

The Racial Question and the Survival of Multiracial Democracy in Post-Apartheid South Africa¹

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ABSTRACT

This article which draws inspiration from the novels of Nicholas Mhlongo, Nadine Gordimer, Andre Brink and Zakes Mda focuses on the racial question on South Africa's public sphere after the official end of apartheid. The article's discussion of the despicable racist attitudes of South Africans and its debilitating consequences on the post-1994 multiracial democracy is predicated on the fictionalized examples drawn from Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*, Gordimer's *The House Gun and Get a Life*, Brink's *The Rights of Desire* and Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* respectively. It is worthy to indicate that the umbilical link between race and racism has always been endemic to the socio-economic, cultural and political conflicts between the different indigenous peoples of South Africa and the two major European powers who were the Dutch and British who in the late 17th Century and early 18th Century settled permanently in this part of Africa (T.R.Batten, 1951: 129-64). Christopher O'Reilly (2001) indicates that the institutionalization of racism as a governance policy known as 'Apartheid' was implemented by the Afrikaner National Party in 1948. And it formally ended in 1994 when Nelson Mandela became the country's first black president after winning the first ever organized multiracial election (40). And this event, on the political sphere, marked the official end of racialism as an institutionalized policy which subjugated a majority of the country's population considered 'racially inferior' to the minority-turned majority Afrikaner population. Despite the tremendous efforts of the Nelson Mandela and Tabo Beki leaderships geared at the concrete implantation of the spirit of reconciliation and nationhood in all South Africans, the racial question continues to be one of the many challenges that impede the African National Congress' (ANC) nation-building goal. Thus this article seeks to illustrate the fragility of the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation evident in the persistent resurgence and upsurge of racist attitudes of the Apartheid past which puts to question the practicality of the guiding principle of its democracy, that of a 'Rainbow Nation,' formulated by its architects who are Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. The central thrust of this paper is informed by new historicists and Postcolonial theoretical considerations. It borrows from the major concepts of New Historicism such as those propounded by Anton Kaes, Steven Greenblatt, Jerome McGann, Louis Montrose and the Postcolonial concepts of Centre/Margin, Self/Other binaries, Race, Class and Ethnicity.

Key Terms: *Post-apartheid; Racism; Multiracial Democracy; Nationhood and Nation-building*

The guiding principle of South Africa's multiracial democracy, that of a 'Rainbow Nation,' formulated by its architects who are Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu is endangered by the residues of racist attitudes upheld by a cross section of her population. An examination of the racist attitudes of South Africans in respective novels of Gordimer, Brink, Mhlongo and Mda show that the delicate state of social cohesion noticed on the country's public spheres is the consequence of the four decades of apartheid rule. This major challenge to national unity is ironically informed by the paradoxical imagery that underlies the concept of a 'Rainbow Nation,' as the political metaphor and symbol of the multiracial and democratic character of the country. To Mai Palmberg (1999):

On the general level the metaphor is a beautiful symbol for new attitude towards the various groups making up South Africa, each welcome to add colour to a multiethnic country. Surely equality, tolerance and pluralism were the values intended in the metaphor. But one does not have to be the devil's advocate to ask whether the respect for other groups is built on safe democratic ground. (17-18)

Palmberg's critique of this image which is part of the fulcrum of the country's multiracial democracy seems to dovetail with the principal argument in this paper. And the reason for this state of affairs in the country is better understood

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from the actual notion of 'post-apartheid.' In essence, Brendon Nicholl's (1999) declares that "the term post-apartheid signals a certain liminality; that of the ever-receding end of the old regime within which the new dispensation can never entirely realise itself as such" (4). By implication, it is difficult for the new leadership to fully accomplish its vision of a united multiracial South Africa due to the presence of racial attitudes conditioned by the vestiges of the apartheid era which unfortunately exist in a continuum that is difficult to eradicate. Ironically, the positive outcome that should emerge from the convergence of 'post-apartheid', as a political epoch, and 'rainbow nation', as the image of a cherished future South Africa, has rather exposed the weak foundation of the country. Concretely, the critical question which seems to arise in the novels of Gordimer, Brink, Mhlongo and Mda is: how total is the reconciliation and unity of the 'new' South Africa when there is still so much hatred, skepticism, dissatisfaction across the former racial divide about the very character of the post-apartheid nation they all agreed on? Actually, a close reading of these novels reveals that the three most crucial precepts of equality, tolerance and pluralism that should constitute the bedrock of South Africa's multiracial democracy seem difficult to achieve on the country's public sphere due to racist attitudes. Hence, Gordimer, Brink, Mda and Mhlongo portray post-apartheid South Africa as a society where old racial attitudes conditioned by apartheid realities still continue to influence inter-personal relationships despite the official call for forgiveness and reconciliation.

MULTIRACIAL SOUTH AFRICA AND THE FRAGILITY OF RECONCILIATION

The racially motivated actions, behaviours and perceptions witnessed on the country's public sphere are dangerous to the survival of the rainbow society and democracy which its founding fathers sought to achieve after the demise of apartheid. An example of the prejudicial attitude and perception to South Africa's nation building initiative is described in Gordimer's (1999). This is the inability and unwillingness of the Lindgards to accept the fact that their son has committed murder. Such an attitude is informed by their belief in the superiority of the white race which is too 'civilised' to commit murder. According to them, their son's cultural and intellectual upbringing grounded in the principles of humanism and Catholic doctrine – both being common precepts of the white race – could not have permitted him to commit such a debasing act of senseless cruelty. This overt display of racial chauvinism is vividly depicted when Harald and Claudia, according to the narrator, claim:

[...] that kind of act isn't in the range of emotional control in which their son's character was formed, or the contemporary ethic that men don't own women. Therefore, the act could not have been committed [...] what they burn to ask their son is: does he know why the man was killed? (Gordimer 1999:31)

Ironically the issue at stake, from the Lindgards' point of view, is not why their son commits the crime in question but rather why they think someone else could have killed his friend, Carl Jespersen. By refusing to accept the fact that their son has committed the crime he is charged with shows that the family is not ready to take responsibility, as whites, in the degrading state of security in the country. At this juncture, it can be assumed that the unwillingness of the Lindgards to accept their son's responsibility in the crime is actually a glaring manifestation of the spirit that engendered racism in South Africa since they think, like the architects of apartheid, that Duncan's racial and cultural background ingrained in a 'civilised' and 'standardized' manner of interrelating with other people put their son above the social constraints that could have compelled him to committing such an outrageous crime. And if one were to juxtapose such an outlook with the current historical situation of the country, one would subtly conclude that Duncan's parents hold such a view because it is common knowledge that such an outrageous crime as their son's is only committed by blacks whose 'inferior' and 'non-standardized' racial, cultural and intellectual backgrounds did not prepare them psychologically to shun all acts of violence.

This seemingly overstated conclusion comes from the self-deception which characterises Claudia's outlook even when she and her husband, Harald, are finally convinced of their son's guilt. In fact Claudia hesitates to accept her son's full responsibility in the death of Jespersen and she even thinks that Duncan's crime is not as outrageous as others existing daily in the 'new' South Africa. Ironically, she claims that Duncan's crime is just the unfortunate end of a domestic quarrel amongst former gay lovers provoked by jealousy. Hence the element of racial chauvinism clearly emerges when she compares her son's crime with the widespread crime wave in the country with the intension to justify the supposed inconsequential nature of Duncan's crime. This is palpable when she ironically declares:

[...] what is an indoor killing (homeground in the suburbs), lover's obscure quarrel, gays' jealousy [...] in comparison with the spectacular public violence where you can film or photograph people shot dead on the streets in crossfire of the new hit squads, hired by taxi drivers and drug dealers who have learnt their tactics from the state hit-squads of the old regime with its range of methods of 'permanently removing' political opponents, from

blowing up with car and parcel bombs to knifing their bodies again and again to make bloodily sure bullets have done their work. (Gordimer 1999: 157)

Such an incongruous comparison as that which Claudia struggles to establish between Duncan's crime and those that now exist in the country, however relevant, exposes the racially motivated perception and attitude that threatens the aspirations of building a cohesive multiracial democracy. In fact, Claudia, by ironically trying to downplay the gravity of her son's crime by comparing it with the new wave of more violent crimes in the country, is manifestly shifting away the responsibility and contribution of her son in the existence of violent crimes to the country's past. This sort of outlook is actually eroding the bases of South Africa's quest for nationhood especially when one thinks that Claudia is subtly pointing out that her son's crime is unjustly being given much attention while the country is going up in flames, evidenced by the lawlessness in its street mostly orchestrated by blacks who have learned it from the apartheid regimes of the past. This shows that Claudia and symbolically most white South Africans are still to accept the new socio-political ethos given that she, like most whites, believes that outrageous crimes can only be committed by blacks who have learned to be violent as a result of their turbulent past.

The perceptions of the Lindgards are synonymous to Ruben's and Magrieta's who are still stuck to the racial binaries of old that was built on the supposed 'racial inferiority' of black South Africans. In fact, Ruben who does not seem to have any positive view about the 'new' South Africa since he claims that the country is no longer a safe place for whites because the blacks' led government is synonymous to violence. In fact, Ruben believes that the ANC's accession to power has destroyed the order which the apartheid establishment had imposed on the society. This explains why he tells Tessa Butler who wishes to go for a walk in the nights that "do be careful. The world is not a safe place any longer. Especially not for young women on their own" (Brink 2001:73). In Ruben's opinion the widespread violence noticed in post-apartheid South Africa is perpetrated by blacks and the white community are its first victims evidenced by the appeal to Tessa Butler to be cautious. And the questions that arise from Ruben's seemingly apprehensive attitude are: is the post-apartheid world no longer a safe place simply because the society is ruled by blacks? Or is it true that blacks are all violent especially towards whites? Whatever the answers to these questions, what is evident is that Ruben by subtly comparing the present and past is actually saying that all whites are potential victims in the midst of blacks.

Ruben's apparent racist attitude is further strengthened through Magrieta's pessimistic opinion of the country where according to her all crimes that are committed in her township are the handiwork of blacks. This is the conclusion that emerges when Ruben informs Tessa Butler that "her township can be quite rowdy, she often complains about it ('especially now they get these black people also moving in en squatting en disturbing the peace')" (Brink 2001:139). Like Ruben's view, Magrieta's negative impression of blacks seems to put to question the foundation of a rainbow nation as one could assume that she is certainly controlled by a certain degree of racial superiority which leads her to view blacks as trouble makers.

This obvious adherence to the whites' racial 'superiority' over the black upheld by Ruben and Magrieta can further be noted in the attitude of the Lindgards who are shocked with their son's choice of a black man as his lawyer. The omniscient narrator brings this out when he observes that caught up in such a precarious situation:

[...] she is questioning, and he is; in the muck in which they are stewing now, where murder is done, old prejudices still writhe to the surface. Looking at the appointment of someone called Motsamai that way, he can find an answer within its context [...] could be an advantage. If there's one of the black judges on the bench. (Gordimer 1999:33)

This is one of the many instances in Gordimer's novel where the narrator gets into the minds of the characters to expose what they think about post-apartheid South Africa. In this wise, the reactions above show that the Lindgards believe that their son being a white in the present era cannot have a fair trial because of prejudices harboured by black judges against whites. As such, despite their hesitation to accept a black lawyer, they think it might after all be an advantage to have a black lawyer representing their son because any black judge would consider such a lawyer as his brother by virtue of their racial affinity and the sentence on their son would not be as heavy if he were to be represented by a white lawyer who probably would remind such a judge of the injustices of the past. By harbouring such a view, Harald and Claudia seem to put to question the very foundation of the 'new' South Africa which is built on equality and the respect of human rights of all its citizens irrespective of their racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds as engraved in the country's multiracial constitution discussed by Neil Lazarus (2004:08-26).

What is important to note from the attitude of the Lindgards is the fact that they see themselves and other whites as helpless individuals at the 'margin' who are now subjects of an all-powerful black government that currently occupies the 'centre' of political power. This feeling of victimhood which now dominates white South Africans is vividly exposed when the Lindgards are shocked and angered when Motsamai addresses Harald Lindgard by referring to the

latter's first name. To the Lindgards this would have been an aberration under the apartheid leadership when the white man was in control of the country. Concretely, the family thinks he can address them by their first name because "He has the authority. Present within it, he has complete authority over everything in the enclosure of their situation. Motsamai the stranger from the other side of the divided past. They are in his Pink-palmed black hands" (Gordimer 1999:86). It is quite ironical that despite the official multiracial basis of the 'new' nation ingrained in collective forgiveness and reconciliation between blacks and whites, whites such as the Lindgards still believe that the advent of multiracial democracy has rendered them victims to the new black dominated leadership symbolically and metaphorically represented by Motsamai and his 'Pink-palmed black hands', which now has the authority to punish their son and, by extension, all other whites as it wishes.

Ironically, the real reason for such pessimistic views of the 'new' South Africa can be traced to the fact that multiracial democracy has brought with it a reversal of roles which are very disquieting to whites such as this family who had always been those giving orders from the 'centre' to the blacks at the 'margin'. It is as a result of this 'decentring' of the once racist public sphere that the Lindgards consider Motsamai as "[...] one of those kept-apart strangers from the Other Side has come across and they are dependent on him. The black man will act, speak for them. They have become those who cannot speak, act, for themselves" (Gordimer 1999:89). They believe that the advent of multiracial democracy has rendered them subalterns who are now at the mercy of the blacks at the 'centre' who now have total control over their existence as whites in the 'new' South Africa. This, therefore, accounts for why they believe that not only has Motsamai "[...] come from the Other Side; everything had come to them from the Other Side, the nakedness to the final disaster: powerlessness, helplessness, before the law" (Gordimer 1999:127).

The attitude of the family described above is similar to the attitudes of Magrieta and Ruben who are embarrassed to accept the fact that Tessa Butler has a black boyfriend called Zolani (Brink 2001:278). In this regards, Magrieta's violent attitude towards the Zolani as well as Ruben's lukewarm attitude vis-à-vis Magrieta's behaviour shows that whites and Coloureds are still very reluctant to accept the change in race relations as evident in the amorous relationship between Zolani and Tessa Butler. This therefore proves that tension still exists between the different races even though officially these groups have been reconciled.

Like Gordimer (1999) and Brink (2001), Mda (2002) equally portrays the same sort of stumbling block to the concrete implantation of a multiracial culture in post-apartheid South Africa. Like the Lindgards and Magrieta and Ruben in Gordimer (1999) and Brink (2001) respectively, an Afrikaner like Tjaart Cronje is still ardently adheres to the perception that black South Africans constitute an 'inferior' race. His anger towards post-apartheid is born of frustration especially when he tells Lizette de Vries that he could not get a promotion in the army because "a black terrorist was promoted. I couldn't stay in an affirmative action army and salute on affirmative action general" (Mda 2002:172). The implication of this is that by refusing to salute a black army general he is actually refusing to acknowledge the 'new' nation which is built on reconciliation. But his action is equally ironical because he is part of the joint white and black controlled council where he contests for the post of the major of Excelsior despite his hatred for blacks. This is a discrepancy in his attitude because despite his hatred for the new government, he still wants to be mayor in a country where the policy of the former is bound to affect the way he would want to rule his municipality.

The reluctance of the Lindgards, Magrieta, Ruben and Tjaart Cronje in Gordimer (1999), Brink (2001) and Mda (2002) respectively is quite synonymous to the attitude of Dunga's white colleagues who harbour feelings of being victims to the freedom brought about by multiracial democracy. This is evident in their reaction to the episode of the gay and lesbian protest march which symbolically acts as an outlet for them to express their dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the country. Njomane vividly describes their anger when he visits one of the toilets of Dunga's work place where he eavesdrops on the conversation between his friend's white colleagues. The narrator recounts what one of them tells his friend:

Everything in this country is about the dance nowadays: you want promotion at work, you just dance in the street. You want the reduction of electricity or telephone bills, you go to the street and dance. You want a house, you just dance. You think your boss is a racist, you just dance [...]. (Mhlongo 2004:168)

The full import of the whites' attitude can only be appreciated if one juxtaposes the broader symbolism of the dance alluded to by these whites within an equally broader context of the country's history of protests (as discussed by Patti Waldmeir (1997) and Jamie Frueh (2003) respectively). Historically, the dance referred to metaphorically stands for the protest songs which accompanied anti-apartheid protest marches from the 1960s to 1970s and beyond, and which became symbolic of the demand for freedom and justice. By borrowing from the country's history of protest marches, Dunga's white colleagues seem to be alluding to the broader meaning of the dance which now symbolises the freedom to oppose the state or any constituted order which does not meet up with a people's demand or is slow in doing so as

in the case with the homosexual protesters. Thus the implication of these whites' sarcastic remarks about the symbolism of the dance is an outright condemnation of not only the existence of homosexuality in the country but also, and most significantly, the new order that promotes such a freedom of expression imbedded in protest marches for diverse causes.

Consequently it is necessary to emphasize that these whites are ironically dissatisfied with the advent of multiracial democracy which has enabled the existence of rights and freedoms that now permit South Africans to make known their claims and dissatisfaction on any issue which touches their lives. It is at this juncture that the threat to South Africa's multiracial democracy and nationhood become apparent especially when Dunga's white colleagues subtly regret the end of the era of apartheid and the supposed order that it maintained in the country. One is bound to ask questions such as: why is the present dispensation synonymous to disorder? Is it because it has instituted rights and freedoms of all types whose absence in the past were a source of privilege to the whites? Considering their attitude, one would not be mistaken to think that they are simply angry because they have lost the privileges apartheid accorded to them. This assumption is given credence when one takes into consideration the remarks one of these whites makes to his friend "[...] we must also start learning to dance or the gravy train will pass us by" (Mhlongo 2004:168) which, by implication, means they as white South Africans need to join the blacks by pretending to be like them in order to have a fair share in the national resources which are supposedly being shared amongst blacks and those who uphold the new governance philosophy of multiracialism.

The anger of Dunga's colleagues therefore cast a doubt over the success of multiracial character of South Africa's democratic process since one notices that their anger is not so much about the existence of homosexuality but about the existence of freedom in its much broader sense. Consequently, one is tempted to agree with the view expressed by Ingrid De Kok (2000) when he says:

since the country's 'negotiated revolution' and the inception of full democracy in 1994, nonracialism has remained the government's pivotal philosophy, although it has been put under considerable strain by the demands of affirmative action which necessarily mobilize race as a category. (283)

The concord between the critic's opinion and the attitude of Dunga's white colleagues derives from the negative aspect of affirmative action that seems to give blacks the possibility to demand for privileges from their government observable in the whites' reference to the attitude of these blacks. These whites consider the privileges which the government gives to blacks as a form of disguised racism even though her intention is to gradually integrate blacks in the political life of the country.

In fact, the most painful setback to reconciliation is the loss of confidence of the once marginalized coloured population so early in the process of rebuilding the society. Magrieta is a symbol of the latter group who had hoped that the new government would solve their problems immediately it came to power but who become quickly disillusioned when the latter takes a long time to do so. The gruesome part of this experience is that it is looked at from a racial stance by a white like Ruben who observes "if she'd been too black for the old government, who'd thrown her out of District Six, she now turned out to be not quite black enough for the new people in power" (Brink 2001:89). This shows that everything in the 'new' South Africa, especially the shortcoming of the new government, is still viewed from the perspective of white and black polarity.

In addition to the examples discussed above is a similar but more subtle display of racist tendencies emanating from the white South African community symbolised by Professor McGregor. According to Njomane, Professor McGregor is one of those white South African lecturers who subtly discriminate between their black and white students despite the fact that the political era they live in condemns such attitudes. Njomane claims that while some black students such as Dworkin and Thek raise their hands to answer a question in a lecture on political science, what readily comes to his mind is an observation made by a second year student about white lecturers such as Professor McGregor. Actually, Njomane holds that while his friends, together with other black and white students, are struggling to respond to the Professor's question on the meaning of democracy:

I was thinking about what I'd heard from some of my second year friends, who had told me of a subtle form of racism practiced by some white lecturers. My source had explained that these white lecturers didn't know their black students by name and that was why they often said "yes" when asking them to respond to a question. As for the white students, the white Professors always addressed them politely by their full names. (Mhlongo 2004:142)

From Njomane's reminiscence, it is obvious that even though the emergence of multiracial democracy has instituted a change of attitude in all South Africans, the social interaction between whites and blacks is still very much

determined by the residues of the apartheid era. White South Africans symbolised by white lecturers still have not yet accepted blacks, symbolised by the black students, as equal citizens of a united and non-racial South Africa. In as much as Njomane's flashback to his black friend's conclusion is quite debatable since it might be difficult to deduce the implied racism exhibited by these lecturers whose attitudes may arise from the difficult phonological characteristics of the names of these black students, the element of subtle racism in the responses of these lecturers cannot be completely excluded or overlooked. Njomane, by virtue of the vantage point he occupies in the novel as a first person narrator, adds credence to the claim made above by observing that when Thek puts up her hand to respond to Professor McGregor's question, the latter does not address her politely as he does when a white male student called Rutherford is about to answer the same question. Njomane claims that Professor McGregor actually addresses the white student as "Mr Rutherford" (Mhlongo 2004:143) and this is what lends credence to the claim of an existence of a more subtle and dangerous form of racism in the 'new' South Africa, particularly its academic sphere. Professor McGregor's apparent discriminatory attitude re-echoes what obtained in the past when blacks were called 'boys', better still servants by their white masters who were supposed to be referred to as 'bass' or 'master.' It is rather unfortunate that lecturers like the said professor, instead of assisting the government in its endeavours to stamp out racism, rather contribute significantly in its entrenchment in the minds of the younger generation of South Africans symbolised by their students.

The reaction of Professor McGregor towards his black and white students can be explained by his apparent disregard for and pessimistic view of the underlying meaning of the nation's multiracial democracy. The lukewarmness and nonchalance which characterise the Professor's general attitude toward the meaning of democracy from the South African perspective further demonstrates the widespread unwillingness of a cross section of the country's white academics to embrace the country's political change. In fact the disinterestedness of this group is conspicuous when Professor McGregor pessimistically tells his students:

When you voted on the 27th of April, you were convinced that you were voting for democracy. Election and universal suffrage are now seen as essential features of democracy, but there may be undemocratic at the same time. For example, every constitution requires a framework of offices and conventions that will not be subject to easy amendments by popular choice or vox populi. Moreover, a democratically elected government may proceed to enact, during its term of office, policies that are manifestly in conflict with the wishes and interests of the people [...] Therefore the question we have to ask ourselves is: is democracy just another form of perceived freedom or is it truly the ability to realise oneself in autonomous choices? (Mhlongo 2004:144).

Professor McGregor's critique of the character of South Africa's multiracial democracy is a clear manifestation of the mindset of whites, such as him, who now feel trapped by a new sort of democracy which has given the opportunity to the majority who, hitherto, could not participate in the old repressive and racist democracy which was built on the popular choice of a minority. Thus the Professor's opinion of the country's new and more inclusive democracy carries an undertone of fear and apprehension engendered by the past deeds of his kind whose governance philosophy was based on an exclusive and racist form of democracy wherein the majority in terms of population and political views were excluded from all spheres of life by a numerical minority. As such, Professor McGregor now considers the advent of multiracial democracy dominated by a black majority as an opportunity for the latter to become repressive towards their former oppressors. In actual fact, Professor McGregor seems to express the fears of whites who now believe that the new leadership will not take their interests and aspiration as a people into consideration given that as a minority they can hardly influence the decision of the new leadership who racially represents a numerical majority of the country's population.

This is why to him the real meaning of democracy, which stands for the participation of all in nation-building, may not be a reality in the country since the blacks who have a numerical advantage represented by the new leadership would always want to consolidate and safeguard the interests of that section of the population to the detriment of the white minority. Professor McGregor's rhetorical question on the meaning of democracy becomes more meaningful within the context of the reconciliation between blacks and whites. Within the scepticism expressed by Professor McGregor is a subtle suggestion that the notion of democratic multiracialism upheld by the new leadership is a sham as it is just a "[...] form of perceived freedom [...]" (Mhlongo 2004:144) certainly for white South Africans who will never be able to realise themselves again - as a minority - in autonomous choices in the face of a majority who now form the country's leadership whose numerical advantage gives them the possibility to perpetuate a culture of a 'black democracy' and not a united multiracial democracy.

It is necessary to emphasize that the Professor's opinion is illustrative of the debate that characterises the country's miraculous transition to and implantation of multiracialism. The Professor's arguments are: how can South Africans

talk about multiracial democracy when its advent is based on the popular choice of a particular racial group? And what happens if the black dominated leadership in its term of office enacts policies that go against the aspirations of South Africans as a people? Can they be changed by a 'vox populi' representing the good of all when they are voted into office by a numerical racial majority whose wishes do not necessarily represent those of all South Africans as a people? In essence Professor McGregor thinks that even though the new democratic nature of the society is guided by a democratic constitution drawn up and unanimously endorsed by the representatives of both racial groups, the provisions in the latter can be changed by the new leadership to suit its aim. Despite the Professor's apprehension, what the country needs at this point in its socio-political growth is for pessimists such as the character in question to give multiracial democracy and its custodians a chance to prove how workable the system can be.

Ruben's attitude towards the welfare of the country, which is not very different from Professor McGregor, goes right back to the moment F. W. de Klerk decided to negotiate with Nelson Mandela which culminated in the general elections of 1994. Ruben says "I did watch Mandela walk to freedom from Victor Vorster prison... but I did not vote in the much vaunted democratic elections of '94" (Brink 2001:261). By not voting for change symbolically represented by the election that ushered in equality, Ruben seemed to have clearly taken a stance of non-involvement in post-apartheid politics. And it is ironical when he complains bitterly about the shortcomings of the new government, and also says "my feelings range from occasional outrage as when I was so summarily retrenched, to annoyance or vague irritability. The outside world has simply never mattered to me all that much" (Brink 2001:261). The question that can be asked is: how does he expect the country to be a much better place for whites like him when he decides to stand aloof from whatever happenings in the society? The explanation to Ruben's anger towards the 'new' South Africa can be traced to the fear of the future of whites in the country. This fear seems ironical because he cannot say why he is afraid of the new society especially when he tells Butler that "I'm not sure. The past? The future?... I try to make light of it: sometimes I think the past is my only future" (Brink 81) when the reason for such a hesitation to face the future is due to his nostalgia for the country's past.

The image and symbolism of Ruben's pyjamas and the library are very poignant explanations of the apparent racist attitude of a cross section of white South Africans Ruben symbolizes. Ruben is convinced that the apartheid past seems to be the only source of assurance to him in the post-1994 South Africa as symbolized by the image of the pyjamas which still gives him comfort even after forty years of constant use noticed when he says "I ... put on my pyjamas and the thread bare but still cherished old dark-red dressing gown I've had for almost forty years... it bears the inscriptions of my life more than any C.V. I can wrap myself in it like a cloak, I can retreat into it like a hermit into his cave" (Brink 2001: 75). First of all the colours of the pyjamas may symbolise the years of brutality exacted on the blacks which he still believes was the best period in the country's history. This is because a mathematic calculation shows that the duration of the pyjamas actually covers the years of the apartheid establishment which ranged from 1948-1988. So that by withdrawing into the pyjamas like a "hermit" into his cave", in the post-apartheid context he elucidates the predominance of the racist attitudes of the past which continues to affect the survival of rainbow nation.

Synonymous to the example from Brink (2001) discussed above is the case of a subtle form of racism emanating from the white community which Gordimer (2006) describes. The narrator holds that the Bannermans - Andrian and Lyndsay - treat their house keeper, Primrose, with much dignity devoid of any hidden intensions as is now the case with the reactions and attitudes of most whites towards blacks. The narrator states that the good rapport that exists between the white family in question and their black house keeper is built on a sense of mutual respect despite the fact that most whites nowadays only identify with blacks because of the benefit they stand to have doing so, and not because they actually want to acknowledge the necessity of living together in a multiracial society that is mutually beneficial to all South Africans. In actuality, the narrator claims that Andrian and Lyndsay "[...] didn't try any of the sentimental coming close many did with blacks these days when they wanted something from you [...]" (18). Although the white couple above (who may symbolise most whites) have identified themselves with blacks (symbolised by Primrose) there is still a majority of the same white population who have not yet embraced the country's new political ethos which favours cross-racial integration, better still, multiracial integration of the country's races into a 'rainbow nation.' In this wise one can state that the very concept of multiracialism as imbedded in the image of a 'rainbow nation' is in itself controversial since it has engendered a more subtle form of racism exhibited by whites who seem to pay lip service to the new nation's governance policy. These whites know that it is only through such hypocritical display of friendliness to blacks that they can continue to reign over blacks by virtue of the privileges they stand to gain from such cunning acceptance of the new democratic way of life.

In addition to the subtle form of racism so far discussed is a more overt manifestation of the hatred whites and coloureds harbour against blacks. This is the case of Natalie James' reaction towards Motsamai as described in Gordimer (1999). The narrator observes that the very probing questions Motsamai asks Natalie James during cross-

examination are viewed by the girl as an affront to her as a white to whom a black man seems not to give the respect that he is supposed to when talking to a white. In this light, the narrator points this out when he says during the cross-examination of Natalie James “one of those old, officially outlawed reactions comes back – a white, spoken to like this by this black man with his lined face drawn tight and demanding by the years when his kind couldn’t have asked any question at all of her, a white” (194). According to her, the black lawyer does not have the right to ask her questions that deal with her intimate relationship with Duncan and Jespersen although she is directly responsible for the former’s crime. Consequently, by rejecting Motsamai’s right to question her in a murder case that involves her directly, she seems to be rejecting the country’s new form of justice defended by blacks such as Motsamai. It is worth noting that Natalie James’ reaction, like that of the Lindgards who are shocked with their son’s choice of a black man as his lawyer, seems to cast doubts over South Africa’s much praised transition to multiracial democracy built on the reconciliation between whites and blacks.

Quite similar to Natalie James’ abrasive display of racist attitude is that of the coloured secretary towards Njomane as described in Mhlongo’s (2004). The significance of Njomane’s story stands out when he goes to the University Aid House to seek answers to why he cannot be offered a bursary by the institution and he is confronted by a racist coloured secretary. Despite the fact that Njomane does not respect the sign which reads “STAND IN THE QUEUE AND WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO HELP YOU” (12), the racist abuses she rains on him are quite unacceptable especially coming on the heels of the advent of multiracial democracy which stands for a break away from the racist habits of the past. Her attitude as described by the narrator, like Natalie James’ described in Gordimer (1999:194), shows her outright rejection of the precepts of equality of all races. This deplorable attitude is noticeable when the narrator emphasizes that she tells everyone present in the hall “shoo! You know I thought they lie. But they were right to say that if you want to hide money from a black person, you must put it in writing [...]” (Mhlongo 2004:12). The coloured secretary in this instance openly acknowledges that the architects of apartheid establishment were right in their belief that the black South African was intellectually inferior to the white South African. The unfortunate part of such a racist attitude is the fact that it ironically comes from an academic environment which is supposed to have inculcated in the minds of those who form part of its existence the knowledge that black South Africans are as human as the whites, coloured and any other race in the country.

The attitudes of Natalie James and the coloured secretary can be said to reflect Werner Sollors’ claims about the term ‘ethnic.’ The reactions of Natalie James and the coloured secretary justify Sollors’ claim that the European powers, consequently whites, considered a section of the world’s population as not being part of a ‘civilised’ and ‘standardized’ culture by virtue of their race. This is because those who thought they belonged to the ‘civilised’ and ‘standardized’ culture looked at those who, physiologically, were different as being primitive and barbaric (Ashcroft et al 1995: 219-20). Therefore one could say that the reactions of these white and coloured South Africans are informed by their belief in the supposed ‘superiority’ of their race over the black South African’s, precisely the coloured secretary who considers Njomane and all blacks as being part of an ‘inferior,’ ‘primitive’ and ‘barbaric’ race.

Such resurgence of racial chauvinism exhibited by whites has provoked a counter-racist boomerang from black South Africans. This sort of racial tension puts to question the practicality of the concept of a ‘rainbow nation’ that underlies the country’s multiracial democracy and its leadership’s policy of non-racialism. Mhlongo (2004) clearly expresses this turn of events in the country through the graffiti on the walls of the toilets of the University of Witwatersrand which read “KAFFIRS INVADED OUR FATHERLAND, VIVA, AWB, ONE SETTLER ONE BULLET - VIVA AZANIA” (146) and *THIS COUNTRY BELONGS TO BLACKS, FUCK ALL THE WHITES WHITES MUST START TO LIVE IN THE CONDITIONS STIPULATED BY BLACKS OR MUST LEAVE THE COUNTRY PEACEFULLY.* (147). This is a vivid illustration of the resurgence of racist attacks and counterattacks from the two major racial groups – blacks and whites – existing in the country whose collective history had always conditioned them to consider each other as enemies. And within South Africa’s contemporary socio-political atmosphere such acrimonious disputes on the issue of their respective rights to place and belonging definitely puts to question the relevance and practicality of the country’s peculiar democratic aspirations. The issue of belonging, historically, has been sanctioned first and foremost by the negotiated transition to multiracial democracy, and by the new leadership’s socio-political philosophy of multiracialism. And promoted by its metaphoric concept of a ‘rainbow nation’ but when each group starts claiming sole rights of belonging over the other what it proves is that the successful political negotiation based on forgiveness and reconciliation between whites and blacks is actually a utopia.

The outlooks of white South Africans so far described by Gordimer (1999), (2006) and Mhlongo (2004) are very detrimental to the country’s reconstruction process and its aspirations towards achieving nationhood. The conclusion is based on the view expressed by T.V Smith and Eduard Lindeman (1951) on the destructive attitudes to democracy as they note that “It is a dangerous sign in democracy for the ‘average citizen’ ensconced in his safe minorities to think that, as Margaret Mead says he now thinks, ‘of power as wielded by THEM’. Minorities must be responsible in

order to remain safe” (15). In the case of South Africa, the white and coloured population, such as the Lindgards and Natalie James in (Gordimer 1999) and Professor McGregor and Dunga’s white colleagues in Mhlongo (2004) must contribute in the country’s democratization process if they want to safeguard their freedom as minorities and not shun the present political and social ethos. Being disinterested in their country’s political process does not in any way solve their problems and fears but endangers the prosperity they would enjoy if they contribute to the implantation of the democratic multiracial way of life.

So far the attitudes of white and coloured South Africans discussed above may create the impression that the racial question that continues to impede South Africa’s quest for nationhood originates solely from these sections of the country’s population. Although their negative and often pessimistic perceptions of the post-apartheid nation may dominate whatever faults that blacks commit, it is extremely important to note that the actions and perceptions of some blacks leave much to be desired. Some blacks have become racial chauvinists as is the case with the house maid of one of Dunga’s white colleagues. This unfortunate turn of events is vividly portrayed through the conversation between Dunga’s white colleagues who continue to complain bitterly about the chaos that now reigns in the country. One of them, as reported by Njomane, recounts to his friend a confrontation with his housemaid whom he surprises in bed with another black man in the former’s house. The white tells his friend that the woman told him “‘Darling, not only white people enjoy sex’ meaning that I should knock when I enter my room that she is temporarily living in while she is working for me” (Mhlongo 2004:169). This is clearly a humorous but vivid description of the mindset of some blacks who seem to have misconstrued the meaning and significance of a democratic multiracial South Africa. This group symbolised by the black woman and her lover view the emergence of racial equality as meaning the latitude to do whatever they like, since to them their kind are now in power. Mhlongo through this incident seeks to expose the fragility of the country’s reconciliation initiatives since the advent of multiracial democracy seems to have, ironically, brought about chaos.

This, therefore, accounts for the reason why some whites, such as the woman’s employer and his friend, consider themselves as outsiders in a political system that is based on a modus vivendi between the country’s two broad racial groups wherein these characters belong. And consequently, such an overt display of racial chauvinism equally accounts for the whites’ backlash against the concept of multiracial democracy defended by the architects of the ‘new’ South Africa. This is observed in the embittered white’s outburst when he tells his friend:

[...] can you say anything nowadays? They will just dance that toyi- toyi dance of theirs and call you a racist [...] You know sometimes it makes me long for those days. Us white people no longer have a hope in this country [...] They’ve got the power now and there’s nothing we can do. (Mhlongo 2004:19)

The woman’s attitude towards her white employer and its attendant consequence evidenced by the element of victimhood inherent in the whites’ helpless outcry are boomerangs to the nation-building process. This shows how fragile the structure of the ‘new’ South Africa is despite the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation as championed by the last white apartheid regime and the ANC. In fact, her attitude is a severe setback to the country’s reconstruction process and quest for nationhood because whites who officially are an integral part of this post-apartheid nation feel marginalised by blacks whose kind are now in power. The apparent vindictive attitude of the black woman and her lover depicts the element of vengeance that now influence black and white relations in the new country.

Quite similar to the attitude of the black woman is that of the main character in Mhlongo (2004), Njomane, who employs racist remarks to a blonde who calls on him to help a black woman (whose credit card seems stuck in the credit card machine) simply because he is a few metres away from the black woman. Ironically, Njomane considers the blonde’s suggestion from a racist perspective as he views her recommendation to be a command from a white who is presumptuous enough to think she is superior to a black like him and thus can tell him to help a woman of his kind. This, like the attitude of the black woman described above, is equally a lucid display of the mindset created by long years of established racial discrimination and stereotypes, which, unfortunately, seem to have spilled over into the post-apartheid era built on reconciliation. Unfortunately, the precepts of the new South Africa which are forgiveness and reconciliation, and non-racialism are actually put to question particularly when Njomane wonders “she could have even offered to help the lady herself if she was really serious about it. Why me? Is it because she is used to blacks running her errands everyday?” (35). What emerges from Njomane’s remark is a tangible in-built anger against the white race who had oppressed his kind for so many decades. This sort of outlook, which is further accentuated when Njomane asks the blonde “is it because I’m black” (Mhlongo 2004:35), typifies a conspicuous unwillingness on the part of the narrator and blacks in general to forgive and accept whites as equal partners in the nation-building process.

Njomane's vindictive attitude becomes most alarming when he outrightly accepts his unwillingness to embrace, in its entirety, the change that is going on in the country. Such a reaction therefore becomes a deliberate refusal to accept the principle of multiracialism and non-racialism which are the founding ideologies of the new South Africa evidenced when he says:

I could tell that my words had had a strong impact. Yes, it is true that I was implying that she was a racist. It was the season of change when everyone was trying hard to disown apartheid, but to me the colour white was synonymous with the word and I didn't regret what I had said to the blonde. (Mhlongo 2004:35)

This episode, like that of the black house maid discussed above, is ironically a very disquieting revelation coming from the black population symbolised by Njomane. It is considered alarming because it is the same state of mind that created the policy of apartheid which Nelson Mandela and many others fought tirelessly to eradicate. If blacks such as Njomane do not want to expunge from the new social landscape the same kind of mindset that caused so much oppression and misery in the country, then the much praised foundation of the country's multiracial democracy becomes quite debatable.

This opinion about the country's future is justified when one takes into consideration the violent racist attitude of the black homeless beggar towards his white counterpart. This episode is vividly described by Njomane who presents two homeless beggars from the two main racial groups in the country – black and white. The black beggar confronts his white counterpart over a coin given to the latter by a group of black students, Thek and her friends. It is worth noting that the two beggars had symbolically stood side-by-side during the last general elections which ushered in multiracial democracy but when the black beggar questions Thek's and her friends' reason for favouring the white beggar and not him:

Are you giving preference to this man who has been exploiting us all at the expense of those who have been fighting for your right? [...] can't you see that this shit has played with his chance; he left his job at Transnet at his own accord. (Mhlongo 2004:69)

And this spirit of vengeance which typifies the black beggar's outburst is further reinforced when he reprimands Thek and her friends thus "I have never even had a chance of being employed. That's why I became an MK soldier, to fight for you and me. Fighting so that you could get a chance of better education [...] are you now telling me that our sacrifices are worth nothing?" (Mhlongo 2004:69-70). The vengefulness which is characteristic of the beggar's outlook, as seen in his allusion to the apartheid past which is supposed to have been buried by the election that he and his white counterpart participated in, further exposes the fragile foundation of the country's multiracial democracy. This conclusion is based first and foremost on the irony that underlies the symbolic union of these two beggars who had participated in the birth of a non-racial South Africa through its first multiracial election. Their active participation in creating a democratic multiracial society seemed to have given the impression that black and white South Africans, whom they symbolise, have finally buried their differences and united for the common good of all. And the black beggar's outburst directed to fellow blacks such as Thek and her friends who seem to have overcome the imposed racial stereotypes, Centre/Margin and Self/Other binaries of the past therefore, casts a doubt over the existence of the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation which are considered as the cornerstone of the country's democracy.

The general attitudes and perceptions of white and black South Africans that have so far been described in the novels of the selected authors are illustrations of how challenging it is for the country to do away with the vestiges of the racism that characterised the public sphere under the apartheid era. Thus it is disquieting that South Africans are still very much stuck to the racialised Centre/Margin, Self/Other binaries imposed by the past and this racist attitudes seem to confirm Desmond Tutu's view on why it will take decades for all South Africans to rise above the constraints of the past. Actually, Tutu (2000) indicates that every aspect of life in post-apartheid South Africa is greatly influenced by apartheid's legacy since the system had entrenched itself firmly in the South African way of life that it would take a magician to eradicate it with the single wand of a magic stick (17). And it therefore confirms Nelson Mandela's claim that "the hardest, most complex task for the African National Congress was to build solidarity across the racial and tribal divides that had been calcified and institutionalised by the apartheid state" (qtd in Lomba 1998:123).

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