

**Language and Cultural Hybridization in Nadine Gordimer's Novel
*The Pickup***

R. Vanmathi

**Assistant Professor of English
Seethalakshmi Ramaswami College
Trichirappalli - 2**

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This Paper tends to analyze how the Language and Culture are hybridized in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*. The study seeks to find out how the language of the protagonists in the novel change when they get married across cultures and face new traditions and beliefs. Bakhtin theory, which is developed by Homi Bhabha and other hybridity theorists such as Stuart Hall, Nederveen Pieterse, and Marwan Kraidy, can be a relevant tool for analysis of the characters' identities. Theorist Homi K. Bhabha challenges that those who cross cultures live in an "in-between space" in which they alternate between their native culture and the host culture. However, results show that fictional characters present cases, which have not been explored by hybridity theorists.

In addition, it is stressed that various factors of a cultural, religious, personal, and social nature affect the protagonists in the novels to either develop a hybrid identity or maintain their native way of life. It is also found that cross-cultural marriage and hybridity are correlated. The former can be both a manifestation of hybridity, where the protagonists' cross-cultural marriage is seen as an affirmation of their hybrid experience.

Keywords: Nadine Gordimer, *The Pickup*, Cross-cultural marriage, Hybrid identities, Cultural hybridity, Linguistic hybridity, Homi Bhabha.

The Post-Colonial Movement has had a great impact on the women of varied culture. The determined, independent and strong-willed peace of mind of the women characters portrayed in the Post-Colonial literature. Several important women writers played so big role in the development of the African novel in the nineteen and twenties. The most noticeable writer is Nadine Gordimer.

Nadine Gordimer (1923-), writer of the novel *The Pickup*, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991, is a White South African novelist and short story writer. She was born at Springs, a small mining town near Johannesburg. Her parents were European migrants. Her mother was British, and her father was a Lithuanian Jew. She is, therefore, not strange with the notions of hybridity, migration and diaspora. Gordimer has mainly focused the political situation in her native land; Her main theme of the novels is apartheid. Even in the toughest periods of censorship, Gordimer never stepped down and always continued addressing the issue of African identity. Her writing had been a sort of intervention in the prevailing discourse of apartheid.

Literature is an interpretation of society. A poet or writer in composing his /her literary work is very often inspired and influenced by some of his or her own experiences and social surroundings. The situation in which Nadine Gordimer wrote her 13th novel, *The Pickup* (2001), is hugely different from the time she was writing her pre-Apartheid novels and short stories. Apartheid was officially gone; she was at the age of about seventy seven and was writing at the very beginning of the third millennium; Gordimer's fiction dealt mostly with the African situation, including apartheid. Most of her critics and her readers were concerned about the theme of her future work, for she had lost one of her favorite ones—apartheid. However, she surprised all of them by turning to a more universal issue, that of migration and exile. In fact, Gordimer is a writer who understands her era and its needs amazingly. She knows that migration and exile are becoming the world's destiny and she intensely feels the need to address such global issues. Perhaps, that is the reason she does not name the country her central characters (in *The Pickup*) migrate to—to show the ubiquity and universality of migrant experience.

The Pickup is the story portrays a twenty-nine-year-old South African girl named Julie, daughter of Nigel Ackroyd Summers. He is “an investment banker” (Gordimer, *The Pickup*, 41) — “catching the garage mechanic [Abdu] in the net” (Ibid, 11). Abdu, whose real name is Ibrahim ibn Musa. He is an illegal immigrant who works in a garage in South Africa. Gordimer's grand imagination takes Julie out of a rich family in South Africa to a village in Abdu's native land, a place which is “buried in desert” of an unknown Arab country (Ibid, 122).

The Pickup is “a novel about migration in a contemporary globalized world” (Ibid, 70). Mainly, this research attempts to show the marginal position of both characters, Abdu- Ibrahim and Julie. It will examine the Bhabhaian ideas of negotiated identity and hybridity and will account for the concept of cultural difference.

We live in language and we use language for living. Sometimes, some people have to live in more than one language (the exiles and migrants, for instance). They regularly learn to (and have to) find a way to discuss between their double lives. Thus hybridity emerges. Now, we shall explain more the language hybridization. Pidgin language is one explicit example of the linguistic hybridity. The “English-Arabic pidgin” Julie uses manifests this hybridization. Furthermore, Gordimer's random speech of Abdu's vernacular language (Arabic) in the text of the novel comes to put stress on the hybridity at issue, and more than that, it underscores the concept of cultural difference.

Language has an important role in building and also in hindering successful communication between cross-cultural couples. Abdu's insufficient English sometimes “brings” misunderstanding between him and Julie: “Sometimes the limitations of his use of her language bring misunderstanding although she thinks she lovingly has taught herself to interpret him instinctively” (p. 62).

Abdu's poor English makes him unable to flatter Julie, because he does not know how to express tender things in her language (p. 93). However, he insists on using the language and is determined to master it. When Julie corrects his sentence: “Time my uncle gave a new one my mother can be safe in, anyway” (p. 207) by telling him to use ““*Would be, not can*”

(p. 207), he complains that Julie helps everyone to improve their English except him, to whom it was important. He wants to learn English and become fluent in the language as it is important for him in his quest to enter a Western country: “*We must talk English. I need to 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*” (p. 152). In addition, he refuses to communicate with his wife using his own language and insists on using English only (p. 151).

Abdu’s denial to communicate with Julie in his native language and his longing to improve his English reflect his alienation from his native culture and his wish to embrace a Western culture. This asserts Bhabha’s notion of “looking for the join” and Pieterse’s notion of “assimilationist hybridity,” where Abdu tries his best to enter the “center” through mastering English, the language of the “center” or the West. The writer also reveals the “selection of certain words which remain untranslated in the text” (Ibid). These are among the many ways of injecting cultural singularity into the style of writing. Indeed, Gordimer pursues this very goal when she incorporates within the novel a group of words such as “*Idikazana lomlungu, le!*” (Gordimer, *The Pickup*, 3), or “*Aoodhu Billah*” (Ibid, 158), “*Allah yahfazak*” (Ibid, 259), and so on. The reader is not even provided with any sort of translation notes. Now that so much attention has focused upon the concept of hybridity in general, it might seem appropriate to discuss the issue of language hybridization. This concept is actually associated with the name of Bakhtin. The idea behind the Bakhtinian hybridity is to interrupt any claim to cultural purity and totalitarian thinking and help make way for cultural difference.

Migrants such as Abdu-Ibrahim and Julie have to find their way in-between. Their marginal position empowers them to liberate themselves from the binary of ‘here/there’ or ‘inside/outside’. Hybridity will serve as a ‘strategy of survival’, where one can be ‘outside of the inside’, while remaining ‘a part in the whole’. Hence, hybridity steps beyond the dialectic of belonging/not belonging. However, it is suggested “the essence of the global predicament is to be found in ‘the problem of minorities’” (Ibid, xviii). For Bhabha, the minorities (im/migrants, refugees and the like) should place themselves “at the intersections (and in the interstices)” of the dominant (national) narratives in order to stress the “cultural re-visioning” (Ibid, xx). The imagined migrant position (that of Abdu-Ibrahim or Julie) inscribes a sort of agency and resistance over “our myths of belonging”. However we might find Abdu’s desire for a dreamland, his is an articulated agency and a ‘right to narrate’:

You are part of a dialogue that may not, at first, be heard or heralded—you may be ignored—but your personhood cannot be denied. In another’s country that is also your own, your person divides, and in following the forked path you encounter yourself in a double movement . . . once as a stranger, then as friend. (Ibid, xxv)

The above passage is used to describe Julie’s position in migration. One of the stereotypes Gordimer erases the submissive role of women. Her novel shows an example of female agency. Julie, as a migrant, takes an active role in a foreign land by teaching the children. The moment she arrived in Abdu’s country, she felt as an outsider; however, at the end of the novel, she stays there

and does not accompany her husband to the US. Therefore, as Bhabha says, she was once a stranger, then a friend.

The Pickup is the novel divided into two parts. In the first part, we focus Abdu, an illegal migrant in a South African city. Julie who picks him up is a native there. In the second part, the couple fly to Abdu's (now, Ibrahim's) country, and this time Julie feels as a stranger there. The story has a reverse structure. In the first part, Abdu is an outsider and, in the second part, Julie. Abdu craves for Julie's life and vice versa. However, they both try to dispense with their past and look forward to starting over. Generally, this is a stimulus to migrate.

The second point is that to live with such a multiple sense of self is to believe in hybridity. In other words, negotiated identities are hybrid. Gordimer's *The Pickup* is a typical work of art in the age of hybrid identities. It carefully pictures the migrant identity at the very beginning of the third millennium.

In general, hybridity emerges when the location of culture is in-between. It defies the *either/or* belief of the colonial discourse. In this sense, third space, as a liminal place of meaning, becomes a site of negotiation of the foreign and the local, granting sovereignty to neither of them. I believe, this is where Abdu-Ibrahim and Julie (and, in a sense, all the migrants) halt. The following extracts are taken from the novel to illustrate how much both of them desire to enter a liminal zone:

“he steps from his only identity, here, into a disguise, the nobody Abdu” (Gordimer, The Pickup, 31); “they double the disappearance of his identity, they disappear together” (Ibid, 34); “He doesn’t offer an identity” (Ibid, 44); “Disappear. Like I say. Either way. He disappears into another city, another identity” (Ibid, 91); “He is here, and he is not here [...] It is a state of suspension from the pressures of necessity. In its very precariousness the state is pure and free” (Ibid, 37).

The word ‘disappear’ is repeated many times. This is the result of any essentialist perception of identity, which is tied tightly to the matters of race, colour and nation. *The Pickup* is the story, with its reverse structure, depicts two characters who desire to leave their places of origin. Abdu is thrilled at the idea of abandoning his country and going anywhere, they will let him in, anywhere.

Conclusion

This article proposed to explore two aspects of hybridity: the complex representation of Gordimer's protagonists' hybrid cultural identities, and the different forms of linguistic hybridity that are present in the novel. Both aspects of hybridity, the cultural and linguistic, converge and coincide in the novel. First, we have seen that in polyphony, text interference occurs, and two hybrid voices emerge in the same segment of text. Similarly, in cultural hybridity, identity interference occurs, and the protagonists develop two different identities that co-exist and, at other times, struggle together. In addition, multi-language or heteroglossia exists in the novel, where we have seen that the boundary between languages can be crossed. Likewise, the protagonists have proven that cultural boundaries can be crossed.

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