

**VOICE OF THE MARGINALIZED IN THE NOVEL NADINE GORDIMER'S
BURGER'S DAUGHTER**

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Abstract:

In Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* the Afrikaner Burger family is ostracized by the bulk of the Afrikaner clan. Rosa's sense of awareness is as much a function of family and school as it is a manifestation of the 'Prison house' of experience involving substitution and more consequences of institutionalized racism and racial discrimination in South Africa. The most natural confidence that she should have had is shattered because her mother has been put away into the state prison suspected of racist activities. The race-based apartheid structure founded on the idea of inequality seeks justification not merely in medieval and post-medieval European ethnography and beliefs but also in the Old Testament records and the New Testament teaching of *The Bible*. The black woman in South Africa remain unsurpassed as a victims of one of the most inhuman conducts by men, since the official end of slavery and the international slave trade. The African Society consisting of both Black and White ever dream of all Africa, completely devoid of racism. The African society refuses to take racial remedies suggested by Gordimer's Black opposition is the only solution to a racial problem. Gordimer's novels are an attempt towards self knowledge, awareness of the milieu and a painful kindling of each individual's indifferent spirit to problems abound in their surroundings.

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In Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* the Afrikaner Burger family is ostracized by the bulk of the Afrikaner clan. They are hunted down for daring to be different, for opposing the doctrines of racism and oppression by embracing communism, which as a political theory decries class privilege and class exploitation.

The protagonist Rosa is born into a politically active Afrikaner family. She had assimilated herself with Marx and Lenin as other children do their parent's religion. To her, the given conditions of responsible, adult life, living under surveillance, being named, censored and repeatedly imprisoned, a norm reinforced by her parents' periodic detention appeared strange and meaningless. Her mother Cathy succumbs quietly to multiple sclerosis,

while her father Lionel dies as a hero serving a life sentence for anti-apartheid activities. Rosa is placed in a critical situation regarding her future after the death of her parents'.

Rosa's sense of awareness is as much a function of family and school as it is a manifestation of the 'Prison house' of experience involving substitution and more consequences of institutionalized racism and racial discrimination in South Africa. Her parents were imprisoned when she was fourteen years. She was used to State terrorism. She can be calm and unruffled as she waits with other people outside the prison yard, contemplating the iron gates, which were closed against her mother:

The most natural confidence that she should have had is shattered because her mother has been put away into the state prison suspected of racist activities. Her political growth is shadowed by her awareness of the racial rebellion practiced by her parents. Later when her father and mother die in a prison she becomes aware that she has to continue where her parents left off.

Communism denounces religion for good or ill as 'opium' for brainwashing the masses. An exponent of communism by the likes of Lionel Burger and lately Rosa represents an uncomfortable negation of an Afrikaners' false consciousness. Rosa's racial displacement occurs as she returns from driving an old black woman home to one of those "...undefined areas between black men's hostels and the mine-dumps on the outskirts of the city" (206).

The race-based apartheid structure founded on the idea of inequality seeks justification not merely in medieval and post-medieval European ethnography and beliefs but also in the Old Testament records and the New Testament teaching of *The Bible*. It is therefore the mainstay of apartheid philosophy in Christianity, however falsely interpreted and negatively applied, and communism is antithetical to religion, the communist Lionel and Rosa, are ready and willing to set themselves up for hatred, harassment and state molestation.

Race-associated false consciousness is not the preserver of the Afrikaner or the white South African as Rosa has learnt in her later days. It is manifested in the class of the oppressed and exploited blacks as well. The whites, without exception stood for everything, including evil and opposed to the interests of the black race. During the animated discussions at the house of Marisa's cousin, Fats, in the black township, the militant Duma Dhladhla declares over-generally:

To believe that Whites cannot honestly identify with blacks in the struggle for political liberation is to advocate prejudice. To adopt an exclusivist approach to the political problem in South Africa is to be racist, not tactical. Rosa discovers on first-hand what it means to be a victim of this kind of philosophy of hate in Europe at the hands of her 'long-lost' black brother, Baasie. He materializes before her very eyes in London, is cold towards her and practices racism naturally and quite unfeelingly. He appears altered, but not in the sense of

being a child anymore. In his ideological transformation from 'Baasie' to Zwelinzima Vulindlela, from youthful innocence to unthinking exclusivism, he is diminished in stature.

She decides to return to the forefront of the action, unstopped and unstoppable by either male chauvinism or apartheid racism. She decides to tread the path chosen for her by the circumstances of her birth and upbringing, the road previously trodden by Rosa Luxemburg, the revolutionary heroine of Germany. She identifies in an unshakeable, irrevocable manner with the ideal which her father has lived for when he declared from the dock: "I would be guilty if I were innocent of working to destroy racism in my country. If I'm guilty of that innocence the police will not be the ones with the right to apprehend me" (133). Even so, Rosa understands clearly and acknowledges the fact that as a victim herself of both sexism and apartheid, the overall weight of her pain, suffering and mental anguish pales before the net burden of physical, psychological, emotional and mental torture borne daily by the black woman. The black woman in South Africa remain unsurpassed as a victims of one of the most inhuman conducts by men, since the official end of slavery and the international slave trade.

At the end of the stimulating political argument at Fats' place, involving comrades of a diversity of political persuasions and backgrounds who are held together nonetheless by a common opposition to racism in South Africa, she leaves for home and drives along an earth road. As she drives, she comes upon a bizarre spectacle. Against a backdrop of waste and dereliction arises a scene of unbelievable brutality and torture only matched in the wasteland by the sight of blacks in the process of burying their dead, the victims of official and unofficial killings by the apartheid system.

The event, the scene, is a profound testament of pain. It is at once a symbol of torture and callousness and of resignation and apathy. There is a metaphorical equation between one grotesque instance of suffering and the daily repeated occurrence of deep hurt and anguish in the lives of millions of South African blacks. Rosa is scandalized and riddled with guilt and ambivalence. She fails to take positive action:

She has problems of relation with neither Lily nor Bassie. 'Lily' as the name of a black domestic staffer in the Burger's household shows the absence of racial prejudice amongst the Burgers. As for the young Bassie, he is like Tony to Rosa, a black brother: 'Bassie' means 'little master', a name contradicted by racism outside the Burger's household. Rosa's sense of decency and sincerity are matched by her sense of aesthetics. She is capable of appreciating beauty in a black person as readily as she would in any other colour of the human race:

Rosa perceives blackness, not only aesthetically but also as a positive essence, a positive characterizing quality, but also ideologically, as the key to the future of South Africa. Just as

whiteness has been South Africa's past blackness is all that South Africa's future will be about:

She learns that Marisa's blackness in something that separates them, interrupting the female bonds that are common between them Rosa distinguishes in certain ways that her father could not. She feels the complexities of racial problems in the closeness of her relationship with Marisa, but Lionel invited blacks to his white suburban home without realizing the contradictions they felt there. The inkling Rosa has of this inherent incongruence will later be literally 'brought to light' in her phone conversation with Bassie, an exchange of insults that made her physically ill and which helps her to decide to leave Europe and go to Africa.

At an exile gathering in London, Bassie is insulted both by the attention paid to Lionel Burger's daughter and her easygoing attitude of making friend with him. He telephones her later and they exchange racial insults. He is openly hostile to all white attempts at non-racial co-operation and implicitly scornful of his empty revolutionary rhetoric in the safety of London. The shock of what he and she have become during that clash restores her instinctive political conviction. Burger's daughter returns to a home that is convulsed with the Soweto riots and furious violence from semi articulate black youth. Her home experience parallels the experience that she had met in London.

In *Burger's Daughter*, Conrad, Rosa Burger's lover is a police informer. He is violently self – destructive as can be seen from the way his finger is stuck into a light socket. The white liberal's conviction that in a reformed South Africa, whites and nonwhites will touch in a condition of equality and fellowship may be as fanciful as the "French medieval tapestry of the lady touches the unicorn's horn that Rosa sees on her European trip". Inter-racial closeness is seen when Rosa massages the back of a black woman and in jail for anti-government activities. The earlier phone conversations between Rosa and 'Suffering land', the embittered black man far different from the little 'Bassie' of Rosa's childhood, who casts a very cold eye on that powerful craving within the white humanitarian to lose himself in the dark continent

It becomes a warm childhood memory for her, until she remains an inter-racial community of women in prison at the end of the novel. In a 1980 interview with Susan Gardner, Gordimer tells of being politically active and thus was considered the official head and leader and, therefore, the one to be kept under close surveillance The woman, was dealt with leniently by the court.

Gordimer goes on to elaborate the role women have played in South African politics. On the one hand, there was the middle-class Flora Donaldsons who had the leisure time to devote to charitable activities and consequently became involved in efforts to bring about social reforms. These women understood the inequity of black oppression and tried to effect

some change. Their class status and protective husbands impeded them from undertaking more radical, dangerous methods of protest, but as wives, did recognize a need for action.

The novel's background implies that it is race and class, which are, 'objectively' speaking, of a greater importance in apartheid South Africa than gender issue. Rosa's painful narrative is constituted by her separateness from the black people as well as 'her own people'. Her inability to separate herself from the outside society, because of her own history and her commitment to 'the cause', which works for the abolition of a bifurcation based on race which, in the eyes of the newly emerging black consciousness movement, is impossible to transcend. Her white characters, in *Burger's Daughter* are shown to shed the clothing of 'baaskaapism' and privileges to don the clothing of 'shared purpose'. Lionel Burger had earned for himself the right to belong in South Africa by dedicating his life and his family to the black cause. It is to be understood that, not all whites crave for power and not all blacks thirst for blood.

Colonial subjugation is one of the ineradicable features of African History which has found its imprint not only in the official documents but also in the African minds. Persistent arrests, trials, prisons, exiles and underground hiding have become inextricable in the everyday affairs of Africans. Though there were messiahs now and then like Sisula, Mandela, Mlbeki and Abhram Fisher stimulating the enslaved African spirits against the blood-squeezing group of beastly Europeans, it took eternity for the writing souls to experience the promised movement of freedom. A successive year of apartheid has rendered blacks subaltern and silent to the extent of losing their voice. It is Rosa Burger, who restores their voice and celebrates their ethnicity with ANC's 'Africa Mayibuya'.

Burger's Daughter is a miniature South Africa, truthfully possessing in it, the events that distinguished Africa among colonized countries as a nation marching towards its freedom, proud and un subdued, in spite of its low economic standards. The almanac of African apartheid, which starts from 1948, is recaptured here encompassing Soweto Revolt and Black consciousness movement. Gordimer has registered numerous protests, campaigns and deaths so that African history will not remain unnoticed in voluminous books in moth ridden shelves of unfrequented libraries. Detentions, conviction and surveillance are some of the recurrent events of African life highlighted through the imprisonments of Lionel Burger, a prominent member of the communist party and Cathy Burger, his wife.

The inevitable suffering encountered by the Africans frustrates a few active and sensitive white souls which result in negation of that which frustrates. Rosa Burger, daughter of Lionel Burger is a reluctant but sympathizing white who, ignoring the reality of suffering, refuses the responsibility. Haunted by the hollowness that filled the gap left by reality Rosa returns, prepared to confront her unacknowledged commitment, compassionate towards the bereft blacks. This transformed perspective is echoed in the epigraph chosen from Levi –

Strauss which gains liveliness when Gordimer exclaims, 'I am the place in which something has occurred'.

The place which denotes South Africa is colonization as become 'Everything', dividing its body and dehumanizing its inhabitants in the name of colour and destroying indigenous culture. The other place suggested by the lines is Rosa's mind, the self the arena where the fierce fight between indifference and responsibility and inner bliss is the award of the victor. The novel is divided into three sections, each providing clue to the changing perspective of the protagonist so that at the end the full – throated voice of Rosa declares itself as a sacrifice, a simple contribution towards the ending of apartheid.

Gordimer hints at the lot of the oppressed in the very beginning through Rosa's refusal to 'be' *Burger's Daughter*. Blacks, deprived of their land, wealth and birthright are the uncomplaining orphans of the African continent having no one to echo their thoughts, if not their voice. The cruelties heaped upon blacks are mirrored through Conrad who acts as Rosa's conscience, and who in the first section of the novel is addressed. Blackness is the enemy of blacks to which they should become reconciled. Conrad's piercing words, recreating an unidentified reality:

The hydra-headed problems of the racially segregated Africans are the preoccupation of Gordimer's as revealed in her works. The African Society consisting of both Black and White ever dream of all Africa, completely devoid of racism. The African society refuses to take racial remedies suggested by Gordimer's Black opposition is the only solution to a racial problem. Gordimer's novels are an attempt towards self knowledge, awareness of the milieu and a painful kindling of each individual's indifferent spirit to problems abound in their surroundings.

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