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## Perspectives on Past and Present Realities: Nadine Gordimer's Voice on Social and Political Problems in South Africa

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Marek Pawlicki\*

## PERSPECTIVES ON PAST AND PRESENT REALITIES: NADINE GORDIMER'S VOICE ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

### Abstract

In his work *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon famously states that the most important task of African politicians and intellectuals is to understand the nature of the social and political transformations taking place in their countries. This task was undertaken by Nadine Gordimer in her sixty-five-year writing career, from the publication of her first collection of short stories in 1949 until her death in 2014. Gordimer helped her readers understand the situation in South Africa and anticipated many of the country's social and political problems. In her novel *A Guest of Honour*, published in 1970, while her country was still struggling against apartheid, she painted the scenario of an unnamed African country which has succeeded in throwing off colonial rule. The socio-political issues she examines in this novel, such as the corruption of its leaders, poor schooling of the blacks and the problem of violence, proved to be the main challenges of contemporary South Africa. It is interesting to juxtapose the problems anticipated by Gordimer in the previous century and those facing South Africa today; such a comparative study, proposed in this article, is primarily a social analysis of a country which reached independence only twenty years ago and remains "deformed by its history," as Gordimer pointed out in one of her interviews. This article is based on a detailed analysis of *A Guest of Honour*, primarily with a view to highlight the social and political issues described by Gordimer. The comparative aspect of this study is ensured by references to Gordimer's most recent essays, interviews, and to her last novel, *No Time Like the Present*, published in 2012. Due to the fact that in writing *A Guest of Honour* Gordimer was influenced by Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, this article is also an investigation of Fanon's seminal study about the anticolonial movement.

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## Keywords

South Africa, colonialism, apartheid, Gordimer, Fanon



## Introduction: “A Writer’s Freedom”

In the essay titled “A Writer’s Freedom” Nadine Gordimer puts forward her credo as a writer who, from the beginning of her career, has been involved in the struggle against apartheid. At the beginning of the essay Gordimer poses the question “What is a writer’s freedom?” and then gives the following succinct answer: “To me it 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 1989: 104). Gordimer is convinced that even if the writer’s view of society is based on criticism, he should not flinch from it – this is the quality she admires in Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev, one of the writers who had a major influence on her development as an author of fiction. Indeed, throughout her sixty-five-year career, from the publication of her first collection of short stories in 1949 to her death in July 2014, Gordimer was always alert to the problems inherent in South African society. What is interesting in her novels, as well as in her essays, is that she also anticipated some of those problems, showing considerable insight into the socio-political situation of her home country.

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The aim of this article is to analyse Gordimer’s “private view” of South Africa, as conveyed in *A Guest of Honour*, her fifth novel, published in 1971, and juxtapose this view with her opinions on the South African socio-political situation, as presented in her most recent essays and her last novel, *No Time Like the Present*. Such a comparative study will show the problems which South Africa had to confront from the years of apartheid to the first democratic elections. As the ensuing discussion will show, some of those problems are not exclusive to Gordimer’s native country, but are relevant also in the context of the African continent<sup>2</sup>, as well as the Western world.

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<sup>2</sup> Gordimer underlined the African, and not South African setting of *A Guest of Honour*. In an interview with Stephen Gray and Phil du Plessis Gordimer she commented that in writing *A Guest of Honour*: “I wanted to return again to my feeling that this context that one lives in, is *Africa*, and that there are vast differences, but there are also tremendous similarities in the countries that comprise it” (Gordimer 1990: 60).

## Then and Now: A Social and Political Analysis of Gordimer's Novels

*A Guest of Honour* presents two intersecting stories: that of the main protagonist, Colonel James Evelyn Bray, and the story about the political events of an unspecified country in Africa. Stephen Clingman rightly calls *A Guest of Honour* “a post-apartheid novel” (Gordimer 2002: 115), as it is set in a country which has recently gained independence from colonial rule. Written at a time when freedom in South Africa was still in the realm of the imagination, the novel is a social hypothesis<sup>3</sup>: it anticipates a future course of events, and the possible socio-political situation in a postcolonial country.

As has been mentioned, the main protagonist of the novel is Colonel James Evelyn Bray, a fifty-four-year-old Englishman and a former colonial official. During colonial rule, Bray supported the anti-colonial movement, anticipating the inevitable end of colonialism<sup>4</sup>. Due to his political sympathies, he was called from his post and sent back to England. Now that the African country has gained independence, its president, Adamson Mweta, invites him to join the independence celebrations. Bray accepts the cordial invitation of his influential friend, leaving in England his wife, Olivia. Back in Africa, Bray joins the enthusiastic crowd, greeting Mweta as the first president of their independent country, after which he is invited to the presidential palace. Mweta is determined to keep Bray in his country and so offers him the post of educational adviser. Bray takes the offer, accepting the “supportive role history now appoints for whites” (Temple-Thurston 1999: 60). His role is to survey the poor condition of schooling in the country and propose ways of improving the situation. He travels all over the country and ultimately settles in the northern province of Gala, which he administered during the colonial rule. During his stay in Gala, he begins a relationship with the secretary of the presiding colonial administrator, a thirty-year-old woman, Rebecca Edwards. It is also during his stay in Gala that he meets his old friend, Edward Shinza, a one-time freedom fighter, pushed to the political margins by the president. Bray senses a deep animosity between Mweta and Shinza, who used to be close comrades in their struggle against colonial rule, but are now strong political rivals. As John Cooke observes, for

<sup>3</sup> This point has been raised by Stephen Clingman. As the critic writes, “all of Gordimer’s novels are in some sense social hypotheses: attempts, within a fictional domain, to formulate the structures and forces of social reality and their implications for personal life” (Clingman 1993: 114).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Wade comments that Bray belongs to the group of “the few Europeans who have, in the past, *understood* that the nature of their official relationship with Africa possessed within it the seeds of its own decay” (Wade 1978: 156).

much of the novel Bray “persists in the mediatory posture between two<sup>5</sup> sets of contradictory alliances” (Cooke 1985: 136); he tries to reconcile the two men, as he is convinced that cooperation between the two accomplished leaders would benefit their country. Ultimately, his attempts are to no avail; after a political confrontation, ending with Mweta’s victory over Shinza, the latter decides to plan a coup d’état aimed at deposing the president. Bray finds himself sympathizing with Shinza, and, in consequence, is torn between the two men and their political affiliations. Meanwhile riots break out in the country, to which Bray falls victim: he is killed in an ambush attack launched by Shinza’s supporters, who know nothing about Bray’s clandestine relationship with their leader.

As mentioned, Colonel James Evelyn Bray is a former colonial official; his position in Africa is then, from the beginning, that of an outsider<sup>6</sup> – during his years in service he was the representative of a colonising country. At the same time, his sympathies with the black revolutionaries, who seek to overthrow colonial rule, show that he is not entirely a foreigner; on the contrary, he is considered a friend by both Adamson Mweta and Edward Shinza. Bray is then both an outsider and an ally to the newly emerged independent country. This position enables him to formulate objective judgments of the situation in which the country has found itself<sup>7</sup>. His ability to look upon the social and political events in the country with an impartial eye is perhaps the most important feature of Gordimer’s protagonist, not least because this stance is also the expression of Gordimer’s viewpoint.

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There are four important social issues raised by Gordimer in her work. As most of Gordimer’s critics point out, in writing about these social and political problems, Gordimer was influenced by Frantz Fanon, an Afro-French psychiatrist and philosopher, and an important theorist of revolution and colonialism. His best known study, *The Wretched of the Earth*, about the mechanisms by which a colonial country rebels against the colonizer and gains independence, had a consid-

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<sup>5</sup> In his article Cooke analyses the contradictions present not only in Bray’s relations with Mweta and Shinza, but also in his relationships with Olivia, his wife, and Rebecca, his lover.

<sup>6</sup> Compare Christopher Heywood’s comments on Bray: “He remains an outsider, a vehicle for the experience of ‘the growing unwelcomeness of the white man in Africa’, as Nadine Gordimer expressed the problem in her essay ‘Where Do Whites Fit In?’” (Heywood 1983: 26).

<sup>7</sup> Elaine Fido raises a similar point in her article about *A Guest of Honour*. Having mentioned Bray’s political sympathies and his personal relationships, she observes that Bray “contains within himself enough conflicting facts to provide an interesting study of a search for identity” (Fido 1990: 98). In contrast to this article, Fido examines the primarily personal implications of Bray’s conflicting allegiances.

erable impact on the development of anti-colonial movements all over the world. In this work Fanon not only discussed the rebirth of the colonised nations, but also considered the problems facing them after the gaining of independence.

The most overt reference to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* can be found in Bray's conversation with Shinza, in which the latter mentions Fanon's name and quotes a sentence from the aforementioned study (Gordimer 2002: 258). The passage from Fanon's book which Shinza mentions can be found in the second chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, in which he discusses, among others, the necessary change in the mentality of the colonized nation. Fanon argues that with the transition from a colonized state to an independent country, one of the things that occurs first is a growing distance between the country's new leaders and its working classes. The people of a postcolonial country gradually realize that some of their compatriots have followed in the footsteps of their colonizers in that they have become corrupt and indifferent to the life of those who elected them. As Fanon argues, it is then that the people rise in protest against their leaders: "They cry treason, but in fact the treason is not national but social, and they need to be taught to cry thief" (Fanon 2004: 94). In the situation described by Fanon, people should not treat the unlawful practices of some postcolonial politicians as signs of neo-colonial aggression, but as manifestations of various abuses of power. This observation is important insofar as it directs the people's attention to the real problems in a postcolonial country, in which there are no longer any racial conflicts – the anti-colonial revolution has ensured that – instead, the newly-emerged society becomes divided socially. As Stephen Clingman observes, by adopting Fanon's theory Gordimer "has entered the domain of class analysis" (Clingman 1993: 121)<sup>8</sup>.

The corruption of political leaders is one of the problems to which Fanon devotes a considerable part of his work. He argues that the distance between the leaders and the masses leads to a growing elitism within the ruling political party and its preoccupation with individual gain<sup>9</sup>. This, in turn, results in a serious conflict between the people and their leaders, as a result of which "the regime becomes more au-

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<sup>8</sup> Robert F. Haugh in the first full-length analysis of Gordimer's oeuvre, published in 1974, makes a similar observation when he writes in simple and straightforward language about the charged social critique in *A Guest of Honour*: "Blacks are also, we discover, capable of dirty politics – even murderous politics – and they are also greedy and deceitful in its pursuit; they also violate civil liberties and rig the police and the courts; they also betray comrades in obedience to a 'new reality'" (Haugh 1974: 145).

<sup>9</sup> "The party becomes a tool for individual advancement" (Fanon 2004: 116).

thoritarian” (Fanon 2004: 118). From this state of affairs there is only one step to general discontent, hostility and revolution – this time not a revolution aimed against colonial rulers, but at former anti-colonial heroes. This chain of events is powerfully depicted in *A Guest of Honour*. An informed and keen observer of the political situation, Bray is quick to notice Mweta’s growing elitism even before his attempts to suppress the opposition become transparent. The pivotal point is the congress of the ruling party – the People’s Independence Party – at which Edward Shinza, now in opposition to Mweta and his ministers, voices legitimate criticism of the party’s policy. Shinza points out that the anti-colonial revolution has privileged only a small part of the population, leaving the working classes in dire living conditions. He alerts the political leaders to the problem of social inequality and the indifference of prominent politicians to the poverty of the working classes. He concludes: “If we were a classless people, we are now creating a dispossessed peasant proletariat of our own” (Gordimer 2002: 343). Shinza’s warning, which is totally ignored by Mweta, appeals to Bray, and it is from this moment that the former colonial official clandestinely moves towards Shinza’s political camp.

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It is interesting to note that in her criticism of the fictional African state Gordimer anticipated her own critique of contemporary South Africa. In her last novel, *No Time Like the Present*, Gordimer has one of the protagonists – a former freedom fighter – ask the rhetorical question about the leaders who have once struggled against apartheid: “How’s it possible to believe these same comrade leaders have forgotten what they were, what they fought through – in exchange for freedom as bribes, freedom as money” (Gordimer 2012: 132). The same tone of bitter surprise with some of the country’s politicians can be heard in interviews with Gordimer. In an interview with Stephen Sackur on the BBC in 2011, Gordimer observed that she is “disillusioned in the matter of corruption (Gordimer 2011)”<sup>10</sup>.

In the interview Gordimer mentions another issue which worries her in contemporary South African politics. As she observes, “we [the South African nation] need and we have for a long time needed, a good opposition [to the ruling party, the African National Congress]. If we could have a good opposition then that’s a corrective, I think, to what’s wrong in the party. Then they’d [the ANC] have to wake up and see that they cannot carry on the way many of them are”. In *A Guest of Honour*, Bray has a similar concern in mind when he tries to per-

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<sup>10</sup> A similar observation is made by Gordimer in her 2012 interview on Al Jazeera, also available on the YouTube channel.



suade president Mweta to respect the opposition and hear their voices. Mweta stays indifferent to those arguments, putting forth the patently false assertion that a political opposition is needed only after the governing party has secured its interests and “consolidate[d] its own benefits” (Gordimer 2002: 373).

Further critique of political leaders, present both in *A Guest of Honour* and in *No Time Like the Present*, is connected with the notion of neo-colonialism. Again, Fanon’s diagnosis is illuminative in the context of this analysis. As Fanon points out, the leader of a postcolonial country loses sight of the general well-being of his people because he becomes entangled in the interests of the national bourgeoisie and the ex-colonial companies. This is well-illustrated in *A Guest of Honour*, in which Mweta stresses several times the importance of foreign investments in his country, arguing that it is only the considerable foreign capital which is capable of rapidly developing the country’s ailing economy and bringing about general prosperity. Shinza strongly criticizes this viewpoint by pointing out that political leaders should invest money and effort into facilitating the growth of national capital, for example by educating the underprivileged and by assisting small business ventures. As Shinza argues, “the development of a country is brought about by people, not by money” (Gordimer 2002: 362).

The problem of neo-colonialism is also described in *No Time Like the Present*. The statistics quoted in the novel are telling: in 2012, whites, who constituted 12 per cent of the population, were the ones who shaped the economy of South Africa. “How long are whites going to dominate the economy?” asks one of the protagonists, and adds that no major change in the country’s economic situation has been achieved: whites still occupy the lucrative positions, while most blacks are saddled with menial and low-paid jobs. As he argues, “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” (Gordimer 2012: 23).

To state that neo-colonialism stems from the opportunism of the country’s leaders, who seek wealth in foreign capital, is to highlight only one aspect of the problem. In *A Guest of Honour*, the problems with the country’s economy are an echo of colonialism, especially the lack of a thorough education; blacks, who are poorly educated, are simply unable to substantially contribute to the development of the country. The most pressing problem, which concerns the entire black population, is that of the inadequacy of colonial education. After one of his visits to the black schools, Bray writes in his notebook: “If all M[weta]’s government can do is extend dingy light of knowledge we brought,



not much benefit” (Gordimer 2002: 101). Clearly, Bray speaks from within the group of former colonizers and notes that the new leaders of the country should not continue the colonial educational policy, but come up with a radical change. Whether Bray is capable of proposing such a solution, he is not at all sure. His attempts to set up a vocational school, whose goal is to enable the black population to carry out various jobs and in this way earn their living, is only a partial solution, which ultimately fails because of the ensuing riots.

The social issues in *A Guest of Honour* are a direct cause of Mweta’s policy. The general discontent with the ruling party’s indifference to the working conditions of the masses, fired by Shinza’s subversive actions against the government, lead to widespread riots. In analysing the various stages of this postcolonial revolution aimed at deposing Mweta, one is made aware that domestic violence is also, to a certain extent, an answer to the violence carried out by the government. Bray witnesses the results of this violence early in his stay: he gives a lift to a silent and taciturn young man, who, as it turns out, was tortured by the police for breeding discontent with the working conditions of the country’s labourers. Although violent methods of investigation are banned in the newly independent country, they are still practiced clandestinely, and, as Shinza asserts, with the president’s approval. The violence of the ruling party at first seems to be an effective way of drowning out voices of protest. After a while the methods become indispensable for maintaining the general level of approval for the country’s leaders. With the passage of time, those who know about and are responsible for these practices become insensitive to them. As Bray points out, “every nation has its own private violence... after a while one can feel at home and sheltered between almost any borders – you grow accustomed to anything” (Gordimer 2002: 187). This assertion is full of irony; of course, in this situation it becomes necessary not to get accustomed to any manifestation of violence, and not to explain it away as a necessary step in the country’s political and economic development. As the novel shows, violence leads both to political and social regression: it is sufficient proof that after the riots in the country grow to uncontrollable proportions, Mweta asks the English government to help him quell the rebellion – in other words, reinvade the country.

Violence is also one of the main issues discussed in *No Time Like the Present*. Violence in contemporary South Africa is no longer state-instituted, but results indirectly from the country’s history. As Gordimer pointed out in a letter to Kenzaburo Oe, the reasons for the high crime rate in South Africa constitute “our heritage from apartheid” (Gordimer 2010: 541). As Gordimer explains, during apartheid the black

population was kept out of cities and forced to live in appointed areas, the so-called 'homelands.' After the first democratic elections the black population flocked to the cities, which were not prepared to accommodate such a vast number of people; problems with housing ensued, while the rate of unemployment rose dramatically. Crime became widespread as a result of the poverty of the working classes. Commenting on the situation in 1998, Gordimer writes about the impoverished black population: "Their home is the streets; hunger turns them, as it would most of us who deplore crime on full stomachs, to crime, and degradation degenerates into violence" (Gordimer 2010: 541–2). This situation is powerfully depicted in *No Time Like the Present*. Gordimer shows the violence towards poor immigrants from Zimbabwe, who came to South Africa as a direct result of political oppression in their home country. The hostility of the South Africans towards the immigrants results from the poverty of the former; struggling with their penury, the South Africans blame the immigrants for taking their jobs, stealing their water and fouling their streets. This hostility, which sometimes turns into open aggression, is not judged in the novel – as in the letter to Kenzaburo Oe, Gordimer is wary of making any moral judgments – it is only remarked that the main protagonists "have the same intense conception of horror at the degradation to violence people have descended against Zimbabweans" (Gordimer 2012: 411). When asked by a friend to give shelter to an immigrant whose life is in danger, the protagonists do not hesitate to do so – this reaction, which is reminiscent of Gordimer's actions during apartheid<sup>11</sup>, shows a possible reaction to this widespread hostility: instead of a pointed critique, it demonstrates an ethical stance of personal involvement in the problems of the country. A more global response to the problem of violence is suggested by Gordimer in an essay published in 1997; in it Gordimer suggests that the most effective way of dealing with widespread aggression is to confront the problem of poverty<sup>12</sup>.

The comments above on the issue of violence refer to South Africa, but it is apparent that Gordimer's diagnosis of this problem is universal and refers not only to the developing countries, but also to those among the more affluent ones in which the problem of social inequality is connected with the growth in the immigrant population. Another aspect of the problem, also discussed by Gordimer, is even more

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<sup>11</sup> During apartheid Gordimer, together with her husband, Reinhold Cassirer, gave shelter to several political activists, including a prominent politician, Albert Luthuli, the former President-General of the African National Congress.

<sup>12</sup> "The campaign against poverty is the best campaign against crime" (Gordimer 2010: 538).

resonant in the global context. In the previously mentioned letter to Kenzaburo Oe, she writes about the “devaluation of pain” (Gordimer 2010: 543), which is directly connected with widespread aggression on television and the Internet. “The power of the image”, observes Gordimer, “has become greater than the word” (Gordimer 2010: 543), and adds that in the case of children any arguments against violence as a way of solving conflicts are outweighed by the powerfulness of the message conveyed by the mass media. Gordimer discusses this problem in connection with the plague of murders carried out by children in schools. School shootings are the most extreme and dramatic manifestations of aggression, but they are not the only pathologies discussed by Gordimer. Violence shown in *No Time Like the Present* takes the form of brutal “initiations” of the young students by those of later classes. This form of bullying is strongly criticised by one of the protagonists, who calls the young students “young fascists in the making” (Gordimer 2012: 327), and adds, “history’s always ready to make a comeback” (Gordimer 2012: 327). As this aggression is carried over into the universities and finds its outlet in two racial episodes, the above statement becomes even more resonant: the disgraceful episodes in which white students humiliate blacks seem to be a regression to the days of apartheid.

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The protagonists of *No Time Like the Present* are clearly shocked to see racial exploitation as part of life in contemporary South Africa. Nonetheless, it may be argued that this deep surprise is, in a sense, the expression of the protagonists’ latent naivety as to the anticipated progress of the post-apartheid South Africa. Joan Tronto in her article about Frantz Fanon’s legacy in the contemporary world argues that Fanon’s pessimistic observations about social injustice should not be viewed only in the context of the second half of the 20th century, but are very much relevant in the light of today’s globalizing world. As Tronto argues, exploitation, understood as “the treatment of another person in a dehumanizing way” (2004: 248), is not a phenomenon of colonialism, but is also an inherent part of racism and anti-Semitism, which are both common in today’s world. Decolonisation, argued Tronto, should not be understood only as a historical process which came to an end with the liquidation of colonies around the world, but rather as an ongoing humanist project and a challenge for the political theory in the time to come. To task of decolonisation consists in “bringing human dignity even to the most wretched of the earth” (Tronto 2004: 250). Influenced not only by Fanon’s thought, but also by his uncompromising rhetoric, Tronto argues that if the task of decolonization is ignored by the contemporary world, then we will have

to “face the violent consequences” (2004: 250). Tronto’s interpretation of Fanon’s thought is important insofar as it points to the fact that the task of decolonization should be a vital part of the agenda of every democratic government.

### **Conclusion: A Writer’s Task**

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon anticipated a time when the rebellion of the colonial subject will lead to an effective decolonisation. His call to action aimed against the colonisers’ aggression has inspired intellectuals and political activists in postcolonial countries. In postcolonial theory it is the reaction of Benita Parry that is most relevant in the context of the present discussion. Criticising Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha for underestimating the role of the native culture in the process of decolonisation, Parry reminds her readers of the radical nature inherent in Fanon’s social observations. As she writes, “Fanon’s theory projects a development inseparable from a community’s engagement in combative social action, during which a native contest initially enunciated in the invaders’ language, culminates in a rejection of imperialism’s signifying system” (Parry 2003: 44). Parry’s essay, first published in 1995, followed the first democratic election in South Africa, and, in this respect, was a timely response to the political changes in Gordimer’s homeland. Twenty years after those landmark elections South Africa still has the task of confronting the burden of its long colonial history. Social inequality and widespread violence are pressing issues for South African’s democratic government, and an important part of the country’s decolonisation. What is the role of the intellectual in this process?

Writing from the vantage point of intellectuals living in postcolonial countries, Frantz Fanon asserts that “our greatest task is to constantly understand what is happening in our own countries” (Fanon 2004: 137). This general observation can be viewed as an apt summary of Fanon’s objectives as a social philosopher and political activist. The same can be said of Gordimer’s life as a writer. It can be argued that her ethical stance is partly conveyed in the thoughts and actions of her protagonist, Colonel James Evelyn Bray, most importantly in his sense of responsibility to the country. In the analysis of Bray’s motivations and his moral choices, it is instructive to consider the first of the two epigraphs in *A Guest of Honour*, written by Ivan Turgenev: “An

honourable man will end by not knowing where to live”<sup>13</sup>. This succinct and somewhat ironic observation becomes more understandable if it is placed in the context of Gordimer’s observations about the role of the public individual. As she observed in her Nobel lecture, the role of the writer is to “use the word even against his or her own loyalties” (Gordimer 1999: 206). This ethical imperative can jeopardize the writer’s political and social affiliations; if he decides to criticize his political allies as well as his adversaries, he puts himself at risk of being rejected by all camps and thus becoming, in a sense, ‘homeless.’

Throughout her life Gordimer stood by Turgenev’s principle. Assuming a stance of “realistic optimism” (Lazar 1998: 439) towards the end of her life she remained a keen observer of the socio-political situation in her native country noting both the positive changes and the challenges facing the country. This feature of her activity as a writer continues to be appreciated both by foreign commentators and by her compatriots. Learning about Gordimer’s death on 13 July, J.M. Coetzee, the most acclaimed writer from South Africa besides Gordimer, observed that Gordimer “responded with exemplary courage and creative energy to the great challenge of her times, the system of apartheid unjustly imposed and heartlessly implemented on the South African people” (BBC, 2014). What foreign commentators, including the author of this article, can add to Coetzee’s observation is that Gordimer’s response to social injustice is important and relevant not only in the context of South Africa, but on the more global scale. Indeed, it is the feature of great realist writers that their literary works, focusing on a specific social and political situation, prove their urgency in countries which are distant from the writer’s homeland, both geographically and culturally.

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<sup>13</sup> Gordimer commented on the epigraph: “I could add to my epigraph the epilogue: his [an honourable man’s] honour may lie in the attempt to *live*, fully involved, compromised by an irrevocable choice. That’s what’s known as destiny” (Roberts 2005: 317). Bray is an embodiment of this conviction; indeed, he is worthy of the readers’ admiration in his determination not to avoid making difficult political and personal decisions.

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## Streszczenie

W swoim najważniejszym dziele, „Wyklęty lud ziemi”, Frantz Fanon stwierdza, że najważniejszym zadaniem afrykańskich polityków i intelektualistów jest rozumienie istoty przemian zachodzących w ich krajach. To przekonanie może posłużyć jako myśl przewodnia twórczości Nadine Gordimer. W swojej liczącej sześćdziesiąt pięć lat karierze pisarskiej autorka „Zachować swój świat” (*The Conservationist*) pomagała swoim czytelnikom zrozumieć istotę społecznych i politycznych przemian w jej rodzimej Południowej Afryce. W kilku powieściach trafnie przewidziała problemy, z którymi przyjdzie zmierzyć się jej krajowi po wprowadzeniu demokracji. W powieści „Gość honorowy” (*A Guest of Honour*), wydanej w 1970 roku, przedstawiła wydarzenia rozgrywające się w fikcyjnym afrykańskim kraju, który odzyskał niepodległość po okresie niewoli kolonialnej. Analiza problemów społecznych i politycznych przeprowadzona przez Gordimer w tej powieści ma odniesienie do aktualnych problemów w Południowej Afryce, takich jak skorumpowanie władz, niski poziom edukacji uboższych warstw społecznych oraz ważny w tym kraju problem przemocy. Celem artykułu jest analiza powieści „Gość honorowy” oraz porównanie przedstawionego w niej obrazu państwa i społeczeństwa z rzeczywistością współczesnej Południowej Afryki. W analizie powieści ważnym odniesieniem będzie wspomniane dzieło Frantza Fanona, natomiast w opisie problemów współczesnej Południowej Afryki istotne będą odwołania do esejów Gordimer, wywiadów oraz jej ostatniej powieści *No Time Like the Present* wydanej w 2012 roku.

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## Słowa kluczowe

Południowa Afryka, kolonializm, apartheid, Gordimer, Fanon