

## **The Post- Apartheid Condition of Women Depicted in Nadine Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present***

**Aratrika Ganguly**  
Ph.D Research Scholar,  
Dept. of Comparative Indian Language and Literature,  
University of Calcutta.

**Article History:** Submitted-13/05/2021, Revised-12/06/2021, Accepted-13/06/2021, Published-30/06/2021.

### **Abstract:**

This paper undertakes a reading of the 'post'-colonial novel written in English in South Africa to bring into focus how women in Anglophone novels of Africa are represented through the writings of Anglophone women. This paper will explore the condition of women as represented in the Anglophone African novel *No Time Like the Present* (2012) written by the South African Anglophone writer, Nadine Gordimer. This paper will try to explore the relationship between the liberation of African countries from colonial rulers and the liberation of women from traditional patriarchal authority. The writer is using her novel to create this space and speak out to the world using the colonizer's language about the challenges women face in the modern, "post-independent" countries of Africa. In this paper, I am concerned with how the experiences of the writers as a woman and a former colonial subject have been reflected in the novel under study.

**Keywords:** Apartheid, Feminism, Patriarchy, Anglophone Africa, Nadine Gordimer.

Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer's novel *No Time Like the Present* is set in post-apartheid<sup>1</sup> South Africa. In this novel, the protagonist, Jabulile, a Zulu, marries a white man, Stephen. This novel revolves around their married life and the way they are coping up with post-apartheid Africa. Both were previously veterans of the war against the Apartheid regime. This book deals with how the relationship that took birth during the revolution stands up to the challenges posed by freedom from the shackles of apartheid in both their personal and political life, if this freedom really exists.

Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014) is the Nobel Laureate of South Africa and she was also a very active anti-apartheid activist whose writing career almost ran parallel to the apartheid era of South Africa. Just after apartheid ended, starting with the freedom of the eminent

revolutionary Nelson Mandela, after him serving twenty-seven years in prison in 1990, Gordimer received the “Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991 as an affirmation of her role in creating a literature to challenge apartheid, since the consolidation and ultimate dissolution of the political ideology occur alongside the publication of the fictions (1949-90)” (Head xi- xii). According to the famous scholar of Gordimer, Dominic Head, “Apartheid (separateness) was a political programme of separate development supposedly justified by the perception of Africans as a distinct subspecies of humanity, inferior to whites and who has no historical claim to the territory of Southern Africa.” (Head xi) Gordimer was one such writer who tried to bring harmony between these racial differences and in turn, wanted to portray a South Africa of the contemporary period.

South African literary identity, in Gordimer's conception, is really a quest to construct a hybridized cultural expression, a fusion of African culture and European literary form. Such a hybrid represents a way beyond the limitations of South African society where apartheid, by preventing different groups from knowing each other, restricts narrative possibilities. (Head xii)

Through the genre of the novel, she fought hard to bring about changes in the post-apartheid society and to let the world know about the situation of her country during the era of apartheid and after it ended. Gordimer's position is very critical because at one point she is standing by the side of the power group that she challenges through her writings and simultaneously she is an active anti-apartheid activist who was a regular candidate of demonstrations against the dictatorial rule of apartheid. While visiting other countries she would lecture on the difficulty of her country and the effects of apartheid. She was even known for hiding ANC (African National Congress) leaders in her own home to save them from the apartheid government. Gordimer's oeuvre “spans the entire period of apartheid in South Africa” (Head 2). Gordimer's entire collection of work can provide more material regarding the socio-politico-cultural condition of the society about the era of apartheid. Her novels describe intricately the phases of apartheid and what people exactly went through during this period.

There is an obvious ambivalence about Gordimer's historical position, as a privileged white attacking the social system that she is inevitably in complicity with to some degree, and this is a dilemma which all white South African writers have had to face. Gordimer's position with regard to this dilemma is, essentially, that despite the ‘self-

disgust' the situation might sometimes evoke in whites, the necessary task of historical transformation is really best served by working from within the nation, rather than from a position of self-imposed exile (if one has the choice). This is also an expression of the need to accept one's national identity, however uncomfortable that may be. (Head 4)

However, she is essentially African from the bottom of her heart, and she has described what it means to be a writer from Africa. As this literary enigma said in her own words:

My own definition is that African writing is writing done in any language by Africans themselves and by others of whatever skin colour who share with Africans the experience of having been shaped, mentally and spiritually, by Africa rather than anywhere else in the world. One must look at the world from Africa, to be an African writer, not look upon Africa from the world. (Head 5, 6)

There has been a tendency among scholars to claim that female novelists of Africa are apolitical because of their focus on domesticity. However, reading the novel, *No Time Like the Present* proves that this is not the situation at all. This novel is drenched in the socio-political system of South Africa where it is conceived and, in the time, it is conceived, and the author's experience of politics is reflected both in the domestic and political setting of this novel. One cannot claim African women novelists to be apolitical. It is not possible to be apolitical especially in the case of women who are twice colonized: first in terms of gender and then in the context of race. Their lives are more flooded in politics than their male counterparts. Correspondingly, Gordimer was a member of the African National Congress (ANC); she became a member of this present-day ruling party of South Africa when the party was banned by the apartheid government. She was a huge supporter of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM). Her writings have reflected her stance very boldly and still today this Nobel Prize winner in literature has been considered as one of the major writers in the world who took pen and paper seriously to condemn and protest the colonial machinery of the state.

Gordimer's political identity was very much shaped by her family. Her mother was very much concerned about the plight of the black children, and she opened a day-care for them. She has done much for the writers as well as she was one of the founding members of the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) that tried to minimize the damage caused to the writers of South Africa by the white government that imposed the policy of apartheid on the country. Her compositions focus on the themes of both politics and love and how they influence a person's life. Even in *No Time Like the Present*, the lives of the protagonists Jabu

and Steve are related to politics, and it was the main reason why they fell in love subsequently and got married. Politics was something that brought them closer and shaped their love life and their later life as well. The relations between the 'political' and the 'personal' get blurred in her works and it consequently reveals the situation of the country and the position of the women as well. The relationship between the novel and politics in the work of Gordimer can be understood by how the writer treats the broad political themes in this novel. The women characters are analysed in their political setting and this perception of politics is tied not only to immediate contemporary issues but also to a wider understanding of politics. The oppression faced by the women characters of these novels is presented uniquely by the writers. There is a challenge on the writer's shoulder to represent the political sphere politically correct in their writings to do justice to the women characters. Post-independent African literature faces this problem. Here, politics is mentioned in a wider sense as in how humans relate to one another and with their environment.

Gordimer's feminism has been studied by many scholars from many angles and they have agreed how politics and feminism are intricately joined in her works.

Gordimer has moved from political ignorance to a profound politicality, from aspects of a racist mental world to one approaching a revolutionary alignment. She has progressed from an account of growing up as a woman to a politicized feminism adapted to the realities of South Africa...Clingman might mean that, unlike some other articulations of feminist politics, Gordimer's is 'adapted to the realities of South Africa' in its attentiveness to race as a factor which constitutes, limits and regulates women's lives in different ways. But there is another way of reading 'politicized.' Clingman might be arguing that her later feminism is 'politicized' in comparison to what comes before it-that is, that 'an account of growing up as a woman' is non-political, and her later writing is more political to the extent that it moves away from this kind of personal story, towards representing women making political choices and involved in political movements. (Hogg and Jones 52)

Although she has advocated for women's rights and very clearly depicted the women characters in her works, still her stance on feminism is very different. Gordimer's viewpoint on racism and sexism are very different and although all her works are sensitive to the woman's cause, however, she puts more emphasis on racism than sexism.

In her fiction she has pursued her political analyses primarily through her own brand of micropolitics or politics of the body, in which question of sexual expression and transgression are closely linked to racial consciousness...In a number of interviews Gordimer has expressed impatience with the feminist movement, an attitude which might seem strange in a writer whose fictions are particularly sensitive to the problems of women's oppression. The following is a representative comment, taken from a 1982 interview:

The white man and the white woman have much more in common...Similarly the black man and the black woman have much more in common...The basis of colour cuts right through the sisterhood or brotherhood of sex. It bold down to the old issue of prejudice and the suppression of blacks of both sexes...That's why Women's Liberation is, I think, a farce in South Africa.

Gordimer is clear here, as elsewhere in her non-fictional statements, that racism is the primary issue and sexism a secondary one. (Head 19)

This viewpoint is very clear, though in *No Time Like the Present*, she is also empathetic towards the causes of the women characters, and she portrays their life in the post-apartheid society in a sensitive manner. Gordimer creates a narrative that is not only not patriarchal, but not racist as well. Consequently, it can be said that her oeuvre creates a parallel narrative in post-independent, post-colonial South Africa that is free from the predisposition of patriarchy and racism.

Jabu is a lawyer in South Africa, and she is black, and Steve is a Professor of Chemistry who is white. Moreover, Steven Reed is a non-practicing Jew and Jabulile Gumede is a Zulu<sup>2</sup> Methodist. They bought their house in a former Afrikaner town. Their interracial love and marriage form the backbone of the novel. Steve and Jabu's life in the suburbs is still haunted by the fact that they were anti-apartheid revolutionaries. Their shared political passion and past have made them come together. Later, when they were married with a child; they started feeling the more bourgeois problems of life; some typical middle-class problems weighing over their life and their relationship and marriage. There is an "interdependence of public and private realm" (Head 15) in this novel and Jabu and Steve's story runs parallel to the events happening in the post-apartheid situation in South Africa. In post-apartheid South Africa, they face the turmoil of a country that has not yet adjusted to its new situation. The totalitarian regime of apartheid has caused a lot of trouble for this inter-racial couple. Apartheid was totalitarian because it was a vast, single administration that used dictatorship and tried to bring everyone

under their racially segregated laws that resulted in the torture of millions of South African people. Apartheid was officially over in the '90s, but its after-effect still lingers on the country like a dark shadow. This couple is struggling to understand their role in the ever-changing modern society. Jabu and Steve's different upbringings become clear in post-apartheid South Africa, and it was not that evident when both were working under the same armed forces and struggling to be with each other. The "Struggle" always emphasized with a capital S denotes how the existence of this married couple is due to the Struggle only and in the future where the Struggle is not present, their marriage also goes through many upheavals and their differences and attitude towards life are coming out. Every issue mentioned in this novel like the hiring of a black maidservant, holidaying in England, sending Sindiswa and Elias to private schools, and living in a former Afrikaner town becomes major issues in their life after the "Struggle".

Interracial marriage and love are the key themes of this novel. They got married when their marriage was still considered illegal. Later they settled down among closed ones when their union was not illegal anymore. After apartheid was officially over and the ANC became the ruling party, Steve and Jabu settled among friends, not as outlaws, but respectable and honoured citizens of the country. As if fighting for their country men's existence was not enough, they now must fight for the typical middle-class existence they are going to live and which was not their kind of life, although in which they preferred to settle down and start a family. As the renowned psychologist, Maria P. P. Root starts her book, *Love's Revolution: Interracial Marriage*, with these lines:

Love promises happiness and wholeness. Contemporary marriage suggests that fulfilment of these promises is invaluable and worth sacrifices. With love as a beacon, a couple commits to a constructive and transformative phase of their life...Families support this ideology of love so long as their children uphold two conventions in their choice of partners. Marry within your race. Marry someone of the opposite sex." (Root 1)

It becomes very important for our society that men and women marry within their same race only and it becomes a threat to the homogenous social structure when another race gets involved in marital relations. It is also a threat to the purity of genes as the offspring of this kind of relationship will not have the purity of blood- the kind that patriarchal society demands. In post-independent Africa, it was common to have interracial marriages, but while apartheid was the dominant political position of the country, inter-racial marriages were banned. The

Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 was revoked in 1985. These kinds of laws are always a violent breach of privacy. Jabu and Steve also felt the same; his white Jewish ancestry and her black Zulu blood made their relationship illegal. This is one of the major ways patriarchy operates by controlling the institution of marriage. Also, it is a way Eurocentric patriarchy can control whom one can marry and who one cannot, and this way controls the person from not getting involved with other races to maintain the so-called purity of the race. The child of a white man and black woman is a coloured person who gets less respect in an Afrikaner society and as this novel suggests even after apartheid ended the situation did not improve much. “She was black, he was white. That was all that mattered. It was in those two identities that they transgressed” (Gordimer 1).

Even while renting their new residence, they faced discrimination against Jabu’s racial background. They were given the apartment on the guarantee “that although the woman was black these were reliable tenants who wouldn’t fill the house with immigrant refugees or whatever they were” (Gordimer 12). As human beings are social, so acceptance is very much important for any relationship to survive and only if the bond is very strong can it survive the prejudices of the society. Likewise, interracial marriages help people to accept the fact that their country is a multiracial one. It is one of the reasons why Steve and Jabu’s child was accepted well by the family of Jabu in KwaZulu<sup>3</sup>. In post-independent South Africa coloured children themselves formed an entire race and not accepting them would be denying the right of existence to one major half of the population of the country. Another situation that arises in any inter-racial marriage is the fact that during any family occasion the partner will be the only white or black member present and inevitably all eyes would be drawn to them because people still identify each other through their race. When Steve and Jabu were invited to the barmitzva<sup>4</sup> of Steve’s nephew, Jabu was “the only black woman” (Gordimer 47) present. This reality hit hard on Steve as well and his feelings are revealed when he says to himself, “My Jabu is a woman the same as your Brenda is a woman, same rights-must I spell them out” (Gordimer 46). In post-apartheid Africa, when racial segregation finally started to dissolve, the racial condition did not completely change. Inter-racial marriage was still taboo and bringing a black woman into the home of a white family was still seen with suspicious eyes. This was the reaction of one of the guests, who has come to the occasion, “Never mind the racist thing...it still must be strange, with a black woman...at least at the beginning, no?” (Gordimer 50) On the other hand, interracial marriage is a great step towards striving for equality, and especially in a multi-racial country like South Africa it can strive for bringing the races together and

marriage is the best option to break the barriers of races that have plagued the world since ages. The hangover of apartheid can also decrease by such marriages and people can finally treat each other as humans and not as a symbol of any race. In Jabu's situation, her identity is not only getting hazy because of her marriage to a white man, but as an African Christian, her name denotes conflicting identities as well. One half of her name was African and the other half Christian. "The Bible was the source of baptismal first names along with the second, African ones, with which white people, whom the child would grow up to have to please, deal with in this world, had no association of identity. Rebecca Jabulile" (Gordimer 2).

Although Steve's parents were both from different religions- his mother was Jew and his father "normally observant Christian" (Gordimer 2), nonetheless what mattered in the racially segregated country of South Africa was the act that his "elements were white" (Gordimer 2) and there was not a single drop of black blood within him. Hence, the identity of the people depends on their race. Gordimer has powerfully sketched these problems through the inter-racial love story of Jabu and Steve. Their backgrounds are essentially different and the very traditional Zulu childhood of Jabu has made her very different from her husband.

They were pleased to walk out and find shrubs beyond that half-hid the wall that was overhung with shade from a neighbour's tree-Acacia.-But she was not interested in the identification. As a kid given every advantage he was taken to plant nurseries with his father and learnt to match botanical names to certain trunks, leaves and bark. She had learnt on walks with her grandmother in the forests of Zululand what wild fruits were safe and good to eat. (Gordimer 11)

Post-apartheid, citizen's lives have changed in South Africa. The traditional role of the wife as a homemaker also changed. The largest ethnic community of South Africa, the Zulu people, treat women in the utmost patriarchal ways possible. The wives are always subservient to their husbands. However, in Jabu's situation like many other women living in the post-colonial society the times have changed and so their lifestyle. Now her daughter Sindiswa was kept in "day-care" because both she and Steve were working parents. Jabu's contemporary lifestyle would not let her spend much time with her daughter or her family. Among all the changes of the post-colonial society, motherhood was something that has changed much and probably for the betterment of women who now finally were able to choose what they wanted to do and like Jabu they were becoming free to pursue their career while simultaneously maintaining their family. Yet, one fact that did not change was the concept of fatherhood as



revealed by men. As Gordimer describes fatherhood in describing the relationship between Steve and their daughter Sindiswa, “He is saying as he lifts Sindiswa flying high on the way to bedtime (fathering is something the older generation, white and black, segregated themselves from” (Gordimer 7). Thus, fatherhood was not nurtured well by both the blacks and the whites and in this one situation patriarchy works together in creating a similar trait among men for whom fatherhood never seemed important, and the nurture and care that the baby deserves is mainly thought to be the woman’s duty. The patriarchal expectation equates femininity with marriage as well as motherhood and that is why it becomes unimaginable for men to become equal partners in case of parenting a child. Even a man like Steve who is both educated and liberal-minded was not that much involved in parenting their children- Sindiswa and Elias. On contrary, Jabu’s relationship with her father is exceptional in this novel. They share a bond that cuts across time and space. Her traditional Zulu father, additionally the Elder of the Methodist Church was like her friend. Her mindset has been influenced a lot by her father when she was a child. He always supported her education unlike the others in her community. It was always the male members of the family who had the privilege to go to school and Jabu’s admission to a mission school paved a way for the emancipation of women. It is in these small steps the bigger freedom can be found. It was her father who sends Jabu to the teacher’s training college of Swaziland<sup>5</sup>. Her father made her realize that there is “No time like the present” and it is her signal to venture out to a new country to write her destiny. This is a tremendous step towards the liberation of women since the other female members of her household entirely stayed away from education. He even communicated with her as discreetly as possible when she was detained in the women’s prison in Johannesburg. The only time they had fallout was on the matter of Jacob Zuma, the fourth President of the country, faced rape charges and bribe charges. Even after knowing everything her father would proudly and blindly support Zuma which she opposed and then he almost compared his daughter with the whites because she opposed a black man, and it is evident in this context that in post-apartheid South Africa every issue is analysed through the lens of race.

On the issue of motherhood, Gordimer has not much delved about in this novel. Jabu loves her children very much and wants the best for them just like any other mother. Nevertheless, she wants a son to be born when she gets pregnant for the second time. It was not because of the patriarchal mindset of begetting sons that many women have due to societal and religious issues, but Jabu believes that “A son doesn’t have predetermined by what’s between his legs, his function in any extended family, at Home or in that of the world. He’s

born free. At least in this sense. She wants a son, everything she isn't. It's the other, to complete the fulfilment of favourable court judgment" (Gordimer, 61). This is what happens when women are constantly deprived of their needs and rights. Consequently, she wants a son because her maternal instinct wants her child to be happy; to be safe, and to be free. This shows the condition of the society of South Africa post-apartheid and how it can make a free-spirited woman like Jabu crave for a son just to see her would-be child happy who can be free from the shackles of patriarchy.

Jabu is an independent woman who is also capable of deciding things for herself. She decided who she wanted to marry, what profession she wanted to pursue, and what cause she was fighting for. She even left her teaching job to pursue a career in law. This is a major example of the little changes in women's life in independent South Africa. Jabu is a perfect example- from being the perfect daughter to the revolutionary to being a career woman and then being a wife and mother, she has handled it all well and still learning how to accommodate her values and teachings in her evolving daily life. She later started working in a human rights organization named the Justice Centre. In this way she was able to stay a part of the cause she fought for all her life; she devoted her life to that cause. Jabu's independence and freedom in her career choice also reflect the support of Steve and it shows the society has been evolving post-apartheid and finally, women were able to come out of their designated gendered roles. Her switching careers are another indication of this major phenomenon. Although, in her workplace, one of her colleagues, "whose patriarchal white face did not match his feared cross-examination techniques" (Gordimer 57), will be surprised on hearing her unexpected questions and it was not just the surprise of hearing a woman speak, but a black woman speaks. As a result, sexism and racism still lurk around in the workplace even if progress happens in society.

Steve has an affair in London when he goes there for a conference. Steve cheated on Jabu with Lindsay Wilson, the white English woman who was in public relations, whom he met in England. From the beginning, there was sexual tension between them, and they finally consummated their relationship before Steve left for South Africa. When Steve went on to have sexual pleasure with her, he did not give a thought about Jabu and his family because for him, "What was between them has nothing to do with anything. No relation to others, private and public commitment, loyalties...What was between them had nothing to do with consistency in life. A reality outside reality. Just real in itself" (Gordimer 180-184). Steve's breach of his monogamous marriage is not affecting him at all and for him, it had nothing to do with reality.

It is the classic example of infidelity where the cheating partner attempts to reason his breaking of his promise of his fidelity with excuses to justify their actions. If one has not promised fidelity, then one has the right to be polygamous, although when the unsigned contract of fidelity comes, then this kind of behaviour can be considered as cheating. It is the man satisfying his ego by bedding other women other than his wife and it is the height of patriarchal traits among human beings that makes them break their promises of fidelity. Jabu would never find out about this relationship, she will always be in the dark about what happened behind her back. In Steve's mindset it is also the white man's ego that made him have a sexual relationship with another white woman; one belonging to his race. Steve, who had fought against apartheid all his life, still has the white, patriarchal consciousness ingrained in his mind. If it had not for the "Struggle" or if life was different for him, he might not have chosen Jabu at all. As is evident from his thoughts, "Or was it a snatch of the alternative, what life might have been if there hadn't been the Struggle, if he had been produced only by the private whites-only school, its greensward a Mother Country import, and grown up to a money-making profession, the corporates" (Gordimer 185).

Human beings are polygamous by nature and thus monogamy becomes stifling for humanity, but when one enters monogamy, one is expected to honour the promise, one has made to their partner. When people who are polygamous tries to forcefully stay in a monogamous relationship because of some of the other reasons, they cheat on their partner as monogamy becomes stifling for them. In these cases, monogamy becomes the ultimate hypocrisy of the patriarchal society, which tries to control the reproduction and claim of paternity and tries to control the property by the heir that the woman begets. Thus, monogamy is also a way through which patriarchy prevails. About monogamy Engels said:

It was not in any way the fruit of individual sex-love, with which it had nothing whatever to do; marriages remained as before marriages of convenience. It was the first form of the family to be based, not on natural, but on economic conditions – on the victory of private property over primitive, natural communal property... Thus when monogamous marriage first makes its appearance in history, it is not as the reconciliation of man and woman, still less as the highest form of such a reconciliation. Quite the contrary. Monogamous marriage comes on the scene as the subjugation of the one sex by the other; it announces a struggle between the sexes unknown throughout the whole previous prehistoric period. (Engels 34-35)

Homophobia has been synonymous in the world since sexual orientation other than heterosexuality has existed on the planet. Homosexuality has existed all over the world for centuries and it has even been celebrated in many cultures but with the imposition of patriarchy in religions and then colonialism, homosexuality, and all other kinds of gender and sexual orientations (i.e., other than the normative gender roles of male and female and the heterosexual orientation) have been viewed with a suspicious eye. Patriarchy is again operating under these situations and not conforming to the heterosexual ideal means that one is not considered normal. Feminism looks at homophobia and the rights of the Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, queer (LGBTQ) people because like female human beings they too face the same kind of oppression created by the male, heterosexual society. With second-wave feminism of the 1960s came the liberation movement for the LGBT people as well. However, the situation has not been better since the 1960s and still, there are places where it is not legalized by the national governments and even in countries like South Africa, which was the first country to remove discrimination against the LGBT people, the society, and the outlook of the people have not changed much. Although taking same-sex partnership is lawful, but then society makes a mockery and humiliates the people who chose to go against heteronormative patriarchal norms. In the novel *No Time Like the Present*, the gay neighbours of Jabu and Steve often become the discussion of their rendezvous with their former "comrades" and a subject of ridicule and mockery as well. When at first Jabu and Steve went to the house of their friends Jake and Isa, they encountered the gay men; it was before they have shifted to the same area. Among the friends the conversations regarding their gay neighbours went on as follows, "Who are the frolicking owners who've taken over? Pierre answers whomever's question. - It's one of our gay families. - More laughter-this is the final blasphemy, housed" (Gordimer 9).

Through this representation of the gay men not only Gordimer reflects the condition of the society where revolutionaries and progressive people like Jabu and Steve are revealed as homophobic, but it is a call to her readers to realize that it is time that the oppressed people suffering under the male, heterosexual, misogynistic world must protest all kinds and form of oppression and unlawful control. Steve's brother Alan is also a gay man, and his sexuality was though accepted by his mother Pauline very feely, but their father Andrew had a hard time accepting it. Just for the sake of his son's happiness, he did not object, but in his heterosexual mind, it was very appalling.

Andrew, his father, had accepted that his son among his sons made 'love' to men (yes, entering the place of shit) a version of sexual desire; he couldn't understand how this

chosen deprivation of the love of women, the place for perfect consummation in their lovely bodies, could come about. He loved his son and continued to show it, and did not let appear what he felt on his son's behalf. Not disgust: regret. He could not go so far as behaving exceptionally welcoming to Alan's lovers, as Pauline did, as if they were the same as the other sons' wives, the producers of grandchildren. Hard for him to dictate to himself: so long as he's happy. (Gordimer 34)

On the same note, Steve's family knew not how to accept Jabulile as part of their family. The uneasy situation between the blacks and the whites is depicted in these lines, "One sister-in-law, wife of Steve's brother Jonathan, rather overdoes it; Brenda flings her arms around Jabu, kisses, rocks their bodies together, pulls back her face to Jabu as in delighted discovery. This with every arrival and departure from a gathering" (Gordimer 21). The "delighted discovery" is the inherent nature of the colonials rather than the whites to discover their opponents in the black- the savage, the inferior race. Even when his family members take Jabu to an African restaurant, one of his siblings Alan says that he liked this new food joint because it was "exotic for us whites" (Gordimer 21). Even after having a family member who is black, they are still not over their colonial attitude. Gordimer shows through this novel that interracial marriages are a big step towards nullifying racial differences in the minds of people, nonetheless, her country has a long way to go to achieve that kind of prejudice-free mind where human beings are considered human irrespective of the number of melanin pigments they bear on their skin.

Another delicate topic touched on in this novel is abortion, which Jabu prefers to do when she realized that both she and her husband do not need a third child. It was legal and their doctor friend helped Jabu to go through the process. This is a great step towards a woman's emancipation because after all it is her body, and she has the right to decide whether she wants to keep the foetus or not. Whatever she does she has the right to decide even if she is married. The patriarchal society, however, never considers her as an autonomous being and her body becomes the site for oppression and rights are taken away from her body; she is not allowed to decide whether wants to go through a certain situation that is related to her body. The campaigns for women's reproductive rights were born during the 19th century. "The most important victory of the contemporary birth control movement was won during the early 1970s when abortions were at last declared legal" (Davis 203). Nevertheless, during this time it did not include women of colour or black women altogether. In Gordimer's country, medical termination of pregnancy got legal in 1996 when the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act

was passed by the government. A woman can choose to continue with her pregnancy or terminate it, but this freedom of hers should not be curbed by the government or society. Jabu's decision about medically terminating her pregnancy and the way she handled it seems like one step forward for the women of South Africa. Another problem that has been mentioned in the novel i.e., faced by inter-racial couples are the issue of language. Language is always subtle, yet a barrier between any inter-racial couple. Between Steve and Jabu too the same happened. Sindiswa's speaking of her mother's language with her mother and Jabu's speaking in her language with the luggage movers before going to their new place, bothered Steve a lot. It was not just his feeling of getting linguistically segregated from Jabu's world and their daughter's world, but somewhat the patriarchal feeling of not getting importance from the women in his life because he was not getting initiated into their world and it made him feel inferior in certain ways.

Gordimer was a white African female novelist. Both her parents were Jewish immigrants and from Europe. Her childhood was unique, and she was raised in a secular family whereas she went into a Catholic school. Brought up in the small town of Springs situated near Johannesburg, she saw a lot of upheaval of the apartheid era during her childhood. In that town, the social hierarchy was very much present and on the upper strata of the society as usual the colonial powers were present; then falls on the second place are the Afrikaners and then the immigrants like Gordimer's family and at last comes the black Africans- the worst treated people in the apartheid era. Her writings mainly focus on the repressed non-white people of the apartheid regime. She grew up in a community where apartheid was a very common phenomenon, but still, she opposed apartheid in all her writings. She even helped in editing the famous 1964 speech given by the first President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela titled "I am prepared to die". In her last novel written before her death in 2014, *No Time Like the Present*, the book also deals with apartheid, but here it is all about life after apartheid and how it still haunts the memory and presence of the citizens of South Africa. Apartheid left, but the hangover is still there. It still lingers within the shadow of the 'neo'-colonial regime. Gordimer has been the spokesperson of apartheid and by writing in the language of the colonizers she has helped in spreading the knowledge of apartheid to a wider audience. Similarly, writing about women makes us aware of the women's perspective of apartheid through literature. A woman writer creates a parallel narrative that has always existed in society, and it can make us see a lot of events in a new light that generally gets distorted by the lens of patriarchy. She has asked with boldness difficult questions relating to the future of her country, relating to the problems

its citizens face in the post-apartheid era, and what are the solutions to it? Is it leaving the country because of one attack on your home and other situational problems faced by you and your family, as Steve and Jabu decide to emigrate to Australia for a better life? Through the decision of this couple's emigration, Gordimer has asked the question of how much we need to act in the present for the sake of our family and whether it is wise to choose one's safety and family's security instead of one's country that is decaying morally and socially every single passing day. Steve never had a second thought about emigration, but for Jabu, it was painful because of her roots so entrapped in the country, because of her Zulu identity that was unique to her country alone; for Steve somehow probably never got attached with South Africa; the country of the blacks even though he had fought for it once when he fought against apartheid. Probably, him being white, South Africa was another country like Australia where he could settle and call the place home just like the colonizers did- moving from Africa to Asia to Australia and so on. For the white people, Africa has been their centre of attraction mainly because they have wanted to go back to the roots of humanity. It was also the eagerness and curiosity of the global north to find more about a world that they considered as an antithesis to their world. Through this novel, Gordimer has tried to ask how much we need to give for our family's sake or give up for our country's sake. This novel deals with the 'now' - there is stress on the 'now'; on the 'present'. Bearing its namesake this novel put stress on the present period and it is like almost a wake-up call to the people of South Africa or anyone facing repression that they should start fighting against oppression and start living their life according to their own beliefs and values. In the era of the Black Lives Matter movement, it becomes crucial to fight for human beings irrespective of their colour. Gordimer is among those who show us this way through the literature.

### Notes

1. Apartheid- System of racial segregation imposed on South Africa by the white colonial government that went from 1948-1990's.
2. Zulu- One of the largest ethnic groups of Southern Africa.
3. KwaZulu- It was created during the apartheid regime for the Zulu people; this homeland was semi-independent and was made only for the Zulu people.
4. Barmitzvah- a Jewish ceremony.
5. Swaziland- a land-locked country in Southern Africa.

**Works Cited:**

Achebe, Chinua. *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. Anchor Books, 1990.

Adichie, Amanda N. *We Should All Be Feminists*. Fourth Estate, 2017.

Bunch, Charlotte. "Not By Degrees: Feminist Theory and Education (1983)". *Feminisms: a Reader*. Humm, Maggie, editor. Routledge, 2016, pp 172.

Caro, Mina De. "'A WELL-READ WOMAN IS A DANGEROUS CREATURE.'" Does Literature Have a Gender?" Mina's Bookshelf, 26 June 2014, [minadecaro.blogspot.in/2014/06/a-well-read-woman-is-dangerous-creature.html](http://minadecaro.blogspot.in/2014/06/a-well-read-woman-is-dangerous-creature.html).

Chanda, Ipsita (Ipshita). "Creating Communities: Anglophone African Drama in Postcolonial Reconstruction." *African Literatures: Remembrances and Constructions*. Bandyopadhyay, Manabendra, editor. Vol. 4, Bhaskar Banerjea, 1997, pp 86.

Charleswell, Cherise. "Herstory: The Origins and Continued Relevancy of Black Feminist Thought in the United States." *Women's Issues*, 27 Feb. 2014, pp. 1–15.

Davis, Angela. *Women, Race and Class*. Vintage Books, 1983.

Eilersen, Gillian Stead. *Bessie Head -Thunder Behind Her Ears: Her Life and Writing*. Heinemann, 1995.

Engels, Friedrich. "Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State." *Marxists*, [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin\\_family.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf).

Fanon, Franz. "Black Skin, White Masks." 2008. *Abahlali*, [abahlali.org/files/\\_Black\\_Skin\\_\\_White\\_Masks\\_\\_Pluto\\_Classics\\_.pdf](http://abahlali.org/files/_Black_Skin__White_Masks__Pluto_Classics_.pdf).

Griffiths, Ieuan. "The Scramble for Africa: Inherited Political Boundaries." *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 152, no. 2, 1986, pp. 204–216. JSTOR, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/634762](http://www.jstor.org/stable/634762).

Gordimer, Nadine. *No Time Like the Present*. Bloomsbury, 2012.

Gordimer, Nadine. "The Essential Gesture: Writers and Responsibility." 1984. *Tannerlectures.utah*, [tannerlectures.utah.edu/\\_documents/a-to-z/g/gordimer85.pdf](http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/g/gordimer85.pdf).



Head, Dominic. *Nadine Gordimer*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

“Her Story | BBC World Service.” *BBC*, *BBC*,

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/arts/features/womenwriters/aidoo\\_life.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/arts/features/womenwriters/aidoo_life.shtml).

Irele, Abiola. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. Indiana University Press, 1990.

Lenin, Vi. “First All-Russia Congress of Working Women.” 1918. *Marxists*, Introduction to the Metaphysics of Morals by Immanuel Kant, [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/nov/19.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/nov/19.htm).

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Fingerprint Classics, 2017.

“Mbaasem.” *Mbaasem*, [mbaasem.wordpress.com/](http://mbaasem.wordpress.com/).

Ngcobo, Laurretta. “African Motherhood- Myth and Reality”. Olaniyan, Tejumola, and Ato Quayson, editors. *African Literature An Anthology of Criticism and Literary Theory*. Blackwell Publishing, 2007. pp533.

Petchesky, Rosalind. “Abortion and Woman’s Choice: The State, Sexuality, And Reproductive Freedom (1985)”. *Feminisms: a Reader*. Humm, Maggie, editor. Routledge, 2016, pp 294.

Rich, Adrienne. “Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution.” W.W. Norton and Company. *PDF* file.

Root, Maria P.P. “Love's Revolution.” *Google Books*, Google, [books.google.co.in/books?id=-im2X0hbpv8C&printsec=frontcover&dq=interracialmarriage&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjRgZX33ILbAhUMr48KHUSYD6oQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=interracialmarriage&f=true](https://books.google.co.in/books?id=-im2X0hbpv8C&printsec=frontcover&dq=interracialmarriage&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjRgZX33ILbAhUMr48KHUSYD6oQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=interracialmarriage&f=true).

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Penguin Books, 2019.

Sircar, Roopali. *The Twice Colonised: Women in African Literature*. 1st ed., Creative Books, 1995.

“The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature.” Edited by Angelyn Mitchell and Danille K. Taylor, 2009. *Google Books*, *Google*,

[books.google.co.in/books?id=GFQWIgOGJQAC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The  
Cambridge Companion to African American Women's  
Literature\).&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiwitDasZDbAhXMto8KHVYADTIQ6AE  
IKDAA#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.in/books?id=GFQWIgOGJQAC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+Cambridge+Companion+to+African+American+Women's+Literature.&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiwitDasZDbAhXMto8KHVYADTIQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q&f=false).

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa. *Decolonising the Mind*. Worldview Publications, 2007.