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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I hereby confirm to have conceived and written this diploma thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors and any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are all clearly marked within the text and acknowledged in the bibliographical references.

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FOR MUM AND DAD

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1 Introduction

In her long and still active literary career, Nobel Prize Laureate for Literature and Booker Prize Winner Nadine Gordimer has always been regarded as an "interpreter of South African reality". (Baena Molina n.p.) The vast majority of her fiction and non-fiction, among which are numerous novels as well as multiple short fiction and essay collections, has apartheid and its impacts and consequences as its main topics and offers a contemporary assessment and criticism of South Africa's respective current socio-political/politico-economic situations. Furthermore, Gordimer's literary oeuvre also helped her to establish and grow a considerable "reputation during forty years of Apartheid as a spokesperson against racial oppression" (Dimitriu, *Art of Conscience* 17) as well as earned her fame as a chronicler of South Africa's history and as an anti-apartheid literary and political activist.

After all these years of active participation in the struggle against the apartheid regime together with the turpitudes of its adherers and followers, and after uttering outspoken as well as veiled criticism both in her various works of fiction and also as an anti-apartheid movement activist from the public platform, it is self-evident to ask the pertinent question, if Nadine Gordimer's politics conveyed in her post-apartheid novels have changed after the demise of the old regime, or if she is still mainly preoccupied with apartheid and the various issues associated with it. Even though Ileana Dimitriu refers to Gordimer's first post-apartheid novel *None to Accompany Me* (1994), the following question she raises as a starting point for her examination of Gordimer's new role in a changing South Africa, can also be applied when discussing her subsequent post-apartheid novels discussed and compared in this thesis. "[I]f Gordimer was so closely linked to the conscience of Apartheid, what values does she have as society moves beyond the political struggle?" (Dimitriu, *Art of Conscience* 93) In addition to this more or less general question concerning the transition of Nadine Gordimer's fiction from her apartheid to her post-apartheid novels, it is important to add the following two research questions in order to provide a frame for the upcoming chapters and for the thesis on the whole.

Does the end of the apartheid regime and the coming to power of the ANC as well as the election of Nelson Mandela as South Africa's first black president in the year 1994 lead to a decisive change in Nadine Gordimer's subsequent literary works, or is she still mainly concerned with South Africa's apartheid past and worried about its impacts on the present as well as its consequences for the future generations? What are the significant changes concerning her writing and how does she manage to weave her political attitude and interests as well as her critique of the system and of society into the novels?

Emanating from these questions, this thesis analyses the transition from Gordimer's apartheid literature to her post-apartheid literature on the basis of her later novels *The House Gun* (1998), *The Pickup* (2001) and *Get a Life* (2005) and by additionally incorporating her first post-apartheid novel *None to Accompany Me* (1994) as well as her most recent novel *No Time Like the Present* (2012) in places. Whereas the first three chapters will focus on the above-mentioned three main novels in question individually by turning on their respective themes, their stylistic and narratological particularities as well as by examining their overall relevance on a social, individual/personal as well as political level, the last chapter offers a comparison of the three novels including *No Time Like the Present* and attempts to find similarities and differences as well as tries to answer the question, if a linearity and a common ground can be spotted.

More precisely, the first chapter on *The House Gun* focuses on the narrative's dealing with racism, violence and the characters' alterity in the form of homo-/bisexuality by reconsidering apartheid, the second chapter on *The Pickup* deals with the issues of globalisation, racial, social and cultural otherness as well as exploitation in a cosmopolitan South Africa, which is now part of a connected world, and the third chapter on *Get a Life* puts the themes ecology, nature conservation, illness and the examination of the story's characters and their personal problems in the spotlight. Finally, the fourth and last chapter on the comparison of the three novels in question attempts to compare and contrast the narrative's three central events, their respective central characters as well as the important topoi. In addition, the last chapter also

brings Nadine Gordimer's most recent novel *No Time Like the Present* into line with the canon of her former post-apartheid fiction by scrutinizing its themes and its characters

Overall, the aim of the thesis is to work out how Nadine Gordimer gets across her political views and beliefs as well as her fears and concerns with the help of her later post-apartheid novels and to give an answer to the question if she really turns her back on politics and on the public sector in favour of a focus on the lives of individuals and their personal problems and destinies in a new and still changing post-apartheid South Africa.

2 The House Gun

In her second post-apartheid novel after *None to Accompany Me (1994)*, Nadine Gordimer indulges in precisely dealing with racism and violence as well as their consequences in a present-day South Africa, which is marked by its past and which is still undergoing transition. On the basis of the story's central event – Duncan Lindgard's murder of his cohabitant and former lover Carl Jespersen – the novel critically deals with questions of responsibility, guilt, morality and empathy, challenges the death penalty laws of South Africa's new constitution and tackles the still sensitive issues of racism, by bringing into focus and contrasting Duncan's parents and the story's black characters Hamilton Motsamai and Nkululeko 'Khulu' Dladla as well as their interactions, interrelations, and violence, by drawing a line from the Lindgards to the society they live in and by examining the relation of the personal and the political as well as the impact of individual choices on the wider society.

By accompanying the Lindgards from the very beginning of the story, when they receive the message of the murder, up to the final conviction, the narrative not only examines their self-doubts and self-criticism concerning Duncan's upbringing and education, but also tries to answer the questions of who is to blame for the awful event and consequently for South Africa's long history of the still predominant violence and racist attitudes. In this context, the symbolism of the gun, the trope of disease, the prison as well as the prison cell and the homosexuality and bisexuality of Duncan and the other residents in the flat sharing community will be in the focus of attention.

On the whole, the aim of this chapter is to investigate how much the past apartheid era still influences racist and violent acts in the present post-apartheid South Africa and how much such acts can or should be traced back to what has happened during apartheid. In addition, this chapter on *The House Gun* examines if there are any changes in Gordimer's post-apartheid writing concerning South Africa's transition

and dealing with its problems and which overall tone *The House Gun* takes on concerning South Africa's future prospects.

2.1 Racism

Racism, due to the depiction of the story's two noticeable and important black characters – the lawyer Hamilton Motsamai and the journalist Khulu Dladla – as well as the way Harald and Claudia Lindgard interact with them and respond to them, is a central topic to *The House Gun.* The narrative shows that either conscious or subconscious racism is still at the heart of the post-apartheid South African society, and that primarily the people belonging to the middle and upper-class white population, who where inactive during the apartheid years, need to become aware of their own racism in order for a decisive change to happen.

The following chapter thus deals with the concepts of the Self and the Other, emanating from the opposition of the Lindgards to the black lawyer Motsamai and to Duncan's friend Khulu Dladla, and culminating in the reversal of their positions.

2.1.1 The Self & the Other

In her article "Nadine Gordimer's Later Novels", Natividad Martínez Marín describes racism as the rejection of the Other being created by and rooting in colonial rule, which is also why Nadine Gordimer still understands and depicts racism in her novels as "the struggle of the white Self against the black Other". (153) These old binary oppositions of the Self and the Other are still existent in a present-day transitional South Africa as well as in Nadine Gordimer's literature, and whites, no matter if consciously or subconsciously, still feel superior to blacks (see Martínez Marín 153). As we will later see, although Gordimer comes up with a new form concerning role allocation, these two concepts as well as the conscious/subconscious racism can be perfectly applied to *The House Gun*'s black and white characters in terms of race and skin colour.

Official policies back in the days of apartheid created the image of the black as an outlaw who is involved in all kinds of crimes and violent acts. In order to protect themselves, whites used this image to justify their rejection of blacks and in addition, this fear from the Other was misused as an excuse to justify segregation, which the story deals with from a double perspective, as the following quote perfectly indicates (see Martínez Marín 155-157).

> On the one hand, [segregation] is described in the form of racial prejudices the whites have against blacks. On the other hand, it can be inferred from the violence haunting contemporary South Africa, and which is still based on fear of the Other. The title of the novel explicitly represents this. The house gun serves as the symbol of an unstable society that is still afraid of the unknown. (Martínez Marín 157)

These two perspectives, namely racial prejudices in the form of subconscious racist attitudes, and violence, represented in the novel by the house gun, will be in the focus of attention in the upcoming parts. This section discusses racism in connection with the black lawyer Hamilton Motsamai and Duncan's friend and cohabitant Nkululeko 'Khulu' Dladla as well as their interactions with Harald and Claudia Lindgard. Concerning violence, the quotation above foreshadows that the subsequent chapter of the same name will then focus on South Africa's violence as well as the symbolism of the house gun and its wider significance for a society which has to come to terms with its violent past, and which has to feel responsible and guilty for what has happened in order to move on and leave apartheid behind.

The House Gun's most important black character, who leaves a mark on the narrative and who is part of nearly every decisive situation from the story's very beginning, is without any doubt the lawyer Hamilton Motsamai. Despite his importance, he is only shown in his transactions with the narrative's white characters and we are introduced to him only on a surface level without getting to know his interior self (see also Stobie, *Discourses of Alterity* 174). This fact and the fact that the whole story is mostly narrated either by Harald or by Duncan and their thoughts and feelings, not only supports the theory of binary oppositions and highlights the distinction of black and white characters, it also makes the black characters appear more sympathetic,

and also more important to the narrative, since through their decisions and their advice, they give the narrative's white characters direction to change their minds about certain deep-seated attitudes and mind-sets rooting in the past.

What we are told about Hamilton Motsamai though is, that he is by any means "empathetic, engaged and ethical" (Durst 299) and that he is certainly the best lawyer available, but not only the best attorney concerning his expertise in law, he also "[…] displays personal, cultural and political empathy, is engaged in and has a sophisticated knowledge of the world, and never loses sight of his ethical obligations or the powerful role he plays." (Durst 302-303; see also Lazarus 623-624) The narrative also makes clear that "[…] Motsamai is known as eminently capable. And experienced" [1], and that he is not only the best lawyer available but also the most suitable lawyer for Duncan and the situation he and his parents Harald and Claudia are in. Another quote from the novel points to the law system and kind of underlines that it is the lawyer who is the crucial element when it comes to the judge and his final judgement at court. "Duncan is not innocent, but he cannot be guilty. The crucial matter, then, is the lawyer; again there must be the best lawyer." (HG 30) The first part of the quote, "Duncan is not innocent, but he cannot be guilty", does not only mark the Lindgard's final realisation that their son Duncan was actually capable of committing the crime, but also makes clear that everything in the world needs to be done to first prove that other circumstances had led him to fire the deadly shot at Carl Jespersen and secondly to convince the judges of a milder punishment. This undertaking is doubtlessly one that Motsamai is supposed to handle best, as the outcome of the trial later clearly underlines.

Regardless of his qualifications and his good reputation, the Lindgards are nonetheless still bothered by Duncan's choice and they over and over again debate if Motsamai is really a suitable defender for their son. They furthermore assure that they are not and have never been racists nowadays or in the past and they also

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[1] See Nadine Gordimer, *The House Gun* (Bloomsbury: London. 1998). Page 31. Subsequent references indicated by the acronym HG and the respective page numbers in brackets.

attempt to cover their doubt by putting on the table that the attorney Hamilton Motsamai might obviously lack expertise and experience. In the novel, we can find the following part of a conversation between Harald and a legal adviser in the insurance company, which backs up the above-mentioned revelation and which makes Harald and Claudia believe that they are on the safe side concerning racism, since they hold on to their interpretation that the biasing has nothing to do with Motsamai's skin colour, but rather with the exclusion of black lawyers from the legal profession during apartheid (see also Martínez Marín 158).

> You've had doubts about your son's defence being conducted by a black man. There it is. Laid out before them, Harald and his distinguished mentor. But it is presented as what might be expected, a simple regression, belched up from the shared dinners of the past. We don't have to attribute that doubt to racial prejudice, because it is a fact, incontrovertible fact, that due to racial prejudice in the old regimes, black lawyers have had far less experience than white lawyers, and experience is what counts. They've had fewer chances to prove themselves; it's their disadvantage, and you would not be showing racial prejudice in seeing that disadvantage as yours, if entrusting defence to most of them. (HG 38)

This process of pondering on and discussing the decision if Motsamai is really the right choice along with Claudia's shrinking when treating black patients and touching their black skin in her profession as a physician as well as her considerations that blacks are still intellectually inferior, "[…] reveals the racism that [the Lindgards] were not yet consciously aware of." (Martínez Marín 158) In addition, this discovery of the Lindgard's subconscious racism is certainly rooted in South Africa's past and must be seen within the context of an overall racist climate since apartheid and colonialism and "we must understand the novel as the revelation of their suppressed, internalized prejudices." (Martínez Marín 157-158)

Another quote draws on the role of the story's black characters when it comes to white racism and also alludes to the above-mentioned fact that black characters are only presented by their spoken words and not through their feelings or thoughts.

> The black characters in *The House Gun* fulfil the function of exposing white characters' unconscious racism which co-exists with conscious non-racialism, and do the interactional work of revealing the mystery of "the

> Other Side", but they are never revealed in thought as all three Lindgards are, they are only conveyed through the formal exteriority of the spoken word. (Stobie, *Discourses of Alterity* 174)

Along with this, the black characters are not shown as perpetrators as can normally be inferred from the above-explained binary opposition of the Self and the Other. The actual perpetrators in a violent and racist post-apartheid South African society are the Lindgards, who were inactive during apartheid, and who stood apart when crimes happened. Except for Duncan, who shows signs of redemption – which will be discussed in greater detail later – the narrative's white characters are depicted as not having changed since apartheid and as still believing that living in their own world separated from the black population keeps them safe and protected from crime, violence and catastrophe.

Similar to Stobie and Martínez Marín, Anthony O'Brien states that "[…] *The House Gun* is subtly directed at changing white people's understanding of their/our own microracism and stimulating a desire on their/our part to intervene in ending the macroracism still constitutive of South Africa […]" (258) This process of white conscientization also functions to bring white readers to identify with the circle of violence "not as victims, vengeance seekers, or moral and legal theorists, but as perpetrators and affectionate accomplices" (O'Brien 258). However, the question if people like the Lindgards have really been taught a lesson or if the awful event remains just a private disaster without future consequences for them is still left and certainly also open to discussion (see also Lazarus 622-623) According to Ileana Dimitriu, reflecting on their past and their parental responsibilities, Harald and Claudia go through mental processes under extreme circumstances and they also "[…] undergo a painful inner journey, which comes to an end upon their having acquired a deeper understanding of their own repressed acts and rigid beliefs." (*The Writer* 142) This actually means that they certainly have been taught a lesson; to which extent, however, will be discussed and attempted to answer later in this section.

In his article "Surviving Murder: Oscillation and Triangulation in Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*", Stephen Clingman deals with the story's relationships and draws on the importance of *The House Gun*'s second important black character Khulu Dladla and his role in the story's triangular relationships. Next to the triangular love relationship between Duncan, Natalie and Carl, Nkululeko 'Khulu' Dladla serves an important role within the story's triangles. Standing on the one hand between Duncan and the pairing of Natalie and Carl and on the other hand supporting Harald and Claudia as a 'son' and mediator, he becomes a triangulating and triangulated figure at the same time (see Clingman, *Surviving Murder* 150). Growing out of one another, all these triangles "[…] suggest a world of new relationships growing out of the old; though they in some sense replicate previous social structures, they do so through significant differences or accents, requiring new forms of codification and understanding." (Clingman, *Surviving Murder* 150) In addition, just as Duncan is, or rather believes he is, the leading part in his love relationship with Natalie, situations are reversed now, and the supposedly 'weak' characters like for example Khulu Dladla sort of gain power and are the new leaders.

Finally, the Lindgards who are eager for Duncan's trial to turn out right agree to the decision of letting Motsamai defend their son. But accepting the black Other does not root in real recognition of the Other, in this case it does not mean that Harald and Claudia have fully overcome their unconscious racist attitudes and have reconsidered their segregationist view. The only reason why they have changed their attitude is self-interest, which is not rooted in real conviction (see Martínez Marín 158-159).

2.1.2 Reversal of Positions

It is not only the case that the Lindgards are proverbially forced to accept that Hamilton Motsamai is the best choice and that they therefore have to overcome their subconscious racist attitudes, the situation they are in also leads to a more or less far-reaching role reversal between themselves and their lawyer.

Several times in the course of the narrative, black people are referred to as coming from the Other Side. "Motsamai, the stranger from the Other Side of the divided

past. They are in his pink-palmed black hands." (HG 86) Here, next to the already described opposition between the white Self and the black Other, it is made clear that Hamilton Motsamai, having had a completely different life and different experiences in the divided past than the Lindgards is now in control of them and it is up to his decisions and his acting how Duncan is going to be charged at court.

In addition, it is interesting to first consider the Lindgard's position in society and their representation in the novel before examining the reversal of roles. The narrative questions Harald and Claudia Lindgard's ideologies, their conceptions of upbringing and education as well as their view of themselves and Duncan in a post-apartheid South African society, with the help of an omniscient narrator and direct speech in between. Over and over, their respective position in society – Claudia, who is a doctor and Harald, who works as a director of board in an insurance company – is underlined, and they are portrayed as having lived a comfortable life during the apartheid years and respectively also after the end of the regime. Although they do not describe themselves as racists or supporters of the apartheid regime at all, they did not take action back in apartheid days and led their lives as if everything around them was as usual as always. Their pitiful situation and the fact that their hands are tied are summarised in the following quote: "The truth of all this was that he and his wife belonged, now, to the other side of privilege. Neither whiteness, nor observance of the teachings of Father and Son, nor the pious respectability of liberalism, nor money, that had kept them in safety – that other form of segregation – could change their status" (HG 127) (see also Lazarus 623).

The reversal of positions is also perfectly indicated in the following quotation from the novel: "One of those kept-apart strangers from the Other Side has come across and they are dependent on him. The black man will act, speak for them. They have become those who cannot speak, act, for themselves. (89)" (see Medalie 643). Whereas this quote comprises aspects like "the black man", "those kept-apart strangers" and "the Other Side", which once again draw on the aforementioned theory of the white Self and the black Other, and which underlines the still deep-seated racism due to segregation, it also adds another aspect with the helplessness

and muteness of the Lindgards. Their inabilities to speak and act as well as the handing over of these actions are important steps for them to become conscious about their own racism.

Drawing on naming, which can also be considered indicative of a reversal of positions, Natividad Martínez Marín puts the above-mentioned the following way:

> The manner in which the white couple and Motsamai address each other tells us it is not only that Gordimer dismantles apartheid's traditional hierarchy of whites occupying the upper positions and of blacks occupying the lower ones, but that she goes even further by reversing this hierarchy in the very instant that […] the whites become dependent on the blacks. (Martínez Marín 159)

Just as Hamilton Motsamai calls the Lindgards by their first names, the way Harald and Claudia address Motsamai, that is to say by his surname, is a representation of their subordination to their black lawyer and a clear sign of respect (see Martínez Marín 159). "It's very different with Motsamai Hamilton. Servants used to be known to their employers only by their first names, everyone knows now it was intrinsically derogatory. This use of a black man's first name is a sign of acceptance of you, white man, of his allowing him unintimidated access to his power." (HG 88) However, as we have already pointed out further above, this acceptance does not root in real recognition and acceptance, because the circumstances which lead to it do not come from the very heart but from a change in the lives of the Lindgards which demands it.

Although a reversal of positions, as the previous paragraphs have shown without any doubt, has actually happened, the Lindgards identify Mr. Motsamai as "[t]heir Hamilton Motsamai" (114) a number of times. This might be either an indication of a relapse into the apartheid years, where white people 'owned' or most of them had the feeling that they were superior to them, or a form of highlighting that the Lindgards are totally dependent of him. Although they are certainly aware that the life of Duncan and also their own lives are in their attorney's hands, they literally possess him as their servant but at the very same time are also dependent on him.

But what should this reversal of roles and positions symbolize then? One answer or explanation might be, that Nadine Gordimer reversed the roles because she wanted to explain that in order for South Africa to overcome apartheid it is necessary for those who have not been involved in the struggle personally or those who have not participated in a movement against the regime directly, to witness the position of those being segregated and persecuted; and of those being in pain and desperation. So should the Lindgards be blamed for their inactiveness during apartheid? Should they be punished for their son's criminal action, which – alongside South Africa's long history of violence – could well be traced back to their (subconscious) segregationist form of education and their hidden racism? Or should the reversal support white middle- or upper-class people to awake to their racism, as we have already examined?

Yet another indicator of the split relationship between the white Lindgards and the black Motsamai can be detected in the following quote. "Harald had never been to a black man's home before. This kind of gesture on both sides – the black man asking, the white man accepting – was that of the Left-wing circles to which they had not belonged during the old regime, and of the circles of hastily-formed new liberals of whose conversion they were sceptical." (HG 165) In this scene, Hamilton Motsamai invites Harald and Claudia Lindgard to a party at his home and Harald agrees to attend it. At this point it is worth digging deeper into the matter and ask ourselves the following questions: Why did Mr. Motsamai invite the Lindgards? It may be because he just wanted to be friendly, break the ice between them and wanted to build up a different relationship than the ordinary one between a lawyer and his clients. Or else it was just part of his work, of getting more and more information about Duncan and his parents, information necessary to represent Duncan best. Ilene Durst, who solely focuses on the image of the lawyer, explains Motsamai's decision of inviting the Lindgards as follows: "Thus, here we see an attorney not merely concerned with the rules or with winning, nor engaged in the apartness, distrustfulness, frugality and passivity that characterize the Western literary attorney" (see Weisberg 14 qtd. in Durst 306).

Overall, with respect to racism, *The House Gun* gives us a murder, which is not triggered by racism, but which is supported by a violent and (subconsciously) racist society and South Africa's history, and since it was committed by a house gun does not lose the aftertaste of decades of crimes, racism and segregation.

2.2 Violence

"Something terrible happened" (HG 3), the novel's first and in the course of the narrative (HG 68, 75, 107, 118, 159, 183) reappearing sentence, serves to constantly draw the readers' attention to the awful event on Friday night, 19th January 1996, when Duncan Lindgard caught his girlfriend Natalie James and his cohabitant and former lover Carl Jespersen red-handed and afterwards picked up the house gun and fired a deadly shot at him. Beginning *in medias res* with Julian Verster's delivery of the message that Duncan Lindgard has been accused of murder and arrested, the narrative embeds the story's central event in the wider context of South Africa's problems with violence, segregation as well as the handling of laws during and after apartheid.

When Duncan's work mate Julian Verster delivers the message to Harald and Claudia, they are immediately alarmed. "What is there to fear, defined in the known context of a twenty-seven-year-old in this city – a car crash, a street mugging, a violent break-in at the cottage." (HG 4) This quote makes clear that violence is ubiquitous in South African cities, that whites still consider themselves as possible victims of black violence and that Harald and Claudia not in the least take account of Duncan not being the victim but the offender able to actually commit a murder himself.

Their thought that it is impossible that Duncan has committed a crime is undermined by the fact that they taught and raised Duncan according to the two principles, which should exclude even the very thought of murder, namely the religious and the humanistic. "[T]he sound principles with which he was imbued: one, the sacred injunction, Thou Shalt Not Kill, two, the secular code, human life is the highest value to be respected" (HG 98-99). The secular and spiritual humanism should not only be

understood with regard to Duncan's education, pragmatic solutions and Christian faith also help Claudia and Harald in dealing with the situation and in accepting that they are now the parents of a murderer (see Dimitriu, *The Writer* 142). But in Duncan's situation, it was not the education that failed, but a culture in a society that considers guns as normal parts of a household and that makes violence daily and ordinary (see Diala, *Guilt* 54).

In the course of the narrative, violent acts and crimes are mentioned and described in great detail a number of times, and the repercussions of the apartheid years can still be felt in the present day South Africa. "Violence is presented in *The House Gun* as a kind of social recidivism, a generalized regression to modes of behaviour which have not been discarded with the passing of the apartheid regime." (Medalie 639) Although the murder of Carl Jespersen cannot be classified as a racist act at all and although it has not happened against the background of South Africa's recent history concerning struggles for political or economic power – contexts which have survived the old regime and which remain unchanged – it is much sought-after in the media because violence of all different kinds is still inside people's minds (see also Medalie 639). Michiko Kakutani narrates street violence, the narrative's leitmotif, which reverberates in the novel, as follows:

> And Harald wonders whether the "inhumanity of the old regime's assault upon body and mind" has somehow survived beyond its time: not only in "the hut burnings and assassinations of atavistic political rivalry in one part of the country" but also in "the hijackers who take life as well as the keys of the vehicle, the taxi drivers who kill rivals for the patronage of fares," giving "license to a young man to pick up a gun that's to hand and shoot in the head of a lover." (Kakutani qtd. in Martínez Marín 161)

During apartheid, countless crimes of all different kinds like the ones mentioned in the quotations, and since these were daily occurrences and therefore nothing special any more, people became used to it after a while, and, in the case of Duncan, his violent deed was just one among the many other killings taking place daily (see also Martínez Marín 161).

> There were so many; in a region of the country where the political ambition of a leader had lead to killings that had become vendettas, fomented by him, a daily tally of deaths was routine as a weather report; elsewhere, taxi drivers shot one another in rivalry over who would choose to ride with them, quarrels in discotheques were settled by the final curse-word of guns. State violence under the old, past regime had habituated its victims to it. People had forgotten there was any other way. (HG 49-50)

> In a society where violence is prevalent the moral taboos against violence are devalued. Where it has become, for whatever historical reasons, the way to deal with frustration, despair or injury, natural abhorrence of violence is suspended. Everyone becomes accustomed to the solution of violence, whether as victim, perpetrator or observer. You live with it. (HG 226)

Special attention, especially with regard to what happened in *The House Gun*, needs to be given to the 'solution of violence'. If we once again recall Duncan and what has happened to him, did he really consciously consider seizing the gun and firing a shot at Carl as a solution to his problematic situation? The narrative describes the opposite, since for instance Hamilton Motsamai, with the help of the results of a psychiatric examination, claims that Duncan did not plan to kill Carl, that the murder was an irrational act and that he acted in a matter of seconds. The only thing Duncan had in mind when he picked up the gun in a split second was to stop Carl's chitchat. This is also what makes the story's central event seem vague and it is without any doubt hard to believe that every violent act and every crime committed in a post-apartheid South African environment needs to be analysed with regard to the past.

However, what is left and doubtlessly open to further discussion is the history preceding the awful event and the after effects of being brought up in a violent environment. Being brought up in apartheid South Africa and daily witnessing gruesome pictures certainly left a mark on Duncan and apparently also on his parents. So who is there to blame and who is there to blame for what? Or who should be blamed for not doing anything? Duncan's parents for not telling him enough times how dreadful and wrong apartheid is and that violence of any kind is never neither a solution nor justifiable? Or South Africa and its history for offering the future generations a breeding ground for violent acts like Duncan's? The following parts concentrate on this search for the culprits and include individuals as well as a whole society.

2.2.1 Who is there to Blame?

As already touched upon further above, *The House Gun* has to be understood in connection to "communal or collective violence and communal responsibility" since violence links "the individual to the communal" and "personal trauma becomes collective experience". (Kossew, *Something terrible* no page numbers) The following part consequently researches into the distinction between the public and the private, tries to find an answer to the question of who has to be found guilty and responsible for the prevailing violence and discusses the novel's dealing with the trope of disease and the death penalty.

2.2.1.1 The Public & the Private

With Duncan's passionate act of killing his roommate and former lover Carl Jespersen – who had sex with his girlfriend Natalie James, downplayed it afterwards and wanted to continue their friendship as if nothing had happened – the narrative perfectly connects the individual and society as well as the personal and the political. *The House Gun* is Gordimer's first novel firmly set in post-apartheid South Africa. Consequently, it is also interesting to consider her handling of the distinction between the public and the private as well as the impact of individual choices on the wider society. Since in her apartheid novels, Gordimer was preoccupied with the public sector, with political decisions and its impacts and with historical events influencing and shaping society, it is interesting to investigate if these still dominate her writing and if not, what the changes are and if the past still plays such a dominant role in her writing.

Just as Gordimer portrays "[…] post-apartheid South Africa as a place of perplexing indeterminacy, simultaneously progressive and regressive, where past contexts persist stubbornly or lapse unexpectedly […]" (Medalie 644) in *The House Gun*, the personal and the political cannot be "aligned, synthesized or dialectically interwoven" (Medalie 644). It remains unknown and unpredictable how much the public and the private affect each other, especially when we focus on a phenomenon like violence. Maybe this explains Gordimer's choice of an unusual crime in *The*

House Gun. By depicting a crime that neither has a political or economic reason nor is triggered by racism, Gordimer even intensifies the reaction of the public to a private issue and underlines that society still pricks up its ears when it comes to violent acts.

2.2.1.2 The Death Penalty

The death penalty, which the Constitutional Court is deciding on whether to remove it from the statute book or not before Duncan is arrested, is ruled unconstitutional after he goes to prison. Harald's personal interest in the decision leads him to attend a court sitting (see Medalie 640-641). After the sitting, Harald ponders over the decision to abolish the death penalty or not and also over who has to decide.

> The Death Penalty is a subject for dinner table discussion for those, the others, who will drift back into the Court as Harald will. Their concern, whether they want the State to murder or want to outlaw the State as a murderer, is objective, assumed by either side as a responsibility and a duty owed to society. Nothing personal. (HG 138)

Concerning the decision about the death penalty, the court and the state have to separate social and personal interests, since their function is to reflect upon "the collective morality of a nation which is the substance of a constitution". (HG 128) However, the decision to abolish the death penalty is not really what society wants and "collective morality" does not mean that a consensus is reached. According to South Africa's violent past and present, the death penalty is situated between personal and public crisis, between Duncan's murder and crime and violence in society (see Medalie 642).

2.2.1.3 The Trope of Disease

In the course of the narrative, the trope of disease can be detected several times on different levels. Whereas the most obvious link is with Claudia's profession as a doctor, the narrative also links disease to the country's body politic, which is in need of cure. The Constitutional Court, which has to decide if the death penalty should be abolished or retained, is by no means unintentionally the Old Fever Hospital. Nadine

Gordimer additionally underlines this imagery of disease by suggesting that the Hospital "will house the antithesis of the confusion and disorientation of the fevered mind" (HG 131) and that it decides to choose "health not sickness, life not death" (HG 132) when it comes to the abolition of the death penalty (see Kossew, *Something terrible* n.p.).

"What we have to worry about medically is only communicated intimately, as you know; so it wouldn't be right to isolate the carriers from ordinary contacts, moving about among us. Yet that's another thing people fear." (HG 141), Claudia's answer to Paul's wondering about where people with infectious diseases go now, is not only an obvious reference to HIV/AIDS, it "[…] should also be read as a trope which links disease and violence: both are spread by contact, via the personal, the intimate, the 'private' act which becomes public." (Kossew, *Something terrible* n.p.) As already mentioned further above, the Lindgards – through their son's murder – have now become part of society's daily violence. This means that the personal and the political are linked in an intimacy, which is caused or rather provoked by an act of violence, a fact that is confirmed by the juxtaposition of the above quotation and the image of the city as a "labyrinth of violence" (HG 141) where Harald and Claudia are trapped "through intimate contact with a carrier of a nature other than the ones Claudia cited". (HG 141)

2.2.1.4 Guilt & Responsibility

Having so far considered the interrelation of violence and disease and the death penalty, what does assignment of guilt mean, if we reconsider the awful event in *The House Gun*? One could say that the killing of Carl Jespersen – although it is just another violent act among many others – connects the Lindgards to the wider society insofar as it raises questions concerning the death penalty and criminality on the whole, and insofar as the family's private trauma repeats or resembles South Africa's violent history and admonishes a whole society as well as appeals for taking responsibility. As the judge points out, a violent society has a wider responsibility:

> The gun happened to be there … that is the tragedy of our present time, a tragedy repeated daily, nightly, in this city, in our country. part of the furnishings in homes, carried in pockets along with car keys, even in school-bags of children, constantly ready to hand in situations which lead to tragedy, the guns happen to be there. [sic] (HG 267)

The judge's last words at Duncan's murder trial can also be understood as a way for Gordimer to answer the following question: "In such a chain of linked causalities, the attribution of blame and responsibility is complex: to what extent can individual responsibility be separated from collective responsibility?" (Kossew, *Something terrible* n.p.; see also Cooke 185)

Whereas a society in which something terrible has happened tries to assign or escape blame, Harald and Claudia in the end instead take responsibility for what Duncan has committed and hence no longer remain trapped in their own microcosm. Sue Kossew's last and summarizing paragraph, which also draws on the novel's ending, highlights that the past can be overcome and that a mirror needs to be hold up to society in order to understand itself and change (see also Kossew, *Something terrible* n.p.).

> The House Gun links the issues of violence, guilt and responsibility to turn the spotlight on those "liberal-minded" whites who were not racist but had stood by while the crime of apartheid was perpetrated, not wishing to risk losing their privileged place within that society. That there is the possibility of recovery is suggested in the cautious optimism of the ending; and by the novel's figuring of complex new relationships and moral dilemmas in a society trying to simultaneously come to terms with the past, deal with present trauma and construct a positive moral and ethical climate for its future. (Kossew, *Something terrible* n.p.)

Similarly, Isidore Diala draws on the story's ending by writing that "Harald and Claudia go through the symbolic expulsion from the cave of delusions, experience the pain and anguish of the human condition, and sink back into their primeval cocoon unperturbed." (*Guilt* 55) Unsurprisingly, it is therefore not the liberal whites – represented in *The House Gun* by Harald and Claudia Lindgard – who play the most important role in the reconciliation process in the new South Africa. Since their integration into this process would be "imperilled by deeply ingrained habits", it is

"through Duncan that a positive pattern of remorse and even restitution is indicated." (Diala, *Guilt* 56)

Stephen Clingman also focuses on the story's murder and asks why *The House Gun* is founded on such and which valuable clues it offers to the readership. According to the novel, the murdered man is under the ground of Johannesburg, representing South Africa, which has been built on violence and murder. "The murder in this novel is also the past – an inscrutable past whose essence will not finally be interpreted, understood, or redeemed." (Clingman, *Surviving Murder* 156) The just judgement along with the abolition of the death penalty by the new Constitutional Court offers not a binary opposition or a triangular closure but rather a fresh form of rehabilitation, which has a pretty positive overall tone. "Murder can be survived. Identity will be defined not simply by genetics or the lines of closure, the rigid orders of location and birth, but through dispersion, relocation, and realignment." (Clingman, *Surviving Murder* 156)

2.2.1.5 The Gun

The house gun, a weapon used for self-defence against intruders, can be found in nearly every South African household and is thus the symbol of omnipresent violence in a post-apartheid South Africa. The coterie of young people living in the house and the nearby cottage all have access to the gun "lying around in the living-room, like a house cat; on a table, like an ashtray" (271) and they "share [it] like a six-pack of beers" (114) (see Medalie 638). Although the atrocities of the apartheid regime should already be over with the pronounced end in the year 1994, all sorts of different crimes are still the order of the day and people still feel the need to protect themselves. As the awful event itself, the house gun as the story's corpus delicti is mentioned repeatedly in the course of the narrative and needs to be put under further investigation.

What is interesting to mention first is, that the weapon just happened to be at hand for Duncan as his former lover Carl was insistently talking to him and he just wanted

to end the unbearable monologue. The narrator explains the events, which lead to the murder in the following way:

> He can follow the sight of the gun lying there, but that is the night before, some idiot was talking of buying one and had asked to be shown to use the thing. The house gun. It was always somewhere about, no use having it for protection if when the time came no-one would remember where it was safely stashed away. (HG 151)

In this respect, the murder, although Carl has been shot dead right in his head, can be categorized as neither planned nor intended, but by confronting us with the murder, Gordimer wants to show us plainly that possessing a gun always harbours the potential of violence and murder. However, the reason why the lawyer Hamilton Motsamai advances to the court and which, together with Duncan's personal history and Natalie's documented bad influence on him, finally lead to the sound judgement of just seven years of imprisonment, is without any doubt that Duncan did not intentionally and forcefully kill Carl. In addition, the last sentence of the quote indicates that the gun, if intended to really protect the people living in the house, would not be at hand anyway, a fact that is indeed speaks against gun possession for protection.

In the second part of *The House Gun*, we come across some lines, which, on the one hand, try hard to 'justify' possessing a gun and, on the other hand, criticize violent acts in general, thus underlining the ambivalent attitude towards guns and their possession.

> A house gun, If it hadn't been there how could you defend yourself, in this city, against losing your hi-fi equipment, your television set and computer, your watch and rings, against being gagged, raped, knifed. If it hadn't been there the man on the sofa would not be under the ground of the city. (HG 157)

Alongside the criticism of owning a gun and the bemoaning of Carl's death, this quote also indicates that no matter what had happened, it is sad to admit that the house gun indeed belongs to the inventory of a post-apartheid (white) South African household.

2.2.2 The Prison & the Prison Cell

When Harald and Claudia first meet Duncan in prison, they immediately feel estranged by the sight of it. The narrator describes their feelings as follows: “The very smell of the place was that of a foreign country to which they were deported.” (HG 7) This quote from the novel not only implies that the Lindgards have never acted against the law in their lives and thus neither have been to a prison nor to a prison cell before, it also makes them feel as if they were in a place they do not belong to and which makes no sense to them at all. Whereas for Harald and Claudia, through whose thoughts, emotions and reflections the narrative is primarily mediated, Duncan’s imprisonment as well as the prison and the prison cell itself do not represent hope or reconciliation, Duncan uses his cell as a sanctuary for self-discovery and self-knowledge which allows him to explore deep psychological truths and contemplate about what he has done (see also Dimitriu, *The End of History* 28; see also Dimitriu, *The Writer* 141).

After meeting Duncan in prison, Harald and Claudia do not recognize him as their son in the same way as they could and cannot understand, believe and not really accept that their son has actually committed a murder. “Duncan. Can it be? He has to be recognized in a persona that doesn’t belong to him, as they know him, have always known him – and who could identify him better?” (HG 7) With the murder that their son might have actually committed at the back of their minds, they cannot recognize him as their own son any more. There is a discrepancy “between the one they knew, *him*, and this other” (HG 7)

On a linguistic and syntactical level, Gordimer underlines the Lindgard’s confusion by showing that their “voices and focalizations shift or echo” when they meet their son Duncan in prison. (Clingman, *Surviving Murder* 147) “Signals fly like bats about the room. Don’t ask me. We only want to know what to do. I need to see you. If you don’t tell us. I don’t want to see you […]. You can’t know. At least how did it. (30)” Here we have a “rapid movement of voice and countervoice”, the original order of the fragments seems to be reversed, the focalization cannot be located and there happens to be a transposition of indicative and interrogative modes (see Clingman,

Surviving Murder 147). This confusing extract may also be indicative of the above-mentioned difficulties of Harald and Claudia's dealing with the situation of Duncan's arrest and the fact that they are the parents of a murderer.

At another instance at the prison, which also points to the confusing, dramatic and extreme situation, Nadine Gordimer also plays with stylistic features. Concerning the absence of speech markers and demarcations, "[…] there are shifts in level between (apparently) spoken and thought words, between reported speech and free indirect discourse, between referential shifters ("he"), and between interrogative and indicative moods." (Clingman, *Surviving Murder* 148) Since the speech markers are absent in this instance, it is hard to determine if the words are spoken or thought or both and whose mind these words occupy. Actually, the characters are separated in space and time at a certain degree and their communication is subject to a wave motion, flow or oscillation. The effect of this movement is to create a "nuanced and delicate version of consciousness and relationship", since Claudia and Harald have to master the situation and deal with the awful event together. Their awareness is distributed, collective, and collaborative, although it is different (see Clingman, *Surviving Murder* 149).

Ileana Dimitriu, in her article "The End of History", highlights Gordimer's new metaphor of the prison as the "locus of self-discovery and contemplation" (29) and explains her engagement with Homer, Dostoyevski and Thomas Mann, while at the same time she also mocks the murder-mystery genre and keeps socio-political issues at a fictional level (see 29). By doing so, Gordimer tries to focus her narrative on deep psychological processes, which affect people of all colours and orientations. As already mentioned above, Duncan Lindgard, the real voice of humanity in the novel, in his process of suffering and getting to terms with his emotions and suppressions of his psyche, distances himself from his middle-class upbringing (see Dimitriu, *The End of History* 29).

> His becomes the voice of reason and reconciliation in his echoing of Dostoyevski's Prince Myshkin (in *The Idiot*), who returned to his decadent Russian high society – from an asylum in Switzerland – and tragically became the novel's unacknowledged voice of reason. Thomas Mann's Hans

> Castorp in *The Magic Mountain* is, similarly and paradoxically, a lone voice of sanity: a man in a Swiss sanatorium, while in the valley below Europe prepares for war. (Dimitriu, *The End of History* 29)

Other than Duncan, his parents think and talk about what being in prison means to them in a completely different way. "To be in prison is to be dead with consciousness outside, to exist there only in the past tense" (HG 25), implying that prison means death and that they have lost their son Duncan. The narrative's omniscient narrator underlines the Lindgards' lack of understanding concerning their son's experiences by telling that "[t]here is no privacy more inviolable than that of the prisoner. To visualize that cell in which he is thinking, to reach what he alone knows; that is a blank in the dark." (Durst 300)

Imprisonment for Duncan, however, means exactly the opposite, because "[t]hrough suffering and a deep process of emotional 'house-cleaning', he detaches himself from the conditioning of his middle-class upbringing; learns how to forgive and heal the suppressions of his psyche." (Dimitriu, *The End of History* 29; see also Dimitriu, *The Writer* 141) His parents in the meantime still feel confused and ponder about Duncan's upbringing and what they have done wrong in the past assigning blame to each other and also to others. Duncan on the other hand is given the chance to emotionally mature and become an independent being. In the end, after the complex process of self-reflection, the story leads to reconciliation, which is confirmed by Duncan's own voice at the very end of the novel. But this process of reconciliation comprises both of the past and the present in the form of the murdered Carl, the soon to be born child as well as the actual specified reason for the murder, represented in the novel through the character of Natalie.

> So many things we didn't know, never should have needed to know. The three of us, Carl, dead, Natalie and I alive, Nastasya my victim and ... Natalie my torturer, wherever she is, in what I've done we're bound together, whether she ever knows it or not, whether or not what she has in her womb is another secret. [...] It does not matter whether or not anyone else will understand: Carl, Natalie/Nastasya and me, the three of us. I've had to find a way to bring death and life together. (HG 283, 294)

2.3 Alterity

Secondary sources on *The House Gun* predominantly deal with the prominent issues of racism and violence, which we have already dealt with in great detail in the previous two chapters. Whereas South Africa's criminality and violent acts along with persistent racist attitudes are nothing new to Nadine Gordimer's fiction and are popular themes that she has elaborately dealt with during the apartheid years, the bisexuality of Duncan Lindgard and the homosexuality of his cohabitants Carl Jespersen, David Baker and Nkululeko 'Khulu' Dladla are new tropes worth to be given greater attention. The following part should therefore serve to portray and contrast the narrative's bisexual/homosexual characters and analyse the symbolism of the trope of homosexuality as well as the symbolic value of the child, which is the product of the triangular relationship between Duncan, Natalie and Carl.

2.3.1 Homosexuality/Bisexuality

The homosexual couple David Baker and Carl Jespersen, the homosexual black journalist Nkululeko 'Khulu' Dladla as well as the presumably bisexual Duncan Lindgard and his heterosexual girlfriend Natalie James are all residents of the property and the nearby cottage where the awful event happened. What distinguishes them is that they are black and white, locals and foreigners, male and female, homosexual/bisexual and heterosexual, but what unites them is that all of them share the same household and live in some kind of a 20th century commune. This community can be described as liberal and open-minded and its members represent a new kind of future-orientated and unprejudiced South African identity, as the following paragraphs will indicate.

However, the most prominent feature of the community and consequently also of alterity in *The House Gun,* is the trope of homosexuality/bisexuality, which can be explained as a symbol of a new openness to matters of sexuality and which "[…] parallels attitudes towards change, the future, and progressive politics, including gender politics." (Stobie, *Discourses of Alterity* 167) Brenna Munro makes a similar attempt in describing the function of the gay characters by writing that "[…] they

stand in for the many unexpected political directions being taken as the country emerges from apartheid [and that they] are a readily available metaphor for a new South African liberal cultural in the making." (412) By quoting David Medalie, she adds that the coterie occupying the house and the cottage "seems to be a new kind of family unit […] enacting, in a microcosmic way, the society which the new South African constitution is making possible, one in which there is no discrimination on the basis of race, gender or sexual preference." (Medalie 638 qtd. in Munro 412) Taking these descriptions as a starting point, it is interesting to investigate which further meanings and functions sexuality has and what its connection to violence and murder might symbolize.

In her article "Discourses of Alterity in Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*", Cheryl Stobie expresses that in order to grasp *The House Gun* to the full extent, one has to analyse Gordimer's representation of Duncan as bisexual *and* a murderer in depth and what consequences these choices have. In the middle of the novel, the narrator notes, "Why is Duncan not in the story? He is a vortex from which, flung away, around, are all: Harald, Claudia, Motsamai, Khulu, the girl, and the dead man." (HG 151) Duncan, the narrative's scapegoat carrying South Africa's violence and oppression on his shoulders, embodies white violence, which derived from the collective past and guilt (see Stobie, *Discourses of Alterity* 169-173; see also Cooke 185, 196-198) Furthermore, homosexual/bisexual behaviour in the novel is indicative of a new period and a new generation in South Africa. Therefore, another function of Duncan in the story is to give his parents a thought-provoking impulse in order for them to think more progressively about difference, privilege, cultural relativism, sexuality and marriage (see Stobie, *Discourses of Alterity* 169-173).

"The trope of bisexuality in *The House Gun* represents a space of anxiety, but also of opportunity. It represents a mysterious ability to adapt, which is essential in contemporary South African society." (Stobie, *Discourses of Alterity* 173) So although Duncan has committed a crime and although his parents believe that this is the end of their son's and also their own life, bisexuality and in connection with it

jealousy, is a new situation with which not only Harald and Claudia have to deal with, but which has the potential to change a whole society.

Brian Worsfold, in his article "The Anti-Apartheid Liberal and Post-Apartheid Cultural Resistance: A Critical View of Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*", also argues that White South African male sexuality is the main discourse topic of *The House Gun*. Since the plot is made up of a mystery, namely the mystery to find the cause and reason for Duncan Lindgard's murder of Carl Jespersen, sexuality – a new trope in Gordimer's fiction – offers a valuable clue, which racism and violence alone could not achieve (see Worsfold, *Anti-Apartheid* 254).

Although Gordimer lets Duncan's parents recollect childhood behaviour patters and although the court puts him under a psychiatric examination and suggests a Dostoyevskian motif, we struggle to find an acceptable reason for the murder, which makes us engage in a further investigation of the murder under sexual circumstances. Duncan, when he surprises Natalie and Carl during sexual intercourse becomes the witness of a penetration and when he finds Carl on the couch where he and Natalie made love on the following day, this act of penetration repeats itself. In this context, the gun, which was formerly known to be a symbol of white domination, is the "symbol of phallic power". This white male sexuality, no matter if homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual, is turned on its head and represents the confusion and disruption of a post-apartheid order. White South African males can no longer deal with the dominance and power with which they have been equipped; they are in need of a new mind-set and a new morality. Just as community violence, guns or infectious diseases are only on the smokescreens of the novel, finding a reason or justification for the murder is too. Gordimer after all does not serve us with a plan or manner in which the mind-set should be changed, she just once again lays bare that something needs to be done (see Worsfold, *Anti-Apartheid* 254, 256-257).

Already mentioned further above and connected to the white male South African society, is the identification with the straight parents of a homosexual/bisexual adult child or with the people struggling for gay rights. Since gay love and jealousy act as

triggers for the act of murder, it is interesting and fruitful to take into consideration the connection between racial and sexual politics, for both of them are "politics of recognition, of acknowledgement and inclusion." (O'Brien 260; see O'Brien 260) This is reached in *The House Gun* through the character of Khulu. The black journalist and cohabitant of Duncan in the commune is the Lindgards' ally and supports them emotionally in the course of the trial and further. Thus, the Lindgards sense a "black inclusion in white life" which makes it a necessary social and emotional expansion for them in order to reach a normalization of public life on the whole (see O'Brien 260).

2.3.2 The Child

The story's love triangle between Carl, Duncan and Natalie – a homosexual man actually feeling disgusted by women's genitals having sex with the girlfriend of his former lover who we do not know if he is bisexual or heterosexual – which can be described as "fruitful, despite violence and death" (Stobie, *Discourses of Alterity* 174) results in the birth of a child whose father can be both men, because the mother has slept with each of them within 24 hours. What remains and lives on from this relationship, is the baby child, who may raise the hope for the future and which may symbolize South Africa's possibility and challenge that the past can be overcome. The novel's last sentence uttered by Duncan implies this promise and the positive tone: "But I have to find a way. Carl's death and Natalie's child, I think of one, then the other. They become one, for me. It does not matter whether or not anyone else will understand: Carl, Natalie/Nastasya and me, the three of us. I've had to find a way to bring life and death together." (HG 294)

As "[…] an emblem of reconciliation and of hope for the future [the] child is the litmus test of the possibility of nullifying the divisive binaries of the genetic, ethnic, and national past." (Stobie, *Discourses of Alterity* 169) Although it is not sure whether Duncan is the father of the baby boy or not, it becomes part of his life, also because Khulu Dladla and Hamilton Motsamai persuade the Lindgards according to their more humane black cultural notions, to accept the child no matter what its

origins are (see also Stobie, *Discourses of Alterity* 173-174 and Dimitriu, *The Writer* 145).

3 The Pickup

Nadine Gordimer's third novel after the breakdown of the apartheid regime in 1994 narrates the eventful and complicated love story between Julie Summers, a well-off upper-class South African white woman and daughter of a powerful businessman, and her pickup Abdu/Ibrahim, an illegal Arab immigrant from an unknown developing country somewhere in the north of Africa or in Arabia. By putting this interracial love relationship in the centre of the narrative and by connecting it to the characters' individual destinies concerning freedom, identity, and displacement, *The Pickup*, similar to *The House Gun*, moves away from dealing with issues directly connected with South Africa and its apartheid past. Gordimer even goes one step further by setting more than half of the novel outside of South Africa in an unknown Arab village in the desert, and by doing so, deals with the globalisation topics immigration and emigration, which arose in the 1990s and which posed new challenges to South Africa.

Regarding *The Pickup*'s themes, typical issues like, for instance, racial segregation, criminality and violence, unequal rights as well as judicial, economic and political problems and disparities mostly or at least partly dealt with in Gordimer's former post-apartheid novels *None to Accompany Me* (1994) and *The House Gun* (1998) and of course in her numerous apartheid novels, are more and more eclipsed. Instead, quite a great number of secondary sources as well as reviews on *The Pickup* deal with the politics of location as well as the narrative's important spaces – as featured in the sections on The Table in the EL-AY Café and the desert – with identity, belonging and freedom – as featured in the section on otherness dealing with Julie and Abdu's/Ibrahim's racial, cultural and social differences – as well as with their mutual picking up and Julie's successive transformation at the end of the narrative. All these topics have to be seen in the light of illegal immigration and have to be examined in connection with the restrictions it imposes on immigrants like Abdu/Ibrahim.

The moment at the beginning of the narrative, when Julie Summers discovers Abdu under the belly of a car in the garage where he illegally works as a car mechanic, as well as the subsequent encounters and the following love relationship between them underline their otherness and are altogether seemingly ill-fated due to a multiple number of reasons and circumstances. However, concerning their attraction to each other, it is interesting to have a closer look at the narrative's beginning. Whereas Julie is certainly struck by Abdu's otherness and his kind of mysterious oriental appearance, which is highlighted in the narrative by his skin colour, his eyes as well as his irresistible smile, Abdu ostensibly feels attracted to Julie's as well as her parents' status, wealth and manifold opportunities, which is mostly described through her secure job as a professional fundraiser in the PR domain, her parents' luxurious lifestyle and her own easy going lifestyle with her liberal friends at The Table in the hipster Café EL-AY. Before, however, dealing with the main characters' otherness, their mutual exploitation, and before trying to come up with an answer to the question of who picked up whom and who used whom for what reason, this chapter on *The Pickup* begins with a short section on globalisation and in particular immigration and emigration, which is the story's main frame.

3.1 Globalisation

Nadine Gordimer's third post-apartheid novel embeds the interracial love relationship between the privileged white South African Julie Summers and the illegal Arab immigrant Ibrahim ibn Musa alias Abdu into the wider context of post-apartheid South Africa's dealing with globalisation issues like immigration and emigration including its triggers like, for instance, the striving for freedom and the search for new opportunities.

Emma Hunt, who focuses on post-apartheid South Africa and its transformation in the process of global mobility, explains that in *The Pickup*, Johannesburg is a metonym for a world, which becomes more and more globalised and that globalisation promotes a division of the city mostly along the line of class, which again often, though, implies aspects of race, ethnicity and citizenship (see 104). Hilary P Dannenberg, in her article "Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* and the Desert

Romance Tradition in Post/Colonial Anglophone Fiction", caters to the problematic sides of globalisation and the narrative's criticism of it, by claiming that *The Pickup* makes its readers reflect on the way globalisation and consequently migration produce new conflicts as well as certain cultural exchanges and that it additionally promotes a coexistence between people from different corners of the earth (see Woodhull 87 in Dannenberg 70). Similarly, Ileana Dimitriu argues that *The Pickup* contains "a veiled criticism of globalisation with its 'asymmetrical' opportunities of access to the so-called First World" (*The End of History* 24; see also Dimitriu, *Postcolonialising Gordimer* 167), Sue Kossew mentions that "globalization, rather than leading to more choice for those from "underdeveloped" nations, reduces such choices, while enabling only the already-privileged to participate in the interchange of ideas" (*Beyond the National* 22) and Ann Skea, in her book review on *The Pickup*, reasons that Gordimer wants to help readers understand society as well as issues of immigration and "offers insight into the radically different meaning which "another country" has for those who can choose to move and those who must overcome seemingly insurmountable odds in order to be chosen." (2)

What all these quotations from critics and reviewers have in common is the predominantly cautious and sometimes negative tone towards globalisation and its products and problems, and that it bears the potential for disparities and conflicts. Additionally, as the last three quotes above indicate, mostly those coming from third-world and underdeveloped countries are the losers and the already privileged ones are the beneficiaries of globalisation. Having said that, one positive effect dealt with in the last paragraph, is that globalisation might also culturally and personally enrich countries, nations as well as individuals, an effect, which will be taken on at the very end of the chapter.

The shady sides of globalisation will not only be discussed through the problems of illegal immigration, but will also feature in the social and cultural otherness of Julie and Abdu/Ibrahim as well as in their mutual exploitation, which results in several role reversals and power shifts. However, before indulging in the love relationship between Julie and Ibrahim, this upcoming section provides a short disquisition on

Gordimer's new topics of (illegal) immigration and emigration as well as the pursuit of freedom and the quest for new opportunities and a new life with changed identity and better future prospects.

3.1.1 Immigration & Emigration

Both immigration and emigration are discussed in *The Pickup* a great number of times and they always determine the protagonists' life-changing decisions as well as the course of the narrative itself. Whereas the first part of the novel broaches the issues of Ibrahim's immigration to South Africa, his failed attempts to immigrate in other wealthy first world countries as well as the emigration of Nigel Ackroyd Summer's friends to Australia, the second part deals with Ibrahim's forced emigration back to his desert home country somewhere in the north of Africa and his following re-emigration to the United States of America at the very end of the narrative.

As mentioned above, Gordimer presents both immigration and emigration as problematic, since they are mostly only available to the privileged people who can afford it anyway, and who mostly have other reasons than the ones who are either forced to emigrate or for example want to escape bad working situations and living conditions or flee political and religious persecution. Different from Nadine Gordimer's apartheid-era fiction, which focused on the demarcation of a white dominated Johannesburg from the black townships, "[…] *The Pickup* shows a world divided instead between people able to move freely between countries and those who enter them illegally to work in menial jobs at the edges of global cities." (Hunt 105; see Hunt 105) This quote not only foreshadows that the city in *The Pickup* can be exchanged with any other global city which is part of global international finance, it also makes clear that immigration is almost always illegal and that "the quest for happiness in this harsh 'global village'" (Lebdai 105) is a hard one (see Hunt 105).

If we consider the cases of Julie and Ibrahim, their respective reasons for leaving their home countries are the complete opposite. Ibrahim is ashamed of his country due to a number of reasons, which include the interdependence of religion and

politics, the traditional Islamic family structures and role allocation, and maybe most importantly the West's call for endless opportunities. On the other side, Julie wants to escape exactly the kind of living situations Ibrahim longs for, since she is ashamed of her middle-class upbringing and her father's luxurious life style including brunches and parties. So whereas Julie has the freedom and literally the right to do whatever she wishes to do and wherever she wants to go, Ibrahim always lives on the edge of legitimacy and is dependent on immigration authorities, which decide on whether he gets a visa or not. As mentioned earlier on, although globalisation should give everyone the opportunity to emigrate to other countries, it is mostly the privileged ones who can afford to emigrate and who consequently have endless opportunities.

Another factor concerning migration is, that the characters' opportunities are dependent on money, since Julie would not be able to survive in another country without having a proper occupation. By asking her mother and her uncle for financial support as well as by cancelling a policy, Julie gets access to the necessary money she needs to fulfil her newfound dream. Referring to money, Sue Kossew asks if Julie would have also wanted to stay in the desert if she had to live authentically without her supportive contacts from outside (see *Beyond the National* 24). This privilege of always being able to rely on the people around her can be seen on various levels back in South Africa. Although Julie pretends to reject middle-class values, she has moved away from the Suburbs but still occupies a well-equipped cottage and has even employed a black housekeeper. In addition, as the next parts will reveal, her friends at The Table as well as her whole lifestyle can be said to be nothing but pseudo.

3.2 Otherness

On the most obvious and easily recognizable level, the otherness between Ibrahim and Julie is confirmed by the mostly negatively afflicted names and designations Abdu/Ibrahim are given. Among these names and designations either the narrator, Julie's friends at the L.A. Café or her father Nigel Summers and his wife Danielle as well as other characters like for instance the black lawyer Hamilton Motsamai and

the owner of the garage give Abdu/Ibrahim, are for example “the garage man” (TP 14)[2], “the grease-monkey“ (TP 52, 60), “the young man (foreign)” (TP 76), “this illegal alien from a backward country” (TP 88) and “the filthy wicked foreigner” (TP 95), which all indicate Ibrahim’s inferior position in society and his status as an unwanted illegal foreigner. Others, like for example “her Someone“ (TP 40), “her oriental prince“ (TP 57, 92), “this pickup of hers” (TP 92), “her pickup (God knows where she found him)” (TP 63) and “her problem” (TP 82), draw on Julie’s superior position as well as her initial possession of him, and also foreshadow that the so called romantic attachment is actually built upon mutual exploitation.

But the protagonists’ otherness can not only be reduced to the names and designations Abdu/Ibrahim gets in the course of the narrative, it is important to highlight Julie and Ibrahim’s racial, cultural and social differences as well as to refer to the theme of the Self and the Other in order to highlight their otherness and in order to explain why both of them need each other to fulfil their very personal quests. In his article “Picking up the Other: Nadine Gordimer’s *The Pickup*”, Franz Meier explains that Gordimer has always dealt with the theme of the Self and the Other in her literary works, but that, in *The Pickup*, she adds the cultural opposition between the East and the West to the predominant racial opposition of black and white. Since the story develops in two completely different settings and depicts two completely different characters, the intercultural and interracial love story between Julie and Ibrahim is a clear example of a binary opposition. “[E]ach position and character gains clarity and contour through its/his/her confrontation with significant Others. This process of reciprocal self-definition through difference takes place on several discursive levels […]” (Meier no page numbers) However, before drawing on the mutual exploitation resulting from this respective confrontation with the Other, it is important to deal with the three interwoven discursive levels separately.

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[2] See Nadine Gordimer, *The Pickup* (Bloomsbury: London. 2001). Page 14. Subsequent references indicated by the acronym TP and the respective page numbers in brackets.

3.2.1 The Racial Other

Different from her previous work, in *The Pickup*, race and skin colour are mentioned but not of great importance any more, neither for the characters themselves, nor for the development of the narrative. As an example, the reappearing black lawyer Hamilton Motsamai from *The House Gun* is described as an ordinary member of Nigel Ackroyd Summers' community of friends and business associates, and since he is a respected lawyer in the new South Africa, his race and skin colour is no longer of prior or actually of no importance at all. Similarly, it is not Abdu's skin colour Nigel Summers' wife Danielle ponders about, which is the most prominent feature, but rather his status as an illegal immigrant who belongs to the wrong social class and is not in possession of the correct citizenship.

What is mentioned in the novel concerning race and skin colour, however is, that blacks, Indians and Arabs are all the same in the eyes of white South Africans, a fact which not only speaks against migration, but which also underlines that the world is not meant to be shared with others. When Julie takes Abdu to her father's party, he is thought to be a "Black – some sort of Black" (TP 40-41), described as "some sort of Arab" (TP 44) and also mistaken for an "Indian" (TP 44). This implies that non-Whites are perceived as one single group and that this classification and ostracism comes from a fear towards otherness and foreigner (see Lebdai 111). Franz Meier additionally also argues that the racial aspect is hardly ever mentioned, that "blackness is no longer a distinctive feature of 'otherness'", and he adds that when the narrative progresses to Ibrahim's home country, Julie's whiteness is not even mentioned once and seems to be of no significance in the Arab world at all (see Meier n.p.).

3.2.2 The Cultural Other – Orientalism

The cultural Other in *The Pickup* can be described by the binary opposition between East and West; between Orient and Occident. According to Edward Said, the Orient is a construct of western culture and is basically a negative mirror image, which gives the Occident a positive definition as well as its identity. In one of his major

works called “Orientalism”, Said reasons that “[…] the West first constructs the East as its cultural Other and [that it] then makes this Other conform to the western image […].” (Meier n.p.; see also Said *Culture*, *Orientalism* qtd. in Meier n.p.)

> In order to confirm the western post-enlightenment self-image as positively characterized by rationality, progress, civilization, tolerance, honesty and self-control, the stereotypical concept of the East is negatively defined by irrationality, decadence, archaism, intolerance, violence, corruption and sensual excess. […] The West is depicted as white, dominant and masculine, the East as black, subaltern and feminine […]” (Meier n.p.; see also Said *Culture*, *Orientalism* qtd. in Meier n.p.)

Although Nadine Gordimer makes use of the opposition of Orient and Occident in *The Pickup*, a white South African woman finally represents the East and a coloured Arab man stands for the values of the West. In addition, though South Africa belongs to a continent which has traditionally been associated with images from the Orient, the opposition nearly deconstructs itself in *The Pickup,* because the Occident already contains elements of the Orient. Then again, the beginning of the 21st century marks a new era for South Africa and the political and economic progress emanating from globalisation makes it explicitly western (see Meier n.p.).

The numerous examples of stereotyping, which can be found in the narrative, serve as perfect indicators of the above-mentioned oppositions. First of all, Gordimer leaves the name of the foreign country where Abdu/Ibrahim comes from unspecified, a fact, which not only makes the readers curious and look for signifiers, it also makes all Arabic-Islamic countries seem identical (see Meier n.p.). However, if we consider the partially huge cultural and religious differences between North African countries like for instance Morocco, Algeria, Libya or Egypt and Arabic countries like for example Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran or Syria, it can by no means be said that these are all alike. In the narrative, the following quotation also stereotypes Ibrahim’s place of birth: “One of those partitioned by colonial powers on their departure, or seceded from federations cobbled together to fill vacuums of powerlessness against the regrouping of those old colonial powers under acronyms that still brand-name the world for themselves. One of those countries where you can’t tell religion apart from politics […]” (TP 12) Whilst a couple of critics still brood over the exact location of

Ibrahim's native country, it is important to keep in the back of one's mind that it was Gordimer's intention to leave certain aspects undefined.

Furthermore, the narrative additionally generates the image of Ibrahim's culture as totally dominated by Islam and/or Islamism. Concerning religious and/or traditional norms, the cultural differences between Julie and Ibrahim also become apparent when Abdu asks Julie to introduce him to her parents when their love attachment has already endured about half a year (see Meier n.p.).

> If a woman chooses a man for this, or a man chooses a woman, it is time for the parents to know. To see the man. It's usual. Maybe where he comes from. For the first time, the difference between them, the secret conditioning of their origins, an intriguing special bond in their intimacy against all others, is a difference in a different sense – an opposition." (TP 38)

This opposition also forecasts the reversal of Julie and Ibrahim's roles as well as Julie's transformation in the desert, when she accepts Ibrahim's culture and feels comfortable being part of his family and the customs and values associated with it (see also Meier n.p.).

Other cultural stereotypes, which can be detected in the story, are the picturesque images of the Orient and the presentations of bribery as ordinary and bureaucracy as bloated. At their arrival in Ibrahim's home country, Julie expectedly and unsurprisingly detects the first images: "The old women squatting, wide kneed, skirts occupied by the to-and-fro of children, the black-veiled women gazing, jostling, the mouths masticating food, the big bellies of men pregnant with age under white tunics, the tangling patterns of human speech, laughter, exasperation, argument [...]" (TP 109-110). Similarly, visits to the market as well as when "for the first time in her life [she sees] two old men actually sharing a water-pipe, the hookah of illustrations to childhood's Scheherazade stories" (TP 128) are also followed by such descriptions (see Meier n.p.).

What remains interesting apart from these stereotypes is how Julie and Ibrahim comprehend this Other. "While Abdu/Ibrahim sees in his own Arabic-Islamic culture

little more than the prison he desperately wants to escape from, Julie increasingly finds in it what she obviously had been missing in the liberal 'New South Africa': values such as commitment, solidarity, family, spirituality." (Meier n.p.) Just as Julie and Ibrahim feel attracted to each other on a sexual level and continue their love relationship for different reasons, they also mutually use each other for their own individual quests. Considering the body of the Other as sexual, in *The Pickup*, Gordimer stereotypes Africans as "oversexed" and writes that Julie is first attracted by Abdu's "flat dark-haired belly" (TP 51). Furthermore, the developing love relationship between them is mostly described in terms of sexuality and other than the sexual adventures they both share with each other, which are indeed described in great detail, the actual love relationship is not very convincing (see also Kossew, *Beyond the National* 25). Andrew Sullivan too indicates that "[o]nly sex saves them" and that "[w]hat keeps Julie and Ibrahim together, what cements their relationship, is the wordless communication of sex". (Sullivan no page numbers) Moreover, sex seems to be the one and only solution to their problems and to their opposition. "They embraced […] made love beautifully; she, so roused and fulfilled that tears flooded her" (TP 27) (see Lebdai 110). This is also underlined and indicated by the fact that whenever Julie and Abdu/Ibrahim are confronted with problems and whenever a conflict comes up, at least Abdu/Ibrahim is not able to make love to Julie.

Before however indulging in this mutual exploitation, which has role reversals and power shifts as consequences when the narrative moves from South Africa to the desert country, and which culminates in Julie's gradual transformation to the end of the narrative, we will look at the social otherness between the two protagonists and especially at which identity each of them adopts and which shapes their decisions.

3.2.3 The Social Other – Identity

Concerning the main characters' social differences, which represent yet another opposition between Julie and Abdu/Ibrahim, it is important to look at their respective roles in society and especially at the different identities both of them have and which Abdu/Ibrahim is forced to take on. As Franz Meier puts it, the protagonists'

problematic identities are on the one hand doubted by others and on the other hand doubted even by them. “Abdu-Ibrahim” (TP 125), which comes up several times in the course of the narrative, marks Ibrahim’s double identity, since he calls himself Abdu in South Africa and only reveals his real name Ibrahim ibn Musa after having landed in his desert home country. Although Abdu is just Ibrahim’s alias he takes on as an illegal immigrant in South Africa, it actually describes him more accurately, since his real name only signifies the past he left behind (see Meier n.p.).

Although he has a university degree in economics in his home country which should actually give him the opportunity to get a proper and well-paid job, Ibrahim illegally lives and works in Johannesburg and still drools over a better life than the one he had or might have back in the unnamed poor country somewhere in the north of Africa or in Arabia. In order to survive, Abdu finds work at a garage where he disguises as a grease monkey and hides his real identity. “7 a.m. he’s at the garage in the grease-stiff disguise of his overalls. Or is it that when he climbs out of them, leg by leg, in the evening he steps from his only identity, *here*, into a disguise, the nobody Abdu – he cannot ask himself, such questions are luxuries he can’t afford.“ (TP 31) Indeed, due to the fact that Ibrahim removes and alienates himself from his own culture and due to the fact that he is dependent on the Other he desires, it is impossible for him to create and maintain his identity (see Meier n.p.).

According to Franz Meier, Julie, on the other side, “defines herself in opposition to the culture of her past. She finds her own identity through radical difference from the bourgeois world of her parents, making herself a ‘home’ instead in the social network of liberal friends at the EL-AY Café.” (Meier n.p.) The moment when Julie first ‘discovers’ Ibrahim aka Abdu under the belly of a car in the garage marks the beginning of a relationship, which is determined by social differences from the very beginning onwards. „[S]he did not like to walk ahead of the garage man as if he were some sort of servant.“ (TP 7) This quote at the very beginning of the story not only highlights the different positions in society, but also makes clear that Julie, as expressed above, distances herself from her privileged social position, but at the same time also takes advantage of it, as the following quote perfectly shows:

“[P]eople like her have a black woman who comes to clean and wash and iron.” (TP 61)

Although Julie moved away from the Suburbs and does not live in a luxurious house like her father, and although she is part of a circle of liberal friends at The Table in the EL-AY Café, she still takes advantage of her own as well as her father’s respective position in society and takes whatever it needs to live a good a life. Franz Meier also highlights their different social backgrounds by underlining that while Julie defines herself through difference and signals independence by moving from the wealthy Suburbs to a cottage in a formerly black district in Johannesburg, earning her own money and driving an old second hand car, Abdu feels attracted by exactly these bourgeois norms and favours capitalistic elements (see Meier n.p.).

The following two subheadings, which have already been mentioned at some stages in this chapter, should serve to define Julie’s as well as Ibrahim’s identities in their home countries, and they should also describe the different spaces each of the two protagonists need and belong to.

3.2.3.1 The EL-AY/L.A. Café & The Table

The EL-AY/L.A. Café, with its acronyms EL-AY, is a reference to the paradigmatic global city Los Angeles and has its real counterpart in Yeoville’s (an area in Johannesburg) Time Square Café (see Hunt 107). In addition, the café represents the new post-apartheid South Africa and is “an example of a new kind of community detached from family and from place” (Hunt 108). Laura Winkiel adds that the café is “a banal form of globalization signified by the transliteration of the café’s name that echoes the local accent and mixes western and Arabic names.” (36) In a globalised world, the EL-AY Café is home to all kinds of people from all over the world, no matter if young or old, black or white, poor or rich and no matter which religion and culture they belong to, as the following quote indicates: „The name of this café was a statement. A place for the young; but also one where old survivors of the quarter’s past, ageing Hippies and Leftist Jews, grandfathers and grandmothers of

the 1920s immigration who had not become prosperous bourgeois, could sit over a single coffee." (TP 5)

Moreover, the café, which is a quite important place and space in the narrative, is also a symbol for a new South African identity in a post-apartheid era, a "metaphor for the hybrid culture of a particular kind of Johannesburg" (Heyns 74) and it becomes "emblematic of a newly emergent "modern" lifestyle" (Altnöder 115). The members of The Table, which Julie calls "her elective siblings" (TP 23), are an intellectual circle of friends among whom are for example an old poet, a man recently conformed to Buddhism, a person infected with AIDS as well as a black man and they distance themselves from bourgeois norms and consequently from the people living in The Suburbs who represent these.

"The friends have no delicacy about asking who you are, where you come from – that's just the reverse side of bourgeois xenophobia." (TP 14) Although they pretend to be liberal, open-minded and without any prejudices – as the quote above indicates – the following quote, among other instances where Abdu is shown as the outsider – proves to doubt their attitudes and makes them appear to only have taken on these different identities. The quote „That relationship's getting heavy, our girl's really gone on that oriental prince of hers. Where was it she picked him up, again?" (TP 36), points to the assumption that Julie's friends are not as liberal as they might think of themselves because of a number of reasons. Firstly, they actually do not really accept Julie's decision to have a love relationship with the stranger Abdu, who is never really part of them since he does not want to party, does not drink alcohol and rather stays in the background when it comes to discussions. The second thing is, that the naming of Abdu as an "oriental prince" (TP 36, 57, 92) marks their actual opposition to the Other, but at the same time, the quotation above also foreshadows Julie's distancing from her friends, because she cannot identify with their pseudo or fake values they stand for any more and recognizes by and by that her lifestyle is nothing but the longing for the Other.

Emma Hunt debates that although Julie and her friends represent an opposition to everything Julie's father and The Suburbs stand for, they are also a product of globalisation, since they too have dropped their own cultures and to some extent have adopted other cultures and religions, a fact the narrator additionally mocks and which makes them seem superficial and self-serving (see 107-108). Sonja Altnöder, in her book "Inhabiting the "New" South Africa: Ethical Encounters at the Race-Gender Interface in Four Post-Apartheid Novels by Zoë Wicomb, Sindiwe Magona, Nadine Gordimer and Farida Karodia", claims that the EL-AY Café "comes to represent the stereotypical social environment of the post-apartheid liberal bourgeois, whose solution to the challenges of coping under South Africa's "new" non-racial dispensation remain intellectual rather than practical or indeed practicable." (116)

Concerning freedom, Abdu notes that "[…] the only queue she [Julie] might stand in with the mates from The Table was to gain entry to a cinema. *That's it*, for her […]" (TP 202) Therefore, The Table including Julie "is emblematic of the social freedom and mobility of the new South Africa" (Kossew *Beyond the National*, 23) and it is a depiction of the actual opposite of Abdu, since the members of The Table are free to do whatever they want to, whereas Abdu has to stay in the underground of illegal immigration and has to hide his "real" identity. The social differences between Julie and Abdu/Ibrahim even continue when they are in the desert village, where Ibrahim reminds himself of Julie's freedom and independence. After arriving at Ibrahim's parental home, he utters anger over Julie's endless opportunities. "Of course. Of course. Independent. This is the way she's accustomed to living, pleasing herself." (TP 122) As we will see however, the shift from Johannesburg to the desert town also marks a shift in their positions and accordingly a reversal of their roles although Julie still has the choice to escape the situation because she is in possession of the money and the connections she needs.

3.2.3.2 The Desert

The desert, because it is "a terrain with multiple significations." (Dannenberg 79), is dealt with in nearly every article, book or review on *The Pickup* and consequently has a very special significance for the narrative's love relationship and the narrative

itself. Although it plays an important role in the upcoming part on mutual exploitation and especially regarding Julie's transformation at the very end of this chapter, the desert also serves as a prominent space, which contributes to Julie's way of finding her real identity. In this regard, the desert also stands in opposition to The Suburbs and The Table at the EL-AY Café discussed in the last subheading, which Julie distances herself from and which also symbolize her pseudo identity. Furthermore, as the following part will show, the desert also stands in between Julie and Ibrahim and their respective different expectations of one another and their longings for a place in the world.

In her article "Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* and the Desert Romance Tradition in Post/Colonial Anglophone Fiction", where Julie's transformation and the role of the desert are in the centre of interest, Hilary P Dannenberg represents the desert not only "in terms of the poetically temporal transcendence" but also as a "thoroughly local and mundane space". (79) Gordimer's desert therefore represents the exact opposite of the desert depicted in colonial fiction, where it symbolizes a stereotypical romanticised European longing as well as where it stands for the exotic Other. In *The Pickup*, Julie Summers perceives the desert as "a familiar local space" (Dannenberg 79) beginning at the end of the road:

> Where the street ended, there was the desert. Led by the children down the row of houses […,] dusty plants, leaning bicycles, cars sputtering from broken exhausts, men lounging, women at windows, […] the man selling bean rissoles calling out – this everyday life suddenly ends. (TP 131)

Thus, this quote shows that the desert has no distinguished and distanced borders and boundaries from real life, but it is also represented as a space which transcends time as well as civilization, another aspect which adds to the fact that Nadine Gordimer "deconstructs the traditions of colonial self-fashioning in the desert and the colonial stereotype of the cosmopolitan English traveller" in *The Pickup* (Dannenberg 80-81; see Hunt 110).

On a quite basic level and concerning the love attachment between the two protagonists, the desert marks yet another sharp opposition. Whereas Julie

immediately finds the beauty and special positive significance in the desert, Ibrahim still connects it with his home country and with it everything he wants to escape from. Katie Gramich, in her article "The politics of location: Nadine Gordimer's fiction then and now", where she deals with the interrelations between different spaces and identity, also writes that *The Pickup* demonstrates that the same space may cause conflicts for different people at the same time. For Julie, the desert "is a positive space of eternity and infinity, offering a welcome if temporary escape from the intense familial relationships of the domestic interior to which she is confined by virtue of gender, whereas for Ibrahim the desert is a symbol of the futility and nothingness of the homeland from which he is desperately trying to escape." (Gramich 81) The following quotations should serve as examples of the above-mentioned and should stress the different ways in which Julie and Ibrahim apprehend the desert.

> The desert. No reason of bloom or decay. Just the endless turn of night and day. Out of time […] Sky-haze is indistinguishable from sand-haze. All drifts together, and there is no onlooker; the desert is eternity. (TP 171)

> He shuns the desert. It is the denial of everything he yearns for, for him. And if he should remember – the enthusiasm of some members of The Table – his next derision could be that her decision was a typical piece of sheltered middle-class Western romanticism. Like picking up a grease-monkey." (TP 262)

In addition, the second quote anticipates that Ibrahim still thinks that not accompanying him to the United States and instead staying with his family in his home town, is yet another of Julie's adventures associated with her freedom and her middle-class sheltered decent. Ibrahim's rejection of the desert as described in the quotation together with his intense longing for a Western city and lifestyle is also the exact reversal of the Western romantic longing for the desert in colonial fiction. Thus, this longing for the West along with the neglect of the desert as well as the traditions in the village and country all belong to *The Pickup*'s dealing with intercultural movement and migration and point "a critical finger at the draining of local talent by the lure of Western economies". (Dannenberg 84-85)

However, Julie not only sees the beauty of the desert but also literally falls in love with it, since she "develops stronger emotional bonds to the desert itself rather than to the male lover". (Dannenberg 81) As the object of romance and the major reason for Julie's abandonment of the male lover Ibrahim, the desert is represented as an anthropomorphised lover and even becomes a character of its own in the narrative. "He did not know of her hours with the desert; she didn't tell him, because he avoided, ignored, shunned the desert. (*Are you crazy?)* […S]he had in fact fallen asleep by transporting herself into the pale radiance of the desert entered that afternoon, beyond the colour and time of growth." (TP 173-174)

In attempting to find a new sense of identity, the desert also triggers Julie's thirst for self-knowledge and leads her to reassess her past. When Julie, in this process of self-discovery, contrasts the silent effect the desert has on her with the privileges she had back in South Africa, these immediately seem "frivolous and insignificant" (see Dimitriu, *Beyond the National* 31). The quotes "The desert. *Always*. The true meaning of the common word tripping off every tongue to suit every meaning, comes from the desert. It is there before her and the dog. The desert is always; it doesn't die it doesn't change, it exists." (TP 229) and "There is no last time, for the desert. The desert is always. It does not matter that she has turned and gone back up the street, buying three circles of warm fritters from the vendor as she returns to the family home, the lean-to for transients" (TP 246) once again underline the desert's important function. J.M. Coetzee, in regard to the desert's function, adds that it is "the desert's timelessness – its infinity, and its immutability – that penetrates Julie's Westernized consciousness." (Coetzee 249 in Worsfold, *Peeking* 168) (see Dannenberg 83-84; see also Dimitriu, *Postcolonialising Gordimer* 170-171 and Dimitriu, *Beyond the National* 31).

But after all, the desert serves as an impulse for Julie's final decision to stay with Ibrahim's family and it is the desert, where Julie finds her very own psychological identity as well as "lasting values, such as commitment, solidarity, family cohesion, and spirituality." (Cloete 64; see Dannenberg 84). So whereas Julie, among other things but mainly through the desert, has found the right place in her life, Ibrahim

has not found his and is still blinded by the fortunate future the West promises. In this respect, the desert serves another function, namely the one of "a sobering reminder of the psychological damage that has been inflicted on Abdu by global colonialism" (Dimitriu, *Postcolonialising Gordimer* 171)

3.3 Exploitation: Who picked up Whom?

As the previous sections have shown and confirmed, the interracial love relationship between Julie and Ibrahim is marked by a lot of differences on various and partly interconnected levels. It therefore comes as no surprise, that each of the two protagonists has different expectations to the attachment and that the love relationship ultimately culminates in mutual exploitation. The aim of this section therefore is, to figure out who really picked up whom for what reason as well as to discuss the role reversals and power shifts, which are the direct results of this mutual picking-up. The end of this part on *The Pickup* will then be an examination of Julie's transformation at the end of the narrative, which is more than the adventure which Ibrahim calls Julie's decision to accompany him to his home country.

3.3.1 Mutuality

Finding out who really picked up whom, or rather who had the intention of exploiting the other, is quite a difficult and seemingly impossible task. Ileana Dimitriu too observed that "[t]he reader is puzzled as to who picks up whom; who needs whom and why; who accompanies whom and why/why not [and she reasons that] Gordimer does not provide answers to these questions […]" (*Beyond the National* 30; see also Hunt 106) However, what the narrative tells us is that Julie first saw Abdu/Ibrahim under the belly of a car in the garage where he works and that Julie, who was struck by Abdu's otherness, immediately felt attracted to him and invited him to drink a coffee with her. So after the first few pages, the reader first of all gets the impression that it is Julie who actually picks up Abdu/Ibrahim and who wants to take advantage of him (see also Barker no page numbers). Secondly, however, as the story progresses and as it reveals Abdu's assumingly real face, the readers might ask themselves the following questions raised by Julie and

Abdu's/Ibrahim's mutual picking-up: "[I]s he simply using her as a ticket to stay in South Africa at the start of the novel; is she using him as an exotic other to create some excitement in her somewhat mundane existence?" (Kossew, *Beyond the National* 25)

Due to the fact that we hardly ever get to know Abdu's thoughts and feelings, it is very difficult to find out about his real intentions and consequently, it is also complicated to answer the questions. When Abdu suggests Julie to buy a new car, she accepts and he offers her help to find a suitable one, we are to believe though, that Abdu actually begins to take advantage of Julie, because he might earn money when he organizes a new car for Julie. In the course of the narrative, Abdu then reveals himself to apparently use Julie and her status as a perfect way to try to stay in South Africa. When her relatives as well as the lawyer Hamilton Motsamai then attempt to prevent his deportation, or later in his home country, when he establishes a connection to Julie's mother and her husband in California in order to get a visa for the United States, Ibrahim clearly does everything, even behind Julie's back, to escape his home country. Julie, to return to the question raised in the last paragraph, on the other hand uses Abdu to open up new possibilities. He introduces her to his native country, to his culture, to his family and to the desert, encounters and experiences, which decisively lead to a change of identity and finally to Julie's complete transformation in respect of her upbringing and her former life in South Africa.

Sue Kossew puts the idea of mutuality in a nutshell by explaining that "while Julie is keen to expand her own cultural horizons through her immersion in Ibrahim's Arabic culture, Ibrahim's only desire is to escape the poverty and limitations of his own village by emigrating to the West". (*Beyond the National* 22) Important to mention however is, that this mutuality does not work out without difficulties. Julie and Ibrahim constantly misread each other and "what they share and what brought them together […] is what is slowly tearing them apart" (Sullivan no page numbers). Since "each is imposing an identity on the other for their own selfish purposes" (Kossew, *Beyond the National* 25; see also Kossew *Nadine Gordimer*), it is impossible for both

of them to find a place where they can be together. In short, both Julie and Ibrahim, although they share a similar quest in trying to flee their past and their countries/cultures, are the victims of their respective worlds and times. "[T]heir mutual incomprehension is also related to their mutual attraction" (Sullivan n.p.; see also Barker n.p.) and certainly also the other way round (see also Sullivan n.p., Winkiel 39, Cloete 54).

3.3.2 Role Reversals & Power Shifts

Next to their mutual attraction and consequent mutual exploitation, *The Pickup* also perfectly shows how easily people change and adapt or have to change and adapt as well as reverse roles when they are dislocated from their home, their country and their culture.

In the course of the narrative, Julie and Abdu/Ibrahim reverse their roles for a number of times. The first role reversal happens at the beginning, when they celebrate Julie's new car. When Julie is convinced to celebrate as well as christen her new car, Abdu immediately replies by saying "[b]ut not at the café" (TP 17) and therefore changes the former position, which saw Julie above him and in charge of the situation and in fact of the whole acquaintanceship (see also Barker n.p. and Cloete 56-57). The following quote underlines this first reversal of roles: „He had spoken; with this, a change in their positions was swiftly taken, these were smoothly and firmly reversed, like a shift of gears synchronized under her foot; he was in charge of the acquaintanceship." (TP 17)

After having decided to accompany Abdu/Ibrahim back to his home country and after having bought the two airplane tickets, Julie starts to quarrel with her lover for the first time in their love relationship. While Abdu, on the one hand, is ashamed to take Julie with him to the poor desert country, he, on the other hand, also blames Julie for her decision to go with him and tells her that – just like South Africa seems not to be the right country for Ibrahim – his home is a country, where she cannot live. Julie's reply not only results in an even more intense quarrel, where Ibrahim

again accuses Julie of rushing into the next adventure after picking him up a while ago, but also emphasizes Julie's leading position.

> Nobody has to be responsible for me. I am responsible for myself.
>
> For yourself. Always yourself. You think that is very brave. I must tell you something. You only know how to be responsible for yourself here – this place, your café friends, your country where you have everything. I can't be responsible. I don't want it. (TP 95)

The move to Abdu's native country then results in a change of his identity as indicated by the three words "Ibrahim ibn Musa", which open the second part of the novel, and continues with Ibrahim's command of the situation, as the below-mentioned extracts from the novel emphasize.

> He stands at the foot of the stair where the aircraft has brought its human load down from the skies. Lumbered and slung about with hand-luggage and carrier bags, he turns to wait for her to descend from behind him.
>
> He is home. He is someone she sees for the first time. [...]
>
> An airport in a country like this is a surging, shifting human mass with all individualism subsumed in two human states, both of suspension, both temporary, both vacuums before reality: Leaving. Arriving. Total self-absorption becomes its opposite, a vast amorphous condition. [...] Julie is no different, she has no sense of who she is in this immersion, everyone nameless: only him, officially: Ibrahim ibn Musa. (TP 109-110)

In addition to this contrast to the novel's opening, in his home country, Ibrahim is "very efficient in exchanges of colloquial ease with those he approached" (TP 110) (see Cloete 61-62). After moving to the north of Africa, roles are more and more reversing, and Ibrahim as well as his family and the culture and religion they belong to now decide over the couple's and in particular Julie's life. "Back where she came from she had been the one in charge, the one with status; here, in what was his home, his place, ineradicable birthmark that defined in him that place's ways of going about things, he had done – and only he could do – what was necessary." (TP 223) Due to the fact that according to cultural and religious matters, Julie is not allowed to go outside uncovered and without the company of other men from the family, and she has to follow the rules of the house and especially the rules of Ibrahim's mother.

"Now Julie becomes the outsider. She doesn't speak the language, and must wrestle with the constraints placed on a woman living in a Muslim society." (York no page numbers)

Concerning Julie's personal decision to emigrate together with Ibrahim, when they arrive in the North African country and when she is exposed to the extreme poverty, she also starts to rethink her privileged life in South Africa as well as her leftist life-style as an independent woman. "The roles are reversed now" and Julie "like one who has [metaphorically] to settle for the underbelly of a car" (143), just as Abdu had to do literally as an illegal motor mechanic in her home country." (Dimitriu, *Postcolonialising Gordimer* 168) Whereas "[i]n Johannesburg, Julie is the one with contacts, money and power [,…] it is she who has to adapt and learn how to be a migrant in an Islamic Arab society" (Kossew, *Beyond the National* 22; see also Kossew *Nadine Gordimer*, Altnöder 140 and Sizemore 76)

M.J. Cloete localizes an instance of an ironic reversal of roles, when Ibrahim is offered a proper job by his uncle. "Ibrahim, who has been so impressed by the material grandeur of Julie's parents, rejects the opportunity his uncle offers him to take over the wealthy family business when back home." (Cloete 64) He further explains Ibrahim's decision by stating that "culture is not easily acquired but inborn" (see Cloete 64 and York n.p.).

In her article "Beyond the National: Exile and Belonging in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*", Sue Kossew also states that Gordimer is fascinated by the power shifts which result from the displacement of people's comfort zones. When Julie tries to adapt to new ways of thinking and being, it is mostly language through which this adaption occurs. By learning the new language, teaching English to the town people and indulging in religion by reading the Koran, Julie manages to gain the power she has lost when she removed herself from the familiar surroundings (see Kossew, *Nadine Gordimer* 23). Another quotation indicates the above-mentioned power shift, because although they are in the desert country now, it is still Julie who has some choices and, because of her money, can nearly do whatever she wishes to do. "She

was not at home, now, in the EL-AY Café; she had been determined to come here, to this place. It had its rules, as her father's beautiful house and the guests who came there had theirs. She had made her choice; here it was. She was the one with the choices. The freedom of the world was hers." (TP 115) Although it seems, at least to Ibrahim, that Julie's decision to accompany Ibrahim to his home country was a bad idea, the way she distances herself from her middle-class upbringing, the way she adapts to her new family and praises the desert and most of all, her interest in investing in a rice plantation are all indicative of Julie's opportunities to change her life.

In the end however, because of Julie's access to money and her other connections, the power is always on her side and she is capable of deciding what to do. Abdu, who is still blinded by his keen decision to gain entry into a Western country, on the other side is always dependent on other people and his destiny does not lie in his own hands. Julie's final decision to stay with Ibrahim's family is the narrative's last reversal of roles, which again limits Ibrahim's role in the love attachment as well as highlights his role as an illegal immigrant.

3.3.3 Julie's Transformation

The Pickup, which ends with Ibrahim's presumable departure to the United States and Julie's expected stay in the Arab village, finally depicts Julie's transformation and describes the spiritual growth she has undergone since the arrival at Ibrahim's hometown in the North African desert about a year ago. As dealt with in the previous sections on the symbolism of the desert as well as on role reversals and power shifts, Ileana Dimitriu explains that "[t]he novel ends with a perplexing reversal of roles. Abdu, the illegal immigrant to South Africa, proves to be the eternal nomad, but one who no longer manifests his earlier dignity. Tragically, he is a phenomenon of the 1990s: a global mercenary condemned by history to be ever seeking opportunities elsewhere." (*The End of History* 32) His eager and stubborn attempts to enter Western countries prove to be endless journeys in search of a better future, which actually make him go round in circles without ever reaching his intended goals. As Ileana Dimitriu and M.J. Cloete continue, Julie substitutes one place of privilege for

another and turns her back on materialistic pursuits (see Dimitriu, *Postcolonialising Gordimer* 172 and Cloete 65). "[S]he embarks on a journey of self-discovery that proves to have no boundaries other than those imposed upon her by her own inner dedication. Rejecting what she comes to regard as the superficial landscapes of global opportunities, she identifies the map of her own inner life as a new country of exploration." (Dimitriu, *The End of History* 32)

The first excerpt about Ibrahim above once more shows one of the many negative aspects of globalisation. The new possibilities arising from the world as a global village in terms of migration depict a seemingly infinite number of opportunities for everybody around the globe and a lot of tireless migrants fall prey to these false hopes and promises. But the second extract looks at a positive side effect of immigration and emigration, by pursuing Julie on her journey of self-discovery, where she leaves all her materialistic belongings behind her and instead finds a more important new meaning in her life "in the sympathetic acceptance of her sisters-in-law; in the simple trust of a niece [as well as] in the welcoming emptiness of the desert beyond the street". (Kline no page numbers) In addition, she gains "a sense of family, a sense of belonging [and] learns how to accept and be accepted" (Kline n.p.), all the goods she did not have back in South Africa. There, she neither was part of a sheltered family – with her divorced parents and her distanced and critical as well as nauseating attitude towards their lifestyles – nor did she really feel to belong to and be accepted by her circle of friends at the EL-AY-Café – which proved to be only a loosely connected bunch of individualistic theorists and wannabe stary-eyed idealists.

M.J. Cloete's article "A Study of Identity in Post-Apartheid South African English Literature: *The Pickup* by Nadine Gordimer" also deals with Julie's transformation and describes her change as "a real change of heart, an attainment of contentment and commitment" and her attraction to "lasting values, such as […] solidarity, family cohesion, and spirituality" and attests "an exceptional degree of psychological growth" to her. (64) All these changes as well as her gains and losses are aspects in Julie's favour, since she seems to have finally settled, whereas Ibrahim is still on the

run and on the search. Moreover, in the end Ibrahim is disabused since he always accused Julie of only being eager for another adventure in her life.

However, the novel's ending not only involves Julie's transformation and spiritual growth, but also again draws on emigration and freedom as already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and this section. Sue Kossew in her article "Beyond the National: Exile and Belonging in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*" makes clear that "[…] if you are trying to emigrate, it is where you come from, not who you are, that is the main criterion for acceptance or rejection." (25) In addition, the world is far from being without boundaries and actually proves to be the very reverse by only allowing the privileged to move freely and keeping out the unwanted others. "It is fitting, then, that the novel ends ambiguously, with questions unanswered, and with a sense of readerly unease rather than in a formulaic neat ending. Both Julie and Ibrahim face a perverse kind of freedom: she in his "backward" village, he in the "advanced" United States." (Kossew, *Beyond the National* 25-26; see also Kossew *Nadine Gordimer*) This idea of ambiguity can even be expanded by asking on the one hand, if Ibrahim will even go to America at all or if he changes his mind and stays, and on the other hand, if Julie will indeed remain in the desert village and how she manages to cope with the situation, or if she makes use of her privilege and finally backs out (see Kossew, *Beyond the National* 26). Laura Winkiel, in the last sentence of the closing paragraph of her article "Immigration and the Practice of Freedom in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*", writes that "[t]he problem […] of migration is also an opportunity for collective transformation, a discovery of the freedom to live differently." (40-41) What remains in the end, however is, that these open questions may well be brought more in line with the problems of a new South Africa which has left apartheid behind and has to face up to new challenges like for instance globalisation in the case of *The Pickup*.

With *The Pickup*, Nadine Gordimer succeeds to deal with post-apartheid South Africa's new challenges of being part of the newly arising process of globalisation, which entails possible discrepancies through migration and results in an intercultural exchange. By depicting the love relationship between Julie and Ibrahim from the

very beginning when they meet up, to their emigration to his home country and to their final separation at the end of the narrative, Gordimer utters concern over migration and globalisation on the whole. At the same time, by leaving certain details unspecified and unspoken, as well as by leaving the narrative's ending open-ended and open for discussion, her concerns and her criticism are somewhat outshined by a positive tone and an expectant tone towards South Africa's development.

4 Get a Life

Nadine Gordimer's 2005 novel *Get a Life* focuses on the life of the 35-year-old ecologist Paul Bannerman as well as on how he, his family and his teammates cope with his serious diagnosis of thyroid cancer and most importantly, on how they all react to his recovery after the surgery and after the iodine treatment, which leaves him temporarily radioactive and which also forces him to return to his childhood home in order not to harm his wife Benni and their 10-year-old son Nicholas. Like Paul, who is employed at a foundation for conservation and environmental control, also his parents Adrian – a former, but now retired managing director – and Lyndsay – a partner in a legal practice working as a civil rights lawyer and a judge later in the narrative – as well as his wife Benni/Berenice – a copywriter working in the managerial area of an international advertising agency – all belong to the well-off middle-class, living a sheltered life in the wealthy Suburbs of Johannesburg or nearby. By narrating the individual and collective stories of these central characters, *Get a Life* offers a class-based analysis of their lives and their coping strategies, when they are confronted with their respective problems and their personal life-changing experiences.

Get a Life, on the basis of the three ecological projects for modernisation – the Okavango Delta, the pebble-bed nuclear reactor and the Pondoland national toll road and mining scheme – Paul and his colleagues Derek and Thapelo work on, the narrative deals with the key concepts of ecology's and environmentalism's significance together with nature conservation, which form the story's frame, around which all the other events are built. In addition, we are told about how these projects reflect on South Africa's stance on ecology and nature conservation, its connection to economics and also about Paul's understanding of nature and his mediations about it.

Besides Paul's illness and his work-related activities, which also have to be examined with respect to the characters' class, Lyndsay has to get over Adrian's decision to leave her for an affair with another woman and she also has to rethink her

future, which results in the decision to adopt a black, HIV-infected, rape victim child. Benni too has to reassess her multiple roles as Paul's wife, the businesswoman opposing Paul and his job as an ecologist, and as a part of the Bannerman family and their mutual circle of friends. Finally, the whole family additionally has to cope with Adrian's death at the end of the novel. Overall, the narrative accompanies each of the characters, as they are about to get new lives and enter new states of their existences.

Among the decisive events mentioned above, Paul's illness, which is the narrative's master trope, accounts for the most important part of this chapter's analysis. During the time he has to currently leave his job and his part as a husband and father behind and stay in a separated quarantine room, Paul mediates about his work as an ecologist, about his perception of nature as well as about his marriage with his wife Benni. Next to the side-effects of his sickness, the symbolism of his illness, the way they serve to symbolize various aspects of the narrative as well as how these concepts correspond with the lives of the central characters, this chapter on *Get a Life* will elaborate Gordimer's politics in a post-apartheid South Africa.

4.1 Ecology

From the very beginning of the narrative, when Paul gets diagnosed with thyroid cancer, is then treated with radioactive iodine and consequently put under quarantine in his childhood home, the topics ecology – and closely connected to it, the topics environmentalism as well as nature conservation – are in the focus of attention and form the narrative's framework. On the one side, *Get a Life* overtly deals with the three environmental projects – the Okavango Delta, which, because of its thorough examination in the course of the narrative, will be dealt with more precisely in the upcoming section of the same name, the pebble-bed nuclear reactor and the Pondoland national toll road and mining scheme – Paul Bannerman and his teammates Derek and Thapelo work on. On the other side, the narrative combines the topics of nature and its conservation with Paul's work as an ecologist and his family life by showing the influence of his work on his private life especially at two occasions, namely the invitation of Paul and Benni's friends as well as co-workers to their home, and the family outing to the Nature Reserve pretty much at the end of the

narrative. Besides, *Get a Life* also picks up the topic of economy in the socio-political context of a post-apartheid globalised South Africa, by looking at its place and function in the international trade and finance sector as well as the impact international companies have on South Africa and in particular its ecological projects dealt with in the course of the narrative.

Anthony Vital and Ileana Dimitriu similarly explain that by bringing into focus the story on Paul Bannerman, a 35-year-old researcher working for an unnamed ecological foundation, Nadine Gordimer explores the wider significance of ecology, environmentalism and nature conservation in the present-day South Africa, and by doing so provides a version of postcolonial criticism. Through *Get a Life*'s protagonist and primarily through stream-of-consciousness techniques, we are told about several interventions by ecological conservationists – in particular Paul and his teammates Derek and Thapelo – against political projects for economic modernisation and Gordimer explicitly attempts to make her readers aware that there are no simple solutions to issues concerning ecology and nature conservation (see Vital 90-91; see Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 124).

In attempting to give a definition or rather an explanation of the narrative's important term ecology, Anthony Vital, in his article "Another Kind of Combat in the Bush": *Get a Life* and Gordimer's Critique of Ecology in a Globalized World", remarks that the scientific field of ecology studies "the relation of organisms to their environment" (96). He adds that reflecting on ecology depends on the personal views of different matters and that psychological, cultural, social as well as political considerations – suggesting an entering of other areas outside of ecology – need to be included. This form of ecology, which *Get a Life* deals with by reflecting on Paul's mediations and conversations, is depicted as basically positive. Paul, who is passionately fond of the wilderness he finds in nature, uses ecology and his job as an activist to protect and defend nature as well as people who are the victims of the damaging use of natural resources (see Vital 96-97).

Next to the trope of illness and the focus on the narrative's characters and their mainly class-based issues and mediations, which will be dealt with in the second and third part of this chapter on *Get a Life*, ecology, together with illness, represents the most important topic as well as the narrative's basis, around which all the events are built. "Ecology – and the conservation it sustains – emerges from the novel as both a valued modern response to nature and a form of knowing limited by being linked to and shaped by the life-aspirations […] of a materially comfortable professional middle-class." (Vital 91) This connection between ecology and the main characters' social class and economic status as well as their respective interests, which is examined in the course of the narrative in the form of constant references to transnational trade, can be considered to be Gordimer's continuing valuation of nature conservation as portrayed in her earlier novel *The Conservationist* (1974), but this time, the story's setting is a post-apartheid South Africa (see Vital 90-91).

Given these lines as a starting point for further examinations, the following sections will elaborate the important concepts of ecology, environmentalism along with nature and its conservation, by reflecting critically on the narratives' ecological projects and by connecting the concepts wilderness, freedom and imprisonment with the garden and nature in general. Moreover, the contradictions Paul finds in his conservation work and the contradictory relation of ecology and economy concerning transnational trade and political-economic interests in a present-day post-apartheid South Africa will be in the focus of attention.

4.1.1 Nature – Wilderness & The Garden

In *Get a Life*, nature is at the interface between Paul Bannerman's illness and the wilderness. Whereas the thyroid cancer – which forces him to be confined in a separate quarantine room and which initiates an enlightening time in the garden – triggers Paul's recollections of his childhood memories and leads him to ponder about his work as an ecologist as well as about the marriage with his wife Benni/Berenice, the wilderness – which represents Paul's workplace in nature – brings the topic of ecology and nature conservation into the foreground and therefore establishes a connection between Paul's private enquiries and South Africa's dealing

with public ecologic/economic matters. Consequently, the following part tries to examine this interconnectedness and attempts to describe the significance as well as the symbolism of nature, wilderness and the garden for the topics ecology and illness as well as for the narrative overall.

On a basic and simple level, nature is Paul's major field of concern, since he spends most of his working hours as an ecologist and nature conservationist outdoors. "His work is scientific, in collaboration with the greatest scientist of all, nature, who has the formula for everything, whether discovered or still a mystery to research by its self-styled highest creation […]"[3]. This important quote from the narrative anticipates nature's extraordinary position with respect to *Get a Life*'s three projects, the environmentalists around Paul Bannerman fight against and in addition, nature – in the above quotation – proves to stand above everything else, which the following paragraphs will even make clearer.

The wilderness, which stands for Paul's workplace at diverse locations in nature, symbolizes freedom from society and the real world as well as a detachment from its demands. The following quote underlines that Paul is withdrawn from the real world when he is working in the wilderness: "The wilderness is an innocent environment whatever else he exposes there; he doesn't know what goes on in the real world." (GL 153) However, when he is suddenly confronted with the serious diagnosis of thyroid cancer, Paul finally has to confront himself with the real world, since he is forced to pause his work in the wilderness and return to his childhood home, where he is accommodated in a separated quarantine room. Nevertheless, he is not only allowed to stay in this single room, but is also free to enter the garden – one of the narrative's most important and telling loci – which will be in the focus of attention in the following paragraphs.

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[3] See Nadine Gordimer. *Get a Life* (Bloomsbury: London. 2005). Page 20. Subsequent references indicated by the acronym GL and the respective page numbers in brackets.

The garden – which could well be understood to stand in opposition to the afore-mentioned quarantine room inside his parents' house Paul is forced to live in for more than two weeks and which resembles a prison cell – symbolizes a temporary escape from reality akin to nature's wilderness and consequently supports Paul's temporary pondering over the discrepancies in his private life. In addition, the garden is also a locus where Paul has a certain form of freedom, which not only reminds him of his work in the wilderness, but which also establishes a connection between the two terms wilderness and garden in reference to nature. The following quote perfectly expresses, on the one hand, that Paul's entering of the garden underlines that he is help-/useless and stresses his status as a weak invalid who poses a threat to other people, and on the other hand, symbolizes his engagement in serious soul-searching. "No connection between that quarantine room and out here. The garden. It's both the place banished to in order to be got rid of by the preoccupations of an adult house, and the place to be yourself, against orders." (GL 49)

Nevertheless, the time he spends in the garden also leads Paul to recollect memories from his childhood and consequently changes the present time garden into the garden of his childhood. In the episodes, where he remembers certain events from his childhood like for example the "experiment with mutual masturbation" (GL 51) in the high grass, the forbidden shooting of birds with a self-made catapult, or the "tussling contests and cricket runs" (GL 51), the reader gets to know Paul's personal past and his longing for the way back to work in the wilderness. Anthony Vital points out that it is the garden, where Paul thinks about the attractive "idea of limitlessness in nature" and that he finds a connection between the garden and wilderness in his adult mind by mixing his memories and his perceptions (see 100). "The wetlands of St. Lucia […] that wilderness can be walked again from this small one, sequence by sequence, impression by impression, scent by scent. […] Only out there, the garden, could the wilderness be regained". (GL 51)

In his article "Another Kind of Combat in the Bush": *Get a Life* and Gordimer's Critique of Ecology in a Globalized World" Anthony Vital also describes the suburban garden, where Paul collects memories of his childhood, as typically South

African, since he only constructs a personal significance from it and totally forgets about or rather eliminates his encounters with the nameless black gardener, who is recognized as black and speaking a certain indigenous African language like for instance Zulu, but whose work is of no special significance (see GL 22, 37). Like this almost invisible gardener, the garden itself also appears to be no different. Although it may have existed during the apartheid years, there is no sense of a change other than in the significance, which derived from Paul's consciousness caused by a shift from childhood to adulthood (see Vital 100-101). "The garden, walled, secured by electronic gate, but nonetheless subject to night-time intrusion, exists in Paul's mind outside of history, its temporarily personal, not social or political." (Vital 101) The night-time intruder, which Lyndsay faces fairly at the beginning of the narrative, the black housekeeper Primrose, the above-mentioned nameless black gardener as well as the still existent street violence among other examples, serve as retrospectives as well as reminders of South Africa's apartheid past and therefore fill the blank, which Paul Bannerman and the other central characters leave empty. In addition, *Get a Life* provides the reader with numerous flashbacks to apartheid days like for instance the separation along racial lines, where blacks where only allowed to visit the zoo on one day in the week, which is discussed during the outing in the Nature Reserve.

Another quote from *Get a Life* also draws on the further above explained concept of freedom by explaining that Paul, who is quarantined because of his radio activeness after the iodine treatment against his thyroid cancer, can only find a connection to his work as well as his former life in the garden. "Only out there, the garden, could the wilderness be gained, the unfinished homework be escaped." (GL 51) Additionally, Paul's temporary solitude in the garden makes him think about his marriage with Benni/Berenice as well as about his work as an ecologist. "[In] the garden, […] there is the wise presence that changes solitude of monologue into some kind of dialogue. A dialogue with questions; or answers never sought, heard in the elsewhere. Not even the wilderness, where they must have, sometime, disturbed the readings of surveying instruments; the body of a fish floating belly-up?" (GL 54)

In the garden, which paradoxically also represents an interspace between the quarantine room and the property's gates, which his son Nicholas is not allowed to cross and which estranges his father from him, Paul also spends rather good times, either alone pondering about his life or together with his literally fearless work mate Thapelo. "The endless hours he seems to spend in the garden. No book, no radio. Imagine, an attempt to leave the state behind in this prison-home." (GL 67) The various states of existence – temporary or permanent – the novel describes as well as the quotation's reference to the prison-home also remind oneself of the changing conditions. In the case of *Get a Life*, it is Paul Bannerman who finds a way to temporarily escape his prison and in the wider context it is South Africa and its past, which can be overcome and which, like Paul's temporary state of radioactive existence, can be come to terms with and left behind. However, as the narrative makes clear, just as Paul's cancer might have left traces of it back in his body, a fear which is raised in the novel by his subsequent scans in hospital and the fear that he would not be able to beget another child, South Africa's apartheid past also left traces of its violence, racial hatred and its whole system behind.

South Africa's apartheid past, or rather Paul's repression of it and replacement of it with his childhood memories, are touched upon by Anthony Vital in the upcoming paragraph. He analyses that the narrative establishes a connection between the absence of Paul's interest in South Africa's national history recollecting the apartheid years and a modern form of romanticism, which can be best felt in his perception of nature. Paul's entering into the garden, as an example, is signalled in the following one-sentence paragraph: "What do you do when you have no obligation, no everyday expectation of yourself and others?" (GL 22) Here, Paul associates "nature with freedom from social demands", which however not only Paul does, but which is actually part of a family culture. Just like when he remembers his parents spending their weekends in "the bush," taking their dog for "long walks", "its sense of freedom matched by theirs", the leisure industry his wife Benni/Berenice works for commercialises "a few days' break" in the "bush" (GL 33, 49, 56) (see Vital 100).

"Paul's apprehension of nature […] is presented as circling about this basic opposition between the social as category and nature as a realm of attractive ahistorical freedom." (Vital 101) In two moments of reflection, in which Paul explores the contradictions in ideas of conservation, this opposition reveals his ecological thought as originating in an urbanizing European eighteenth century (see Vital 101). The subsequent two sections about the Okavango Delta and the Nature Reserve should exemplify these contradicting ideas and highlight Paul Bannerman's thoughts about nature and how he understands it from the perspective of an ecologist.

4.1.2 The Okavango Delta

"The Okavango is an inland delta in Botswana, the country of desert and swamp landlocked in the middle of the breadth of South West, South and South East Africa. That's it on the maps; nature doesn't acknowledge frontiers. Neither can ecology." (GL 90) This, in the first part of the quote, seemingly neutral description of the Okavango Delta – which is the most evaluated of the three ecological projects dealt with in *Get a Life* – ultimately pinpoints the fact that Paul's work as an ecologist can be nothing else but self-serving and satisfying only for himself and his fellow environmentalists, since nature actually does not adjust to the frontiers built up by humans, and nature actually does not need humans to successfully operate (see also Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 131).

In the course of the narrative, Paul meditates on the delta's natural processes and concludes that "[…] water brings seeds from afar, alien seeds grow into trees; waters bring sand from afar, sand leaching salt; the risk of salt contamination is managed by nature, and clean water continues to fertilise the land." (Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 131) Additionally, this pondering, which underlines the aspects mentioned in the paragraph above, brings him to draw a parallel from his ecological knowledge to the problems and threats the three ecological projects pose. "[W]e don't know how the salt is managed. It *is* […] we drink that water! This's what we should work on, how with the Okavango the balance between positive and negative is achieved …" (GL 92) So here, Paul advises mankind and especially the environmentalists and ecologists among his friends and colleagues, not to just take certain things for given,

but to explore nature's proceedings in more detail in order to get the best for nature and also for humanity out of it.

Although it depicts Paul's excitement about the impressive Okavango Delta as positive and it also shows how amazed he actually is by nature's management of it, the quotation – "The Okavango delta in co-existence with a desert is a system of elements contained, maintained – by the phenomenon itself, unbelievably, inconceivably. The Okavango is a primal feature of creation, so vast it can be seen by astronauts from Outer Space." (GL 91) – highlights his understanding of it as an ecologist, who has to recognize that his professional ecological terminology is insufficient in this respect. This impossibility of understanding nature makes grasping the complexity of the Delta even more difficult, as Paul has to acknowledge when he asks himself the following question: "Where to begin understanding what we've only got a computerspeak label for, ecosystem?" and when he scrutinizes the term "biodiversity" (GL 91-93) (see Vital 101).

To return to the initially explained description of the Okavango Delta and its functionality, nature, in this sense and in this scenario, is sublime and humans have no control of it, a fact, which seems to be quite appealing, because nature changes and rearranges on it's own account and also adjusts to these rearrangements. In this process, nature does not need human actions, although Paul for instance "claims to work in the service of nature" and that this is simply the role he plays even though he cannot find strong arguments for nature conservation (see Vital 101-102).

Gordimer's elaboration of the Okavango Delta after all "[…] reveals Paul's suburban form of ecological thinking as profoundly ideological, a thinking in the (unacknowledged) service of maintaining the social order that benefits him." (Vital 102) This exposure of Paul's ideological way of thinking also becomes evident in the second encounter at the Nature Reserve, which Paul and Benni/Berenice Bannerman attend with their son Nicholas and Lyndsay with her adopted child Klara.

4.1.3 The Nature Reserve

At the Nature Reserve, Paul marvels at the successful evolutionary strategy of the Black Eagle. He struggles with nature's solution – "two chicks always born, one chick always throwing the other out of the nest" (Vital 102) – which makes the eagle "symbolic of the power of nature to overcome the limitations imposed on it". (Tenenbaum 50) Paul concludes that this strategy is certainly inhumane and can thus never be understood by humans (see Vital 102-103). Again, the description of nature's approach here, which is additionally described with the help of the biblical story of Cain and Abel, equals the one nature applies at the impressive Okavango Delta. It is nature's destiny to only let the fittest survive, and that is what mankind, on the one side, cannot grasp and therefore, on the other side, also should not challenge and change.

Anthony Vital reasons that this puzzling about nature as well as nature's strategies and the solutions Paul finds in it, rest on "romantic patterns of thinking", which are meant "to maintain a suburban sense of order", but the puzzling and its solutions also originate in the language and discourse normalizing his life, which, on the one hand consists of him as a professional ecologist and, on the other hand, of him as a father and husband. Paul, being a representative of such a discourse, identifies the visits to the Nature Reserve as "family outings" (see Vital 103). In his substantial article, where he offers an elaborated criticism of ecology in Nadine Gordimer's *Get a Life*, Vital also discovers another of Gordimer's metaphors dealing with a binary opposition, which draws on the metaphor hidden in the seemingly ordinary phrase of the family outing. He suggests that the family in the narrative and especially during the family outing in the reserve fills the "inside" part of an "outside/inside binary". Reflecting on the eagle's significance also includes "the modern opposition of 'freedom' and 'imprisonment'"; therefore resembling the lesson about not keeping animals caged Paul was taught by his mother in his childhood. Although the setting suggests the oppositions of "the outside", "freedom" and "wilderness", the Nature Reserve is just a social construct, and we may thus assume that "[…] nature as 'outside' stands in opposition to the social world as 'inside' [and that it] shapes characters' perceptions through the novel's end." (Vital 103; see also Vital 103)

4.1.4 Economy

By describing the characters' lives in national as well as in international contexts, *Get a Life* provides insights into the complex historic connection of ecology with political-economic structures (see Vital 97). This connection can be revealed to be contradictory, as the following quote apparently indicates:

> On the one hand, Bannerman's thinking is in accord with a changed evaluation of conservation in South Africa. No longer viewed as the preoccupation of an elite rooted in a colonial past, the natural environment becomes with the political changes circa 1990 a concern across social sectors, from wealthy to impoverished, and after 1994 a cause as well for the national government at ministerial level. (Vital 97)

Since the environment is now for all to benefit from, having the potential to assist people generally as well as other species, Paul Bannerman's activism for nature is considered to be progressive and to have "broad social benefits". Nevertheless, how the novel represents South Africa's national agendas, depends on the country's ambiguous situation as both independent and part of economic and cultural capital flows in a globalised world. This means that these transnational relations are indeed contradictory, because the tourism, which evolved from the conservation and protection of the environment, actually involves transnational traffic (see Vital 98).

Moreover, the industrial activity in the form of mining proposed by an Australian corporation, threatens the ecological environment on the coast of Pondoland. Concerning this controversial exploitation of nature, Paul struggles with the thought, that the Pondoland area is resourceful because it harbours sources of various salts and ilmenite, which could be utilized by humans. However, on the other hand, the narrative steps away from a possibly positive side of building the toll road, since it would not only have the resettlement of people living in the area as a consequence, but the narrative also comes up with simply one more positive aspect, namely the use of the resources in the cosmetics industry. Therefore, South Africa's natural environment is presented as a multiple resource for national and transnational constituencies, an indication of an uncomfortable relation between ecology and economy, since nature is the target of exploitation (see also Vital 98). Over and

above all this, with *Get a Life*, Nadine Gordimer offers a form of critique on the way South Africa handles economic issues and also focuses on the role globalisation plays concerning economic-political projects. As mentioned by drawing on the Australian mining company as well as other international companies, the narrative – by showing the ecological work of Paul and his work mates – makes clear that it is important to conserve nature and not just satisfy the national as well as international companies' greed of gain.

With respect to the three projects Paul and his friends and teammates Derek and Thapelo are occupied with in *Get a Life*, the end of the narrative marks at least a temporal win for the ecologists, environmentalists and/or nature conservationists, because the projects are currently abandoned due to a number of reasons, among which are the lack of money and ecological reasons concerning nuclear energy. Nevertheless, as the very end of the novel makes clear, the stoppage of the project might well just be a strategy to quiet the minds of the protesters, and the systematic destruction of the environment will continue, as the very end of this chapter will deal with a little later.

4.2 Illness

In her literary works, Nadine Gordimer has often written about illness/sickness, but it was not the sickness of an individual like Paul in *Get a Life*, but rather the sickness of a society, more precisely South Africa under and after apartheid. Since illness, next to ecology, predominates the narrative and Gordimer introduces her readers to the new trope – "a young man forced to retreat from the world into illness and isolation" (Dimitriu *Getting a Life*, 126) – we may ask ourselves what Paul's disease and his subsequent contamination might signify, and what the symbolism of Gordimer's chosen disease for Paul might be (see Dimitriu *Getting a Life*, 126; see Harrison no page numbers).

The subsequent sections therefore try to find an answer to the questions of what Paul's disease symbolises and of what the consequences of it are for him and his life as an ecologist as well as a father and husband. More exactly, this section's most

elaborated part on the trope of illness identifies the disease's significance on a linguistic level and also describes its political notion by underlining the findings with multiple quotations from the narrative.

4.2.1 Symbolism

In the course of the narrative, Paul is constantly referred to as "[t]he pestilent one, the leper" (GL 6), "[t]he new leper." (GL 6), "an Untouchable" (GL 42, 56), "the twenty-first-century leper" (GL 54) or "the leper himself" (GL 60), which are all designations signifying his status as leprous, infectious and overall dangerous to other people. As already mentioned several times before, Paul has thyroid cancer, which, as the following quote shows, certainly could not have been a random and coincidental choice by Nadine Gordimer. "The organ affected by disease is the thyroid gland, which is considered from a spiritually-symbolic point of view (Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 126) "the seed and fruit of the Tree of Knowledge [so that] he who opens up this fruit has access to the World and Knowledge." (De Souzenelle 333 quoted in Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 126) Therefore, the affection of the thyroid gland could well be related to Paul's constant pondering about his work as an ecologist, to his lengthy meditations about his current status as a husband and father, as well as to the thoughts about his serious disease and its consequences, when he gets the diagnosis and is then proverbially left to himself in his quarantine room after the iodine treatment. In addition, according to the quote above, Paul's sickness might also stand for his extraordinary thirst for knowledge, which seems to be even more increased after the diagnosis and is especially evident, when he and his workmates Derek and Thapelo work on the Okavango Delta case, and when Paul accompanies his family to the Nature Reserve.

Ileana Dimitriu, in her article "Nadine Gordimer: Getting a Life after Apartheid", continues by explaining that "[a]ccording to interpretations of the body symbolism by eastern philosophies, […] the throat-region/chakra is also considered to be the seat of creativity and communication (Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 126), "a point of entry to the innermost recesses of the spirit and self-knowledge." (Ozaniec 152 quoted in Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 126) This kind of symbolism doubtlessly points to the fact

that Paul's engaging in serious soul-searching is essential for him to get a life and that getting seriously ill is necessary for the revelation of his real and true self, which seems to be hidden or at least untouched before the cancer diagnosis, and which might not have changed his life. Dimitriu further states that Gordimer repeatedly mentions that something "had Paul by the throat" (GL 3, 16), or that his "ability to communicate was stifled" (GL 43). Consequently, the bodily location of Paul's disease has an obvious symbolic value, and it needs to be related to and compared with the other literary conventions of symbols and themes in the narrative. Paul, due to his illness and the subsequent radioactive contamination, has a constricted ability to communicate verbally with others and he is physically and emotionally isolated from his family. After being diagnosed with cancer, "[t]he new leper, that's how he thinks of himself" (GL 6) "[…] stood there, alone" (GL 7), his "cutlery is kept apart" (GL 14), "he's learning to be alone in his way" (GL 33) and "even the family dog avoids him" (GL 48) (see Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 126). However, it is exactly this physical and emotional isolation, which is achieved through the fenced garden and the separate quarantine room as well as the prescribed distance, he has to keep to other people, which is essential for Paul's soul-searching and the consequence of getting a life.

Taking all these quotations from the novel into consideration, Paul's illness is a perfect example of Susan Sontag's coined term "Illness as Metaphor", as described in her book of the same title. Sontag argues that "[…] the most truthful way of regarding illness – and the healthiest way of being ill – is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking." (Sontag n.p. quoted in Harrison n.p.) Given this quote and the above-mentioned excerpts from the novel, Paul is doubtlessly ill in a deeply unhealthy way (see Harrison n.p.). This becomes even more evident, when we have another repeated look at the first part of the novel, which is full of shorthand expressions connected with leprosy and its various states of being: "Paul is a "lit-up leper"" (GL 33), "the emanation" (GL 37), "the leper himself" (GL 60), "an Untouchable" (GL 42), and he feels "[…] a lack of purpose (GL 20)" and "a sense of entrapment […]" (GL 82). In my opinion, some of these expressions among which are "a lit-up leper" (GL 33) and "the emanation" (GL 37), can also be understood in

a more or less positive way, because they also entail the concept of enlightenment or epiphany, which point to Paul's gradual process of emotional realisation about his life, both private and working life, when he is cut off from the outside world and forced into solitude. Moreover, this solitude then leads him to rethink his purpose in life, and since he feels entrapped, there is no other way than to deliberate.

In her article "Nadine Gordimer: Getting a Life after Apartheid", Ileana Dimitriu also suggests that Gordimer's use of Paul's symbolic status as "the twenty-first century leper" (56) gives reason to further investigate the wider significance of Paul and his disease, and she poses the following questions: "Does the physical disease suggest unease with the statues quo? Is a young white male in the new South Africa 'the new leper'?" (*Getting a Life* 127) These two questions cannot be answered straight away, since Gordimer in the first place does neither discuss such issues directly nor does she spell them out publicly and secondly, because she points out that her characters are not meant to anticipate everything and that her readers have to intuit for themselves what has not been spelt out straight away (see Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 127; see also Isaacson quoted in Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 127). I agree with Dimitriu here, because Gordimer's fiction doubtlessly encourages the readers to read between the lines and fill the narrative's empty spaces by themselves. However, what Paul's illness and its bodily symbolism may well stand for, is the indisposition about the current status as well as South Africa's future, a fear which is described through the controversial topic of ecology, but which certainly features in quite a great amount of other topics concerning the identification process of a nation, which has witnessed a difficult past and is yet to witness a difficult present and future. This indisposition in *Get a Life* is depicted on various levels. Firstly, it refers to Paul's illness and that he does not feel well physically and consequently also mentally, secondly, it alludes to Paul's predicaments concerning the environmental projects he is concerned with, and thirdly, all these indispositions flow into post-apartheid South Africa's uncertain future and Gordimer's preoccupation with its problematic status.

After having regarded Paul's disease from a metaphorical and symbolic point of view, the next part will connect the trope of illness with linguistic and political aspects and concepts.

4.2.2 The Master Trope of Illness

In his article "Unspeakable Phrases: The Tragedy of Point of View in Nadine Gordimer's *Get a Life*" – which will also be the main reference source for the following sections on the trope of illness – Julián Jiménez Heffernan focuses especially on *Get a Life*'s linguistic features and argues that, in Gordimer's fiction, the self may have its authority imperilled in three parallel ways: "first, through multivoicedness, when it takes on someone else's voice; second, through commitment, when it assumes someone else's moral position; third, through estrangement, when it welcomes an external body." (88) Heffernan acknowledges that this listing has the advantage that a great amount of Gordimer's central matters in her fiction – like for example "the ethical relation between the private and the public" (88), certain conflicts concerning gender and race, or the clash between the self and the other on an erotic level as well as of languages, which long for prominence in the narrative – converge so that not each of them has to be examined separately. The following paragraphs therefore attempt to describe the fusion of these above-mentioned three modes of imperilled authority into the term "defencelessness" in Gordimer's late writing (see Heffernan 88).

In *Get a Life*, the master trope of illness, which can be identified on various interrelated levels, as Heffernan lists in the subsequent paragraph, is mediated through this above-mentioned crisis of authority (see 88).

> Thematically, it accounts for the obtrusive centrality of cancer and AIDS. Psychologically, it enhances the novel's prevailing atmosphere of estrangement and alienation. Politically, it promotes a relapse into nightmares of interracial vulnerability; illness, moreover, provides Gordimer with fresh means for dramatizing the "morbid symptoms" (Gramsci) of a crisis of authority still visible in postapartheid South Africa. Linguistically, it informs the diseased condition of the narrative prose, best described […] as the inherently sick jargon of the interregnum. (Heffernan 88-89)

Whereas the thematic, psychological, political, and verbal level strengthen each other, the stylistic level seems to stand above all the other afore-mentioned levels, because the usage of free indirect speech accounts for most of the stylistic anomalies, which can be detected in the course of the narrative (see Heffernan 89). The upcoming section on style and language identifies these stylistic anomalies in numerous quotations from the novel and mostly deals with the free indirect speech style and how it relates to the master trope of illness. The next but one section then focuses on the political level and in particular on the comparison of Paul's quarantine and South Africa's interregnum, which was also explained in the quoted paragraph.

4.2.2.1 Illness & the Linguistic Notion – Style & Language

"The writing deploys […] an unusually rich variety of stylistic devices that verge on a-grammaticality and serve to promote a sense of fragmentation and confusion. These devices are ellipsis, appended clauses, syntactical correction, and free indirect style." (Heffernan 90) The subsequent paragraphs should give an overview of these manifold and indeed awkward stylistic devices detected and described by Julián Jiménez Heffernan in his extensive article about *Get a Life*'s unspeakable phrases and should then emphasize them with short excerpts from the novel.

"Only the street-sweeper swishing his broom to collect fallen leaves from the gutter" (GL 3), the novel's first sentence, apparently is an example of an ellipsis, which needs to be reconstructed. Isolated phrases, which are very common in the narrative – like for example "The pestilent one, the leper" (GL 6), "The picture of health" (GL 8), "The unbelievable become one flesh" (GL 9), "No closeness to his parents, really" (GL 10), "Taken for granted" (GL 11), "Enough" (GL 16), "So thirty-five, a candidate" (GL 16) – of which some are appended clauses, can be regarded as reluctant after-thoughts or starting phrases gathering "reflective momentum" (see Heffernan 90).

Heffernan moves on by explaining that "[t]here are also strings of appositional phrases, or floating phrases and elliptical sentences in interrupted sequences […] "(90), as the following extracts prove. "Lindsay and Adrian. His parents. *The*

parents" (GL 10), "When he was in the wilderness her city place did not exist for him, as at her console in that city space his wilderness did not exist for her. Neither does. Both equally unreachable. He's the receded. It's him. Far away." (GL 15) Syntactical corrections or so-called transitional zones "[…] where the syntactical structure seems altered half-way through the sentence […]" (Heffernan 90) are other instances of Gordimer's seemingly awkward stylistic devices. Here, the reader senses an "[…] *extempore* convolution, a difficulty arising from the meandering, tentative improvisation of a stammering mind." (Heffernan 90, original emphasis)

Nevertheless, the most frequent device, which also accounts for the three other ones, is the free indirect speech style, which can be first detected on the initial pages of the novel, but which becomes fully observable, when Paul's parents make decisions "in a loop of inter-vocal consciousness." (Heffernan 90) When Paul gets informed about the radio activeness after his treatment and after the doctors have recommended him to return to his parental home in order to protect his wife and his young son, uncontrolled emotions, which affect Paul as well as his parents, come up (see Heffernan 90).

> It was not for a moment necessary to wonder what to do. Lyndsay spoke at once, for both of them, and it was there, in the tightening of Adrian's forehead and his darkly fixed eye, that she was certainly so doing. – He'll come to us. Until it's safe. –
>
> Taken for granted.
>
> It would have been somehow intrusive to bring up the risk to them; clearly that final of all matters, the value of life and death, had long been discussed ultimately and privately, and resolved between them. Don't break down in emotion of gratitude. (GL 11)

The first sentence, which is uttered by the narrator, may be seen through the perspective of the parents. The phrase "Taken for granted" (GL 11) undoubtedly is a confirmation that the structuring device can only be free indirect style. Since we do not know who the speaker of this elliptical phrase is, we consequently also have no clue about the authority (see Heffernan 91). "The phrase is either an afterthought of one of the parents, seeking further confirmation of the rightness of the decision, or

else an oracular intrusion of an ominously sympathetic narrator who reads deep into her character's motivations and judges accordingly." (Heffernan 91, see also Banfield 69) The following sentence, however, alternates between the authorities of the narrator and Paul's: "It would have been somehow intrusive to bring up the risk to them." (GL 11) "The last performative "Don't break down in emotion of gratitude" (GL 11) must be understood as Paul's self-addressed admonition. Otherwise we would have to resort to an omniscient narrator, now in the role of a God-like supervisor […]" (Heffernan 91) The chapter's last part, which concentrates on the opposition between author, narrator and character, dedicates itself to this tricky differentiation and further elaborates the concept of a God-like omniscient narrator. Summing up, the effect of the above passage is overall one of "plural consciousness, shifting authority, and interlocking voices." (Heffernan 91)

The following passage, Julián Jiménez Heffernan is concerned with in his article, illustrates the strained relation between Paul's sister Emma and their parents Adrian and Lyndsay.

> He [Adrian] suggested to their daughter that you can perhaps destroy out of pride and anger, too hastily, what may be essential for you. She had been so crazily in love with the man, whatever had happened to them since. Give yourself time to be sure whether the heady power of rejection […] hasn't taken from you the one you really want, worth an acceptance of all the disillusion come about. So the girl who had married too young didn't take quick and tidy divorce (GL 66) (see Heffernan 91).

The switch from Adrian's direct address to his daughter and the narrator's isolated report, which becomes obvious in the transition from she to you, gets more and more perplexing, when we reach the last sentence, "So the girl who had married too young didn't take quick and tidy divorce" (GL 66) (see Heffernan 91). "This cruelly ironic statement is again technically *unspeakable*, for its authority resides indistinctly in Adrian and the narrator. Who says that sentence? Who exactly *sentences* Emma to the banality of her petit-bourgeois fate? Her father? The narrator? Both? None?" (Heffernan 91)

Besides this difficult differentiation between author, narrator and character, as well as the narrative's unspeakable parts, a lot of reviewers called the above-mentioned idiosyncrasies of *Get a Life*'s style "straining grammar", the writing "uncomfortably towards self-parody" and the style "telegraphic" and "at once incantatory and distancing" (Heffernan 91). Jane Stevenson, as only one example among many other critics, wrote the following in her *Observer* review: "Gordimer's style has always been spare, but here it is elliptical to the point, at times, of straining grammar beyond its normal bounds." (Stevenson n.p.) She adds that the novel to some extent appears not to have been edited or proofread because "[t]here are sentences which change direction ungrammatically, adjectives where an adverb is expected – conceivably authorial license, but at points, looking like simple error." (Stevenson n.p.)

Given all theses instances of stylistic anomalies, it is inevitable to ask ourselves, what Gordimer wants to achieve with them and what this extraordinary style should symbolize. A possible explanation of or rather justification for Gordimer's narrative style in *Get a Life* can again be found in Heffernan's article "Unspeakable Phrases: The Tragedy of Point of View in Nadine Gordimer's *Get a Life*". He outlines that

> [i]t is rather a radicalization of Gordimer's ongoing experiment with narrative diction. The goal and conditions of this experiment are no doubt still open to discussion, but there is some critical consensus regarding the dialectic that has informed Gordimer's fiction since the full revelation back in the 1970s of her modernist credentials. (Heffernan 92)

According to this consensus, her fiction is a seesaw between the realistic narrative including third-person conventional forms and the modernist techniques of perspectivism, stream of consciousness and indirect free style (see Heffernan 92).

Next to matters of style, language is central to the linguistic notion of the master trope of illness. Heffernan concludes that "[t]he language of *Get a Life* is the sick jargon of the interregnum. And the interregnum is the purgatorial realm where we are, where we have always been. Gordimer seems to have undergone of late a gradual process of sceptical disenchantment." (98) Nadine Gordimer's former progressive and teleological vision of South Africa's historical process seems to have

stagnated in *Get a Life* and her fiction also implies that the "morbid mutations" caused by racist politics and laws in the course of South Africa's apartheid history can still be felt in the post-apartheid South African era. Furthermore, this feeling of disenchantment in the aftermath of apartheid can be explained insofar as "[…] Gordimer seems to have gathered a new courage, a sort of creative rage that had been always there, if only hidden under a mask of typicality and representativeness." (Heffernan 98) *Get a Life*, other than her previous novels, does not profit from a narrator or character equipped with moral authority and a certain support equipped with background information (see Heffernan 98). So while Gordimer felt the need and the responsibility to represent the struggle against apartheid in her fiction, she now breaks free from this and is preoccupied with a different sort of creative writing, which completely leaves her the choice of her topics and other concerns.

Julián Jiménez Heffernan, in the following quotation, once more draws on the function of language in the narrative and also reasons that in *Get a Life*, Gordimer is still searching for her new position in a country where she has witnessed so much and still finds no rest.

> Gordimer might have always suspected that language is sick, that language is a material (corporal) medium struggling to accrue and ultimately impose its own authority. […] Language is regarded as a circulating social commodity that cruises the mind generating transitory flashes of consciousness and a fleeting sense of identity. Words are ideological waste, derelict, calcified, and unreliable. Under these conditions, all claims to moral representativeness are doomed to failure. Gordimer is still speaking, but she no longer knows from where. This uncertain position may be described as a tragedy of point of view. She believed once that she knew, or she deluded herself in the pride of such believe. But now she seems to have fully accepted an inability to understand her place, that is, the place of her voice. (Heffernan (99)

Summing up, the above-debated examples of stylistic devices and *Get a Life*'s idiosyncratic language not only confuse the readers, but also hand over the work of interpreting and deciphering the story to them, because Gordimer holds back an omniscient narrator or character. Additionally, these stylistic elements mark a change in Gordimer's writing, since she no longer has the clear view about South Africa's future prospects, which she might have had back during the apartheid era.

4.2.2.2 Illness & the Political Notion – Quarantine & Interregnum

Whereas commitment, involving "the moral relation between the private and the public", was the general theme in Gordimer's earlier fiction, inter-racial conflict is no longer dominant (see Heffernan 93-94). On the basis of the two prominent black characters Thapelo and Primrose, as well as the mentioning of Benni's black co-workers and the Bannerman's black gardener among other instances, otherness as well as a certain racial division still finds its place in the novel. *Get a Life* suggests not only that in the new South Africa, inter-racial friendship, the recognition of the black population and the overall co-existence between black and white people no matter which class they belong to are daily matters, but also that the country now has to challenge other issues.

The new form of political commitment is reached by depicting the work of ecological activists and the charity between Paul and the people closest to him. Heffernan finds one possible explanation for this development in the fact that *Get a Life* deals with the related themes of authority and existence, which are less context-determined, and which imply that there may be another authority controlling the self, a fate that is realized in the novel through the omnipresence of illness. After being surprised by coming down with cancer, Paul loses the authority over his own life. Illness – in the case of *Get a Life* Paul's cancer and Klara's AIDS – stands for otherness and it is expressed through the body, which is the actual target of alienation. Paul's discovery of the truth of illness "[…] is followed by enforced quarantine, a circumstance that deepens a sense of uncanny familiarity with the body […]" (Heffernan 94; see Heffernan 93-94). In order to maintain a link between the terms illness, quarantine and interregnum it is worth having a look at translations and interpretations of the term interregnum.

Julián Jiménez Heffernan explains that "[t]echnically speaking, an interregnum is a reign or tenure of power during a temporary vacancy of a throne or suspension of the ordinary government.", and he mentions that the term has the figural meaning of a "period of freedom from customary authority," or simply to "a lapse, a break, or a

pause in a continuous series." (*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, 1967* In Heffernan 95)

In the early 1980s, Gordimer used the term, which can also be translated as "[…] a temporary state of emergency in the political order of a State where legitimate authority remains uncertain" (Heffernan 95; see also Clingman *History from the Inside*) as a metonymy for South Africa's historical confusion before overcoming the injustices of apartheid. This historical confusion can be metaphorically transferred to "morbid symptoms", which in turn can be identified as objective correlations for the political stagnancy of the interregnum (see Heffernan 95).

While the disease touches all sides of the conflict and causes "emotional perplexity", "psychological disintegration", "moral paralysis", and "pragmatic stasis", "[…] the political interregnum is symbolically materialized through Paul's quarantine" (Heffernan 96). Appearing first on page 14, the recurrent use of the term needs further detailed explanation (see Heffernan 96).

> 1) The period often of 40 days during which a widow is permitted by law to remain in her deceased husband's principal home without being obliged to pay rent to the heirs;
>
> 2) a term (as of 40 days) during which a ship arriving in port and suspected of carrying serious contagious disease is forbidden all intercourse with the shore;
>
> 3) a stoppage of travel, communication, or intercourse imposed as a precaution against contagion or infection or the spreading of plant or animal pests.
>
> (Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, 1968 quoted in Heffernan 96-97)

Emanating from these three definitions of the term interregnum, Heffernan states that the second and the third meaning implicate the notions of disease or infection and the connection with the notion of interregnum can be found in their shared consequence of stoppage. Noteworthy, however, is, that illness cannot only be the cause of stagnancy but also the consequence of it (see Heffernan 96-97). "Thus, the morbidity of Paul's interregnum does not arise only from his illness, but also from the

purposelessness caused by his forced quarantine: “What do you do when you have no purpose, are allowed no purpose but something his mother has called ‘recuperate’.” (GL 20) There has happened a transformation from the body politic of South Africa to Paul’s political body. The crisis does not just originate from the cancer, but also from Paul’s inability to cope with the existential surprise the disease and the treatment had brought along (see Heffernan 97). It is also noteworthy, that this purposelessness, the loss of authority and the inability to cope with the current situation also remind one of Gordimer’s stylistic experimentations mentioned earlier on and they also underline Gordimer’s distancing from the public platform, which she occupied during apartheid.

Consequently, Paul has no longer authority over his life. His parents and their housekeeper Primrose are the new authors of his life who have “temporary but commanding” power, his workmates Derek and Thapelo take over his part concerning ecological matters, and his wife Benni/Berenice decides to become pregnant without his consent. Similarly, his mother also has to cope with her own marital crisis and loses the authorship of her life. The narrator conjoins the two terms interregnum and quarantine with the help of this shared crisis: “If this was an interregnum his mother was managing it just as she had managed the isolation of quarantine” (GL 139) (see Heffernan 97).

In a nutshell, “[i]llness is the metaphorical vehicle for a literal tenor which is the interregnum as a historical crisis of authority. Political crisis and psychological crisis are thus made to correspond via the semantic resourcefulness of the master-trope disease.” (Heffernan 97) The novel is after all about a crisis of authority over the body and therefore it does not come as a surprise, that the novel comprises a conflict of dominion over language. Thus, the narrator, just as Nadine Gordimer herself, is unable or unwilling to keep the character’s voices under control with the effect of an authority in crisis (see Heffernan 97).

Julián Jiménez Heffernan closes his article “Unspeakable Phrases: The Tragedy of Point of View in Nadine Gordimer’s *Get a Life*” by identifying Nadine Gordimer’s

tragedy. The first meaning of the term quarantine – "The period often of 40 days during which a widow is permitted by law to remain in her deceased husband's principal home without being obliged to pay rent to the heirs." (*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* 1968 quoted in Heffernan 96-97) – refers to the following passage from the novel: "His mother became somehow part of the life returned to, taken up, in his house; as if with the end of its occupation as a place of quarantine and in the absence of the father the house was no longer home" (GL 140) (see Heffernan 104). Emanating from this quotation is that "[…] the widow is always Gordimer. The principal home is South Africa. Her residence has been, is, will always be, a temporary occupation. Her life unfolds in an interregnum. Hers is no country for old women." (Heffernan 104)

4.3 Characters

Due to the fact that *Get a Life*'s central characters – Paul and Benni/Berenice Bannerman and their 10-year-old son Nicholas, Paul's parents Adrian and Lyndsay Bannerman, Paul's fellow workers Derek and Thapelo – along with their particular jobs, their respective attitudes and life-styles as well as their class affiliations, play an important role in the process of grasping the narrative – including the topics ecology in the present day South Africa and Paul's illness, dealt with in the previous two sections – it is inevitable to discuss Gordimer's selection of her central characters. Over and above the selection of these central and most important characters, it is also crucial to examine their identities and consequent oppositions, their social circles as well as their actions within these, the way all these choices may influence our interpretations of them and of the whole narrative, and how Gordimer plays with all that in order to attempt to confuse the readers with the inseparable distinction between narrator, character and author.

Although the previous two sections on ecology as well as on illness were also partly concerned with the description of characters and their roles in the narrative, this last part on the narrative's characters intends to dig even deeper into the matter and reveal their social and class affiliation as well as the limitations connected with these. In his article on *Get a Life*'s ecological criticism, Anthony Vital claims that despite

the limitations rooting in their social affiliations and although they sporadically behave incalculably and unsteadily, the central characters appearing in *Get a Life* are introduced as good characters and the narrative presents them as overall likeable and their behaviour as convincingly characteristic of the social class they are members of (see Vital 95-96). Furthermore, Vital mentions that "[…] the narrative develops characters attractive in their intelligence, civility and civic conscience […] and attractive too for their nuanced self-regard, sensibly balanced between criticism and self-understanding." (Vital 96) To back this up, he refers to an example from the narrative, in which Benni, although she lacks commitment, leads Paul to engage in a little soul-searching and she is additionally also shown in a humorous social circle, while the narrative is not entered by voices that might interrupt the characters' illustrations of their own lives (see Vital 96).

In fact, the characters we are introduced to in the course of the narrative are typical examples of Gordimer characters, which have already appeared in her former fiction and especially in her two other post-apartheid novels *The House Gun* and *The Pickup*. These central characters are mostly members of the well-off upper-classes or middle-classes, they have respectable jobs, live in or near the wealthy Suburbs of diverse South African cities and they lead sheltered lives without having to confront themselves with the problems of the past and the present. Nevertheless, in *Get a Life*, these seemingly sheltered lives are disrupted by two major disturbances, namely Paul's illness and Adrian's breakup with Lyndsay as well as his death at the end of the novel.

Nevertheless, in spite of their limitations, the narrative convincingly invites its readers to experience the world through the eyes of the central characters and to find their words and deeds, when they are confronted with disturbances like the ones just mentioned now, attractive. These familiar occurrences are exhibited as perfectly normal and the narrative constantly questions what the middle-class characters accept as normal in their lives and in the whole cosmos they live in (see Vital 96). What is missing, however, are the characters' real emotions, when they are confronted with diverse serious problems. When Paul gets diagnosed with cancer, he

replies, that you could also be run over by a bus any time instead, and it is mostly Benni, who shows some kind of reaction and who seems to be touched by Paul's destiny. Nonetheless, she is not really touched by it in the form of feeling with him, but rather by fearing to be in his position herself. In addition, apart from the recurring sentence "*I thought you were going to tell me you were leaving*" (GL 161) as well as her lengthy conversations with her son Paul, Lyndsay's reaction to Adrian's decision to leave her for an affair with a much younger woman, the dramatic events are not commented on a lot by the narrator, and they are also not accompanied by the characters' emotional feelings. Concerning the emotions of the story's black characters Primrose and Thapelo, they don't recognize any danger in Paul's radioactive status and don't hesitate to get in physical contact with him. Maybe, as the narrative also indicates, this seemingly emotional coldness and indeed fearless behaviour might well be explained by the cruelty they have witnessed during apartheid. These experiences make the possible radioactive danger emanating from Paul seem redundant and not even worth mentioning. David Tenenbaum, who also deals with the characters' reasons for detaching themselves from their feelings and emotions (see 45-57), points out that *Get a Life* exhibits the "black characters' courage in contrast to the anxiety of the white middle class" (49).

However, this exhibition of middle-class life and the various occurrences are exactly what can be described as a problematic relationship between the readers of *Get a Life* and the portrayal of its characters. Nadine Gordimer herself is not only part of the well-situated middle-class, she also writes from the standpoint of the Bannermans, themselves a professional middle-class family. Therefore, this relationship in connection with the central characters' social class, which has already been mentioned in the part dealing with the stylistic devices and *Get a Life*'s language, will be in the focus of attention in the following sections on class, identity & opposition and on the problematic distinction between narrator, character and author in the novel.

4.3.1 Class

Just like Gordimer's 1974 novel *The Conservationist*, *Get a Life* reflects critically on ecology and nature conservation by reflecting on the characters' social situations and especially their class affiliations. More precisely, it brings into focus a middle-class family, which lives in a well-protected and controlled suburban private property, and whose members are rarely shown outside from where they feel comfortable, a point, that is indicated by the story's few settings which are the "two upper middle-class homes in or near Johannesburg, primarily, and also, visited briefly, an advertising agency, a nearby Nature Reserve, a fashionable suburban restaurant, and a series of tourist destinations in Mexico" (Vital 92; see Vital 91-92)

Anthony Vital confirms that as in her previous post-apartheid novels, Nadine Gordimer's characters in *Get a Life* find the significance in their lives on a deeply personal level. While "[…] death, sexual and emotional betrayal [as well as] the attempt after illness to bring into being another child […]" (92) are in the main focus of interest, the politics of nationhood, which were important to the characters' personal choices in Gordimer's earlier fiction, are no longer of prior or sole importance. Although political activity still accounts for personal identity, in most of the cases, politics do not influence personal decisions (see Vital 92). Actually, the only way politics are mentioned or play a part in the characters' lives, is when Paul and his fellow co-workers deal with their ecological projects in which they either fight against the government and certain inter-/national companies, or want to ally with politics in order to preserve nature.

In addition to that, as mentioned earlier on, although the narrative deals with the private rather than with the public dimension, it is rather surprising, that the majority of the novel lacks emotional reactions and is not intensively concerned with family ties. One explanation for this can be found in the matter of fact, that for example emotions are rather exchanged with the ecologist's enthusiasm and eagerness connected with ecology and nature conservation. Additionally, emotional relationships within the Bannerman family and between Paul and his colleagues Derek and Thapelo are replaced by business relationship in the characters' respective

jobs. This is made clear in the narrative by explaining that the characters' personal and social experiences are "limited in range locally but [are] wide-ranging globally" (Vital 92) and that people belonging to the middle class will certainly have more in common with each other across the world than with poor people across town. This also reflects in the way class defines subjectivity, as the following quotation shows (see Vital 92).

> The central characters identify themselves in relation to each other – or in relation to those who, on the one hand, confirm their sense of stability (their servants, victimized children, powerful progressive social institutions with which they identify, both national and global) and on the other hand, appear in some distanced way to threaten it (and that includes on occasion the state, for its closeness to corporate interests, both national and global). (Vital 104)

Returning to the already-examined topics of ecology and nature conservation, the above quotation draws on the character's, and in this case Paul and his colleagues' relation to the ecological projects, to the State as well as to the companies they struggle with and fight against. In the course of the novel, we are told about the three projects – "[the] opposing development of the pebble-bed nuclear reactor, the dams in the Okavango Delta, and the Pondoland national toll road and mining scheme" (Vital 93) – the activists around Paul are working on. Anthony Vital judges that while the teammates evaluate the outcome of their work as "having broad-based social consequence[s]", their ecological activism actually has nothing to do with their love for nature (see 93). He carries on by emphasizing that "[t]he conservation Paul engages in is both valuable […] yet limited by being associated with the sort of person Paul represents, economically secure, educationally privileged, and as family member concerned primarily with those closest to him, those who are of his kind." (93)

In summary, by declaring Paul's understanding of environmentalism as class-based, the novel attempts to comment on the connection between ecology and national as well as transnational economic activity. Although Paul Bannerman may well be aware of the fact that his work has a "broad social benefit", we hardly ever come across expressions that would testify such awareness. The way Paul gives attention

to nature is mostly shown in relation to the pleasure he takes when he recognizes other species, but also in relation to his colleagues with whom he fights for justice concerning economic-political matters and in relation to the wilderness he makes use of when he longs for religious experiences (see Vital 98). This also features in the way Paul and his colleagues react to nature and its exploitation. The enthusiasm for their ecological work, as well as the above-described emotional reaction, which seems to consolidate their ego and also serves to underline their positive and justified work in the name of nature.

Due to the fact that many critics attacked Gordimer for choosing a particular class as the predominant and ruling one, but also for providing the readers only with her subjective perceptions of ecological issues, Ileana Dimitriu – by referring to Anthony Vital and also discussing his criticism – floats the following questions:

> Are not all acts of fiction inescapably acts of the subjective imagination? Are we as critics entitled to dictate to writers their terms of fictional engagement? In this case, are we supposed to condemn Gordimer for her focus on a certain class? If so, do we not then risk becoming ideologically prescriptive? […] Is it not […] almost 20 years into our democracy […] legitimate to permit writers the freedom of their fictional choices to depict what they know most intimately? Is Gordimer's depiction of her own class […] too trivial to matter in the larger scheme of South Africa's national challenges? Or does that constitute 'boldness' of an unexpected kind? (Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 125-126)

Just as difficult and seemingly unanswerable these questions might be, not only we as readers are unable to find satisfactory answers to these questions, but also Nadine Gordimer herself does not really attempt to come to terms with a final solution, as we will witness at the very end of this chapter.

4.3.2 Identity & Opposition

Paul's temporary isolation and subsequent solitude in his separated quarantine room, as already covered in the sections above, lead him to an intense soul-searching. Among other things, like for example the meditations about his work as an ecologist/environmentalist, this process of soul-searching also brings Paul to reflect

on his marriage with his wife "Benni/Berenice" (GL 6, 47). From the very beginning of the narrative, she is given a split personality and numerous times, quotes like "[the] combined personality Berenice/Benni" (GL 140) and "[w]as it Berenice or Benni who proposed it. The two personae were more and more mingled in the life they lived now." (GL 116) point to the fact, that Paul's wife comprises two personae, namely the loving wife and mother, as well as the tough-minded businesswoman.

Her job in the advertising industry, which apparently stands in sharp opposition to Paul's occupation as an ecologist and which also holds different views, has a sort of positive influence on the love relationship, as the following quote highlights. "It is probably the contrast in the context and different practices of their working lives that keeps for them a sense of the unknown, even sexually, that usually gets lost in habit after a few years of marriage." (GL 6-7) Together with this sense of the sexual unknown, which constantly freshens up Paul and Benni's love relationship but which also makes them appear to be strangers to each other, sex in *Get a Life* also serves another interesting function. Paul and Benni as well as Adrian and Lyndsay are depicted to have sex or at least to long for it, when they are confronted with life-changing situations and when they face fear. With the act of loving, they temporarily escape their fears and the uncertain future caused by Paul's disease. What this reaction might mean or symbolize can only be guessed, but the love making as a reaction to something frightening, can well be explained in connection with South Africa's apartheid past. The Bannermans, as part of the well-off middle class who did not come into direct contact with the cruelties of apartheid and who therefore also did not have to confront themselves with it, now face their very own tragedy and sex seems to be a temporary solution to their problems.

The following quotes further indicate the opposition between the couple, show that their respective jobs work against each other and are actually contradicting. "Whom does Berenice believe. Him, her man, or the client. What is her conviction when he comes from the wilderness and tells of the irreplaceable forest felled to make way for the casino [and] fish floating belly-up […] What's her conviction within herself. His, or her clients? Or it's not as crude as that." (GL 57). "[W]hat is this all about but an

obvious matter of the incompatibility between the advertising industry and environmental protection. Two clichés. *So what?* Can't even call it by its true term. Irreconcilability." (GL 58) These ponderings about their opposing jobs along with his wife's double identity continue, when Paul works in nature's wilderness. "When he was in a wilderness her city place did not exist for him, as at her console in that city space his wilderness did not exist for her." (GL 15) Pointing to two different lives, this quote not only shows that each of the two is separated from the other through his or her job, but also foreshadows that Paul has to pause from his job in order to become aware of these differences.

The next and last section of this chapter on *Get a Life* deals with yet another distinction, where certain boundaries are indistinct and/or blurred and where the narrative's dealing with class is touched once more. As the next part will reveal and discuss, the differentiation between narrator, character and/or author is difficult and something impossible to notice.

4.3.3 Narrator? Character? Author?

Get a Life's opening sentence fragment "Only the street-sweeper swishing his broom to collect fallen leaves from the gutter" (GL 3) first indicates that Nadine Gordimer distances herself from the novel's prevalent social class while at the same time she seems to be intimate with it. When reading this first line, it is additionally difficult to determine, if it is a character or the narrator, who is noting the presence of the street-sweeper (see Vital 94, 95).

Vital moves on by remarking that in the course of the novel, the characters' and the narrator's perspectives become even further indistinct, which accounts for the feeling that the narrator is very close to the characters and their innermost thoughts and feelings. At the same time, however, the above opening words signal distance, because the following lines in the novel signify how easily the attention of the homeowners slips away from a public servant at work (see Vital 95). This distance is maintained by the sentence following the opening sentence: "The neighbours might

have seen, but in the middle of a weekday morning everyone would be out at work or away for other daily-life reasons." (GL 3)

The fact that the behaviour of the main characters being part of the middle class is predefined, actually means that the reader has no guidance by the narrator concerning the limits of the "characters' perceptions" and their "personal reflections". Furthermore, the readers are left alone with the characters' thoughts and mostly neither does communication by characters happen, nor does the narrator comment on important situations. It is up to the reader to observe what has and has not happened and also how to judge social divisions in the novel (see Vital 95). Moreover, the readers are not only left alone with these perceptions, reflections and thoughts, the narrative is also sparing with words and emotions, when it comes to the characters' feelings. Especially Paul's feelings and his emotional reactions to the potentially deathly diagnosis of serious thyroid cancer are repressed by the narrator and rather if at all shown through Benni's reactions and feelings. Similarly, Lyndsay's emotional reactions when she gets informed about Adrian's decision not to return to her are not narrated in great detail as is the letter, in which Adrian's girl friend Hilde informs Lyndsay about Adrian's death.

An attempt to explain the role of the narrator in *Get a Life* is taken by Julián Jiménez Heffernan. He evaluates the narrator by stating that the "tragic chorus" in the novel is underlined by the "notorious presence" of words like "disaster" (GL 99, 128) and "hubris" (GL 107) and therefore gives convincing reasons, that the narrative's tragic dimension is powerfully indicated by the third person oracular voice, a mixture of cruelty and tenderness at the same time (see Heffernan 100).

> There is something clinically precise, an uncanny accuracy of reference, about this voice, that goes beyond the scientific aloofness of naturalistic narrators and approximates it to the voice of the tragic chorus. After introducing Paul's wife, the narrator comments: "She earns more than he does, of course, but that's no matter for imbalance in the mating since the role-casting of male as the provider is outdated, as the price of feminist freedom" (26). We overhear the off-voice of sociological reportage. Cynicism is here the price the God-like narrator has to pay in exchange for its claim to scientific accuracy. (Heffernan 100)

Heffernan underlines his examination of *Get a Life*'s narrator by revealing that the narrative's chorus and transcendental voice actually alludes to "a deus-ex-machina or supernatural agency", by ironically referring to "Outer Space instructions" (GL 11), to "the oracle of the scan" (GL 14), or to a "God (who) will see he comes through" (GL 19) (see 100). Besides, this voice of the narrator might also indicate that Gordimer is not able to deal with the excessive demands together with an inability to stay in control of as well as keep track of South Africa's development any more. By the adoption of a God-like narrator, she could well attempt to give away responsibility and put South Africa's destiny as well as its problems and concerns into another one's hands.

In her review on *Get a Life*, in which she also deals with the significance of the narrator, Sophie Harrison expresses that Gordimer "[…] indulges in her familiar habit of having her narrator slip casually in and out of her characters' thoughts so that you can never tell quite what is thought and what is narration – a sort of *narrator sans frontières*." (n.p.) She continues to criticize the effect this slipping in and out creates, by calling it "evasive" and "imprecise", and in order to prove her claim, Harrison also draws on the upper example given by Julián Jiménez Heffernan and tries to detect the speaker (see Harrison n.p.).

> "She earns more than he does, of course," which suggests that we're in Paul's mind as he thinks about his wife, is instantly followed by the weird pseudo-sociology of "but that's no matter for imbalance in the mating since the role-casting of male as provider is outdated." The latter half of this thought must belong to the narrator, as surely no one conceives of his marriage as "the mating," however bitterly ironic he may be feeling. (Harrison n.p.)

Another perfect indication for the narrative to have been penned by the narrator is the preference of definite articles to personal pronouns. Paul's son Nicholas is named "the child," his parents are called "the parents" and Paul's wife Benni gets "the wife" as a label. Who other than the narrator would use these words to describe the characters? (see Harrison n.p.).

The closing paragraph of Anthony Vital's article "Another Kind of Combat in the Bush": *Get a Life* and Gordimer's Critique of Ecology in a Globalized World" not only provides a comprehensible logic for the choice of the Bannermans as the central characters as well as the choice of their social class, but also for the novel's overall tone. In the following paragraphs at the end of this chapter on *Get a Life*, I will comment on Vital's lines and by doing so, add my own thoughts about the narrative's closing and its potential underlying meaning and message.

> For no-one can gauge with certainty this current planetary civilization's resilience; the material profits it reaps (for some) may well sustain it, despite costs to humanity and environment. So it seems plausible, in this historical moment, to close a narrative about the professional and managerial classes inconclusively and in the celebratory spirit of comedy. (Vital 111)

Just as already mentioned in the first section of this chapter, in her 2005 novel *Get a Life*, Nadine Gordimer indulges in the topics of ecology and environmentalism by criticising the way nature is exploited and by identifying as well as partly decrying the profiteers of this exploitation. Next to ecology, environmentalism and nature conservation, the topics of inter- and transnational trade – next to the upcoming issue of globalisation – are relatively new phenomena, and, as mentioned repeatedly in the course of this chapter, and just like *Get a Life*'s inconclusive ending, Gordimer cannot really find an effective recipe and also no pioneering instructions for South Africa's successful transformation in the near future.

> For Gordimer's environmentalists the work simply goes on, "no final solution" – and that phrase, surely, is meant to convey a sense of relief over their sensible openness to an unpredictable future, after a century in which terrible crimes were committed in the engineering of social 'solutions.' (Vital 111)

Although the current environmental concerns can hardly, if at all, be compared to apartheid issues, there seems to be no final solution for both of them. Just like apartheid and its ramifications did not immediately vanish with the declared end in the year 1994, Paul and his colleagues are also not able to find an ultimate solution to their ecological work.

> Yet it is plausible as well for the same narrative to guide the reader to look with suspicion at the world's current social arrangements, especially for their inability to compensate for the harms suffered in a history of colonizing modernity. *Get a Life* in its critical realism offers no ideological resting place, no closing harmonies, subjective or (even more illusory) objective. Instead, while calling us to be appreciative of the thoughtful, liberal goodness of its characters, impressed by the undeniable value of ecological thought, it requires we do not forget the realities of past and present dominance, the ineluctable modality of material and discursive power. (Vital 111-112)

After all, Nadine Gordimer, while writing and acting against the apartheid regime and its cruelties for decades, after witnessing inequality, segregation as well as all kinds of brutal violence against the black population of her native country, after authoring and fighting from the public platform and after backing out from the public and concentrating on the private lives of her privileged middle-class characters, still feels uneasy about South Africa's dark past, its current development and its uncertain as well as open future. Just like *Get a Life* – with its ending and outcomes – suggests and underlines, Gordimer also finds no resting place and, although she seems to move away from the topic of apartheid more and more, again and again reminds one, or rather feels obliged to remind one of the apartheid era in her fiction

5 Comparison of the Three Novels

The upcoming last section of this thesis attempts to compare and contrast Nadine Gordimer's three post-apartheid novels *The House Gun* (1998), *The Pickup* (2001) and *Get a Life* (2005), which were all written and published after the end of the apartheid regime in the year 1994 as well as after the coming to power of the ANC and the following election of Nelson Mandela as South Africa's new president. Whereas the previous three sections – apart from a few minor exceptions – have dealt with each of the three post-apartheid novels in question individually, this last chapter is intended to find parallels and similarities as well as differences and divergences between them. In addition, it also tries to answer the question of what Gordimer's underlying politics of these novels are and it includes her first post-apartheid novel *None to Accompany Me* (1994) and her most recent novel *No Time Like the Present* (2012).

On the basis of the narratives' three central events, this fourth chapter first of all offers an introductory part by outlining the narratives' respective themes, their similarity concerning the juxtaposition of two different stories, as well as the crucial distinction between, and the overall significance of the public and the private dimension along with Nadine Gordimer's emphasis of these two realms on her later writing. Continuing with the important and central white families and couples as well as with the crucial black and culturally and/or racially diverse characters, the second part will then focus on certain aspects of the central characters' similarities as well as on their relative otherness/alterity, and it will also describe their reversals of roles and positions, which take place in all of the respective three narratives. The last two parts of this comparative chapter will afterwards deal with the pathbreaking topoi, with the incorporation of religion and spirituality into the narratives, and they will as well briefly discuss and put Gordimer's most recent novel *No Time Like the Present* (2012) into the context of her other post-apartheid fiction.

By doing so, this last section as well as the overall last chapter of the thesis aim for a synthesis between the three novels published consecutively within a period of eight

years by trying to find out, if the novels in question follow a linear development, a constant pattern and/or a logic continuation of Gordimer's previous apartheid and post-apartheid writing, and therefore attempts to analyse Nadine Gordimer's continuing politics conveyed in her post-apartheid fiction.

5.1 The Three Central Events

The narratives' three central events – Duncan Lindgard's murder of Carl Jespersen in *The House Gun*, Julie Summers and Abdu's/Ibrahim ibn Musa's mutual picking up and their joint emigration to his North African home country following his forced deportation in *The Pickup*, and Paul Bannerman's diagnosis and successive therapy of thyroid cancer in *Get a Life* – as well as their consequences for the courses of the narratives and their impacts on the central characters, are in the focus of attention in this first part on the comparison of Nadine Gordimer's later post-apartheid novels. By concentrating particularly on the repercussions of these incisive events, their effects on the individuals as well as on wider society, and by focussing on their respective themes as well as on the important distinction between the public and the private dimension in Gordimer's post-apartheid fiction, the following sections should find similarities and differences between the three novels in question.

First of all, the narratives' above-named three central events all effectively change the characters' lives and therefore have far-reaching consequences, not only for them, but also for their respective families, friends and work mates, because the incisive events among other implications, for instance illuminate certain past events and also touch and change the social environment around the central characters. Here, we can draw a line to Nadine Gordimer's practice of intertwining the private with the public sector, since, with the quite realistic depiction of her characters and her overall fiction, Gordimer addresses South Africa's wider society, criticizes it and teaches her whole readership a moral lesson. Speaking of that, the incidences mostly have positive effects for and influences on the characters and their social environment, and they certainly open up new possibilities and situations for them. Due to the fact that something positive is born out of something negative, the central characters in the novels face new states of existence and new attitudes, although the

aftertaste of the past constantly swings back on the characters, their personal current situations as well as on the narratives' situations overall. In order to substantiate these rather general features of the novels under examination, the following part will go into further detail with each of the three narrative's incidents individually as well as comparatively.

Concerning Duncan Lindgard's murder of his cohabitant and former gay lover Carl Jespersen in *The House Gun*, beginning with Julian Verster's delivery of the message, the narrative more and more reveals the subconscious racism of Duncan's parents Claudia and Harald Lindgard along with their inactivity during apartheid. Additionally, it accompanies Duncan as he spiritually transforms and grows as well as receives redemption at the very end of the story. Through the incorporation of the discussion about South Africa's death penalty laws into the narrative, Nadine Gordimer, too, holds up a mirror to society and to what has happened in its apartheid past. In this regard, the murder as the narrative's decisive incident both illuminates the past and has consequences for the future, while at the same time, the story's private disaster is mixed with the public dimension and more precisely with society, as has been described in the paragraph above.

With respect to the central event in *The Pickup*, Julie Summer's multiple encounters with the illegal Arab immigrant Abdu and the following love story, deportation and their joint emigration – similar to what happened in *The House Gun* – change Julie's life – similar to Duncan's life – for the better in the end. As the love attachment between the two develops, Julie more and more becomes aware of the fact that she has to change her unsatisfactory life. Not until she moves away from the place of her origin as well as her upbringing and education, she discovers her true identity, her final transformation, and her journey of inner discovery finds an end in the desert, which also includes a spiritual growth (see also Dimitriu, *The Writer* 146). A similar procedure can be observed in *The House Gun*, since Duncan – in order to become aware of what he has done – also has to move away from his familiar surroundings. However, the two novels differ in a main point, which is, that the desert is associated with freedom and the prison cell obviously with imprisonment. By choosing

globalisation and especially illegal immigration as the main topics of interest, Gordimer, akin to her depiction of a violent and criminal society in *The House Gun* and the connection of ecology and socio-political and-economical issues in *Get a Life*, too, weaves in her criticism of current political and economical phenomena.

Ileana Dimitriu connects Gordimer's 2001 and 2005 novels by remarking that "[w]hereas *The Pick Up* ends with Julie Summers embarking on a journey of self discovery in the desert, *Get a Life* starts with Paul Bannerman's soul-searching." (*Getting a Life* 126) This connection between the two novels underlines Gordimer's preoccupation with characters whose lives take incisive changes and who experience redemption at the end of the stories. "Both Paul and Julie have intense glimpses of meaning and purpose amid the everyday scramble for survival." (Dimitriu, *The Writer* 146) In *Get a Life*, the diagnosis of serious cancer of the thyroid gland leads Paul Bannerman to a serious soul-searching, which culminates in various meditations and ponderings about his job as an ecologist and nature conservationist as well as about his marriage and the living together with his wife Benni. The lives of Paul and Julie cannot simply go on, they need a change, which is achieved in the novels through the tragic events. However, just like *The House Gun* and *The Pickup* have promising and rather positive, though at the same time ambiguous and uncertain endings for the central characters and South Africa on the whole, *Get a Life* also ends with a temporary rest and peace and gives its central characters a chance to rethink and change certain aspects in the microcosms of their lives and in the macrocosms of South Africa as well as of the wider world.

All in all, by narrating these central events and their implications, Nadine Gordimer exudes and radiates a fresh and yet cautious optimism, and, although she states harsh criticism on South Africa, she still holds on to believe in a better future for her country.

5.1.1 Themes

Offering a vast and incalculable number of themes and topics, the long period of the apartheid era during which Nadine Gordimer wrote and published a great number of

her novels, short stories and other writings was a perfect breeding ground for criticism of the whole apartheid regime and its system. But now, after the end of apartheid and after the installation of a South African democracy voted by all its citizens, does Gordimer still know what to write about? Has she exchanged her typical and distinctive apartheid themes with completely different and new as well as current themes? The subsequent lines and paragraphs try to give an answer to these questions by dealing with the narratives' respective themes.

"Gordimer observes that in the new South Africa there would be no lack of themes and subject[s] [sic] to replace apartheid; she adds, however, that some of these would be contentious and enjoined writers not to let anyone dictate to them how to deal with theses themes." (Diala, *Mandela* 149) This quotation draws attention to the fact that Gordimer, though still dealing with South Africa's past, also aims to enter new terrains in her post-apartheid novels. In addition, the quotation as well pleads for a certain necessary writerly freedom, which should allow writers to choose their themes and topics of interests freely without mandatorily having to incorporate political and historical events into their fiction (see also Diala, *Mandela* 149).

Anticipating the next part dealing with Gordimer's and her narrative's handling of the distinction between the public and the private domain in her later fiction, Ileana Dimitriu (see *Getting a Life* 121) explains Gordimer's shift from apartheid to post-apartheid novels, as well as the effects of the apartheid era as follows: "The shift in Gordimer's post-apartheid novels to a primary consideration of individual choice and responsibility does not mean that the political dimension vanishes." (Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 121) By concentrating on the novel's respective themes, she continues to write the following:

> *The House Gun* (1998) engages with the ubiquity of social violence while questioning the illusion of individual security in a society that has not resolved the discrepancy between first-world affluence and third-world poverty. *The Pickup* (2001) tackles the issue of illegal immigration to a South Africa pictured as a land of plenty by many Africans to the north of its borders. In her most recent novel, *Get a Life* (2005), Gordimer discusses issues of ecology in relation to economic and political interests." (Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 121)

Next to the apparent above-mentioned themes, including their criticism of social violence and hidden racism in *The House Gun*, globalisation entailing illegal immigration and emigration in *The Pickup* and the interrelation of ecology, environmentalism, nature conservation and economy in *Get a Life*, these narratives also deal with a dozen of other underlying topics on a more private and individual level.

All of Gordimer's post-apartheid novels dealt with in this thesis discuss the characters' spiritual disorders, the consequent revolts and the spiritual maturing in the end. *The House Gun* additionally tackles the themes of individual responsibility and the responsibility of the wider society, guilt, morality and empathy, *The Pickup* includes the themes of displacement, the politics of location, religious and spiritual stereotyping and shares the themes of freedom and identity with *Get a Life*, which supplementarily deals with marital problems and the question of truth. Next to the narratives' shared themes, Dimitriu adds that there is a difference in *Get a Life* compared with *The Pickup* and the other post-apartheid novels: In *Get a Life*, "[…] the social issues are not central to the politics of nationhood, and the private life proceeds without dramatic irruptions beyond the 'family'" (Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 121)

In addition, what all three novels certainly have in common – although their basic themes are different – is that emanating from the mostly current political and socio-economical issues at the time they were written and/or published, all the stories move from the political and public to the individual, the personal and the private sphere in the course of the narrative. This move within the novels as well as within Gordimer's later post-apartheid writing on the whole will be dealt with in the following section.

5.1.2 The Public & the Private

As touched upon in the course of the individual chapters on the three novels, the differentiation between the public and the private, the individual and society as well as the personal and the political, is an essential instrument when comparing Nadine Gordimer's apartheid fiction with her fiction written and published in a post-

apartheid South Africa, as well as when comparing her later post-apartheid novels with each other.

In "Nadine Gordimer: Getting a Life after Apartheid", Ileana Dimitriu focuses on Gordimer's shift from the public to the private sector, and states that although the private sphere has always intrigued her, Gordimer "[…] felt obliged to interweave the private with the public, to blend her "essential gesture" with her "necessary gesture". (118) Dimitriu also remarks that in her first post-apartheid novels *None to Accompany Me* and *The House Gun*, published in the years 1994 and 1998, Gordimer did not inextricably link the public with the private domain, and that these new tendencies "signal a kind of liberation from the burden of excessive social responsibility within large historical events." (*Postcolonialising Gordimer* 159; see also Dimitriu *Art of Conscience*)

Laura Winkiel similarly caters to Gordimer's shift from the public to the private by claiming that "[i]n her post-apartheid novels, *None to Accompany Me*, *The House Gun* and *The Pickup*, Gordimer shifts her focus from the national stage, overdetermined by the apartheid struggle, to the complexities of intersubjective, often intimate, human relations of privilege, power and alterity." (29) Yet another explanation of Gordimer's shift to the private can be found in Gareth Cornwell's guide to South African literatures.

> Gordimer's recent work represents a pronounced move away from the political sphere that has dominated her oeuvre, and this suggests that the normalization of South Africa's political and social life has allowed her to move back to an exploration of the private lives of her protagonists – aspect of her early writing that became overlaid with the urgent political themes and messages of the day. (Cornwell 98)

However, arguing that Gordimer completely eradicated the public and political dimension from her writing would be a great mistake, since, as an example of the post-apartheid novels, *The Pickup* depicts the case of an illegal economic migrant, as well as critiques the phenomenon of globalisation and dismisses the West's false values (see Coetzee 250). Ileana Dimitriu further expands Winkiel's above

description of Gordimer's shift and debates that in *None to Accompany Me* (1994), *The House Gun* (1998) and in *The Pickup* (2001) "[…] (although she turns to the private), the public domain still intrudes via 'spectacular' incidents: township crime and violence; middle-class parents dealing with their son's imprisonment; the traumas of immigration and emigration. Theses are core social issues, and they receive a prominent place in the novels prior to *Get a Life*." (Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 134) Dimitriu though continues by arguing that these resolutions of the characters' personal issues are actually non-credible and that they "[…] are symbolic gestures within novels that primarily comply with the conventions of realism." (Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 134) As reminders of Gordimer's "[…] 'necessary gestures' of goodwill and reconciliation in a divided society […] Duncan Lindgard [, who lives] in a bi-sexual triangle plans to adopt the child of the triangle [and] Julie Summers, the wealthy young woman, rejects her privilege to commune with the desert." (Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 134) These are facts, which lead Ileana Dimitriu to pose the following question: "Are these incidents meant to shock middle-class readers into an awareness of the need for some drastic change in their attitudes?" (*Getting a Life* 134)

In contrast to her 1998 and 2001 novels, her 2005 novel *Get a Life* shows a different picture concerning the public and the private, in that she depicts her doubtlessly realistic middle-class characters – although, as mentioned in the above paragraph, Ileana Dimitriu argues differently – to actually have a life. Since, as Gordimer herself is part of the middle-class and also writes from the perspective of a middle-class family, she therefore "focuses on the class she knows best" (Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 134; see Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 134) and the above question could well be answered with yes. Who other than middle-class readers should feel touched by the Bannermans' destinies and should consequently raise their awareness? Just like Gordimer, who can best identify with her own class and mostly concentrates and writes about suburban white South Africans and their individual stories, also the (white) middle-class people among the readership can best comprehend the Bannermans (see also Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 134).

Another indicator for Gordimer's return to and placement of emphasis on the private sphere can be found in the role sex plays for the narratives' central characters, and to what extent the narratives' central events and its themes draw a parallel to the private dimension of the respective novels. In *Get a Life*, an intense sexual longing is the answer to Paul's diagnosis of cancer. After recognizing that Benni is struck by the doctor's message, Paul – who the narrative describes as taking the serious cancer diagnosis lightly by narrating that he might also get run over by a bus instead of having cancer – feels the need to comfort his wife. "He turned back to where she lay, bent to put his arms round her […] and kissed each wet cheek. But she pulled her hands free roughly and seizing his head pushed his mouth hard against hers, opened his lips with a stiff tongue and the kiss was about to become a passionate prelude […]" (GL 9) In this case, sex, or at least the kissing should soothe the possible pain and it also serves to let the couple experience themselves anew.

Similarly, *The Pickup*'s love relationship between Julie and Abdu/Ibrahim and their mutual attraction is built upon sex and sexual longing, which Coetzee (see 245-246) names as one possible reason for Julie's abandonment of South Africa in favour of Abdu's backward land of birth somewhere in the north of Africa. Coetzee continues that "[w]ords may lie, but sex always tells the truth [and that] there must be some deeply hidden potential to the relationship" (246) Moreover, sex is also a reaction to the incisive events, although other than in *Get a Life*, Abdu is not able to make love to Julie in the moments when he faces either deportation or when he is about to leave his home country for the United States and when he comes to know that Julie will not accompany him at the very end of the novel.

Likewise, in *The House Gun*, which links the Lindgard's sexual journey with the more obvious spiritual journey, Claudia and Harald are not able to have sexual intercourse with each other as they are confronted with the message Julian Verster delivers. "This lack of physical intimacy reflects their divergent psycho-spiritual relationship with […] the 'unspeakable'. Just as they are unable to articulate to each other their hidden fears, so they are now unable to express themselves intimately." (Dimitriu, *The Writer* 144-145) Although they are on the spiritual journey together as

the parents of Duncan, they have different ways of trying to cope with the pain resulting from the terrible event. Whereas Claudia tries to soothe her pain "through moments of presencing, whether through touch or smell or sex, or by literally trying to conceive another child", Harald turns to spiritual internal dialogues. (Dimitriu, *The Writer* 145) Yet another different symbolism sex serves in Gordimer's later novels, can again be detected in *The House Gun*. On a private level, the sex between Duncan Lindgard's girlfriend and his former gay lover Carl Jespersen leads to the violent act of murder and to the child with two possible fathers. On a public level, the sex and its consequences therefore are combined with Africa's violence, its death penalty laws and the trials.

5.1.3 Juxtaposition of Two Stories

Deeply connected to the just elaborated distinction between the public and the private, are the juxtapositions of two stories in *None to Accompany Me*, *The House Gun* and *The Pickup*. In Gordimer's second post-apartheid novel, the story of Duncan's parents Harald and Claudia Lindgard is perfectly connecting private and public realms. However, their story is not the narrative's main focus, because just "[l]ike *None to Accompany Me*, *The House Gun* presents an abrupt juxtaposition of two apparently ill-fitting stories." (Dimitriu, *The End* 23) Apart from the fact that it is rather surprisingly not Duncan's story that is actually in the centre of attention, but his parent's story of their spiritual journey, Ileana Dimitriu draws on the distinction between the public and the private. "The problem seems to be that the private and the public can never be entirely separated, and that the author can shift her own interest, even if almost imperceptible and conveyed obliquely, away from the behaviour and thought processes of her characters." (Dimitriu, *The End* 23)

In her article "Postcolonialising Gordimer: The Ethics of 'Beyond' and Significant Peripheries in the Recent Fiction", Ileana Dimitriu is preoccupied with Gordimer's new way of looking beyond the local and shifting the narrative from South Africa to an unnamed North African country. Along with finding an answer to the question of what this shift and geographical removal of the protagonists in *The Pickup* might

symbolize, she also focuses on the public and the private as mentioned above (see 166).

> This short novel represents an abrupt juxtaposition of what may strike one as two novels in one. It could have been two separate short stories: the one dealing with the dreams and realities of illegal immigration, the other dealing with the dreams and realities of escape against the backdrop of an unnamed desert country, indeed the desert itself. (Dimitriu, *Postcolonialising Gordimer* 166-167)

Dimitriu cannot find an apparent reason for the removal of the protagonists from South Africa and therefore poses the following questions: "Is it to suggest Julie's avoidance of the challenging transformation in her own country? Is the novel a parable: the result of the author's unease in dealing with local circumstances?" (Dimitriu, *Postcolonialising Gordimer* 167; see also Dimitriu, *The End* 24)

Ileana Dimitriu concludes that "[t]he public and the private have never been treated by Gordimer as entirely distinct aspects of experience" (*The End* 33) and that Gordimer offers "a more socially diverse, more politically various, and more spiritually inclined landscape of personal possibility." (*The End* 33) As an example, in *The Pickup*, Julie's story is not one of political commitment, but she rather privately unfolds her self. Dimitriu ends her article by explaining that "Gordimer has reversed horizons of expectations and explored new characters, concerns and symbols – in a new, deceptively plain style" (*The End* 33)

5.2 The Characters

Besides the alike central events including their consequences, the narratives' themes, as well as Gordimer's return to or (re-) focus on the private sector and on individual destinies in her post-apartheid fiction, her protagonists and (mostly white) central characters also share a lot of similarities as well as are defined in opposition to the narrative's respective (mostly black) other characters.

The subsequent parts on similarity and otherness therefore intend to find similarities between the ostensibly white families and especially between the particular

protagonists and couples in the respective three narratives, as well as compare them to the narratives' important black and/or racially and culturally other characters. In addition to that, the next but one part will then exemplify the characters' reversals of roles and positions as well as the shifts of power, which occur to the narratives' white middle-class characters.

5.2.1 Similarity – the Families & the Couples

The narratives' couples and families – Harald, Claudia and Duncan Lindgard in *The House Gun,* Abdu/Ibrahim and Julie Summers as well as her parents in *The Pickup*, and Adrian and Lyndsay as well as Paul and Berenice/Benni Bannerman with their son Nicholas in *Get a Life* – all share at least one important common ground apart from the above-mentioned mental processes and reflections of the past, which are triggered by the respective incisive events and which result in redemption. As a doctor (Claudia), a director (Adrian), an architect (Duncan), a publicist and agency executive (Benni/Berenice), powerful business men and managers (Harald, Nigel Summers), a lawyer and judge (Lyndsay), an ecologist (Paul) and a copywriter (Julie), they all belong to South Africa's well-off and well-situated middle- and upper classes, whose members have good and secure jobs and fill upper positions, as well as who have lived sheltered lives despite apartheid and its ramifications, and who – at least at the beginnings of the narratives – also live lives without disruptions in South Africa's post-apartheid era.

As representatives of the social class also their creator Nadine Gordimer belongs to, their depiction is mostly quite authentic and realistic, and their behaviour and lifestyle – although it is primarily self-serving – seems to be stereotypical of their class affiliation. Moreover, although the black characters seem to be in the background – since their feelings, emotions and thoughts are not directly and sometimes not even at all conveyed by the narrator – they determine the actions of the narrative's important white characters and therefore need to be compared to each other in the following subsection.

5.2.2 Otherness/Alterity – the Black Characters

In opposition to the narratives' central white South African characters, are the black characters as well as Abdu/Ibrahim, whose decent – representing a coloured, non-white Arab character – we are not clearly informed about. Although they are not introduced and described in great detail, and although their emotions and thoughts are omitted, they play crucial roles and fulfil even more important functions for the narratives and most importantly for the narratives' white characters.

In *The House Gun*, the black characters – the Lindgard's black lawyer Hamilton Motsamai, Duncan's black gay cohabitant and friend Nkululeko Dladla, as well as the shortly mentioned black plumber's assistant Petrus Ntuli – working as a gardener for the commune – all play important roles in the narrative. Whereas the lawyer Motsamai, as a member of South African's new rich black middle-class, and Khulu Dladla, as a representative of the marginal group of homosexuals/bisexuals, which experiences South Africa's arising liberality, serve to assist the Lindgards to become aware of their subconscious racism, the gardener Petrus Ntuli represents a typical remnant of the apartheid years, during which white people owned black people who worked for them as servants, housekeepers and charladies among many other, mostly degrading occupations. Similarly, in *The Pickup*, Julie Summers' housekeeper in her cottage and more importantly her pickup Abdu/Ibrahim serve to raise the awareness of her pseudo lifestyle. Another interesting aspect which connects *The House Gun* and *The Pickup* is the reappearance of the black lawyer Hamilton Motsamai. In *Living in Hope and History* (89), Nadine Gordimer draws on the double thesis of *The House Gun* by indicating the central role of Hamilton Motsamai as follows:

> I must tell you that when I began to write *The House Gun*, it came to me as the personal tragedy of a mother and father whose son, in a crime of passion, murders their human value along with the man he kills. The parallel theme, placing their lives in the context of their country, the new South Africa, was that they – white people who in the past regimes of racial discrimination had always had black people dependent upon them – would find themselves dependent upon a distinguished black lawyer to defend their son. That was going to be the double thesis of my novel. (Gordimer, *Living* 89 qtd. in Diala, *Mandela* 150)

However, this preoccupation with dependence in the narrative already dealt with in the first chapter of the thesis, finds an extension, since, although he seems to have changed, Hamilton Motsamai also plays an important role in *The Pickup*, when he is shown around the rich and influential guests of Nigel Ackroyd Summers and his parties.

In *The House Gun*, he is a "newcomer into the class of wealth and power" and also depicted as being (stereo-) typically African. He is as well shown as a self-dramatizing lawyer, whose anti-apartheid activism led to his detention and self-exile during apartheid and finally ended with his reappearance as a newly rich black in the new post-apartheid South Africa. On the contrary, in *The Pickup*, Motsamai is not into law any more, but focuses now on finance, which appears more fruitful to him (see Diala, *Mandela* 152-152). Isidore Diala additionally remarks that Motsamai "[…] is one of *them*, her [Julie's] father's people and their glossy Danielles comparing the purchase of Future and Hedging Funds, sitting here in his corporate palazzo [and that] it doesn't help at all he is black; he's been one of their victims, he's been one of *them* now" (Pickup 80)." (*Mandela* 152) Consequently, Gordimer treats the emergence of the new black elite as depicted in the 1998 and 2001 novels through Hamilton Motsamai cautiously (see Diala, *Mandela* 152).

Get a Life's black characters establish yet another tie between the three post-apartheid novels. The Bannerman's black housekeeper Primrose and Paul's teammate Thapelo, who are depicted as fearless – presumably according to what they have witnessed during apartheid – stand above him and his family during the time he spends in quarantine, gain control over his life and take over his position at work, as well as symbolize strength in comparison to the white characters' physical and emotional weaknesses.

5.2.3 Reversal of Roles & Positions

As just explained, in *Get a Life*, the roles between the prevalent weak white characters and the strong black characters are finally reversed, when Paul is faced with his cancer diagnosis and his parents, along with himself and his wife Benni, are

faced with marital problems. Thapelo – Paul's teammate normally working for him – and Primrose – Adrian and Lyndsay's housekeeper – take over Paul's life and work in the wilderness as well as the life of the other white characters, because they accept the responsibility and get into contact with Paul, although they are aware of the possible threat he poses to them.

In *The House Gun*, the drastic change of the Lindgard's life after Carl Jespersen's murder leaves them no other opportunity than to lay their lives and their destiny into the hands of the black lawyer Hamilton Motsamai – who has been chosen to defend him by Duncan himself – and also accept Khulu Dladla as their advisor and mentor and in addition as their new son in the world outside prison. Whereas Motsamai overcomes the differences on various levels including the personal, the racial and cultural, as well as accepts the judicial challenge of Duncan's difficult case, Khulu serves as their second son and offers support in these difficult times.

In Gordimer's 2001 novel *The Pickup*, exactly the same reversal of roles and shift of power happens. Although the reversal between the roles of Julie and Ibrahim occur when they move to another country, Julie no longer has the privileges of her former life in South Africa. However, the picture is different here, since Abdu/Ibrahim – unlike the black characters in the other two novels in question – although he helps Julie and paves her way for a decisive change and the final redemption, he himself is still lost in his attempts to enter privileged countries worldwide and in his eagerness to live a western life. On the other hand, the black characters in Gordimer's previous post-apartheid novels appear to have taken South Africa's destiny of a new democracy and united country into their own hands and they are also described as active forces when it comes to a mutual harmonisation.

The characters' changes of attitude as well as their eagerness in the name of nature and mankind alongside their supposed help for underprivileged people, reveal themselves to be serving for the characters' self-interests only. As already described, the Lindgard's acceptance of Hamilton Motsamai is grounded on the desperation of their situation, Paul Bannerman's enthusiasm for ecology and nature conservation

serves to satisfy his love for nature only, and Julie Summers' picking up of Abdu/Ibrahim is not an altruistic act of charity, but a stepping stone for a decisive life change.

5.3 The Topoi

Closely connected to the narratives' three central events and their respective themes, are the prison cell in *The House Gun*, the desert in *The Pickup*, and the garden in *Get a Life* as the narratives' three important and meaningful topoi, which symbolize the spaces or loci where the characters experience intuition and where they begin to change on various levels in the courses of the particular post-apartheid narratives.

Nadine Gordimer's 2001 novel *The Pickup* narrates Julie Summers' encounters with the desert, which is supplementarily also personified and depicted as Julie's anthropomorphized lover substituting Abdu/Ibrahim in the second part of the narrative, and which supports and triggers her thirst for self-knowledge. It is also the desert at the end of the street leading out of the town into the nowhere, where she discovers herself and finds the right way to find her real identity. In her article "The End of History", Ileana Dimitriu also explains the desert's function, and by doing so, provides a link to *The House Gun*. "Interestingly, Julie's response to the mood evoked for her by the desert – which offers her a locus for inner concentration, catharsis and self-knowledge – brings into mind another of Gordimer's fairly recent characters: Duncan's father, Harald Lindgard, of *The House Gun*, and his sensitivity to spiritual issues." (32) His turn to God for prayers, which allow him to concentrate on himself and to remain in privacy, all lead him to find his "[…] own resources in solution of guidance through fears, failures and sorrows" (HG 27 qtd. in Dimitriu, *The End* 32) "Like Harald, who cannot share his spiritual preoccupations with his wife Claudia, so Julie cannot share with Abdu her insights into the existential dimension of her being, of herself rediscovered, in and through communion with the desert." (Dimitriu, *The End* 32)

In addition to that, the prison cell in *The House Gun* – where Duncan Lindgard spends the time awaiting the trial for his murder of Carl Jespersen – is the site, which

promotes his reconciliation and where he finds his final redemption alongside the necessary self-discovery resulting from an intense soul-searching. This is exactly what links the respective topoi in *The House Gun* (1998), *The Pickup* (2001) and *Get a Life* (2005). In Gordimer's 2005 novel *Get a Life*, Paul Bannerman – additionally due to his solitude in his prison-like quarantine room inside the house – is similarly forced to ponder about his work as an ecologist and about his marriage with Benni in the garden, where he spends enlightening hours. There, he also engages in a serious soul-searching just like Julie in the desert. Ileana Dimitriu explains the similarity of the narratives' topoi as follows: "In many ways, the garden for Paul has a similar function to that of other new symbolic spaces in Gordimer's post-apartheid novels: the desert for Julie Summers [and] the prison cell for Duncan Lindgard. The garden becomes a place of introspection, a conversational partner, Paul's alter ego." (*Getting a Life* 127)

What also connects the three novels in question concerning their respective topoi, is the reassessment of the past, since like Paul – who recollects memories of his childhood past in the garden – Julie also rethinks her past during her hours in and with the desert, and consequently realizes, that the life she led back in South Africa is not fulfilling, and that it is exactly the desert and the desert country, where she can find her real self and her real identity. Similarly, although it is not Duncan, whose past is actually conjured up through the terrible event, it forces his parents Harald and Claudia to rethink their inactive parts during apartheid, as well as their upbringing and education of their son during a time, where crimes and violence where the order of the day. Consequently, although the apartheid era, presumably due to its temporal closeness, features more prominently in *The House Gun* than in the following novels, the violent and crime-ridden past is always present and conjured up mostly by the narratives' events and the topoi, where the events happen, but also through street violence, robberies and car hijackings.

In addition, just like the narratives build up oppositions between blacks/coloureds and whites, rich/privileged and poor/underprivileged people, homo-/bisexuals and heterosexuals, as well as people with different cultural backgrounds and origins, the

prison and the prison cell stand in opposition to the outside world and they also symbolize the more obvious opposition between imprisonment and freedom. Just like the garden – symbolizing freedom from the quarantine room – stands in opposition to the wilderness in nature and the demands of the real world, the desert Julie gets to know in Ibrahim's native country stands in opposition to her friends at The Table and her overall former life and past implying a suburban lifestyle. Another interesting fact is, that these topoi are all bordered, enclosed and confined sites and that they are also temporary, since the desert is bordered by the street and the town, the garden is in between the house – where the quarantine cell is – and the gates, and the prison cell is the topoi with a clear reference to the deprivation of liberty according to the imprisonment in a mostly small cell.

5.3.1 Religion & Spirituality

Religion and spirituality, including the individual aspects of faith, certain religious believes, biblical references, as well as the link between culture and faith, connecting either daily life and politics with religion or the characters' different views on and approaches to religion – although these aspects do not dominate in the novels – play quite important and interesting roles in the narratives, which are worth elaborating.

Whereas religion and spirituality in *The Pickup* are conveyed through the converted Buddhist who is a member at The Table in the cosmopolitan L.A. Café – and the religious as well as oriental stereotyping of Islam/Islamism and its critical stance towards it in Ibrahim's home country – religious belief and spirituality in *The House Gun* plainly features in the biblical number seven as in Duncan's sentence, and it is as well expressed in the day Harald and Claudia hear about their son's murder of Carl Jespersen, which is "that Friday", marking "the day of Jesus' Crucifixion". (Dimitriu, *The Writer* 142) Moreover, the narrative shows Harald as he finds comfort in his Catholic faith, which temporarily makes him ignore the current difficult situation and which offers him a different view on his belief in God. As he is shown to pray to God in order to understand his son's deed, Harald also decries his wife Claudia for not being religious any more and therefore not being exemplary for their

son Duncan, which even results in quarrels and recriminations between the couple (see also Dimitriu, *The Writer* 144).

The events following the murder and the message of it concerning Harald and Claudia can be described as follows. “Theirs becomes a truly spiritual journey, especially so in those instances of prolonged conversation in which father and mother explicitly confront their divergent views on religion.” (Dimitriu, *The Writer* 142) Nevertheless, as the narrative reveals, neither Harald’s belief in God, nor Claudia’s spiritual humanism help them to become better people, overcome their racism and change their lives for the better. Isidore Diala rephrases this by explaining that both “Harald and Claudia go through the symbolic expulsion from the cave of delusions, experience the pain and anguish of the human condition, and sink back into their primeval cocoon unperturbed.” (*Guilt* 55)

Get a Life, on the other side, is full of biblical references by mentioning Adam & Eve, Paradise, God, as well as Cain and Abel either directly or indirectly. In her Observer Review on *Get a Life*, Jane Stevenson describes the garden of the Bannermans as Paul’s “personal Eden” and remarks that “references to the Book of Genesis come thick and fast” from the first moment when Paul enters the garden (see Stevenson no page numbers). She continues to explain that “Genesis suggests that paradise will always be lost, that mistakes are irreparable and that the older brother, Cain, will always kill Abel.” (Stevenson n.p.) Moreover, “[…] paradise will be destroyed [,] the past cannot be escaped [and] South African blacks will never catch up with the whites.” (Stevenson n.p.) In this case, just like Harald and Claudia Lindgard cannot profit from their spiritual or religious humanism, also Paul Bannerman and his dearest cannot really escape the past and have to be responsible for their mistakes.

Turning to the function of the above-mentioned religious and spiritual references, Ileana Dimitriu (*Getting a Life* 128) asks how to explain Gordimer’s symbolic choices in *Get a Life* and if the highlighting of the symbolic garden should have an ironic effect. Although she doubts that dealing with ecology and gardens necessarily

means turning one's back on history, Dimitriu admits that "there has been a shift in Gordimer's writing", which Coetzee named "a spiritual turn in her thought". (252 qtd. in Dimitriu, *Getting a Life* 128)

If this spiritual shift or turn in her thought and in her narratives on the whole finds a continuation in her latest novel *No Time Like the Present* (2012), will be discussed in the subsequent section of the same name.

5.4 No Time Like the Present

In her most recent novel *No Time Like the Present* (2012), Nadine Gordimer is not yet again preferentially preoccupied with the religious and the spiritual as in her other post-apartheid novels *None to Accompany Me* (1994), *The House Gun* (1998), *The Pickup* (2001) and *Get a Life* (2005). "With the characters rarely going deeper into their personal lives than perplexities and anger about what has befallen a once idealistic liberation culture […] Steve, who is married to an African ex-struggle participant just like him, consumes sex in the form of a one-night stand and "discussion remains at the level of newspaper reportage on the end of political idealism." (Dimitriu, *The Writer* 146-147; see also Slovo no page numbers) Just as Dimitriu describes Duncan's, Claudia's, Harald's as well as Julie's and Paul's spiritual journeys of inner discovery, spirituality in Gordimer's 2012 novel, if at all, "is present […] by an inversion of presencing: the time of the present in South Africa suggests a spiritual wasteland!" (*The Writer* 146-147) Religion or religious belief only features in the confessions of Steve and Jabu's parents. Whereas Steve is the child of a mixed marriage between a Jewish mother and a Christian father, Jabulile's parents mix the practices of the Methodist Church with the traditions of the Zulu. However, the only reason for this diversity seems to be Gordimer's affectation for showing her readership every single cultural, social and political aspect (see Rubin no page numbers; see also Tonkin no page numbers).

Apart from the missing religious and spiritual aspects, *No Time Like the Present*, though, may well be regarded as a continuation of Gordimer's post-apartheid novels due to a number of reasons and apparent similarities, which will be dealt with in the

subsequent paragraphs. Although its protagonists Steve Reed and Jabulile Gumede nicknamed Jabu, which rings a bell reconsidering the double identities Abdu/Ibrahim in *The Pickup* and Benni/Berenice in *Get a Life* – however other than the couples in the former post-apartheid novels – are "veterans of the war against South African apartheid" (Prose no page numbers), they are an interracial couple just like Julie and Abdu/Ibrahim, they are both members of the middle-class as an industrial chemist (Steve) and a lawyer (Jabulile) just like the Lindgards, the Summers' and the Bannermans, and they also struggle with their middle-class values and consequently with their identities after the end of apartheid just like all of the protagonists in Gordimer's post-apartheid fiction (see Hannan no page numbers, Prose n.p., Rubin n.p., Slovo n.p., Tonkin n.p.)

After fighting for their rights and for the installation of a new democracy in South Africa, "[…] they must [now] confront [themselves with the] concerns of middle-class existence: where to live and travel, what job to take, how many children to have and where to send them to school." (Prose n.p.) This quote also includes another important aspect, since though we hardly ever get inside the protagonists' minds and are not told about their thoughts and feelings as mentioned further above in the section on the characters, the way they deal with their current situations in the new South Africa is of great importance. Concerning identity, which is also a prominent aspect in Gordimer's former post-apartheid novels, her 2012 novel centres Steve and Jabulile's dilemmas. In her newspaper book review, Francine Prose writes that "[i]n a time of heroic struggle, Steve and Jabu knew exactly who they were and what they were doing. But now that the battle is over, their identities and the reasons for their choices are considerably less clear." (n.p.)

Steve and Jabu's above-described difficulties may also be referred to when it comes to Nadine Gordimer's preoccupation with the new post-apartheid South Africa. While she had enough topics to write about and while she had enough inequalities, controversies and misgovernment, among many other issues to fight and step up against, she is now trapped in a new situation, seeing the democratic and free South Africa still struggling with the past and how it reflects on the present. Actually, this

also features in the novel's well-chosen title *No Time Like the Present*. Additionally, Gordimer struggles with a vision, again a possible explanation for her perpetual returns to find the answer in the past and somewhere outside South Africa or the African continent. Just as she saw hope and an amendment in the coming to power of the ANC and the following installation of democracy in South Africa, Steve and Jabulile "see its fragile stability threatened by poverty, unemployment, AIDS, government scandal, tribal loyalties, contested elections and the influx of refugees from other African countries." (Prose n.p.; see also Rubin n.p.)

After all, with her latest novel *No Time Like the Present*, Nadine Gordimer continues to mingle the private with the public and deals with the way "politics shape the private lives of unique individuals". (Prose n.p.) "Jabu and Steve have always put commitment ahead of private happiness" (Tonkin n.p.), which now leaves them with an insurmountable number of problems and dilemmas in the present of "a country ill at ease with its new self" (Slovo n.p.) Other reviewers like for example Darryl Whetter, who states that in her latest novel, Gordimer is preoccupied with the "political, social and emotional questions raised by the South Africa of today" (n.p.), Jim Hannan, who writes that Gordimer is "[…] expressing discontent with the social, economic, and political conditions in post-Apartheid South Africa" (n.p.) as well as Martin Rubin, who tellingly pinpoints the fact that Nadine Gordimer "[…] is rooted in this chaotic present, still, despite the newfound freedoms, affected by the inevitable spectre of past racial segregation." (n.p.) What all these quotations from reviewers have in common, is that in *No Time Like the Present*, Nadine Gordimer still mixes the individual, personal, emotional and spiritual with society, politics and economy and once again utters concern over post-apartheid South Africa's development.

6 Conclusion

Having had enough issues to deal with and to write about as well as having enough inequalities and wrongdoings to step up against during apartheid, the changed democratic post-apartheid South Africa confronts Nadine Gordimer with a totally new situation and definitely also with a challenge concerning her writing and the politics she wants to convey with it. As the analysis and comparison of her later post-apartheid novels in this thesis have shown, Gordimer, however, still includes apartheid and its ramifications in her narratives. In *The House Gun* (1998), *The Pickup* (2001) and *Get a Life* (2005) – although she deals with current socio-politic and politico-economic issues like for instance the discussion about the abolition of the death penalty, globalisation issues like for example immigration and emigration, as well as ecology and nature conservation – the past still seems to determine the present and consequently also the lives of the narrative's protagonists. In a nutshell, Nadine Gordimer's post-apartheid fiction dealt with in the course of this thesis offers an examination of contemporary social, political and/or ecological/economic issues, while at the same time, the present situation in South Africa is predominantly explained by its apartheid past.

If Nadine Gordimer – after a decade-long fight against apartheid from the public platform and a focus on South Africa's public and social dimension – solely turns to individual destinies and brings into focus personal and private issues rather than predominantly dealing with socio-economic matters in her later post-apartheid novels, cannot be answered straight away and certainly also not explicitly. That she focuses on the lives of individuals and their respective destinies and personal problems in the new South Africa cannot be denied, but it must be brought into mind, that the personal decisions always provide a link to the society around the protagonists and that the past and the public still consciously or subconsciously influence individuals in their decisions and in their actions. This interplay between the public and the private sector in her later-post apartheid novels and consequently also Nadine Gordimer's equal treatment of the two dimensions, also lead Ileana Dimitriu to comment on Gordimer's shift. In her book "Art of Conscience: Re-

Reading Nadine Gordimer", she spots Gordimer's return to the private domain as in her pre-apartheid novels by remarking that political aspects have never fully vanished from her texts. "[S]uch a tension identifies the integrity of the novelist who is seriously committed to public issues at the same time as she has remained more concerned with complex individual lives than even she herself has felt able to acknowledge." (Dimitriu, *Art of Conscience* 17) Since the apartheid past swings back on the present and especially on the characters and their lives, in 2012, Gordimer still feels the need to deal with apartheid issues, although it has already been 18 years since the apartheid regime fell apart.

Apart from the concern as well as her indisposition and uncertainty about the new South Africa and its development, Nadine Gordimer still expresses in her later post-apartheid novels, she also offers a cautious optimism and also believes in a change of her country. Duncan Lindgard's redemption at the end of the novel as well as the child symbolising new hope for the future, in *The House Gun*, Julie Summers' spiritual transformation in *The Pickup*, and Paul Bannerman's rethinking and re-evaluation of his life and its values together with the adoption of a rape victim, HIV-infected black girl by his mother Lindsay in *Get a Life* all point to the possibility, that people can change, forgive and consequently leave the difficult past behind and look forward into a future of a country, which has been under turmoil and suffered atrocities and inequalities for decades.

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8 Appendix

8.1 German Abstract

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht und vergleicht Nadine Gordimers spätere Post-Apartheidromane *Die Hauswaffe* (1998), *Ein Mann von der Straße* (2001) sowie *Fang an zu Leben* (2005), bezieht sich stellenweise auch auf ihren ersten Post-Apartheidroman *Niemand, der mit mir geht* (1994) sowie ihren aktuellen Roman *Keine Zeit wie diese* (2012) und hat die Herausarbeitung, wie Nadine Gordimer ihre politischen Einstellungen sowie ihre Bedenken und Ängste über die Entwicklung Südafrikas mithilfe ihrer Post-Apartheidromane transportiert zum Ziel. Nachdem sich die Literaturnobelpreisträgerin sowie Booker Prize Gewinnerin Nadine Gordimer eine starke und im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes untrennbare Verbindung zur Apartheid in Südafrika erarbeitet hat und nachdem sie sich in den 40 Jahren, in denen sie gegen das Regime angekämpft hat, einen Ruf als Wortführerin gegen Rassenunterdrückung, -trennung sowie gesellschaftliche und politische Ungleichheit gemacht hat, stellt sich die Frage, was nun Gordimers Werte in einem Land und einer Gesellschaft sind, welche sich vom politischen Kampf wegbewegt haben.

Ausgehend von den folgenden Forschungsfragen soll herausgearbeitet werden, ob sich Nadine Gordimer nach all den Jahren des Kampfes gegen das Apartheidregime und seine Schandtaten, und nachdem sie sowohl offene Kritik in der Öffentlichkeit als auch teils verschleierte Kritik in ihren literarischen Werken geäußert hat, sie sich in ihren Post-Apartheidromanen noch immer gezielt mit dem Thema Apartheid auseinandersetzt, oder ob sie sich nun vermehrt den persönlichen Problemen und Schicksalen von Individuen widmet. Stellt das Ende des Apartheidregimes im Jahre 1994 und die Machtübernahme durch den Afrikanischen Nationalkongress (ANC) sowie die Wahl Nelson Mandelas zu Südafrikas erstem schwarzen Präsidenten eine entscheidende Veränderung in Nadine Gordimers darauffolgender Post-Apartheidliteratur dar, oder beschäftigt sie sich noch immer mit Südafrikas einschneidender Apartheidvergangenheit und dessen Auswirkungen auf die Gegenwart sowie dessen Konsequenzen für die zukünftigen Generationen? Was sind

die signifikanten Veränderungen in ihrem Schreiben und wie veranlasst sie es, ihre politische Einstellung und ihre politischen Interessen sowie ihre Kritik am System und der Gesellschaft in ihre Romane einfließen zu lassen?

Während sich die ersten drei Kapitel individuell mit den drei Hauptwerken *Die Hauswaffe*, *Ein Mann von der Straße* und *Fang an zu Leben* beschäftigen, indem sie sich auf die jeweiligen Themen, die stilistischen und erzähltheoretischen Besonderheiten sowie deren Relevanz auf sozialer, individueller/persönlicher sowie politischer Ebene beziehen, nimmt sich das letzte Kapitel den Vergleich der drei Hauptwerke zum Inhalt und setzt es sich zum Ziel, Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede auszumachen, sowie herauszufinden, ob sich eine Linearität zwischen den Romanen erkennen lässt.

8.2 Curriculum Vitae

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