

## *Original Paper*

# The Omnipresent Past: Dystopian Trends in Nadine Gordimer's

## *No Time Like the Present*

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### **Abstract**

*This paper seeks to analyze the dystopian character of Nadine Gordimer's No Time Like the Present and demonstrate the claustrophobic nature of post-apartheid South Africa. The problem in this paper is to investigate the way in which Gordimer's novel interprets the perceived socio-political evolution of her country. Our point of departure is that post-apartheid South Africa is not healed of its turbulent past and this past haunts and torments it till date. This article foregrounds the argument that the dystopian nature of Gordimer's last novel is evident in the fact it captures the crash of dreams for an egalitarian, non-racial society; it portrays the repression and failure of individual efforts to improve society; and it describes poverty, violence and anarchy as society's unchanging norms. Using postcolonial literary theory, this paper shows how No Time Like the Present narrates the entanglement of South Africans at a time when political morass and socio-economic inequalities abort anti-apartheid expectations. This paper arrives at the conclusion that No Time Like the Present is a dystopian novel in which grim, absurd realities are portrayed to show how remote and unfamiliar the present is when compared with expectations nurtured in the past.*

### **Keywords**

*dystopia, disillusionment, past, post-apartheid, present*

### **1. Introduction**

South Africa has been labeled a rainbow nation due to the heterogeneity of its population. Throughout its history, it has had to manage this cultural diversity against a background of conflict, repression and oppression. Saul and Bond (2014) tell us that original inhabitants of South Africa are collectively called Khoisan—comprising Khoikhoi and San groups (p. 17). The first European to reach South Africa was a

Dutch captain named Jan Van Riebeeck who landed at the Cape in 1652 for commercial purposes (Saul & Bond, 2014, p. 16). After decades of trading between whites and the Khoisan in the western part of the country, the former decided to settle in South Africa, hence expropriating the land of the indigenes. Saul and Bond (2014) say about the Khoisan, “Dispossessed, defeated militarily and devastated by disease, those who survived had been forced, by the early eighteenth century, into dependent economic roles as labourers within white society—while also losing, slowly but surely, much of their autonomous identity” (p. 18). The indigenous population of South Africa was thus victim of European violence and lacked the necessary tools (since they were mostly hunters, farmers and nomads) to resist invaders. The seeds of segregation had been sown.

Around the same period as Europeans were dominating the Khoisan in the west, Bantu groups, indigenous to Africa, migrated and settled in the Eastern parts of South Africa. These Bantu groups were black people who practiced settled agriculture; were great in numbers; and had stronger socio-political structures than those of the Khoisan. These Bantu groups were made up of tribes such as Zulus, Xhosas, Sotho, Ndebele, Shangaan, Venda, Tsonga, Tswana, Swasi, and Pedi among others (Saul & Bond, 2014, p. 19). In the meantime, the white community that had settled in South Africa forged an identity of its own: Afrikaner or Boer. These Afrikaners were made up of Dutch, French, Scandinavians and Germans who spoke a dialect quite different from standard Dutch. This language is Afrikaans, from which the term “apartheid” will later be derived (Saul & Bond, 2014, p. 22). These Afrikaners tried to subjugate the Bantu groups but failed because the latter were well organized politically and could make artisanal weapons.

From 1806, the more powerful British Empire defeated the Dutch and took control of the Cape. Through guns and the exploitation of socio-cultural differences between Bantu groups, British colonial settlers overpowered Bantu resistances, meanwhile shipping many British people to South Africa to strengthen their grip over the land (Saul & Bond, 2014, pp. 22-23). With the discovery of diamond in 1867, whites created and controlled the mines and forced Blacks to toil in them under degrading conditions. From this epoch onwards, British settlers applied segregation policies and legalized them. For instance, there was the Natives Land Act of 1913 which restricted African ownership of land while reserving the largest and most fertile portions of land for the white minority (Saul & Bond, 2014, p. 26). When apartheid was finally voted into law and established as the ruling system of the country in 1948, it was in reality the apotheosis of a long process of racial segregation.

Saul and Bond (2014) describe apartheid as “the late-twentieth century’s most obvious historical anomaly” and a “deeply inequitable system” (p. 1). They define apartheid as a policy of “apartness” that operated “in the name of white supremacy and racial purity, not only against Africans but also Indians and Coloureds” (Saul & Bond, 2014, p. 43). From Daniel Francois Malan to Frederick de Klerk, apartheid marginalized and subdued the majority black population and other racial groups. It is this racist, white-dominated system (sometimes supported by Christendom) that blacks fought in a long, bloody struggle. With the formal end of apartheid in 1994 and Nelson Mandela’s election as first

democratic president of South Africa, the gory past seemed to be behind. Unfortunately, as this research demonstrates, this past keeps repeating itself in the present.

Set in post-apartheid South Africa, Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present* introduces us to the dilemmas, realizations and disillusionments which the present imparts on former anti-apartheid fighters. Although the novel spans over fifteen years—from 1994 when apartheid ended to 2009 when Zuma was elected president—most of the happenings in the novel take place during Thabo Mbeki's mandate. Gordimer's text makes a realistic critique of post-apartheid South Africa with a dominant use of internal focalization. By internal focalization, we mean that the disillusionment of former anti-apartheid fighters is mainly told by themselves with authorial intrusions that enable the writer to give personal opinions or comments regarding the present state of affairs. This narrative technique emphasizes dystopia by showing how hopelessness sprouts from within the characters' private lives. The novel describes a progressive narrowing of the people's horizon to a point where escape alone seems to be the reasonable alternative.

This paper is divided into three sections: the first section shows how leaders of anti-apartheid struggle betray the hopes for a color-blind South Africa devoid of blacks' oppression; the second section examines the failed attempts of protagonists to resolve social inequalities; the third section discusses the degradation of the social climate and hopelessness that accompanies it. Post colonialism is employed as a theoretical tool throughout this work in a bid to investigate the perpetuation of racial oppression and injustices after the "end" of apartheid.

In the last half of the twentieth century, South Africa, along with other African countries, witnessed a political transition primed with hope. However, no sooner had freedom and independence been proclaimed than a sense of disillusionment pervaded the nation. We therefore probe into this failed transition, bearing in mind South Africa's peculiar context marked by entrenched racial stratifications and ethnic eclecticism. The main question that guides this research is: How does Gordimer's novel interpret the perceived evolution of South Africa's socio-political consciousness, and how is *No Time Like the Present* stitched to express this interpretation? Three research questions structure this work: what is the link between South Africa's post-Apartheid period and the post-independence experience of other African countries? Do former anti-apartheid fighters integrate the "new" South Africa? What indicates that much of the Apartheid status-quo has been conserved?

This research has three objectives. The first is to demonstrate South Africa's poor negotiation of the 1994 historic shift. The paper explores the inability of South Africa's new leaders to consolidate Mandela's watershed victory over Apartheid, and the ensuing disenchantment. The second objective is to show the significance of Gordimer's innovative narrative technique consisting in allowing characters converse with their experience and judge it. Lastly, this research seeks to establish the dystopian nature of Gordimer's last novel and know whether dystopian realities in the African context can be avoided and/or abated.

This study is based on the premise that Nadine Gordimer's novel portrays South Africa's present and

future conditions as caged in the Apartheid dolorous past. Both the dreams and pains experienced in this past lurk threateningly into the present and extinct all trusts in a better future. As such, Nadine Gordimer depicts a dystopian society wherein the much-expected socio-political change turns out to be mere farce and travesty. This paper argues that dystopia can be avoided if freedom is more thoroughly conceived and managed in a collegial frame. This will prevent egocentric individuals from leading a whole nation into mess.

## 2. The Concept of Dystopianism

Claeys (2017) says that the term “dystopia” was coined in 1747 and was defined in 1748 as “an unhappy country” (p. 273). Etymologically, it is derived from two Greek words, “dus” and “topos”, which mean “a diseased, bad, faulty or unfavorable place” (Claeys, 2017, p. 4). It is in 1868 that John Stuart Mills, Victorian philosopher, used ‘dystopia’ for the first time in his speech before the House of Commons to condemn British policies in Ireland. It is from this period that dystopia received an eminently political tinge. Dystopia is usually conceived as the opposite of utopia and it describes a nightmarish, often apocalyptic, world wherein the future is utterly bleak and blood-red. Dystopia is usually engendered in societies that seem to have reached a cul-de-sac in their evolution. Claeys (2017) posits that dystopia describes a condition in which there is a “triumph of chaos over order”, a triumph which foretells of “the complete breakdown of society” (p. 4).

Historically, dystopia has a Western provenance. The rise of totalitarianism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a turning point in the concept of dystopianism. These totalitarian societies under such rulers as Hitler and Stalin embraced ideals of progress based on rigor, policing and coercion. However, these ideals veered to oppression, imprisonment, slavery and inequalities—problems which these ideals meant to resolve. Thus, the “failed utopia” of these totalitarian regimes created de facto favorable conditions for dystopia since citizens were anxious and envisaged “fearful futures where chaos and ruin prevail” (Claeys, 2017, p. 5). Also, the history of dystopianism reveals that it captured a dominant feeling in post-war Europe where life was marred by depression, epidemics and debts on one hand; uncontrolled industrialization on the other. Novels like George Orwell’s *1984* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* are usually interpreted as central texts of the dystopian tradition.

Although dystopia is viewed as the opposite of utopia (an imagined perfect and stable world), it is worth noting that both terms are interwoven. Claeys (2010) postulates that, “from time immemorial people have thought about the possibility of the construction of a better world, but they have also been aware of the likelihood of a future which might be worse than the present” (p. 16). This implies that utopianism always precedes dystopianism and makes the latter firmly entrenched in a sense of deprivation. The desire to see brighter dawns and positive changes does not preclude the possibility of failure, for the better world one imagines can easily crumble. We may imagine paradisiacal worlds and even live in them but this utopic experience rests upon other people’s sufferings and is liable to destabilization.

Claeys (2017) identifies three main forms of dystopia: political dystopia, environmental dystopia and technological dystopia (p. 5). These forms of dystopia are interrelated. Political dystopia exposes the brutality of despotic regimes and always emanates from a failed utopia, that is, it is generated by a condition in which political ideals fail to be concretized. Environmental dystopia is concerned with a world in which natural elements are destroyed by and inflict havoc on human societies. Technological dystopia observes the way in which industrialization and scientific progress trump human surveillance and menace humanity. All these forms of dystopia are characterized by fear. According to Claeys (2017), the dystopian novel “portrays an extremely negative or evil fictional state usually dominated by fear” (p. 7).

Regarding the textual representation of dystopian societies, Claeys (2017) submits that: “literary dystopias are understood as primarily concerned to portray societies where a substantial majority suffers slavery and/or oppression *as a result of human action*. Privileged groups may benefit from this. Others may escape it” (p. 290). Actually, Gordimer’s novel describes the perpetuation of oppression meted on blacks by a minority composed of other blacks. In the face of this continuous domination, many South Africans envisage escape (emigration). *No Time Like the Present*, therefore, ties with the features of a dystopian novel.

The Western origins of dystopia request that we contextualize the term when using it in an African setting. The African experience of dystopia usually hinges on the corrupt neocolonial establishments that perpetuate societal inequalities after the hopeful independences. Chifane and Chifane (2019) argue that dystopianism in African literature originates with the post-independence period and is canonized by texts like *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. In their article, they posit that Achebe’s last novels “acquire new dimensions, giving birth to what can be called dystopian standardization characteristic not only of a certain space or time, but of any society fighting corruption and abusive political systems inevitably leading to oppressive regimes, chaos and collapse” (Chifane & Chifane, 2019, p. 69). Achebe’s narratives on post-independence morass, therefore, serve as precursors to the evolution of dystopian literature in Africa as they represent the demise of the independence ideal. Unlike the Western outlook, African views on dystopia do not depict imaginary, terrible worlds where individuals are zombies and prisoners of technology; African texts rather draw inspiration from messy societal realities and present this mess in crude, repulsive narratives.

### 3. Theoretical Layout

The beginning of postcolonial criticism is generally traced back to the 1980s when scholars like Edward Said, GayatriSpivak, Henry Louis Gates, Jr and later on, HomiBhabha produced insightful theoretical and critical works that paved the way for the elaboration of a theory that meets the demands and opinions of formerly colonized societies. In order to come to terms with the postcolonial condition, these scholars started discussions from the colonial encounter, which has been a watershed in the history of their societies. Amoko (2006) submits that “the colonial encounter resulted in the

consolidation of the idea of European or Western modernity at the apex of human civilization. It also resulted in incomplete, chaotic and traumatic attempts forcibly to transform other societies in the image of that modernity” (p. 132). It is Europe’s brutal effort to homogenize all civilizations in its own mold that pushes postcolonial criticism to dismantle colonial constructions, hence creating a counter-discourse.

One of the central, and perhaps most important, issues with which postcolonial scholars have always engaged from Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* till present is the question of resistance. European misrepresentations of non-Europe as barbaric Others opposed to its civilized Self have led to reactions from postcolonial critics. These reactions have been subsumed in the ‘writing back’ model which underscores the falsity of European hegemonic depictions and deconstructs the colonial ideology. On this issue of resistance, Chew and Richards (2010) opine, “In cultural and symbolic terms, resistance [is] a struggle for agency in the representation process, that is, for the power among different colonized peoples to reinvent themselves as subjects of their own stories and histories” (p. 2). Resistance, thus, enables the colonized to define themselves and participate actively in their freedom by subverting (sometimes through art) oppressive political and economic institutions. Although there is a debate as to whether postcolonial theory has really empowered and freed colonized peoples, it remains an important tool for analyzing critically the whole colonial syndrome (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p. 203).

Given the fact that apartheid was a racist, colonial system in South Africa, it is logical to apply a postcolonial approach in a discussion on post-apartheid South Africa since the “national culture” of formerly colonized territories is still affected by the imperial process after the formal end of colonialism (Ashcroft et al., 2002, pp. 1-2). Postcolonialism refers to a theory of, for and by formerly colonized peoples which analyzes the ideologies, processes and impacts of European colonial rule with keen focus on how oppressed peoples negotiate their identity and freedom in an increasingly hegemonic world. Since postcolonialism is historically and essentially linked to the colonial encounter, it discusses all those dynamics which colonization ignited in indigenous, migrant and settler spaces. Ashcroft et al (2002) claim that postcolonialism provides “a different way of understanding colonial relations: no longer a simple binary opposition, black colonized vs. white colonizers; Third World vs. the West, but *an engagement with all the varied manifestations of colonial power, including those in settler colonies*” (p. 200, emphasis ours). Hence, postcolonialism helps investigate a broad spectrum of experiences that are linked to oppression and hegemony. Apartheid and its repercussions are part of these experiences. In this study, postcolonial concepts like marginality and neocolonialism are employed to dissect the political and socio-economic quagmires of post-apartheid South Africa.

#### **4. Discussion**

##### *4.1 Political Disenchantment: Past Dreams and Present Fears*

As we earlier mentioned, dystopianism is inherently political from its origins. It is thus, logical that we

explore the political manifestations of dystopia first. Paraphrasing Basu et al., GeirFinnsson (2016) submits that “dystopian writing has the unique quality of engaging its readers with pressing political matters, such as liberty and self-determination” (p. 4). It is this political thrust that constitutes the backbone of Nadine Gordimer’s last novel, *No Time Like the Present*. Her novel gives life to the disenchantment of many South Africans after the anti-apartheid struggle. Since dystopianism is characterized by fear, this section examines the fear caused by perceived disillusionment in former anti-apartheid fighters. This fear is highlighted by Huxley when he describes dystopia as “fear of the Great men whom we have raised, by popular acclaim, to a power which they use, inevitably, to murder and enslave us” (Huxley, as cited in Claeys, 2017, p. 3). Actually, those who lead the anti-apartheid struggle and who have the approval of masses turn their backs against the latter once in power, thereby practicing neocolonialism. Hence, this section discusses the sacrifices of the protagonists during apartheid and the corrupt egocentrism that characterizes post-apartheid black leaders.

The novel opens with the move from a past (symbolized by Glengrove Place) to a more promising present and future. This past is pregnant with the memories of the anti-apartheid struggle, clandestine existence and racism. The main characters of the novel, Jabulile (Jabu) and Steve are of different races: Jabu is a black Zulu woman while Steve is white from English and Jewish descent—his ancestors having left England to settle in South Africa. This interracial couple epitomizes the hopes for racial harmony in a country that is in convalescence after decades of racial segregation and injustice. The move toward a new, hopefully stable life is symbolized by the tearing noise of a motorbike. As Jabu and Steve stand on their balcony, contemplating what their new life will be after apartheid, the narrator says: “a motorbike ripped the street like a sheet of paper roughly torn” (Gordimer, 2012, p. 5). The idea of ripping evokes either separation or disruption, and in this instance it is the separation of painful apartheid past from wishes formulated in the present for an egalitarian society. It is evident that Jabu and Steve are nostalgic about Glengrove because “it is the place that took them in when nowhere, no one allowed them to be together as a man and a woman” (Gordimer, 2012, p.15). But they are now visualizing freedom as they prepare to move from Glengrove to a former white suburb where they can start a new life and provide a real home for their first child, Sindiswa. The narrator says: “now everything is after” (Gordimer, 2012, p. 8). There is, therefore, a determined effort made by Jabu and Steve to go forward without turning a moment to look behind. However, Nadine Gordimer dexterously makes this past they are eschewing to haunt their present and extinct their glimmers of hope for the future.

Gordimer’s novel puts the past in-between the present and the future such that it is always possible to follow the crumbling up of past utopias in the political quagmires of the present. This is how the dystopian vision is intensified throughout the text without giving respite or relief to the reader who expects things to get better sometime. Concretely, the narrator starts by presenting the two protagonists’ past in the *Umkhonto* (military wing of the ANC that fought against apartheid). Jabu, being a native of IsiZulu, is enrolled in the anti-apartheid guerilla when she goes to Swaziland for studies. She sacrifices

her studies and engages wholeheartedly in the fight to end racial discrimination. She is later on imprisoned for three months in Johannesburg under the apartheid regime, even enduring torture to protect the lives of her comrades (Gordimer, 2012, pp. 30-31, 79). Intriguing as it is, Steve, although a white, joins the Struggle early and becomes Jabu's mentor in Swaziland. He fights a regime that protects white interests and personalizes the selflessness shown by some whites who supported anti-apartheid struggles. We are told that instead of pursuing his education or finding a comfortable job within the apartheid system as his parents wished, Steve decides to use his knowledge of chemistry "to make explosives for targets such as power installations" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 4). He becomes a bomb confectioner blowing up an oppressive system controlled by members of his own race. Hence, both Jabu and Steve actively participated in the anti-apartheid guerilla. The narrator, commenting on their past lives, says that faith in the Struggle made any other preoccupation secondary; "freedom [demanded] everything" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 190).

By presenting the contributions and sacrifices made by Jabu and Steve to subvert apartheid, the narrator makes the reader to be expectant of a sort of reward for these freedom fighters now that apartheid has ended and democracy is being established. And this is what the narrator *seems* to do as the story unfolds. Nonetheless, a closer look indicates that the prize of freedom, good governance and equity which ought to reward the years of anti-apartheid struggle is replaced by enigmatic disenchantments. In order to place the reader at the heart of dystopian sentiments, Gordimer creates a kind of debate club in the new suburb in which ex-fighters (the Dolphins) involve in intercourses regarding the state of affairs in the new South Africa. The narrator informs us that "Sunday's permanent invitation for Jake, Isa, the Mkizes, Jabu, Steve and everyone's kids to come to the pool become socially political amid the cult repartee... of the commune" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 124). These discussions reveal the expectations of ex-fighters whose leaders in the 'bush' have now been propelled to the helms of the democratic state. Nelson Mandela, having addressed the pressing problems left by the apartheid regime, has left a country that needs to build for itself a foundation. This is what is expected of President Thabo Mbeki. During their discussions, Steve argues:

*Government has to pick up the spade and tackle where we bulldozed apartheid. How long are whites going to dominate the economy? ... Who's going to change the hierarchy of mine bosses—from the top. 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.... Mbeki has to integrate us as a concept if we are ever going to be reckoned with in the order of the world.* (Gordimer, 2012, pp. 23-24)

Steve points at the enormous task of nation building that awaits post-apartheid government. As the symbol of the spade highlights, there is much work to do, especially in the economy, for black South Africans to enjoy a stable egalitarian edifice. For decades, these blacks have been excluded by Boers and by the British from the circuit of material prosperity: they have been limited to working for foreign people to consume. With a black president as Head of State, a quick change is expected. In the process



of restructuring a society that had steel-like racist foundations, the new president has to conceptualize the being of South Africa in the world and raise a national culture.

All these dreams are shattered by slogan-full and egocentric politics that bring no solution to the nation's problems. In fact, things are worsened. Since Jabu, Steve and the other comrades know most of the country's leaders (for having fought and suffered with them in *Umkhonto*), their disgust and irritation are authentically rendered. For instance, when Zuma, vice-President under Mbeki's regime, is alleged to be involved in an Arms Deal and bribes, Peter Mkize remembers: "Zuma was our Chief of Intelligence in the bush" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 131). Mkize is disappointed by this fellow comrade who had been a model in the Struggle but has veered into corruption and nepotism. Like Mkize, Jake exposes his frustration when he asks: "How's it possible to believe that these same comrade leaders have forgotten what they were, what they fought through—in exchange for freedom as bribes, freedom as money" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 132). He cannot explain the fact that the ideal of freedom has been screwed for money. To be perplexed, as Jake is, is a symptom of the dystopiansyndrome. The inability to understand how and why reality has turned so gloomy leads to what can be termed imaginative failure. Imaginative failure means that the faculty of dreaming has been compromised by the absence of possibilities. This either involves an abrupt or progressive disconnection of the mind from societal closures that render dreams possible. Here, dreaming is not viewed from the Freudian perspective; it is rather understood as an activity which the human mind can carry to imagine possibilities which society does not permit. In a dystopian context, however, this imagination fails because the mind has fought to transgress societal barriers only to realize that an abyss lies behind these barriers. Jake's imaginative failure is therefore an attempt to protect himself from possibilities he is afraid to behold.

Furthermore, the narrator reveals the annoyance of the Dolphins with the appointment of incompetent comrades at key ministerial positions at the detriment of qualified ones. They question "why so-and-so, whose pathetic lack of capabilities comrades all knew too well, had been given the leg-up in a ministry while so-and-such, comrade of brains and integrity, seemed to be sidelined onto some minor committee chair" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 125). This deliberate encouragement of mediocrity in ministerial appointments prepares grounds for inertia to paralyze the country. But an objective reading also gives reason to doubt the ability of these qualified ones to keep their integrity if they are given the powers. Jacob Zuma, one of the qualified ones, is actually immersed in accusations of rape and corruption and only gets scot-free because the justice system is manned by the 'democratic' government (Gordimer, 2012, pp. 255-256). Hence, those who had fought for and believed in the anti-apartheid struggle are disillusioned when their leaders, competent or not, betray their trusts.

In fact, these new leaders have engaged in another struggle, the scramble for power and money. This is evident in the schisms that take place within the ANC itself. Mosiuoa Lekota, a prominent anti-apartheid fighter, takes advantage of accusations against Zuma to create his own political party called COPE ("Congress of the People"). Although he is defeated in the elections, Jabu who had voted for COPE learns afterwards the implication of its leaders in bribery. COPE leaders who manage a public

fuel company receive undue bonuses of 1.8 million and 3.5 million rands! (Gordimer, 2012, p. 350). Jabu is obliged to admit that there is no difference between corrupt ANC politics and the supposedly new COPE. This situation reinforces dystopianism in the novel since expected sources of change eventually turn to be replicas of the Establishment one is running away from. Steve describes these so-called comrades as “reborn clones of apartheid bosses” (Gordimer, 2012, p. 223). This is a direct evocation of neocolonialism. Qiao (2018) asserts that neocolonialism “inherits the historical legacy of colonialism and presents itself in various subtle forms” (1). One of these forms is the occupation of political space by leaders who pretend to serve the people meanwhile they steal national wealth. As such, neocolonialism induces formerly colonized people into being “willingly and sometimes actively self-colonized” (Qiao, 2018, p. 1). Those in power become the new colonists by indirectly reproducing the same oppressive schemas as the white colonists. These leaders turn their backs from a shared ideal, oppress their kin and there is no hint that a reversal is possible. Revealing his own disillusionment, Steve asks Jabu: “D’you really believe in the classless society we were making for? Our old freedom dream stuff? We’ve been woken up. Had to be” (Gordimer, 2012, p. 228). Steve’s words indicate that he has already relinquished every hope for betterment. He refers to their anti-apartheid dream as mere stuff and he recognizes having been awakened by the shocking realities of the present. It was imperative that their utopic vision be caught by facts—one of the facts being that the “*Ubuntu*—we’re all one, I am you, you are me” ideology has been completely forgotten and forsaken (Gordimer, 2012, p. 111).

The absurd equally plays a fundamental role in enhancing the dystopian character of *No Time Like the Present*. Absurdity springs from some disorientation in the attitudes of characters and ironies in events described in the narrative. In this novel, absurdity is politically oriented and focuses on Zuma. We are told that “Zuma headed the ‘Moral Regeneration Movement’, a government initiative on prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS” (Gordimer, 2012, p. 133). This means that he is supposed to be a model of moral rectitude, especially in matters of sexuality. Ironically though, he is accused of raping the seropositive daughter of a comrade, and Jabu’s legal experience induces the reader to believe that Zuma is guilty in this affair. The fact that Zuma displays ignorance of HIV prevention measures in court is alarming for someone who ought to lead the fight against AIDS pandemic. This situation underscores the topsy-turvy management of the country, and more so, if we realize that Zuma’s rape is symbolic of the regime’s exploitation of and deviation from liberation ideals. To give a greater ironic twist to the whole story, Gordimer’s (2012) narrator keeps the reader in suspense of a definitive judgment that never comes: Zuma slips through the nets of justice and the rape affair is tagged as a defamatory plot against his presidential ambitions (p. 134, p. 142).

The peak of absurdity is reached when Zuma is elected president “with seventy-two charges of fraud and corruption against him” (Gordimer, 2012, p. 322). One of his first promises is that he will fight corruption and nepotism under his administration meanwhile he is involved in corruption scandals (Gordimer, 2012, p. 348). There seem to be opaque blinds that prevent masses all over the country from

noticing the perfidy underlying his candidature. Zuma's ANC also promises "to rescue South Africa from global recession. Cut unemployment to less than 15 percent by 2014" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 282). Naïve, disillusioned people in quest for a hope to hang on believe in these promises which carry from their very origin the promise of their failure. The population therefore makes wrong choices for the wrong leaders. The narrator summarizes the nation's evident confusion in these words: "The country is in its adolescence" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 260). This metaphor is poignant for at least two reasons: firstly, it denotes a premature state wherein false consciousness is dominant; secondly, it connotes the presence of troublesome political 'hormones' secreted by the ruling establishment and which disrupt rational functionalities. Post-apartheid South Africa is thus in a transitional phase, just that we do not know where it will lead the country to.

The future is somber and the narrator emphasizes this point with her own reflections:

*What is the difference between not doing anything, and having arrived, while desperately opposing yourself, at recognition that what had been believed, fought for hasn't begun to be followed—granted, couldn't be realised—in fifteen years—and right now, every day degenerates. Oh that fucking litany, Better Life, how often to face the dead with it.* (Gordimer, 2012, p. 351)

The narrator in these words captures the dystopian trend of political activism in South Africa by arguing that it makes no difference to have fought against apartheid or not. This is because the expectations of those who fought (and who seemed to achieve their goal) have been quickly battered by reality. Former freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for societal equity and justice are now obliged to "oppose" themselves, that is, they are forced to live/witness the corruption of their ideals by fellow comrades. Fifteen years after the struggle, they are compelled to admit that they have failed: fighting in the bush, being imprisoned and tortured, making bombs, dying, all of these efforts were futile. Not only has the present condition failed to fulfill the promises of the past, it has also made the situation worse than it was before—and the deterioration is accentuated day after day. It is similar to watching powerlessly a newborn baby drown bit by bit. It is the dream of many generations that Mbeki and Zuma have selfishly betrayed. That faith in a better life to come has claimed many lives and, alas, there has been no significant improvement.

This section has analyzed the political disenchantment caused by egocentric administration of post-apartheid South Africa by former *Umkhonto* leaders. The incompetence of these leaders, the impunity that accompanies their illegal activities and power-mongering constitute the recipe of ex-fighters' dystopian outlook throughout the novel. This outlook is emphasized by the fact that both the rulers and masses are afraid to acknowledge the sordid realities of society. For the ruling class, resistance to dystopian reality means refusing to accept their failure to construct societal peace, equity and freedom; for the masses, rejecting dystopianism implies the refusal to surrender and the denial that their hopes have turned into chimeras. But as the Dolphins are forced to acknowledge, "the shit of the past" (the apartheid mentality) has not yet been cleaned (Gordimer, 2012, p. 254).

#### 4.2 Individual versus Society: The Impossibility of Progress

Pataki (2017) highlights the fact that dystopian novels are concerned with “negotiation of individual’s position within the oppressive society” (p. 428). She equally mentions that “the dystopian world is inevitably linked to a totalitarian state apparatus, depriving its inhabitants of freedom” (Pataki, 2017, p. 426). As such, there is a conflict opposing the individual to his/her society as he/she strives to obtain freedom which the regime firmly withholds. In the context of South Africa, this totalitarianism is not a direct brutal assault of the government to restrict liberties; it is rather its breeding of societal inequalities that help consolidate its power. In such context, the dystopian protagonist is usually abreast with the socio-political and economic state of his/her country, he/she is critical of the ills of this society and concerned with breaking free from societal shackles. There is, therefore, a complex intertwining of freedom, fear and happiness in dystopian fiction. Happiness is viewed as an ideal that only freedom gives way to, but the worry is that freedom remains unattained mainly because of 1) the fear of failing anew and 2) the resilience of socially-destructive practices to individuals’ improvement moves. In this section, Jabu and Steve are considered as dystopian protagonists in *No Time Like the Present*. Their engagement with societal inequities is given keen attention because it serves indirectly as a battleground where they oppose the regime’s complicit aloofness, albeit unsuccessfully.

After living an anti-apartheid clandestine life in Glengrove Place, Jabu and Steve caress the hope of starting afresh in a new age. The oppressive system is apparently dismantled. The narrator, who narrates most of the story from the third person limited point of view, says: “it seemed an Age was over. Surely nothing less than a New Age when the law is not promulgated on pigment, anyone may live and work and move anywhere in a country commonly theirs” (Gordimer, 2012, p. 4). There is a semblance of freedom and equality after the Struggle: Blacks can now live in former exclusively-white populated suburbs; many black students are admitted into various higher education programs; and mixed marriages are no longer prohibited. Nevertheless, this impression of freedom proves deceptive when Jabu and Steve venture into their respective professions. The societal commitment infused in them by *Umkhonto* directs them towards vocations that put them in close contact with the people.

Jabu is, for some time, hypnotized by the ideals of the Struggle. About her choice to leave teaching and join the legal professions, we are told: “[The Struggle is] not left in the bush camp or the desert or the prison, it is the purpose of being alive; still a comrade... So she’s going to become a lawyer” (Gordimer, 2012, p. 56). Jabu’s choice is clearly not motivated by financial rewards; her profession is a dedication to the predicaments of the oppressed as well as a move to make things better with the measure of power she has (Gordimer, 2012, p. 115). This is evident when she fights to protect the rights of black workers who are dismissed without compensation after working in mining companies for years (Gordimer, 2012, p. 277). According to her, life is meaningful only when it is geared toward justice and freedom. But the cases she works on at the Justice Center soon reflect into her eyes the shocking reality: racism is still present and causes havoc. For instance, while Steve is in London for a conference, Jabu relates to him an incident (through phone call): “a farmer’s shot a man he saw on his mealie field, he says he thought

it was a baboon—She doesn't have to say white farmer (who else)" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 173). A white farmer has deliberately killed a Black farmer, pretexting that he was protecting his farm from a "baboon". The reference to a baboon is obviously racist because it is a primate to which white supremacists have always associated black people—when it is not "baboon", it is "monkey". Thus racism disguises to resurface in ways that are difficult to forestall and stop.

Commenting on Jabu's and Steve's expectation to witness the end of racism, Pawlicki (2014) argues that although they are shocked and surprised to live the perpetuation of racism, this attitude is "in a sense, the expression of the protagonists' latent naivety as to the anticipated progress of the post-apartheid South Africa" (p. 182). In other words, their utopic world is challenged and extinguished by dystopian realities. At another moment, Jabu complains about a case in which white students in hostels abuse black cleaners, and no sanction is given; the hostel is simply closed (Gordimer, 2012, p. 217). Racism, therefore, perpetrates its attacks on blacks with the consenting impunity and silence of a black democratic government. Jabu is forced to realize that even her dedication to justice/freedom is insufficient for redressing widespread corrupt mentalities.

Steve has his own lot of disappointment. His conversion from industrial chemistry to academics is geared at impacting young people more effectively. Early in his teaching profession, he notices that the politicized intake of black students in the University maintains, or even worsens, the intellectual gap between white and black South Africans. He organizes what he calls 'Band-aid' lectures for black students because their intellectual abilities are far beneath university requirements, contrary to their white counterparts. Steve welcomes these students in his house regularly to teach them. He quickly realizes that this initiative is quite inadequate to solve this problem. He asks himself "whether a token of coaching in hopes of bringing [black students] up to university standards can achieve recovery from ten years of hopelessly poor schooling" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 66). Indeed, for this educational disparity to be resolved, and in a bid to maintain social equilibrium, a profound reformation of the educational system has to be undertaken at the national level, not a minute individual enterprise. With this idea in mind, Steve becomes an activist in his university urging his colleagues to address the issue seriously with the Minister of Education. Steve and LesegoMoloi (another colleague) are quickly viewed as "Lefties" who want to disturb the status-quo of "the old guard" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 65). The tag, leftie, is used to define him against the right, "normal" majority that condones the iniquitous educational system. Steve's categorization marginalizes him because he is prevented from building a synergy that can effect significant change in blacks' education. Ashcroft et al. (2013) opine that marginality is "a positionality that is best defined in terms of the limitations of a subject's access to power" (p. 151). Steve, like Jabu, wants to reform a racist system but his rejection by colleagues puts him in a position of minority, hence weakening his laudable efforts.

Upon many attempts, a delegation is constituted and finally decides to meet the minister who purposefully avoids them. The delegation is received by a top official who gives them this evasive answer: "The department is applying itself intently to changes that will bring about development

necessary for the times” (Gordimer, 2012, p. 101). This answer is a polite way of telling these teachers to go back to their classes and shut up. The cosmetic changes that are eventually made (like the change from “Pupil” to “Learners”; from “Results” to “Outcomes”) show that the academic Establishment has not taken the problem of black students into consideration (Gordimer, 2012, p. 92). This fundamental negligence provokes massive unemployment in the country as black students obtain university degrees with no competence/know-how; whites are privileged by the job market because their training has been thorough. Hence, all of Steve’s efforts have been watered down. His dismay is captured when the narrator says: “in the faculty room he was in a coterie of the present among the structures of the past, fuming inwardly against... the rites of scholarly self-esteem” (Gordimer, 2012, p. 122). These words foreground Steve’s detachment from inertia nestled in the education sector. He is living a present which ought to be devoid of past inequalities but he is witnessing the survival, worst still, the nursing of inequalities in a delicate, pivotal sector.

The segregating policies of apartheid are indirectly reinforced when the new government neglects the training of blacks. In a discussion on this issue, Jake asks Marc: “Can you tell me the ‘advancement’ in granting degrees to students who’re going to enter professions unequipped to do the work they’re supposed to do... That’s perpetuating the racist “inferiority of blacks” brains’, that’s apartheid dolled up as Black Economic Empowerment” (Gordimer, 2012, p. 260). Jake is actually pointing at a trap embedded in demagogic claims that the admission of blacks in higher education institutions constitutes in itself an emancipatory, equality-driven policy. Steve attempts unsuccessfully to make the academic administration take special measures that would help black students compete equally with whites.

Therefore, both Jabu and Steve use their jobs as springboards to a more egalitarian society wherein justice and freedom would be preserved. The order they try to put after the demise of the apartheid Establishment ultimately fails because the so-called democratic regime of Mbeki is nonchalant, inert and aloof from the pressing problems of the legal and educational systems. This insouciance allows the canker of apartheid and racism to keep scorching South Africa’s black-majority population. The freedom ideal for which Jabu and Steve sacrificed; the inequalities which they so vigorously combatted during apartheid; their personal initiatives towards betterment—all these are crumpled by a reckless government.

#### *4.3 A Steaming Socio-Economic Context: Dearth, Violence and Chaos*

This section explores the series of events in the novel which point at a degradation of the social context in a way that sustains hopelessness. Dearth, violence and chaos signal a dystopian future for South Africa. Claeys(2017) posits that dystopia emerges from problems of widespread poverty and the concentration of wealth by a small group (p. 274). These create a general sense of unhappiness in society, thereby reinforcing the notion of dystopia. Here we are analyzing post-apartheid South Africa bearing in mind the fundamental historical reality of social inequality. Tafira (2018) states that, “Ironically, South African whites who constitute 10 percent of the population own more than 80 percent of the country’s wealth” (p. viii). It is this gross economic inequality that engenders all sorts of tension

in post-apartheid South Africa. This section therefore explores problems like xenophobia, abject poverty, the perpetuation of rabid racism, and the question of emigration to show how these issues firmly imprint a dystopian character on the society described in *No Time Like the Present*.

As mentioned earlier, Nadine Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present* offers no break to its reader; it constantly assaults him/her with deteriorations of the social corpus, especially as the story gives the impression of being narrated by powerless commentators of this degradation. Jabu, one of these commentators, raises the first alarm when she evokes the possible contamination of South Africa by Robert Mugabe's poor governance. She asserts: "Mugabe's good start in Zimbabwe has careered off into dictatorship. We can't pretend other neighbours aren't in trouble or heading for trouble and we won't be involved" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 24). Jabu's premonition is confirmed in the later parts of the text when poor Zimbabweans migrate in great numbers to South Africa and create unprecedented social tensions. The country finds itself in deep trouble. It is this influx of Zimbabwean refugees, coupled with South Africa's widening social fissures, which stir the urge of emigration in many middle-class South Africans. On the other hand, the implications and exigencies of migration make Jabu and Steve (who are of the middle-class) reconsider their wish to migrate. The novel, therefore, ends with an impassable situation wherein the protagonists are entrapped in socio-economic chaos at home.

Zimbabweans are running away from misery and death to seek refuge in South Africa. As Steve says, they are fleeing from a country "where you can die slowly, because your brothers take everything from you... for themselves" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 195). These Zimbabweans first settle in Alex Township but are quickly driven by the police because it is a rich, mostly white populated area (Gordimer, 2012, p. 198). They now turn to poor black suburbs where their black race makes it difficult to distinguish them from Black South Africans. And, of course, there is no police to send them out. The 'invasion' of these Zimbabweans has the merit of revealing the structure of neo-apartheid South Africa where class stratification has increased racial inequities. The whites are rich and well educated while blacks suffer dearth in the ghettos. While white towns have been freed of Zimbabwean intruders, black quarters experience a boom of violence with regular, sometimes murderous, confrontations between black South Africans and refugees. The narrator depicts this tension and violence in these words:

*No authority but what they can lay their hands on: knives, axes, their resident gangs' stolen guns; fire. Some Somalis fled from their country's particular conflict bring with them their trading instincts and have set up stores which are torched with the new traditional weapons of South Africa resorted to during the Struggle, burning tyres. And the invaders are fighting back.* (Gordimer, 2012, p. 203)

These ferocious attacks are quickly represented in discussions as South Africans' outright display of xenophobia. But do South Africans really hate other Africans?

Tafira (2018) argues that this problem of xenophobia should be analyzed from the perspective of race and as a result of blacks' internalization of white racism and violence. According to him, xenophobia in South Africa is "black-on-black racism/intra-black racism practiced by black people on other black people whom they deem to be inferior" (Tafira, 2018, pp. 8-10). Although the psychological impacts of

colonialism (apartheid) cannot be denied, we disagree with Tafira's reading because it gives too much importance to the psychological aspect and minimizes the material one. Most South Africans who engage in violent 'xenophobic' acts are not reproducing unconsciously white racism and they do not view strangers as inferior to themselves; these black South Africans are rather responding to the reality of their economic marginalization by post-apartheid regimes, ever conscious of the fact that fighting against strangers—be they black or else—is the only means they have to make their inert government understand their daily predicaments.

Also, as long as black South Africans' conditions are precarious, it is hasty and simplistic to conclude that they hate strangers. Their so-called xenophobic instinct is less the dislike for foreigners than the urgency of protecting morsels that maintain them alive. In effect, they would like to help poor fellow blacks from neighboring countries, but in a situation where goods are scarce, survival is obtained by the fittest. As the narrator adroitly opines, "in last resort against their own condition [black South Africans] are desperately defending the means, scraps of substance, their own survival" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 206). Hence, their violent actions are the signs of a marginal existence in their own country. Steve emphasizes this point when he says that black South Africans live "an existence as refugees from [South African] economy, unemployed, unhoused, surviving by ingenuities of begging" and should not be guilty of defending "the only space, the only means of survival against competitors for this *almost nothing*" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 212). Here, Steve indicates that blacks have been economically excluded. They are left with almost nothing and cannot dare share it with strangers, even if these ones are also facing difficult times. Ashcroft et al. (2013) submit that, "marginality unintentionally reifies centrality because it is the centre that creates the condition of marginality" (p. 151). This implies that the violence exhibited by poor black South Africans against black strangers materializes the economic chasm separating them from the rich white minority. The black 'democratic' government is responsible for this situation because it has maintained an economic imbalance in society and has only been preoccupied with embezzling as much money as possible. Hence, it is sheer poverty, concretizing a marginal position, which causes these tensions. So instead of labeling the South African subaltern, who defends his crumbs, as xenophobic the accusing finger should rather point at African rulers who enrich themselves to the detriment of their disillusioned peoples.

Furthermore, fragmentation of the societal fabric is projected by a racist scandal at The Free State University. The narrator ironically says:

*White students... held out the ultimate hand of non-racialism and no class prejudice by inviting the university cleaners of their hostel, black, to a party... The mostly elderly four women and one man whose role in these students' higher education was to clean up after them, danced in drunken freedom, and then on their knees forced to help themselves generously from a pot of stew. One of the students had pissed into it.* (Gordimer, 2012, p. 234)

This symbolic blatant insult made by young, rich white students against elderly, black people exposes the economic disparity between both races as well as the racist mentality assimilated by many white



South Africans. Genuine economic empowerment of blacks, which would reduce racism, is fudged by the government thereby allowing the notion of whites' supremacy to be consolidated. By their sordid act, these students reinstate their belief in white superiority. As Ashcroft et al. (2013) point out, racism always has "the underlying desire for hierarchical categorization" wherein white physical features are associated with superiority and others with inferiority (p. 219). It is this racial binary that is enacted by these students and it is expected that the leaders who fought apartheid punish such ignominy. Alas, the government remains silent. Since the novel is set in a globalized era, this racist act is filmed and shared through the internet by its perpetrators. The university institution takes no drastic sanction against these students, and the black workers are simply ignored. This racist scandal perturbs Jabu profoundly to the point that she starts considering migration as a means to run away from this racist society (Gordimer, 2012, pp. 238-239).

After this racist scandal, the narrator takes us back to issues of unemployment and poverty. Jabu has an encounter with a broom-seller who has finished school and is still unemployed two years later (Gordimer, 2012, p. 278). Despite the education and degrees he has received, this black South African is limited to selling brooms, an activity that can only earn him a meager pittance. Yet, in line with dystopian representations, we are made to think that this broom-seller's condition is better than that of other blacks. For instance, in her car, Jabu sees a bony beggar clinging to the glasses of her car, imploring to be given some money. The narrator says this beggar is "barely alive", meaning that death can be read on his body (Gordimer, 2012, p. 303). What is worth noting is the meaning Jabu gives to his begging gesture; she thinks that "what whites did and blacks must change, pointed down the open mouth" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 304). In other words, the black beggar acts like a symbol of the failure of post-apartheid leadership, constantly reminding drivers and passersby that the regime has completely missed the mark. Indeed, democratic governments after apartheid "failed to redistribute the country's wealth and establish conditions for thoroughgoing participatory democracy, thus leaving the door open for widespread social protest, populist demagoguery and apathy" (Saul & Bond, 2014, p. 146). Thus, the beggar's ghastly gestures symbolize the oppressive nature of post-apartheid regimes.

The series of problems in this country is extended to the educational sector and to public services. Nothing functions normally. In the educational field, students riot because the school fee is too elevated; fresh year maths students in a university follow lessons seated on the floor; school authorities embezzle millions destined for scholarships; nationwide performance of engineering students is poor (Gordimer, 2012, p. 350). In the public service it is a succession of strikes that assault important aspects of social and economic life. The narrator says: "On the first day of August telecommunications workers began a strike of 40,000 union members. The workers at the zoo in the capital city Pretoria were on strike...A metropolitan railway strike continues" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 377). Also, electricity workers threaten to strike because the National Treasury refuses to give money they need (Gordimer, 2012, p. 380). To crown this disorder, there is a rise in insecurity throughout the country. Wethu (Jabu's house girl) for instance has to learn to keep away from dangerous sites in the town. Despite her prudence, Wethu is

brutalized when robbers penetrate Jabu's house to steal (Gordimer, 2012, p. 382, p. 387). A hint is given that one of the thieves is an unemployed boy who used to hang around in the streets. Violent confrontations between the natives and Zimbabwean refugees continue with some unfortunate ones dying in the course (Gordimer, 2012, p. 401). South Africa seems to have reached a dead-end where people resign and surrender to their lot. It is in this hopeless and steaming social context that the novel ends.

The last sentence of the novel, "I'm not going", is uttered by Jabu and Steve (Gordimer, 2012, p. 421). This statement connotes a faint utopia (that things may someday get better) and the vicious cycle is expected to continue. Refusing to go/emigrate implies that one is ready to cope with the present bad situation, harboring at the back of one's mind that things can change one day. In line with Pataki's (2017) observation, there is an "inevitably circular nature of utopian and dystopian ideals" observed in the fact that "they repeatedly instigate each other's occurrence" (p. 426). Thus, the last sentence of the text hints at a frail possibility of improvement that prepares the ground for another dystopia. Davies (2014) emphasizes this point when he argues that Jabu's and Steve's decision to stay in South Africa "despite the pervasive sense of disillusionment and fatigue with which they have been grappling" is a symbolic enactment of their return to the public, political sphere (91). They have decided to endure the poor state of affairs, to dream again and take action against socio-political problems, making the reader wonder whether this will not lead to another—and perhaps greater—disenchantment. In our opinion, their final decision to refuse to emigrate (escape) signals a utopia that carries the germs of another dismal end (dystopia).

In sum, this section has analyzed the progressive deterioration of the socio-economic fabric in post-apartheid South Africa. The country is shaken by violence (resulting from abject poverty of the black population), the perpetuation of racism and a general sentiment of unhappiness and insecurity affecting both public and private spheres. This tension-ridden environment makes many South Africans envisage emigration in a bid to escape the present's hellishness. All these foreground dystopianism. Claeys (2010) actually defines dystopia as the fact of "portraying feasible negative visions of social and political development, cast principally in fictional form" (p. 109). Thus, Nadine Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present* is a dystopian text because it realistically depicts the dilapidation of the social nexus and problematizes the notion of escape.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the dystopian features that transpire from a reading of Nadine Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present*. The first section has discussed the betrayal of freedom ideals and the sense of loss that characterizes ex-fighters who do not know what to do and whom to rely on. The second section has analyzed the attempts made by the novel's protagonists to effect change in their respective sectors, and how government's inertia blocks these efforts and represses them. The third section of this article has retraced the series of chaotic events that destroy South Africa's socio-economic fabric and

intensify hopelessness at the end of the narrative. Thus, no time resembles the present condition because anti-apartheid dreams have not been realized and there is no indication that things will improve in the future. This article suggests that Africans conceptualize their freedom before engaging into struggles for when the reverse is done, disenchantment is inevitable.

This research has led to two findings. The first is that oppression has the tendency of creating in the mind of the oppressed a false consciousness, which, when left unharnessed, transforms them into oppressors afterwards. By this we mean that the oppressed feel and think they will naturally/automatically set things straight in society when they start wielding power. Nonetheless, as the South African experience demonstrates, this assumption is faulty and has a fundamental weakness: the absence of caution and thorough preparation. The oppressed should train themselves for freedom by practicing leadership skills that promote collectivity rather than individuality/centrality. In this way, when the oppressed gains freedom and eventually exerts power, poor governance practices will be confined to their least expression. Thus, the oppressed should not be misled to think that they will be good leaders simply because they have been victims of oppression.

The second finding has to do with Gordimer's narrative style. Her ability to blend the limited and omnipresent modes of the third-person point of view with the ex-fighters' dialogues enables the reader live the dystopian experience. As the narrator delves into the characters' thoughts and allows them express their feelings about the country, the reader internalizes their desperation and their craving for true freedom. Hence, the narrative technique emphasizes the sad, melancholic content and positions Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present* as an artful molder of consciousness.

This study therefore arrives at the conclusion that Nadine Gordimer's novel captures the inherent handicap of political change in Africa, that of not being reliable: what is expected of change in a rosy imagination turns out many a times into a nightmare. This is the sentiment of post-apartheid South Africans when, having nurtured a common dream for a non-racial and classless society, find themselves abandoned and exploited by the very people who led the Struggle for freedom. The narrator summarizes the disillusion brought by change when she says: "Change, change, the past had to be overturned but what crawls out of the rubble can surface in some form anywhere" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 252). Actually, racism camouflages as class stratification and the apartheid regime simply puts on black masks. As the narrator further highlights, the country has to deal no longer with the "rising sun post-apartheid but the present freedom's storms" (Gordimer, 2012, p. 290). At the end of the story every aspect of societal life has to be reformed—if only change does not disguise into old structures as it usually does.

Although South Africa is still far from freedom, Nadine Gordimer finds her own freedom as a writer through her subjective but realistic depiction of her country. In her own words, a writer's freedom "is his right to maintain and publish to the world a deep, intense, private view of the situation in which he finds his society" (Gordimer, as cited in Pawlicki, 2014, p. 174). The intensity of socio-political problems recorded in the novel and her personal implication through the narrator's opinions indicate

that Gordimer attains her artistic freedom through severe critique of South Africa's morass, an interweaving of literature with politics.

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