

“Who Am I?” : Between the Burden of the White House, Clutches of Political Agency¹ and Eagerness for Privacy in Nadine Gordimer’s *Occasion for Loving*

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Abstract People’s lives in South Africa were dangerously affected by the policies of apartheid. White people of conscience, like the natives, were also prone to the repercussions of these policies. As a result, these whites lived as a minority within another minority suffering from unbearable psychological wounds because of their racial identity, the necessity to be politically active and their yearning for privacy. This paper investigates this predicament in Nadine Gordimer’s *Occasion for Loving (OFL)* specifically. Jessie, a white liberal woman, shows that living in such a milieu is so demanding, for she, like most of Gordimer’s female protagonists, lacks this sense of belonging that she starts questioning her being in South Africa. While using basically a psychoanalytic lens, Jacques Lacan’s model of human development, along with some of Bakhtin’s and Bhabha’s concepts, the paper demonstrates that after an arduous psychological journey which epitomizes the author’s understanding of this dilemma, Jessie succeeds to construct an identity of her own. Gordimer’s heroine concludes that the personal and the political cannot be set apart in apartheid South Africa. This paper then aims at shedding light on the process of white female identity construction in this turmoil suggesting that the novel under scrutiny endows the white woman in Africa with an intricate compromise to enjoy, at least partially, a satisfactory self-image.

Key words Gordimer; white; woman; identity; political; personal.

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“[T]he real influence of politics on my writing is the influence of politics on people. Their lives, and I believe their very personalities, are changed by the extreme political circumstances one lives under in South Africa. I am dealing with people; here are people who are shaped and changed by politics. In that way my material is profoundly influenced by politics.”

— Nadine Gordimer (Interviewed by Jannica Hurwitt)

Like the wide range of characters in Nadine Gordimer’s early long fiction, white women of conscience are strangled by the condition of living in South Africa in the light of apartheid legislations. The latter inflict unbearable psychological wounds, for being white equals conspiracy. The outer pressures are filiatively tied with the inward anxieties and the psychological traumas since the first forges the second. Therefore, Gordimer’s female characters are subject to a twofold coercive system which prevents them from living as ordinary people and leading a private life. The lack of a sense of belonging is the overriding trauma that disturbs them. They refuse willingly to align themselves with the rest of whites, and at the same time they are not seen to fulfill an effective role in the struggle by black people, at best, if not radically discarded. This leads them to feel as outsiders living in the margins of life; subsequently, they do not only have a troubled sense of belonging to South Africa, but the whole world becomes too small to encompass them.

The paper brings Gordimer’s female protagonist of *Occasion for Loving*, a white woman of conscience, to the fore to investigate her possibilities for forming a personal identity under the influence of the abovementioned factors. It revolves around the idea that this woman’s voice and personality are greatly influenced and largely shaped by circumstances she goes through to reach maturity. These circumstances, of course, since they are the product of a particular ideological system at a certain point of time in history and in a specific geographical setting which is South Africa make the experience of this woman unique. As such, one wonders in what way can the trio of time, place and ideology impinge on the life of this sensitive creature, named as Jessie, in particular and South Africa’s white women of conscience as a whole? Further, is she really able to form a personal identity? i.e. Can she live a private life and escape the demands of the public

realm? And if so, what is the process?

Nadine Gordimer’s fiction is generally seen as presenting readers with white women who are not able to reconcile the traumas implicated by their biological whiteness in a land in which acting against the government’s system is a difficult alternative to espouse. For this reason, these women are usually perceived as voiceless locked in a tricky situation. However, by taking *Occasion for Loving*’s female protagonist, Jessie, as a case in point, the paper demonstrates the opposite. Before attaining a sense of a redeemed self, Jessie goes through a tremendously arduous psychological journey that runs in parallel with the structure of the narrative. She passes through three² consecutive psychological stages: contemplation and alertness, stigma and self-questing, relief and reconciliation. Each of these stages corresponds amazingly with one stage of human development in Jacques Lacan’s model. These striking similarities will help to analyze her movement towards forming an image of her “self”. Accordingly, the paper will be structured into three main points; each will demonstrate how the protagonist perceives herself in a particular stage.

From Homi Bhabha, two key concepts are borrowed, the borderline and the unhomely lives, to point out the dilemmas and the troubles that Gordimer’s female character is trapped in. Borderlines are “the locations of culture” in which new dimensions of existence leap to the surface. Unhomeliness is not a physical condition rather it is a moment of psychological confusion in which the individual fails to locate himself within the usual conditions of his living, and his life turns to be too strange to him. Jessie falls in an intensely harming state of confusion which leads her to question her being in South Africa much in the same way Bhabha describes the state of unhomeliness. Once she crosses the threshold of the state of the unhomely, Jessie’s voice emerges in the midst of others daringly in an attempt to negotiate a sense of privacy. This echoes in essence Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogic novel which embraces “a diversity of social speech types [...] and a diversity of individual voices” (262). Whether extrinsically or intrinsically, in this novel, voices do always compete before a sense of resolution takes place. On this ground, Gordimer builds the novel. This intermarriage between psychoanalysis, postcolonialism and dialogism seeks to bring to light the Gordimerian theory of white female identity construction in apartheid South Africa.

1. “In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms”³

Nadine Gordimer’s novels include usually a long array of characters, amongst emerge female protagonists whose lives impart how living in the turmoil apartheid

caused looks like. She does not narrate their stories, but they are responsible for re/presenting themselves. A close reading of Gordimer's novels reveals that the process of female identity formation in a tense political context is more complicated in comparison with the process the characters portrayed through the ideal lens of the liberal Gordimer go through. On this Basis, the process Liz in *The Late Bourgeois World* and Rosa in *Burger's Daughter*, as examples, undergo to gain an appreciation of their selves is more intricate compared to Jessie's in *Occasion for Loving*, though hers cannot be minimized, simply because concrete political activism in the lives of both Liz and Rosa is a daily commodity that cannot be easily relinquished.

Jessie starts her search for a meaning for her life as a twice-married woman. In this first stage of her development, contemplation and alertness, most of the action takes place in her mind. Through moments of contemplation, she recalls her past. She analyzes cautiously her past through the eyes of the present. The technique of flashback helps the readers to know the character: who she is and from where she comes. Juxtaposing the past and the present successfully spawns comprehension. In view of that, she becomes alert to the psychological emptiness, loneliness and estrangement she endures. She comprehends that the mode of life apartheid generates renders her as an isolated creature oscillating between two blocks, the oppressor and the oppressed. After an important event suddenly crops up, she hurriedly steps towards reexamining her roles in life. As a matter of fact, she spots no progress because she is still dominated by roles already assigned to her. For Lacan, the human being during the first stage of his development is a dependent creature co-existing as a one entity with someone else. It is the same case for Gordimer's female protagonist; she understands that she does not possess a private identity as she is reliant on her family and the will of the collective. The demand for recognition is henceforth her main preoccupation. Not surprisingly then, she rejects the imposed ideals that make her "destiny" forcibly yields to "political terms" and steps to the next psychological stage.

Jessie is strangely attached to her mother for most of her life. The novel opens with Jessie in her late thirties; she is married to a liberal-minded professor of history. She, next to her job, leads an ordinary life as a mother of four children. As a pregnant woman, she goes to consult a doctor to discover the cataclysmic lie around which her mother configured her life.

Jessie had gone to a heart specialist to see if the old ailment had left any weakness that might make a normal birth dangerous for her, and he had told

her with empathic quiet that not only was her heart perfectly normal, in fact it was not possible that a heart ailment serious enough to keep a child out of school for years could leave no sign of damage. (*OFL* 74)

Definitely, after she “clipped her wings and brainwashed her” (74), the mother does not make out of Jessie an overdependent human being only but terribly a woman without a self. She does not pass a normal childhood and leaves her mother’s house only to her husband’s.

As the novel opens, Jessie sits in her garden. The quietude carries to her mind the “illusion of silence and motionlessness” (3) typical of her mother’s house. She feels for some time that “she had never left her mother’s house” (3). This is indicative of the lack of vitality that characterizes her current life in person as well as that of most women, for this is the life mode emblematic of the standards of white bourgeoisie — this minority — in South Africa and reminiscent of the Victorian stereotype. She is vigilant that she accepts submissively the roles she occupies throughout her life, whether motherhood or marriage. In the moments of contemplation, “[t]he past [rises] to the surface of the present, free of the ambiguities and softening evasions that had made it possible in the living” (83). She constantly watches herself in her three little daughters playing without inhibitions. Unlike them, “there was no excitement” of such things “for the little bourgeois girl from the mine” (192).

The coming of the lively girl Ann from England to the Stilwells’ house awakens in Jessie the desire to pursue “the life dreamt and not lived” (67). By breaking the routine of that house, Ann becomes in a relatively short time the source of life. She is an open-minded girl who optimistically, unlike Jessie, enjoys living under whatever circumstances. Curiously attracted to everything, discriminatory laws are, to her, the last hurdle to think about. Her eagerness to discover the unknown leads her to fall in love with a black man and to cross the color line the white government mapped. Ann does what the years could not do in Jessie; she rejuvenates in her an inner yearning for privacy. “At last,” Jessie has “time to ask herself why she lived, and [...] she had scarcely begun to know to formulate the question, let alone grope for the possible answers” (19).

In Lacan’s theory, the identification of the human being, in the mirror stage, with an object outside the body is actually a misidentification or a misrecognition. It is a misrecognition in the sense that the subject (child) conceives the image in the mirror as “me.” Logically, the mirror in which the subject sees his reflection and identifies with is not only the real mirror but other people or objects he

encounters as well. The subject is usually accompanied by people who confirm the connection between him and the images he sees. Because the object the subject identifies with subsists outside the body and may change, the ego or “I identity”, to Lacan, is always on some level a kind of fiction (Zizek 25). In this regard, the first sense of the self that Jessie has throughout the first stage of her development is a misrecognition. The image of the self she gains is a duplicate figure of her caregiver. In Lacan’s terms, she sees her reflection in the people surrounding her, and she identifies with this reflection. She mystifies herself with other characters which display a pivotal role in her life. The first insight Jessie gets into herself is of course provided by her disturbed mother.

Elizabeth Grosz contends that the Mirror Stage does not only provide the subject with “an image of its own body in a visualised exteriority, but also duplicates the environment, placing real and virtual space in contiguous relations” (87). The subject, as a consequence, besides gaining an understanding of itself, establishes spatial relationships. Environment is not taken here to refer only to the character’s own house or entourage rather to the whole county which falls under the mercy of the successive white regimes to be likened to a white house. Taking into account what has been revealed about this female character’s life, she maintains a mutual relationship with the space she inhabits i.e. Jessie is not only supposed to act in this environment as a white citizen, but she is also fraught with its prejudicial legislations that engender two categories of human beings. For this reason, house in the novel appears as an indicator of psychological emptiness that causes boredom; frailty prevails everything. Notwithstanding she lives with her family in the same house, there is no strong familial relationship that ties them in the common sense. Their lives are cold in spite of the heat politics incorporates. There is no strong contact between Jessie and her mother and then her husband. Even though she lived for a long time with her mother in the same house, resentment grows instead. In the same way, as pointed to above, she maintains a troubled sense of belonging to what is normally considered as her homeland, South Africa. This tortured land, white house, holds a white European minority that exerted its hegemony over, roughly, 90% of the whole population establishing itself as the leading class with its bourgeois life standards. Unfortunately, such standards dispossess Jessie of her right to feel at home in this land as she is taught since her childhood that she should not, for example, mix with the mine workers she resided nearby. What is worse, these standards succeed to keep her in a total isolation to, according to her mother, save her purity, for the white woman is the “vessel for the virtues of “white civilization” in the “heart of darkness” (Visel 33).

From a different angle, however, the motif of house in Gordimer’s fiction is, according to Susan Pearsall, “associated with inherited features and, like the idea of ‘culture’, also represents those traits the subject inherits but that are not considered ‘genetically fixed’ ” (109). Since the inherited conditions are not genetically fixed, they can be thus changed. Ironically, Jessie inherits her mother’s mode of life and, strangely, her destiny: both lost the first husband and married again. Gordimer’s female protagonist comprehends at a certain point in her life that she must rid herself of the external factors that render her as a manipulated object. These hereditary traits resemble resonantly the past for the protagonist in her present situation. In Homi Bhabha’s perspective, this is a borderline situation where “past and present, inside and outside no longer remain separated as binary oppositions but instead commingle and conflict” (McLeod 217). The present does conflict with the past in the character’s mind in order not to allow a space for it to overshadow her anymore. From the border spaces her mind provides, “*something begins its presencing*” (*Location of Culture*, original emphasis 5). It is the longing for personal freedom, for self-assertion, and for recognition. And this is how the second psychological stage starts.

2. “There are possibilities for me, certainly; but under what stone do they lie?”⁴

Of the three stages, the second is the most complicated. Jessie enters the stage of stigma and self-questioning more convinced that she is the product of her society rather than of herself. Not satisfied by her current position, she strives to find her own voice in life exploring the possibilities available to her. Summative of this stage is the first epigraph of *The Late Bourgeois World*: “[t]here are possibilities for me, certainly; but under what stone do they lie?” What applies to Liz applies also to Jessie; nevertheless, each woman makes a distinctive experience. As it appears, the epigraph comprises two segments. Whilst the first segment “[t]here are possibilities for me, certainly” concedes the availability of other options to live by in South Africa, the second one “but under what stone do they lie?” is suggestive of the difficulty to grope for them.

Pursuing a private life is not an easy task, for Gordimer’s female protagonist is hampered by many obstacles. The foremost predicament is, of course, the government’s system which leaves no choice other than to act against it or to remain silent. All the borderline situations the novel unfolds lead her to maintain an attitude, at least an intermediate position which is “refusal.” Before this, she emerges from these borderlines usually embarrassed because of her inability to alter the odds. Her status as a member of the society of the white oppressor adds

to her embarrassment. She passes through a very difficult psychological state of loss and confusion interrogating her existence in such a tormented land. These are the features of the “liminal space”. It is also the very stage of puzzlement which Bhabha terms as the unhomely. The “uncanny voice of memory” (“World and Home” 146), or the unhomely, is put into play with the voice of the present, seen in the demands and the pressures imposed on the heroine, and the monologic voice of apartheid. Worth noting here is that “neither ‘voice’ nor ‘dialogic’ is usually related to individual subjects in a given text,” and that “Bakhtin distinguishes ordinary dialogue between individuals from a dialogic relationship between ‘voices’” (Eigler 196). The notion of the dialogic “includes tension and struggle between antagonistic ‘voices’” (197) or discourses that constitute the narrative, be they two interlocutors or more in the common sense of dialogue or two competing forces like it is the case in Gordimer’s apartheid fiction between apartheid and the oppressed majority.

Gordimer exploits a set of literary techniques to help the readers to absorb the perplexity this character is locked in. She does not exhibit the physical traits of her character rather she ponders the workings of the mind. In point of fact, the main terrain of action throughout most of the novel becomes the character’s mind. This does not sound strange out of a writer who believes in the brainpower and sufferings of her white women of conscience. Another technique is the sudden shift in point of view, first person and third person narration, which brings many views in opposition and raises voices against one another. This technique adeptly makes the text a site of contention between the “personal” and the “political,”⁵ yet it appends more ambiguity to the protagonist’s confusion because the reader cannot guess who is speaking sometimes unless he concentrates especially when Jessie is accompanied with her husband. The interior monologue is a one more device that is useful to understand how this female character questions herself. It is closely linked to the previous technique, for between the use of one narrative perspective and another a short monologue is intruded. The latter of course is interrupted by the third narrative perspective alluding to the fact that the personal is always disturbed by the political in this land.

To end confusion, the protagonist must confront her apprehension as well as all the outer pressures. Through reviving a previously mentioned black male character, the confrontation takes place. Of course, the novel centers around many twists that can be sorted out as sub-climaxes, and this encounter is one since it changes markedly the course of action. According to Lacan, this stage is the realm of the father, or the male character which Jessie abruptly encounters.

Khursheed Qazi equates the father, the figure responsible for socialization, with the “society’s ideologies: its beliefs, values, and biases; its system of government, laws, educational practices, religious tenets” (8). In this instance, the black male character is one aspect of the political. Our interactions with and reactions to this ideology, the political, make us who we are, and this is what happened to Jessie.

Finally, Jessie understands in this stage that the “self [is] the creation of man” (*OFL* 19). To feel at home, as Gordimer believes, one must come to grips with the “concealed side” (*Writing and Being* 45), the true sense of the self lurking somewhere. Ann, interestingly, mirrors Jessie but not in consistency with Lacan’s terms i.e. Ann is the mirror which penetrates the shell to reveal the concealed side of Jessie. Even she worked as a “secretary to an association of African musicians and entertainers” (*OFL* 18), Jessie is still unable to unlock herself from the cage of the white bourgeois life. The latter dictates certainly living as a minority within a minority. How can a liberal woman who strongly believes in the merit of human soul, be it black or white of course, break free from her isolation and come to life again to be effectively a member of the multi-colored South African society? The only possible way, Ann illustrates, is to cross the racial borders beyond all expectations.

Occasion for Loving shows how Ann and Jessie are involved physically and mentally in many borderline situations. Gordimer’s characters attempt to escape alienation taking refuge hopefully in those borderland spaces where they meet people across the racial bar. The pervasive liminality of these spaces puts Jessie in a tricky state of contestation with herself and her race. The most obvious example is that of Ann who and her black lover Gideon Shibalo visit Western Transvaal, a township⁶, to see James Mapulane. The Stilwells, Jessie and her husband, were completely aware that the couple was constantly under high risk since the relation is criminalized by the government fearing harm that was more likely going to fall in a whole on the black part. If Ann’s presence was discovered by the commissioner, the results would be unknown. Alongside, Gideon appears on the beach with Jessie and her daughters. Amazed because the white inhabitants of the town think seriously that “some arrangements ought to be made ... a part of the beach ought to be set aside for *them* [Blacks]” aiming “to enjoy [their] beautiful beach in privacy” (263, emphasis added), Jessie cannot embarrassingly utter a single word. Apartheid legislations grimly mediate all the country: “nothing was innocent, not even here [the beach]. There was no corner of the whole country that was without ugliness” (264). This incident makes Jessie more vigilant of a deeply entrenched race consciousness between whites and blacks.

After a short time, Ann unexpectedly returns back to England with her husband to leave the poor Gideon wandering solely. Jessie is annoyed by the fact that Ann does not show the least commitment to the man she risks everything for. Actually, Ann is unfaithful towards not only one man rather towards the African life she tastes and the colored people she eagerly mixes with in “Lucky Star” and “Tommie’s”. This indifferent attitude exasperates Jessie to harshly criticize her: “[a] fat lot she cares about people like that. In a whole year, has she ever really *said* anything, except “It was marvelous fun” or “Let’s do this” or “So-and-so’s got a marvelous idea, we’re going to...” (208-9, original emphasis). Homi Bhabaha sees in the borders a fascinating ability to fashion “a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation” (*Location of Culture* 7). Likewise, the departure of the Davises, Ann with her husband, bestows Jessie with a new kind of an understanding of the erroneous attitudes of her white community towards the other race in South Africa.

Jessie does not emerge safe from these experiences. “[H]er consciousness was a plot without theme” (*OFL* 197), the third person narrator unfurls. This is a clear sign of the wounding effects of the state of the unhomey appalling Jessie: is it possible for a person to fall in love with another and at the same time destroy him?! Well, Jessie herself could not come to terms with this impasse, and she cannot endure thinking wordlessly. Thus, she unveils these feelings to her husband. Tom tries to calm her down by finding a justification for Ann: “[b]ut what could the bloody woman do, if she didn’t want him, or couldn’t face wanting him?” (286). But to Jessie: “[s]he didn’t have to stick to him to harm him; it was done already” (286). In a long conversation with Tom, Jessie makes her claims and fear more understandable:

“Ah, Tom , don’t ask me to postulate it .We don’t see black and white and so we all think we behave as decently to one colour face as another. But how can that ever be, so long as there’s the possibility that you can escape back into your filthy damn whiteness? How do you know you’ll always play fair? [...]

“Yes, yes, but all right –what ‘harm’ could you do or I do to Len and Gideon or anybody else?”

“But how can you be sure, while one set of circumstances governs their lives and another governs yours?”

Tom said shortly, “I don’t see Ann thinking about this, tough.” [...]

[...] “If she really loves him, as you say, what harm can she do him?”

[Tom]

“First he couldn’t get out on his scholarship because he’s black, now he can’t stay because she’s white. What’s the good of us to him? What’s the good of our friendship or her love?” (278)

The above passage reveals three clusters of dialogical relationships which construct the novel. The most apparent level of this sort of relationships takes place between Jessie and the other characters all over the narrative, significantly with her husband. The resulting dialogue is not only a kind of questioning or blaming as it seems; however, it is fundamentally a search for the meaning of life in South Africa within the norms of the white bourgeois class. The second type of the dialogical relationships is observable between the voice of the liberal white minority Jessie is representative of in this novel and the white minority enjoying life at the expense of the other races. Ann and her husband escapes back into their “filthy damn whiteness” once finished exploiting the Africans and Africa respectively. Most important is the third type which raises the monologic voice of apartheid and the voice of two thirds of Colored South Africans, who refuse to live according to a “one set of circumstances” governing “their lives”, against each other. Similarly, Gideon Shibalo, though drunk, does not falter to announce his true feelings to Jessie: “[w]hite bitch –get away” (296). It is the moment of confrontation of Jessie.

3. “I am the place in which something has occurred” ⁷

The phase of relief and reconciliation extends between the moment of confrontation and the moment Jessie gains a deep self-awareness, psychological relief, and reconciliation. This actually does not take, unlike the preceding phase, a great deal of time. The implications of the moment of confrontation pave the way for new possibilities of living to spring. Relief is the phase during which Jessie throws away all the shackles used to circumscribe her soul. In comparison with the other phases, she displays a notable maturity since she enters the realm of the ‘Real’ where she acts beyond any kind of interference. By taking an extremely crucial decision, she ascribes voluntarily a particular identity to herself. This woman, however, whether she chooses a new stance for her life or accepts an already assigned one according to her own terms of course, remains the product of the South African society.

Jessie could not forget Gideon Shibalo’s words; they open her eyes on another reality. She understands that she is not the only tortured self under apartheid in South Africa and, on the contrary, there are voiceless millions like Gideon whom apartheid dispossesses of all the rights accessible to whites: the right to speak up,

to get a passport, and even to love across the color line. One of the most potent ironies Gordimer creates to describe the alienated selves apartheid spawns comes from Jessie's memory of a mad woman who "was sewing without any thread in the needle ... connecting nothing with nothing" (*OFL* 40). For the Stilwells, this experience discloses the inefficacy of their liberal attitudes, their "stony silence" (286). And in case apartheid is not abandoned, nothing will bring the buried selves to life again. Jessie's consciousness of herself and the world surrounding her escalates considerably, hence a favorable change in personality. Indeed, echoing Gordimer's epigraph which is cited above, Jessie becomes a "place in which something has occurred."

At the end of her inner journey, Jessie finds the thread whereby to connect the fragments of her 'self'. Her efforts to attain a sense of awareness and privacy lead her to end up committed. Commitment is not simply a political act though which the individual is supposed to be fully immersed in politics. To Gordimer, "it is seeking that thread of order and logic in the disorder, and the incredible waste and marvelous profligate character of life" (Hurwitt 140). Well, commitment seems to escape literal representation as it is the case of the Real with its unchangeable nature. The thread of order and logic in Jessie's situation is her decision to continue meeting people across the racial divide in the "Lucky Star," "where coloured and white people mixed" (*OFL* 100), ending by that the authority of apartheid over her life. Again, the Real manifests itself through this very act, for an actual nature implies people contacting one another, as this is the nature of human beings, beyond all systems of symbolization that create races and incarcerate their relations.

Robin Visel emphasizes the above saying that Jessie "who has learned to see herself as another, starts *to become one* by removing herself from the protection of her white society"(37, emphasis added). In this regard, the occasion for loving of the title stands for a moment to love one's self first and the other second. Jessie, at the end of the novel, becomes a new person: "[t]he ribbon of her identity ... there was no coil of it continuing from the past. I was; I am: these were not two different tenses, but two different people" (*OFL* 18-9). In the realm of the Real, "the uninterpretable dimension of existence" (Qazi 10), Gordimer's woman is metaphorically born again. She realizes that ideology is "only a curtain that is embroidered and makes everything bleak" (10). Therefore, she seeks a meaning for her existence beyond this curtain. She succeeds to manage a definition for her 'self' in which maturity, high self-esteem, and action based on her own determination are pervasive. The trio of place, time and ideology seems, on the surface, to have no

impact on her decision. Nevertheless, as I mentioned few lines up, this woman for more or less is the outcome of the interplay of these external forces.

Gordimer presents her readers with a woman who endeavors to find her own voice in her own country crossing many psychological stages. She ends her journey of spiritual renewal committed. For this reason, Gordimer’s female heroines’ journeys are frequently criticized of being predetermined as they arrive at the same point they depart from. During her journey, which is both external and internal, Jessie experiences a radical change at the level of her personality and the way she perceives herself and the turmoil of her country. Between the point of departure and the point of arrival many things change to denote the movement of time and her growing consciousness of the workings of apartheid. The meaning of living under the despotism of apartheid is tasted by Jessie only when she traverses the color bar and is caught in physical and mental borderline situations like that of the beach. Her and Ann’s experiences with Gideon Shibalo allude to a series of segregationist legislations as the *Group Areas Act* of 1950 and the *Native Laws Amendment Act* of 1952 through which constraints to live in urban areas were further imposed on the natives by mostly specifying poor residential areas where they were condensed.

In her article “Othering the Self: Nadine Gordimer’s Colonial Heroines,” Robin Visel contends that Gordimer’s “female characters are [...] internal battlegrounds in which the conflicts of South African society are played out” (35). The most remarkable conflict occurs always between the personal and the political i.e. between the need to enjoy a personal life and the burden of the political engagement that falls upon those of conscience. The process of identity construction in Gordimer’s fiction includes always a figure of reference designating the political with which the protagonist is constantly juxtaposed and confronted to gain maturity. In *Occasion for Loving*, the political is exceptionally signified by two characters; Jessie’s mother represents the dying white regime while Gideon Shibalo is its counter force i.e. the anti-apartheid campaign. Through emphasizing the role of the conflicting events in restricting and shaping the character’s life, Gordimer is using an outstanding technique to foreground that the public and the private realms cannot be set apart in apartheid South Africa. Understanding the impossibility of setting them apart unquestionably resolves other dilemmas.

Notes

1. In this paper, “political agency” does not refer necessarily to the concrete political involvement as in many of Nadine Gordimer’s novels but typically to the fact of challenging every

segregationist act including crossing the racial bar.

2. In “White Women In South Africa: An Inferior Gender Within a Superior Race” (Thesis 1989), Tamar M. Copeland, reading the novels of Nadine Gordimer, devised six stages to describe how self-perception of the white women contributes to make them understand their past to create the future. However, as the title indicates, Copeland perceives these women as an inferior gender within a superior race. This paper takes one novel, *Occasion for Loving*, as a case study to investigate how Gordimer’s female protagonist Jessie finds her voice, self-image, amidst three incarcerating factors in particular. For this reason, she passes through a psychological journey of three stages. The paper is against the idea that gender is a source of victimization.
3. The epigraph of *Occasion for Loving*.
4. The epigraph of *The Late Bourgeois World*.
5. See Baena Molina, Rosalía. “Revising South African History: Multiple Perspectives in the Novels of Nadine Gordimer.” *Miscelánea* 16 (1995): 25-44 which is specified to tackle this point.
6. Homelands, reserves, townships and bantustans are among the various terms created to designate the areas black people lived in separately from whites.
7. The epigraph of *Burger’s Daughter*.

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