

Racism in Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*

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Abstract

Post-Colonialism is the study of the legacy of the era of European, and sometimes French or Dutch, direct global domination, which ended roughly in the mid-twentieth century and the residual Political, Racial, Socio-economic and Psychological effects of that colonial history. Post colonialism examines the manner in which emerging societies grapple with the challenge of self-determination and how they incorporate or reject western norms and conversions. Themes like Racism, Identity crisis and Dualism can be placed under the theory of post-colonialism. Literary works of the African continent's African literature consists of a body of work in different and various genres ranging from oral literature to literature written in colonial languages. Oral literature, including stories, dramas, riddles, histories, myths, songs, proverbs and other genres is frequently employed to educate or entertain children, oral histories myths and proverbs additionally serve to remind whole communities of their ancestors' heroic deeds, their past and the precedents of their customs and traditions essential to oral literature are matters for presentation and oratory.

Racism is prejudice, discrimination, or antagonisms directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior; modern variants are often based on social perception of biological differences between people. These can take the form of social actions, practices and beliefs, or political systems that consider different races to be ranked as inherently superior or inferior to each other. This is based on a presumed shared inheritable traits, abilities and qualities.

Nadine Gordimer was born on November 20, 1923 near spring, Gauteng and East Rand mining town outside Johannesburg. He was educated at a Catholic School and he studied for the first time with fellow professionals across the color-bar. He was a South African writer, political activist and recipient of the 1991 Nobel Prize literature. She was recognized as a woman who through her magnificent epic writing have in the words of Alfred Nobel been of very great benefit to humanity. Gordimer's writing dealt with moral and racial issues, particularly apartheid in south Africa. Under the regime, works such as Burger's Daughter and July's People were banned. She was active in the anti-apartheid Movement.

Her first published work was a short story for children. The Quest for Seen Gold which appeared in the children's Sunday express in 1937; Come Again Tomorrow, another children's story, appeared around the same time. At the age of sixteen, she had her first adult fiction published. Gordimer has achieved lasting international recognition for her works, most of which deal with political issues, as well as the moral and psychological tensions of her racially divided home country. Virtually all of Gordimer's works deal with themes of love and politics, particularly concerning race in South Africa.

Always questioning power relation and truth, Gordimer tells stories of ordinary people, reviling moral ambiguities and choices. Her characterization is nuanced, revealed more through the choice her characters make than through their claimed identities and beliefs. She also weaves in subtle details within the character's names. Her first novel *The Lying Days* 1953, takes place in Gordimer's home town of Springs, Transvaal, an East Rand mining town near Johannesburg. Arguably a semi-autobiography work *The Lying Days* is a Bildungsroman, charting the growing political awareness of young white woman, Helen towards small-town life and South African racial divisions.

The House Gun is a passionately schematic moral anatomy of a murder. Gordimer's small cast of characters embodies uncomfortable social truths about contemporary South African life challenged in the course of the novel, which finally seems more universal than local. This is not a detective story, declares the writer quite early, but rather an opportunity to explore complex human contradictions regarding race, sexual identity, social relation and ethical authority.

The book's drawback, despite its admirably close-packed construction and battering power of observation, is that Gordimer's characters are more like symbols than real people, they serve her rhetorical ends too summarily. The Lindgards are liberal white pillars of the less racist than it used to be South African established social sphere. Harald is an insurance executive, Claudia is a doctor architect and their son Duncan shoots and kills his friend Carl Jespersen after stumbling upon Jespersen having sex with Duncan's girlfriend. But the story is only nominally about Duncan's motives.

Instead, Gordimer puts us on the planet of his parents' panic as they realize for the first time that violence is the common hell of all who are associated with it. The Lindgards are temporarily robbed of their privilege and left to cope with what little remains of their moral confidences. Their previously untested social prestige, for instance, when they had never been to a black man's home before Hamilton Motsamai, now their son's lawyer, welcomes them to his.

But so much else in their lives has also gone unquestioned and Gordimer concentrates on showing how one destructive event can forcibly clarify whatever has led up to it. Her narrative makes her insights seem absolute, not conditional. Yet her object stances as an insider arbiter also lifts her high above the hell she is evoking, with the results that hell can seem rather too orchestrated and an orderly place. A Dostoevskian look at crime and punishment, although far removed from the way the earlier master did it.

The House Gun is set in the early days of South African democracy, the main themes are still valid in today's rainbow nation, for we are still at the mercy of relentless violence and criminality, people arrested for looting and public violence in only one area of the country. The Lindgards lives are thrown into chaos, when their son Duncan is accused of murder with the accusation and his subsequent arrest, they call into question their own parenting skills, their own supposedly liberal lives and upbringing of their son as well as the state of the country they are living in. The constitutional court is still deliberating whether or not the state can murder the murderer and Harald and Claudia hope against hope that their son will not have to face the death penalty. But Gordimer demands albeit indirectly that we compare the senseless and unplanned death of one man in a fit of emotional overwhelm with the mass killing undertaken during the apartheid regime with the sole purpose of instilling fear and control.

Meanwhile, the concept of forgiveness is also broached; can Duncan's parents forgive him, can the partner of the man he killed offer forgiveness, does a verdict and sentence in court start the process for forgiveness, and can south African tumultuous, violent past be forgiven, by the individuals who were forever affected by the nation. The House Gun forces us to ask these questions, take a look at our own histories and beliefs and consider how we feel in the greater scheme of South African socio-political chaos.

By entrusting Motsamai with Duncan's life he was all that was there between them and the death penalty. Harald and Claudia have to confront their prejudices. For the first time in their lives the Lindgards experience complete powerlessness which their class and race had protected them from, while millions had experienced it though apartheid. Not only had he come from the other side, in his nakedness to the final disaster powerless, helpless before the law. (THG 231) Like two creatures caught in the headlines of catastrophe, their entire world falls apart. The truth of all this was that he and his wife belonged, now to the other side of privilege. Neither whiteness, nor observance of the teaching of the father and son, nor the pious respectability of liberalism, nor money, that had kept them in safety, from that other form of segregation could change their status. In its way, that status was definitive as the forced removals of the old regime, no chance of remaining where they had been, surviving in themselves as they were. Even money that could only buy for them the best lawyer available.

However, at the same time as their world is crumbling apart, the Lindgards relationship with the lawyer also opens up new possibilities of understanding and identification for them, which, most likely would have remained unexplored, had the context of their lives not changed. It is through Motsamai that Harald and Claudia cross over to the other side in another way, not because they are forced to, but because they learn to see beyond race. (THG 293) In this respect, the most important episode in The House Gun is that of the party at Motsamai house which the Lindgards attend. Harald and Claudia had never been to a black man's home before. This kind of gesture on both sides, the black man asking, the white man accepting was that of the left-wing circles to which they had not belonged during the old regime and of the circles of hastily formed new liberals of whose conversion they were skeptical.

Important to note here that seem to be two faces to Motsamai character; one is that of Hamilton and the other is Motsamai. Duncan clearly differentiates between the two of these when he says that. In his relation to the Lindgards the lawyer always adopts the Hamilton persona which exhibits a friendly, warm hearted and understanding character, whereas in his relation with the other characters he usually displays a cold, professional, even intimidating stance. Although reluctant to accept the invitation at first, the Lindgards, decide that it would be in their best interest to give course to it. Through an interesting reversal, it is the white family who unexpectedly look like awkward and inexperienced guests at the party. They are overwhelmed with the crowd of people they encounter at the house, unsure whether these were all guests, or more or less living in the house. The culture differences come as a shock to them.

The end of the novel invests the future not in Duncan, but in the child whose untraceable origins seems free from the cycle of repetition. Here, Gordimer suggests that the future may lie beyond any known genres, even those previously understood as progressive. On the one hand, Duncan's action of murder violates the type of kind of person his parents imagined him to be. In addition, his refusal to explain his motivations also violates the genre of the detective story, which conventionally concludes by revealing the truth of the crime.

What this passage suggests is that while the act of murder may seem incongruous with Duncan's character, the act has been present all along as part of the cyclical repetition of violence. In this way, the passage actually domesticates Duncan queerness, subordinating its apparent difference to the narrative of the same story he seems doomed to repeat. Harald and Claudia, who have reached the other side of privilege, while Duncan seems to have reached the other side of violence. He has now become one of the common criminals endlessly tracing the outlines of their own enclosure. Here the novel, invests Duncan with a hope for the future that can nevertheless only express itself from the confines of the prison cell. As an architect, the Duncan role has only nominally been in the service of building a new and different future for the nation.

In this novel Nadine Gordimer reveals the racial issues among the characters, when the protagonist Duncan who belongs to the white community shoots Jespersen. The case was filed against Duncan and a black lawyer argues for the infamous Duncan, but the court does not accept the case argued by black lawyer Motsamai. Even when the black people are well educated; they are not given freedom to do their duty. A lawyer by name of Motsamai, belongs to the black community. During those periods of apartheid, Motsamai was not allowed to work as lawyer, but now he does argue the case of Duncan, even though Duncan is white. But now black people are not able to get any support from others. They had to stand on their own. Now the white need some help from the black and vice versa. When the white and black behave as brothers, on that day onwards racism will never more lift its head up.

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