Political Negotiation, Reconciliation, and Reconstruction in Post-Apartheid Female Narratives

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Abstract:

Since the official end of apartheid, different state actors and non-state actors have been chanting the creed of national reconciliation and reconstruction for a better and harmonious South Africa. In fact, Desmond Tutu's vision of the "rainbow nation", to an extent, has been the driving force behind the policies of successive regimes in South Africa following the trauma and dispossession of the past. Since literature can also be conceived as an interpretation of society in time and space, the discourse of national reconciliation and reconstruction has found inroads in the literary and cultural productions of post-apartheid South Africa. This paper, thus, seeks to show the relationship between post-apartheid female narratives and post-apartheid politics. In other words, it verifies the contributory role of South African female writers in re-negotiating, re-conciliating and re-constructing the post-apartheid nation. In this connection, this paper is predicated on the premise that the post-apartheid South African female writer, just like her male counterpart, is also involved in the political project of nation building through political negotiation, reconciliation, and reconstruction. These writers, in their works, affirm the view that without political dialogue and reconciliation, the nation-building project in post-apartheid South Africa is a mere hoax and an exercise in futility.

Keywords: post-apartheid, narratives, reconciliation, negotiation, nation-building.

Introduction

Dialogue is an invaluable ingredient in the development and progress of society. It is only in the context of social dialogue that different shades of opinions could coalesce for the *summon bonum* of society. St. Thomas Aquinas argues in "Statesmanship on Kingship", as Aristotle had done in *The Politics*, that man by nature is a political and social animal living amid a multitude of its kind and endowed with reason unlike other animals to solve his problems and interact harmoniously with his fellow man (Aristotle 1962, 463). This interaction and socialization can only be fruitful, concrete and genuine in the spirit of permanent and genuine dialogue. In fact, he principle of permanent dialogue is even more crucial and cardinal in the context of the state where there is the ruling establishment, on the one hand, and the masses on the other. In order for the state to pursue her objectives and form a social contract with its subjects, it must be enshrined in her policy the spirit

of free and frank debate which will eventually culminate in social dialogue. Thus, Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *The Social Contract* contends that: "Since men cannot create new forces, but merely combine and control those that already exist, the only way in which they can preserve themselves is by uniting their separate powers in a combination strong enough to overcome any resistance uniting them so that their powers are directed by a single motive and act in concert" (Rousseau 1968, 59-60). This bond of unity, as depicted by Rousseau, is the leitmotif that animates the imaginative consciousness of most South African writers in the post-apartheid era.

In general terms, this paper aims at expounding on the nexus between literary discourse and nation-building. The paper, in other words, underscores that nation-building is not the preserve of politicians, statesmen, and freedom fighters alone but it is also the discursive matter of creative writers as well. Thus, the work aims at bringing out the contributory role of South African female writers in reconstructing the post-Apartheid nation. Drawing inspiration from Nadine Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*, Gillian Slovo's *Red Dust*, Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, and Pamela Jooste's *People Like Ourselves*, this focus is anchored on the perspective that the woman, from time immemorial, has not been adequately recognised for the role she has been playing in the development of her society and nation in general. The probable reason for the shabby treatment of the role of the woman in national development and reconstruction is the fact that her male counterpart for a very long time has been the sole controller of history. In this guise, the male historian, consciously or not, tends to accord a patriarchal orientation to historiography where the exploits of men are highlighted to the detriment of those of women. In other words, this work seeks to prove the standpoint that most female South African literary and cultural discourses have always been tailored towards building the South African nation.

In a paper entitled "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom", which was presented in an ANC in-house seminar on arts and culture in 1989, Albie Sachs, the virulent apartheid iconoclast, gave what could be called, his visionary manifesto on how the post-Apartheid society should operate at the socio-artistic, cultural and political levels. The author suggests in his paper that in the post-Apartheid context, the artistic, cultural and political discourses should be aimed at reconciling the ethnic and racial cleavages or fragments of South Africa (Sachs 1998, 243). Albie Sachs' vision of South African discourse in the post-apartheid era finds inroads in the creative works of most South African female writers and artists like Nadine Gordimer, Gillian Slovo, Zoë Wicomb, and Pamela Jooste. The analysis of these writers' works shows the extent to which most of the post-apartheid female writers use their artistic fortes to serve their nation. Thus, this paper contends that the post-apartheid South African female writer also places her art at the service of her nation. In other words, Gordimer, Slovo, Wicomb, and Jooste reveal that the post-apartheid nation can only re-create itself in the context of political dialogue and reconciliation which will usher in national reconstruction. Put differently, national reconstruction in post-apartheid South Africa is unfeasible and impossible in the context of hatred, fragmentation, and intolerance – ills that were ushered into South African politics during the apartheid era.

Gordimer, Slovo, Wicomb, and Jooste: No Reconstruction without Reconciliation

In his Nobel Lecture, entitled "Strategies for World Peace: The View of the UN Secretary-General", (delivered on December 10, 2001, in Oslo, Norway) Kofi A. Annan argues that it is only through dialogue and the acceptance of diversity that the world can have meaningful and lasting peace. In this connection, "Only in a world that is rid of poverty", Annan writes "can all men and women make the most of their abilities. Only where individual rights are respected can differences be channelled politically and resolved peacefully. Only in a democratic environment, based on respect for diversity and dialogue, can individual self-expression and self-government be secured and freedom of association be upheld" (Annan 2006, 162). The above quotation shows that dialogue is a vital instrument in the development of society. It is even more important in the context of multiracialism – since conflict is always the order of the day in multicultural societies. To this view Annan further comments thus: "Today, however, even amid continuing ethnic conflict around the world, there is a growing understanding that human diversity is both the reality that makes dialogue necessary and the basis for that dialogue" (Annan 2006, 162). The novels of Gordimer, Slovo, Wicomb, and Jooste reveal the veracity of Ann's philosophical vision for peace and concord in society.

In *None to Accompany Me*, the release of Nelson Mandela from prison shows the determination of the anti-apartheid white regime to engage in dialogue and reconciliation with blacks. Mandela in this novel, therefore, becomes a symbol of black liberation struggle in South Africa. It is for this reason that his release, in the novel, generates widespread celebration and jubilation across South Africa. The narrator comments: "[...] sports club delegations, mothers' unions and herded schoolchildren stood around Nelson Mandela's old Soweto cottage queuing to embrace him, while foreign diplomats presented themselves to be filmed clasping his hand" (Gordimer 1994, 5). The release of Mandela is a prelude to political dialogue and the search for harmony in post-Apartheid South Africa. This is because it opens the way for freedom of speech and association which had been suppressed in the days of apartheid.

The white regime, in order to show her alacrity to abolish apartheid, uses the pragmatic approach in dealing with the situation. The omniscient narrator remarks that "Negotiation with the Government on indemnity for political activists [...]" are on the way although it "[...] were not decisive" (Gordimer 1994, 6). This is a laudable move by the regime to reconcile itself with the freedom fighters. Moreover, the above fact is strengthened when the narrator attests that "With the old stern President pushed out by one of his cabinet ministers who smiled like a film star and was said to be having talks with blacks no one could be sure what that would be" (Gordimer 1994, 21). The "old stern President" here is metaphorical of Pieter Botha while his successor, "who smiled like a film star" is Frederick de Klerk. This is attested by the fact that it was during the reign of de Klerk that Mandela was released from prison. The policy of Frederick de Klerk, following his ascension to power, has been summarized by Rosemary Jolly, in "Introduction", in the following words: "As Rob Nixon has emphasized, the phrase 'the New South Africa' was minted by F.W. de Klerk in his speech on 2 February 1990, which proclaimed the end of apartheid, announced

Mandela's release from prison, and promised the repeal of apartheid laws" (Jolly 1998, 4).

Furthermore, the determination of the regime to opt for dialogue and reconciliation is confirmed by the fact that all those who were exiled in the days of apartheid have been granted armistice to return to their country. A case in point is Sibongile and Didymus who are now in South Africa from exile and have regained their real names. This is because in the days of apartheid they concealed their identity and used pseudonyms in order to avoid being tracked down by the police. This is shown through the comments of the omniscient narrator, when he says that "In exile they [Sibongile and Didymus] had had code names; there would always be many people in the outside world who would know them by no other (Gordimer 1994, 43). The idea of the couple coming back to the country on exile and regaining their original names is a positive sign that the environment is now free for mutual talks between the freedom fighters and the ruling government.

In Vera's discussion with Sibongile in a restaurant, one realizes the willingness of some of the whites to reconcile with South African blacks and the freedom fighters in general. This explains why in the dialogue Vera openly declares to Sibongile that "-The Boers fawning all over us, inviting us for official dinners, getting themselves photographed with us for the papers!" (Gordimer 1994, 47). The Boers, who are the present-day Afrikaners, historically were the first settlers in South Africa. In a nutshell, the Boers, as portrayed by Vera, are struggling to socialise with the blacks and the freedom fighters in order to make peace with them and reconcile their differences. Through this gesture by the Boers, Gordimer is transmitting a concise ideology that reconciliation and reconstruction in post-apartheid South Africa is impossible without some degree of mutual comprehension between the various racial cleavages.

In addition, the post-apartheid white regime further adapts a liberal policy in the dismantlement of apartheid. The regime is more inclusive unlike in the days of institutionalised racial segregation when it was racially exclusive. With the coming of the exile, the Movement is allowed to organise its meetings, rallies and conferences without any state injunction and sanction. This would not have been in the days of apartheid where political gatherings were banned because the apartheid regime saw these meetings as subversive and injurious to its very existence. In fact, the narrator confirms that "What has been forbidden for so long – a gathering, any gathering – becomes a kind of fairground [....] No more police, no more dogs, no more tear-gas, no more beatings on the Black Maria" (Gordimer 1994, 94). The narrator's comments show that the members are free to organise their meetings without being afraid of any police victimisation unlike in the days of apartheid where such meetings were held *in camera*. The use of the contrast between the past and the present therefore is to show how far the post-apartheid regime has gone in the move towards social reconciliation and reconstruction. More so, in the hall where the election of the members of the Movement is to take place, the delegates of the party are in a relaxed, unperturbed, and untroubled mood – without any element of panic or fright. This is because they are not, in any way, frightened that the regime will suppress the meeting. This comportment is seen in the behaviour of Didymus. The narrator confirms this when he says that "Didymus moved among old acquaintances, old

comrades who had to introduce themselves with reminiscence of campaigns they had shared with him. He had the politician's flattering tactic of the hand on the shoulder, the grin of recognition even without knowing whom he was greeting" (Gordimer 1994, 94-95). Also, in the days of apartheid, members of the Movement were scattered all over the world. In some of the countries where they were found, the members constructed structures such as schools, and hospitals to take care of the members who were in exile. Sibongile is commissioned by the new national executive of the Movement to go to Libya – one of such countries – "[...] to negotiate the takeover by that country's Government of a school for exiles' children and various other buildings the Movement had had there. The National Executive left it to her diplomacy to see whether these assets, no longer needed, should be handed as a gift to a country that had given asylum, or whether it might be possible to expect some sort of compensation [...]" (Gordimer 1994, 126-127). This move, by the Movement, clearly shows that its members do not have the intention to go out of the country any longer but to remain in South Africa and get involved in the process of social cohesion and national reconstruction.

The policy of reconciliation and national reconstruction is also seen in the move taken by the post-apartheid regime to abolish the law on residence and settlement. In the days of apartheid, it was a taboo for a black South African to be found in white settlement areas and vice versa. However, in the post-apartheid context these legal barriers have all been broken. It is customary now to see blacks in white areas and vice versa without any legal impediment. A case in point is Mpho who happens to be the daughter of Didymus and Sibongile. She leaves London and comes to her native country – South Africa – where she finds herself in a typical white suburban part of the city without any police harassment for breaking the law on settlement. Mpho's stay in this white settlement area symbolises that the country is beginning to reconcile itself from the octopus grip of racism. Despite all these moves, the narrator conscientiously underscores that there are some white South African citizens who are still nostalgic of the apartheid past because they were beneficiaries of the racist apartheid system. In this connection, the narrator affirms that "For although they [whites] squabble solemnly among themselves their yearning is the same, they yearn for the impossible (escape from history, Vera Stark would call it), the reinstatement of life as it was before" (Gordimer 1994, 263). This statement shows that these people are fighting to do the impossible since the apartheid era has come and gone and no degree of agitation can bring it back. This explains why the narrator further, in an assertive mood, states that "They are prepared to kill for that, although nothing will bring it back; assassination is an offering for which there are no gods left." (Gordimer 1994, 263) One gathers from the narrator's comments and thought that national reconstruction in post-apartheid South Africa is a forward-moving process and no amount of intimidation from conservative whites can retard the process.

In *Red Dust*, Gillian Slovo similarly brings out the notion of political dialogue and the search for mutual coexistence, between the races, in the post-apartheid era. In the novel, a Truth Commission is set up by the black majority government to probe into the atrocities committed during the apartheid era and also to give room for prisoners who have been arrested in connection with crimes against humanity during this period to apply for amnesty. This Truth Commission is

semiotic signification of the Truth and Reconciliation commission (TRC) which was set up by the Mandela government in 1996 and placed under the leadership of the Anglican Arch-bishop Desmond Tutu with the aim to investigate crimes committed during the apartheid period. In commenting on this post-apartheid structure, Anthony Holiday argues that "The TRC was the fruit of protracted negotiations between politicians, negotiations that culminated in the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995. This act established a commission which was to provide 'as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights', committed between 1 March 1960 and 5th December 1993. [....] It was to hold public hearings throughout the country in which the victims of human rights abuses and those who had wronged them should tell their stories (Slovo 2002, 46). Holiday's perception of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is also articulated in the dialogue between Sarah and Alex at the "white bar" (Slovo 2002, 239). In their discussion, Alex describes the Truth Commission "as social antiseptic" (Slovo 2002, 239). The description gives the fundamental role of this commission in the post-apartheid context. This is because an 'antiseptic' is a chemical used for preventing infections in an injury especially by killing bacteria. By describing the Truth Commission as an antiseptic, shows that it is a structure, in the post-Apartheid society, to reconcile and make peace among the warring races during the apartheid era. In this way the commission plays a regulatory role in South Africa.

Furthermore, Dick Hendricks is a former white police officer who is in jail for crimes against humanity which he committed when he was in active service in the apartheid days. He is one of those who maltreated and tortured Alex Mpondo (now a parliamentarian in the post-Apartheid nation) when he was incarcerated, as a political prisoner, during that period. In order to regain his liberty, he applies through the Truth Commission for an amnesty and reconciliation with Alex Mpondo. This is seen in the dialogue between James Sizela and Ben Hoffman where the latter informs him that "Dick Hendricks is applying for amnesty for the torture of Alex Mpondo" (Slovo 2002, 20). Dick's gesture is an eloquent testimony of the fact that he has realized the nefariousness of the activities he carried out, during his tenure of office, as police constable for the apartheid regime. This is the reason why he wants to make amends by reconciling with Alex Mpondo.

In addition, Ben Hoffman in the dialogue with Sarah Barcant tells her how the Truth Commission came about. The recounting of the history of the Truth Commission by Ben Hoffman shows that he is one of the characters, in the post-Apartheid society, who harbours the opinion that peaceful co-existence and reconciliation between the various racial and cultural components are necessary hallmarks for a progressive and prosperous post-Apartheid South Africa. Ben Hoffman comments: "you forget that in 1990 there were two opposing sides. Call them what you will: the torturer and the freedom fighter, or the law-abiding police and the terrorist. They were at war with each other and they need to negotiate the peace. That's how the Truth Commission came about" (Slovo 2002, 38). The Truth Commission, from the statements of Ben Hoffman, is a forum for the aggressor and the victim to reconcile and live together in mutuality and unity. In his "I Have a Dream" peroration, Martin Luther King Jr. dreams of the day when his little children and the

American people, in general, "will not be judged", by their fellow compatriots, based on "the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (King 1989, 984). It is in similar perspective that the Truth Commission, in the novel, is expected to open a leeway for the spirit of national brotherhood to flow and animate the post-Apartheid nation. This vision of national cohesion has also been expatiated in Njabulo Ndebele's article entitled "Memory, Metaphor and the Triumph of Narrative" when he declares that "When it was announced [...] that a group of former police generals of the old South African Police were going to apply for amnesty, I thought to myself that a new chapter had opened in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (Ndebele 1998, 19).

The desire of Dirk Hendricks that his case be heard at the Truth Commission is very high. This is to show the zeal he has to reconcile himself with his past and face the post-Apartheid society with a clear conscience. When he is transferred from the Pretoria jail to Smitsrivier, where the Truth Commission is to be held, one is told by the narrator that he is very elevated in spirit. Even the dust that is littered on the road and causes him some inconveniences is not so much of a problem to him. What he is interested in is how he will be granted amnesty by the Truth Commission. The omniscient narrator states that: "Dust. It saturated the space and kept on coming: clouds of red dust puffing through the gaps in the kombi's back door" (Slovo 2002, 22). The narrator further articulates that, while in the car, "He glanced at his watch to confirm what he already knew: they'd soon be in Smitsrivier. Despite the fact that he had trained himself to remain always calm, he felt his spirit lifting" (Slovo 2002, 22). This statement, from the narrator, shows that Dirk is very anxious to reconcile with his past. More so, while in the kombi – moving to Smitsrivier – the narrator probes into the mind of Dirk to bring out his zeal to meet with Alex Mpondo – the man he had maltreated in the days of Apartheid. The narrator says: "He leaned his back against the wall of the kombi, stretching out his feet, closing his eyes. Soon, he told himself he would face Alex Mpondo and then it will be almost over. Not long now, he thought, as the kombi jolted down the track" (Slovo 2002, 27-28).

Another instance where the aspect of dialogue and reconciliation is found in the character of Dirk Hendricks is when the hearings of the Truth Commission is about to begin. This is due to the fact that it is only through the hearing of the Truth Commission that his amnesty will be granted. The narrator describes Dirk's composure in the hall where the Truth Commission's hearings are to take place in the following words "Standing in the wings of the town-hall stage, Dirk flicked down his pressed blue jeans, brushing away a fleck of barely visible dust. That done, he straightened up and breathed in and out, in and out, nice and regular, nice and calm" (Slovo 2002, 76). The above composure of Dirk shows the anxiety and optimism he has for the Truth Commission. This fact is further made lucid when the omniscient narrator declares thus: "At last the moment for which he had been waiting was almost upon him" (Slovo 2002, 76).

While in the town-hall stage, Dirk discovers that "Nelson Mandela's portrait was hanging in the place from which other presidents had once looked down" (Slovo 2002, 77). The portrait of Mandela, on the wall in the hall, is symbolic of the collapse of Apartheid and the emergence of democratic governance in the new South Africa. The portrait further depicts that the members

of the Truth Commission are acting under his orders thereby presenting him as an advocate of dialogue and reconciliation. This explains why the narrator is very optimistic in his utterance that "And anyway even though Dirk's police career had been spent trying to keep the likes of Mandela in jail, Mandela could hardly turn out worse than the men who had gone before him [...]" (Slovo 2002, 77). This comment by the narrator shows that he sees Mandela as an icon of peace, unity and reconciliation in South Africa.

In one of the court sessions, Dirk Hendricks testifies to the Truth Commission that he was merely working under the dictates of the system in vogue at the time. They had been brain-washed to believe that the freedom fighters were terrorists and communists since the apartheid doctrine flourished during the period of the Cold War when the world was threatened by Communism. So it was easy for the apartheid regime to justify her act of brutality and victimization by brandishing those who fought against the system as having communist orientation. Dirk Hendricks testifies to the Truth Commission thus: "I was a loyal policeman. We are taught that the enemy was all around, that we must fight communism and its terrorists with all our might. That is what I did. I did not benefit financially from my actions – apart from drawing my police salary, that is, I did it for the good of South Africa" (Slovo 2002, 130). The above declaration, by Dirk Hendricks, shows that he was induced to act the way he did during the apartheid period. His use of the collective pronoun "we" shows that he is not the only former police constable who committed crimes against humanity and against his conscience. The apex of his declaration is when he finally asserts that "In hindsight; it was wrong. I am truly sorry for the hurt I caused [...]" (Slovo 2002, 132). The apology, by Hendricks, brings out the issue of self-realisation in the post-Apartheid era. It shows that Hendricks has come to realise that his activities during the apartheid era were inhuman and against the law of human rights and freedoms.

Alex Mpondo demonstrates a lukewarm attitude towards the activities of the Truth Commission. He is not really interested in the hearings and investigations of this commission. This explains why the application by Dirk Hendricks to solicit for pardon for what he did to him (Alex) while in prison does not really interest him. Perhaps, Alex's lackadaisical attitude towards the hearing is because he does not want to have any memory of what happened to him during this period. He usually comes late for the hearing of the commission when all the other members of the crew and the lawyers are already seated. In one of the court sessions, the narrator says: "THE JUDGE SWITCHED on his microphone. 'I'm afraid we can't wait any longer, Miss Barcant. You had better proceed without your client'" (Slovo 2002, 182). The tone of the Judge shows that he is not happy with Alex Mpondo; it also shows that the entire hall has been waiting for long for his arrival in the hall. The omniscient narrator remarks that it is only when Sarah Barcant is about to begin the session without Alex that he appears in the hall (Slovo 2002, 182-183).

During the hearing of the Truth Commission, when Sarah Barcant is about to cross-examine Dirk Hendricks on his apartheid activities and especially his maltreatment of Alex, Alex opts to interrogate him himself. This creates tension and suspense in the mind of his torturer for he does

not know Alex's intentions. Alex's interaction with Hendricks depicts the brutal nature of the apartheid era and the maltreatment of political prisoners. This also recalls to memory the different means of torture orchestrated by the apartheid police during this period. One of the means of torture was "the wet blanket" (Slovo 2002, 186). This had to do with forcing the prisoner perhaps to cover wet blankets when they were sleeping. When Alex asked Hendricks whether he used the wet blanket Hendricks says "It was a bag. [....] A bag, not a blanket. I used the weight bag method" (Slovo 2002, 187). However, Alex retorts that he is not asking about Hendricks's favourite means of torture. His question is on the blanket he used. He retorts: "I'm not asking you about your favourite means of torture. My question centres on the blanket that you yourself introduced into evidence. You told us about it yesterday. Remember? You told us that you kept a blanket in the bath and that you taught your children what to do with it should the need arise. My question is – did the need ever arise?" (Slovo 2002, 187)

When Sarah Barcant meets Alex in the white bar which in the days of apartheid was reserved only for white people, she informs him that she has come to take him to the farm where they were incarcerated during the apartheid era. Apparently, Alex thought that she was taking him to see or talk with Dirk Hendricks whom he detested. This explains why in her discussion with him Sarah says "I've come to get you." This statement actually creates suspense and uncertainty in Alex's mind because he does not know where Sarah is taking him to. It is for this reason that what immediately comes to Alex's mind is that Sarah wants him to meet Hendricks. This is seen through these series of questions posed by Alex to Sarah. "What? To Hendricks? So he can pull his innocent act in front of a private audience, forget it." (Slovo 2002, 240). These rhetorical questions show that Alex does not really want to reconcile with Hendricks. This shows that Hendricks had maltreated Alex during the apartheid days to such an extent that merely thinking of him (Hendricks) traumatises him. Hendricks, according to Alex, is a metaphor for oppression during the apartheid days. The farmhouse is symbolic of the torture that Alex and his colleagues received during this period. This idea is justified from the vivid description the omniscient narrator gives when Sarah and Alex finally reached the farmhouse. The narrator says "Dark. This was his first impression. The hallway where he was standing was very dark. He stood still, waiting for his eyes to acclimatise. When they did, he saw the house was divided into two, with the hall where he was standing acting as the bridge between each separate part. To the right, the living quarters. To the left, the jail. Someone had hung a huge heavy steel door to the left. The Police" (Slovo 2002, 246). However, Dirk Hendricks decides to reconcile privately with Alex Mpondo. In one of the court sessions he solicits permission from the chairman of the Truth Commission to discuss with Alex Mpondo *in camera*. The reason for this private colloquy is that he is uncomfortable to testify what he did, during the apartheid era to the hearing of the public. This is seen when he addresses the chairman in these words: "there is something I must say Mr. Chairman [....] It is not easy to talk about what happened. You can even feel a bit ashamed" (Slovo 2002, 233). He further addresses Alex Mpondo thus: "But to you Mr. Mpondo, I want to say

that in all honesty I didn't know who you were then. I never saw you sit there today – an MP, a man with education, a fellow human being. I can understand it if you hate me – I went on too long – but if you could find it in your heart, I will like to talk to you. Not here [....] If you agree, I will try and explain to you why I did what I did to show you that I also I am human" (Slovo 2002, 233).

The idea of reconciliation is also echoed in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*. As depicted in the novel, the author is of the opinion that for a strong and united South Africa to exist, the different racial and ethnic cleavages should reconcile with one another. Rupert Taylor and Don Foster in "Advancing Non-Racialism in Post-Apartheid South Africa" assert thus: "As part of developing a new sociology of South Africa, it is therefore time to advance a frame of reference regarding the promotion of non-racialism, so as to guide public policy and further the deracialization of society" (Taylor & Don 1999, 338). The "deracialization" of South Africa cannot be feasible if there is no reconciliation and if possible, compensation. It is for this reason that Marion believes that in spite of the layabouts in the post-Apartheid South African society, Apartheid was still a blatant mistake. In other words, she sees nothing good about the apartheid system. The narrator says that: "Now she [Marion] understands only too well that the past was a mistake, that things are better now, for instance, things like tourism. She certainly can't complain about the boom in travel; it's just that these layabouts catch you off your guard so early in the morning" (Wicomb 2006, 28).

From a comparative perspective, Marion is of the view that despite the vandalism in post-Apartheid South Africa, the situation is still better and more accommodating than the days of racial segregation. She even goes ahead to describe the apartheid past as "a mistake." This shows that the apartheid era was so bad that no pleasant memories could be remembered about this period. Robert Mattes in "Do Diverse Social Identities Inhibit Nationhood and Democracy? Initial Considerations from South Africa" further argues that "Racial divides in South Africa were not just artificial legal barriers, nor proxies for class lines, but had come to delineate enduring ethno-national conflict between white and African communal power blocs." (Mattes 1999, 269). However, he cautions that "[...] the end of white domination (which had produced incentives toward black solidarity) would introduce new incentives leading to the rise of ethnic divisions among black South Africans in the post-apartheid era" (Mattes 1999, 269).

In *Playing in the Light*, Zoe Wicomb depicts a post-apartheid South Africa which is in the advanced process of reconciling itself from the racial fragmentation of the past. The novel commences with Marion in this mood of relaxation when the narrator says: "It is on the balcony, the space both inside and out where she [Marion] spends much of her time at home [...]" (Wicomb 2006, 1). These opening lines of the novel, capturing Marion's relaxed mood, show that there is comparative tranquillity and serenity in the post-apartheid context. In other words, the citizens are free to relax in their premises without being afraid of police brutality or violence – sign that sounds a positive note of the move towards reconciliation, reconstruction, and social rehabilitation in post-apartheid South Africa. In addition, the narrator remarks that couples can now enjoy recreational and leisure activities such as going to the nightclub and picnics. When Brenda

solicits permission from Marion to take Friday off her work days, so that she could "[...] go away for a long weekend", (Wicomb 2006, 17) it is not granted to her for the reason that it is during weekends that the agency is very busy with travellers. The narrator says: "Marion would have liked to oblige, but it's true, Fridays are impossible, especially in the afternoons, when the place buzzes with young and old alike, those who faced with yet another dull weekend, with the reality of their humdrum lives, decide that they need to travel. This is what couples seem to do on Thursday nights, anticipating the weekend tedium, the elusive heart of Saturday night: they plan a trip, and then it simply can't wait till Saturday" (Wicomb 2006, 17) The freedom in which couples travel partly shows the fruits of reconciliation and reconstruction in post-Apartheid South Africa.

The omniscient narrator's discourse shows that Marion is of the opinion that the ills and infirmities of the past, in the historiography of South Africa, should be shoved aside so that the post-apartheid nation can reconcile itself and collectively forge a better and brighter future. It is for this reason that she rejects any discussion which will remind her of the apartheid history and its ills. The narrator remarks that "She [Marion] has no interest in the to-ing and fro-ing, and is impatient with people in sackcloth and ashes who flagellate themselves over the so-called misdemeanours of history, or with those who choose not to forget, who harp on about the past and so fail to move forward and look to the future" (Wicomb 2006, 8). The narrator, through the above passage, brings out Marion's views in relation to nation building in the post-Apartheid era. From this passage, one can opine that Marion holds the view that for the post-Apartheid nation to be united and progressive, the past must be forgotten and the errors of the past be forgiven. However, the idea of forgetting the past does not lead to nation-building. The citizens should be able to know what their past was and their determination to change it. This explains why the past is still re-echoed in the South African Constitution not for the purpose of vengeance but for the purpose of awareness not to fall back into it.

In the novel, F.W. de Klerk is seen as an icon of reconciliation, harmony and social justice. In the context of historicity, he was the one who replaced Pieter Botha as President of South Africa, and finally brought apartheid to an end in 1990. In a dialogue between Boetie and Brenda, the latter comments: "God knows how that phantom called apartheid came into being all by itself [...] and then of course it was F.W. de Klerk who woke up one morning to recognise the evil ghost for what it was and tackled it single-handedly" (Wicomb 2006, 36). This statement evokes the aggressive attitude of Brenda against the apartheid era. It is because of this that Brenda accuses Boetie that it was morally incorrect for him to benefit from the apartheid era at the expense of non-whites. She comments: "Look, since we're talking about morality, would it not be more honest to say that you didn't know any better, that you didn't understand the implications of accepting jobs and salaries that others were barred from, a choice of schools and places to live and play that discriminated against others, that came at the expense of cheap labour, of those who didn't have the vote? Or shall we say that apartheid somehow just gave birth to itself, just popped like an uninvited guest into the constitution?" (Wicomb 2006, 36-37). These rhetorical questions, posed

by Brenda, show that for dialogue and reconciliation to be meaningful and effective, people should speak the truth and acknowledge their moral deficiencies during the apartheid era. Without this, the reconciliation process in South Africa becomes faulty and fragile.

The on-going reconciliation process in post-Apartheid South Africa has made the society comfortable for foreigners. In the novel, one realises that South Africa is now a haven for tourists. In the days of apartheid, the country was quarantined from the rest of the world. This explains why during this era the tourist industry was not flourishing as it is in the post-apartheid context. In the conversation between Brenda and Marion, the narrator remarks that "The topic of travel must once more come to the rescue. It's not doing the tourist industry any harm, Brenda says. The Cape is overrun with foreigners – only a couple of years ago, this hotel would have been empty" (Wicomb 2006, 83). Conclusively, the reason why the Clanwilliam Hotel is overrun with foreigners is that the environment is conducive enough for tourists – since tourism is an activity that cannot take place or flourish in the context of political instability. In addition, while in the Clanwilliam hotel, Marion initiates a conversation with Brenda. They begin discussing about the beauty of wine in the country. The narrator asserts that, "Marion orders another bottle of wine. Thank God for the bounty of the Cape vineyards, which come to the rescue also as topic of conversation" (Wicomb 2006, 82). In this conversation, the narrator says that Marion appreciated the South African wine and its weather conditions. "What would we do, Marion says, without all this, the wine and the weather?" (Wicomb 2006, 82). This rhetorical question shows Marion admires South African wine and its weather. This admiration depicts the concept of nation-building and reconstruction in the post-apartheid era; it shows that South Africans are beginning to believe in their own products and natural endowment. It is for this reason that "She [Marion] would not consider living in another country" (Wicomb 2006, 82). Marion, by not considering living in another country, shows her patriotic sentiments for her nation. Thus, she is resolute to participate in the reconstruction of her nation. It is in this context that the narrator says: "Has Brenda heard the clients who rave about Europe, the English South Africans who yearn to live their lives under grey skies? Surely, they are kidding themselves, surely the wonderment would subside and leave them howling for home. How could one survive without the light, the heat, the fruit and the wine? How do you breathe in those tiny, cramped countries stuffed with people? That was why Europeans came to Africa in the first place – empty cellars, empty larders, not enough room, and rickets." (Wicomb 2006, pp. 82-83)

In the post-apartheid context, the barrier of colour has been broken down. This is unlike the days of apartheid where colour was very vital in social interaction and policy formulation. The narrator remarks that in contemporary South Africa "It may be true that being white, black or coloured means nothing, but it is also true that things are no longer the same; there must be a difference between what things are and what they mean" (Wicomb 2006, 106). This statement illustrates that the post-Apartheid nation is slowly graduating from the past where there was racial exclusion to the present context of racial inclusion. This explains why the narrator

remarks that "These categories may have slimmed down, may no longer be tagged with identity cards, but once they were pot-bellied with meaning" (Wicomb 2006, 106).

The policy of genuine dialogue and reconciliation, which is the political creed of the regime, has also been copied by individuals in the society. In the post-Apartheid society, most individual problems are solved through dialogue and negotiation. When Marion mistakenly hits Vumile Mkhize's BMW, the problem is solved amicably without rancour or acrimony. The narrator says that this problem is solved when the two parties agree that Marion will simply pay for the panel beater's bill since the damage is not grievous. This move shows that the post-apartheid citizen is coming to consciousness that dialogue is the best way to solve problems and not bitterness or violence.

The idea of the "rainbow nation" is the fruit of dialogue and reconciliation in the post-apartheid era. In a dialogue with Brenda and Marion, the poet Mr Mahmoud makes it clear that in the post-1990 South Africa, radical poetry is outdated. This type of poetry was necessary in the days of the apartheid struggle in order to whip up the sentiments of the freedom fighters so as to encourage them not to relent in the struggle. However, in the context of post-apartheid, such poems with radical contents or subject matter are not necessary – the post-apartheid era is one of reconciling racial fragments and not maintaining them. This explains why Mr Mahmoud describes the poems he wrote during the period of struggle as "old stuff" which is "passé now". He further contends that "[...] it's all rainbow poetry that's in vogue" (Wicomb 2006, 183). Put differently, what Mr Mahmoud is insinuating is that in the post-1990 era, creativity in the South African society should be directed towards advancing the philosophy of the 'rainbow nation' – which is a philosophy whose concern is to bring all South African citizens to live in peace and unity in their diversity.

Due to the process of reconciliation, South Africans have turned to love and believe in their country even when they are out of it. While in Europe, Marion is seen showing her patriotism for her fatherland. After reading Nadine Gordimer' *The Conservationist*, she looks forward to reading J.M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*. The narrator says that "She finds the title inspiring; she chooses to read it as her country having a real, live, throbbing heart." (Wicomb 2006, 197) The metaphor "throbbing heart" shows that life has returned to the country after the dark days of institutionalised racial discrimination. In other words, it depicts that she is satisfied with the path that her country has chosen to re-write the wrongs of her history. In this light, the narrator comments that "In this alien world, it pleases her [Marion] to think of South Africa as her country" (Wicomb 2006, 197).

The practise of dialogue and reconciliation in the post-Apartheid South Africa has brought the South African citizens, from the different racial groups to see something good in each other. In other words, it has created a comparatively conducive atmosphere where whites and non-whites can appreciate the ability of others without any bias. In the novel, one sees Geoff appreciating Brenda, who is a non-white. The narrator says: "Brenda looks at Geoff, who says, Yes, all is well. He looks appreciatively at Brenda: she has done a brilliant job; there'll be no reason for complaint" (Wicomb 2006, 208-209). The narrator's statement depicts the view that Geoff has no scurrility

against the non-white race. In other words, by appreciating Brenda, he is inadvertently pontificating that good things can also come from non-whites. Also, in the party at the Campbells, to welcome Marion back home, Elsie gets up to propose a toast for the location. The narrator comments that "Her speech, woven through with laughter, starts with Nelson Mandela and works her way down to Brenda, who in her own humble way is an agent of reconciliation; she even has a gracious word for Helen, now sadly departed, whose beauty, like her melktert and crunchies, was unrivalled" (Wicomb 2006, 214).

The ideological postures of political dialogue and reconciliation are likewise highlighted in Pamela Jooste's *People Like Ourselves*. Jooste's narrative discourse stresses that blacks are no longer inferior – at least officially – to the whites. When Douglas parks his car, he tells the attendant to watch over it for fear for it being stolen by hoodlums. He promises to pay the attendant in the following words: "Something now on deposit and something more if it's still here and in one piece when I get back" (Jooste 2003, 88). From this statement, Douglas strikes a verbal contract with the attendant who is presumably a black. This is to intimate that the Blackman in the post-apartheid context is no longer seen as subordinate but as collaborator. The parking attendant, in addition, answers him with the title "Yes boss" (Jooste 2003, 88). However, despite his allusion to Douglas as "boss", the narrator remarks that "[...] but it's not the 'boss' as 'boss' was in the old days. That's gone forever" (Jooste 2003, 88). Through this observation, the narrator draws a sharp contrast between the concept of 'boss' in the days of apartheid and in the post-apartheid context. In the days of apartheid, the boss saw himself as superior while the servant, inferior. However, in the post-apartheid context, there is a new humanism as a result of dialogue and reconciliation. Due to this new humanism, therefore, the boss does not view his subordinates as sub-humans but as people whose dignity has to be protected and projected.

Also, the South African High Commissioner in London organises the celebration of Freedom Day where there is a reception in honour of Nelson Mandela. The image of Mandela, in most of post-apartheid discourses, is one of reconciliation, forgiveness and national unity. The Preamble of the South African Constitution states that, the South African people "Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land" and "Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country;" By conferring honour on Mandela during this occasion, the South African High Commission in London is merely respecting the above clause in the South African Constitution. In addition, the narrator testifies that "[...] everyone wants to see Nelson Mandela and the closer they can get to him the more privileged they consider themselves" (Jooste 2003, 100). The narrator, in this observation, accords Mandela the status of a national hero who incarnates South African unity and freedom. This explains why T-shirts have been made in honour of him and the role he has played in the liberation of South Africa from. The narrator remarks: "Brixton welcomes Nelson Mandela. There's a T-shirt that says so. A man in a blue peaked cap is wearing it. Around his neck is a camera and, on his face, for no reason that's clearly apparent, a smile which makes you forget that in the daily grind and grimace thousands of shoppers and commuters scowl and hustle their way along

here. Here, in this very same place which is made different today on this drizzly Sunday by one grizzle-headed gentleman the entire world loves. Everyone wants to see Nelson Mandela" (Jooste 2003, pp. 100-101). The celebration of the day and the reception that is given to Nelson Mandela is an open secret that the reconciliation process in South Africa is on a positive note. The ambience and frenzy, that characterise the occasion, is captured by the narrator in the following words: "People climb the barriers around one of the fountains in the centre of the square. They climb to the top and sing and dance for freedom in this extraordinary place on top of the world. Until the security officials ask them politely, for their own safety, please to come back, to come down into the singing and dancing crowd and even reach up to offer them a hand" (Jooste 2003, 101). The reception of Nelson Mandela, in London, is published in newspapers in South Africa. The pictures or photographs of the occasion further depict Mandela as an icon of national unity and freedom in South Africa. In a dialogue between Silvie and Rosalie following the publication of the event, the former says: "'See what it says here.' Says Silvie. 'Just look. It says the bells of St. Martin-in-the-Fields nearly drowned out the music. Well, they would, wouldn't they? Someone should have thought about that beforehand but I don't suppose it made any difference. Tony Blair got a boo. No one wanted him. They can see him any day of the week, I suppose. It's Nelson Mandela they came out for.'" (Jooste 2003, 118)

The narrator further remarks that "It's Celebrate South Africa in London and Rosalie, who was sent an invitation to the special reception for Nelson Mandela at South Africa House, has made herself conspicuous by not being there" (Jooste 2003, 99). The conspicuous absence of Rosalie creates suspense in the story because Rosalie was one of the freedom fighters in the days of Apartheid. This makes her absence in this occasion shocking and incomprehensible. The South African authority itself in London is uncomfortable with her absence – that is why an enquiry is made to know whether she received the invitation or not. The narrator comments: "What a day! What a turnaround! Life back home was never like this and Rosalie, most conspicuous by her absence, who, once upon a time, would most surely have been there, has missed every minute of it" (Jooste 2003, 101). The move taken to have Rosalie participate in the celebration shows that the reconciliation process in post-Apartheid South Africa is inclusive and not exclusive.

The policy of reconciliation and social reconstruction in the post-apartheid era has ushered in a new-found optimism, in the post-apartheid youth. This hope has made them not to even think of the past and politics in the post-apartheid era. The narrator says that "In the old days when there were few people out on the streets and none of them Black unless they had legitimate business and could prove it, the talk was about nothing but politics" (Jooste 2003, 222). Politics was the main topic of discussion because the blacks had to fight against the excruciating injustice that was orchestrated against them during this era. However, in the post-apartheid era, these youths are no longer focused in politics; they are more interested in the future than in the past. In fact, the narrator comments that "They look forward optimistically, not backwards in anger" (Jooste 2003, 222). The source of this optimism, in the youths, is the dialogue and reconciliation process between the

anti-Apartheid white regime and the freedom fighters which began in South Africa after the collapse of Apartheid in 1990.

Conclusion

Priscilla B.P. Clark, in "Literature and Sociology" argues that "all literature draws on social relations and expresses social experiences. Every work of literature fuses the observed and the imagined; every work perceives the social in terms of the aesthetic" (1982, 107). Thus, literature is not an isolated object but an artefact which is deeply-rooted in the society from which it emanates. It is from this backdrop that on can aptly ascertain that Nadine Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*, Gillian Slovo's Red *Dust*, Zoe Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, and Pamela Jooste's *People Like Ourselves* are literary narratives that interpret the post-apartheid situation in South Africa and the efforts by successive regimes to reconcile the citizens with their politico-ideological past. These novelists have accentuated the view that post-apartheid reconstruction is impossible without political negotiation and reconciliation. It is for this reason that when Nelson Mandela took over power in 1994, reconciliation and non-racialism were the political and social creeds of the ANC-led government. In *Anatomy of Miracle*, Patti Waldmeir attests that, after his accession to the helm of leadership in South Africa, "Mandela made non-racialism the new civil religion in South Africa. He spoke of giving the nervous minorities "a silver bridge to cross" to the new South Africa and he began to trace his path from the moment he was elected. The politics of reconciliation reigned supreme in those early days, and every ANC politician did his bit to contribute". (Waldmeir 1997, 268-269)

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