



APARTHEID EFFECTS ON SOCIETY AND NADINE GRODIMER: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Before 1991, when the South Africa's apartheid laws was repealed, to be personally liberated and to be South African was to be sunk to a continuing struggle between the desire for further freedom and development for oneself and the desire for the liberation of the country's oppressed masses. The question was whether one could pursue both effectually. South Africa was a nation in which a white legislature announces laws that made it impossible for the overwhelming majority of black people to advance themselves. Apartheid, which in Africans means "apartness," was the law of the land. It became codified after the Nationalists came to power in 1948.

Keywords: *apartheid, racism, feminism, slavery, African American struggle, sexism etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Nadine Gordimer's novels are centers on the ongoing examination of the possible combinations of the private life and the public life. She creates a gallery of characters ranging from pure hedonists concerned only with their own pleasure to those who have committed their lives to bringing liberty, equality, and solidarity to South Africa. Her most interesting characters are those who are ruined and torn by the struggle, those who want to be themselves and yet find it impossible to take personal goals seriously in a society built on the exploitation of blacks.

There are also some great writers, such as James Joyce and Thomas Mann; they believed that to write freely one must live in a free country. During the 1920's, a quite a few American



writers disgusted with American values chose to become nonnative. Other writers, such as the great Russians Fyodor Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Aleksandra Solzhenitsyn, believe that nothing could be more oppressive to them than to be separated from their fellow citizens, however oppressive the government of their country might be. With some of her books banned, with some charge or other always dangling over her head, with her passport liable to be lifted at any time, Gordimer undoubtedly was tempted to go into exile and live in a free country. She always, however, returned to Johannesburg. To her, the accident of being born in a particular place imposed obligations, and having become a writer with an international reputation imposed special obligations. At the cost of the personal freedom and the very air of freedom that could be hers elsewhere, she remained in South Africa during the apartheid years, living with frustration and danger, a witness to the power of compassion and hope.

Nadine Gordimer's fictional characters show resentment with social class, expected cultural roles, and place. In her fictional novels, the conflicting notions of space and self are tied to gender, social status and identity. Gordimer's characters are victims of circumstance, of birth, place where they belong to, but in addition to the feeling of exile linked to these factors, her fiction draws attention to female spheres, communal spaces, domesticity, and sexuality. This paper will examine the role of female feminist literary perspective as well as apartheid though Gordimer's relationship with black racism and feminism was at the best tentative.

Nadine Gordimer's short story "Once Upon a Time" is a chilling depiction of systematic segregation of races in South Africa, a period known as apartheid. Gordimer presents a story as a "fairytale," in which upper class family constructed wall around their property to protect themselves from people of another color. One day family got backfires and their little boy becomes trapped in the razor wire on top of the wall and bleeds to death. Gordimer focuses largely on the actions of the white family and their direct consequences. However, an examination of one character – the trusted housemaid, who is black, does a critical insight on the complex social and political issues of the time. While Gordimer's description of the black housemaid is minimal, the way she navigates her position is revealing; the housemaid's relations with her own race are characterized by isolation, fear, and discrimination. In "Once Upon a Time," Nadine Gordimer's portrayal of the trusted housemaid reveals a subtle, but salient symptom of institutionalized racism: the harmful divisions that occur within groups. Ultimately, the housemaid's actions are not reflections of her own inherent racism, but the product of the larger social context of apartheid.

Gordimer simply describes the housemaid as "trusted", this is very effective for the reader's understanding of the social situation under apartheid. In a story that depicts the forced, physical separation of races. "People of another color were not allowed into the suburb except as reliable housemaids, so there was nothing to fear. Gordimer's repetition of the



phrase “trusted housemaid” throughout the story reassures both the reader and the family that the housemaid will not do any harm. If the housemaid were not described with this label, she would be just another threatening “person of another color”. This shows us how deeply we all are wounded by this apartheid.

These details are key to understanding the trusted housemaid’s actions and role in the story. Unsurprisingly, the housemaid recognizes this “misfortune befalling a friend” as a possible threat to her own safety. Thus, by drawing attention to inter-group animosity, Gordimer presents the reader with a complex picture of the fear, oppression and discrimination of apartheid. The simply rational fear, the housemaid’s actions are symptoms of the larger social context of institutionalized racism. They cannot, and should not, be viewed as reflections of genuine racist sentiments of the housemaid herself. The housemaid’s internalized oppression would not exist without the initial external oppressors. Similarly, the social and political unrest that contributes to the housemaid’s acute fear would not exist if apartheid had not been implemented in the first place. Gordimer’s characterization of the housemaid highlights these complexities, and the omission of a direct explanation for the housemaid’s actions suggests that there is no simple explanation. The housemaid’s position between racial worlds makes her acutely aware of the complex and vicious social situation of her country. This awareness feeds into her actions—they are not aimed at effectively straddling the racial rift, but staying as far away from it as possible. In this way, she tragically, unwittingly contributes to the further division of her race.

What matters is that the housemaid’s seemingly racist acts are merely symptoms of the larger social disease of apartheid. Today, nearly 20 years after the official end apartheid in South Africa, the country still grapples with the after effects of half a century of institutionalized racism. As racial animosity persists even after the formal institution of equality, it is tempting to shift the blame onto minority groups. However, placing the blame onto the oppressed is not only unfair, but it is inaccurate. Now, more than ever, it is critical to remember that the complex and vicious consequences of apartheid originate from the oppressor, and not the oppressed. Indeed, although “Once Upon a Time” does not present any possibilities for subverting the apartheid system and the social tensions it creates, it does come with a warning approaching the situation from a place of just born and ignorance has potentially grave consequences.

Nadine Gordimer’s work has grown into a profoundly psychological and social chronicle of half a century in South Africa. She is both its archivist and lighthouse keeper. Above her collected experience, the light sweeps, illuminating parts that would otherwise have lain in darkness, helping us navigate towards a South Africa that, far from being geographically cut off and politically ostracised, depicts a universal landscape.



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