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# *Adab Al-Rafidayn Journal*

**A refereed journal concerned with the publishing of scientific researches  
in the field of arts and humanities both in Arabic and English**

**Vol. Ninety-Two / year Fifty- Three /Shabban - 1444 AH / March 2023 AD**

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## *Identity, Migration, and Assimilation in Nadine Gordimer's The Pickup*

**Haider Najee Shanboj Alaliwi \***

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### **Abstract**

Twenty years after the publication of Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* (2001), thousands of migrants from Arab and other Muslim countries uselessly knocked at the gates of Europe in the search of a better life. At a different and less global level, Gordimer's text investigates the condition of those forced to immigrate. While it is detached from apartheid, or revisiting such a crucial theme, the author found herself having to choose topics to be privileged to narratively express the impact of the historical, ideological, and personal evolutions of the last decade. The identity aspect of migration is linked to its physical part, for there is a connection with a form of representation. The idea of the word as a powerful means of expression is enriched by the language's multiple and constantly varied characteristics. English and Arabic are placed on an equivalent level of ontological validity. The individual and the social stabilization that indicate a sort of completeness seems achievable through a dynamic and productive comparison.

**Keywords:** Gordimer (Nadine), identity, migration, representation, South Africa

### **1. Introduction: Nadine Gordimer, Migration as a Representation**

Representation is a fundamental concept in postcolonial theory. With scholars and thinkers such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, or Arjun

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Appadurai, the representation designates not only the theoretical phase where the “self” decides to falsify others starting from the criteria chosen by itself but also the experimental phase during which this “self” strives to make visible its superiority as well as the inferiority of others (Bhabha.1994) <sup>1</sup>. According to Said, the West, having represented the East as a subcontinent, would have had to resort to colonization. The East effectively emerges as the great opposite of the West, and thus, his observation about the East has been created by the West (Said.1993)<sup>2</sup>.

During her prodigious literary life, Nadine Gordimer was the uncompromising witness to the contradictions and upheavals at work in her country, post-apartheid South Africa (Ashcroft.1995)<sup>3</sup>. *The Pickup* reflects the complexity of ethnic and cultural diversity and highlights the dramas from a position that has gained height by refusing clichés: the post-colony is a chaotic plurality, endowed with an internal coherence, a system of signs all its own, its own ways of fabricating simulacra or reconstructing stereotypes, of a specific art of excess, particular ways of expropriating the subject of his identities. Julie, who is white and a daughter of rich parents, plays the bohemian rebel with her friends from La Table, Ibrahim “Abdu” Ibn Musa, a black, Muslim, and illegal immigrant, who repairs cars. In the garage, Julie meets Ibrahim as she wants to repair her car. They instantly become improbable lovers; they are aware and amused of everything that separates them. A denunciation puts an end to this semi-clandestine state, and forced him to a humiliating return to his home country. Against all odds, Julie turns her back on her country, which shuns her “fortune lover,” and thus, she decides to follow him. From then on, the chips are down, and the trivial reality imposes its rules. Ibrahim is the prodigal son, who returned after a reversal of fortune; his place is reconquered within the clan with coded behaviors but not devoid of benevolence. Julie ceases to be the bohemian rebel to become

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<sup>1</sup> Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge. 1994. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books. 1993. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Ashcroft, Bill et al. *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.1995. Print.

Ibrahim's wife; she is forced to decipher the subtle interactions within the clan in a language that she does not master (Gordimer.2001)<sup>4</sup>.

*The Pickup* addresses the issue of migration in a particular way. Ibrahim is an immigrant who leaves his country for other countries that he considers rich. It is a form of migration that corresponds to most current migrations in Africa south of the Sahara. Further, Julie, a young woman from a wealthy family, leaves her family and country for a developing country. This form of migration opens up a new perspective on how South Africans perceive themselves and the others. The representation that Europeans projected on themselves and on the rest of the world can be considered responsible for the hegemony that characterizes Western culture. Ibrahim's repeated migrations towards the West are the consequence of the catalyst of imperialism which is representation. *The Pickup* invites the readers to trace the course of the history of the latter's country to understand its past because it is this past that shows that Ibrahim is only a victim of imperialism orchestrated by the West in his country.

This imperialism has convinced Ibrahim that the West is the ideal framework for his development. In other words, if Ibrahim's country had not been subjected to Western imperialism, he would probably not feel ashamed of his country and wants to leave it at all costs.

Representation can be considered a symbolic rite that guarantees, in its author's psychology, the transformation of violence or domination into a natural duty, a legitimate right for the dominant group. It makes its authors hegemonic and creative. It makes them hegemonic because it legitimizes or justifies the domination of its authors over supposedly inferior peoples. It also makes them creative because it obliges them to invent methods, means, or techniques of domination, to adapt them according to the unpredictable reactions of the supposedly inferior group.

## **2. Going places: Migration as a means of unwillingly bridging the cultures**

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<sup>4</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001.

The novel's strength lies in the confrontation of this improbable couple, firm in their love, with a tribal society, seemingly archaic, far from the tinsel of modernity and technological equipment. It is a society strong in a tradition that designates everyone their rightful place and invites them to behave in ways where restraint and deference outweigh revolt and insubordination.

After writing so much on racial segregation, Nadine Gordimer investigates the minority condition of those forced to look for a chance in a country that does not want them, suspects them, and regulates their expulsion by law. The "immigration problem," as it is now defined by the social sciences and politics, which decline it when speaking of flows and quotas, has paradoxically become central even in the new South Africa. This nation was legally and pragmatically founded on racial discrimination. During apartheid, the borders were an almost insuperable barrier, but since it was again possible to move freely, the wealthiest nation on the African continent has seen numerous immigrants arriving from the rest of Africa, Asia and Korea (Appadurai 1996)<sup>5</sup>.

The thematic novelty of *The Pickup* concerns the introduction of Middle Eastern culture as an element of comparison with South African life. Therefore, the novel anticipates the literary analysis of a new geographical space. Recently, the Islamic territories have dominated the scene as a recurring place of conflicts due to a tradition that, when confronted with the rapid transformation of the surrounding cultural contexts, still appears to be linked to the past. An element of fundamental importance is that the transition from the South African to the Arab setting raises diegesis to a global level by introducing highly topical themes. Considering that the publication of *The Pickup* does not precede the events of 9/11 by much, the narrativization of the Islamic world in the novel stands as literary anticipation of the interest that Middle Eastern nations have

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<sup>5</sup> Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996. Print.

recently aroused. In addition to this, the issue of illegal immigration indeed constitutes an element of centrality in today's society. Immigration is no longer that of the 1950s towards the West. How South Africa enters into relation with these current phenomena in the novel is proof of the new literary interest for a nation inserted in a dynamic world reality, which actively interacts with the surrounding environment.

The idea of the flight to another nation is the hermeneutic pivot around which the whole diegesis revolves. For Julie Summers and Abdu, whose real name is Ibrahim ibn Musa, a reality different from their homeland is the unique place of self-realization. Abdu will be forced to return to the country where he was born, and Julie will decide to follow him, leaving South Africa and moving to this new unspecified nation, "one of those partitioned by colonial powers on their departure" (Gordimer.2001, p. 12)<sup>6</sup>.

Two worlds of a diverse ways of seeing life and reality meet: a disappointed woman, Julie, who has abandoned a family of good society in which she feels no longer belongs to, and a man, Arab, an undocumented immigrant with a degree in economics. Abdu was born in an impoverished Muslim country, where he dominated the desert. He works illegally under a false name in a mechanical workshop. It is not the first time he has tried to cross a state's borders; he has already been rejected by more than one European country. Gordimer's declared intent is to free her protagonist from invisibility. By telling his story, she means to give a face, a name, an identity to one who is not allowed to stay in a country.

In this text, therefore, two strangers meet and fall in love, but, at the same time, they will never be able to unite ultimately. In this sense, one may come across Julia Kristeva's words that clarify this complicated issue:

"Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our

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<sup>6</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. Print. P.12

abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. A symptom that precisely turns “we” into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible, The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities.” (Kristeva.1991, p. 1)<sup>7</sup>

*The Pickup* becomes the narration of borders that introduces the burning issue of illegal immigration. The passage from one nation to another produces a profound change that triggers a series of reflections in the socio-cultural context of the current South Africa. The distinction between the post-apartheid South African city and the small Islamic village bordering the desert brings the confrontation between the Western and the Eastern cultures into the play. The political and economic renewal of modern South Africa constitutes its central aspect of “Westernization.” On the other hand, the fact that neither of the two places is precisely identified could lead the readers to think of a non-casual generalization in which the two nations place themselves as a metaphor for East and West (Steele 2001)<sup>8</sup>.

The first part of the novel takes place in Johannesburg. There have been divergent opinions on the identification of the Muslim country in which the second part of the story takes place. According to Jonathan Steele, the author had Saudi Arabia in mind, but other North African territories cannot be excluded. In particular, the reference to the tomb of Sidi Yusuf calls into question places such as Tunisia, Morocco, or Egypt: “The tomb of Sidi Yusuf, the holy man from long ago, supposed to be

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<sup>7</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1991. Print.

<sup>8</sup> Steele, Jonathan. “White Magic”, *The Guardian*. October 27, 2001. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/oct/27/fiction.artsandhumanities>).

Accessed 24.11.2021.Web.

why this place grew. Not much of a shrine, only people from the roundabout in the desert come to it” (Gordimer, 2001, p. 125)<sup>9</sup>.

The tomb can be considered the ideal projection of a territory in which to find oneself. Beyond the more or less concrete localization of the two countries, there is a different reading level. The reader sees a metaphor of an abstract life towards which Julie and Abdu tend, verbally identified as “another country” – the new land mentioned in William Plomer’s poem, which appears regularly throughout the narrative. This utopian nation does not only appeal to a state of cultural totality, but it stands as a mirror of various axiological, behavioral principles, and the figuration of new feelings. Surprisingly enough, the moments of intimacy between Julie and Abdu are projected into a different dimension perceived through “another country”: “That night they made love, the kind of love-making that is another country, a country of its own, not yours nor mine” (Gordimer. 20001, P. 96)<sup>10</sup>.

### **3. On the Road: Journeys as identity markers**

Julie and Abdu move to “another” place to take a break from where they were . They will no longer be the same as they will inhabit the stranger in them. In *None to Accompany Me* (1994), Gordimer asks:

“Is the one who left ever the one who comes back? There are changes in understanding and awareness that can occur only when one is alone, away from containment in the shape of self-outlined by another. Such changes can never be shared. Alone with them forever. The images are postcards sent from countries that exist only in the personality of the subject; you will never visit them.” (Gordimer.1994, p. 136)<sup>11</sup>

*The Pickup* is built on a series of parallels, dichotomies, and reversals. The novel is divided into two mirror parts, set in two different

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<sup>9</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P. 12.

<sup>10</sup> [Ibid., 96]

<sup>11</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *None to Accompany Me*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. 1994.P.136

nations. The metropolis is opposed to the small village, the noise of traffic to the silence of the desert, the chaotic life to the slow and rhythmic rhythms of days spent in tranquility. These polarizations can be traced back to the broader distinction between East and West. In this case, the terms of comparison are subject to variation. The reality of the Middle is substituted for the comparison between Europe and the Western world in general. East is a more modern (westernized, almost “Europeanized”) South Africa. The vision of the Islamic environment does not differ from the stereotypes of a land that feeds on rituals in which religion and politics are hardly distinguishable from each other (Said.2003)<sup>12</sup>.

### **3.1. *Abdu's journeys***

Abdu was first in Germany and England before ending up in South Africa, where he appears at the start of the novel. South Africa is only a stopover in Abdu's itinerary. In London, he practiced diving in a restaurant. In Germany, he worked as a housekeeper in a bar. In South Africa he works as a mechanic in a garage:

“[Abdu is]washing dishes in a London restaurant, swabbing the floors of drunken vomit in a Berlin beer hall, lying under trucks and cars around the block from the EL-AY Café, and emerging to take the opportunity – what choices are there – to become the lover of one of those who have everything (the Uncle could never dream of) and who could be a way to fulfill a need – a destiny! – to realize one's self in ambitions hopeless in this place.” (Gordimer.2001, p. 128)<sup>13</sup>

Like the pseudonym Abdu he wears, this garage serves as a refuge from the vigilance of the South African police. He is an illegal immigrant because his visa was invalid. Nevertheless, he spotted despite his ingenuity in dodging the police. He is then threatened with

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<sup>12</sup> Said, Edward. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1978). London: Penguin Books. 2003. Print.

<sup>13</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P.128



repatriation to his origin country. The avenues he takes to escape repatriation all fail. Then, he lands in his homeland, accompanied by Julie, who became his legal wife shortly before leaving South Africa. In his country, Abdu is never quiet in his mind. He is still in the capital, far from his village, looking for visas for Western countries: “often he was away all day. He left early, for the capital” (Gordimer.2001, p. 134)<sup>14</sup>. When asked about the purpose of his repetitive morning outings, Abdu replies to Julie: “I started right away to get us out of here” (Gordimer.2001, p. 140)<sup>15</sup>. He calls on New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and the United States of America in turn.

Abdu’s mother, who rejects Abdu’s intention to emigrate again, suggests making him the next heir to Uncle Yakoub, her brother. Yet, he declines the offer and prefers to go into exile in the United States of America:

“Noone in this village, in this place, has anything to do with why I cannot accept the offer you have honored me with, uncle Yaqub. I do not have any interest in the government. It is not going to govern me. I am going to America” (Gordimer.2001, p. 190)<sup>16</sup>.

At the end of the novel, Abdu emigrates for the fourth time to the United States of America. He abandons his family, his wife, and everything offered to him and prefers uncertainty and difficult living conditions. He knows well the difficulties that migrants endure in the countries of immigration, primarily upon arrival, he explains to Julie:

“You don’t understand what it is like come in a country as I do. I have done - how many times? Even legal. It’s hard, nothing is nice, in the beginning, Julie. Without proper money to live, you are a stray dog, a

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<sup>14</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P.134

<sup>15</sup> [Ibid.,140]

<sup>16</sup> [Ibid.,190]



rat finding its hole as the way to get in (Gordimer.2001, p. 227)<sup>17</sup>.

Abdu's journey is indicative of the nature of his psychology. He rejects all that belongs to him by nature. He is obsessed with what is outside his country. He denies himself and prefers to be identified with Europe or with what he calls "The Christian world; the West" (Gordimer.2001, p. 160)<sup>18</sup>. Whenever he can find himself in Europe, he is reduced to thankless tasks. Europe is closing itself off or accepting him with the strict aim of using it for the exclusive benefit of Europeans. Although he has experienced this various times, he still feels the unbridled desire to re-start the adventure.

Abdu is, if not illustrative of the depth of the psychological diversion that the other can impose to establish or enhance his power, at least representative of the consequences of colonization on the colonized. In addition, the representativeness of Abdu for the two orientations above is legitimate when one takes into consideration the meaning that Gordimer gives to his fiction: "For myself, I have said that nothing factual that I write or say will be as truthful as my fiction. The life, the opinions, are not the work, for it is in the tension between standing apart and being involved that the imagination transforms both." (Gordimer, 1991)<sup>19</sup>. In other words, there is a reason to read Abdu's repeated migrations as determined by a complex imposed on him by colonization. His country has just given up on colonization. Uncle Yaquab recognizes that: "there are no foreigners from Europe flying flags over our land any longer" (Gordimer.2001, p. 189)<sup>20</sup>.

### **3.2. Julie's journey**

Ibrahim's journey follows a descending line. Julie's journey is narrativized as an ascent towards self-realization. Once in the new

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<sup>17</sup> [Ibid.,227]

<sup>18</sup> [Ibid.,160]

<sup>19</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. "Writing and Being". Nobel Lecture, December 7, 1991.

Available at: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1991/gordimer/lecture/>.

Accessed: 24.11.2021.Web.

<sup>20</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P.189

place, she seems to start from nothing and gradually configure her identity by counterfeiting it according to the practices and customs of the new life. The flattening of any individualized presence is the element that characterizes the comings and goings of people on the day of arrival at the airport:

“An airport in a country like this is a surging, shifting human mass with all individualism subsumed in two human states, both of suspension, both temporary, both vacuums before reality: Leaving, Arriving. Total self-absorption becomes its opposite, a vast amorphous condition. [...] *in a common existence-that-does-not-exist. Julie is no different, she has no sense of who she is in this immersion, everyone nameless*” (Gordimer. 2001, pp. 109-110, italics mine)<sup>21</sup>.

The sensation of being in a place inhabited by no one, common when one is in a new place, constitutes a moment of general cancellation of individuality that Julie will recover entirely. The initial enthusiasm of the girl for places, people, and things replaces the desire to penetrate deeply into daily life until she obtains her role and is accepted as one of the women of the family with whom she shares domestic habits and commitments. The initial bewilderment of the lack of comfort that makes daily life more difficult is replaced by Ibrahim’s respect and admiration for the people who view relationships with responsibility.

Julie’s journey is determined by her relationship with the social group to which she belongs in South Africa. The most significant symbol of this social group is her father’s home. It is a highly bourgeois universe. Its location in a suburb, withdrawn from the din of South African cities and the sumptuousness of its interior decor constitute the most expressive elements of this universe. This imposing setting resembles the sumptuous villas belonging to the wealthy men of society. These villas exclude noisy and mundane environment where promiscuity is everywhere. Her father’s universe is also distinguished by his systematic rejection of the poor like Abdu. During a gathering in which

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<sup>21</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. PP.109-110

she takes part at her father's house, the narrator notices the refusal which Abdu is the object of for the universe of Julie's father beyond the comment he makes of Julie:

“Sitting among the gathering Julie is seeing the couple [a white couple invited by Julie's father] as those – her father's kind of people – who may move about the world welcome everywhere, as they please, while someone [Abdu] has to live disguised as a grease-monkey without a name.” (Gordimer.2001, p. 49)<sup>22</sup>

The universe explained above is closed to the sufferings and miseries of Abdu in South Africa because it perceives him as an outsider, and thus, he is marginalized. This universe underlies the hegemonic Western culture, “a concept that includes a refining and elevating element,” and “a protective enclosure” (Said, 1993, p. xiii, xiv)<sup>23</sup>

The condition for Abdu to be accepted into Julie's father's group is that he carries himself as a subordinate. This social group favors Abdu's marginalization and exploitation. In the garage where he lives and works, he is exploited as can be seen: “The garage employs him illegally, ‘black,’ yes that's the word they use. It's cheap for the owner; he doesn't pay accident insurance, pension, and medical aid (Gordimer.2001, p. 17)<sup>24</sup>. The owner of this garage espouses the same ideas as Julie's father. He further refuses the romantic relationship between Julie and Abdu: “For your own good, you're a nice girl, a somebody, I can see. He's not for you. He's not even allowed to be in the country. I give him a job, poor devil” (Gordimer.2001, p. 32)<sup>25</sup>. To mark her refusal to identify with this man's universe, Julie qualifies him as “one of them” (Gordimer.2001, p. 63)<sup>26</sup>. To her father's universe, Julie prefers dependencies for servants: she did not live in the suburbs,

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<sup>22</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P.49

<sup>23</sup> Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books. 1993. Print. PP. xiii, xiv

<sup>24</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P.17

<sup>25</sup> [Ibid.,32]

<sup>26</sup> [Ibid.,63]

where “she had grown up but in a series of backyard cottages adapted from servant’s quarters or in modest apartments of the kind they favored or had to be unable to afford anything better” (*Gordimer.2001*, p. 8)<sup>27</sup>.

No longer able to cope with the radicalism of the Ministry of Internal Affairs concerning Abdu’s repatriation, Julie emigrates to Abdu’s country, definitively abandoning South Africa, and therefore, the universe of her father. In Abdu’s country, Julie is impressed by the solidarity that emerges from the behavior of his brothers and parents. Everyone willingly contributes to the arrangement of the young couple from South Africa, in Abdu’s family home: “The house – its face, facade – she could be aware of only peripherally behind the excited assembly, the carrying of the elegant suitcase, canvas bag and bundles snatched by various hands taking charge” (*Gordimer.2001*, p. 119)<sup>28</sup>.

Abdu’s family home is a modest setting that stands out for the solidarity that animates its inhabitants. For this reason, it is comparable to El-Ay café, although located thousands of kilometers away. The narrator translates the similarity in the spirit that inhabits these two microcosms in these terms: “people sat round small tables on the carpet and cushions and ate the way Ibrahim had given up, in the company of the table, agilely with their fingers” (*Gordimer.2001*, p. 120)<sup>29</sup>.

As soon as she arrives in Abdu’s country, Julie faces the aggravation of Abdu’s illusions about himself and his country. From the first days, Abdu is troubled, perplexed, and furious. He is ashamed to reveal himself to Julie as he is:

“He was angry – with this house, this village, these his people, to have to tell her other unacceptable things, tell her once and for all what her ignorant obstinacy of coming with him to this place means, when she failed, with all her privilege, at getting him accepted in hers” (*Gordimer.2001*, p. 122)<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P.8

<sup>28</sup> [*Ibid.*,119]

<sup>29</sup> [*Ibid.*,120]

<sup>30</sup> [*Ibid.*,122]

While Abdu requires that they communicate exclusively in English, “we must talk English” (*Gordimer.2001*, p. 152)<sup>31</sup>, Julie wants to learn Arabic instead. She thinks this language would allow her to integrate easily: “Why sit among his people as a deaf-mute? Always the foreigner where she ate from the communal dish, a closeness that the Table at the distant El-Ay café aimed to emulate far from any biological family” (*Gordimer.2001*, p. 143)<sup>32</sup>.

Julie’s actual spiritual realization occurs during her usual morning walks at the end of the road, where the world ceases to be, and the desert begins. Immensity, silence, and stillness are the semantic fields within which the relationship between Julie and the natural order of the surrounding landscape is configured; the desert is an entire space that exists for itself, not corrupted by the growth of vegetable bodies, nor invaded by the noises of civilization. Contained in a dimension out of time and space, it stands as an extreme manifestation of the sublime, a place where the girl can trace the ultimate meaning of life:

“The desert. No seasons of bloom and decay. Just the endless turn of night and day. Out of time: and she is gazing - not over it, taken into it, for it has no measure of space, features that mark distance from here to there. In a film of haze there is no horizon, the pallor of sand, pink-traced, lilac-luminous with its own color of faint light, has no demarcation from land to air. Sky-haze is indistinguishable from sand-haze. All drift together and there is no onlooker; the desert is eternity.” (*Gordimer.2001*, p. 172)<sup>33</sup>.

The union between the soul of the protagonist and the sense of eternity metaphorized by a landscape made indistinguishable by the mist of the desert is conveyed in highly philosophical terms. It creates an epiphany that arises as to the interiorization of a material and ideal place. The idea of the expanse of sand as nothing is overturned: in

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<sup>31</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P.152

<sup>32</sup> [*Ibid.*,143]

<sup>33</sup> [*Ibid.*,172]

reality, this apparent dryness is the highest expression of the eternal. The only means that can restore a temporal dimension to the desert is water, an element through which sterility can once again be transformed into life. If, on the one hand returning to life means breaking the irrefutable purity of an immortal moment, on the other, this return is necessary, if not inevitable. A symbolic opposition arises between water and sand that represents a broader connection between the paradigms of birth and decay, finitude, and immortality. It finds a point of arrival in the vision of “a green dream” (*Gordimer.2001*, p. 173)<sup>34</sup> and passim that the protagonist seems to do with a particular frequency and has concrete expression in the idea of cultivating a part of the desert. While visiting a rice plantation with Ibrahim’s father, Julie discovers the wonder of the artificial but incredibly natural union of still sand and green vegetation:

“The intoxication of green she entered was audible as well as visual, the twittering sussuration of a great company of birds clinging, woven into the green as they fed [...] The desert is mute; in the middle of the desert there is this, the infinite articulation: pure sound. Where else could that be? That coexistence of wonder” (*Gordimer.2001*, p. 210-211)<sup>35</sup>.

The joining of two opposite phenomena metaphorizes natural perfection, absolute silence and pure sonority, which, placed in only apparent discord, constitute the fulfillment of a beautiful harmony. This euphony, Julie seems to find herself again.

#### **4. The migrant’s assimilation through language**

Julie Summers’ fulfillment is aided by elements of a pragmatic nature that question a different territory of analysis, that of language. The first step taken by the heroine to enter the new life is the decision to begin reading the Holy Qur’an, of which she favors some chapters, those that Ibrahim’s mother knows by heart: The Merciful, Mary, The Prophets. More than the concrete implications of this gesture, the reading is not too exciting: it is a question of passages also contained in the Bible and

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<sup>34</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P.173

<sup>35</sup> [*Ibid.*,210-211]

studied at school – she must pay attention to the symbolic meaning of Julie’s approach to a new culture, a new religion. This approach is expressed in the form of an intersection between the two worlds, as it starts from the cultural ties and the emotional aspirations of the girl: the steps chosen by Julie are those that also belong to her religion and to those studied by Ibrahim’s mother, who is the central character of the family and the primary model to whom Julie refers and the person to be accepted.

One of the parts quoted from The Holy Qur’an, which the girl reads in English, introduces the question of language as a primordial element, part of divine creation: “The God of Mercy hath taught the Koran / Hath created man. / Hath taught him articulate speech. / ... He hath let loose the two seas which meet each other: / Yet between them is a barrier which they overpass not.” (Surat ar-Rahman 55.1-8, in *Gordimer.2001*, p. 146)<sup>36</sup>

Beyond the connection between language and religion that have been thematized in the text, there is a deeper reflection on the idea of the verbal act as a tool for understanding, integration, and self-realization. The ethical and existential path of Julie and Ibrahim is accomplished through their way of expressing themselves, the ability to deal with different languages, and the will to fulfill themselves as beings capable of establishing verbal relationships. Suppose Julie does not experience a religious conversion. In that case, she is nevertheless subjected to a process of spiritual renewal in which the word as the primary means of communication plays a fundamental role. She manages to use her mother tongue, English, as a tool to fit into the small Arab village whose culture appears so distant from hers. Ibrahim, on the contrary, never seems to get in perfect harmony with the languages he speaks. And this sort of friction constitutes an element of difficulty for the harmonization of himself with the world around him, be it the Western one in which he lives as a clandestine immigrant or the oriental one who stubbornly refuses.

The recovery of self-awareness and the profound understanding of oneself takes place not only in moments of contemplation of the desert,

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<sup>36</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P.146

but also through a more subtle, hidden, and complex process that starts from the exploration of new languages, intended as tools of knowledge of different realities. Julie immediately undergoes a fascination with the Arabic language, endowed with a degree of expressiveness that goes beyond words: “[...] the hoarse flow and guttural hum of the language reached her on a wave-length of meaning other than verbal” (*Gordimer.2001*, p. 118)<sup>37</sup>.

Driven by the need to understand the inner nature of a world that gradually conquers it, and at the same time stimulated by the vision of an interpretative key for deep knowledge of herself, she decides to learn the new language. Meanwhile, she tries to reciprocate the opportunity offered by teaching English lessons to Ibrahim’s family, some friends, and neighbors. Julie is an unskilled teacher, just as her husband was a makeshift mechanic. She perceives how expensive education received during adolescence can take on social utility for the first time. Therefore, the linguistic exchange does not stop on the practical level of learning, but becomes an exchange of culture, feelings, and inner life.

Within the alternation of English and Arabic courses, Maryam, Ibrahim’s younger sister, identifies an essential quality of the language when she suggests that Julie refer to Khadija to learn pronunciation better. Khadija, the wife of one of Ibrahim’s brothers, lives with her family, awaiting her husband’s return, who has left to work outside and of whom there is no more news. The woman’s sad state of mind, which oscillates between moments of deep sadness and tremendous anger due to her abandonment, could be alleviated by recognizing her linguistic superiority, given that Khadija comes from the capital and has a reasonable degree of education. As Maryam tries to explain, both teaching and acquiring an idiom can serve to alleviate loneliness:

“Maryam’s delicate way of wanting to help her sister-in-law is to attempt to distract her by recognizing her superiority and flattering her into the obligation to use it to help someone else: their new sister-in-law,

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<sup>37</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P.118



Ibrahim's wife. I tell Khadija, she is lonely without our language" (Gordimer.2001, p. 151)<sup>38</sup>.

Language is synonymous with contact, communication, integration, and regeneration. Its absence is equivalent to loss, detachment, loneliness, and invisibility; the meaning of these reflections becomes more meaningful if one may consider the complex context of displacements, migrations, individual, and social changes of the novel within which it operates. Initially, Abdu does not seem to recognize the importance given by Julie to the Arabic language and considers her new passion only a momentary desire. At the end of the narration, he spontaneously speaks Arabic to his wife. It is a way to indicate the unconscious, hidden achievement, but still present in the awareness that his language is a great wealth: although he had to give it up to enter the new world. Despite the repeated desire to replace it with English, it is an intrinsically rooted reality in being, impossible to ignore.

The idea of the word as a powerful means of expression is enriched by the language's multiple and constantly varied characters. In *The Pickup*, English and Arabic are placed on an equivalent level of ontological validity and individual and social stabilization to indicate that completeness is achievable through a dynamic and productive comparison. The idea of openness is aimed not only at geographical borders and social spaces, but spontaneously involves daily life, personal reality, and the expressive means of the individual. Consequently, the forms of the new literature cannot fail to represent the total sense of this plurality. The interest of the novel in modern South Africa is aimed at current themes keeping alive the attention on the symbolic value of writing: the evolution, therefore, is actualized in the narrative not only thematically through the presentation of daily and individual life, but with the means of expression used for that presentation.

## **5. Conclusions: The Foreigner's Otherness**

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<sup>38</sup> Gordimer, Nadine. *The Pickup*. London: Bloomsbury. 2001. P.151

Abdu-Ibrahim represents the colonized subject, a subject who has convinced himself that Europe is right to make him what he is: a subordinate. Julie, for her part, asserts herself as a resistor as much to assimilation to Europe as to the idea of Europe's superiority, of which her father's universe can serve as a symbol.

The itinerary of these characters is inseparable from migration. Abdu left his country four times in a row for England, Germany, South Africa, and finally for the United States of America . Julie first leaves her environment in South Africa and then South Africa for Abdu's country. Conversely, the reasons that push these characters to migrate are the same. Abdu leaves his country because a force has taken possession of him that distorted him to the point of convincing him that his country is hell. It is observed that through his multiple migrations, he translates his convictions according to which Europe represents Paradise while his country means Gehenna. It oils the mechanism that physically produces the center and the periphery from the perspective of postcolonial theory. Julie leaves her country because she refuses the aspiration to minimize the importance of the Other, which characterizes her social group. She rejects that human groups correspond to the dominant / dominated configuration. With her migration, Julie reveals the correlation between the dominant group and the overlooked group, of which Abdu is only a symbol. Her migration reflects her desire to destroy or deconstruct the logic of domination that governs the relations between the dominant and dominated group. She wishes to construct a bridge of love and solidarity between these groups. Abdu and Julie undoubtedly encounter obstacles in their respective quests and benefit from help from other characters.

In *The Pickup*, there is a constant reminder of the gaze and how things are named; it is necessary to look beyond the invisibility screen that makes people disappear – conceptually rather than physically – and pay attention to the words used. It is precisely what Gordimer seems to convey. Looking at the other self-constituted by the undocumented immigrant and telling his life story, saying his name, means removing him from cancellation, from being exposed as a flow, load, horde, human tide, and with all those images with which, through a semantic shift, from the word immigrant to illegal, clandestine, ending up in

criminal, creating a dangerous syllogism. In this novel, there is a profoundly political indication, an invitation to get out of the setback that leads to the use of categories that leave out human beings with their names, their bodies, and their feeling.

Abdu is unable to trust the woman he loves : he fears that one day she will leave him and return to her privileges, because Julie was “one of those who own the world, can buy a ticket, get on a plane, present a passport and be welcomed back into that world any time” (Gordimer.2001, p. 173)<sup>39</sup>

Paradoxically, while feeling like a stranger, Julie will find something of herself day after day that she did not know because she will come into contact with what she had lacked in all her existence: the world of women. She will find herself leading a large part of her daily existence in their company, sharing domestic spaces and family care with them. Everything revolves around the mother, the very figure Julie has most missed. Ibrahim’s mother will sanction Julie’s successful integration allowing Julie to be next to her in the kitchen and teaching her how to prepare her wise recipes.

Although Julie seems to integrate into that world so far away from her Ibrahim, she fears that she will one day leave him to return to her previous, privileged existence. Eventually, it will happen, and therefore better not rely on that love. Better to reroll the dice and look once again for a chance to redeem himself, to escape from a place that is no longer enough for him.

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## الهوية والهجرة والاستيعاب في رواية (الشاحنة الصغيرة) لنادين

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### المستخلص :

بعد عشرين عاماً من نشر رواية نادين جورديمر (الشاحنة الصغيرة) ، طرق آلاف المهاجرين من الدول العربية والإسلامية الأخرى أبواب أوروبا بحثاً عن حياة أفضل. على مستوى مختلف وأقل عالمية ، تبحث رواية جورديمر في حالة أولئك الذين أُجبروا على الهجرة. في حين أن القصة تنفصل عن الفصل العنصري ، بدلاً من إعادة النظر في مثل هذه الموضوعات في ضوء التغييرات ذات المغزى ، وجدت الكاتبة نفسها مضطرة لاختيار الموضوعات التي تتمتع بامتياز للتعبير عن تأثير التطورات التاريخية والأيدولوجية والشخصية في العقد الماضي. في رواية (الشاحنة الصغيرة) ، يرتبط جانب الهوية للهجرة بجزئها المادي ، لأنه في كلا جانبي الهجرة ، هناك صلة بشكل من أشكال التمثيل. يتم إثراء فكرة الكلمة كوسيلة تعبير قوية من خلال خصائص اللغة المتعددة والمتنوعة باستمرار. تم وضع اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية على مستوى مكافئ من الصلاحية الوجودية والاستقرار الفردي والاجتماعي في رواية (الشاحنة الصغيرة) ، مما يشير إلى أن الاكتمال يمكن تحقيقه من خلال مقارنة ديناميكية ومثمرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : جورديمر (نادين) ، الهوية؛ الهجرة ، التمثيل، جنوب أفريقيا

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