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Master's Dissertation/
Trabajo Fin de Máster

ILLUSTRATING APARTHEID: FIVE SOUTH AFRICAN WRITERS

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Abstract

This Master's Dissertation focuses on the importance of the use of literature during the apartheid era in South Africa in order to transmit the reality of life under this system of racial segregation. To that end, it will encompass the analysis of five works belonging to a specific genre: the short story. This piece of prose fiction has been used frequently by some South African writers with the aim to raise their voices against the apartheid regime. Thus, following a chronological order, the following selected short stories will be studied: *The Death of Masaba* by R.R.R. Dhlomo, *Six Feet of the Country* by Nadine Gordimer, "The Lemon Orchard" by Alex La Guma, *Mrs. Plum* by Ezekiel Mphahlele, and "N2" by Zoë Wicomb. Despite the use of censorship to control the media, through their works, these authors have attempted to illustrate this regime implemented by the governing National Party of South Africa, from 1948 to 1994. Therefore, they will make use of art to reflect the impacts this period of oppression had on themselves and their own country.

Key words

South Africa, apartheid, short story, black, white, ethnicity.

Resumen

Este Trabajo Fin de Máster se centra en la importancia del uso de la literatura durante la era del apartheid en Sudáfrica para transmitir la realidad de la vida bajo este sistema de segregación racial. Con ese fin, incluirá el análisis de cinco obras pertenecientes a un género concreto: el relato corto. Esta obra de ficción en prosa ha sido utilizada con frecuencia por algunos escritores sudafricanos con el fin de alzar la voz contra el régimen del apartheid. Así, siguiendo un orden cronológico, se estudiarán los siguientes relatos cortos seleccionados: *The Death of Masaba* de R.R.R. Dhlomo, *Six Feet of the Country* de Nadine Gordimer, "The Lemon Orchard" de Alex La Guma, *Mrs. Plum* de Ezekiel Mphahlele, and "N2" de Zoë Wicomb. A pesar del uso de la censura para controlar los medios, estos autores han intentado ilustrar a través de sus obras este régimen implementado por el gobernante Partido Nacional de Sudáfrica, desde 1948 hasta 1994. Por lo tanto, harán uso del arte para reflejar los impactos que este período de opresión tuvo en ellos mismos y en su propio país.

Palabras clave

Sudáfrica, apartheid, relato corto, negro, blanco, grupo étnico.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Master's Dissertation is to analyse the work of five South African short story writers who have made a mark against apartheid, a system of legislation which was officially introduced in the country in 1948 by the National Party government. It surrendered the political, social and economic power to the nation's minority white population. According to this system of racial segregation, South African society should be separated into different groups concerning their race: whites, blacks, Coloureds, and Asians. White citizens belonged to the highest status, whereas black people were cruelly oppressed and discriminated against. This racist system of laws lasted 46 years, since it came to an end in 1994, with the arrival of a democratic government led by Nelson Mandela. Thus, because of this unfair situation, many South African writers decided to describe it in their works. Therefore, this Dissertation will offer an analysis of five of them so that we become aware of the importance of knowing the perspective of those people who suffered this system first-hand.

To that end, the following authors have been chosen: R.R.R. Dhlomo, Nadine Gordimer, Alex La Guma, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Zoë Wicomb. With regard to the first one, R.R.R. Dhlomo, we will analyse his short story *The Death of Masaba*, published in 1929. This means that it was set in pre-apartheid, so it helps us to understand that there was racial segregation in South Africa before the arrival of this regime. To continue with, special attention will be paid to Nadine Gordimer who, despite the white colour of her skin, always was an activist against apartheid and racist attitudes in general. Moreover, it is interesting to mention that she also faced censorship. In her short story *Six Feet of the Country*, originally published in 1956, she includes themes such as interracial relationships and the consequences of racial inequality. Then, the focus will be placed on Alex La Guma, another black anti-apartheid activist whose works clearly depicted the oppressive measures of this movement. Among his works, we can highlight "The Lemon Orchard", one of the stories present in *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories* which perfectly captures the essence of apartheid and heavily criticizes it. The next short story to be analysed will be *Mrs. Plum*, by Ezekiel Mphahlele, another black activist against the conditions forced upon blacks during this period. Finally, we will concentrate on "N2", one of the twelve interconnected short stories belonging to the collection *The One that Got Away*, written by Zoë Wicomb. This work has been

selected because it is part of the literature of post-apartheid South Africa, so going more deeply into it may make us see this movement's influence after it was repealed.

Thus, this Dissertation is divided into different sections as described below.

Section 2, on its part, will deal with the short story. Thus, in section 2.1, special attention will be paid to relevant aspects surrounding this literary genre, such as its characteristics and definitions of "short story" provided by different authors. Furthermore, a comparison between this genre and the novel will be offered. To continue with, section 2.2 will focus on the South African context, where the short story was one of the dominant genres of writing during the apartheid era. It also points out the reasons why the short story was highly cultivated in South Africa in contrast to the whole continent's preferences.

Then, section 3 will be devoted to the analysis of those short stories written by the selected above-mentioned authors: R.R.R. Dhlomo, Nadine Gordimer, Alex La Guma, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Zoë Wicomb, respectively. Among other elements, the stories' main characters and the authors' style will be taken into account, as well as important passages to emphasize. Thus, this study will help us to understand the transformation of the country from the perspective of these writers who condemned the injustice of this system of institutionalized racial oppression.

Last but not least, section 4 will summarize some final remarks which become interesting in the South African context, thus providing a brief summary of the main developed ideas.

2. SHORT STORY

2.1. A notion of short story

In a country where literature has been used as a tool in order to show its urgent historical and political issues, the literary genre of the short story has played a relevant role.¹ But before going into specificities of the South African short story, let me try to arrive at a definition of the short story as a literary genre. Nadine Gordimer, in her Introduction to *Selected Stories*, wonders if "a short story is a piece of fiction short enough to be read at one sitting" (1978: 15). Through this statement, we can clearly see that the aspect that is often taken as the main feature of this genre is length. However,

¹ There are two clear examples of authors whose works deal with the political drama and ordinary everyday settings: Njabulo Ndebele and Es'kia Mphahlele. Through these important writers, we can see the reality of South Africa during critical years of Apartheid.

the length of some narratives may lead to confusion because it is virtually impossible to establish a fixed number of pages assigned to the short story as a literary genre.

On the other hand, as opposed to the other main narrative genre, i.e., the novel, the short story has tended to suffer from critical neglect. Thus, it would be interesting to make a comparison between them in terms of similarities and differences. To that end, we can highlight Gordimer's words:

Both novel and story use the same material: human experience. Both have the same aim: to communicate it. Both use the same medium: the written world. There is a general and recurrent dissatisfaction with the novel as a means of netting ultimate reality. (2012: 168)

In this statement we can see that there are many similarities between the short story and the novel. As a matter of fact, they share the same material, aim and medium. Nevertheless, in terms of conveying the "ultimate reality", Gordimer suggests that the short story may be the literary genre that suits better the needs of certain writers:

If the short story is alive while the novel is dead, the reason must lie in approach and method. The short story as a form and as a *kind of creative vision* must be better equipped to attempt the capture of ultimate reality at a time when (whichever way you choose to see it) we are drawing nearer to the mystery of life or are losing ourselves in a bellowing wilderness of mirrors. (2012: 169)

Moreover, as Gordimer points out, "Certainly the short story always has been more flexible and open to experiment than the novel. Short-story writers always have been subject at the same time to both a stricter technical discipline and a wider freedom than the novelist" (2012:169). The last part of this claim could seem a little bit contradictory because, according to Gordimer, while the short story requires a "stricter technical discipline" which would correspond to the length condensed, it gives "a wider freedom" to the writer. On some occasions, this freedom is necessary for writers to express delicate situations such as apartheid in South Africa, as discussed later in this paper.

Another interesting idea is conveyed by the South African author Andries Walter Oliphant:

The short story when compared to the novel, apart from its length, does not require the same degree of stability in the order of things, or continuity between past and present, for its operations. This makes it extremely flexible and enables it to focus on the fragments and fractions of everyday life without forfeiting any of the efficacy of

narrative to describe imaginary or real events and illuminate their causal relationship. (1996: 59)

As we have seen in Gordimer, the implication here is that, as opposed to the novel, the short story is characterized by certain flexibility. The short story does not usually require an established order of events or situations. In fact, continuity between past and present is not required as in the novel. Thus, writers of the short story may base their stories on relevant, isolated moments, as Gordimer points out: “Short story writers see by the light of the flash” (1976: 179). In the short story, writers may follow their own vision, -however limited and momentary it may be- instead of following a strict chronological, historical or objective order. The emphasis is on “a single situation”:

The problem of how best to take hold of ultimate reality, from the technical and stylistic point of view, is one that the short-story writer is accustomed to solving specifically in relation to an area-event, mental state, mood, appearance-which is heightened manifest in a single situation. (2012: 170)

These flashes also correspond to, borrowing Oliphant’s words, “fragments and fractions of everyday life”, real or imaginary events which are described by writers in a successful way, despite their fragmentation.

Chapman (2004: 11) also contends the fragmentation and flexibility of the short story in his introduction in *The New Century of South African Short Stories*: “With the novel we enter a big world; characters develop in interchange with society; there is a beginning, middle and end to the plot. With the story beginnings, middles and ends are not as decisive”. Through this claim, we can observe that the structure of the plot of the short story is not as defined or fixed as the plot of the novel, which is marked by a beginning, middle and end.

If we turn to Chapman, we find another interesting idea: “Whereas the novel is equated with big ideas, big events, the story favours flexibility, ellipses, surprise, emotion, implication” (2004: 11). Again, the emphasis is on flexibility. In this case, it is said that in contrast to the novel, which presents big assumptions, the short story is characterized by a fragmentation that allows the writer to present “ellipses” and to convey emotions through which the reader feels involved in the reading.

To finish this brief comparison between the short story and the novel, I would like to mention another interesting difference mentioned by Mphahlele: “the short story

is more 'handy' than the novel, and its content more available" (1969: 479). Here, Mphahlele seems to suggest that the short story has an immediacy and a straightforwardness that the novel does not have. That may be one reason why black South African writers, especially during apartheid times, when they were subjected to constraining material circumstances, tended to cultivate this genre.

Chapman, on his part, also tries to define the short story as opposed to the novel:

The short story is not a mini-novel. It is not a simple tale, or incident. It is not a joke or lyrical rhapsody in prose. Not a case history, or a reported incident. 'The short story is none of these things' says O'Connor, 'because it has an extra dimension'. This dimension is achieved when the teller or writer puts the audience firmly in the middle of an action. (16)

As we have read in many articles and it has been mentioned before, the boundaries of the short story are blurred with respect to other types of narratives. Here, O'Connor claims that the short story has an extra dimension which involves the relation between writer and reader. This extra dimension refers to the fact that the writer makes the reader being "in the middle of an action". It would be the genre that creates a closer proximity between reader and writer.

Another interesting idea related to the characterization of the short story is the way in which writers of this literary genre deal with fantasy, as discussed by Gordimer (2012): "Writers turn to the less obvious fantasy as a wider lens on ultimate reality. But this fantasy is something that changes, merges, emerges, disappears as a pattern does viewed through the bottom of a glass" (170). The use of fantasy is related to the fragmentary condition of the short story. As we have said before, Gordimer states that "short story writers see by the light of the flash" (1976: 179). These "flashes" may be fantastic in the sense that they are tied to the personal, idiosyncratic, maybe distorted vision of the writers instead of following pre-given conventional patterns of perception.

To conclude the general characterization of the short story, we have to highlight that, in spite of all the features mentioned, it is impossible to establish an unequivocal definition of this literary genre, as Chapman admits:

The fact that criticism has not formulated any unique theory of the short-story genre according to which we might understand its unique kind of experience or the unique

way it imitates and creates its experience, alerts us to the difficulties of defining the form. (2004: 11)

Through these words, we can notice that there is not a unique theory to define the short-story genre, but some features, such as its length, that can be applied to it. However, they become very subjective and depend on the perspective of writer and reader.

2.2. Short story in South African literature

Once we have a notion of the short story as a literary genre, we are going to focus our attention on this literary genre in the South African context, mainly in relation to apartheid, a radical political system that shook and changed the lives of its population. We are going to see in detail many aspects that have given shape to the short story in this country.

I would like to begin with a general reflection on the role of South African Literature. Nkosi (1981: 76) reminds us that “the literature of Southern Africa is wholly concerned with the theme of struggle and conflict-conflict between the white conquerors and the conquered blacks, between with masters and black servitors, between the village and the city”. Though this rigid dichotomy is not operative in post-apartheid any more, this was the case in South Africa for a long time. We are going to see that literature was used as a tool for political protest, and how the short story was chosen by many authors to convey that feeling of complaint and commitment.² Nevertheless, it is important to take into account the fact that censorship operated at the time with the aim of avoiding the flowering of ideas without the consent of the oppressor. Kunene (2002: 224) perfectly explains why so many pieces of literature were censored during apartheid:

art is the mirror in which the oppressor sees himself truthfully reflected, that is to say, at his ugliest. In his panic the oppressor, by a strange distortion of logic, sees the ugliness in the art and not in himself, and instead of removing his own deformities, he breaks the mirror.

To this clear explanation he adds that a good work “derives its persuasiveness from the fact that it confronts us with characters in situations”, and this was a threat to the South

² According to Nkosi, what readers expected from literature were three qualities: “protest, commitment and explanation” (76). Literature was more than entertainment; it was a way of conveying an answer of what was happening in South Africa due to apartheid.

African white minority. Another relevant author who wrote about censorship was Nadine Gordimer, who stated in the magazine *Index on Censorship* that black South African literature has been eradicated by this legal tool and the “banning of individuals, at home and in exile” (2012: 152). Yet white writers have been permitted to address black people’s disabilities, sufferings, hopes, dreams, and resentments within strict limits.

Despite apartheid censorship, South African literature has focused its attention on topics related to political struggle and conflict. Therefore, the situation that these people experienced there was what prevailed in South African literature.

Short fiction has been used to convey information about troublesome situations, not only in South Africa but in Southern Africa, in general. According to Stephen Gray, in his work *The Penguin Book of Southern African story*:

Short fiction as a literary form has played a long and central role in all the sub-literatures of Southern Africa, and appears to have been serviceable in many situations: in autochthonous, pre-contact literature before 1800, as the vehicle for legend and folklore; in colonial literature of the same period in European languages, as the vehicle for fireside tales; and not to put too fine a point upon it, many of these are absorbed into the form of the written short story of modern times during the twentieth century. (8)

For example, this kind of narrative has been used “as the vehicle for legend and folklore”, that is to say, there is a link between short fiction and the roots and customs of Southern Africa. As put by Gray, diverse forms of short fiction have coexisted in Southern Africa. Among them, we are going to pay attention on the short story that is present in modern times.

Focusing again on South African literature, in particular, we can say that the short story is probably the South African literary genre par excellence. There are many reasons to consider this previous statement as true. It was probably the divisive effects of first colonialism and later apartheid that were very much responsible for the idea that the writer is unable or unwilling to provide an all-embracing picture of South African society, and produces instead, through the short story, fragmented restless and brief images. Therefore, we can say that the fragmentary condition of the short story is appropriate for writers to offer their particular vision. In a context of racial segregation and social division, each writer tries to convey his or her limited vision. It is very

difficult for the writer to embrace a whole picture of previous South African society. Thus, we are going to see that there are black, white and coloured writers who focus their attention on very different aspects of South African society and from very different perspectives.

To continue with the characteristics of the short story in the South African apartheid, let us look at the following words by Mphahlele:

(...) the short story can be read quickly and makes itself available to the lesser educated, who constitute a predominant class in Africa. These are people who will be bringing to their reading an acquaintance with folk tales from which they do not have to make a big jump in terms of identification. In the sophisticated short story they find characters that approximate real-life people, like the readers themselves. (1969: 478)

Mphahlele emphasizes that this kind of literature allowed non-educated readers to feel close to the writer, since the latter writes about “real-life people”. We can see that this general feature, previously mentioned in the general features of the short story, can be perfectly applied to the South African short story. The particularity of this kind of literature is the fact that it can be addressed to a kind of audience that Mphahlele calls “the lesser educated” who, according to this author, represented a predominant class in Africa.³

The fact that the writer offers stories that are close to folk tales, and stories with which the readers can identify themselves, makes the reading easier to those people who have not received an appropriate education. Furthermore, Mphahlele’s reference to “characters that approximate real life people” highlights the realist mode that has very much prevailed not only in the short story but in South African literature in general.

To reinforce the idea of the relation between writer and reader that the short story establishes, it would be interesting to concentrate on the next comment from Michael Chapman:

Many commentators have found a unity between ancient oral stories and modern written stories in that, to a greater degree than the novel, the short story invites the participation of its listener or reader. Its brevity and elusiveness challenge its audience to ‘complete’

³ The fact that the lesser educated represented a predominant class in South Africa does not mean that the short story is only addressed to black people. As a matter of fact, white people also constituted the audience of this literary genre and it is important to mention that there are some relevant white authors of the short story. Nadine Gordimer is a clear example of it.

its suggestion and to seek coherence even when the experience, or the style, signals dislocation (13).

This statement clearly shows the connection between the modern short story and ancient oral African stories, which is like a connection between past and present: as if the short story was a continuity of these folk tales told in South Africa in the past. This connection between oral folk tales and the modern short story can be seen in the way the latter invites the reader to participate, as the listener did it in the folk tale. Also in the Introduction of traditional and mythical elements, Mphahlele underlines “I listened dumbstruck to my grandmother’s stories of violence, mystery, witchcraft and so on , and I recited them to my friends several times.(...) I think all these things conditioned my mind to the short story frame” (473-474). When we read this statement, we notice that the fact that Mphahlele was exposed to oral folk tales told by his grandmother, and maybe the admiration that this caused on him, influenced him to select the short story, a literary genre that allows the writer to expand, in a way, a form of literature as it was the oral tradition of folk tales from the past. This oral tradition cannot only be found in South Africa, but in the whole of the African continent, according to Mphahlele.

To continue with the short story in South Africa, it would be interesting to make a contrast between this and the African continent as a whole. In both of them, the role of the short story genre has been very relevant, but it would be curious to justify why it has been highly cultivated in South Africa. To that end, we are going to focus on the following idea of Mphahlele:

The short story is not as highly developed in other parts of Africa as it is in South Africa. And yet the African folk tale is still a living tradition, although conditions are developing which make oral storytelling impossible and sometimes irrelevant. (1969: 476)

The development of the short story in South Africa has been more remarkable than in other parts of Africa. This has depended, partly, on the relevance of the African folk tale in each context. Irony case, given its obvious progressive evolution, the modern short story could be seen as having at least partly substituted the traditional oral folk tale.

Mphahlele also explains why so many black and coloured writers often choose this literary genre:

I have suggested elsewhere that the very physical presence of oppression made the sustained effort required for a novel almost impossible; and that the medium of the short story seemed suited for a fugitive urban culture such as the white society of South Africa had imposed on the non-whites. (473)

The novel required a sustained effort and concentration that they just could not afford. The short story suited much better the urgency and precariousness of their lifestyle, because most of them collaborated with the Anti-Apartheid movements and had to make a living for themselves. Therefore, writing was not their only activity.

On the other hand, turning now to post-apartheid South Africa, through the following words by Oliphant (1996: 59), we will understand why many authors have continued to choose this literary genre: “The short story’s concentration and focus, accordingly renders it uniquely appropriate for capturing disparate moments and events. In fluid and transitory contexts such as present-day South Africa, this form of narrative can be practised with great effect”.

Oliphant is writing in 1996, and let us remember that the first democratic elections took place in 1994. In the short story by Zoë Wicomb, we will see this exactly: a “fluid” and “transitory” context in which characters try to negotiate a new social landscape.

As regards the themes and styles that this literary genre offers in the South African context, according to Mzamane (1986: 24):

The short story in South Africa may not possess the rich variety in themes and styles that national literatures in other parts of the world possess. But it boasts an unsurpassed tradition of political commitment, emotional intensity, high seriousness, freedom from pretentiousness, simplicity, (...)

The limitation on themes and styles in the short story in South Africa is due to pervasive influence of apartheid, which led to a repetitive emphasis on political and social commitment. But this does not mean that this kind of literature has a low value. In contrast to the richness of other literatures, the short story in South Africa cannot show off about having a wide range of themes or styles. However, what really matters is the way in which authors convey the feelings and themes they focus on. Furthermore, we will see later that this changes in a way when the effects of apartheid decreased.

Thus, the development of the genre of the short story in South Africa has mirrored historical developments, as Cornwell, Kloppe and MacKenzie point out:

The trajectory of the South African short story from the 1860s to the 1950s parallels the demographic shifts in South Africa from countryside to city that were occasioned by the mineral discoveries of the late nineteenth century and subsequent industrialization and urbanization. The effects of this demographic shift can be traced in the changing texture of the short story over this period. From stories which have a predominantly rural setting, and which bear close relationship to oral lore, legend, and small-town gossip, the South African short story of the 1950's and after is city based, increasingly fragmented, and social realist. (178)

In this Master's Dissertation, I will analyse both urban and rural stories. Due to changes related to industrialization and urbanization, there is a migration from the countryside to the city that influenced on the short story, particularly its setting.

If we have said that there was a moment when the South African short story seemed not to have a very rich range of styles and themes, in the contemporary South African short story this reality has changed. As we can read in *The Columbia guide to South Africa literature in English since 1945*:

The contemporary South African short story manifests a fascinating diversity of techniques. The social realism so prominent in the 1970s and 80s has given away to metafictional experimentation in a variety of forms. Predictably, this development involves a further movement away from forms of story writing that draw on oral culture, the milieu in which the South African short story first emerged. (180)

In the contemporary South African short story there is a wide variety of forms and techniques. Apartheid is still present in this genre, but now there are other concerns which were unthinkable decades ago.

3. ANALYSIS OF SHORT STORIES: FROM R.R.R. DHLOMO TO ZOË WICOMB

The characteristics of the short story in general as well as in South Africa, and the interpersonal relations in this country, constitute an excellent background to go into detail about certain short stories that clearly represent the characteristics that we have mentioned in the previous sections of this essay.

We are going to follow a chronological order, that is to say, we are going to analyze, firstly, the older short stories and, finally, the most contemporary ones. In this

way, we will observe the effects of the changing context of South Africa in the production of this literary genre. It will help us to see the transformation of the country and the changes from the violence of the Apartheid Regime to the uncertainties and inherited consequences in the post-Apartheid era.

3.1. *The Death of Masaba*, by R.R.R. Dhlomo

The Death of Masaba, whose author is R.R.R. Dhlomo, is the first short story to be analyzed. To begin with, it is important to know that this is an ancient short story as we are going to see in some details, and it was published in 1929. To understand it better, we need to delve into this black South African author. In order to have an idea of what this author supposed for South African literature, and particularly in the short story tradition, it would be interesting to deal with the following idea by Mzamane: “R.R.R. Dhlomo achieved distinction as the first Black South African to publish a novel in English [...] His stories inaugurated the modern short story tradition among Blacks in South Africa” (1986: 10).

Hence we can consider Dhlomo as a very important figure for South African literature, as a “Pioneer”, as it is labelled in that article. The fact that Dhlomo is one of the first black authors is of paramount importance because, at those times, it was very difficult for black people to express their opinion through literature since they were subject to white people.

To continue with, we are going to highlight some characteristics of his stories which define the style of this author. According to Ndebele: “The stories of R.R.R. Dhlomo, for example are characterized by tightness of plot, emphasis on the most essential items of plot, the predominance of dialogue, and sudden, almost unexpected shocking endings, all of which are the ingredients of dramatic writing” (1991: 33).

The kind of plot that he presented and the items with which he dealt produce a dramatic writing, perfect to convey the difficult situation of South Africa. In words of Tim Couzens in the article of Mzamane: “Many of the themes he raised are ‘universal’ to the Black South African condition and foreshadow the concerns of present-day Africa” (1986: 10).

If we start with the analysis of the story *The Death of Masaba*, firstly, we have to contextualize it in a setting widely used by Dhlomo, which are the mines. As Ndebele points out, “Dhlomo takes us, in this highly dramatic manner, through the working conditions in the mines” (1991: 33), that is to say, the setting that we face in this story

involves suffering, cruelty and harshness. It is a place that could represent perfectly the lives of several people at those ages. As we have mentioned previously in the general characteristics of the short story, this genre usually represents the daily life of South African people. Dhlomo shows in this story maybe one of the cruelest sides of this country.

In summary, this is a story told by an unknown narrator and it is about a man called Masaba who starts to work in the mines. He suffers the extreme conditions that working in such a deep place entails, not only by the heat on that level, but also by the violence to which they are constantly exposed from the part of their masters. As it is present in the text, “here their half-naked bodies were bent unceasingly. Even old lashing hands were seen staggering under the heat and through the pangs of hunger” (1985: 119). Masaba suffers a number of accidents. As he is a new worker he cannot be lashed, but this is ignored by Boss Tom. Although Boss Steamer seems to be a little bit permissive, and the main character begs to Boss Tom to give him another job, this does not save Masaba from its final destination: the death. “For with a heartrending cry, Masaba fell with a sickening thud, knocking his head against a jagged piece of rock on the stope [...] Madoda the manager said *I should come to tell you Masaba is dead*” (1985: 120).

If we talk about the characters present in this story, we could highlight three. The main character is Masaba, a black man who works in the mines. In this character we can observe a person suppressed to bad conditions. He tries to survive to this hard situation, but he fails. We see in him a naïve person since he thinks about the possibility of saving himself begging the master another job. As we can see: “*I don’t know*, sobbed Masaba. *This is my first time to work in the mine. I began work yesterday.*” (1985: 119). We could say that the fact that this character tries to save himself begging to a white master could reveal that Masaba trusts in the “humanity” of white people, in a moment of hopelessness, although the response from the part of the master is the expected one by the reader, since he does not show any sign of compassion.

The second character I would like to highlight is Boss Tom, who represents a master whose cruelty can be highlighted through the following statement: “Under these disabilities, with death everywhere beckoning, Boss Tom made them lash as though the Furies were after them” (1985: 119). During the story, Boss Tom utters inhuman words towards those people who are working in the mines, and concretely towards Masaba. “*What! Masaba can’t lash? A bloody Kaffir...can’t lash?*” (1985: 119). Here we can see

the violence with which they treat their workers. We see in Boss Tom the impossibility of getting an understanding between whites and blacks.

Another curious character is Boss Boy Stimela, whose position is not so clear in the story. He is black, a feature that we can deduce from the use of the word “Boys” which will be discussed later. In spite of representing the authority, because he is a foreman, he is defined in the text as “one of those fast-dwindling Boss Boys”. We can see on him a figure which conveys some compassion towards Masaba, maybe due to the fact that they both share the same race. “*He is dying, sir*,” cried Stimela in a strained voice” (1985: 119).

On the other hand, we must take into account that an interesting aspect that we find in this story is the connection between this one and the oral tradition. In fact, at the very beginning, we see that this is a story told by someone:

“Fellows, what do you think of this business of Masaba?”

“Yes, just tell us what happened.” (1985: 118)

We can affirm that words and speech are crucial elements in the text. That is to say, along the story, what is relevant is the dialogue between Masaba and his masters, a dialogue through which he seems not to get something. This dialogue could be a representation of the difficult relations between whites and blacks. In this story, the lack of understanding between black and white people is evident due to the superiority of the second ones. As it is present in the text, “It is difficult for a boy and his Boss to come to quick understanding down there. Because in the mine their language is different from ours” (1985: 119). This is a very relevant moment in this short story. On the one hand, we see that Dhlomo introduces himself as part of the community with the use of “ours” and, on the other hand, this author conveys explicitly the impossibility of fraternity between the two ethnicities. By showing the hard reality that these workers experience, he is condemning the situation in his country. To continue with this important aspect of the story as it is the lack of understanding between different ethnicities, we have to mention the presence of “the Prince of Darkness” which represents Satan. This is in relation to the speech of white people, who use words which cause pain and bad feelings in black people.

The best example in this story is the character of Boss Tom who, as we have said before, utters significant words through which he conveys the meaning of black people for him, objects whose sense of their lives is to work as if black people are only predestined to work hardly due to their color skin. There are two interesting moments in

which this character points out his hate and the scorn towards black people⁴. The first one: “Boss Tom was greatly surprised when he heard that a ‘Kaffir’ could not do the job for which he was solely created, the handling of the shovel” (1985: 119). For this character, a Kaffir has only one function in life which is to work hard for white people. Another crucial moment which is very interesting to mention is a repeated one in this story. These are words from Boss Tom which are mentioned at the beginning and at the end of the story: “*There are lots of Kaffirs in the compound!*” As we have already pointed out, these are painful words for the black population. They are uttered when Masaba dies and it implies the fact that, as he is a black person, his death has not relevance because he can be substituted by another black worker.

We can see the reaction of black people towards these words at the end of the story: “The boys having digested these words bent once more over their shovels” (1985: 120).

To continue with this aspect of the language, it would be interesting to mention the use of certain words in the text that imply a treat of inequality towards black people and also the presence of different languages in South Africa at those moments. For example, the word “Kaffir”, which is a racial term used in this context to refer to a black person, could be considered an offensive word. Then, we can find “Nkosi”, a traditional term whose origin is Zulu and which was used by black people to address the Boss. Finally, the use of “Boy” implies a pejorative way used by white individuals to address black people of different ages.

But it should be pointed out that in this short story not only violence, pain, and inequality are present. We can also perceive signs of brotherhood, not only in the first words that the story teller utters, but also in the reaction of black people before Masaba’s critical situation: “*Lord Jesus, please save Masaba for his poor mother’s sake. She will be left alone in this world*”. (1985:120). We can see signs of fraternity between people of the same ethnicity who tell this kind of stories showing compassion toward those people who cannot stand these hard conditions.

Also apart from this oral tradition, we can observe this sense of brotherhood through the first sentence. Maybe a brotherhood that implies the fact of gathering many people from the same place in order to entertain them with this kind of stories that deal

⁴ This hate and scorn, although is conveyed by this character, is very representative of many people whose skin colour is white and lived in South Africa at those ages.

with inequalities; and also, by the way in which the teller addresses to his/her audience: “*Fellows*”.

We could say that the style that prevails in this story is realism due to aspects that we have mentioned before, as it is the inclusion of the author, the detailed description of the setting and the fact that this is a story told by someone.

Last but not least, we have to mention that, at the end of this story, the author gives an interesting image, which is Boss Tom’s as guilty for the death of Masaba: “Through his carelessness and indifference he had caused the death of Masaba” (1985: 120). This means that even the story teller considers this death as a murder. After the perfect image that white people want to offer, we see a person who ignores their own rules: “For he had caused a new boy to lash before putting him first carelessness and indifference he had caused the death of Masaba” (1985: 120).

Generally speaking, if we compare this short story with the following work to be studied, *Six Feet of the country*, firstly, we find a different work environment (the mine in contrast to the farm), but they share how the figure of black people is directly connected to a treat of inequality. However, violence is much more present in Mphahlele’s story. This kind of physical violence is also present in “The Lemon Orchard” by Alex la Guma, as we will analyze in section 3.3.

3.2. *Six Feet of the Country*, by Nadine Gordimer

Now we have the peculiarity of facing a white and female novelist. With the objective of going deep into this short story, it is advisable to consider the important role of this author in South Africa. Gordimer, who was born in Springs, was very known by her short stories and her essays according to *The Columbia Guide to South African Literature in English Since 1945* (2010: 96). It is interesting to know that, despite being considered a white citizen, she belonged to an ethnic minority since her parents had Jewish origins. As García Ramírez (1999: 194) points out, when she was eleven, her mother decided to take her off school and take responsibility for her education, since “los centros educativos de la comunidad blanca sudafricana (...) constituía sin duda un foco particularmente intenso de transmisión ideológica de las concepciones racistas y segregacionistas”.

Through Owomoyela’s words, we are going to see a clear description of what Gordimer means as a South African writer:

Undoubtedly, the finest white South African writer is Nadine Gordimer whose brilliant short stories and powerful novels surgically expose the bizarre attitudes and behavior that become manners of survival in so repugnant system. With exquisite penetration she exposes the raw vulgarity of racial prejudice. (1993: 89)⁵

Despite her skin color, she deals in her short stories with the harshness of the treat of white people towards black people. We could say that she speaks about it offering a different perspective by the fact that she belongs to a privileged part of the community. There is no better way of knowing an author than looking at their work. In the Introduction to her *Selected stories*, Gordimer affirms:

The change in social attitudes unconsciously reflected in the stories represents both that of the people in my society-that is to say, history- and my apprehension of it; in the writing, I am acting upon my society and in the manner of my apprehension, all the time history is acting upon me. (1978: 139)

Therefore, through these words, we can know that the literature in Gordimer is directly related to history, but there is a personal touch in it since it expresses the changes that were happening in her country so providing her point of view. Hence we observe the historic and the personal component.

Her position against apartheid is clear in her book *Living in Hope and History: Notes from Our Century* in which she explains about her life in relation to the hard conditions that separated blacks and whites. She describes the environment of the city where she lives as follows:

I live in the white city of Johannesburg, the biggest city in South Africa. Around the white city, particularly to the west and north, is another city, black Johannesburg. This clear picture of black and white is blurred only a little at the edges by the presence of small coloured (mixed blood) and Indian communities, also segregated, both from each other and the rest. (1999: 106, 107)

It is very interesting the way in which she describes the existence of two parts: the white and the black Johannesburg, as two different worlds. Taking into account this environment, we are going to find that the color clash theme prevails in her stories.

⁵ We can see the relevance of Gordimer also in words of Mzamane: "In addition, there are many excellent White exponents of the short story form in South Africa such as Charles Herman Bosman and Nadine Gordimer". (1986: 9)

On the other hand, with regard to her style, Heywood (2004: 201) points out that

There are penalties as well as rewards for Gordimer's fictional method: it is necessary to view one's world from the outside, but difficult to achieve an authentic voice. Gordimer's novels create a world of mirrors, with many signs of her careful and frequently over-careful construction.

Focusing our attention on her collection of short stories, we can mention the next idea that Cornwell, Klopfer and Mackenzie reflect in their work:

Her first collection of stories, *Face to Face*, appeared in 1949 [...] The title story of her next collection *Six Feet of the Country* (1956), is equally well known. Gordimer's skill at capturing the many nuances in human relationships-whether these be master-servant, husband-wife, or black-white-is brought sharply into focus in this story. (2010: 96)

Therefore, we can say that in the analysis of *Six Feet of the Country* we face one of the first short stories written by this author. The way in which Gordimer presents the relations between master-servant, husband-wife, and black-white in this story cannot be ignored because this is the essence of Gordimer. As Heywood (2004: 201) states, "fictional masks act as interpreters of her South African world".

To continue with, concerning its plot, *Six Feet of the Country* is the story of a couple, Lerice and her husband, Bass, who have a farm in South Africa. In contrast to the previous story, we know that the main characters belong to the white population. They have black people as workers, and one day the husband is warned by one of his workers, Petrus, that someone is sick. He goes to the huts where they live and he sees an unknown young man who has died. This is Petrus's brother who had come from Rhodesia to look for work in an illegal manner as an immigrant worker. After that, the husband has to face a process in order to let the authorities know about this death. The husband is subdued to an interrogation from the part of the police and then he has to explain to Petrus that authorities have taken away the body for a post-mortem. However, the family of Petrus wants the body of their familiar back to celebrate his burial as the tradition says, and even the old father of Petrus comes from Rhodesia. He is pressured not only by this situation but also by Lerice. He faces a lot of troubles until he gets to come back the body of Petrus' brother. In this way, black people prepare the burial; This is witnessed by Lerice's husband who experiences an awkward situation since he has forgotten this event, and he is practicing his hobby while the burial takes

place. Suddenly, people realize that it is not the body of their familiar. Again, Lerice's husband talks to the authorities but despite his persistence, this issue remains unresolved.

After this brief summary of the story, special attention can be paid to the setting, i.e., the couple's farm. It is a very typical way of life for white people who came to South Africa at those ages. In this case, we have the particularity that the farm is the way in which Lerice tries to escape from her frustration caused by her broken dreams as an actress. As we can read at the very beginning of the story, they are not real farmers. In fact, they bought it to change something in themselves (1978: 69). We can say that the life in farm supposes a hobby for white people while for black people, living in a farm supposes their livelihood.

In the first part of the story, it is Lerice's husband who narrates almost the entire story in first person, describes the landscapes that they can see and the way they live: "I get up and go out into the paddock and see not the palm trees and fishpond and imitation-stone bird" (1978: 69). In this story, the narrator establishes a comparison between the rural landscape and the city. The second one is described as a place where tension is present. This is an allusion to the difficult relationships between white and black which are even more troublesome in the city:

When Johannesburg people speak of 'tension', they don't mean hurrying people in crowded streets, the struggle for money, or the general competitive character of city life. They mean the guns under the white men's pillows and the burglar bars on the white men's windows. They mean those strange moments on the city pavements when a black man won't stand aside for a white man. (1978: 70)

We see how relations between black and white people are almost impossible in the city, the violence is represented in the form of guns and burglars, and the differences are so extreme that even people of both ethnicities cannot share the city pavements. It is interesting the fact that the narrator explains that these relations among white and black inhabitants are better in the country, although inequality continues among them in the rural landscape: "... our relationship with the blacks is almost feudal. Wrong, I suppose, obsolete, but more comfortable all around. We have no burglar bars, no gun" (1978: 70). The main character describes the rural setting as a place to escape from the oppression of white people, something contradictory, taking into account the fact that he

has a farm and has servants who work for him, although it is clear that he does not show signs of violence towards them.

To contextualize this story, we have to take into account that in the text the narrator makes allusion to the “pretransitional stage”, that is to say, this was the beginning of the segregation, so the worst was to come. In this context, it is remarkable the kind of relationship that this couple keeps with their servants. On the one hand we have the very interesting role of Lerice, a demanding wife. She has a good relation with black people, and even she takes care of the children of their servants. At difficult moments, she stands for black people and she requires her husband to solve Petrus family’s problems. On the other hand, we have the figure of Lerice’s husband, a very curious one, since we could situate him on the middle in the sense that he tries to help to Petrus’ family but sometimes it is like if he was forced to act like that by the pressure of his wife and the situation, not by himself.

In the figure of Petrus, we have an amazing image that could represent the black ethnicity side. We have a person who is faithful to his family and his traditions. He does not persist until the supposed body of his brother is brought back and even he makes what it seems to be impossible, to gather a great amount of money in order to get what he wants.

Furthermore, the fact that Lerice and her husband live with black people is something that influences in their relation as a marriage. We see that their discussions are usually caused by their different points of view in relation to help Petrus’ family. Another interesting aspect that is shown in this story is the way in which authorities treat Lerice’s husband. When he is trying to solve Petrus’ problems, he is treated in a particular way as we can see in the next statement: “I had to notify the police as well as the health authorities, and answer a lot of tedious questions [...] (referring to a police), He grinned at me with a mixture of scorn and delight at my stupidity” (1978: 73, 74). That is to say, police and authorities show scorn and convey negative feelings to Lerice’s husband, may be by the fact that he is trying to solve a problem of a black person. We see here again that the disagreement of certain people with regards to the treatment towards black people causes differences between people of white skin colour.

The most interesting part of this short story is the burial of Petrus’ brother. The details of this burial are described with precision, including the coffin, the way in which

Lerice's husband feels since he had forgotten the event: "I felt a little awkward, and did not know whether to go on hitting my golf ball or stop" (1978: 77); and the presence of the donkey cart which implies an identification with donkeys as animals of low range. If black people are subordinated to white people, donkeys are subordinated to black people, which shows a very revealing image. These animals convey an air of submission and downcast as it is mentioned in the text. Moreover, the description of the cemetery reveals the impossibility of having a better one: "you can see the graves quite clearly, and that day the sun glinted on bits of broken pottery, a lopsided homemade cross, and jam-jars brown with rainwater and dead flowers (1978: 77). This is a moving image which gives the impression that these people even did not have a decent place to be buried. This may be related to the title *Six Feet of the Country*, thus corresponding to the length needed to bury someone.

Another relevant aspect of this burial is the fact that black people bury their familiar outside the farm, which makes us understand the importance of the territory. In a way, this means that black people marked their possession with the presence of their cadavers. This could remind us of another story of Gordimer, *The Conservationist*, in which, according to Barnard (2006: 88), the author uses "the trope of the buried black body, a figure for all that is repressed by the racist mind". In this story there is the presence of a body which is buried and reappears on the farm of Mehring, a white man.

Special mention can be made of the question of identity, since it is also an important aspect to highlight, as Heywood does in the following excerpt:

The body of a murdered man is found on the property and since no murderer or identity of the victim appears, the police bury the body in a shallow grave on the farm. Their action cuts off the dead man from the ancestors, but a flood brings the body to the surface. (2004: 203)

Therefore, in *Six Feet of the Country*, black people seem to suffer a lack of identity from the part of white people. Firstly, we observe that they are treated as "illegal immigrants" in their own country. They have certain limitations. To put it clearly, it can be said that the roles changed: European citizens were hosts and South African black and colored people, the guests. That implied some consequences for the latter, such as their lack of an appropriate documentation and rights and not being allowed to move freely in their own country. So that it is not strange the treatment that the body of Petrus' brother

receives: “He had no identity in this world anyway”. There is confusion from the part of black and colored population, a feeling of not knowing where they belong to, being under the authority of white people.

Finally, to conclude with this short story, we have to emphasize the fact that Gordimer offers in it the perspective of a white narrator who is the main character. By doing this, we have access to the inner self of this one. In spite of this, we do not get a clear idea of her position. Feelings are mixed, guilty, awkwardness and superiority. As well as black people feel confusion because they are guests in their own country, white people feel like them in the sense that they are hosts, they take responsibility for these people somehow, but they do not know how to behave in certain complex situations as we have seen in this story.

3.3. “The Lemon Orchard” in *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*, by Alex La Guma

As in previous stories, to start with, we will focus on the author, Alex La Guma, who according to *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, this political activist, journalist and author “is best known for his fiction concerning racial oppression under the apartheid system in South Africa” (2000: 236). As a matter of fact, we are going to see that the life of this author is marked by the fight that he carries out against apartheid system, a fight that is conveyed in his own works:

La Guma was a committed opponent of apartheid, and his overriding concern in his writing is to expose its evils and to help bring about its downfall. Since this system of government has come to an end in South Africa, his fiction has become an important social and historical testament of the apartheid era. (2000: 244)

The previous statement clearly shows that the relevance of this author is due to the intention that there is behind his writing, i. e., the intention of fighting against inequalities. He left an important trace as regards literature related to the apartheid struggle. Through this we can observe an author who explicitly expresses his objective of using literature as a weapon. However, La Guma’s life was marked by the consequences that his fight caused. In his stories full of realism, he told his experiences as a coloured person. In fact, as it is mentioned in *World writers in English: v-1*, “La Guma always identified himself as Coloured, the term of self-identification used by

many members of South Africa's heterogeneous mixed-raced communities" (2004: 250).

On the other hand, in order to have an idea of the kind of stories that La Guma wrote, we can take the example of *A Walk in the Night*. According to Scanlon, "All of the characters in *A Walk in the Night*, whether black, coloured, or white, suffer as a result of the social system" (2000: 237). As in this novel, in the short story that we are going to analyze, *The Lemon Orchard*, the presence of suffering is the main motif. All of the characters that appear in these stories are, in different ways, victims of the social system that ruled in South Africa at those moments. It is important to emphasize the way in which La Guma expresses this idea of suffering in his stories. To that end, let us read about his style in the following statement from *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture*:

Everything in La Guma's story points to spectacle: the complete exteriority of everything; the dramatic contrasts all over the story, the lack of specificity of place and character so that we have spectacular ritual instantly turned into symbol, with instant meaning (no interpretation here is necessary: seeing is meaning), and the intensifying device of hyphenated adjectives. (1991: 38)

That reinforces the idea mentioned before about the explicitness that this author uses in order to convey the real situation of South Africa. With regard to the term "spectacle", it makes reference to "the spectacle of phenomenal social change and the growing confidence of the urban African population that we see being dramatized here" (1991: 3). We have to say that the dramatic component in the stories of La Guma, as well as in his literature in general, is very important to convey the reader what he wants, i. e., the suffering of South African people. In fact, if something is clear about this author is that he supposed the best representation of protest in literature.

To sum up this story, it must be said that the plot is about a colored man who is prisoner from other white men. They are walking in the night through a lemon orchard, and in this place, moments of physical and psychological violence against this colored man take place. Through the text, it can be deduced that this colored man has the peculiarity of being an educated man. This quality is repressed by these white oppressors who show their superiority along the story.

Concerning the setting of this story, it is interesting to point out that, at the very beginning, La Guma offers the reader a very descriptive passage through which the reader imagines a dark, obscure and cold place: “The winter had not passed completely and there was a chill in the air [...] The night and earth was cold and damp [...] but they could not be seen in the dark” (1967: 125). This setting may make the reader suspect that something wrong happens. Furthermore, we know that this story happens in a lemon orchard, an image from which La Guma takes advantage to convey sensations through the smell of the lemon: “The men were walking through an orchard of lemons and the sharp, bitter-sweet citrus smell hung gently on the night air”; “the perfume of lemons seemed to grow stronger as if the juice was being crushed from them” (1967:125). This image is very important because it could represent the bitterness that white men show toward the colored man. As the story progresses we see that this smell is more intense as well as the treat between the whites and the colored man is tenser. In this story we have the peculiarity that the setting could represent an idyllic landscape, however we see that in this place something horrible happens: “The blackness of the night crouched over the orchard and the leaves rustled with harsh whispering that was inconsistent with the pleasant scent of the lemons [...] the perfume of lemons seemed to grow stronger, as if the juice was being crushed from them (1967: 129). This way of assigning realism is very characteristic of La Guma as we can see in the next idea: “Through his novels and short stories he conveys, as Nadine Gordimer says in her *The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing* (1973) the sight, sound and smell of poverty and misery” (*Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 2000: 235).

Moreover, we have to take into account that La Guma expresses a realist tone in this story not only in the way he describes the setting and the events, but also in the use of dialogue and the way in which he conveys pain and suffer. We see a strong position of condemning these inequalities.

We could say that, in *The Lemon Orchard*, La Guma clearly represents, on the one hand, the figure of the oppressor and, on the other hand, the figure of the victim, as it is described in the story *The Death of Masaba*. We have the colored character that is introduced in the story by a white voice who says “It’s as dark as a kaffir’s soul here at the back” (1967: 125). We can see that the first addressing to this colored man is in a pejorative way, specifically using the term “kaffir”, so showing a treat of inequality from the very beginning. Through this colored character we can notice the suffering and

pain of these people. Another interesting aspect of this character is the fact that this is an educated man and it seems that white people feel some resentment about it, since this is a quality that makes to arise the white's insecurities. "Wait a moment", the leader said, speaking with forced casualness. "He is not dumb. He is a slim hotnot; one of those educated bushmen' [...] 'This is mos a slim hotnot' he said again. 'A teacher in a school for which we pay'" (1967: 127). As we can read, we see that this man is submitted to any kind of violence: physical as well as psychological, like the following examples show: "Listen you hotnot bastard", he said loudly. 'Why don't you answer?'" (1967: 128). Threats toward this man and black and colored people in general can also be exemplified: "And he gestured in the dark with the muzzle of the gun at the man who stumbled along in their midst and who was the only one not warmly dressed" (1967: 126); "The bound man felt the hard round metal of the gun muzzle through the loose raincoat and clenched his teeth" (1967:127). The suffering of this man is reflected in the next part of the story: "The colored man's wrists were tied behind him with a riem and the leader brought the muzzle of the shotgun down, pressing it hard into the small of the man's back above where the wrists met.(1967: 127). We can consider this episode as one of the cruelest parts of this story in which the oppression towards this man is evident. We can say that apart from suffering and pain, the character representing the colored man shows dignity, a kind of attitude in which we can see that he tries not to lose his identity despite the confusion that white people could cause on him: "'Yes, baas'", the bound man said, speaking with a mixture of dignity and contempt which was missed by those who surrounded him" (1967: 127).

On the other hand, we have to focus our attention in the figure of the oppressor, in this case represented by some white men. Firstly, we have to highlight the use of certain terms in order to refer to these colored people, such as "kaffir", "hotnot"⁶, "bushmen" or "donders", which are pejorative terms. The insult from the part of the white side is present throughout the story. On the other hand, superior people are called "baas"⁷. We see the use of Afrikaans, the language of Afrikaners. Another example of this use is the word "Oom" also used to address this colored man, and it means "guy". So that we consider very important the way of addressing colored and black people in

⁶ The term "hotnot" is extremely offensive. It comes from the term "Hottentot" (Khoi people) and it is applied to colored people.

⁷ This denotes superiority from the part of white people who want black people to use a particular language or terms to address them.

general, using pejorative expressions. Through the use of these words we can get used to the idea of the mixture of languages and cultures that coexisted at the time of the publication of this short story.

To continue with, we could establish a comparison between two kinds of white people in this story. They show different cruelty level. The following words can be considered in this respect: “I will shoot whatever hotnot or kaffir I desire, and see me get into trouble over it. I demand respect from these donders”. As we can observe, the character uttering the previous words is the pure image of the inequality, rudeness and scorn towards black people. However, the lantern-bearer does not stand the idea of killing this prisoner: “There is no necessity to shoot him. We don’t want that kind of trouble” (1967: 128). We could not see a heroic act in this statement, since this character is not defending the colored man at all, but trying to avoid problems. They are responsible for physical violence towards this man, too: “The man who had jeered about the prisoner’s fear stepped up then, and hit him in the face, striking him on a cheekbone with the clenched fist... (1967: 128). They show their hatred through punishment: “We will give him a better hiding” [...] “This time we will teach him a lesson ...” (1967: 127, 128). Doubtlessly, this is a neat representation of the hard image of what happened at those ages in South Africa, thus becoming a great and realist portrait of scenes of the daily life of black people.

Another interesting aspect to mention is the fact that in the final part of this short story white people mock “Englishmen”. This makes us see differences even in people who share their ethnicity: “We don’t want any educated hottentots in our town” “Neither black Englishmen” (1967: 129). Hence we can say that these words are addressed not only toward black and coloured people, but also to those people who share their skin colour.

On the other hand, concerning the end of the story, it is striking that there is no a final conclusion, so, we do not know whether the man is killed or not. However, we can deduce that the oppressors will continue torturing and abusing coloured people. When reading “They had come into a wide gap in the orchard, a small amphitheatre ...” (1967: 129), the use of the term “amphitheatre” as a metaphor makes us imagine the place in Rome where men were sent to be killed by lions, which becomes really meaningful.

Taking into account another curiosity, we have to mention the figure of dogs as being allied with white people. They show admiration towards them, as deduced from “I would like to have a dog like that. I would take great care of such a dog” (1967: 129). We see that for these people dogs have much more value than colored people; they show humanity with animals but not with people of different ethnicity. In the analysis of *Mrs. Plum*, found in the next section, special attention will be paid to the relevance of dogs for white people at those ages.

To conclude this story’s analysis, we can highlight that it shows the cruelest side of the struggle⁸, a story full of realism and marked by inequalities through threads, physical and psychological violence, fear, and punishment.

3.4. *Mrs. Plum*, by Ezekiel Mphahlele

The life of Mphahlele is worth of attention since it helps his readers clearly understand his story and the way in which he writes. According to Cornwell, Klopper and Mackenzie (2010: 142), he was a “short story writer, novelist and autobiographer”. He was involved in the cause of apartheid, too, although it must be said that Alex La Guma was the most representative writer in the political struggle. In order to have an idea of Mphahlele’s participation in the fight against apartheid, we can quote Nkosi’s following words: “He organized and took part in many conferences on African culture and literature. At this time he also became engaged in many wearying disputations with the leading figures in the Negritude Movement” (Tasks and Masks, 1981:93). It is important to remark that he was elected for exile, which was a typical situation for black writers who wanted to convey the hard situation created by white people in South Africa. However, he returned to his country in 1977, according to the Anthology of Cornwell, Klopper, and Mackenzie. Then, he started working at the University of Witwatersrand and became an influential leader due to his ideas in the field of

⁸ It reffers to Apartheid.

education. It is clear that with the exile, his life changed, and we could say that he adopted a more radical position with regards to the critic of apartheid:

At the age of 56, Mphahlele is one of the best-known figures of modern African literature. A life-long teacher, writer and critic, his fame or notoriety, depending on which side you take in the many disputes which have plagued his career since he left South Africa derive mainly from his position as a fierce critic of negritude (*Tasks and Masks*, 1981: 91).

The following excerpt presents the aim of this author: “Mphahlele is attempting to paint for us, as he himself had admitted, ‘a panoramic view’ of a continent awakening from the stupor of colonialism, still unsure which direction to go” (*Tasks and Masks*, 1981: 98). It is very interesting the fact that the author wants to convey as much as possible, he wants to offer “a panoramic view” and, at those moments, it is crucial to exploit literature to solve the great problem of apartheid.

With regard to Mphahlele’s style, we can allude to John F. Povey’s essay on English-language fiction from South Africa, where he points out that “Ezekiel Mphahlele in the mid 1950’s developed a natural and personal style that combined the immediacy of *Drum*⁹ with the formal literary style found in international short stories. With this technical combination he wrote a series of stories that explored the subjects and form that were later to become common” (1993: 93). It is relevant that Mphahlele also participates in the *Drum* as other writers did. This participation influences in the way in which he writes in the immediacy that he conveys, apart from the fact that he develops “a natural and personal style”. As mentioned before, black writers had much to tell, because they are the most affected individuals by apartheid, so their personal experiences are worth a great deal to society.

⁹ *Drum* magazine was first published in 1952 and, for a long time, it was the only journal which gave voice to black and coloured communities during apartheid, since it described the lifestyle of black population in Africa. It still exists in an online format.

To continue with this author, we have to make reference to their characters who, according to John F. Povey, “carry out a day to day existence in the midst of violence, both mental and physical, and in spite of stride and various forms of official persecution” (1993: 93). This means that what is characteristic in these stories is the daily life which, at first sight, should be normal, but under apartheid conditions, this daily life could be turned into a nightmare, especially for black people.

Approaching to the analysis of the story *Mrs. Plum*, we have to say that “In 1967 his third collection of stories, *In Corner B*, was published. It contained his classic and much-anthologized *Mrs. Plum*” (*The Columbia Guide to South African Literature in English Since 1945*, 2010: 142, 143). This is the longest story in his collection. In fact, it consists of four chapters, so it is often considered a novella.

Going deep into the analysis of *Mrs. Plum*, firstly, we can say that it describes the changing relationships between Karabo, a young black South African woman, and her liberal white employer, Mrs. Plum. For Karabo, her “madam” is different from the rest of wealthy and white people since, besides the fact that Mrs. Plum wants Karabo to have knowledge, she uses her employee’s African name instead of a white one. Even Mrs. Plum’s daughter, Kate, tells Karabo things white people do not use to tell their black servants.

The story is told in first person through Karabo’s eyes, which helps us to better understand her experiences. Thus, by means of the use of the pronoun “I”, readers can feel closer to her perspective within the story.

From the very beginning of the story, we can perceive the signs of abuse and lack of respect that Karabo had to suffer during her two previous work experiences. Concerning her first white employers, they forgot to pay her because they were drunk

all the time. With regard to the second house, where there were five impolite children who addressed her with “You Black Girl” (193), she was abused by a man who sometimes visited the family. Therefore, she decided to leave due to the indifference of her bosses in light of that situation.

With regard to the setting of this story, it takes place in the suburbs of Johannesburg. This is a very interesting detail because its geography reflected the division between the rich and white citizens and the black and poor ones.

It is also remarkable, as mentioned at the end of the previous section, the relevant role that dogs play during the entire story. The author uses the following ironic words to describe Mrs. Plum’s interest in these animals: “My madam’s name was Mrs. Plum. She loved dogs and Africans” (193). In this way, she places dogs and Africans at the same level. In fact, along the story, we notice that Mrs. Plum treats her dogs better than her black servants. Special allusion can be made to a part of the text which perfectly depicts the importance given to dogs: “In winter so many families went away that the dogs remained the masters and the madams. You could see them walk like white people in the streets. Silent but with plenty of power” (207). The higher position of dogs upon the servants clearly illustrates the lack of identity of the latter.

Abortion is another issue briefly treated in this story since Karabo’s best friend, Chimane, has an abortion due to her economic situation (214). It is interesting to point out that, in most cases, abortion was considered a crime during the apartheid era, as Susanne M. Klausen (2015) describes in her work *Abortion Under Apartheid: Nationalism, Sexuality, and Women's Reproductive Rights in South Africa*.

At the end of this story, after going to jail, it is shown that madam treats black people as a craving, since she asks Karabo to return because she has lost her loved dogs,

so when Karabo wants to know the reason why Madam wants her back, Mrs. Plum replies: “You know, I like your people, Karabo, the Africans” (221). It is also interesting the fact that Mrs. Plum and Karabo negotiate the working conditions since, during apartheid, black people did not have rights. In fact, black and coloured people were required to carry an identification document called “pass” (208) which contains the areas where they can work and travel.

Once more we face a black author who is expressing his critic about what was happening in South Africa. We could consider that Mphahlele devoted his life to the apartheid struggle through literature since in his production we are going to find a depiction of this situation.

3.5. “N2” in *The One that Got Away*, by Zoë Wicomb

Finally, we face the analysis of a short story written by the coloured writer Zoë Wicomb, the most contemporary author in this analysis. This short-story writer and novelist was born in South Africa. However, an interesting aspect of her life according to *The Columbia Guide to South African Literature in English Since 1945* is the fact that she lived in Scotland during apartheid, from 1970 to 1991, except for a period when she returned in order to teach at the University of the Western Cape. According to *Fiction/African Studies*, “Zoë Wicomb’s complex and deeply evocative fiction is among the most distinguished recent works of South African women’s literature”.

With regard to the characters present in Wicomb’s collection of short stories *The One that Got Away*, special mention must be made to those who share features of the author’s own identity: a person classified as ‘coloured’ and her diasporic identity as a South African living in Scotland. In fact, living abroad marked her writing.

As we are going to realize in the analysis of “N2”, the setting of these stories is very relevant. In fact, we observe that different characters visit the same places at different times, offering different perspectives to the reader. The result of the mixture of different perspectives is the interconnectedness between people, and cross-cultural identities at a local and a global context.

On the other hand, through this author, we can understand the situation of South Africa after being shaken by apartheid. We find a history of division that makes different ethnic, social and racial communities. Thus, we can see the clash between modernity and tradition, different perspectives of the same place, and all of this is conveyed by means of the short story to explore the fragmentation, paradox and fluidity that characterized contemporary South Africa.

Focusing on Wicomb’s style, we can find a clear explanation in a section of the book *David’s Story*, in which Dorothy Driver claims that “Wicomb has referred to her need to write in a realist mode and at the same time not to impose order on reality. *Precisely because there isn’t order, there’s conflict and that’s not only in the South African situation... I think it’s important to have chaos on the page*” (2001: 251). We can say that, in words of this author, it is important to reflect reality but not in a chronological order, as it is characteristic in the short story¹⁰.

The literature of Zoë Wicomb is impregnated by the fact that she belongs to the coloured ethnicity, according to Judith Raikin: “Wicomb describes a system that, while officially recognizing a “mixed-race” category called “Coloured”, attempts to reify and legislate discrete categories of racial-and cultural-difference” (1996: 205, 206).

¹⁰ We have already mentioned in the part of this work devoted to the short story that in this literary genre the chronological order does not matter but the fragmentary component is present in the majority of these ones. This fragmentary component is related to the chaos that Wicomb mentions.

Therefore, Zoë Wicomb deals with differences still present in the post-apartheid era, differences that do not disappear, the rests of the apartheid system.

In “N2” we find a short story very different from the previous ones. We change to a contemporary context in which apartheid has finished but its rests are present in the relations between white, coloured and black people. Differences are still present among people, but also in the territory they use to frequent. In spite of this, an air of change is shown by Zoë Wicomb.

In order to briefly summarize the plot of this story, it is necessary to highlight that it is composed of two parts in which the characters are of different ethnicities, and are in a different setting. First, it appears the occidental world through the characters of Mary and Harold; then, the life of Themba who represents the black side; and, finally, there is an encounter between them in a curious place: N2, a road that separates but, at the same time, constitutes a nexus between these characters.

The first scene takes place at Stellenbosch, a conservative city that represents very well the world of the characters having the leading role in this part of the short story. Here, Zoë Wicomb describes the scene of a couple, Mary and Harold, who are in a luxurious party in which the champagne and connotations to alcohol and sex are present, representing the world of the occidental people. In words of Mary: “That’s what’s the best, the moment before, when for seconds you are queen of a world of pleasure that awaits” (2009: 147). Thus, this part depicts different pleasures to which black people have access. As mentioned before, sex is present. As we can observe, Mary shows desire towards Harold: “Yes, sex. She would have liked to have said it out

loud. That's what people like Harold with all their talk of politics don't think of, that there are now all kinds of freedoms" (2009: 148)¹¹.

In this first part of the story we find some references to the influence of the western world: "Just think, that a man who had sat in prison for decades, no champagne, no sex, was the one to push the country into the twentieth century, into the civilized world; she had been to Amsterdam where they made no bones about these things" (149). It is very interesting this allusion to a country from Europe in relation to "the civilized world" that it represents. In a certain way, the presence of sex and alcohol in an explicit way are directly related to the influence of European people who had represented the oppression, but now their influence may have introduced a new mentality which stands for a new freedom in South Africa: "just as De Klerk said, freedom is unstoppable" (148). In this part in which Mary and Harold are at the party, the way in which she enjoys drinking is described in detail, but there is a moment in which Wicomb offers the vision of Harold:

... until Harold, now attentive, watched the composition come to life: the glass pressed against cherry-red lips parted, the liquor spurting. Behind her, the sun was dipping fast, drunkenly, in the usual gold and reds, and then the light, how the light ricocheted from the crystal as she tilted it to her lips.

The excerpt above depicts an erotic passage because of the presence of Mary's red lips in contact to the liquor. Here we see a very interesting image of the woman, a different woman to others present in previous short stories, such as Lerice, a white woman devoted to her farm in *Six Feet from the Country*.

¹¹ These "freedoms" make reference to those changes that took place in South Africa with the end of apartheid. These changes also affected white people, as we can notice with the role of Mary as a woman who drinks alcohol among men. These changes are also due to the arrival of European people who gradually influenced on the South African culture.

In this first part, it is important the moment when the party finishes and they allude to the way back home. They have to finish this party because it is getting dark and they have to go through the N2. From this perspective, this is a dangerous and insecure zone, inhabited by squatter people, i. e. people who live in a kind of township, urbanizations of black people who still exist. N2 represents black people who are poor: “I see those squatter people have started throwing stones from the bridge again, something in this morning’s Cape Times about the N2” (150). After that, another interesting moment of this first part is the apparition of three wild men who represent the Xhosa initiation rites.

Mary thought of the three wild men. On the N2 that morning, as they drove to Stellenbosch, the black men leapt naked, except for skimpy loincloths, out of the bush, ran across the dual carriageway jumping the barriers, and disappeared into the bush on the other side. Their faces were covered in grey clay. They may have carried shields and spears. (150)

Here we have one of the best moments of this story in which those rites of black people are presented from the perspective of a white person, the vision that prevails in this part of the story. Hence we have that N2 establishes the difference between modernity as Mary, Harold and these people who are in the party represent, and the tradition found in the bushes, inhabited by ignorant people.

On the other hand, in the second part of this story, we have a different perspective. What prevails now is the point of view of people belonging to these bushes. We have the story of Themba, a boy who has not got an easy life. We see in this character a boy with a strange personality. At the very beginning of this second part, there is a deep description of what life supposed for many people on the black side: “but that’s life, nothing but trouble, nothing to do, just the business of braving it out”. This

statement precedes the narration of Themba's life, anticipating that it is not a normal one, as we can see in the relation that he has with his own relatives: "But still, Mrs. Matsepe was hurt. The boy was her own since so-so high, since before she herself had children. Why had he not spoken to her? If only she had thought of it first [...]". It appears after the image of a couple responsible for Themba's education, but we are going to see how they have different opinions or mentalities. Mrs. Matsepe, on her part, represents the modernity, she thinks about how things have changed but also considers the dangerous part of being attached to a traditional place as this part of N2 is. We can see the daily life of Mrs. Matsepe who uses this road to go to work and survive: "As if she were not about to take her life in her hands as she did every morning before sunrise, squash herself into a show-off taxi that would hurl itself recklessly all over the N2 [...]" (150). It is a curious scene that we can contrast with the use of this road by Mary, to go to a party. However, for Mrs. Matsepe, this road is an element of her daily life. On the other hand, the traditional side is conveyed by Jim, who wants that Themba goes to the bush: "Themba must go to the bush, to initiation, it's the right way to turn him into a man, help him over this difficult business of growing up. He must go into the bush" (155). What Jim considers the best way to educate Themba, Mrs. Matsepe sees it as a danger for this boy, as a risk. This can be perceived as a critic from the wife to the black community, which is very interesting. She sees this black community as a disintegrated one which wants to preserve their rites: "Just a rubbish scrap of trees left there to keep our place out of sight" (153). This means that the fact of belonging to this place implies a kind of separation from other people: "Those students were toyi-toying fools, always going on strike, loafing about at weekends, doing those terrible things to girls in the hostels and then talking rubbish about roots and traditional culture" (153). So that Mrs. Matsepe does not like at all this kind of traditional education for Themba. She considers

that this implies to instill a life of bad acts in those boys. She also describes the bushes as “A pretend-bush in Town”, an area in Cape Town which is isolated from the rest by those rites carried out by Xhosa people. In this character, we clearly see the confusion felt by some black people who feel that after apartheid they should progress and be at the same level as white people in order to avoid these inequalities belonging to the past.

There is a third part in which Mary, Harold and Themba coincide; this is the best moment of this story at the ending part, when the reader knows the meaning and the purpose of the narration of the previous stories. Mary and Harold have problems with their car in the middle of the N2. This causes fear on these characters, especially on Mary, who says that she would like to go back to civilization (154). This woman considers this place to be very dangerous as it was considered by many people in South Africa. The fact of being in this place supposes to run a great risk, so they consider this place as a uncivilized one being “in the middle of nowhere” (154). The encounter with Themba is fascinating, since a mixture of feelings is present. Firstly, when Themba is observing this couple, we see in him a figure of a very cautious person, he knows that due to his ethnicity he must be careful. We discover in this part of the story that he feels that the bush is his place: “Here he often sat in the dark, with the smell of earth not quite smothered by petrol fumes, the sound of the traffic a steady whoosh and hum [...]” (154). The sense of guilty is an intriguing feeling present in Themba: “Themba squirmed with guilt. For spying on them, for not helping the man” (155). Therefore, we see a kind of humanity in this boy. In contrast, we can read “But it was not his fault that they had landed right there at his private place” (155), which involves contradictory feelings. We see here again that he feels that the bush is his place. When they see Themba, they feel fear but immediately he offers help: “I’m just coming to help, get the wheel loose so we can put on the new one lady”. These are comforting words of Harold

and Mary who accept the help from Themba, although at first they show suspicion as we can see: “her gun was clasped in both hands trained on him”. Thanks to Themba they fixed the car and, after that, a great moment comes: “Together they spoke their scrambled words of thanks, then her voice above his, laughing” (156). Here we see a possibility of understanding between both ethnicities, since it is a moment very different from those present in previous stories, so expressing gratitude from the part of the white side. But the dichotomy between richness and poverty is present until the very ending of this story. We can focus on the moment when Themba asks for money to this couple: “Please sir madam have you please got some rand?” Again, Themba shows strange feelings after receiving money from them, and the reaction of Mrs. Matsepe is even more amazing, since she thinks that Themba has stolen the money and she tore them: “Mrs. Matsepe took the notes, folded them together, then tore them carefully, into halves, into quarters, into eighths [...]” (157).

Thus, we have an ending that we do not expect. This story would have finished with this beautiful image of understanding between two ethnicities that have hated each other for many years, an image of victory from the part of those people who want peace among South African citizens. Nevertheless, this ending suggests that there are many things to do until South African people’s lives become normal. The rests of the apartheid are very powerful and have created mistrust among different ethnicities, and even in the same one.

4. FINAL REMARKS

As a conclusion we can point out that the history of South Africa is considered as one of the most troublesome of the world due to the coexistence of different peoples in the same place. It is interesting that, despite the fact that they lived in the same place for a long time, disagreements between them have marked relationships between black,

white and coloured inhabitants so causing a separated society and culture. Colonialism has played a crucial role in these relationships. As stated in *The Columbia Guide to South African Literature in English Since 1945* (2010: 2), physical and epistemic violence have been the main “characters” during a long period of time and these have been consequences on the relations among South African citizens of different colours.

If we focus our attention on Coetzee’s following words, we can see that the skin’s colour has restricted rights of millions of people in South Africa:

Since there is no way of escaping the skin you are born with (can the leopard change its spots?), you cannot resign from the caste. You can imagine resigning, you can perform a symbolic resignation, but, short of shaking the dust of the country off your feet, there is no way of actually *doing* it (1992: 96).

As Coetzee has mentioned, it is impossible to renounce your colour skin because it is something visible and the reason why many people were condemned to a life of suffering. Since white people came to South Africa, they controlled meticulously people who did not belong to their ethnicity. But this was not simple at all, the fact that they were “invading” a country created insecurities on the white side that they tried to reinforce creating a level of superiority with respect to black and coloured people.

However, despite the differences between white, black and coloured people, coexistence made that they influenced on each other. In words of Nuttall and Michael:

Alongside the closure of South African imaginations there exist intimacies and connectivities, other ways of seeing. The recognition of such intimacies has tended to be end-stopped by invocations of segregation. Despite apartheid, a great many forms of continuity and intimacy managed, if not to flourish, then at least to exist and develop. (2000: 5)

Here we see that it was almost impossible to separate radically different cultures living in the same place as it was the example between black people who lived in the same house serving white people, as illustrated in the analysed short stories.

Concluding this Master's Dissertation, I would like to remark the idea that the situation of apartheid has been widely written by many South African writers and remains in the literary interest of the country.

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