

# Loss of identity and racial melancholy in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's daughter* and Zakes Mda's *the madonna of excelsior*

## Abstract

Loss of identity and racial melancholy are stark realities in postcolonial Namibia and Southern African in general, and these have found expression in artistic works. The fictionalisation of feelings of not belonging, or a sense of unhomeliness is illuminated in this paper. This paper is a literary exploration of racial melancholy and loss of identity in Zakes Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> and Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*;<sup>2</sup> both set in apartheid Namibia. The main aim of the paper is to examine, discuss and explore how the two concepts are presented in the two novels under investigation. The critical race theory was applied in this paper and it is relevant as it states that racism is engrained in the fabric of postcolonial societies.<sup>3</sup> Erikson's theory of human development asserts that for a human being to develop fully he or she goes through different hindrances in the course of life. The findings suggest that there are several issues that lead to loss of identity and racial melancholy. The two concepts are exacerbated by racism, apartheid, and cultural and linguistic identity. Loss of identity and racial melancholy thrive in a racially segregated environment and where there is abuse of power. These are realities in the lives of the characters presented by Mda and Gordimer.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Keywords:** erikson's theory, literary representations, exploration, postcolonial societies, cultural and linguistic identity

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## Introduction

This paper is a literary analysis of two works of fiction set in apartheid South Africa, namely Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup> and Zakes Mda's *the Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup>. The aim of the paper is to explore the literary representations of loss of identity and racial melancholy. Loss of identity is defined as a lack of belonging to the immediate environment and in the world that an individual can associate with. Racial melancholy is an act of sadness and depression that emanate from complications arising out of living in a racially polarised society. Therefore loss of identity and racial melancholy refer to the loss of oneself resulting in a feeling of dejection and sadness.<sup>4</sup>

According to Cho, the term melancholy hinges on Freud's conception of melancholy as a state of unfinished mourning. This paper therefore explores the fictionalisation of sadness that is caused by one's failure to establish an identity within a racially fractured society as experienced by the characters in both texts. *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> explores the infamous (1971) case in which five influential Afrikaner men and fourteen black women were indicted with violating apartheid's Immorality Act of 1950.<sup>5</sup> The trial became known as the Excelsior 19. In *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup> by Gordimer, a young woman's life changes drastically when her father, a legend for both black and white races dies in prison. There is a sense of sadness at the outcome of Lionel Burger's trial which was considered partisan and unjust, causing a sense of mental anguish and angst.

The two novels bring to the fore the contentious yet ever-present challenges of identity and identity construction, particularly for the indigenous Africans, the black people, as they relate to white people. According to Fanon,<sup>6</sup> the identity of a black person is derived from the construction of a white identity and it is based on a number of

assumptions about human agency. Fanon<sup>6</sup> also argues that white Europeans made him a Negro; they made assumptions about him and labelled him thus because of the colour of his skin. He did not know that he was a Negro until he went to Europe and experienced first-hand racism and or alternatively when he was made to face colonialism in his own ancestral lands. It is the aim of this paper therefore to analyse the sad effects of the individual's failure to establish an identity in a fragmented community as presented in the selected fictional works of Nadine Gordimer and Zakes Mda. The focus of the study centres around the feeling of utter desperation and loss of oneself and not knowing what to do about one's situation. Freud<sup>7</sup> accentuates that loss of identity and racial melancholy are intertwined. Both are affected by similar environmental concerns (in this case apartheid South Africa) and the same outward effect (loss, lack of choice and racism) as presented in the two texts in this paper.

The prime objectives of this paper has been to examine the presentation of loss of identity and racial melancholy in the selected works; to explore the effects of loss of identity and racial melancholy in *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup> and *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> and to discuss what the novelists propose as a solution to highly polarised racial societies. In order to clarify these objectives and to put the aim of the paper into focus, it is critical that some concepts be clarified as discussed in literature

## Literature review

### Cultural and linguistic identity

Cultural and linguistic identities are critical markers of the operations of racism and identity. According to Joseph,<sup>8</sup> language and identity are 'ultimately inseparable'; that is why both are constantly referred to in the same breath. To support the importance of language in

identity, Edwards<sup>9</sup> argues that language is an essential communication tool and symbol of identity. Linked to this is the issue of assimilation which Jandt<sup>10</sup> explains as a state when someone gives up their cultural identity of origin and culture, and fully participates in the new culture. It is a long-term or sometimes a multigenerational process. In *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> an example of assimilation is when Rosamaria Burger goes to France to stay with her father's first wife. She tries to abandon her Afrikaner culture and to adopt the French way of life. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> there is a degree of assimilation when Niki strips for the pastor so that he can draw her. From the specific context of the novel, this is typically regarded as the culture of the white people and not necessarily the culture of the *Basotho* people to have their nude portrait drawn. From the above explanation and example, acculturation and assimilation might be effective strategies or coping mechanisms for immigrants or foreigners, but its impacts are more harmful than beneficial and it is these aspects that this paper explores.

Another critical term that is close but preferable to assimilation is integration, and Jandt,<sup>10</sup> declares that true integration is maintaining important parts of one's original culture as well as becoming an integral part of the new culture. Integration ensures a continuity of culture. One contrast between assimilation and integration is that, under assimilation policies, groups disappear through intermarriage but in integration, groups continue to exist. In *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>1</sup> Rosa Burger was at a crossroads in her life when her father passed away. She did not know if she should continue with her father's legacy or take a new path and she resultantly experienced some of identity crisis. This notion is supported by Carlin, who argues against national and ethnic pride as evidenced by Rosa Burger because this is something that ought to be reserved for something one attained or achieved on their own, and not a circumstance that one finds themselves in as is the case of Rosa Burger. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> Niki and Viliki Pule also have an identity problem and they become detached. After the birth of Popi, her husband left and after the trial of *The Excelsior* 19, Niki isolated herself from her community and these are issues this paper pursues.

Furthermore, Khanna<sup>11</sup> proclaims that historically, physical appearance had little consequence for identity because one drop of black blood defined one as black, regardless of physical appearance. The one drop rule defined all multiracial individuals with any amount of black ancestry as black. Popi Pule in *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> was considered black even if her physical appearance showed her miscegenation.

## Racial melancholy

The psychological and physiological effects as described in the cultural and linguistic identity section of what are ideally connected to racial melancholy - fragment. In a study on melancholy, using the terms within colonialisation, Cheng<sup>4</sup> explains racial melancholy as a process whereby racial self-knowledge becomes a site of psychological trauma for the colonised subjects and the coloniser. In *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> Rosa Burger's racial self-knowledge becomes an issue in her life as she does not know which side of the racial line she belongs to. The colonised are likely to be psychologically traumatised as they are in an inferior state, whereas the coloniser may be traumatised because of the insecurities and the mystery created by the colonised. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> Popi's racial self-knowledge causes psychological trauma as she struggles with her

sense of identity. Racial self-knowledge is crucial in terms of self-identity, meaning the individual must have a sense of self so that he or she may not become a victim of racial melancholy.

## Racial, tribal and ethnic societies in the community

In *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> black people were forced to work at bars and on farms so that they could survive, whilst in *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> Popi's grandfather was also forced to work for the white men so that he can put food on the table for his family. Racial discipline, social organization and class are all associated with slavery. In USA, the term coloured refers to a black person but in Southern Africa, especially in South Africa and Namibia, the term refers to someone who is a by-product of miscegenation.

## Racial issues

According to Adhikari,<sup>12</sup> the ruling race considered them (whom?) as social inferiors, thus they were automatically rejected in their (coloured) circle. Their opportunities and social status were determined by their extrinsic physical characteristics. It did not really matter to the dominant group how fully they (coloureds???) had acculturated to western bourgeois norms. Allen<sup>13</sup> examined the employment of intertextuality in *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup> as a way to make people think about their situation, especially racial self-identity, and to challenge the status quo. Similarly, Allen<sup>13</sup> also concentrated on intertextuality which is mainly a stylistic approach. According to Allen,<sup>13</sup> "intertextuality suggests that meaning in a text can only ever be understood in relation to other texts; no work stands alone but is interlinked with the tradition that came before it and the context in which it is produced". The interrelationship of texts is vital and so too is the history where it is coming from.

In addition, Clingman's analysis of *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> revealed that black liberation cannot be divorced from black consciousness. Black consciousness was about making black people aware that they are unique. They must not feel bad about the colour of their skin. Black people need to understand that being different does not mean being inferior. Cooke,<sup>14</sup> on the other hand examined whether the active pursuit of a social world in *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup> was appropriate. Rosa Burger learned to become the centre of her own world just before her detainment. Murakawa and Beckett<sup>15</sup> further argue that racial innocence is sustained by searching for racial causation that destroy the criminal justice institutions from long chains of cumulative racial inequality. The authors want to find out what causes racism and its consequences on the judicial system. The domination of one race over the other is a contentious issue. However, the gap for this study lies in the dimensions on loss of identity and racial melancholy which were not covered by previous researchers. Wylie<sup>16</sup> looked at *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> as a novel that addresses political issues. Wylie<sup>15</sup> argued that Mda uses Afrikaner characters to illustrate both the anger that some Afrikaners feel about the new dispensation and how black Africans feel towards Afrikaners. According to Van Vuuren,<sup>17</sup> in *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> the construction of people's identities is embedded in the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. The relationship between the two groups is vital in identifying oneself. The colonised will behave according to the way they are treated by the colonisers and they will lean more toward where they are treated humanely. The colonisers will rebel against any oppression and ill treatment.

**Racism:** Racism is pivotal to this study. It is the discrimination of people due to the colour of their skin. Andersen and Hill-Collins<sup>18</sup> proclaim that the systematic and institutionalised mistreatment of one group of people by another based on racial heritage is called racism. They start convincing themselves that their race is really inferior and they deserve to be treated that way. Andersen and Hill-Collins<sup>18</sup> assert that racism is supported and reinforced by classism which is given a boost and a foothold by adultism. Classism was very instrumental in fuelling racism. Moreover, Hill emphasises that white dominated institutions such as schools and health care activities are a fertile ground for the white racist to organise racist practices. Everyday choices and behaviours by the vast majority of whites operating as individuals are also organised by the white racist to enforce its belief. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> the white community had their own church and bar where no other race was allowed. The dominant group enforced its beliefs through ownership and contact in this way. Similarly, the superior group in *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup> coerced the majority through its political party and crushed the resistance by employing force. Rosa's parents were victims because they did not support apartheid.

**Xenophobia:** There is a close relationship between xenophobia, racism and melancholy. Elements of xenophobia and racism are illustrated in the novels. The rise in xenophobic activities in South Africa make xenophobia relevant to the study. In May 2008, several xenophobic attacks left approximately 62 people dead. These anti-immigrant riots in South Africa displaced more than a hundred thousand people. Tafira in her study "Is xenophobia racism?" explains that the outbreak of anti-immigrant violence in May 2008 in South Africa were presented as xenophobia, but it was in fact New Racism. It is a new form of racism, as it is practiced by people of the same population group. This new racism is carried by black South Africans on fellow Africans. According to Mosselson<sup>19</sup> the extra-legal order that has established non-nationals as being outside the political community has worsened their plight and has made them easy targets. Segments of the citizenry are able to act in order to assert their own political rights to belong on these non-nationals because non-South Africans are easy targets and operate on the periphery of the law.

**Apartheid:** The term apartheid means an official policy of South Africa with a view to promote and maintain white ascendancy, with the motive to create an apartness between whites and blacks.<sup>20</sup> Fuller<sup>21</sup> recognises white supremacy in South Africa as functional racism. He argues that racism is not merely a pattern of individual and/or institutional practice, but is a universally operating system of white supremacy rule and domination in which the effective majority of the world's white people participate. Fanon<sup>6</sup> suggests that a dominant white group uses dehumanization processes against blacks, which results in alienation and an inferiority complex in the victims. The term apartheid is synonymous with racism, and in the two narratives apartheid is at the centre. Racial segregation (apartheid) is portrayed by the Afrikaners against people of colour in both *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> and *Burger's Daughter*.<sup>2</sup> The races were divided because of the colour of their skin and the division was particularly visible in residential areas. The white area was well built and maintained, whereas the black locations were dirty.

Rosa Burger's parents were staunch anti-apartheid activists until the end of their lives. Even when he was facing jail, Lionel Burger did not waver in his belief that apartheid was wrong. Although he was a stalwart of the South African Communist Party (SACP), that

did not deter his belief; the belief that everyone is the same regardless of colour.

**Racial uprisings and racial activism:** According to Moola,<sup>22</sup> activism in a general sense can be described as involvement in action to bring about change, be it political, social, and environmental or other. The Soweto uprising was a turning point in the history of South Africa. While there were a lot of racial uprisings at the time, especially in the 1970s, the Soweto uprising was prominent. The Soweto uprising was depicted in both novels. When the youth took to the streets to protest against the use of Afrikaans in schools, Rosa Burger was the torch bearer of that uprising. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> the youth were reminded of the heroic deed of Hector Petersen.

**Black Consciousness:** The Black consciousness movement was championed by Steve Biko at the pinnacle of apartheid. In the two narratives under discussion, black consciousness was represented through the characters of Rosa Burger and her parents. Mungayi asserts that the black consciousness movement in the case of South Africa, as identity retrieval and creation emerged as the antithesis of the white dominant culture. Fragment As it appears at times, white South Africans succeeded in mobilising a geo-political identity since the Act of Union in 1910.

**Black Empowerment:** Black empowerment became a norm for many developing countries after independence, but it did not come without its problems. These problems were compounded by individuals who did not have an identity and were struggling to get one. According to Andrews black economic empowerment is a policy intervention derived from the economic and industrial complexity in the government. The policy is primarily aimed at directly addressing the economy's skewed racial profile. Black economic empowerment calls the private sector to restructure itself and create opportunities for previously disadvantaged individuals. Black empowerment is represented by Mrs Mkhonza in *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup> and by Sekatle in *The Madonna of Excelsior*.<sup>1</sup>

## Theoretical framework

The theoretical frameworks used in this study are the Critical race theory (CRT) and the Erikson identity theory of human development. The black people in the two narratives must be marginalised and poorly treated as it is the norm and the racist machinery had put in place all the necessary mechanisms in order for that to happen. According to Delgado and Stefancic<sup>3</sup> black people have to endure perpetual oppression and marginalisation. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> the government oppressed and marginalised black people such as Niki, Viliki and Popi. In *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> the majority of the blacks are marginalised as some live in deplorable conditions; their homes are made of boxes, corrugated iron and other cheap materials. O'Brien states that for one to develop fully, there are several obstacles in the course of his or her life. There are sequences of identity crises or where an individual's social development forces him or her to make uninformed decisions. The age of the person plays a major role in the choices made and how his or her personality develops.

The researchers opted for a desktop study, as the data was collected from the written texts and this process was guided by the objectives of the paper. The researcher purposively selected the two novels, so the purposive sampling technique was used. The study used a qualitative research approach. This approach was essential as it deals with written information and making judgement from the texts.

## Presentation of the findings

### Cultural and linguistic identity in the narratives

The culture and language of an individual plays an important role in forming the identity of a person. The linguistic and cultural identity of the Afrikaners is represented by the white young boys playing rugby. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> the Afrikaner boys are passionate about rugby, and their aspirations to play for their regional or national team. Culturally, Afrikaans is also linked to the Afrikaners. Cultural identity is represented through this portrayal: "For the white boys, they were playing with a rugby ball, practising throws that might see them being picked for Haak Vrystaat, or even the Springboks, in later years".<sup>1</sup> The culture of the Afrikaners is also represented in the novel *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> through music: "The boeremusiek (boer music) of the Concertina was relentless. The *liedjies*, or tunes, were getting louder. The *volkspele*, or dances were getting exaggerated, as the concertina filled the dance with even higher spirits".<sup>1</sup>

The event at Andrew Marguard Hall also represents the Afrikaner and their cultural identity: She (who??) would not have been allowed into the Andrew Marguard Hall even if she had wanted to attend the pageant. The hall – named after the first principal of the Volksskool – belonged only to the volk. And to those visitors whose bodies were blessed enough to have melanin levels that were as low as those of the volk.<sup>1</sup>

### Racial melancholy

The main characters in both narratives experience feelings of sadness and loss. The feeling of loss comes to the fore especially at someone's death. The first example of racial melancholy is portrayed in *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup> "A thousand black and white people had to come to the funeral of Cathy Burger, his wife, and Rosa's mother, some years before".<sup>1</sup> People from all walks of life came to Rosa's mother funeral; evidence of someone who worked across racial lines. In *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> at the trial of Lionel Burger, some stalwarts of the liberation struggle from both races made a nostalgic appearance: "Two or three men and women who had been hidden away by house arrest for many years appeared on the platform like actors making a come-back with the style and rhetoric of their time".<sup>2</sup> Baasie (little boss) was not happy because of what Rosa was telling the people at the gathering in Europe. He did not like the attention that Lionel Burger was receiving, and the way Burger was portrayed as a martyr. He believed that the blacks who fought for the liberation of the country must also be held in high esteem like Lionel Burger. Listen, there are dozens of our fathers sick and dying like dogs, kicked out of the locations when they can't work anymore. Getting old and dying in prison. I know plenty blacks like Burger. It's nothing, it's us, we must be used to it, and it's not going to show on English television.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Rosa Burger is melancholic about her situation. After the heated talk with Baasie, Rosa starts to question herself and her identity. She starts questioning her role in all the political turmoil that her country of her birth is finding itself in. It was a very important time of her life.

### Racism

Racism drove the black inhabitants to desperate measures in order to survive. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>2</sup> Niki had to pose naked for the trinity to put food on the table. The black people of Mahlatswetsa were paid a pittance for whatever job they were doing. Niki was not

an exception; she was paid a meagre wage by her stingy boss. "There was no way she could dress herself and braid her hair like that from her earnings at Excelsior *Slaghuis* (Butchery). We all knew how tight-fisted the Boers of Excelsior were".<sup>1</sup> The locals had their own church, and the elites (Afrikaners) had theirs. "Did you enjoy the service?" "It was good *my baas* (my boss)," responded Niki.<sup>1</sup> Niki was asked by Adam de Vries if she had enjoyed the church service (she was outside the church in the sun). She responded in the affirmative, and she also used the term "*my baas*", which was the norm when a black person was addressing a white man. Moreover, Madam Cornelia Cronje humiliated her black employees by weighing them twice daily – when they come to work in the morning and when they leave in the afternoon. On one particular day, Niki went on the scale and weighed more than she did in the morning, and Madam Cornelia suspected Niki of stealing from the butchery: "You are hiding something," said Cornelia Cronje. "It is not true, Madam Cornelia," protested Niki."<sup>1</sup> Niki was asked to strip to her underwear, but nothing was found. This incident drove Niki to sleep with Madam Cronje's husband, Stephanus Cronje. She wanted to get back at Madam Cornelia for what she did to her in front of everyone, including Stephanus and Tjaart Cronje.

Division and contrast was characteristic of the dispensation of that time, and this is clearly portrayed in *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup>: "Children clean and pretty, we sat among the white neighbours from farms round about and from the *dorp* (town)." In *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> the appearance of the oppressed is portrayed as thus: "the waiter would be in his place down under the trees out of sight of the farmhouses, where black people sang hymns and beat old oil drums, or in the tin church in the *dorp* (town) location".<sup>2</sup> This display shows unambiguously that the white children and adults were portrayed as clean and pretty. The children of the white inhabitants were always clean, compared to their black counterparts, and they would attend the church in town, whereas the black children attended the tin church in the location.

### Racial issues

In *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> black people were portrayed as vulnerable and struggling to make ends meet. The first example that shows the destitute and plight of the black person is represented by the quote below:

Black women selling mealies sat with babies crawling from under the coloured towels they wore as shawls. Black children coming up behind humble parents were in rags or running barefoot, bundled from above the knees in school uniforms that could be afforded only once in years...<sup>2</sup> The vulnerability of black people is shown in the following quotation: "All this ordered life surrounded, coated, swaddled Rosa; the order of Saturday, the order of family hierarchy, the order of black people out in the street and white people in the shade of the hotel *stoep* (floor of the veranda)".<sup>2</sup> In the novel *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> racial issues are shown through the use of the swimming pool, which was a luxury for black people. Some old black people were only now learning how to swim. The white girl, Rosa, was taught how to swim when she was still a small child. "The swimming pool remained to give pleasure to other people, black children who had never been into a pool before could be taught to swim there by my father".<sup>2</sup> In the novel, *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> there was whites who were against apartheid, and fought alongside the blacks to end it. Among them was Lionel Burger, a member of the South African Communist Party, and a stout believer in equality.<sup>2</sup>

## Social issues

In the novel *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> a common social issue at the turn of independence was death. Death as a social issue was shown through Popi's village of Mahlatswetsa, and her singing at these funerals. Death lived among the people of Mahlatswetsa every day. In days gone by a funeral was a rare occasion that everyone talked about. Death was something that happened to the men who worked in the mines of Welkom, who are brought home in pine coffins after their lungs had been eaten by phthisis. Death was something that happened to the aged who had lived their time on earth, but these days death was, as the Basotho people put it in their adage, the daughter-in-law of all homesteads. Young men came home to die after being eaten by AIDS. Young women infected their unborn babies, who died soon after reaching toddlerhood.<sup>1</sup> However these days, death claimed the youngest and the able bodied, especially through the AIDS pandemic. Popi sang at many black people's funerals. Most of the people who were affected and dying from the disease were blacks. The AIDS pandemic was wreaking havoc among the young population and adults, and the rate of mother to child infection was skyrocketing. The infection rate between HIV positive mothers to their unborn babies was very high. Popi sang at white men's funerals as well: "she sang at the Dutch Reformed Church funerals. A whole family had been wiped out. Father, mother, a son and two daughters".<sup>1</sup>

## Apartheid

Apartheid is a significant theme in *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> and *Burger's Daughter*.<sup>2</sup> The plight of the black people is shown by the parties held by the elite. When the whites have their parties or get together there are always leftovers for the vulnerable. This is evident in *The Madonna of Excelsior*.<sup>1</sup> "I was hoping to get the bones... or any leftovers...after the party, she said haltingly. Something for me and my little girl".<sup>1</sup> Niki was sitting outside Mrs de Vries' house with her daughter, Popi, hoping that they would get leftovers. A lot of food normally went to waste at these gatherings, and she was hoping they would feel pity for her and her daughter. Tjaart Cronje did oblige, and then he gave them a piece of cake. Apartheid made the black men suffer and feel worthless as they went begging at people's doors. Another representation of apartheid is shown when Niki goes with her boss to Marguard Hall. "She would not have been allowed into the Marguard Hall even if she had wanted to attend the pageant".<sup>1</sup> The hall was only for the white people of the area, and it was not to be utilised by the blacks for no reason. The hall was for the elite and it was at their disposal.

In *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> the Afrikaners also practised apartheid against other whites. The *dominee* or pastor of the Excelsior congregation was upset by the way one particular Greek boy was getting comfortable with his daughter. "The Greek boys had no right to smooch with Afrikaner *meisies* (girls)".<sup>1</sup> The Greeks were not white enough to be associating with the Afrikaners. This statement was brought to the fore when Jacomina's father found her smooching with a Greek boy. This situation did not sit well with her father and the pastor made it his priority to chase the Greek family out of Excelsior. "Even Johannes Smit and his Brahmins and tracts of land that were as big as a small country".<sup>1</sup> His land, because of its size, was being compared to a small country. His possessions of Brahmins is a sign of wealth, and because of the tracts of land he has, these animals can graze freely. In *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> the stark difference between black and white is shown in the types of dwelling and the residential

areas of the two groups.. The white settlement is characterised by clean streets, good roads and excellent services in contrast to the black township that have dirty streets, old roads or dilapidated roads. On the same side of the divide, the area is characterised by a lot of littering. "How many months since I had crossed the divide that opens every time a black leaves a white and goes to his 'place'; the physical divide of clean streets become rutted roads and city centres become veld dumped with twisted metal and a perpetual autumn of blowing papers".<sup>2</sup>

## Black empowerment

In the *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> black empowerment became the norm after independence. Black empowerment is shown through the accumulation of wealth by Mrs Mkhonza; "Mrs Mkhonza was not only economically-emancipated, but she was a black woman beating white businessmen with their own marked cards".<sup>2</sup> Mrs Mkhonza was a wily businesswoman who has ventured into white dominated arena. This was a sign that the previously disadvantaged were getting a foothold in the country's economy. The scramble for South Africa's wealth is shown clearly in *Burger's Daughter*.<sup>2</sup> The people in power (the previously disadvantaged) have taken it upon themselves to take the assets of the country unchallenged: "Survival of the fittest is the new ethos. Each one for himself or herself in the scramble for the accumulation of wealth".<sup>2</sup> In *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> the two Pule siblings are expressing their concerns at the turn of events after independence. Black economic empowerment became the buzz word, as the people that came to power started to loot the government coffers for self-enrichment. "They must not pretend that they are socialists. And they must not accumulate capital by looting the coffers of the state and by taking (kickbacks) from contractors".<sup>1</sup>

## Racial uprisings

Much of the tension that took place in the early years before independence was racial. The differences and the way the people of colour were treated led to these racial uprisings. Racial uprisings are presented in the *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup> as depicted in the following quotation "After all the Dingaan's Day demonstrations; all the passive resistance campaigns of the Fifties, the pass burnings of the Sixties; after all the police assaults, arrests, after Sharpeville; after the trials...".<sup>2</sup> There were a lot passive resistance campaigns in the Fifties, and all the other forms of oppression against the black men did very little to deter the spirit of the suppressed, as they endured all the pain and tribulations. Rosa Burger was later jailed for her part in organising the youth that revolted against the government. *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> depicts racial uprisings through the demonstrations that lead to Popi being beaten up by the white police of Excelsior. There was a gathering or remembrance of one of the youth leaders who was killed in the liberation war. A group of people were demonstrating in the direction of town as a commemoration of Solomon Mahlangu Day. "They were celebrating Solomon Mahlangu, a young hero from Viliki's movement who was hanged by the *boers* (White Afrikaner) during Wars of the Liberation".<sup>1</sup> The natives wanted to march to the police station to hand in a memorandum so that the government must release all political prisoners. Another depiction of the Soweto uprising of 1976 is portrayed in when a youth leader says: "Black people of Azania remember our beloved dead! Remember Hector Peterson the 13year old Black child of Azania, a future leader we might have produced...".<sup>2</sup> Hector Peterson was one of the first victims when the police opened fire on a group of black youths who were demonstrating

against the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. He was one of the martyrs of 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1976.

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to analyse the findings according to the themes benchmarked in Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> and Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> as well as to examine emerging themes and their link to racial melancholy. Racial segregation (apartheid) was exhibited in the novels as the main cause of loss of identity and racial melancholy. The novels, *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> and *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup> are ideal to be considered as a contemporary post-colonial study.

## Introduction

The overall aim of this research was to explore the concept of loss and racial melancholy in two literary texts. The study was undertaken because loss of identity and racial melancholy are concepts that have not been broadly explored in existing literature. Racial segregation (apartheid) and racism are the main causes of the loss of identity. This is portrayed by *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> and *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup>. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> this loss is shown by the plight of Popi, Niki and Viliki. In *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> Rosa Burger looks for her identity and finally finds who she really is when she returns from Europe.

## Summary of the study findings

**Examining the presentation of loss of identity and racial melancholy in the selected works:** Loss of identity and racial melancholy is presented in many ways in *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> and *Burger's Daughter*.<sup>2</sup> The main characters in both novels exhibit a loss of identity and racial melancholy. In *Burger's Daughter*,<sup>2</sup> Rosa Burger had a major challenge on her hands when both her parents died. The loss is depicted when she cuts herself from family members and starts living on her own. She does not want to be associated with anything that resembles her parents' political life. Rosa feels even worse when she meets Baasie after a long time. After their heated argument on the phone in the middle of the night, she was no longer the same. She questioned herself and the identity crises that she had. In the second novel, *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> loss of identity and racial melancholy is presented by Popi Pule who was the result of miscegenation. Popi Pule always wondered why she was different from other children around her. She was a black girl, but on the surface she was lighter in complexion, had blue eyes, hairy legs, and had flowing locks. Loss of identity and racial melancholy is presented through Popi's attempt to hide her hair in a *doek* (headscarf), and wearing of long dresses to hide her hairy legs. She was lost and did not know where she belonged. She despised her physical experience that caused so much pain in her life; it became a burden.

**Exploring the effects of loss of identity and racial melancholy in *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002):** The effects of loss of identity and racial melancholy in *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> are depicted in Niki's life. Niki feels lost after the trial of the Excelsior 19. She retrieves into a shell and withdraws from the world. She feels embarrassed about her situation and her husband leaves her for having a white man. For Popi, the effects were shown in the disguise that she wore. The effects of loss of identity and racial melancholy in *Burger's Daughter*<sup>2</sup> are depicted in the identity crises that Rosa battles with in her life. She becomes a lonely person as she tries to live a life far away from her father's associates; she even manages to sneak out of the country to start a new life. She was

looking for herself. At the end, she returns after finding herself and becoming a political activist before her imprisonment.

**Discussing what the novelists propose as the possible solution to highly polarised racial societies:** The possible solution to highly polarised racial societies is tolerance, forgiveness and accepting one another. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*,<sup>1</sup> Niki found peace with her situation and became a lover of bees once she accepted who she was. Viliki found solace in the Seller of Songs when he was kicked out of the council. Adam de Vries attempted to find peace with the local community in trying to convince Niki to start a bee business, but to no avail. Johannes Smit had to find peace with the fact that the country was changing and people needed to accommodate one another. He changed his preconceived notion about the black people. He tried to ask for forgiveness from Niki for what he had done to her. The black and white community had to accept their differences and not judge one another. The solution for Popi and her miscegenation was to admit her white part as well as her black part. Rosa Burger was not supposed to discount the fact that she was born in a political house and that politics was part of her life. Eventually her political roots triumphed as she joined the political arena until she was arrested and became a political prisoner. Another solution to these polarised societies is that both groups must be conscious about each other and treat each other accordingly. The white community must be respected as well and not ridiculed for their past deeds.<sup>23-26</sup>

## Conclusion and findings

The study focussed on the loss of identity and racial melancholy in Zakes Mda's, *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> and Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*.<sup>2</sup> It analysed texts and themes from the two novels mentioned above. The study highlighted a lot of useful information in a postcolonial era. It discovered that both novels have similar themes such as racism, apartheid, racial melancholy, racial issues and many more subthemes. Studying loss of identity and racial melancholy is important to understand current trends in countries that experienced racial segregation. By exploring the selected novels, the study found that racial segregation and racism are the major causes of loss of identity and racial melancholy in *The Madonna of Excelsior*<sup>1</sup> and *Burger's Daughter*.<sup>2</sup> This was primarily true for the way Popi and Rosa struggled with identity and a sense of loss in these two novels.

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## Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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