

# Nadine Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*: The New Context of Freedom and Empowerment in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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*It is true that independence produces the spiritual and material conditions for the reconversion of man. But it is also the inner mutation, the renewal of the social and family structures that impose with the rigor of a law the emergence of the Nation and the growth of its sovereignty.* (Fanon 1989: 179)

This paper explores the parallels between national empowerment and women's empowerment in the context of post-apartheid South Africa envisaged in Nadine Gordimer's novel, *None to Accompany Me* (1994). 'Colonization is passing into history', Gordimer said in 1994 when South Africa was witnessing the finale of the long and notorious history of colonisation after the release of Nelson Mandela from his life sentence in 1990 up to the country's first non-racial election in 1994. It was during this period that the process of the 'negotiated revolution'<sup>1</sup> was being finalised to put the liberation of the post-apartheid state into practice. South Africa then had to perform 'the most difficult and least glamorous of all tasks: transition' (Gordimer 1995: 134).<sup>2</sup> Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me* examines the potential of this change and the meanings of liberation and empowerment on both national and personal levels.

Gordimer's earlier novels explore the inter-connections of race, gender and sexuality from various thematic perspectives and within different periods of South African history and politics. In all these perspectives, the constant focus of critique and interrogation is the racial order rooted in the politics of European settlement and the convergence of differ-

ent races and ethnicities in the region. The history of South Africa demonstrates the extent to which the politics of racial segregation and dominance are inseparable from rural/urban economies and the implications of gender and sexuality. Race determined the entire social fabric of South African society. Within the structure of apartheid, it determined the nature and terms of sexuality and regulated all other forms of social relations. Gordimer's protagonists from Helen in her first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953), to Rosa in *Burger's Daughter* (1979) struggle constantly with this order and its replication in the white family. The processes by which these protagonists question, reject, transgress or re-define this order represent Gordimer's imaginative grappling with the South African present. Even where, as in *July's People* (1981), she imagines the possibility of a revolutionary change in the social order, she locates her discourse solidly in the present as if to suggest that, in South Africa, the future will always be mediated by the present and past. The narrative's context of revolution in *None to Accompany Me* thus provides space for envisaging what Fanon has called 'the inner mutation' and 'the renewal of the social and family structures' (1989: 179) crucial for a changed social and political order.

The interval between the end of the old regime and the beginning of a new state presents a fluid context for exploring possibilities for a new order. In this sense, the drafting of the new constitution in *None to Accompany Me* provides Gordimer with the space to raise questions and debate their implications. On one hand, the idea of a new constitution suggests the creation of a new community and the

possible emergence of a new nation. On the other hand, the problematic history of South Africa and Gordimer's own delineation in earlier novels reveal the conflicting histories and competing interests that have marked the progress of South African history. Indeed, the attempt in 1910 to create a single entity out of the British colonies, the Afrikaner republics and the African kingdoms in the region led not to a unified South African nation but to a history of ethnic and regional divisions, racism and consequently an apartheid structure that grew to regulate all social and personal relationships on the basis of racial difference and apartness.

Nationalism, as Ernest Gellner argues in *Thought and Change* (1964), 'is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness. It invents nations where they do not exist' (168). Similarly, Benedict Anderson observes in his *Imagined Communities* (1983) that 'beneath the decline of sacred communities, languages and lineages, a fundamental change was taking place in modes of apprehending the world, which, more than anything else, made it possible to "think" the nation' (22).<sup>3</sup> Anderson's idea of nations as 'imagined communities' (22) and Gellner's statement with its suggestion that nations are constructed and invented communities suggest that the common histories, common aspirations and common interests that the concept connotes are highly problematic. In *None to Accompany Me*, the process by which the new constitution is drafted forms the grounds for the creation of a national community. Yet, how in the absence of a common history, common interests, common aspirations and a common language does one imagine let alone create a South African nation? This seems to be the underlying question that the novel probes. Its narrative structure implicitly raises this question and reflects the paradoxes of the idea of a South African nation. While the narrative enacts a tremendous sense of change in the discussions and negotiations to formulate new policies, it also repeatedly reminds us of the

past struggles, which overshadow the processes of change. 'The past is known to be irretrievable. But here that proposition is overturned' (36).

The euphoria of liberation and the expectations of the future are constantly balanced against the specter of the past and the fragility of the new promise since the past lives within the transition and in the new future. The context of change in the novel is itself very fragile and fraught with power struggles, betrayals and dangers:

Proposals to the Technical Committee on Constitutional Issues come from all groups and formations. And the groupings scarcely can be defined with any accuracy from week to week. Wild alliances clot suddenly in the political bloodstream, are announced, break up, flow in and out of negotiations. Everyone wants their own future arranged around them. (315)

Anxiety among the dominant established white powers, for example, is well reflected in the point of view of the Afrikaner farmer, Tertius Odendaal, who refuses to negotiate the offer of his land to the squatters:

Odensville is my township that's not yet declared, nobody is living in Odensville, nobody! All those people are trespassers....I'm going to get them run off my land....There are no Odensville 'people', so you can forget about calling them that. They're nothing. (24-25)

The implications of anxiety are seen in the fact that race and other divisions do not vanish because of the euphoria of transformation. That these divisions are still there is reflected in Odendaal's attitude towards negotiators like the white protagonist, Vera Stark. She works for the Legal Foundation, which deals with claims to the land. Even Vera is very careful not to force new perspectives on the white farmer because race is still an issue in people's lives and in the structure of society.

The resistance movement itself is not free from

contradictions. There are, for instance, ambiguous feelings between returnees and those who stayed. There are a sense of enthusiasm, welcome and excitement on the part of those who stayed and an enormous sense of change, euphoria and expectation on the part of returnees. Yet, narrative constantly suggests that past contradictions have not disappeared: 'the past was there' (36):

The old events and circumstances exist; standing there in the street, the old dependencies, the old friendships, the old factional rivalries, the old betrayals and loyalties, political scandals and sexual jealousies were not gone for ever but persisted in evidence of traceable, inefaceable features, visible cell structure, still living. (Ibid.)

Empowerment, the new cliché in post-apartheid South Africa, entails re-definitions, re-conceptualisations and transformations of society and self. However, this transformation involves not only justice, fair play and responsibilities but also entrapments, dangers and petty jealousies. It is within this context of a transitional society still caught in old attitudes and enduring inequalities that *None to Accompany Me* examines the meanings, ambiguities and contradictions surrounding the new context of freedom and empowerment.

Against the 'baggage' from the past, the novel also examines the possibilities of transformation both in the social order and in personal relationships because the personal is always linked to the political in the South African context. Such possibilities are suggested in the various implied connotations of liberation and freedom. The novel hints that, in the new context of change and transition, the more fundamental principle of freedom may be overshadowed by the more popular 'easy-to-use freedom' (28). What the narrative suggests as 'the principle of life struggling against death' (ibid.) underlies all the exploration of human relationships in *None to Accompany Me*. Its definition of freedom perceives as the affirmation of

all that is life enhancing as against that which denies the possibility of life. Defining freedom in this way enables Gordimer to widen its implications to cover not only political freedom but also several other areas of social and personal relationships.

As the country struggles with this possibility of transformation, human relationships are also tested in the process so that, on another level, the novel also deals with the question of freedom in relation to how the self survives in the process of tremendous political and social change: 'Does the past return because one can rid oneself of it only slowly, or is the freedom actually the slow process of loss?' (71) The novel is thus also a novel about other kinds of freedom: women's freedom and self-transformation and other kinds of personal freedom. Gordimer explores new changes in power relations between men and women. She also negotiates new choices, new possibilities for women of different races and generations in South Africa. Her premise seems to be that the political circumstances of transition make it possible for individuals to change their lives because, within the whole process of preparing for the new nation, women are provided with many choices in terms of both their personal and political lives. Thus, in *None to Accompany Me*, the personal and the political are paralleled not only in the life of the major white protagonist but also in the lives and personal growth of black and younger women.

During the apartheid era, the ideology of liberation was entirely masculine and now, in *None to Accompany Me*, Gordimer explores the possibility of home and nationhood through the presentation of women as returning home from exile to create a nation. The female characters play more overtly active roles in post-apartheid politics. Sibongile, who has just returned from exile with her husband, Didymus, and their daughter, Mpho, takes up the role as a deputy director of the movement's regional redeployment programme for returnees. She is later elected as a member of the central executive of the

post-apartheid movement. Vera is appointed member of the Technical Committee responsible for drafting the country's new constitution. It is within these perspectives on women's relation to and roles in politics that *None to Accompany Me* can be explored. These women's political growths are paralleled with the delicate processes of empowerment in South Africa, which is undergoing massive and fundamental political transformations. Gordimer inscribes women's political struggle and self-definition into the narrative of the new nation. The empowerment of the nation also becomes an empowerment of women who are integral to that struggle. Gordimer now investigates this and shows us what happens when women re-define themselves and their roles within the struggle.

Gordimer portrays the relationship between men and women in the same stake of transition as the country. The narrative suggests that freedom is a process in which 'everyone ends up moving alone towards the self' (306). There are parallel developments where the sexual self is defined as just one among several other selves, just as empowerment of the nation needs more than just political power formation. Empowerment does not simply mean the acquisition of power but comes with a whole new set of ideas like justice, fair play and accountability. It needs justice for all, 'even if it is renamed empowerment' (305). That is why everyone must account for the terms used to interpret the revolution. Thus, the novel incorporates a whole new set of re-conceptualisations and re-definitions that may lead to a new view of relationships, particularly those defined by gender.

This is something quite new in Gordimer because, in her previous novels, the whole idea of liberation and its possibilities is conceived of in masculine terms. Liberation and nationhood are contextualised within the male domain. It is not until she comes to see the possibilities of nation or what may be called 'the arrival home' that she can also conceive of women's struggle, roles and re-definitions as part of the new transformations of the nation. Nation

assumes common pasts, common aspirations and common destinies. Such homogenous assumptions are easier to adhere to in moments of resistance and rebellion because they galvanise resistance and give a common voice to the liberation movement. In *None to Accompany Me*, the conflation of issues in terms of both gender and political struggles demonstrates that the political struggle is also women's struggle.

This is why I disagree with Gordimer when she says that 'the feminist battle must come afterwards' (Bazin and Seymour 1990: 167), and places more emphasis on national liberation within which black women's struggles are subsumed. She is often criticised on the basis that the novels preceding *My Son's Story* (1990) overlook the complexity of race and gender in black women's oppression. They are also devoid of the perspective of black women's roles in political struggles. She appears to believe with Fanon that, in national liberation, 'truth is the property of the national cause...that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime; that which promotes the emergence of the nation' (1967: 39). I agree with the view that 'it would be impossible for women to achieve their rights as women in a society in which so many fundamental rights were denied to both men and women'<sup>4</sup> (Walker 1982: 263). However, I disagree with Gordimer's statement that 'because if we are all free individuals, that's all we need, we don't have to have special feeling because we are women' (Bazin and Seymour 1990: 168) because it lacks the vision of the particular socio-historical and political context in which black women have been fighting. Walker observes that women in South Africa in the anti-pass campaign in the 1950s 'were moving beyond the traditional boundaries that formerly had circumscribed their lives' (1982: 265). What Gordimer explores in *None to Accompany Me* contradicts her earlier optimistic statement that 'if the real battle for human rights is won, the kingdom of...feminine liberation follows' (Ibid.: 167-68). I would argue that the real battle for black women

must be fought continually along with the national struggle and even after national liberation, since gender issues are an essential part of social transformation and should affect the forms of national liberation in the post-apartheid state.

'The specific interaction of sex, class and race has taken different forms for different women at various times' argues Cheryl Walker (1982: 7) who analyses the factors which have affected the position of South African women.<sup>5</sup> She observes that the traditional tribal and economic status of black women at the time of industrialisation and urbanisation was not only racialised but also gendered. She points out that sexual discrimination in colonial and apartheid South Africa was incorporated into the system of labour exploitation used to exert state control over African women and their economic status. As more and more men migrated to the cities as cheap labour, the women left behind came to play increasingly important roles both in maintaining the subsistence economies of the reserves and in reproducing the supply of migrant labourers. To keep African women in traditional junior roles and to tie them to the rural areas, the state worked to stem the tide of African women's migration and perpetuated their subordinate position. The sexual hierarchy was thus maintained alongside the colour hierarchy of white over black in the interests of capitalism in South Africa.

'The position of women in South Africa has been far from uniform' observes Walker (1982: 7). The tremendous effect of racial ideology in South Africa has obstructed the emergence of common class interests across colour lines. For most women in South Africa, the colour-based division segregated any experience of common womanhood because the divisions among the racial groups in political, economic and legal terms hampered political unity between women regardless of their class. Walker describes the context of women's political struggle in the country:

The nature of the cleavages among them is complex. White women have been separated from black women by a very wide gulf, one located in the basic structures of white supremacy....Furthermore, for the majority of women who are black, the disabilities they suffer as blacks rather than as women have been felt to press most heavily upon them. At the same time, the experience of their 'blackness' has varied considerably among different sections of black women. (Ibid.)

It is this complex interaction of race, gender and class that has defined women's diverse and changing positions and ultimately determined the organisation and the direction of their commitments to the emancipation of women, to the national liberation movement and to multiracialism. Women's involvement in the political struggle has to be considered within this socio-political context in South Africa.

*None to Accompany Me* presents a definite shift of perspective in the way it represents black female characters. There is more concern than ever with the empowerment of black women in politics. More importantly, it contextualises their lives within political change and parallels them with the lives of white women and other characters. Both Vera and Sibongile are deeply committed to the process of national liberation through which they learn to empower themselves. As I have discussed elsewhere, between Vera and Sibongile, who are both involved in the political process of building up the new South Africa and whose husbands are both displaced from this process, there is a common ground and a communication between white and black women. This has never been easy before in South Africa and likewise uncommon in Gordimer's fiction. It can therefore be seen as an attempt by Gordimer to create black/white sisterhood in national progress, an area she has never explored before through her central characters.

In Gordimer's earlier works, a large group of black women are left out of her vision of social reali-

ty. From the standpoint of the enormous impact of history on South Africa's politics and human relationships, she has been criticised for rendering black women silent and invisible in revitalising and liberating exclusively white women<sup>6</sup> through their attachments to African men as if to suggest that the issues of liberation may only be explored between white women and black men, and as if to endorse the assumption that matters of liberation within the non-white community are entirely masculine issues. The liberation movement in *None to Accompany Me* is no longer a masculine business. It presents a perspective of black women's political roles and struggles within the actual progression of an emergent nation with both positive and negative implications. The possibilities, fulfillments and dangers of Sibongile's new power significantly affect and re-organise her relationship with her husband, Didymus, an old fighter in the liberation movement. Sibongile and her daughter, Mpho, are far more capable than male characters of creating a new home and adjusting themselves to home politics.

Cherryl Walker provides an insight which may explain the tensions, anxieties and conflicts occasioned by women's visibility and empowerment in the new political context. As she argues, 'women's primary identification is domestic and maternal', which contributed to 'the often unconscious reservations about women's political autonomy that existed within the Congress Alliance' (1982: 264). This view encouraged a definition of women's political priorities in very conventional terms, centring on domestic issues. Indeed, Gordimer's own novels have supported this view of African women's relation to political issues. Gaitskell, writing in 1983, states that 'black women lack access to any meaningful political power, while the government pursues a policy of systematic dispossession and forced population removals which bears most harshly on women, children and the old' (1983: 1). Gordimer's earlier novels preceding *My Son's Story* do not address the question of what black

women's political roles should be. It is not even clear in *My Son's Story* how the 'coloured' protagonist, Sonny, can find a way to be comrades with his wife, Aila, who has become a revolutionary without his knowledge. Women's involvement in politics could be a potential threat to the unity of the national liberation movement because the women's campaign is not limited to the alliance with the national liberation struggle but is also committed to the emancipation of women from their inferior position in society.

This dual objective of women's involvement in politics is itself a potential site for conflicts. An important consideration in examining Gordimer's representation of women's empowerment should be the extent to which she sustains the tension and dialectic between national freedom and women's freedom. The ways in which these tensions are revealed and explored by the narrative is always an indication that Gordimer is rethinking her ideological and narrative perspectives. In her earlier fiction, this duality exists but is not a major source of tension in the narrative. The processes through which women are empowered within the revolutionary movement lie outside the narrative's explorations. It is perhaps only within the transitional context of *None to Accompany Me* that Gordimer can raise this dual perspective as a major theme.

Gordimer contextualises the women's movement and struggle within the wider struggle of liberation in the emergent nation. The relationship between Sibongile and her husband, Didymus, parallels Vera's relationship with her husband, Ben, in one major sense: it is delineated within the political changes of the country that affect women's access to political life. This relationship, however, faces different pressures from those experienced by Vera and Ben. This is partly because the politicisation of women takes place in a large context where many things have not yet changed. The novel explores what kinds of anxieties and tensions are created when women are empowered and addresses the

question of how men can reconcile themselves to the re-organisation of gender relations occasioned by women's empowerment.

The returnee couple's new situation is delineated in terms of the concept of history at the time of the imminent birth of a new regime. To Sibongile, history does not necessarily belong to the past, but is something to be lived and worked with continually. Sibongile and Didymus were the best of comrades in exile, but their political lives back home are very different and hence their relationship changes considerably after their return to South Africa. Whereas Sibongile is assigned the task of building a new government, her husband remains an old guard who has survived but still 'lives in the past' (47) like a 'phantom...as if dead' and 'unrecognized' (95). Didymus is still concerned with the old struggles: 'He sees himself as history and history stops with him' (133). It is ironic that when times have changed and the scandal of torture is publicly reported, he is deprived of his political leadership in the new organisation of the Movement. Sibongile's political independence represents the claim by the women's political movement of 'women as political actors in their own right' (Walker 1982: 265), assuming their own decision-making powers, autonomy and responsibility. She is a new agent of post-apartheid politics who goes beyond her husband's experiences. She has her own expectations and ambitions to be realised. Given her new power within the changing political scene, Gordimer seems to suggest that it is only in politics that women can experience liberation and empowerment.

The couple's gender roles are re-defined within the transitional context where the uneasiness and fragility of empowerment are still evident. Although the woman protagonists do not face the common male opposition or reluctance to women's political activism, delicate problems and new dilemmas for their husbands arise within the new conceptions of womanhood and female empowerment. Didymus continually struggles to overcome these and the nar-

rative represents the tensions and anxieties that surround the fragile re-definition of their relationship. The possibilities, fulfillments and dangers of Sibongile's new power significantly affect and reorganise her relationship with her husband. Although Didymus is portrayed as a supportive husband and a comrade to Sibongile, he also has to conquer certain feelings within himself. The whole relationship is thus played out in the context of women's empowerment in the emergent country and their husbands' need to come to terms with the tensions and anxieties this produces. The narrative's delineation of the delicate struggle between Sibongile and Didymus in the charged politics of the transition raises the question of how past resistance may be reconciled with present. For it seems women's empowerment is made possible only by the deflation of man. The narrative appears to relegate Didymus to the margins as it makes way for Sibongile's elevation.

The process we see in *None to Accompany Me* is a struggle of black women as well as black men back home within the context of the creation of a new nation. The conventional subordinate position of black women is subverted in the relationship of the returnee couple not only in politicising Sibongile but also in the actual delineation of this process of her empowerment. The representation of Sibongile in the process of her political growth makes a structural contrast to those of Aila and her daughter, Baby, in *My Son's Story* where the 'coloured' women's political identity is a given statement without providing any process of their individuation. Sibongile, on the other hand, is represented in a gradual process of discovery for the reader that recognises the anxieties, worries, and dangers that delineate her political life.

This level of representation is a crucial dimension in South Africa because women's oppression assumes specific forms, which provide an insight into the ways in which women have become politicised. It is as if the novel's context of change, negotiations, empowerment and reconciliation spurs a similar

negotiation in Gordimer's own conception of world and relationships in the novel.

Gordimer's creation of the parallel view of Sibongile and Oupa's wife in the village is a way of showing us the evolution of how far the black woman has come to empower herself within the struggle. Oupa, who works in the city as a clerk at the Legal Foundation, is an inheritor of the old struggle. He embodies the masculine activity of the struggle: 'something of the unacknowledged self that came into being in prison still existed within him' (16). In contrast to him, his wife, who stays in his old village, embodies a conventional African life and represents black women in their traditional place. Cheryl Walker observes that the traditional tribal and economic status of black women at the time of industrialisation and urbanisation was not only racialised but also gendered.<sup>7</sup> In *None to Accompany Me*, the two women's roles are paralleled in the way that Oupa's wife is in the same marginalised position as Sibongile's in exile. We can see by looking at the two women's lives within the new context to measure how far the African woman has come to the centre of the new political arena.

The relationship between Sibongile and Didymus is where Gordimer explores the re-organisation of power relations between men and women within the transitional political circumstances. While Sibongile is provided with productive political action and a new attitude of political intercourse, Didymus is caught, like Oupa, in his old self as an old fighter and incapable of transcending the past. He is even dragged into inherited problems of violent interrogations of suspected spies during the old movements. He is now on the sidelines of the political scene and placed at home to write about South African history of the exile period whilst taking care of the daily tasks for which his wife has no time any more. The novel thus explores pressures and anxieties created when women are empowered and addresses the question of how men may reconcile with the re-

organisation of gender relations occasioned with the politicisation of women.

Because gender differentiates between the sexes and organises the ways in which the sexes relate to each other, it is directly linked to sexuality. Sexuality is the locus where human emotions find their expression, especially between the sexes. Sexuality is one form of this relationship and is governed by the assumptions and knowledge that cultures and societies create around this difference as a way of determining sexual roles and defining relationships between men and women. Sexuality is indeed culturally charged and connotes a variety of meanings, values and attitudes. Discourses of sexuality function as effective means of producing human subjects and regulating human relationships. In the South African context, there is a distinct connection between sexuality and politics because the human body resided at the very centre of the segregation laws of apartheid, which regulated the regime's racial policies.

In contrast and in defiance of these regulations, Gordimer's works present a fluid view of sexuality by making it a significant locus for the intersection of the personal and the political. In earlier works like *The Lying Days* (1953) and *A Sport of Nature* (1987), women's sexuality becomes the site of rebellion within the family. Sexuality and sexual expression are, in these early novels, both spontaneous urges and conscious transgressions of apartheid and its ideology of race, which regulates the sexuality of all South Africans. In both *The Lying Days* and *A Sport of Nature*, the white woman's body rebels against apartheid by staking itself as the territory on which two races (white and black) connect in defiance of the separation those racial laws enforce. In *None to Accompany Me*, however, the idea of the body and sexual expression as sites of rebellion is minimised. Here, the white woman's body and her sexuality are re-defined in other ways. Vera's perception of sexual expression starts out as a purely personal enrichment, but she expects from it not just the pleasure



and satisfaction of the body but also the exchanging and sharing of 'the burdens of the self' (159, 249, 276). Her time in the mountains with her lover, Bennet Stark, gives her a new sense of all that is possible between two people:

Bennet was *the other man*. Yet in a way it was he who made another man possible, wanted, because he it was who had shown her, up in the mountains with those friends of a group photograph, what love-making could be, how many revelations of excitement and wild sensation it could mean beyond what she had thought was its limit, with the husband who was out of the way at war. (61)

Vera, unlike Ben, who is now her second husband, moves away from this view of sexuality. Significantly, it is when her political involvement increases and enhances her public role that she begins to reinterpret her purely personal and subjective view of sexuality. Whereas, in the beginning, sexual expression had been physical fulfilment, which is defined as 'a temporary withdrawal from the world, a sealing off from threat and demand' (18) between men and women, Vera's public involvement moves her beyond this view towards a new understanding in which she defines her sexuality in terms of her dual commitment to the private and the public. Sexuality is in this sense not merely a matter of giving the self wholeheartedly to a man but becomes that which defines so many other selves: the loving self, the political self, the creative self, the companionable self, and so on. In the process of becoming so involved, she also re-defines the meaning of sexuality in relation to public commitment:

She has a need to re-define. Friends. Friends are differing individuals who are the repositories of confidences and confessions. The act of these friendships, in which the various aspects of self cannot be placed all upon one person, is the equivalent of placing the burden of self within the other by which she used to define the sexual act. (276)

Thus, Vera's ideas about sex change through her recognition that her sexual life is just one aspect of several selves. Her sexuality is deeply embedded in her as a crucial part of her being and she comes to understand that her sexual being is contained within the political self. She progresses towards linking the personal to the political and this process is also charged with tensions and problems. This movement from sexuality to politics also loses a certain necessary aspect of her life in leaving her husband.

Vera's relationships with her husband and lover present the process through which the relationship between sexuality and politics is examined and developed. While Vera moves beyond a purely personal and sensual view of sexuality through the demands of political commitment, Ben is unchanged in his personal commitment to his wife. While she takes on the work of land allocation that balances the private with the public, her activities and those of her husband do not synchronise in a way that might encourage mutual respect and further commitment to each other. Vera's development is a development away from her husband because their different public commitments separate them from each other. Vera seeks a connection between the public and ideological as well as the personal and sensual. These can never be completely synthesised as the connection between the personal and the political is not a simple reconciliation but always dialectic fraught with anxieties, contradictions and dilemmas. However, in creating this dialectic, Gordimer does indicate some possibility of their synthesis because it is this connection which provides the potential for the protagonist's transformations and new commitment.

In re-defining sexuality in terms of her dual commitment to the personal and political, Vera takes a transgressive position against the existing regulations of sexuality. As I have discussed earlier, she moves away from her original positions of sexuality as a way of 'the exchange of the burdens of self' in purely personal terms towards the possible synthesis

between sexuality and politics. It is because Vera can link sexuality and politics in this way that she is able to achieve an ideal of human rapport and exchange across racial boundaries, which was extremely difficult in apartheid South Africa. Gordimer's attempt to create a rapprochement between Vera and Zeph Rapulana, a spokesperson of squatters, across racial, gender and sexual boundaries, may be seen as the ramifications of this new synthesis of the personal and the political because their commitment to land redistribution brings them a common sense of elation: 'this single return of land to its people was their right, Rapulana's and hers, to quiet elation' (214). What unites these separate beings as loyal associates is their commitment to the political struggle and creating a new community in the country: 'there was nothing either felt more intensely than these political fears and exaltations, no emotion that could draw two individuals more closely than this' (296-97).

This cross-racial relationship between Vera and Rapulana also represents a new concept of home in post-apartheid South Africa. Vera meets him through her work at the Legal Foundation. Gordimer does not invest this relationship with any radical sexuality, as she does with white female and black male relationships in her earlier novels, but she again locates the interracial connection between a black man and a white woman as a site of human reconciliation and political communion. Her earlier symbolic uses of the body and sexuality as transgressions of the social order appear no longer relevant in the new possibilities for transformations. Rather, the issues of home, land and the ownership of land lie at the centre of their relationship. Leaving her husband and abandoning her old home in the white suburb, Vera moves to the annex of Rapulana's house, which becomes her new home. It is symbolic that in the new South Africa, the white lives in the black man's home as Vera is now a tenant living in a black man's property. Her relationship to Rapulana points to a possible relationship between white South Africa and

the new nation governed by the black majority.

Gordimer's explorations of cross-racial unions are part of her continuing examination of the nature of liberation and political commitment in apartheid South Africa. Most of her earlier protagonists fail to achieve an ideal of human rapport and exchange across racial boundaries.<sup>8</sup> Her earlier creation of black/white couples represents mostly sexual relationships and reflects her concern with the liberating possibilities inherent in cross-racial relationships.<sup>9</sup> Her delineation of the cross-racial encounter continues to respond to the social conditions of change in the historical and political context of South Africa. The social milieu at the time of national transformation in post-apartheid South Africa seems to have urged Gordimer to produce a new kind of union across the colour bar.

Gordimer explores in the relationship between Vera and Rapulana a new area of interracial and cross-gender bonding invested with 'freedom' in the new home, which is dissociated not only from sexual desire but also from various conventions. Gordimer seems to project on this relationship her ideal link between sexes as well as between races:

They continued to accept one another for exactly what they were, no sense of one intruding upon the private territory behind the other. It had come to her that this was the basis that ought to have existed between a man and a woman in general, where it was a question not of a difference of ancestry but of sex. (282)

They represent different racial, cultural, gender identities and do not share any common background. The non-sexual rapport between Vera and Rapulana, achieved through their political commitment to land allocation, can be read as a symbolic reconciliation between people of different races in the new home they share as independent and equal individuals.

It is appropriate to understand that Rapulana is for Vera 'an impersonal promise of symbolic accep-

tance, beyond fears of rejection and exclusion, by an Africa at last able to be constructed as Home' (Wagner 1995: 76). Gordimer's utopian ideal of a human relationship, which is 'closer in their difference' (261, 282), is embodied for the first time in this new type of cross-racial union between Vera and Rapulana. In this arrangement of living alone in the annex of a black colleague's estate which falls into no conventional category in her society, Vera recognises the ultimate state of her existence: '*herself* a final form of company discovered' (321). Within this small space of her solitary home juxtaposed with the present conditions of the home ground, where contradictions, problems and ambiguities are still evident, Vera discovers a place for herself and plays her part in constructing a new home in the country. Gordimer's long-standing search for an answer to the question 'Where Do Whites Fit In?', the title of her 1959 essay, which she originally tended to answer as *nowhere* (1989: 31-32), finally reaches some resolution in *None to Accompany Me*. The tensions, contradictions and dilemmas between the cross-racial couples in her earlier novels are finally resolved here, at the moment of new, emergent South Africa. In this union, one can see the symbolic accommodation of the new home for all those whose home is nowhere else but Africa and for whom cross-racial communication is something they have to learn immediately.

The novel also explores the question of how the past of resistance may be reconciled with the present and future of negotiation, reconciliation and fusion. Though this negotiation in the novel is fraught with tension and danger, its ideal possibility is envisaged in the negotiation made by the young black girl, Mpho, the daughter of Sibongile and Didymus. She was born in exile and educated in London. Gordimer creates her as another 'departure from the parent stock',<sup>10</sup> a symbol of reconciliation created by the 'cross-pollination' of history:

The Maqoma daughter was a sixteen-year-old beau-

ty of the kind created by the cross-pollination of history....Mpho was a resolution—in a time when this had not yet been achieved by governments, conferences, negotiations, mass action and international monitoring or intervention—of the struggle for power in the country which was hers, and yet where, because of that power struggle, she had not been born (48-49).

Gordimer creates in Mpho 'a style of beauty that comes out of the clash between domination and resistance,' the result of boundary changes, of the merging of ideologies, sects, religions and philosophies (49). She is another mutation of a black girl, who is a cultural hybrid between home and exile, Africa and Europe.<sup>11</sup> She is able to negotiate these worlds because she doesn't have the encrustations of the past. Her understanding of her return and her acceptance of home are more honest and much less complicated by the insecurities of past histories than the return home of her parents and of most older exiles in the novel. In Mpho, Gordimer presents her ideal of a cultural merger for new South Africa, where cultural as well as social harmony is extremely difficult to achieve. Her ability to operate in both home and exile is the reconciliation that may be possible within new South Africa.

The irony of this new identity of cultural hybrid, a product of history in South Africa, is that she also reveals some unreadiness and weakness about fitting into the social milieu of her homeland. She has been alienated from the social context and cultural ethos of South Africa. She innocently accepts Africa as her home without a clear sense of what home is. Her unexpected pregnancy and the consequential trouble around her including the conflict with her mother may well imply the fragility of the process of reconciliation. The fact that the novel places the ideal of reconciliation within a symbol of such a young beauty devoid of the past of South Africa may be a reference to the fact that the realities of reconciliation and negotiation are still a complex and fragile process.

In all its experimental delineations, *None to Accompany Me* explores sexuality in terms of the transformation of private selves. Gordimer introduces a lesbian theme for the first time in this novel and envisages new types of daughters in her delineation of lesbian sexual identity. In her earlier novels, Gordimer complies with the stereotypical constructions of homosexuality and lesbianism as related to freak sexuality, personality disorder or emotional disturbance in her unconscious representations of sexual identity. A deviant daughter, Maxine, in her short story, 'Sibling', in *A Soldier's Embrace* (1980), uses lesbianism as a pretext for enigmatising herself in order to distance her from her white middle-class family. Maxine is described as a self-outcast who 'could find no place for her' (39) and cuts off her ties both with her family and the world. After victimising her family through many suicide attempts and arrests on drug charges, she afflicts them by boasting that she now lives as a lesbian. Another example of homosexual identity in Gordimer's work is Terry in *The Conservationist* (1974), the farm owner Mehring's homosexual son. Homosexuality in this novel is a metaphor for the sterility of the white man's line in Africa, which contrasts significantly with the blacks' resilience in their land. Mehring's line becomes extinct when Terry leaves South Africa to live with his divorced mother in New York and never returns to his country. His sexual orientation can be read as a symbol for the heirless white civilisation in Africa as represented by Mehring's leftist mistress: 'And if I had children, I don't believe in inheritance of property, unearned possessions, the perpetuation of privilege' (77). Gordimer grants no tenure of African land to the white landowner, Mehring, who in the end gives up both his family and his farmland. Both Terry and Maxine exemplify 'social deviance', both 'could find no place' in their society and have very weak ties with their family. Gordimer's earlier work thus reproduces the traditional marginalisation of homosexual

and lesbian children as alienated and demonic Others.

While Gordimer's earlier treatment of homosexuals stereotypes them as marginal Others, bereft of home and family ties, the lesbian daughters in *None to Accompany Me* are afforded the potential of creating a new kind of home. Annick and her girlfriend, Lou, are well-integrated members of the new South African society. Within the transitional context of the emergent country, it is even possible for the couple to openly declare themselves as lesbians. They become new parents by adopting a formerly unloved and abandoned black female baby. They are depicted as an unconventional but ideal couple. Lesbianism in the novel is a new lifestyle rather than a pathological manifestation of sexuality. Here, Gordimer renders the lesbian couple into a constructive family unit. The picture of the white mother raising a black daughter and dreaming of a rainbow family is carried over from *A Sport of Nature* and it now projects a new concept of parenthood and family structures beyond the differences of race, gender and sexuality, 'contributing to the rich diversity of humankind' (Kitzinger 1987: 44). It is paradoxical that while the white heterosexual mother, Vera, leaves her nuclear family to live as a tenant, her lesbian daughter and her lover are making a new kind of home on their own terms. The narrative suggests that Annick is another new being who 'grew and changed and moved into another self' (157). The creation of this new being as a lesbian parent for the first time in her work clearly indicates the author's changing and growing awareness of sexuality and her new perception of lesbianism. The new daughters represent the author's re-definition of lesbianism as 'sexual freedom' (273) and an alternative lifestyle, which opens up the possibility of a new home.

Gordimer's renewed sexual awareness, however, does not involve a full appreciation of sexual diversity. What is still problematic about her treatment of the lesbian theme is that Annick's sexuality is attrib-

uted to her fear of men as a result of her mother's exuberant sexual behaviour: 'Fear of men because her mother was "taken away", the nest of home broken into by a man' (273). Vera blames herself for her daughter's sexual identity: 'what did I do to put you off men?' (159). Although Gordimer offers the lesbian daughter the 'free choice' (273) of love and the opportunity of creating new family ties, the novel still cloaks lesbianism as an abnormality for which a cause is sought and for which the mother is blamed within the heterosexual framework of taboos.

As we have seen earlier, Vera later revises her initial view of the sexual act as the exchange of the burdens of self and comes to recognise that 'the various aspects of self cannot be placed all upon one person' (276). Likewise, the various aspects of female sexuality cannot be defined only in terms of heterosexual norms. The course of the dialogue between Vera and Annick indicates that heterosexual essentialism is applied to the mother but not to her daughter (156-60). The gay and lesbian movement may have compelled Gordimer to re-define the complexity of sexuality. The fact that the novel projects the lesbian couple as new parents, who are making a new kind of home, seems to suggest that Gordimer is just beginning to revise her perspective on homosexual love and sexual behaviour as a new form of freedom and new possibility in South Africa. The new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) is one of the very few constitutions that refer to sexual orientation as something that should not be discriminated against. It declares that '[e]quality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms,' and 'no person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds', including 'sexual orientation' as well as 'race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth' (Chapter 2). The lesbian theme in *None to Accompany Me* reflects a new release of creative thinking on all the transformations

possible in the order of the new constitution. Gordimer suggests that sexual choices can be made part of the definition of freedom and that it is just as much a political subject as the official constitution that would legitimate a non-racial order.

Gordimer's fiction is preoccupied with the concept of home in both private and public terms. Gordimer once deplored 'homelessness' in South Africa by saying that 'we have never known the state of community-we seem to pass, without ever having experienced the most fruitful and secure way of living that the soul of man knows, directly from homelessness to regimentation' (1973: 36). *None to Accompany Me* addresses the question of home in the new situation of post-apartheid South Africa. Because sexuality and the whole concept of gender relate to values that are fundamental to communities and cultures, radical experimentation in these areas can disrupt the foundations of an entire social order. Gordimer's re-thinking of sexuality, gender and politics in *None to Accompany Me* leads inevitably to new conceptualisation of home in South Africa. The meaning and implications of home are contested concepts in South Africa and the definition of home always has to take into consideration other claims and interpretations of home. The novel conceives the idea of home through its explorations of new forms of social and personal relations. The new concept of home is explored for each character both in their personal life and in the altering state. The female characters in particular emerge as new subjects through their commitments to creating a new home. Vera and her daughter are engaged in creating a new kind of home in different ways. To Sibongile, home is the politics of home back in South Africa. The male characters, on the other hand, are not able to accommodate themselves to their new circumstances. Didymus is stripped of a major political role back home after a long engagement with and deep commitment to exile politics. The novel seems to suggest that both Didymus's old political commitment and Ben's com-

mitment to personal love, both devoid of any engagement in contemporary politics, have no place in the new South Africa, especially when national transformation is in progress and the country is striving for the 'arrival' of new home.

The exploration of new concepts of home and alternative sexuality as personal freedom have become possible in *None to Accompany Me* by the very potential unleashed by national liberation. The possibility of freedom is real and palpable and the narrative explores its true meaning. The narrative examines various personal lives and interrelationships with such a meaning of freedom in mind, and the purpose of these explorations is to determine how characters can handle the meaning and implications of freedom in their various relationships. This possibility, with all its tensions, betrayals and tragedies, is explored and delineated particularly in terms of new concepts of home on both political and personal levels because, in South Africa, where the public and the private are intricately interlinked, 'perhaps the passing away of the old regime makes the abandonment of an old personal life also possible' (315).

### Conclusion

This study has focused on *None to Accompany Me*'s exploration of the intersection of the politics of race, gender and sexuality within a period of transition. The sheer potential of freedom at this transitional period has given the novelist the inspiration to engage with the present as a very fragile process still entangled with the past. At the same time, it has examined the novel's delineation of new forms of social and personal relations. The implications of the novel's concept of 'arrival' are in part seen in its exploration of women's empowerment in the new circumstances of South Africa in both political and personal terms. The empowerment of women is contextualised within the empowerment of the new nation

and the parallel developments in both demonstrate that all transitional processes are fraught with tensions, contradictions and anxieties and require a great deal of negotiation and new commitments. The novel overviews all the different changes being made in power relations within the country and within the family, and in the lives of all the characters, illustrating how far they have progressed the anxieties, contradictions and betrayals they still have to contend with as remnants of the old system and past struggles.

The central character, Vera's search for the balance between her sexuality and her moral and political commitment reaches in *None to Accompany Me* to her re-definition of her sexuality in terms of her dual commitment to private and public life. She thus seeks a connection between her public, ideological outlook and her personal, sensual beliefs. These perspectives, however, can never be completely synthesised but remain as a dialectic fraught with anxieties, tensions and dilemmas. In creating this dialectic, Gordimer explores the possibility of their synthesis as a potential for her protagonist's transformation and new commitments along with the possibility of national transformation.

*None to Accompany Me* creates new subject positions for women in the changing political context of South Africa. The novel is notably different in its representation of black female characters that are given a more central role in home politics and a new kind of personality, which symbolises the reconciliation between home and exile politics. Gordimer also revises in this novel her former conception of same-gender love and sexuality by turning the lesbian daughters into representatives of a new generation who are capable of nesting a new kind of family in South Africa. Yet she does not develop her sexual politics as much as she could have by naturalising same-gender love as legitimate sexual conduct or granting equal rights to people of diverse sexual orientation.

that it explores new concepts of home and the family. The 'arrival' of new home inevitably entails the disruption of the foundations of the old social order and Gordimer's re-thinking of sexuality, gender and politics in *None to Accompany Me* leads to new conceptualisation of home in the new forms of social and personal relationships in South Africa. Gordimer continues to question the old norms of the white family and to re-define the meanings of the family within the new national formation. In *None to Accompany Me*, Gordimer's creation of alternative family ties, free from old racial, sexual and gender constraints, reflects a new release of her creative thinking on all the transformations possible in the new order of South Africa.

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### Notes

- 1 About the process of this revolution, see Mandela 1994 and Sparks 1995.
- 2 Gordimer quotes this phrase from Flaubert.
- 3 For discussions of the concept of nation and nationalism, see also Gellner 1983; Bhabha 1990; Hobsbawm 1990, and Smith 1991.
- 4 This statement was made by Helen Joseph, a national secretary of the Federation of South African Women in the 1950s and 1960s.

- 5 For perspectives on the economic status of South African women and their political involvement, see Walker 1982 and 1990.
- 6 See especially Nancy Topping Bazin. 'Sex, Politics, and Silent Black Women: Nadine Gordimer's *Occasion for Loving*, *A Sport of Nature*, and *My Son's Story*,' 30-45.
- 7 About perspectives on the position of South African women and their political involvement, see Walker's *Women and Resistance in South Africa* and *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*.
- 8 The failure of the cross-racial love affair in *Occasion for Loving* (1963), for example, signifies the ineffectual liberalism of white South Africans as represented by the Stilwells who face the very dilemma of white South African liberals by failing to develop the potential of the cross-racial union between Gideon and Ann. Rosa Burger and Zwelinzima in *Burger's Daughter* and Maureen and July in *July's People* also fail to achieve cross-racial communication and the ideal of human communion.
- 9 In *A Sport of Nature*, for example, Hillela's radically sexual and political union with her black husbands represents a revolutionary dynamic to change society. Gordimer's creation of this more radical and subversive woman in the domains of both politics and sexuality reflects her renewed commitment to multiracial society and interracial union in working together to liberate South Africa.
- 10 The first departure from the parent stock is the young Jewish heroine, Hillela, in *A Sport of Nature* who is liberated from a familial code of the white race towards a rapprochement with black Africans.
- 11 The author has also presented a new female identity of hybrid, Aila, in *My Son's Story*. The 'coloured' woman represents not only a racial mixture of black and white, of Europe, Asia and Africa, but also intermingled identity between home and exile, the personal and the political, conventional and revolutionary.