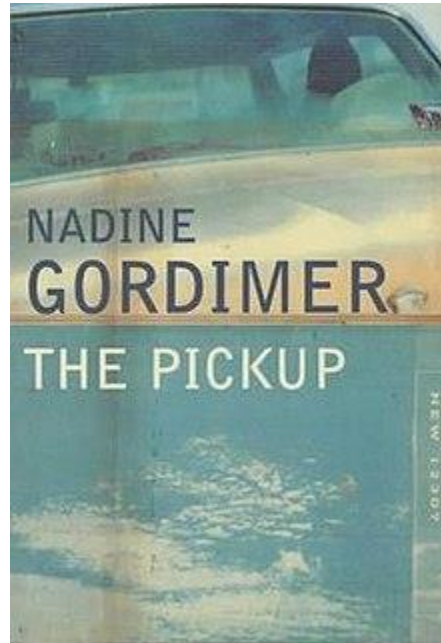


Culture Clash and Identity Crisis in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*

M. Tamil Thendral and Dr. G. Aruna Devi



Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pickup

Nadine Gordimer

Nadine Gordimer is the South African short story writer, essayist, novelist and political activist. She has received many honorable awards include Noble Prize for Literature and Booker Prize for her novel *The Conservationist* (1974), W.H. Smith Commonwealth Literary Award, James Tait Black Memorial Prize, Bennett Award and received many righteous degrees from various universities like Oxford and Cambridge. She belongs to the period of Apartheid in South Africa. Many of her stories deal with the issues of racial injustices, cultural clashes between Whites and Blacks, segregation, displacement, love, political power, alienation and the sufferings of Africans in the White lands. She has been called the leader of South African people. She expresses her views not only on African people in her novels but also criticizes the government policies and activities.

Nadine Gordimer's writing symbolizes that there is a need for political change. Because of protest, many of her novels are banned by the government. Being brave woman, she has never become tired. She used to give her contribution to her country through her writings

spontaneously. Gordimer's short stories collections are *Forum, A Soldier's Embrace, Jump and Other Stories*. Her notable novels are *The Lying Days* (1953), *A World of Strangers* (1958), *The Conservationist* (1974), *Burger's Daughter* (1979), *July's People* (1981), *My Son's Story* (1990), *The House Gun* (1998), *Get a Life* (2005) and *No Time like the Present* (2012).

The Pickup

The Pickup comprises the story of a couple Julie Summers, a White woman and Abdu, an illegal Arab immigrant in South Africa. After Abdu's visa is refused, the couple returns to his unnamed homeland, where she is an alien. She experiences culture shock. The issues of displacement, identity crisis, alienation, immigration, culture clash, economic power and religious faith are portrayed in the novel, *The Pickup*. It won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Best Book from Africa.

Culture Clash

The Oxford Dictionary defines Culture Clash is a conflict between cultures or a disagreement arising between two parties of different beliefs, values and practices. The love affair between Julie and Ibrahim starts as a casual pickup and later involves into very complicated relationship. Its leads them to new directions none of them have expected. Ibrahim overstays his South African permit for one year and five months. It is a criminal offence against the government. He wants to escape from the critical situation but he has no money to pay for his visa. The owner of the garage employs him illegally. Actually it is cheap for the owner because he does not pay accident insurance, pension and medical aids for Ibrahim.

Julie and Ibrahim

Being a Black he is disqualified and he cannot earn money like the other people in the garage. It highlights the discrimination of Blacks. Still Blacks live in the old ghettos and Whites live in the suburbs. In fact no personal interaction takes place until Julie shows up her father's car. He uses the relationship with Julie who belongs to wealthy family. When Julie buys two airline tickets using her background as a wealthy girl, Ibrahim shouts at her. She insists on accompanying Ibrahim to his country he gets angry with her.

Who asked you to buy two tickets? You said nothing to me. Don't you think you said nothing to me? Don't you think you must discuss? No, you are used to making all decisions, you do what you like, no father, no mother, nobody must ever tell you. And me-what am I, don't ask me-you cannot live in my country, it's not for you, you can wish you were dead, if you have to live there. Can't you understand? I can't be for you-responsible. (95)

He says that his country is not suitable to her. She is going to the third world countries which are underdeveloped. Abdu tries to explain everything to her. In her country, she has everything. But Arab country is very dry, dusty and sandy and it is not comfortable for her. It has its culture, civilization which is not understood by anyone. To her it is a place where woman are treated like slaves. She expands her limited horizons and experiences the culture of which she knows nothing. Julie is surprised that Abdu insists upon their marriage before he brings her to

his family home. But she says, “what for we don’t need that” (107). Abdu embarrassed by his dirty, improvised North African village, but Julie becomes entranced living with his large, extended family on the edge of the desert. In Johannesburg, they live together without getting married, but his country does not accept them. The paper examines the cultural clash between Western and Eastern countries.

Julie’s Relationship with Ibrahim

Julie’s relationship with Ibrahim certainly places a major role in her transformation, which leads to a process of boundary– crossing between spaces and cultures. To Arab people English is a foreign language. They do not know how to speak English. Now Julie is a stranger. She must learn Arab for her communication. In this village women are not allowed to eat with the men. The culture of the village irritates her much. There is no alarm clock in the village. Jackals cry loudly in the desert. It is the call for the prayer.

She tries to accept the changes like the small child’s first day at school. Each day for five times the voice of muezzin from the mosque and they read the inscribed version of the Koran. But in Julie’s country, they read the Bible. She thinks about her past. She had a beautiful garden, falling asleep with plush toys bought by her father, but here she has not seen even a single plant. She refuses to cover her head when she enters the village at first. But now she covers over her mouth and nose to protect her from the cutting fury of flaying sand. Once she satirized the café in the village but now she drinks coffee at the same cafe. Julie follows the habit of Arabians by knowingly or unknowingly. This is the reality of the people who tries to adapt another culture. She assimilates many new experiences in her life. This is the Psychology of new immigrants. Now Julie is changed. She teaches lessons for the adults. She speaks their language thoroughly. She came to know that she must fight for survival in the desert. She assimilates many new accomplishments in her life. This paper brings out how people are suffering because of immigration from one country to another country.

Loving Simple Life

Nowadays people are struggling and ask oneself who am I. Identity Crisis is a psychological conflict that involves confusion about one’s social role. In such state, a person experiences uncertainty in life. In *The Pickup*, the protagonists are longing for their identity. Even though Julie possesses the power of the owner of the Rover (car), she declines “It’s not mine! She claimed her identity: I’d like to have my own old one back!”. (Pickup 9). It proves that she loves the simple life.

The lack of physical involvement in daily activities is also reflected in her attitude towards her job in public relations and failure commitment regarding her choices.

What I do, what you do. That’s about the only subject available. I don’t know how exactly these things workout. I wanted to be a lawyer; really I had these great ambitions when I was at school...I quite law after only two years. Then it was languages...and somehow I’ve landed up working as a PRO and

fundraiser...sycophantic. I won't stick to it for long. I don't know what I want to do, if that means what I want to be (11).

When Julie tries to talk in local language to Ibrahim, he says: We must talk in English. I need to speak in English. I must speak English with you if I am going to get a decent job anywhere. I can be able to study some more there. Only with English (152). It shows the passion of speaking English as a foreign language. Moreover, people around the apartheid countries long to speak English. They think that it gives some sort of respect in the society. Julie is alone without language. She makes herself ill.

Seeking Wealth

At the end of the novel she seeks her identity in unnamed Arab country. She starts her life in her own way. At the same time, Ibrahim often says, "I need Permanent Residence". He wants to become a wealthy young man. To attain his goal, he tries to escape from his Arab country. Again he tries to get to Australia, Newlands and America. What an unspeakable condition of the countries which is segregated and does not have a proper environment. Arabic countries are full of deserts. He laments about the reality of the world and pathetic condition of his country, where he does not have any opportunity. Maximum opportunities are given to the Westerns only. Eastern people only have two percentages of opportunities

Reality of Life

Julie explains the reality of the people in USA. It is not his country. He never get out the garage in his country. But America is completely different from his country. One of the biggest, the most important financiers of the whole world lived in USA. They are in computers, in communications, that is where the world is. In Ibrahim's country women are locked within four walls. But in USA, women run away from home for earning. He seeks "permanent residence" in America. But Julie wants to escape from the wealthy life in USA. To him it's a very big dream. He says, "I am going to America" (190). She explains the reality of America.

Works for You are a stray dog. I know you don't mind, you even seem to like to live ... rough ... but this is different, it can be bad, bad. I don't mind for me- because this time I have the chance to move out all that, finished, forever, forever, do what I want to do, live like I want to live. That is the country for it. There's plenty of chances again now, there, you don't read the papers, but the unemployment is nothing. Lowest for many year everybody. (227)

Fails to Find Roots

In search of his own identity, Ibrahim shifts from village to America and joint family to nuclear family but fails to find his own roots amidst socio- cultural change. Both of them identify themselves in an alien land. At the end of the novel, Julie left alone by her husband and living without hope in slum environment. She is a symbol of woman's searching for identity and freedom. She starts a new life in Arab. Thus the novel paints a clear picture of culture clash and identity crisis in an alien environment. Culture clash and Identity crisis are two sides of a same coin. The author ends the novel with an optimistic note. Julie has courage to covert the

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consequences of life into success. She geared up to tackle the worst situations that she will go to meet in the deserted Arab country.

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