

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

THE IMPACT OF THE APARTHEID PAST ON INTERRACIAL UNIONS IN THE DEMOCRATIC PERIOD, A STUDY OF NADINE GORDIMER'S NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

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Malesela E. Montle, Mphoto J. Mogoboya. The Impact Of The Apartheid Past On Interracial Unions In The Democratic Period, A Study Of Nadine Gordimer's No Time Like The Present-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 19(4), 248-256. ISSN 1567-214x

Keywords, Apartheid, Democracy, Miscegenation, Raciality

ABSTRACT

The ending of the apartheid government in South Africa saw many discriminatory laws that the apartheid system had robustly championed during its prime being abolished. Prior to 1994, the indomitable system of apartheid passed equitability and prejudiced laws that included The Immorality Act, 1927 (Act No. 5 of 1927) and The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (Act No. 55 of 1949). These acts forbade sexual relations between white and non-white South Africans and prohibited marriages between white and non-white South Africans respectively. These acts, like other apartheid laws, were obliterated when democratic forces took governance. As a result, the country saw the rise of interracial relationships and marriages in the democratic arena as mirrored in Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present*, which serves as a reflection of South Africa in the post-apartheid era specifically inspecting the state interracial marriages. This qualitative paper has used the Gordimer's aforementioned novel to explore the issues that come to grips with miscegenation in the democratic space. It has found that despite apartheid being dethroned, it still influences the perception of interracial unions in the apartheid era. The interracial couples in Gordimer's novel are still stigmatised and often tabooed, and this is due to the segregation that the apartheid government aimed to eternalise in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present* is a post-apartheid narration, which identifies miscegenation as a new tradition that can normalise unity and possibly be a remedial action for the racial segregation that marginalised South Africa during the apartheid rule. The interracial marriage of Jabulile and Steven

epitomises an era of African renaissance, new beginning and reconstruction of an African institution in which Africans across diverse racial ethnicities assume a democratic identity and celebrate their oneness. It is predominately premised on the obliteration of the apartheid law, The Prohibition of /mixed Marriages Act, Act No. 55 of 1949. This apartheid law had forbidden marital unions between white and non-South Africans and institutionalised that identity in the country. Thus, in the democratic period where white and non-white South Africans are granted approbation despite their diverse races, interracial couples receive backlash from the society that is grappling to come to terms with their unions. This is by virtue of the seed of segregation that apartheid planted in the minds of South Africans, hence, interracial marriages are sometimes perceived as taboo. Therefore, Gordimer's novel uses the interracial couple, Steven, a white chemistry professor and Jabulile, a black Zulu attorney to divulge the democratic identity of South Africa. The couple's love story began in the apartheid era where the laws, The Immorality Act, 1927 (Act No. 5 of 1927) and The Prohibition of /mixed Marriages Act, Act No. 55 of 1949 impeded sexual and marital relations between white and non-white South Africans. According to Kyle (2016), South Africans found to have engaged in interracial sexual relations and marriages were subjected to arrest, and the officiators of mixed marriages were fined not more than 50 pounds. Subsequent to surviving the harsh conditions of apartheid, whose reign ended in 1994, Steven and Jabulile found themselves still conflicted by the stereotypes that they endured during the apartheid. The study will examine the impact of these apartheid-moulded stereotypes on miscegenation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interracial couple in Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present* tussle for societal acceptance. Steven and Jabulile grapple to rip the rewards of their oneness and democratic identity in their community. The duo originating from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds are re-conscientised about this variety by their encounter with the tree that carries a certain degree of identity. Both characters are reminded, upon looking at the tree, of lessons handed down to them from a previous generation, the different agendas of these lessons reflect the different social climate in which they were brought up. They reflect multiple, varied heritages. Steve sees the modest representation of the setting of the house he grew up in as manifested in the rockery with aloes in flower, a jacaranda tree, a neat mat of lawn on either side of a path (Middleton 2016, 10).

A democratic identity that both Steven and Jabulile sought to champion is the rationale for the couple's solid union notwithstanding a set of hurdles against them. Steven emerges from a privileged family. He is "white, but that's also not as definitive as coded in old files. Born in the same past era, a few years before her, he's a white mix- that was of no significance as long as the elements were white. [...] actually, his mix is quite complicated in certain terms of identity not determined by colour. His father was a gentile, secular, nominally observant Christian, his mother Jewish" (*No Time Like the Present*, 2). On the other hand, Jabulile comes from a disadvantaged background from the village in KwaZulu Natal (KZN). She is "black, but there's a great deal more to that now than what was the beginning and end of existence as recorded in an outdated file of an outdated country, even though the name hasn't changed. She was born back in

that time; her name is a signature to the past from which she comes” (No Time Like the Present, 8). As the couple reflected on their identities through the encounter with the acacia tree, Middleton (2016) postulates that Steven’s upbringing unveils botanical recognition lessons from his father that distinguishes him from Jabulile who is in her first experience with KZN forests, You never know when you’ve rid yourself of the trappings of outdated life, come back subconsciously, it’s some privileges of the white suburb where he grew up that come to her man now. He doesn’t know—she does—lying in his mind it’s the Reed home whose segregation from reality he has left behind for ever. How could she not understand, right there in the midst of enacting her freedom, when one of her brothers, the elder of course, dismisses her opinion of some family conduct directed by custom, she finds what her studies by correspondence would call an atavistic voice of submission replacing the one in her throat (No Time Like the Present, 12-13).

Steven and Jabulile’s experiences in the democratic world appear to evince that eighteen years after political emancipation, South Africa has yet to rescind colonial perceptions and utterly discard racist and disuniting traditions. To this note, Gordimer remarks, “history’s always ready to make a comeback” (No Time Like the Present, 327). Racial tensions that prevailed in the course of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa re-surfaced in the democratic period, which meant that peace and unity are the defining cords of the new society, Was a church, this is an old ware Boer suburb, no Kaffirs allowed ... me to Jes us at the altar of apartheid, blankes alleen. Everyone laughing release from the past. Spread hands thrown up and head dropped in mock responsibility for the guilt of the generation of his mother and father, Pierre du Preez is the one who arrived on the caparisoned motorcycle parked outside, as elaborately accoutred as some royal carriage, flashing flanks, sculptured saddle, festooned with flasks and gauges. He’s an Afrikaner who no more takes offence at the gibes than Mkize does at the outlawed word, Kaffir (No Time Like the Present, 15-16).

In the novel, discriminatory practices were sought to be eradicated such as the access to Kruger Park on the basis of skin colour, “used to be a luxury only white children had, the Kruger Park; while blacks were barred entry, except forwarders and camp servants” (No Time Like the Present, 384). The newly constructed democratic discourses came with the construction and reconstruction of an identity in South Africa that bears no colonial undertones (Bhana, 2016). In the apartheid period, the government repudiated identities that encapsulated unity in South Africa such as interracial marriages and the citizens of the country were forbidden to practice them. These identities were foreign in South Africa and defiance to the government’s instruction to the people to refrain from racially uniting activities resulted in punitive measures applied,

She was simply the added appendage ‘Mrs’. They actually were married, although that was unlawful, too. In the neighbouring country where she had gone into exile just over the border to study, and he, a young white man whose political affiliations made it necessary for him to disappear from the university in the city for a time, they, imprudently ignoring the consequence inevitable back home, had fallen in love and got themselves married (No Time Like the Present, 6).

In the same fashion of apartheid times, Steven and Jabulile's marriage, which authenticates unity, is perceived as foreign in the democratic space as they endure societal rejection, intimidation and judgements, "He and she (Steven and Jabulile) are the foreigners here. Even she. Black skin isn't enough...white, but that's also not as definitive as coded in old files" (No Time Like the Present, 192). The couple re-defined their identity in a manner that neither their Black nor White racial traits were enough to serve as their identification criterion. Jabulile and Steven depicted themselves as foreigners in both black and white communities that expressed condemnation towards their interracial union. Moreover, when Jabulile was travelling, she came across a black bystander who opened his mouth to give her a non-verbal message that he is hungry and needs food. She responded to this ordeal as a national crisis without racial attachments, Jabu is caught in the traffic and she suddenly sees an open mouth, wide open, without a face. A finger points into the open hollowness asking for food. Jabu sees that the hand is like hers and black. But the similarity ends there. The black finger is not the same as Jabu's. It is the poverty stricken hand of South Africa that points into the emptiness of the mouth and the fullness of the upcoming new middle class in South Africa (Bandarage, 2019, 4).

Upon re-defining their identity, Steven and Jabulile found themselves at a tussle with a sense of belonging. The couple struggled to find acceptance in democratic communities. Dolby (2001) notes that race still influences the youth of South Africa but they vigorously negotiate and establish new definitions of race as their lives are progressively informed by multiracialism and globalisation. To navigate through hateful remarks and find a congenial community where they can settle in and raise their children. The couple decides to buy a house in an area formerly known as an Afrikaner town, which Jabulile perceives as,

Not only the ware Boer suburb has transformed in accordance with political correctness as an expression of justice. The suburb of fine houses, many with fake features of the various Old Countries from which the owners came, that had been in well-off white ownership has also undergone invasion, if not transformation [...] there is no longer any law to prevent any black who can afford such a stately home from acquiring it (No Time Like the Present, 132).

The rationale to find a home for their children and themselves in the suburb came dashing when Jabulile had to admit that racial tension is still a reality despite the reign of democracy. Moreover, Jabulile's feeling is spurred by her witnessing of a vexing treatment of black foreign nationals in the country, which mimics the colonial nuances of disunity, discrimination and lack of Ubuntu, "That's the cause of what's happening. Not 'an irrational fear or dislike of the Xenos, strange, foreign or different.' Familiar, African, black-like-me" (No Time Like the Present, 206). Furthermore, it is "too-dark-skinned people, undocumented people and/or people belonging to a linguistic minority who are South African being harassed and arrested as if they were foreigners, and even occasionally being deported" (Landau, 2011, 8).

Xenophobia became Steven and Jabulile's new nemesis that shattered their hope of finding a peaceful life in the democratic South Africa. The couple resorted to the idea of relocating to another continent, Australia, however, the decision was later reversed as a result of Steven's hope. The racially-motivated xenophobia that Jabulile observes is instantiated by the knowledge that the majority of those in positions of power have a foreign origin, which could mean that ostracism is not only meted out to foreigners but also those that appear to commensurate to tensions and stereotypes of the alien, particularly from Africa (Neocosmos, 2008). The period of independence in the African continent occasioned partnerships, unions and associations without racial, cultural, ethnic and tribal borders. As a result, the South African society experienced a massive influx of foreign nations, especially from the Southern African region. This advent of foreign nationals in South Africa received negative reactions from the citizens of the country as portrayed in Gordimer's novel,

That rubbish, they must voetsak back to Mugabe [Zimbabwe], they are only here, come from that place to steal take our bags in the street, and shame, shame, look what they do to Mr Jake, they wanted to kill him to get his car, it's only God's will he's still alive to see his children grow up, he can't walk quite right I see him there in the road, eish! They tell lies why they come here, the young ones are just tsotsis, Wonke umuntu makahlale ezweni lakhe alilungise! (No Time Like the Present, 201).

South Africans' sudden abhorrence of foreign nationals is kindled by fears that they will replace their socio-economic status if not threaten their lives. In Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present*, the foreign nationals are accused of thievery. Solomon and Kosaka (2013) aver that non-citizens of South Africa are believed to be a threat to the citizens of the country's identities or their individual rights. Thus, the fear for foreign nationals in the country has kept on deteriorating,

Everybody must stay at their own country to make it right, not run away, we never ran away, we stayed in KwaZulu even while the Boers the whites at the coal mine were paying our men nothing not even for the children at school, and getting sick, sick from down in the mines, we stayed we were strong for the country to come right- If those people don't get out, we must chase them (No Time Like the Present, 204).

According to Harris (2001), it was the apartheid government that inspired Xenophobia in the democratic period through the repression of black people in the past, which resulted in most of them close-minded, mistrusted and suspected of ill. Soji (2019, i) notes that it is true that a black man is always a suspect until he is proven guilty,

When you enter a shopping mall in a white-dominated area, the black security guard gives you that look – that suspicious look – and when you proceed inside, everyone who is sitting and eating at a fancy restaurant will give you ugly stares. It is worse if you have a dark complexion like me and you are not in a suit or in work uniform. After taking in all this humiliation you finally get to sit at a restaurant that a seemingly poor black man like me can't afford, but before you

do that the waitresses and waiters also give you that suspicious look – when you are not a crook but just a hungry person who wants to have a meal like everyone else.

The manifestation of Xenophobia in the post-colonial era compromises Ubuntu which is a sense of oneness that was formerly dismissed by the colonial rule. Furthermore, Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present* also fulfils these prophecies that A Guest of Honour envisaged about a democratic South Africa through Steven and Jabulile,

Socio-economic isolation

South Africa's democratic mission and vision included harmonising and equating the citizens of the country from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. However, racial favour and inequality remain some of the remnants of colonial policies. Nadvi, Sayeed and Smit (2018) assert that the dispensation of democracy in South Africa, 1994 gave impulsion to the notion of the possibility of re-establishing a post-apartheid society that is premised on equality, respect for human's rights and economic prosperity. This is reflected in Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present* where the dawn of a new era of democracy has not alleviated socio-economic inequalities in the South African society.

Racial tension in the novel domineers the distribution of job opportunities, quality education and economic growth of the country, "How long are whites going to dominate the economy?" (*No Time Like the Present*, 20). Disappointments experienced in Gordimer's novel because of the failures of the democratic government are also felt in the present-day South Africa. Du Toit (2017) notes that socio-economic disparities, perpetual obsessions to racialise the country and the deteriorating structures of corruption are the reasons for South Africans' disappointment and loss of credibility in the ruling government that subdued apartheid. When the leadership of democracy took over from apartheid, it "aimed at reconstructing a South African society that cherishes peace, equality, oneness and human rights. This marks the establishment of the rainbow nation as an impulse to harmonise South Africans and validate reconciliation" (Montle, 2020, 7). However, the country appears to be still far from the ideal country that had been envisaged at the threshold of democracy and as some of the set goals have been fairly attained, there are numerous objectives that either are deserted or failed (Nadvi, Sayeed & Smit, 2018).

Today, one of the democratic projects that sought to promote and embrace equality in South Africa, the rainbow nation, is perceived and declared a failed project by many scholars and citizens of the country. Hains (2016) states that the saddening reality is that the rainbow nation in just 22 (now 27) years after democracy, transitioned from success to failure whereas Pearl Ncube on Opinion, News24 (25/05/2019) claims,

The rainbow nation is dead. While the democratic system has delivered political freedom for black South Africans, the economic legacy of apartheid still

endures. Poverty, inequality and joblessness amongst black South Africans, in particular, is pervasive.

The above-mentioned quote validates Gordimer's distress that South Africa has not completely broken away from the economic legacy of apartheid as the white minority is "still earning almost half of the entire national total income. This is just one example of how the intention of affirmative action gets lost. Since the inequalities and the poverty rates are still enormously one-sided, disappointment and anger towards the post-apartheid government are more and more flagrant" (Sall, 2018, 10). As a consequence, many people, especially, black South Africans are victimised by unemployment today. The prophecy of appalling unemployment to strike in the period of independence in Africa is confirmed in Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present* and South Africa today. Sall (2018) notes that inequality is still rife in the country with black people less privileged than white people, and this, drives a compelling argument that South Africa's socio-economic disparities persist in authenticating the vestige of apartheid and the question of precision and validity of equality in the country, "the goose that makes the country rich – blacks, they're the ones who continue to deliver the golden eggs, the whites, grace of Anglo-American and Co. make the profit on the stock exchange" (*No Time Like the Present*, 23).

The apartheid rule in South Africa reserved hard labour for black people. Most of them worked in mines, farms, kitchens and gardens, thus, producing "golden eggs" for whites who held managerial positions (*No Time Like the Present*, 23). Despite the ending of apartheid, the country has not experienced a considerable change regarding job distribution. Johnston (2014) notes that a progressive constitution did not manage to have an effect on the structural remains of apartheid and the pretexts of the inequalities are ingrained in historical injustices. Thus, most of the black individuals that secure professional positions as teachers, lawyers, nurses and doctors are often victimised by 'black tax' unlike their white counterparts. This is because,

The apartheid government socially engineered black poverty and loss of land for black people, for example, a black person may earn the same salary as their white counterparts, but they will have more financial responsibilities to their family, which is often still trapped in poverty due to the inequalities that were engineered by the apartheid system (Mhlongo, 2019, 1).

The central figures of the novel, Steven and Jabulile find themselves in a tug of war with socio-economic inequalities. These crises unsettle the interracial couple as they began to experience confusion regarding suitable employment, place to stay and school for their children, "Steve feels a breath of rejection lifting his lungs. What they did then, some of those present much braver and enduring hell beyond anything he risked, anything Jabu, herself black, inevitable victim, took on" (*No Time Like the Present*, 14). Steven and Jabulile had two children, Sindiswa and her little brother Gary. During the holidays, Jabu would have the children visit her father's homestead in the rural community where Steven often felt alienated. Providing a safe home for their children became a priority, as some communities in the democratic world are not pleased with their interracial union,

—We should move. What d'you think. Have a house.— —Wha'd' you mean— He's smiling almost patronisingly.—What I say. House— —We don't have money.— —I'm not talking about buying. Renting a house somewhere.— She half-circled her head, trying to follow his thought. —One of the suburbs where whites have switched to town house enclosures. A few comrades have found places to rent.— —Who?— —Peter Mkize, I think. Isa and Jake.— —Have you been there?— —Of course not. But Jake was saying when we were at the Commission on Thursday, they're renting near a good school where their boys could go.— —Sindiswa doesn't need a school.—She laughed and as if in a derisive agreement the child hiccupped over the biscuit she was eating. —He says the streets are quiet.— So it is the motorbike that has ripped open the thought. —Old trees there.— (No Time Like the Present, 11-12).

The frequent relocation for Steven and Jabulile becomes a daunting task for the couple as it does not pay off. The couple struggle to circumvent societal rejection in the post-apartheid era as they find themselves moving to either predominately black or white communities and both communities perceive their interracial union as peculiar, thus, Steven said that he and Jabulile are foreigners in South Africa despite being the citizens of the country (No Time Like the Present, 194). This engenders identity-crisis for the couple as they are to establish a home in the post-apartheid South Africa. Bandarage (2019) perceives this ordeal as a result of neo-colonial forces that are at work and the uneven terrain of class. Steven's newly reconstructed identity, an interracially married man, alienates him from fellow white compatriots,

But it has been a place. It was somewhere they could live—together, when there wasn't anywhere to do so lawfully. The rent for the apartment was high, for them then, but it included a certain complicity on the part of the owner of the building and the caretaker, nothing comes for nothing when law-abiding people are taking some risk of breaking the law. As a tenant, he had the kind of English- or European- sounding name no different from others usual on the tenants' mailboxes beside the elevator in the entrance; a potted cactus decorative there, if there was no grove (No Time Like the Present, 194).

CONCLUSION

Gordimer has expressed the challenges that persist on hindering the envisioned democratic (South) Africa from reaching its potential. The hurdles include stereotypes against interracial marriages, racial tensions, corruption, xenophobia and power hunger, which are crystallised in No Time Like the Present. Furthermore, democratisation has been about, inter alia, reconstructing an identity of unity across diverse racial and cultural people in Africa. However, remnants of colonialism in the present day still pose a menace to social transformation. For instance, due to the negative reactions towards Steven and Jabulile's interracial marriage, "rather than interracial couples being a sign of the dissolution of racial borders, these relationships enable us to see how racial borders still exist" (Childs, 2005, 3).

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