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The Poetics of Space as Site of Un-belonging in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*

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ABSTRACT: *This article addresses Nadine Gordimer's 2001 novel The Pickup which has stirred much critical attention as it probes further into the vagaries of the post-apartheid reality. The novel relates a cross-cultural love story between Julie Summers; a well-to-do white woman, and the illegal immigrant Abdu; also called Ibrahim Ibn Musa who is an Arab mechanic from an unnamed Arab country. After constantly declining his visa applications, Abdu was forced to go back to his country with Julie who did not waver to accompany him to the desert, somewhere in North Africa. Nonetheless, Abdu's choice to leave his homeland afresh and dwell in the United States of America verily upsets his wife Julie who unexpectedly chooses to stay in the desert forever. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to show that embracing the 'Other' and living amidst another geographical location is a way to seek re-definition in the midst of the unsteady new South Africa. Identity and place are intertwined as characters' embrace and identify with places they do not belong to. They feel out of place in their homelands. Accordingly, the poetics of non-space and un-belonging is a major template in the novel. Equally of due significance is the notion of place/home as a major factor that shapes one's sense of self and inner integrity. Characters are in a constant quest for the 'Other' to blur feelings of estrangement and alienation. To entrench hybridity instead of racial favoritism is a major premise of post-apartheid literature, however relative this might be.*

KEY WORDS*:* Gordimer, post-apartheid, space, un-belonging, embracing the 'Other'

INTRODUCTION

> *"A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing*"
> **Martin Heidegger, 'Building, dwelling, thinking'**

The term 'Other' has often been associated with people of darker complexion. As opposed to the white man who has always been in a position of privilege, non-whites have been regarded and treated as the downtrodden race. Racial divides were inherent in the very formation of identity. This was brought to a halt as the colonial period came to an end. Ultimately, many works aimed at countering the representation of the 'Other' by letting whites and blacks seek complementarity instead of entrenching racial favoritism and alterity.

Race, place (East and West), social class, religion, culture and gender have been hailed as divides that set lines between the different racial groups in South Africa. As a corollary, the polarity of its social fabric breeds much disquiet and discontentment. To go beyond the state of internal exile, Gordimer tries hard to provide a space for an embrace of the 'Other' in her novel

The Pickup.
Quite succinctly, as power relations have changed, Gordimer features South Africa "as a country collectively seeking a better understanding of itself" as suggests Ileana Dimitriu in "Postcolonialising Gordimer: The Ethics of 'Beyond' and Significant Peripheries" (166). The South African subject is in a state of loss and misrecognition as the novel represents "a post-apartheid world of unfixed identities" (167). How to straddle two cultures is, thus, the major template of the novel. Connecting self and 'Other' and creating a hybrid space that would embrace both sides is one of the major aims of post-apartheid literature at large and Gordimer's *The Pickup* in particular.

Looking for the Join [1]
In the postcolonial dispensation, Homi Bhabha's concept of The Third Space of Enunciation is often regarded as a fertile soil for straddling two clashing cultures. For instance, to go beyond the Western dichotomies that have infected the colonial regime is one of the salient premises of Bhabha's theory of hybridity as clearly outlined in *The Third Space of Enunciation*. Accordingly, to find a third space that would annihilate the polarities of the past and unite the different parcels of the nation is a question worth-addressing in the aftermath of the overthrow of apartheid.

Given the splitting divides of the past and their hard-to-erase legacy, identity construction admist the residues of apartheid is a hard task. "Self or other? East or West? Colonizer or Colonized?", as states Raymond Arsenault, "How do we perceive our identities? Where do we locate them? Is it possible to find a formula that goes beyond these polarities?" (Ed. *The Third Space of Enunciation* 7). Similarly, in *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha addresses the seminal question of identity construction: "How are characters formed 'in-between' or in excess of the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/ class/ gender, etc.)"? (2). In this context, the end of apartheid and the beginning of a new period lay the ground for more contradictions. Bhabha points to the issue of survival after the tenebrous period of colonialism. To connect two clashing cultures after years of separateness is not an easy mission. In *The Location of Culture* he states that:

Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': postmoderrnism, postcolonialism, postfeminism.... (1)

That said, to move beyond the hierarchies of the past and cross the threshold of the 'post' is what postcolonial theoreticians seek out. Yet, the period of transition is a quite anarchic one. Therefore, to break free from the narrow classifications of the past and form the South African

[1] This is central to Homi Bhabha's *The Third Space of Enunciation*.

post-apartheid subject requires another space that unites both races under the umbrella of hybridity, acculturation and cultural diversity. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin assert in their seminal book *Post-Colonial Studies: Key concepts* that "[h]ybridity has frequently been used in post-colonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural 'exchange'" (108). Hybridity moves beyond the unilateral construction of society, identity and subjectivities:

One of the most widely employed and most disputed terms in postcolonial theory, hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. As used in horticulture, the term refers to the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, 'hybrid' species. (Ashcroft et all. 108)

Quite translucently, the process of uniting two entities is suggestive of their interdependent subjectivities. Hybridity washes away the polarity purveyed by colonialism and establishes a third space wherein cultural difference is the norm. For Bhabha, "the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate" (Ashcroft et all. 108). The self versus Other dichotomy is, therefore, no longer valid in the new dispensation. Homi Bhabha's hybrid space eludes the essentialist classification of the self and Other. "As soon as I desire I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now […] I am for somewhere else and for something else. […] I do battle for the creation of a human world – that is a world of reciprocal recognitions" (qtd. In Bhabha 8). Clearly, mutual recognition is what typifies the third space instead of polarity:

To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' - the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture […] And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves. (*The Location of Culture* 38-39)

More to the point, Bhabha's theory cuts with the unilateral construction of identity that typified colonialism and seeks out a unitary paradigm. Fanon asserts that "[t]hat familiar alignment of colonial subjects - Black/ White, Self/Other - is disturbed with one brief pause and the traditional grounds of racial identity are dispersed" (40). He also states that "[i]t is this palpable pressure of division and displacement that pushes Fanon's writing to the edge of things - the cutting edge that reveals no ultimate radiance but, in his words, 'exposed an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born'.2" (40). Ostensibly, to resolve the self versus Other duality and set up the pillars of the postcolonial nation is seminal to Bhabha's theories. Connecting the bits and fragments is a prime step towards fashioning the post-colonial nation.

Beyond the East and West dichotomy

Written seven years or so after the collapse of apartheid, the author's ultimate end seems to spread love and support amongst the different people of South Africa as the title of the novel already implicates. By letting the white young woman Julie Summers get married to a black motor mechanic of a much lesser social status, Gordimer challenges the classist and cultural divides that are deeply-seated in the South African society. In spite of the fact that Julie is of a

bourgeois family and Abdu is an illegal immigrant from an unnamed Arab country, the huge differences between them were no hindrance to their love story.

Abdu, who is a symbolic incarnation of the 'Other' in terms of race and geographical location, becomes a site for meaningful complementarity. Accordingly, the relationship between the 'Self' and the 'Other' is not exclusionary. It tends to be a rather complementary one. From the onset of the novel, Gordimer seems to provide a third space that unites both whites and non-whites. For instance, getting married to the black man Abdu is a gesture that celebrates hybridity. This seems to annihilate racial divides. In this context, Ileana Dimitriu declares in "Postcolonialising Gordimer: The Ethics of 'Beyond' and Significant Peripheries in the Recent Fiction" that:

Now that writers feel less moral pressure to engage with a repressive social context, she is keen to offer literary replies to an important question: "How, in national specificity, does each country go about moving beyond itself, to procreate a culture that will benefit self and others?" It is a question she attempts to answer the tellingly titled essay, "Living on a Frontierless Land: Cultural Globalization" (1999, 212), which presents a new aspect of Gordimer's writerly profile. What are new are her excursions beyond the national question: her aspiration to step beyond cultural isolation and enter a larger, post-ideological world scene. (159-160)

Hence, Gordimer's will to transcend the separatist parameters of the past is hard-to-ignore as I will demonstrate. The protagonist Julie seems to abhor all that is associated with her affluent lifestyle. At the outset, *The Pickup* opens with Julie Summers stuck in the middle of the street after her car's abrupt breakdown. Having had her car at the nearest garage to have it repaired, Julie falls in love with the mechanic Abdu whom she does not waver to invite for a coffee at the EL-AY café where she got used to sitting with her own multiracial and divergent circle; The Table friends. They are the only acquaintances "to which she belongs—they are, after all, her elective siblings who have distanced themselves from the ways of the past, their families, whether these are black ones still living in the old ghettoes or white ones in The Suburbs" (Gordimer, *The Pickup*, 29).

The Table is of a group of people who are diverse in race, skin color, social status and religious backgrounds. Despite the hard-to-ignore differences between them, The Table members enjoy their frequent stays at the café. This might symbolically materialize the post-apartheid tendency to accept differences and breed fruitful diversity instead of separatism. From the very beginning of the novel Gordimer makes it overt that Julie does not feel at home in her homeland. Her choice to live far away from her Bourgeois family bespeaks much restlessness.

Julie's bourgeois lifestyle casts her into a state of ennui from which there is no exempt. From the start, it is clear-cut that it is place that either alienates or comforts her. Julie tries hard to keep at bay the affluence of The Suburbs. The site of un-belonging that Julie occupies permits her to think outside the box. She is able to see clearly who she really is. As she breaks free from the shackles of the mainstream ideology, Julie embarks on a journey of self recognition away from her country of origin. Her quest for a sense of home is made patent from the onset of the

novel. She looks beyond her present and pines for a more meaningful future. This recalls Bhabha's belief that:

'Beyond' signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future, but our intimations of exceeding the barrier or boundary - the very act of going beyond – are unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to 'the present' which in the process of repetition becomes disjunct and displaced. (*The Location of Culture* 4)

Quite conspicuously, Gordimer seems to collapse racial divides as she celebrates an inter-racial love story. As the novel opens, Julie Summers is represented as a white South African woman who chooses to live far away from her very well-to-do family in the northern Suburbs of Johannesburg. Julie abhors the materialistic values of her family and wants to lead a simple lifestyle, work for an agency to be able to make ends meet and drive an old second-hand car too. It is clear-cut that she seems to scorn the affluence often associated with The Suburbs. The mere fact that a white character happens to disdain the privileged circumstances whites are guaranteed is a strategy to de-construct racial favoritism from within. More to the point, Gordimer tries to debunk the race-based assumptions of the past. The life of ease whites lead is meaningless and of no value as it cannot grant them the sense of inner integrity they pine for. It is the 'Other' that gives them a sense of being and meaning. The novel, thus, traces characters' journey towards self re-definition as I will demonstrate.

Quite noticeably, the couple happens to have different social backgrounds, cultures and racial origins which did not pause to their love story. A new kind of inter-racial relationships is made overt in this novel. Gordimer tries to communicate a message the gist of which is the following: what used to be deemed as outlawed and well-nigh forbidden during apartheid is now a commonplace occurrence. This seems to annihilate the deeply-rooted fear of the 'Other'.

More overtly, it reflects the author's post-apartheid tendency to deconstruct the race-based assumptions of the apartheid era. The overthrow of apartheid and the beginning of a new life entails fashioning new socio-racial parameters whereby the 'Self' and the 'Other' are one entity. At this juncture, Mark Swilling asserts in "Living in the Interregnum: Crisis, Reform and the Socialist Alternative in South Africa" that "[a]s apartheid goes through its terminal phase, a vigorous debate has emerged concerning the type of structures that should be established in a post-apartheid South Africa" (408). For instance, what characters seek out is to re-define themselves amidst the new South Africa and reconsider the 'Self' versus 'Other' binarism.

Accordingly, characters straddle between two cultures which, to a certain extent, breaches the fact that the east and west are hailed as two irreconcilable extremes. However, in the act of bringing together the two extremes, there emerge feelings of discomfort as characters still feel out of place and, thus, there looms no home for hybridity, acculturation and inter-racial compromise especially when it comes to Abdu whose homeleness persists till the end of the novel. This stated, the novel seems to negate the third space. There are mixed feelings about the intermixture of cultures. Characters' lives oscillate between aspiration and disillusion, hope and despair. This is summed up in "Event, Exceptionalism, and the Imperceptible: The Politics of Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*" wherein Andrea Spain reveals that:

Julie, and her friends aspire to live lives worthy of the New South Africa, even as those very aspirations are caught in the cynical realities of global capital, power relations, and racialized divisions. The scene is filled with what Goldberg has called the "giddy exuberance of [an] ethos" demonstrating contemporary South Africa's true "conviviality about its intermixture, as though thoroughly enjoying its new-found intercourse (the culture of the mix, the mashup, the piecing together, after all, very much of our time)," while recognizing that beneath it "lurks the legacy of deeper separations, residentially, educationally, commercially and medically" (311). Julie enters breathlessly into the hip, bohemian EL-AY Café to collective, supportive responses after her day's stalled, haphazard start. She meets generalized indignation on her behalf: "This city. What shits" (6). (756)

Quite conspicuously, despite her aspiration to lead a life that pleases her in her hybrid circle, feelings of indignation are made overt from the onset of the book. It is her home that makes her feel like an alien to herself and her surroundings. Julie is estranged in her home. In this context, in "The World and the Home", Homi Bhabha states: "You must permit me this awkward word - the unhomely because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation the home and the world in an unhallowed space" (141). He adds that "|t]he home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the home, the home-in-the-world" (141). Adjusting to the third space is preceded by a shock of recognition as one is no longer accustomed to his old home. Characters feel out of place and incomplete due to the changing world around them.

The sense of incompleteness both Julie and Abdu feel testifies to this idea. For instance, as he could not renew his visa in South Africa, Abdu was forced to leave the country. Much distraught by this decision, Julie decides to go with Abdu to his unnamed North African hometown where she actually got accustomed to the living conditions of the desert Abdu himself could not disdain less. Quite ostensibly, Julie wholeheartedly embraces the new geographical location and displays much love for Abdu's family. Interestingly, feeling alienated in her hometown, Julie now has a sense of home in Abdu's distant desert. She could finally identify with a place that gives her emotional comfort and inner peace.

The issue of 'Otherization' which forms the subject of this article traces the entire book as both Abdu and Julie are in a constant quest for a sense of home; a place that would satisfy their sense of being. William Plomer's words "Let us go to another country … The rest is understood. Just say the word" which Gordimer uses as an epigraph to her novel alludes to the issue of alienation and seeking re-definition amidst the rapidly-changing post-apartheid reality.

It is quite obvious that characters keep looking for a new place that would give them a sense of home. Succinctly, to fit in is what characters yearn for. What characters suffer from is a sense of incompleteness, 'Otherization', and loss amidst the newly-born democracy. What alienates characters is place as none is at-home in his own home country. They seek re-definition somewhere in other geographical locations. In this sense, the concept of the 'Other' is no longer associated with fear and disdain but rather comfort and at-home-ness.

Characters, and most intensely Julie, try hard to adjust to a new place because they do not feel 'here'. She is 'Othered' in her own country. Accordingly, place features as a splitting dimension as the 'here' and 'there' dichotomy is valid and the question of belonging is clearly evoked in the novel. It should come as no surprise then that Julie finally acquires a sense of selfhood far away from her place. Nor is it surprising that Abdu cannot stand living in his country of origin; a place he constantly shuns and deems as of no value. Feelings of discomfort and disgust towards his home country are, indeed, hard-to-overlook. His fervent will to live anywhere else in the West bespeaks his disdain for the Orient as a land of no opportunities.

For Abdu, to escape from the fetters of his country is much more important than living with his beloved blonde wife. It is possible to argue that, for Abdu, his place cannot give him the identity he searches for. He seeks a sense of selfhood in the West for it has always been 'a land of milk and honey'. This indirectly evokes the question of inequity as the novel is set in two economically unequal countries. The way Abdu expresses his admiration for Julie's family affluent standard of living reflects his desire to be just like them.

On the other hand, Julie's disdain for her own city was crystal-clear from the very onset of the book: "There was indignation: this city. What shits" (Gordimer 12). The opening scene already foregrounds feelings of abhorrence and antipathy as Julie could not have suffered less when left alone and helpless with her car broken down. Highly spiteful, the opening scene stresses Julie's helplessness amidst a group of "predators" who seem to cease the opportunity to make her feel vulnerable. It is equally suggestive that the only ones who offered her help are two black men: Clustered predators round a kill. It's a small car with a young woman inside it. The battery has failed and taxis, cars, minibuses, vans, motorcycles butt and challenge one another, reproach and curse her, a traffic mob mounting its own confusion. Get going. Stupid bloody woman. *Idikazana lomlungu, le!* She throws up hands, palms open, in surrender. They continue to jostle and blare their impatience. She gets out of her car and faces them. One of the unemployed black men who beg by waving vehicles into parking bays sidles his way deftly through fenders, signals with his head—Oka-ay, Oka-ay go inside, go!—and mimes control of the steering wheel. Another like him appears, and they push her and her car into a loading bay. […] She doesn't know how to thank them enough, etc. (Gordimer 9)

Quite translucently, from the start Gordimer seems to cast light on the issue of inter-racial compromise. Julie is thankful for blacks who alleviated her stress and lent her a helping hand when no other white did. "—Nothing gives a white male more of a kick than humiliating a woman driver. […] Someone else shouted something … […] 'white bitch', isn't it?— […] This city, man!— —But it was black men who helped me, of course.—", so says Julie with much grief (Gordimer 12). Although Gordimer highlights inter-racial love, it is overt that the question of race and color still permeate the new social order. Apartheid is not only a perished ideology but also an entire culture South Africans are inculcated.

It is quite striking that Julie loathes all that is associated with the European assets of material comfort and highly privileged living conditions. When she was temporarily obliged to drive her father's prestigious car from The Suburbs, Julie found it quite objectionable. Quite significantly, the new Rover is "of a kind that wouldn't be ventured down in the quarter of the

EL-AY Café. When it was parked there under the admiring care of a well-tipped street man, people stood around to gaze at it, a denizen from another world, affluence as distant as space" (Gordimer 14). It is fairly clear that Julie prefers leading a simple life to enjoying the affluence of The Suburbs.

Julie's love for the so-called 'Other' gets on the increase as soon as she meets Abdu who introduces her to the Oriental and Islamic precepts. The first word that captures her attention in Abdu's talk is "fate"; an Islamic word she absolutely knows nothing about. His reply to her question "And if I were driving a new car, someone else on the road could fail in some way, and that could kill me—so?" was simply "That would be your fate" […] Fate. She was amused: Is there such a thing? Do I believe in it. You do, then" (Gordimer 16). It is with much delight and enthusiasm that she reacts to Abdu's different beliefs. This might reflect her desire to wholeheartedly embrace Abdu's differences. And as the story progresses, Julie's interest in getting closer to him becomes hard-to-ignore.

It is meaning-laden that Julie did not shun Abdu's utter differences. She rather got tempted by his peculiarities. Gordimer makes it clear-cut from the start that Julie is going to be smitten with the Abdu's love as she was enthralled by the "the glimpse of something attractive withheld in the man" (Gordimer 16). She might have found in him all that was missing in her own family and old partners as well. The 'Self' and 'Other' dichotomy dissolves the moment Julie pursues Abdu and rejoices in his presence. For instance, "she found herself speaking rather shyly, respectful of the obvious differences in 'fate' between them: she in her father's Rover, he trapped beneath her small jalopy" (Gordimer 17). Quite clearly, she tries not to widen the gap between them and respects their striking yet attractive differences. Therefore, the binary logic seems to decrease.

This sense of interest is shared as Abdu himself tries hard to fit in within Julie's own circle. His admiration for her overcomes all those differences. At the beginning "[h]e was hesitant, after all, did he really know this girl, her gossiping friends, the loud careless forum of the EL-AY Café; but the desire to confide in her overcame him" (Gordimer 22-23). Fair enough, he tries to silence his inner doubts despite his discretion and precarious situation in Johannesburg. Even though Abdu's temporary absences start to bewilder Julie, she can still feel his presence anywhere she goes:

No record of him on any pay-roll, no address but c/o a garage, and under a name that was not his. Another name? She was bewildered: but there he was, a live presence in her room, an atmosphere of skin, systole and diastole of breath blending with that which pervaded from her habits of living, the food, the clothes lying about, the cushions at their backs. (Gordimer 24)

Quite significantly, Abdu's presence gives meaning to Julie's life. That is to say, it is Abdu who makes her feel at-home and puts an end to the feelings of estrangement and alienation she has been suffering from. Additionally, as Julie mingles with new people from Abdu's distant hometown, a fruitful inter-racial encounter is brought forth. This is the fulcrum of the book as Gordimer tries hard to gesture towards better future prospects. Similarly, the stringencies of post-apartheid cannot be left unheeded in this Gordimer work. The reconstitution of the new social order is not straightforward as the old stratifications lead to deeply-inherent fissures.

Highly significant also is the fact that the mere act of leaving Abdu's country unspecified till the end of the novel might imply that his unnamed place is itself an incarnation of the 'Other' wherein Julie finally gets a sense of self. Put more to the point, what Julie embraces in not literally a new country but rather the 'Other' which ends up changing her insignificant life into a purposeful one. Her firm decision to stay 'there' might suggest that she finally gets a sense of integrity and inner coherence she has been seeking for so long.

Set between two discrepant realities, *The Pickup* resembles Gordimer's 1981 novel *July's People* wherein the Smaleses leave their home in Johannesburg to settle in July's miserable bush. Living amidst a new geographical location does certainly affect, in one way or another, one's identity. Their new life leads them to re-consider their perception of 'Other'. As opposed to Maureen who could not identify with the black community, Julie embraces the Orient. The novel somewhat features a space for an embrace of the 'Other'. As she travelled to the east, Julie starts to see the Orient differently. She is now an insider to the Arab community and, as a corollary, she better understands her sense of selfhood, her old exotic world and the new reality she lives in. Likewise, Maureen Smales tries to re-consider her position as she mingles with her servant's black community. The new geographical location leads her to re-weigh her status as a white woman. It endows them with the ability to have a clearer vision of who they are. It is patent that characters' perception of their identity and the whole world around them as well as the 'Other' changes as they shift to another place, away from the insignificant affluence of Johannesburg as Ileana Dimitriu declares that:

Here, Gordimer uses a novelistic technique reminiscent of *People's People* (1981): by shifting the perspective to another plane of reality, the reader gains better perspective on the central story. Significantly, the couple emigrate from one periphery to another, and not to the metropolis; in this way, by seeking familiar patterns elsewhere, Gordimer offers a defamiliarisation of the local, a distant reading from the periphery's many interactions and exchanges with global forces. Julie needs to leave her home in South Africa and emigrate to a place similar to the one she has left - a world of severe discrepancies - in order to see the real character of her place of origin. Julie has a realisation of the fact that she is now a stranger to herself, to her familiar ways. (Dimitriu 168)

In this case, dislocation is a strategy to see things from another perspective. As she travelled to North Africa, Julie becomes more aware of her country. She realizes that she could not identify with her place of origin as much as she does with her new 'home'. Accordingly, new identities are getting shape in "a post-apartheid world of unfixed identities" (Dimitriu 167). More to the point, South Africa is featured as "a country collectively seeking a better understanding of itself" (Dimitriu 166). The setting up of a post-apartheid state is a knotty process as characters have re-define themselves amidst the new subverted reality. That being said, what Gordimer seeks out is to "look at, and beyond, South Africa in ways newly pertinent to a post-apartheid dispensation" (Dimitriu 160). Loss and uncertainty are archetypal of the post-apartheid period. Reconsidering the 'Self' and 'Other' duality is seminal to position them according to the parameters of the post-apartheid age. This is summed up the following passage:

Now that writers feel less moral pressure to engage with a repressive social context, she is keen to offer literary replies to an important question: "How, in national specificity, does each country go about moving beyond itself, to procreate a culture that will benefit self and others?". (159-160)

Coming to terms with the post-apartheid reality is the aim of anti-apartheid authors. Giving birth to a new culture that would assimilate both 'Self' and 'Other' is one of the messages Gordimer seeks to convey. Through embracing a new religion and a new place, Julie shatters the center versus periphery paradigm. Being in communion with the desert, she feels an urgency to delve into the depths of her selfhood. Indeed, "[f]or Julie, the vastness of the desert provokes a longing for self-knowledge, for the reassessment of her past" (172). Quite translucently, it is the gloominess of the desert that enlightens Julie's path.

Place is the central factor that determines characters' sense of self. Julie and Abdu are in a state of exile in their own home countries. More to the point, while Abdu does not feel at-home in his North African country, Julie finds it frivolous and shallow to lead a life of ease in Johannesburg. What they look for is being assimilated into another community. Fair enough, [b]oth Julie and Abdu wish a home in exile, to be integrated and accepted in a different social space. Gordimer presents Abdu's damage as beyond healing" (171). Intriguingly, while Julie finally finds the place she is familiar with and the community she is at home with, Abdu seems to be still looking for his own 'home'.

The ending of the novel is likely to put an end to Julie's state of internal exile, while Abdu keeps blindly seeking the affluence of the Western lifestyle Julie deems as absolutely worthless. The novel, thus, offers two contradictory tales of self-redefinition. The first is about a white woman who seeks the Orient as a place that satiates her inner doubts and offers her reassurance; the other traces the life of an Oriental mechanic who ardently chases the West. And in both tales, escapism features as a major thematic as both protagonists are dissatisfied with their geographical locations:

It could have been two separate short stories: the one dealing with the dreams and realities of illegal immigration, the other dealing with the dreams and realities of escape against the background of an unnamed desert country, indeed the desert itself. Having been expelled from his first imagined mecca (South Africa), Abdu, the 'illegal,' seeks another destination, whereas Julie, his South African wife, finds contentment in an unnamed North African state, Abdu's home country. (166-167)

The dynamics of place and discontentment is, thus, heavily echoed in the text for it is place that gives characters the sense of 'at-home-ness' they pine for. The fact that Julie chooses not to leave the desert is a meant to give value to what was often viewed as the periphery. Gordimer gives much value to the 'Other' instead of putting at a higher pedestal the metropoles. She uses her own term "significant peripheries" thereby she re-thinks the center versus periphery paradigm. Quite conspicuously, Gordimer widens her scope of vision as she:

looks beyond the local to cognate socio-cultural paradigms at other margins of the world. She does not focus on centres or metropoles, a drive which might have been a legitimate compensation given her past over-investment in the local scene. Rather, she seeks to show that there are no clear boundaries between metropoles and margins, and that it is necessary to adjust global interests to a series of intersecting margins. Gordimer conceptualises 'margins and centres' as global networks of many margins in diverse locations, including the 'margins-in-centres.' In this way, she aligns herself with recent postcolonial re-thinking of peripheries, that is, peripheries in relation to one another. (160)

Therefore, by debunking the old classifications of West and East, Self and Other as polar and irreconcilable entities, Gordimer seems to fashion her own post-colonial tendency and re-build the new South African scene. This is quintessential to re-stratify societies according to the premises of the democratic nation. In this sense, to put an end to her alienation, Julie chooses "to consider another type of dislocation: that of the internal exile in solitary communion with the North African desert". Dimitriu adds that Julie "experiences a sense of localised alienation and Unheimlichkeit, 'the uncanny,' - to evoke both Freud's and Heidegger's term, literally translated as 'not-at-home-ness' –" (170). To give solidity to this stance, it is of help to briefly refer to Martin Heidegger's perception of Dasein which stands for 'being-in-the-world' as he theorizes in *Being and Time*. Heidegger argues that ""being is an issue, both in its being alongside the 'world' and in its being-with others." […] [B]eing-in-the-world and being-with others are constitutively interrelated. They are the origin of Dasein's identity" as John Tietz states in *An Outline and Study Guide to Martin Heidegger's Being and Time* (101). Clearly, according to the Heideggerian notion of Dasein, 'being-with-others' and being-in-the-world' are major aspects that shape one's sense of selfhood.

To relate this to the study of this novel, without the presence of the 'Other', the Self cannot get its inner integrity. At this juncture, by pursuing her Oriental husband and the Orient in general, Julie seems to know more about herself as well as her surroundings. The coming together of the Self and Other is fruitful as it endows each side with its sense of being and gives them meaning. As she identifies with the Other, Julie breaks "the boundaries between a Western Self and an anthropological Other" which shatters the very separatism of the past (Quayson 3).

At this juncture, delving into the poetics of place is really permanent in this novel. It is the Orient that represents healing for Julie as opposed to Abdu's undying penchant for the West. Tempted by the allure of America, Abdu dreams of immigrating there no matter how valueless his social status might be there. "And again: America. America. The great and terrible USA. Australia, New Zealand—that would have been something better? Anywhere would be. America. […] *That's where the world is.* He thinks *I* don't know: *he* doesn't know" (236). Quite translucently, the discrepancies between Julie and Abdu are quite striking. Abdu believes that he will be more contented anywhere in the US. The way he thinks about the West reflects the deeply-seated belief that place is what determines his very being.

(Un)belonging features predominantly as at some point in the novel the 'here' and 'there' become conflated. "Where did you get the idea. I'm not going back there. I don't belong there"; that was Julie's reply to Abdu when he decided to immigrate to America (258). Quite clearly,

the 'here' becomes 'there' and vice versa. Put another way, both characters are alienated in their own countries yet at-home somewhere else in a distant place that is never theirs.

More to the point, both of them are not at-home in their own homes as Gordimer blatantly puts it: "So you're going back. There. Where you come from. I thought it all the time. One day. The day will be that you go home where you always say is not your home" (258). Despite his attempts "to come to her, embrace her. Soothe her, […and] get away from here, this place has taken the spirit out of her" (254). Julie cannot leave the desert; "I'm staying here", so she tells Abdu at the end (Gordimer 259). This echoes the volatility of post-apartheid as individuals keep looking for a way to adjust to the new reality.

Her love for Abdu seems to disintegrate at the end of the novel as she "could not approach him. He held her off by his right, as she had asserted hers. She was not going; in all the pain of seeing him return to the same new-old humiliations that await him" (Gordimer 272). She willingly chooses to "be in this house, this family, this village, this place in the desert, without him, without the lovemaking she needs so much" (Gordimer 272). The last pages of the novel highlight tension between both of them: "[s]he comes to him through the mess.", so says Gordimer, "She tries to draw him against her lightly, breasts to chest, belly to belly, but he resists wildly and the embrace becomes a parody of the violence that has never existed between them" (Gordimer 269). As place features as a uniting dimension at the beginning of the novel, it is also a splitting factor at the end of the novel.

The ending of the novel is vague as the reader is left with several questions the most important of which is whether Abdu's decision to live in America entails loosening ties with the Orient or not. Not only does he leave behind his family and ancestral land but also his wife. His relentless preference of the West brings forth the issue of disparity between the West and east. Although place figures as a major factor in the process of shaping one's sense of selfhood, it remains a divisive strategy as it still stratifies society. Put more clearly, as opposed to Julie who finds herself well-at-ease and finally gets a sense of 'home' in the unnamed Arab country, Abdu has always been alienated in his own hometown.

Speaking of post-apartheid South Africa, the dynamics of place and belonging is a major aspect in the re-definition of one's sense of self. To fit in seems to be a misfit whites as well as non-whites encounter. After the fall of apartheid South Africans attempt to re-define themselves according to the parameters of the democratic nation. Nonetheless, given the legacies of the past and the cultural legacies of the unjust old regime, the new social order is still unsteady. In this sense, my assumption is that instead of celebrating reciprocity and compromise, the novel still addresses the issue of alterity. One of the key issues Gordimer addresses in her novel is the issue of incoherence in the South African post-colonial state. Therefore, the will-to-transcendence remains relative after the critical period of apartheid and the transitional phase that followed:

an intractable desire for the overthrow of the regime focalized all energies and shaped all efforts around the nexus of a will-to-transcendence. The desire for a multiracial and more just society became a foundational requirement for the epochal inception and maintenance of the anti-

apartheid struggle […] However, after the fall of apartheid, the entire apparatus supporting the will-to-transcendence requires rigorous problematization. (Quayson xxxvii- xxxviii)

The post-apartheid period is figured out as slippery. In a nutshell, the novel ends with much discomfiture and despair as the notion of place as a splitting dimension is further problematized. As he leaves his country once more, Abdu seems to be in a constant quest for a new home. Dislocation remains a central issue in this novel. It is obvious that the new South Africa is still tracing its way towards a better future. Fitting in amidst the blurred realities is what characters dream of. The question of identity is after all one of the key concerns writers are dedicated to in the post-colonial dispensation.

Despite her attempts to chart a better social design wherein different characters co-exist together, Gordimer still foregrounds issues of dislocation, loss and alienation. Put more directly, no matter how hard she tries to collapse the splitting divides, the reality she depicts is blurred and inter-racial relationships are still precarious. Place is once more a divisive strategy given the unequal opportunities between countries. Inequities are an outcome of the elongated apartheid regime. To wash away the deeply-seated disparities is a tough mission.

Out of a fissured and highly chaotic social design come out unfixed identities seeking re-definition and internal coherence. This seems to be a post-apartheid concern as the country is still left in the throes of the unjust past and its subsequent effects upon the South African subject. To belong or to (un)belong is the major question that passes through the whole text. This is again and again evocative of Bhabha's belief that "[p]ostcoloniality, for its part, is a salutary reminder of the persistent 'neo-colonial' relations within the 'new' world order and the multinational division of labour" (*The Location of Culture* 6). The neocolonial undertones in the text reveal the living spirit of the past. Despite the huge efforts to move beyond the rhetoric of separatism, there looms no home for fruitful hybridity. The effects of the past infect, in different ways, the present.

In a nutshell, a binary representation does not cut with the feel of resentment that has plagued the nation for a long period of time. It might suggest that the crisis is still on-going and that the project of building up a democratic regime is still far-fetched. The novel is open-ended as several questions pop up the most important of which are the following: Is Julie's gesture at the end a way to resolve social, racial and cultural antagonisms? Is Abdu's decision to leave the Orient afresh a reactionary or a progressive behavior? Is not this evocative of the never-ending disparity between the east and west? This preference for the west seems to never end which is obviously the fruit of years of inequities and white favoritism which are not transcended in the novel form.

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