms to rid themselves of oppression.

What comes across from reading *July’s People*, in terms of Gordimer’s social vision, is that South Africa, understood as both space and polity, belongs as much to whites as it belongs to blacks. Hence Bamford Smale’s initial desire to leave South Africa for permanent residence in Canada is seen as being both escapist and cowardly. Both blacks and whites have the moral responsibility to make South Africa a better society.

At a philosophical level Gordimer even sees the relevance and necessity of self-other conflict(s). These conflicts provide a means through which individuals discover themselves. It can be argued, for example, that the conflicts between July and the Smales family are a necessary vehicle through which the former achieves self-discovery. July realises that he has the ability to control things; he must not always play second fiddle. The translocation of Bamford from the neat architectural white houses to the ’crude’ and ’primitive’ huts in the countryside enables him to appreciate the ways in which black people live. The present circumstances even allow Maureen to discover what her real body odour, and that of her husband, is. The human being is seen in natural circumstances, away from all the pretences and facades put up in town life. Conflict between self and other, as the present civil war is, facilitates self-discovery.

The author is also of the view that for any genuine progress towards the achievement of self-other understanding the blacks themselves must shun the narrow-mindedness with which they cling to ethnicity. While this does not mean discarding traditional practices it entails a broadening of vision to see the other black nations within South Africa as being part of the same movement searching for peace and progress. It is along these lines that the shallow nationalism
of the chief is vilified. With ignorance he observes bitterly:

Those people from Soweto... they all want take this country of my nation. Eh? They not our nation. Amazulu, amaxhosa, basotho...we going kill those people when they come with their guns (July's People: 119).

What the chief does not seem to realise is that "those people from Soweto" are his people, they belong with him to the oppressed black self. He also does not realise that they are fighting to liberate him; he is the slave rejoicing in his servitude. All like him must be got rid of, or at least their servile mentalities, before the progressive forces - whatever their colour - can dislodge from power the tyrannical other.

Self-determination, Gordimer appears to argue, is everyone's right. Whatever the means adopted for the achievement of the collective aspirations of a people will by and large depend on the circumstances prevailing within a particular environment. In July's People violence becomes necessary as it is the only language that the dictatorial white other can understand. Gordimer, however, is not the only writer who has addressed herself to issue of the peoples' right to shape their destiny.

Other South African writers have addressed themselves to the issue of black self-determination. We may for instance consider the stance taken by Peter Abrahams, himself a coloured man, in Mine Boy (1946). Here, Abrahams seems to agree with Gordimer that people must be seen as primarily human beings before they can be seen as anything else. It needs to be noted that at the time the novel was written (1946) few of the blacks were conscious what their political rights and freedoms were. It was, especially for the blacks, a period marked only by immigration into urban centres, provision of labour in the mines, drunken brawls and, eventually, chest diseases and death. This is largely all that makes up life in Malay Camp, and
other black suburbs, where time just drags on monotonously. It is this world into which Xuma comes. The ways of urban folk begin changing him and in the end a leader of sorts emerges. Yet Xuma does not know or understand the nature of his oppression, (social, political and economic) by the racist capitalist system of which the mines are an off shoot. Abrahams' concern is to take this raw "native" and make him achieve a social consciousness that will allow him to interact meaningfully with both the black people and the white other.

The instrument with which the author executes his task is Paddy O’shea, known as the 'Red One' in the mines. His Irishness is by no means coincidental since Ireland is associated with a long history of revolt against English domination. In the same manner Paddy seeks to make Xuma realise that it is everyone’s moral responsibility to overthrow oppression in any of its forms, wherever it may be found. Hence, like Gordimer in July’s People, Abrahams places the struggle for human freedom(s) in a universal context.

What is achieved in Mine Boy, basically, is the acquisition-by Xuma - of a consciousness that sees all human beings as just human. He has to grapple with the new awareness that Paddy helps him achieve. His reactions vary from self-hatred for having acquired new knowledge to exhilaration at the possibilities to his life that this knowledge suggests. His mental processes are described thus:

*He remembered the beautiful dream with which he had gone to bed. Man without colour and laughter everywhere. It had all been beautiful and so good. But how could it be? ...The white man will not let it be.... yes! He hated all white people and he hated the Red One (Mine Boy: 176).*

Xuma, in his confusion, does not see the irony that the very white man he feels against so much is the very agent who has made him see human beings as having a common bond beyond colour.

Both Abrahams and Gordimer advance the view that colour divisions have to be
surmounted before the self and the other can see themselves as having a legitimate place in South Africa. However Abrahams, in *Mine Boy*, seems to be just concerned with establishing in the blacks the concept that both black and white are human. It is along these lines that the narrative voice, commenting on Xuma’s rebellion during the strike at the mines, is to be understood:

> Xuma felt good suddenly. *Strong and free.*
> A Man...
> 'We are men!' he shouted. 'It does not, matter if our skins are black! We are not cattle to throw away our lives! We are men!'
> ... Xuma felt stronger than he had ever felt all his life. *Strong enough to be a man without colour.* And now, suddenly, he knew *that it could be so. Man could be without colour* (*Mine Boy*: 181).

Nevertheless, this sudden awareness of having a right to claim human dignity that pitches the black self (Xuma) together with the white other (Paddy) to the same side in the strike does not seem to sink very deeply into Xuma. Nor does it extend to other black characters. Xuma does not seem to understand that asserting his manhood goes beyond mere heroics - like turning himself in after the strike in order to be with Paddy in jail. He could have escaped to go and rouse the consciousness of other black miners. Yet it is a good beginning point. However, Abrahams does not invest this awareness in characters like J.P. Williamson or Big Leah. They either die or go to jail without really understanding the real reason. Gordimer at least pursues issues at a deeper level, as they affect the psychology of her characters, and tries to establish an intricate relationship between characters, their colour and class and how they are affected by their inter-relationship with the other.

The case of La Guma, and his view of self - other conflicts, may also be cited. La Guma, in *In The Fog of the Seasons’ End*, goes beyond where Abrahams left off. By the time the novel is written (1972) the oppressed self has stopped dreaming - like Xuma- about the
beautiful world where man would be without colour’ (Mine Boy:177). The blacks and coloureds have realised that this beautiful world can only be created by resorting to the force of arms. Rebellion is not only now a need but a very urgent one. This is where In The Fog of the Seasons’ End ties in with July’s People. Indeed events in the latter seem to be the corollary of the former. As the revolutionaries begin their journey to training camps in Zimbabwe and Zambia, Beukes muses:

... they have gone to war in the name of a suffering people. What the enemy himself has created, these will become battle-grounds, and what we see now is only the tip of an iceberg of resentment against an ignoble regime, the tortured victims of hatred and humiliation. (In the Fog of Seasons’ End: 180).

It is clear that the black self sees retribution only in taking battle to the doorstep of the white oppressor class. The black is categorical that the oppressive white other must be wiped away with gunfire and bombs. In the minds of the ideologists of the underground (Beukes and Elias Tekwane for instance) there can be no middle-of-the-bridge meeting with the whites. The self and other are not seen as having a meeting point. Years of humiliation, both psychological and physical, can only be righted by revolution.

However though Gordimer and La Guma seem agreed on the necessity of the blacks staging a revolution it must be noted that there are subtle differences in the revolutions that each advocates. The ethos of La Guma’s revolution is basically marxist. He sees the colour question in South Africa in economic terms. To him the white other has dispossessed the Tekwanes, the Aprils, Beukes and so on of their land and means of economic survival. The black self has been enslaved in the mines as a source of cheap labour. La Guma is of the view that the black self must revolt primarily to take control of his/her economic destiny. The author also employs type
characters. La Guma only sees white characters who are part of an evil system. Hence his stereotypical portrayal of, especially, wicked white policemen. Where black policemen and clerks are depicted they are not presented as people but rather as servants of a bad system. Rarely, in fact, does La Guma go deep into the minds of his characters - even the heroic black ones. This typification could be interpreted within the broad ambitions of marxist aesthetics where the focus is on the achievements of the masses as a character rather than on individuals. In this context the usefulness of escapists like Tommy the dance maniac living on life’s fast lane may be understood. The place of cowards like Arthur Bennet, the banality of the Washerwoman, the Bicycle Messenger, the Outlaw, the Child or the happy-go-lucky nature of Abdullah can be appreciated within the goals of depicting a mass character. La Guma is thus not specific to the self-other conflict at an individual level.

In contrast to La Guma, Gordimer’s envisaged revolution is not based on any shade of marxist belief. It springs from the recognition first, of the humanness of all people and secondly of the need to get rid of subjugation, whoever the perpetrators of such oppression may be. While recognising that economic issues play a great part in the self-other conflict between blacks and whites, Gordimer asserts that the core of this conflict is the refusal of both blacks and whites to recognise the basic humanity of each other. Recognition means accepting the legitimacy of the claims of the white people to a space in South Africa. It means accepting, on the whites’ part, that the black other has the right to self-determination and that the whites have no right to decide what is good for blacks. It may be noted here that even though La Guma’s revolution is based on ideology, it has the potential of nihilism where total destruction may not be ruled out. On the other hand, Gordimer does not deal with stock characters. Each one is examined
within specific circumstances. For example even though July Mwatate has been the white man’s servant for fifteen years, the author depicts him like any other human - his adultery, his anger, and pilfery. Maureen is not just a white woman in an evil system - she is jealous, irritable, selfish, dirty, at times narrow-minded and hypocritical. Hence, for Gordimer, the capacity to be human is central to whatever course social realities in South Africa may take. It matters for her that self and other be not defined in colour terms. She just sees people trying to grapple with possibilities that are unleashed upon them by broader social forces.

4.6 Conclusion

On the whole what emerges from our discussion in the foregoing is the fact that writers across the colour spectrum are agreed on the necessity of shifting the value system that is used to define/confine people to racial strait-jackets. It is apparent that there must be a shift from a state of merely instilling a social consciousness to a point where the psychological motivations on which racism is founded are understood and confronted. However, this confrontation of racism, for Gordimer, goes beyond the ‘naive’ perception with which writers like Abrahams depict the self-other conflicts. It also goes deeper into the human psyche than the bombs and guns suggested by other ‘radical’ revolutionary writers like La Guma who seem to be of the view that a revolution is the panacea to self/other conflicts in South Africa. The next chapter makes conclusions on the various options open to South African society and makes recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE

GATHERING THE STRANDS OF SELF - OTHER CONFLICTS

5.0 Introduction

This study set out to investigate what possibilities lie ahead for South Africa as a social entity rid of the apartheid system of government. To do this the study has had to analyse the problems that affected both whites and blacks within a society whose perception of the individual is limited to the hue of their skin. It has also been necessary to assess whether or not the individuals have any awareness of the limitations - both physical and psychological - placed upon them by the colour matrix and how they deal with this knowledge. Finally, the study set out to assess how convincingly Gordimer, a white writer, has articulated the complex realities of an ethnically compound South African society.

To carry out these tasks the study was guided by two assumptions concerning both writers and characters. A biographical reading of a text operates on the presumption that key events in the author's life have a bearing on the material that is eventually produced as art. Influences from the writer's social background are assumed to exist in the text. From the foregoing, it was assumed that should there be any changes in the writer's milieu then the characters would be drawn to reflect those changes.

5.1 An Overview of Findings

Chapter One is basically a mapping out of what the concerns of the study are. It outlines the scope of Gordimer's short stories to be dealt with and makes a case for specific stories being
chosen for study. The discrimination index has been on how closely these stories come to articulating either the white or the black experience or both.

Manichean aesthetics - understood chiefly as the exploration/interpretation of oppositional value systems - is set as the theoretical basis from which the self-other conflicts are studied. This theoretical construct also delineates the friction-prone areas of social experience springing from a polarisation of society on the basis of superior white self versus inferior black other in South Africa.

Chapter Two is an analysis of the factors that inhibit the white self from achieving any meaningful understanding of black alterity. The focus of analysis is Livingstone's Companions. Reasons for the whites not understanding the blacks are traceable to both the individual and corporate self. Some white individuals have absolutely no desire to move towards an accommodation of the black other. The study has also established that the whites who attempt to realise such an integration find themselves hampered either by present traditions or customs rooted in European historical experiences. Either way, the individuals find themselves constrained to react towards black otherness only within prescribed social channels. This means that be it at the collective and personal levels, there are always some social-political and economic structures that impede the search for an accommodation of the black other. Weak social values and the hollowness of ideological beliefs like liberalism have also been found to contribute, to a large extent, towards the inability of the white self to see the black other in terms of legitimate difference. This study has established that the whites are imprisoned at one level by their own shortcomings as human beings and at another level by a web of social, political and economic structures that at once confer upon them undue privilege and at the same
time rob them of the fundamental ability to be human.

Chapter Three’s centre of focus is *A Soldier’s Embrace* where portraits of the black self are analysed. From this analysis the study has established that only a tiny fraction of the white South African population has a positive perception of the non-white alterity. In their dealings with black folk, the majority of the whites are steeped in the stereotypes fashioned earlier on by European white supremacists concerning the former. These stereotypes include seeing the black as thievish, the priapic stud, rapist, of low intelligence and moral standards (if any). This group, like its counterpart in *Livingstone’s Companions* sees a clear - and necessary - demarcation between the white self and the black other. Anything coming in between white and black is entirely out of the question. This study has found that in the middle of all this antipathy, there are a few white characters who seek to strike an understanding with the alterity. Their views are largely informed by liberalism. However, when the internal contradictions within this ideology are examined, the motives of such white characters lend themselves to thorough suspicion. Hence, there is actually no genuine desire, in whites, to either understand or accommodate the black other.

On the other hand, black characters’ reactions to their existential dilemma is found to be three - fold. One group is totally ignorant of its disadvantaged position. It persists in its blind adoration and adulation of the white other, awed and mesmerised by the latter’s seemingly superhuman abilities. This group appears content to let things continue as they are. The second group does not seem to understand that theirs is a servant - master relationship with/to the white other. Opportunists abound here who seek to ‘inherit’ what was previously owned by the whites in instances where the latter are dislodged from their pedestals of privilege. The third
The group consists of the western-schooled elite who, by virtue of their orientation, seem more comfortable with white traditions and practices than they are with those of their black people. The blacks as a corporate entity are thus found not to be actually prepared for any meaningful/enlightened appreciation of the white other. Where such accommodation occurs, the motivational impulses are found to be purely self-centred. The black characters' attitudes towards white alterity are thus seen to shift to exploit the new opportunities that avail themselves when whites are edged out of power. Changed social realities hence become reflected in the black character portraits that Gordimer draws.

The focal point of the fourth chapter is Jump. In this chapter the possibilities of striking an accommodation between the self and other in post-apartheid South Africa are discussed. If this is to be achieved, the study has found, individuals must reassess what it is that defines them as human and be ready to accept the fact that though the other may define itself by different parameters, legitimately so, the self and the other are all human. Inhibitive traditions, it is proposed, must be done away with for a common South African tradition, based on the collective self-other experience, to emerge. However, this does not mean that the place of cultural difference is not acknowledged. The emphasis is that any values adopted must be aimed at the achievement of the greater good of both self and other corporately and separately.

To assess further what options are open to a socially fractured South Africa, this study has done a brief discussion of July's people and found that at the time of its writing (1981) the general mood amongst the black population was towards armed rebellion. In Chapter Four of the study, it has been established that though Gordimer does not advocate for revolution, she points out that the only meaningful revolution must begin at the level of the individual. It is the
Smales’ children - Gina, Victor and Royce - and their black playmates, Nyikal for example, who embody an optimism that by far supercedes the confines of a false consciousness (Maureen’s for instance) located in the bourgeois liberalism of the black and white elite world. After the civil war, a truly cross-cultural society may grow. The revolution thus becomes the field in which the dissolution of the vestiges of racism, at the level of humanity, may occur. In these fields may germinate the seeds of an accommodative, multi-racial post-apartheid society. In this way Gordimer is found to have shown that the conflicts between self and otherness can/must be transcended.

5.2 Conclusion

The study as a whole has established that Gordimer has been able to articulate the realities of apartheid South Africa as faithfully as possible. In fact, Gordimer has done this even more convincingly than other writers (Abrahams and La Guma may be cited) who may be considered to be more attuned to the dynamics of black life. She goes beyond the surface and searches for motivations, linking these to the effects that manifest themselves on the network of social relationships between self and other.

The assumption that writers’ social mileu affects their characters and social vision is held to be only partly valid. The influence of Gordimer’s whiteness on her presentation of white characters cannot be convincingly gainsaid. This is why she is able, for instance, to fathom the ambivalence attached to Jewishness vis-a-vis the term 'white'. Understanding that the Jews, themselves white, have borne the brunt of other purists’ racial venom, she is able to see the capriciousness of the term 'white' even in the wider global context. In her writing Gordimer has portrayed white people’s experiences as only one who is familiar with the workings of a
white mind can. Yet, even while depicting authentic white images she has avoided - through a shrewd manipulation of narrative strategies - being part of this oppressor class, despite her being white. Her sensitiveness is seen in the fact that she does not attach any privileges to the colour white or depict negatively the Africans on account of their black colour. South Africans of all pigmentation are seen as having a legitimate claim to a space in South Africa, which should be seen as home to all those who adopt the attitude that it is their proper place.

The second assumption is found to hold when Gordimer’s characters are seen as participants in an on-going process of social change. These are the characters, black and white, who have come to the awareness that both self and other are intricately held together by a common destiny. This change in the characters’ attitudes springs from their knowledge of the indefensibility of the tenets on which apartheid is based. These characters are also aware of the need to shun the negative understanding enshrined in liberalism. The characters may not be overtly conscious of these facts but their actions, at least, are indicative of the self coming to terms with the other in changed social realities. These characters, priviliged or not, are not satisfied with who they are and seem to yearn, even at an individual level, for something fulfilling. An accommodation of the self by the other is seen as filling up that void.

5.3 Future Tasks

The concerns of this study have been directed primarily at three of Gordimer’s short story anthologies and one novel. It would be a challenging area of study if the conflicts between self and otherness in all of her short story anthologies and novels were examined. Though this study has raised the issue of the space leit-motif in Gordimer’s short stories, it would be worthwhile to study whether the quest for space both geographical and in terms of identity - pervades all of...
Gordimer’s novels. If so, what is the significance of this search for a space? This study has mentioned only two other works by other South African writers and it may be fruitful to make a comparative study of Gordimer along these writers.


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