

APARTHEID AND COLLECTIVE TRAUMA PERFORMATIVITY IN “AMNESTY” BY NADINE GORDIMER

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal the impact and response to the apartheid system in shaping the collective trauma of African society through symbolic representations of suffering and social performativity through political action in “Amnesty” short story by Nadine Gordimer. This study used the cultural trauma theory by Jeffrey Alexander with descriptive qualitative method. The results of this research found that social suffering is symbolically represented with a humanist and theocentric images. Even so, the two seemingly different treatments are essentially the same suffering, disguised by social and cultural symbols. Then, as a response to this suffering, there was social performativity through the political actions of social agents carried out by the Labor Union. These actions occur after going through of socio-cultural processes such as gathering, organizing, rioting, speeches, demonstrations, and accommodating or representing pain as well as distributing social awareness to arrive at the point where the apartheid system is the cause of all forms of suffering they experience.

Keyword: *Collective Trauma, Symbolic Representation, Performativity, Apartheid, Nadine Gordimer*

1) INTRODUCTION

“The trauma process is a dangerous game. It can lead to utopian heights or to depths of despair”.

– Jeffrey Alexander

Social suffering is game of authority. That in its loudest process, it arises as a result of terrible event that occurred in the past, is deeply rooted, targets many people, and is characterized by a collectivity of memories that inherently influences people's perspective and behavior. From there, social suffering is then closely related to social and historical processes. Historical narrative is one of the best instruments in compiling, preserving, and triggering contemporary social memories of events that have occurred in the past, whether heroic events, independence events, or traumatic events. (Djunuhi, 2021, p. 198). This narrative in turn is believed to be able to bring people to certain cultural experiences, as well as being able to present social responses through collective agents as a performative effort in the context of religion, nation, race, ethnicity, gender, class—each of which can become an arena for the emergence of social suffering (Alexander, 2012).

Because history is universal, dominant, and present collectively in people's memories—its discourse or narrative is often attached as a total or absolute truth, especially through social constructions that are repeated in various forms continuously. Historical narratives themselves are known to consist of various kinds, including official documents, newspapers, correspondence, and diaries as well as personal archives, oral histories, and even works of fiction (literature). This statement is then relevant with what was initiated by the New Cultural History school that emerged in the United States in the 1970s, argued the sources of concern for understanding the past are not just conventional historical documents such as letters, reports, sites, or archives, but also cultural products such as literature, advertisements, and films, until performing arts (Hunt, 1989, p. 1-22). Likewise, British literary historians such as Thomas Warton, Henry Morley, Leslie Stephen, to W.J Courthope treat literature as a document for illustration of national history or social history (Wellek-Warren, 2014, p. 313). From this it appears that literary works are not only cultural products containing imaginative texts or mere fiction, but also as expressions, reproductions, or reconstructions of events that have occurred in certain periods and spaces in the past.

Literary works as personal narratives are considered capable of translating certain collectivities or historical events in their own language. Present in a more complex dimension after going through a series of negotiation processes or critical-dialectics between the author's subjectivity and historical objectivity. Present in a more complex dimension after going through a series of negotiation processes or critical-dialectics between the author's subjectivity and historical objectivity. At this point, a common thread can be drawn that through its multi-expressive point of view, the existence of literature is possible to become an alternative text and a supplement to primary sources of historical writing that cannot be done, especially the historiography method—to explore, enter the human psychic space to calculate how many tears or sadness that fall, after history is only able to document material losses and the number of victims caused by, for example war, genocide, or natural disasters. While LaCapra affirms (2001) it is more difficult to document psychological trauma or its post-traumatic effects than to quantify the number of people killed or injured, he argues that “...but there is evidence on which one can conclude a traumatic experience, and some authors may even discuss the experience explicitly”.

One of the most influential events in human history that has arguably become the world's memory and is widely retold in literary works is apartheid. Literally meaning segregation in Afrikaans, apartheid is a racial segregation policy in South Africa introduced by the white Afrikaaner National Party after its victory in the 1948 elections. The segregation policy created a multi-layered society and suffering in which whites who incidentally were a minority dominated politically, economically, socially, and culturally at the expense of blacks who in fact constitute the majority. As an illustration of the system, Jacques Derrida described it quite traumatically, “an untranslatable idiom of racism” or the 'untranslatable idiom' of the worst racism, the most racist of all racism, and the worst racism in the world (1995, p. 291). In theory and practice, apartheid was a colonialist, capitalist, religious and racial ideology designed to ensure the domination and subjugation of the black majority by Europe's white settler minority. This meaning formed the identity of apartheid with colonialism (More, 2014, p. 4).

The impact of European colonialism in African history can simultaneously be seen from many South African literatures or literary works, especially through stories related to the apartheid events. In addition names such as Chinua Achebe, Athol Fugard, Alan Paton, and Bessie Head—awarded of the Booker Prize 1974 and Nobel Prize 1991 in Literature, Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014) was one of South Africa's most influential African writers, emerging against apartheid through fiction. During the journey as an intellectual, Gordimer is credited with being able to create rich picture of South African history before and after the abolition of the system of racial segregation. Nadine Gordimer's past subject is the impact of apartheid on the

lives of South Africans, containing the moral and psychological tensions of life in racially divided country—she often writes focusing on black characters who are oppressed, discriminated against, and excluded from equal rights. with white settlers. “Gordimer was a staunch opponent of apartheid and refused to accommodate the system, despite growing up in a community where it was accepted as normal. His works have served to chart, over the years, the changing response to apartheid in South Africa”.

One of Gordimer's many works which is quite successful in reflecting the suffering of the people in South Africa as a collective memory is "Amnesty", one of sixteen short stories contained in the book, *Jump and Other Story* (first published in 1991). In this story, Gordimer narrates the history of apartheid from the point of view of a young South African woman, living with her family but in poor conditions. The narrator, who is not named, works as a farmer working on land belonging to white settlers. Besides that, she has another job—waiting for the man who had proposed to her again who had previously left to work in the city as a construction worker. The woman's expectation is wavered when the man is involved in a trade union or labor union, leading and organizing many workers. Because of political activities, his fate ended in court and then imprisoned far away on an island. They were not allowed to meet until he was released a few years later. The man, whose name is also unknown, came home in a fit condition and that surprised the woman. Everyone was happy, except for their child who didn't know his father at all. This condition puts their relationship on the verge of ending.

Gordimer describes quite slowly and subtly how a person's life and decisions change the whole condition of his family and the lives of all the other precious people in his life. The depiction of how the symbolic representation of the social suffering caused by the apartheid regime indirectly brought the people of South Africa to collective trauma. At the same time, this oppression directly affects the existence of individuals and groups and ignites the emergence of social performativity through the political actions of collective agents exhibited by the workers. Through a narrative that shows the relationship between two individuals and their social conditions, this work aims to show how significant the understanding and awareness of the crisis situation in society is. As is known, during the apartheid regime in South Africa, black people lived in the poorest areas which were called homelands. They are economically, socially, and politically ostracized which in other words become the second or lowest class of society. As Alexander (2012, p. 2) puts it, “My concern is with trauma becoming collective. They can be so if they are understood as wounds to social identity. It is a matter of intense cultural and political work.”

In turn, apartheid became the basic trauma in creating social suffering as well as shaping South Africa's postcolonial society. As a concept, apartheid runs like consciousness (More, 2014, p. 3). Individuals and groups cannot simply 'aware' without realizing something. Consciousness is always awareness of something; and it was intentional. The concept of apartheid is the separation of the human race, with the doctrine that each race has a unique destiny, history, religion, culture, values, etc. and for this reason they should be separated. Franz Fanon, African intellectual and anti-colonial critic captures this relationship by saying, “with its own structure, colonialism is separatist and regionalist. Colonialism didn't just state the existence of tribes; it also strengthens them and separates them. Violence is comprehensive and national in nature (1968, p. 94)”. In society and the state, collectively experienced trauma can obscure the meaning of particular identity or collectivism (LaCapra, 2001, p. xiii). Due to a structured and intense social and cultural process, these memories are ultimately deeply rooted in African society, becoming collective trauma or cultural trauma according to Jeffrey Alexander's terminology for the community.

Theoretically, Alexander sees that collective trauma (cultural trauma) occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have experienced a terrible event that leaves an indelible mark

on their group consciousness, marks their memories forever and changes future identities in a fundamental and irrevocable way (2012, p. 6). This kind of trauma is primarily an empirical and scientific concept indicating causality between previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions and actions. To trace this causal relationship, it is crucially mediated by symbolic representations of social suffering by understanding how cultural processes work. This can be seen in “Amnesty” story written by Nadine Gordimer, which is seems very aware that the lives of black South Africans during the apartheid regime suffered collectively. They have no political, economic and social rights in their own territory and land. This right was essentially symbolically represented by white European settlers.

The representation manifested in the symbolic power as mentioned above is brought about by social groups whose actions change the world of materiality, morality, and organization, in this case the European settlers who are represented by the African National Party. In its development, the party which originated and was dominated by white ethnic Dutch descent (Afrikaner) controlled the political system and government of South Africa. They won the election in 1948 and established the apartheid regime. The regime declared South Africa a white nation. Even so, at the same time, intellectuals, artists, politicians, or social activists then create a kind of narrative about the suffering. According to Alexander, this has a projection as an ideology that creates new ideal interests, where trauma narratives can trigger significant changes in the social structure of society.

In response to the above sufferings, collective agency developed—illuminating the emerging domains of social responsibility and political action. In other words, Alexander (2012, p. 2), confirms that it is possible that there will always be some kind of material forces involved in social suffering. This refers to the presence of social performance with strategic calculations, practical considerations around traumatic events that have significant effect on collectivities. As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and is associated with reform of collective identity and reworking of collective memory (Eyerman, 2001). Collective trauma thus does not reflect individual suffering or actual events, but rather a symbolic representation that reconstructs and imagines it. At this point, there is a cultural process that transmits human emotions strongly. To the extent that they identify the root causes of trauma in a way that assumes that moral responsibility, social agents define their solidarity relationships in a way that in principle—allows them to share their suffering—becomes a force for resistance. This is because trauma is not something that exists naturally, but something that is constructed by society. Thus, turning individual suffering into collective trauma is a cultural work.

“To transform individual suffering into collective trauma is cultural work. It depends upon speeches, rituals, marches, meetings, plays, movies, and storytelling of all kinds. Carrier groups tie their material and ideal interests to particular scripts about who did what to whom, and how society must respond if a collective identity is to be sustained” (Alexander, 2012, p. 3-4).

The change from individual suffering to collective trauma or social suffering depends on socio-cultural agendas that lead to the process of social awareness. The agenda includes activities such as speeches, rituals, parades, consolidated meetings, or products of popular culture such as dramas, films, and all kinds of stories or narratives by social groups or agents. They tie the material interests and ideals of society that are oppressed by oppressive and discriminatory systems with certain ideas about who does what to whom and how society must respond if collective identity is to be maintained.

Through the description above, before carrying out the research process, the researcher first mapped the position of this research on the existing research arena by conducting a literature review. This literature review was conducted on studies with the same object. Based on

the search, there has been no research either in journals, articles, theses, or theses that directly examines "Amnesty" as a material object as this research does. The closest is the research conducted by Dr. Sangita T. Ghodake (2015) *"Reflection of Apartheid in Nadine Gordimer's Jump and Other Stories"*. In contrast to this research, the research conducted by Ghodake took 8 story from 16 short stories contained in *Jump and Other Stories* (1991). Ghodake attempts to reveal the reflection of apartheid in Gordimer's collection of short stories by using a psycho-social approach and its tragic consequences on children's growth. Based on the description and literature review previously, this study aims to reveal the symbolic representation of collective trauma caused by the apartheid system presented by Gordimer in "Amnesty" by using Jeffrey Alexander's cultural trauma theory with descriptive qualitative methods. From there, this study asks two questions to be analyzed based on formal objects. First, what is the symbolic representation of social suffering as a result of the apartheid system in shaping collective trauma, and second, how is social performativity through the political actions of collective agents as a response to the apartheid system in "Amnesty" short story.

2) SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF BLACK AFRICAN SOCIAL SUFFERING

"Amnesty" is a short story that was first published by *The New Yorker* in 1990 and later included as one of the stories in the short story collection *Jump and Other Stories* (1991). In general, this short story is about a young South African woman who tells the story of her husband's freedom from prison. Set against the backdrop of the apartheid regime in South Africa, Gordimer in "Amnesty" through the narrator shows how oppressed the black people of South Africa are and especially how they are emotionally and physically affected by European colonialism. Gordimer interestingly describes the relationship between the individual and politics in relation to human rights.

In this fiction, the narrative is centered on one point of view only. This view is voiced by a young woman whose name and origin are unknown. She lives in a farming village with his family; parents and brother. Meanwhile, two of them migrated to a distant city. Although she does not mention or identify himself as part of a particular community, this figure seems quite successful in describing the situation and condition of the black South African people who live suffering under the apartheid regime. The narrative focuses on black characters who are oppressed, discriminated against, and separated from the same rights as white settlers. Because of this separation, it results in social suffering which then develops into cultural trauma through symbolic representations or mental processes that represent object experiences with language symbols.

"My parents also don't have any money. My two brothers who go far to work in the city don't send us money; I think they live with the girls. My father and other brothers work here for the Boers, and their wages are very small, we have two goats, we are also allowed to graze some cows and cultivate a patch of land that my mother grows vegetables on. From here no money is made".

Non-white people live in severe and deliberate poverty. All aspects of their lives are fully controlled by the ruling regime. Through political violence, most racist racism, social discrimination, and state-sponsored oppression. This is clearly seen in the text quote above, how the narrator affirms the condition of his "moneyless" family living in the village. From this, we can assume that what the family experienced is quite representative of the collective suffering of the South African community. Such suffering, for example—even though his father and brother are portrayed as farmers working on land belonging to the Boers or white landowners, the wages they receive are far from roasted by fire. Even so, they remained silent and seemed to experience a culture of silence regarding the conditions they were experiencing. It was as if the arbitrary treatment of the landlords in their ancestral lands was normal.

In addition, his mother also worked as a farmer. But unlike his father and brother who work for landlords, the narrator's mother works to care for a number of livestock such as goats and cows as well as cultivate a plot of land that is "allowed" to be managed by local authorities. The land is used to grow vegetables. It's just that from these efforts "no money is made" to cover their needs. In other words, the results from farming are only sufficient to cover their daily food needs. Apart from this sadness, the narrative of "allowed to graze some cows and cultivate a patch of land" is interesting to analyze. This narrative shows an image of suffering that is a little more humanist when compared to what his father and brothers experienced. However, the two seemingly different treatments are essentially the same suffering, disguised by social and cultural symbols.

The treatment black people experienced over time became a collective memory. This memory simultaneously triggers a number of groups to carry out a series of actions, including awareness raising, propaganda, strikes, and so on.

"But apparently he started wearing the T-shirt, he said he was a member of the Labor Union, he told us about the strike, about how he was among those who negotiated with the employer because someone was laid off after the strike took place" [...] "In the third year, we heard he was imprisoned.." Then his trial was over and he got six years. He was sent to the Island. We all know about the Island. Our leaders have been there for a long time".

Since the beginning, the narrator tells that he has been proposed to by a man that she loves. However, their wedding plans were not carried out because the conditions in which the man worked as a laborer experienced a series of turmoil. By the narrator, the man he always looks forward to coming home to works as a laborer in a white-owned construction company in the city. In the early years of their separation, the narrator is told that he always came home once a month on weekends and two weeks on every Christmas. But, his male habit of always coming home every month became rare after "he started wearing the T-shirt". At the same time, a baby was born from their relationship. Instead of getting married immediately with the results of working as a laborer, the man decided to join the Labor Union organization. Together with other workers, he carried out a series of actions such as negotiations to a strike. The quote above shows this. The narrative shows hope for change with the emergence of crucial awareness of the black working group in interpreting the collective suffering of their nation. After understanding the long process of suffering—illuminating the present domain as social responsibility and political action later.

At first, the narrator had absolutely no idea of the man's choice. The reason is, the decision will automatically have an impact on the intensity of their meeting. Thus, quality time is one of the moments that is sacrificed. However, the woman slowly began to understand the decision—especially after understanding the existing conditions that it was carried out solely for the sake of their identity as a group of people who were oppressed and discriminated against by the apartheid regime. In the process, various actions carried out by Labor Union organizations ended or were met with repressive treatment. It is clear that this will always be the case, especially as regimes of the caliber of apartheid have a million ways to ensure their domination and subjugation of the black majority. They carried out efforts to get rid of them through criminalization "after the strike". It is implied that the man is the intellectual figure behind the social movement of the black workers. The impact is heavy, the narrator must accept the latest fact that "In the third year, we heard he was imprisoned ..", was arrested and brought to justice. The court ruling gave a sentence of six years and had to serve a period of imprisonment in a place far from black settlements. From the text above, the place is called "the Island"—which is described as familiar to the indigenous people of Africa. In the history of apartheid, Island refers to a place separated from mainland Africa called Roffineiland or Robbin Island. The island is

where black leaders including Nelson Mandela were imprisoned by the white government. There was no resistance whatsoever in thwarting the punishment.

News of the man's arrest and looting reached his parents' ears. The reaction, who is also the narrator's father-in-law, looks so different. Her mother can only be sad and cry every time. While his father seemed to have lost hope. Surrender to the situation, leave all problems to God.

“His mother always cried and put her hand on head and said nothing, and his father, who preached to us every Sunday said, tell my son that we pray, God will take care of everything for him. He once replied, that's the problem—our people on the farm, they are deceived that God will decide what is good for them so they don't feel the need to do anything to improve their lives”.

Text above shows a different response between his mothers and fathers after receiving information that their son were arrested and imprisoned. The different reactions do not appear to be merely the difference between two individual attitudes, but rather a symbol that represents the differences in black people's awareness in responding to apartheid as a social suffering. This means that not all of them feel the same way or realize suffering together. That way, trauma not fully reached their collectivity, or may have transcended the collectivity. The different awareness as intended can be seen from the response shown by his own father in the piece of text above. Although he is described as regularly giving Sunday sermons to the public, including the narrator, for him there is no suffering that comes except only from God.

This narrative feels quite ironic, considering that he is a religious leader who should open the eyes and hearts of the people to the real conditions. This attitude may be a manifestation of mental processes as a symptom of the strong suffering previously experienced. Suffering that ultimately goes through a cultural process becomes a collective trauma. Instead, he chose to separate himself from the reality or collectivity of the suffering of his people by saying "God will take care of everything for him" to affirm that the suffering that occurs can no longer be resolved by humans. At this point, the previously humanist image of suffering is increasingly disguised by using theocentric symbols such as divinity. This shows how deep the effects of social suffering on African black communities are.

3) COLLECTIVE AGENT PERFORMANCE AND POLITICAL ACTION

As Alexander (2012: 15) said, in order for trauma to appear in the sphere of collectivities, a social crisis must become a cultural crisis. Events are one thing and representations of events are another. Although the response of the trade unions is able to raise awareness of social suffering which in turn creates collective trauma and social performativity, trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. Rather, it is the result of an acute discomfort that enters the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity. Collective actors then decide to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they come from, and where they want to go.

“He was always good at speaking, even in English—when he was a student at a school on a farm, he was once a champion. He always reads the newspapers that Indian shopkeepers use to wrap the soap and sugar they sell”.

Text above shows an indication of the presence of social agents who will act as collective actors who are able to represent the social pain of the community. By the narrator, it is described that the man who is also her husband from the beginning was equipped with good skills in communication, plus his ability to master English, enabling him to represent his group in a series of negotiations to organize larger movements, leading to greater social performativity threatens the apartheid regime.

“There was a problem at the inn, there was a riot about the rent of the inn in a black settlement and he told me—only me, not the other elders—that if people go against the way they are treated, then it's for all of us, good on farms as well as in urban areas, and the Trade Unions are on their side, he is on their side, writing speeches and rallies”.

Simultaneously, a social crisis occurs when the working class begins to read, see, and realize the situations that threaten their collective identity as indigenous people on African soil. Departing from this problem, they formed a Trade Union with the aim of accommodating, fighting for the rights of workers who were suppressed by the white bourgeoisie through a series of actions and awareness propaganda. In its development, the organizational movement developed not only for the benefit of the workers, but also transformed as a moral, political, and social movement for the wider community, both those living in cities and villages. In other words, they act as and like social agents.

The quote above shows an incident of riots that occurred in black settlements. The riots were allegedly caused by "inn rentals" that harmed black Africans. As a result, after going through social and cultural processes—social performativity occurs through political actions of collective agents represented by the Trade Unions as a response to social suffering such as racism, political violence, social discrimination, and oppression. This political action is then in accordance with what Alexander explained that turning individual suffering into collective trauma is a cultural work. That means it depends on cultural activities such as speeches, rituals, parades, and gatherings that are well consolidated and structured. The aim is to accommodate and represent social pain or suffering, as well as to distribute social awareness to get to the stage where the apartheid system is the culprit of all forms of social suffering they experience.

The Trade Unions carried out tasks such as speeches and demonstrations, the aim of which was to fight white domination which was becoming more and more intolerable by the day. In addition, it also shows how trade unions are able to tie their material and ideal interests to certain ideas about who does what to whom and how society must respond if collective identity is to be maintained.

“Our stupidity is a way to humiliate us, this stupidity must disappear.” Then he sent a kind letter. That's why I'm on the Island, far from you, I'm here so that one day our people can provide for land, food, and an end to ignorance”.

Seen from the text above shows a commitment in the form of ideas or ideas propagated by the man through the Labor Union. Although he clearly affirmed the stereotype that black Africans were stupid, he didn't waver and kept going—believing in the power of solidarity between people, driven by one common ground. The narrator describes that he believes that this inherent stupidity must end immediately. As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and is linked to the reform of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory. This means that collective trauma does not reflect individual suffering or actual events, but rather a symbolic representation that reconstructs and harms it.

In this case, the trauma of African society as a symptom of the apartheid system was mediated by the man and the trade unions. They reformed the collective identity of blacks who initially accepted the policy of racial segregation without doing any resistance. This is with the aim of extracting traumatic collective memories into capital in embracing the collectivity to carry out political action as a whole. At this point, there is a cultural process that transmits emotions between people strongly. This process can be seen from the political agendas of liberation such as speeches, demonstrations, and others—although many ended in repression and riots. Most importantly, to the extent that they identify the root causes of trauma in a way that assumes that moral responsibility, social agents define their solidarity relationships in a way that in principle—allows them to share their suffering—becomes a force for resistance.

4) CONCLUSION

Based on discuss and analysis above, it is concluded that the short story “Amnesty” by Nadine Gordimer explicitly describes the deep racial divisions that infected South Africa under the apartheid regime. Through the narrator, played by a young woman, she shows how suffering the people of South Africa are both physically and psychologically. Gordimer tries to show another side of the unequal relationship between the black majority and the white settler minority through symbolic representations of social suffering. This suffering then brought the indigenous black people into the collective trauma. They live in severe and willful poverty. All aspects of their lives are completely controlled by the white regime which is in power through political violence, the most racist racism, social discrimination, and state sponsored oppression.

The symbolic representation of social suffering as a result of the apartheid system in shaping collective trauma can be seen from the narrative of suffering which is portrayed as humanist. The narrator's family is given permission by the apartheid regime to manage a patch of land freely. However, at the same time, the workers who worked for the landlords and the white bourgeoisie were treated unfairly and humanely by receiving low wages, high housing rents, and even termination of employment if they protested. However, the two seemingly different treatments are essentially the same suffering, disguised by social and cultural symbols. In addition, there are also other images of suffering wrapped in theocentric symbols such as divinity. This shows how deep the effects of social suffering on African black communities are.

Then, as a response to the conditions mentioned above, social performativity through political actions of collective agents occurs, which is represented by the Labor Union. Through a series of social and cultural processes such as gathering, organizing, rioting, speeches, and demonstrations, suffering that was previously represented symbolically began to receive attention and support. In its development, this organizational movement developed not only for the benefit of the workers, but also transformed as a moral, political, and social movement for the wider community, both those living in cities and villages. In other words, they act as social agents. This group is able to accommodate, represent social pain or suffering as well as distribute social awareness to arrive at the stage where the apartheid system is the cause of all forms of social suffering they experience.

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