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## **Ideological Development towards "the Other" in Selected Novels by Nadine Gordimer.**

An M. A. Dissertation in literature

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## Preface

The thesis consists of an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. The Introduction is a brief display of Nadine Gordimer's life in South Africa and the theories applied on her novels; ideology, colonialism, carnivalesque and Said's concept of orientalism.

Nadine Gordimer was born in 1923 in South Africa. She is a writer, political activist and recipient of the 1991 Nobel Prize in Literature. Gordimer's writing has long dealt with racial issues, particularly apartheid in South Africa. She is a prolific writer, as she wrote many novels as *The Lying Days* (1953), *Occasion for Loving* (1963), *A Guest of Honour* in 1971 *The Conservationist* (1974), *Burger's Daughter* (1979), *July's People* (1981), *The House Gun* (1998), *The Pickup* (2001) and *Get a Life*, in 2005. This is beside her Short fiction collections, as *Face to Face* (1949), *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* (1952), *Friday's Footprint* (1960), *No Place Like: Selected Stories* (1978), *Once Upon a Time* (1989), *Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black* (2007) and *Life Times: Stories* (2011). Gordimer was awarded many prizes beside the Nobel Prize like W. H. Smith Commonwealth Literary Award (England) (1961), Booker Prize for *The Conservationist* (1974), Grand Aigle d'Or (France) (1975), Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Best Book from Africa for *The Pickup* (2002), Booker Prize long list for *The Pickup* (2001), American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Royal Society of Literature (Britain) and Patron, Congress of South African Writers.

The thesis attempts to trace how South African history, mainly political and social events, affects Nadine Gordimer's ideology towards "the other" (the blacks and the Arabs), and its development through three of her novels: *The Lying Day* 1953, *July's People* 1981 and *The Pickup* 2001. The thesis will mainly discuss these three novels, because they have been written in three different phases, so they will be very relevant to highlight Gordimer's ideological development towards "the other".

The introduction discusses Gordimer's life in South Africa and how South African political and social events affect Gordimer's ideological framework towards "the other". Moreover, the introduction discusses the meaning of ideology. It also explains different theories: colonialism, carnivalesque and Said's concept of orientalism as they show Gordimer's ideological development by applying each theory on one of Gordimer's novels, colonialism on *The Lying Days* 1953, carnivalesque on *July's People* 1981 and Said's concept of orientalism on *The Pickup* 2001. The background of Nadine Gordimer's life in South Africa, the meaning of ideology, colonialism, carnivalesque and Said's concept of orientalism, allow the researcher to analyze the chosen novels within their framework.

Moreover, as a writer from a society where there are people in power and other marginalized, it is obvious that Bakhtin's theories of monologism and dialogism have traces in her novels. This is strongly related to the variable literary theories in discussion: colonialism, carnivalesque and orientalism. They are one face or another of monologism versus dialogism, and show how Gordimer's work is

developed from rejecting to accepting "the other". Feminism is also tackled in the thesis, as Gordimer's ideological development towards "the other" is portrayed through her white female's ability or inability to adapt and mix with "the other", depending on the degree of their rejection of the hegemonic white patriarchal conventions forced upon them in South Africa.

In the first chapter, "Colonial reading of *The Lying Days*", Gordimer remarked that at the time of writing *The Lying Days* she scarcely had formed her own independent ideology. She was wrapped up within the same colonial ideological framework in which she grew up, and from which she tried to escape later on. It is a witness of the 1930s-1960s South Africa.

It is noticed that her view of "the other" in *The Lying Days* is very clear when she portrays the whites as the controllers and the blacks as the inferior. For example, Gordimer describes the poor blacks living in the worst slums with the poor whites. The narrative voice comments:

These are misbegotten people, thin, ugly, misbegotten children, living not because there was a place for them to fill, but because there was no place for them, because they were born of the misfits of both the black and the white races, of men without the sense of responsibility which is self-respect. (Gordimer 25)

The readers are used to Nadine Gordimer as the strong opposer of apartheid, but the above extract on the contrary shows the degree to which, as a young writer, she could be held within the dominant patterns of white ideology. Stephen Clingman writes in *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (1992), "[h]ere Gordimer is restricted by the limits of the dominant (white) ideology. At the same time the above extract marks the changes undergone in her writing in the following period of over thirty-five years" (26).

Furthermore, the novel sheds light on the idea of the whites' sense of alienation in South Africa. In the novel, both Helen and her friend Joel decide to leave South Africa, as they have the feeling of not belonging. They feel that they belong to Europe not to South Africa.

The second chapter is a Bakhtinian reading of Nadine Gordimer's novel, *July's People* 1981. Here the conventional rules of South Africa, based on apartheid, is turned upside down. The blacks now are rising to be in control and the whites are escaping. Through this novel, readers see how Gordimer portrays the 1970s' and 1980s' historical events between the blacks and the whites in South Africa, and thus her ideology about "the other" (the blacks). Her ideology in *July's People* seems to be different from hers in her novel, *The Lying Days* 1953 at the time of the whites' full supremacy.

In analyzing *July's People*, one can trace Bakhtin's carnivalesque. Carnavalesque sheds light on the reversal of roles between the dominant (the whites) and the marginalized (the blacks)

expected in South Africa, and draws a comparison between the past, in which apartheid has the upper hand, and the present in which apartheid is threatened, as well as Gordimer's consciousness of such a present. Through the use of carnivalesque in analyzing *July's People*, it is seen how it is a perfect image of Gordimer's own developed ideological framework towards "the other", based on her awareness of the historical events taking place around her.

As for the third chapter, it is a reading of *The Pickup*, depending on Edward Said. In *The Pickup* 2001, Gordimer is influenced by Edward Said's book, *Orientalism*. Moreover, the book of the Lebanese-French writer, Amin Maalouf, entitled *On Identity* is used in analyzing the novel as a secondary reference after *Orientalism*. Gordimer's ideology towards "the other" extends from the blacks inside South Africa to "the other" outside it, especially the Arabs, apparently because of the relative stability or the declination of apartheid in South Africa if compared to the past. As a Jew from European origins, her portrayal of the hardships faced by an Arab marks another development in her ideology. She proves that she comes over racial, religious and class differences. In *The Pickup*, Gordimer's protagonist is not a black or a white South African, but a Muslim Arab, Ibrahim, who illegally immigrates to South Africa, and who has a relationship with a white rich South African girl, Julie.

Gordimer tackles how the Arabs are looked down upon and how this affects them and their self-confidence, identities and

choices in life. Through *Orientalism*, Gordimer shows that the Europeans' preconceptions of the Arabs are nothing but illusions.

The reader notices that in the thesis Gordimer attacks "the other" (the blacks) in *The Lying Days*, backs them in *July's People*, and finally extends her support to include "the other" outside South Africa, especially the Arabs, in *The Pickup*.

Finally, the conclusion shows that as any work of art, Gordimer's novels are ideologically charged by the historical events in South Africa, especially towards "the other". Gordimer's novels are the product and the witness of her time and her ideological framework. The thesis tries to depict her developed ideology and historical consciousness towards "the other" in the three selected novels. The use of colonialism, carnivalesque and Said's *orientalism* help in a more profound understanding of Gordimer's different portrayals of "the other" and will trace the development of her concepts, codes, beliefs and ideas, or what can be simply called "ideology".

Understanding Nadine Gordimer's ideology towards "the other" makes Gordimer's novels more familiar to the readers. It gives a more profound meaning to the themes and ideas she discusses as it relates her novels to the life of Gordimer and the history of South Africa.

To conclude, the thesis tackles issues of ideology, historical consciousness and historical development, and their relations to fiction. Gordimer's novels may have a combination of the overall

historical moment with which she engages her ideological position. To clarify, Gordimer due to her historical awareness of the South African events and ability to reject her inherited white ideology, has achieved lasting international recognition for her works, most of which deal with political issues, as well as the tensions of her racially divided home country. Even in the post-apartheid era Gordimer's works deal with themes of love and politics but outside South Africa. Moreover, the thesis attempts to answer the following questions: Do the characters in Gordimer's selected novels succeed in or fail to identify themselves with "the other"? And does Gordimer adopt an optimistic or pessimistic view in her novels?

## Introduction

South Africa is one of the few countries that went through the major problems facing humanity in the form of racial, class and cultural clashes. Nadine Gordimer, as Stephen Clingman writes, "[is] a writer whose literary being and career have been directly involved with these issues over an extended period of time...a writer deeply bound up with history encounters extraordinary historical circumstances" (xxxv). This sheds light on her ideological framework and its development.

Gordimer's novels are the product and the witness of her time and her ideological framework. They are documents that should be read in context. In the thesis, the researcher tries to depict Gordimer's developed ideology and historical consciousness towards "the other" in three selected novels written in three different phases: *The Lying Days* (1953), *July's People* (1981) and *The Pickup* (2001). *The Lying Days* is about the first twenty-four years in the life of Helen Shaw, a white girl brought up by conventional middle-class Protestant parents in a mining suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa. As for *July's People*, it is set during a fictional civil war in which black South Africans have violently overturned the system of apartheid. The story follows the Smales, a liberal white South African family, who were forced to flee Johannesburg to the native village of their former black servant, July. Finally, *The Pickup* is about Julie Summers, a young white girl from an affluent and prestigious white

family in South Africa, who loves an Arab immigrant, Ibrahim, marries him, and travels with him to his Arab country.

Moreover, the thesis studies *The Lying Days* using a colonial approach, *July's People* in the light of carnivalesque, a literary theory by the Russian critic, Mikhail Bakhtin, and *The Pickup* in the light of *Orientalism* by the Palestinian-American critic, Edward Said. This traces the development of Gordimer's "ideology" and helps in a more profound understanding of her different portrayals of "the other" over the period she has been writing in.

In other words, in this thesis, the reader notices that Gordimer in the *The Lying Days* is affected by colonial ideology towards "the other" inside South Africa (the blacks), while in *July's People*, she adopts a different ideology towards them in which Bakhtinian carnivalesque is very clear. Finally, in *The Pickup*, she is influenced by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, and this is seen in her view towards "the other", this time the Arabs outside South Africa. The thesis also discusses how apartheid affects mainly black women, beside white women and black men, in two of the three selected novels, namely *The Lying Days* and *July's People*, and how discrimination, in general, affects Arab women, beside Arab men in her third novel. Through her novels she presents South African history from her own ideology that she formed as a white South African citizen and as a writer with a unique personality.

The readers of Gordimer's work find the theme of exile, alienation, and the struggle between "the self" and "the different

other" are important. Always questioning power relations and truth, Gordimer tells stories of ordinary people, revealing moral ambiguities and choices. She also reveals how apartheid affects the man-woman relationship whether black or white and how it badly harms women in South Africa.

## South African history:

South Africa is a country with unique circumstances, as Clingman summarizes the South African history, saying:

There have been the original wars of the whites' conquest and the blacks' resistance, internal class and nationalist conflicts, the oppression and exploitation of the colonized and later proletarianized masses, the modern elaboration of apartheid and, throughout, a moving record of resistance. To mention all this is to give only the broadest and crudest features of South African history. (3)

Racial segregation in South Africa began in colonial times by the Europeans. However, racial segregation as an official policy was introduced in 1948 and became known as apartheid, meaning 'apartness' in Afrikaans, a language which originated mainly from Dutch in South Africa. The South African government classified inhabitants into three racial groups ("white", "coloured" (person of Asian or mixed racial ancestry), and "black"). Under apartheid the whites were at the top of the social ladder, while the blacks were at the bottom.

The whites deprived the other races especially the blacks from all their rights. In 1958, the blacks were forced to move to what is called self-governing homelands. Under the homelands system, blacks would no longer be citizens of South Africa; they would instead become citizens of the independent homelands. Those who merely worked in South Africa were regarded as foreign migrant labourers on temporary work permits or pass laws.

This makes Rita Barnard describe South Africa in *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place* (2007) as "a world apart" (8), as each of the blacks and the whites and other mixed races live in their own world, separate from the other races. She adds:

the segregation of residential areas on the basis of race, the restriction of black urbanization...and the formidable apparatus of state surveillance and control[, o]f all these features, there is not a single one that did not, in practice, rely on the power of space to separate individuals from each other, to direct and control their movements, and to reinforce social distinctions. (6)

Moreover, the poet Jeremy Cronin in *Inside* (1987) comments on the idea of space in South Africa saying, "South Africa is said to have the highest prisoner to population ratio in the world. But this prison regime is merely one face of a countrywide grid of spatial control. There are cordoned-off ethnic 'group areas' "(9).

Such regulations helped preserve the hegemonic white ideology towards "the other". That is why places could be described as ideological apparatuses in the Althusserian sense, in his study, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", in which the state and its organizations serve as an apparatus to the hegemonic ideology spread by people in power.

Besides, apartheid had a major impact on black women in particular, since they suffered both gender and racial discrimination (they are not only women, but black women). They are the marginalized of the marginalized. Deborah K. King in "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology"(1988) quotes bell hooks in her book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, writing, "[n]o other group...has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have the black women. When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black men; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women" (45-46). Black women in South Africa suffered from, the triple jeopardy of racism, sexism, and classism.

Part of the whites' plan to preserve their hegemony in South Africa is to destroy the spirit and steal the identity of the country owners; the blacks. *The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines identity as "who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group which make them different from others" (622). This reveals the idea that identity is a complex phenomenon, as S. Raditlhalo mentions in *Who Am I? The Construction of Identity in Twentieth Century South African Autobiographical Writing in English* (2003)