

**“Returning the Colonizer’s Gaze”, Nadine  
Gordimer’s *None to Accompany Me*, a Hybridity in the  
Making**

**Nabila Ali**

**Abstract**

“Cultural colonization” has proved much more influential than territorial colonization. Lois Tyson states that if the first usurps lands and properties, the second inculcates in the colonized systems and values that “denigrate the culture, moral, and even physical appearance of formerly subjugated people” (419). The “dynamic psychological and social interplay between what ex-colonial populations consider their native, indigenous, pre-colonial cultures” and “the residual effects of colonial domination on their culture” (419) comes at the heart of postcolonial studies and major related issues, e.g., post colonial identity. However, it is not worthwhile for the ex-colonized to preserve some cultural aspects and disown others on basis of the nationality of these aspects. Therefore, several postcolonial theorists claim that “postcolonial identity is necessarily a dynamic, constantly evolving hybrid of native and colonial cultures.”

## النظر فى عين المستعمر: لن يصطحبنى أحد لنادين جوردايمر وتحقيق التوافق المجتمعى

### نبيلة على مرزوق

#### ملخص

لقد اثبتت التجربة ان الاستعمار الثقافى اعمق تأثيرا من احتلال الارض حيث يقرر لويس تايسون ان الاستعمار العسكرى يستولى على الارض والثروات بينما الاحتلال الثقافى يهاجم الهوية الوطنية فيغزوها بالثقافة الوافدة وباحساس بدونية القيم الاصيلية والصفات الشكلية للمجتمع الواقع تحت الاحتلال ودراسة هذه العلاقة الديناميكية بين الثقافة النفسية والاجتماعية للوطن وثقافة المحتل تاتى فى قلب الدراسات ما بعد الاستعمارية الانية ليس من الايجابية فى شئ للشعوب التى عانت من الاستعمار ان تجعل المعيار الاساسى لقبول بعض القيم او رفضها هو البلد الذى نشأت به هذه القيم بغض النظر عن مدى جدواها من الناحية العملية.

“When colonizer and colonized come together, there is an

element of negotiation of cultural meaning” (Huddart, 2).

“Cultural colonization” has proved much more influential than territorial colonization. If the first usurps lands and properties, Lois Tyson states that the second inculcates in the colonized systems and values that “denigrate the culture, moral, and even physical appearance of formerly subjugated people” (419). The cultural and psychological influences of colonizers remain much longer after the withdrawal of their canons and soldiers. The powerful wind of change which sweeps away the traces of their wheels and footprints, find indelible the traces of their manners and attitudes. The “dynamic psychological and social interplay between what ex-colonial populations consider their native, indigenous, pre-colonial cultures” and “the residual effects of colonial domination on their culture” (419) comes at the heart of postcolonial studies and major related issues, e.g., post colonial identity. Ex-colonized countries have so profusely imbibed colonizers’ culture that it became almost impossible to distinguish it from indigenous culture. However, it is not worthwhile for the ex-colonized to preserve some cultural aspects and disown others on basis of the nationality of these aspects. Therefore, several postcolonial theorists claim that “postcolonial identity is necessarily a dynamic, constantly evolving hybrid of native and colonial cultures.” They even go further to argue that hybridity should not be confined to the unwilling cultural exchange (culture transfusion) among contesting or warring countries, but “is rather a productive, exciting, positive force in a shrinking world that is itself becoming more and more culturally hybrid” (422).

Among post-colonial theorists, Homi K. Bhabha distinguishes himself by a set of illuminating concepts that pump new blood into the veins of the movement as a whole. These concepts call for a new understanding of cross-cultural relations and a novel approach towards colonialism. In several instances he explains his views by referring to other major critics, e.g., Said, Fanon and Julia Kristeva. He disagrees with Said’s view that “colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer,” and considers it “a historical and theoretical simplification” that he challenges (Bhabha, 1983, 23), but, according to Richard King, Bhabha adopts the Derridean notion of

difference which highlights the ongoing “deferral and differentiation of meaning within texts in order to emphasize the inherent ambivalence of colonial discourse” (202). Colonial discourse is the outcome of a hybridization process that inevitably ensues when colonizers and colonized meet and interact in “an agonistic space” (202). King maintains that, “Discourses, like texts, can come to mean different things and be appropriated for heterogeneous purposes” (202). Bhabha explains that we “should not see the colonial situation as one of straightforward oppression of the colonized by the colonizer” (Huddart,1) and cites evidence by reference to the ambivalence of the colonial situation especially that his reading of Lacan comes in agreement with this ambivalence. Bhabha’s understanding of the mirror stage sheds light on his evaluation of the colonizer-colonized relationship. In his *The Location of Culture*, (1994), he suggests that “Like the mirror phase ‘the fullness’ of the stereotype-its image as identity- is always threatened by lack” (77). Narcissism and aggressivity that are basically entwined in the mirror stage also overwhelm the colonial situation. This “doubling” describes the ambivalence inherent in the colonizer/colonized relationship. There is always “both an aggressive expression of domination over the other and evidence of narcissistic anxiety about the self” (Huddart, 29). The colonizer’s aggression is manifest in his persistent attempts to show his superiority, but this fails to cover for the real instability of his identity. Bhabha claims that in “the objectification of the scopic drive there is always the threatened return of the look; in the identification of the imaginary relation there is always the alienating other (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject.” A reconsideration of stances is, therefore, vital for a reevaluation of the whole experience within the wider scope of the present and in relation to major issues that were not known when colonialism was almost covering the globe. How could the insistence on cultural difference, so deeply engraved in the history of colonialism be adhered to in relation to globalization? How could the world avoid the cultural freeze/stalemate that would inevitably ensue should colonizers and colonized hold fast to their historical stances? Responding to these issues, Bhabha advocates “critical thinking”, as “a process” opposed

to “theoretical critique”, a procedure which does not contain the truth” (1994, 81). He argues that “Political positions are not simply identifiable as progressive or reactionary, bourgeois or radical, prior to the act of critique engagée, or out-side the terms and conditions of their discursive address” (22). This indicates that Political positions “are always in context, in relation to specific debates and issues, and are not, therefore, ‘left’ or ‘right’ outside specific situations” (Huddart, 12). Critical thinking, “just as ambivalent as the colonial discourse” (13), enables thinkers to break the boundaries of the stable and the expected and therefore attain a new perspective on traditional issues.

Bhabha believes that the “histories and cultures (of colonialism) constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations” (Huddart, 1). Accordingly, he calls for the adoption of new interpretations of old concepts such as “mimicry” and “the uncanny”, besides new concepts especially hybridization. Building on his understanding of mimicry and stereotypes, he uses “the uncanny” to analyze the postcolonial experience. The term is ambivalent and lends itself to various explanations, so it might be convenient to use only the definitions that influenced Bhabha the most, i.e., the definitions offered by Sigmund Freud and adopted by psychoanalytic critic Julia Kristeva. The uncanny is “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once familiar” (Freud, 2003:124). Bhabha uses it in many contexts to refer to “All the hesitations, uncertainties, and ambivalences with which colonial authorities and its figures are imbued” (Huddart, 54). He finds it particularly convenient because he believes in the “uncanniness of culture.”

Culture is *heimlich*, with its disciplinary generalizations, its mimetic narratives, its homologous empty time, its seriality, its progress, its customs and coherence. But cultural authority is also *unheimlich*, for to be distinctive, significant, influential and identifiable, it has to be translated, disseminated, differentiated, interdisciplinary,

intertextual, international, inter-racial. (Bhabha, 1994, In his writings, Bhabha argues against the “multiculturalist” notion that “you can put together any number of cultures in a pretty mosaic” (1991, 82). For him, “there are no cultures that came together leading to hybrid forms; instead, cultures are the consequences of attempts to still the flux of cultural hybridities” (Huddart, 4). Hybridity implies that “the colonial space involves the interaction of two originally ‘pure’ cultures (the British/European and the native) that are only rendered ambivalent once they are brought into direct contact with each other” (King, 204). However, the idea of pure cultures interacting is not Bhabha’s main interest which is actually “the third space” resulting from that interaction and what occupies that space which enables other positions to emerge” (Bhabha, 1991, 211). He is more interested in the “liminal”, the gray area occupying the borderline stage which is critical for the creation of a new culture.

South Africa presents a unique example of liminality in which the colonizer and the colonized have to live side by side even after the colonial situation is terminated. Nadine Gordimer, a Nobel Prize winner, has been preoccupied by the social context of apartheid for more than forty years. She has been acknowledged by “critics and readers alike ... as an uncompromising anti-apartheid spokesperson” (Dimitriu, 1). Gordimer’s views after apartheid are almost identical to Bhabha’s evaluation of the colonial and postcolonial experience. She suggests that “all civilizations including China and Japan have been the result of intersections and clashes.” She quotes the Congolese writer, Henry Lopes who affirms that “every civilization is born of a forgotten mixture; every race is a variety of mixtures that is ignored” (Gordimer, 1999, 28). Bhabha agrees suggesting that “the scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture” (1994, 722). In her first post-apartheid novel, *None to Accompany Me*, (1994), Gordimer employs the paraphernalia of everyday life to reflect either the coherency or incoherency of a national culture in the making. The new hybrid culture should inevitably be a composite of the colonizer and indigenous culture. Gordimer presents South Africa in the borderline

stage when the country has just won the freedom of the black majority. The aim of this paper is therefore to examine how far Gordimer's post-apartheid novel demonstrates Bhabha's views in relation to postcolonialism. Attention will particularly be given to the concepts of "mimicry" and "the uncanny", being so related to each other and also comprehensively illustrated in the novel.

The novel opens with a party thrown "the year the prisons opened" (5) - 1990. The party is held by the Starks, white activists, to welcome their son who arrives from London, welcome black returnees from exile, and mark their wedding anniversary. In the airport, black returnees appear in the costumes of their different places of exile, "the black leather caps of East Germany, the dashikis of Tanzania, the Arab keffiyeh worn as a scarf" (36). This odd combination refutes the idea that we can firmly draw boundaries between individual nations. Hybridization has never stopped. Even though these natives were away from the colonizer, they have obviously imbibed "patches" and "rags" from other cultures. This initial situation of the colonizer acting as a hostess to natives changes by the end when the colonized manages to return the gaze.

Colonialist discourse stands on two basic assumptions, the superiority of the European colonizers (Eurocentrism), and the inferiority of the indigenous peoples they invade. Apparently the colonizers equated technical and military advancement with cultural and humanitarian advancement. They saw themselves as "the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper 'self'" turning the colonized into 'other'," and "therefore inferior to the point of being less than fully human" (Tyson, 420). Native cultures had been devalued for so long that ex-colonized were left with "a psychological inheritance of a negative self-image and alienation from their own indigenous cultures" (419). The colonizers consolidated the idea of their superiority by creating colonial subjects, i.e., "colonized persons who did not resist colonial subjugation because they were taught to believe in [the colonizer's] superiority and, therefore, in their own inferiority" (421). Colonial subjects are people with a double consciousness or vision. The way those subjects perceive themselves and the world is always divided between two contesting cultures: their

indigenous culture and that of the colonizer. Among colonial subjects are people who had the European culture forced upon them in exile like the Maqomas. The Maqomas’ lengthy stay in exile could be measured by the age of their daughter who was born away from home. The girl, except for color, is more European than African which is natural considering her being a production of the European society. Back home, she struggles to learn what was supposed to be her mother tongue. Mpho’s in-between position is reflected in the way she equally feels at home almost anywhere, in London, South Africa, her gogo’s Alexandra house and the Starks house. It is also obvious in her appearance. Her clothes show that she is an embodiment of the reconciliation between the past of resistance and the present. She “combined the style of Vogue with the assertion of Africa... Her hair, drawn back straightened and oiled to the gloss of European hair, was gathered on the crown and twisted into stiff dreadlocks, Congolese style” (49). Mpho is a

beauty of the kind created by the cross-pollination of history ...a style

of beauty [that] comes out of the clash between domination and

resistance...Mpho was a resolution in a time when this had not yet been

achieved by governments, conferences, negotiations...

of the struggle for power in the country which was hers.  
(49)

Bhabha explains that migrants have a peculiar position. Mpho was not literally forced into exile and for her, “migrancy [was] upwardly mobile” (Huddart, 52). Her hybrid identity is “marked by an uncanny ability to be at home anywhere, an ability that always might be the burden of having no home whatsoever” (53). She also exhibits what Bhabha describes as the “uncanny fluency of another’s language” (1994, 139), being so fluent in English and totally ignorant of what is supposed to be her native language (139). Sally laments: “that’s pretty humiliating...have your daughter taught your language as if it’s



French or German” (Gordimer, 1994, 50). Accordingly, Mpho leads a “half-life” as divided as the colonial identity, since these “figures of doubling and halving mark the experience ...of the migrant...in the same way as colonial identity loses its moorings through mimicry” (Huddart, 53).

As a result of belonging nowhere and everywhere, “Propriety and impropriety become confused and doubled” (Huddart, 54). A little shaken before having an abortion, Mpho, who sleeps in a T-shirt with a Mickey Mouse on it, runs to her grandmother’s house (gogo’s house). Gogo stands for the marginalized minority group who act as the last defense against the total demise of national culture. She is the nation-state trying to assert itself as a coherent unified body by “appealing to the historical durability of its identity” (Bhabha, 1994, 772). Bhabha suggests that “the nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor” (139). Among the strategies followed to achieve this form of self-authorization is “indoctrinating” the young in the indigenous traditions. Bhabha calls these strategies the discourse of “nationalist pedagogy” (772). Accordingly, the state simultaneously struggles to define itself in terms of its “contemporaneity” and also in terms of its relevance to the present world that does not have much resemblance to life in the past (772). For Mpho, gogo represents a “nostalgic ... vision of the community” who could offer an alternative to the one solution that Sibongil (Sally), her mother, imported from Western culture (Huddart, 52). The combination of Mpho, now with an African “doek tied over her fancy hair style... ironing on the kitchen table,” and her gogo “peeling potatoes into a basin on her spread lap,” is an uncanny apparition that confronts Sally with how far she has moved away from traditional African thinking and principles (Gordimer, 1994, 185). The uncanny “is a way of reviving... past life, of keeping it alive in the present” (Huddart, 53). This explains Sally’s furious reactions at the slightest hint of a repetition of the humiliations of the colonialist past. The uncanny

is not something that we can control or access directly-  
the feeling of uncanniness is essentially an involuntary  
recurrence of the old and familiar. This involuntary quality

suggests that the uncanny would better have remained hidden- what returns to haunt you is actually something you do not want to face again. (Huddart, 55)

In European clothes, a “hound’s-tooth tweed suit and knotted silk scarf,” Sally enforces European thinking and European ways of life against gogo’s weak resistance. “We are not white people,” (Gordimer, 1994, 185) is gogo’s sole defense and justification for her stance against the abortion of Mpho’s baby.

Sally’s westernized manners emphasize her departure from her Africanness and “her stance before all that was familiar to [Didymus]” (Gordimer, 186) and his mother. Gogo’s modest kitchen utensils pose a striking contrast to Sally’s modern European kitchen. These utensils, however, stood as Didymus’ “childhood reassurances against hunger in many lean times” (186, 187). They stand for the security of the nation and the warmth of his indigenous culture against the loneliness and coldness imparted by the kitchen of his wife where a cold meal left in the oven or the microwave informs him that his wife will not be home for lunch. Fried uses the uncanny to explain “the feeling we get when experiences of childhood that have been repressed return to disrupt our everyday existence” (Huddart, 52). It is also “what alienates or estranges us from whatever we thought was most properly our own” (56). For Didy, the return of these memories embodies the disturbing fact that there is no place now where he can feel at home. “The uncanny,” Bhabha suggests, is also the “unhomely” (1992, 144). He calls it “vernacular cosmopolitanism, which opens “ways of living at home abroad or abroad at home” (2000, 587). Sally states facts that powerfully drive her message home; “We’ve been alienated from what is ours... You (her Daughter) were robbed of your birth that should have been right here... Take back your language” (Gordimer, 1994, 50). Her impressive presence finally wins the battle and reminds Mpho “of what their long life away from home made of her” (186). Mpho, too, has her own form of hybridity that she should achieve. “Once home,” she realizes, “the new world had to be made of exile and home, both accepted” (186). This view agrees with Bhabha’s rejection of rigidly-defined identities built upon a national form. He does not entirely reject the idea of a national identity, but he suggests

that this identity should be open to change, to embrace “rags” and “scraps” from other cultures. “The strategy of self-authorization,” according to Bhabha, “coalesces, not around the antagonism between self and other (home vs abroad, us vs them), but through the constitution of an ideological subject whose withinness is itself divided” (Hale, 667). In this situation, Sally and Mpho act as colonial subjects who glorify the colonizer’s traditions against their own.

Gordimer presents situations where “self and other are locked together” (Huddart, 30), i.e., where the colonized forcefully looks back at the colonizer threatening his sense of self. She emphasizes the colonized’s agency through mimicry (30). Colonial subjects adopted the colonizer’s tastes and lifestyle which they were taught to find superior to their indigenous culture. From Bhabha’s view,

[C]olonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. (1994, 86)

Colonial ideologies stand on the assumption that “there is structural non-equivalence, a split between superior and inferior which explains why any one group of people can dominate another at all” (Huddart, 40). Colonial discourse, therefore, desires the colonized to be “extremely like the colonizer, but by no means identical” (40). A shred of difference should always be there as a reminder of the colonial mission. Bhabha maintains that mimicry “is not slavish imitation, and the colonized is not being assimilated into the supposedly dominant or even superior culture” (39). He believes that the agency of colonized peoples “has often been underplayed when it does not fit our usual expectations of violent anti-colonial opposition” (2). If the colonizer depends on this shred of difference to prove his superiority, then the strife to prove their sameness, on the part of the colonized, is a form of resistance, neither disavowal of the self nor slavish imitation. On the other hand, this desperate attempt to highlight and prove a distinction between himself and the colonized renders the former significantly anxious about his identity. This

anxiety reveals a gap in colonial discourse- “a gap that can be exploited by the colonized, the oppressed” (4).

Gordimer forwards situations where the colonized defies the colonizer and mocks the imperial institution. The position of Vera, the white activist, as a house owner and a generous hostess to blacks irritates Sibongile. Sibongile exhibits symbols of a double consciousness obviously as a direct result of her twenty years of exile. Back home, she prefers to spend the transitional period before she gets a house of her own as a guest in the house of her white friend rather than that of her mother-in-law. Again, she is infuriated at being given a room in a hotel that had previously been used by poor whites. It evoked uncanny memories of past humiliations. Double consciousness causes an unstable sense of self which is markedly heightened in exile. Sally is furious at the idea of being treated as a guest in her own country, yet, “she and Didy have moved away from that cheek-by-jowl existence they were at home in, the old days, Chiawelo” (Gordimer, 1994, 48). She has obviously been attuned to the European standards of everyday life which happen to be different from the past Chiawelo standards “when there was no choice” (48). The Starks’ house with two bathrooms, ensuring a degree of privacy even for guests, is chosen over the Alexandra house where gogo still has to “go out of the house across a yard to a toilet used by everyone round about” (51). The Starks’ house embodies many compromises that Sally reaches in her way to reestablish herself as a citizen of a South Africa that has to be equally the nation of both excolonizer and excolonized. She acts as a mirror that faces Vera with her reflection that is extremely, but not exactly like her. Gordimer here agrees with Bhabha’s view that the “key to the subversion of colonial discourse... can be found in the subversive mimesis of the colonialist by the colonized native” (King, 203). This view explains how Bhabha’s notion of hybridity serves to offer examples of “an anti-colonial subversion” from within (203). Gordimer emphasizes the colonized’s agency through mimicry which she introduces as a strategy of “subversion that turn[s] the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (Bhabha, 1985, 35). This poses the question of whether the colonizer deliberately uses mimicry as a means of resistance. Sally

and Vera meet twice for lunch, once while Sally had not yet established herself in her country and another after she decidedly had. In the first meeting she shows up “elegant in black suede boots draped to the knees” (Gordimer, 1994, 46) and instead of talking about the real issue, that of being treated as a guest in her own country, she shoots her indignation at the restaurant menu. Vera, feeling perfectly at home, asks for “whatever was the special for the day” (46). Sally, starving for the at-home feeling and pining for choice, scrutinizes the menu with the premeditated purpose of finding it short of what she craves-fish. The menu helps her open up and move on to the point: “Lousy; everything is lousy, not even possible to get what you wanted to eat” (47). But after Sibongile is established in a new house and also in the Executive Committee of the new government, she attempts to stand her grounds as the hostess in her country. She invites Vera to a restaurant of her choice where *she* feels at home and is perfectly known to the waiters. She wallows in exact, meticulous food selections and specifications and her orders convey confidence and power. Asserting her position as a hostess, when coffee arrives, Sally “arrange[s] the cups and pour[s] it measuring her words with the flow” (131). Sally is quite similar to Vera in purpose and mission but not identical. She is a female political activist who relegates her personal life, not her femininity, to the background. In this respect she is nothing like Vera who is so neutral to her femininity that she looks almost like a man. Advancing to the position she has longed for in the political life, Sibongile usurps the seat and the attention she is entitled to by advertising her “undocile femininity” (78). Her defiance of the male appropriation of power is evident “in the way she used her body: coming into conference... on high heels that clipped across the floor, no attempt to move discreetly” (78) in a conference room or a political discussion. Sibongil causes a stir in the political life similar to the “stir of legs and seats as perfume marked the progress of her breasts and hips to her place” (78).

Sibongile and her husband adopt and present two different attitudes towards mimicry and also various degrees of adapting to the new circumstances. Separation from the homeland causes the colonized to feel caught between two cultures while belonging to

neither. The colonized finds himself “arrested in a psychological limbo that results not merely from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which one lives” (Tyson, 421). Didymus is an embodiment of this phenomenon to which postcolonial critics refer to as “unhomeliness” (421). To be “unhomed” is different from being “homeless” (421). To be unhomed “is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis had made you a psychological refugee, so to speak” (Tyson, 421). In exile, Didy spends twenty years struggling for the rights of his people risking his life and liberty. However, he comes back home to a country that adopted a way of life very similar to that of the ex-colonizer. In a drastic opposition to his expectations, he is relegated to the sidelines while his wife, also unexpectedly, soars to the heights of black political life. This variance in political status and switch of roles between Sally and Didymus is also reflected in the details of their everyday life. In the mornings, Sally “would be snatching up files, briefcase, keys...while [Didy] was dipping bread in coffee” (75). When she comes back, the “thick atmosphere of the world of discussion and negotiation came from her hair and skin” (75) and Didymus “scented it as a dog sniffs the shoes of its master to trace where he’s been” (75). In bed, Sally’s “body beside him invaded the whole bed” (125).

Didymus is “a time warp” (39). He is imprisoned in his old self as a fighter and cannot transcend the past. Sally is disgusted at his reluctance to insert himself in the new life which is made of the past and the present, of black and white. Accordingly, his “whitening curls sat like the peruke of a seventeenth- century courtier worn stately on his black head” (39). What actually infuriates Sally is Didy’s “slavish imitation” of the colonizers’ ways in order to gain their regard. In spite of his long history as a fighter, Didy fails to stand his grounds when colonization comes to an end. Starting her political career, Sibongile is totally against compromise. The reasons Didymus gives for imitating whites prove that for him mimicry does not transcend “slavish imitation.”

Why do you think we turn up in suits and ties instead of the Mao

shirts and dashikis the leaders in countries up North wear? So that the Boers on the other side of the table will think there is a code between us and them, We've discarded our Africanness, our blackness is hidden under the suit-and-tie outfit, it's not going to jump out at them and demand. (77)

Sally's response reflects that she adopts mimicry as a means of resistance and that the change of her appearance or ways of life is inevitable since all cultures are apt to change, even without colonization, as a result of cultural contact. According to Lois Tyson, many postcolonial critics argue that "postcolonial identity is necessarily a dynamic, constantly evolving *hybrid* of native and colonial cultures (422)." They even assert that "*hybridity*... does not consist of a stalemate between two warring cultures but is rather a productive, exciting, positive force in a shrinking world that is itself becoming more and more culturally hybrid" (422). Sally vehemently contradicts Didymus' opinion on the ground that these items of etiquette should be neglected on purpose to convey a bold, clear message informing ex-colonizers that "there is no respect due to them" (Gordimer, 1994, 76). Sally, however, appreciates the value and convenience of a message conveyed by clothes and never fails to dress herself appropriately for a formal occasion or "public exposure" (182). When invited to a reception party by one of the new embassies opened in Pretoria, she appears "confident and attractively...in African robes and turban" which she wears, not out of personal nationalistic motives, but "for such occasions." (238). Worried as she is about the sudden disappearance of her daughter, Sally still finds time and energy to dress herself properly for an important appointment. She consents to the idea that there should be "nothing showy" (183) about her, but finds it part of her duty as a politician to be "a walking billboard for home products" by wearing garments and jewellery designed and made in their own country" (238). Still, she has to reach a compromise by meeting the expectations of all the parts concerned. Her appearance reflects her successful hybrid identity when she matches "carved wooden bracelets", African style, to "tailored skirt and jacket" (238). She considers it necessary to neglect her personal

taste that “must be subordinate to the cause” (183).

Sally is not as tough as she usually shows herself. Like her husband, she is haunted by insecurities that are related to the past of colonialism. She is contradicted on her way home by black female street sweeper who works as an alter ego facing her with “the probability that gave her an internal cringe” (Gordimer, 1994, 52). As Freud confirms, “as soon as something happens in our lives that seems to confirm ... old discarded beliefs, we experience a sense of the uncanny” (2003, 154). Sally well knows she could have been that woman. There is a definite sense of “the return of the dead”(154). Adults usually arrive at a proper sense of self, but for Freud, “this self never gets rid of...inappropriate...beliefs or attachments...the uncanny... remains a partial presence in what is appropriate” (2003, 154). “Waken suddenly, shaken alive into another light, another existence. Sally is drawn over to her other self, standing there, the one she started out with, this apparition” (Gordimer, 52).

Oupa is another example of a colonial subject whose double consciousness is heightened by the forced double separation from his homeland, once to the Robin Island and another from his village to the city in search of a job. Back home, Oupa migrates so swiftly between identities. In the city, he is a free, young man who befriends his white boss and political activist, Vera, and falls for Mpho, the London girl. Vera blames herself for not connecting his westernized appearance to an affair with Mpho. “When the young man came to her office wearing a new lumbar jacket, brown suede...and asked ...whether a current play was to be recommended”,she should have divined for herself that that London taste was a sign of a relationship with the westernized girl (Gordimer, 1994, 103). Surprisingly Vera discovers the other face of Oupa when she meets his village wife and kids who are still heart and soul immersed in the indigenous culture. Oupa does not seem to strike a balance between the present and the past and it is not a coincidence that the flat he takes in the city had been occupied twenty years before by a victim of racism. He himself ends a victim of colonialism and the lack of ability to form a new self based on a hybrid culture. So, hybridity could face challenges within the construction of the same person “whose withinness is itself divided”



between two cultures, choices of self and other (Hale, 667).

Oupa's wife represents the colonized's struggle to negate the colonizer's stereotypical opinion of the indigenous culture. Fastidiously cleaning their houses and kitchen utensils, black women are actually striving to negate the idea that poverty and dirtiness are equivalent to blackness. Consequently, a black woman removes the blood and the remains of a human brain from her doorstep with the same logic she scrubs away the remains of a cooked cattle brain from her pan, thus erasing the material evidence of a devastating attack of which she herself is a victim.

On the other side stands the colonizer whose response reflects the hesitation he experiences in reaction to the colonized's solid returning of the gaze. Bhabha always raises the issue of the colonized's agency. He maintains that "objectified figures of the colonized are more than just objects" (Huddart, 45) and returning the gaze shakes the colonizer's sense of self by reminding him of that fact. Bhabha argues that neither the black person nor the white are complete in terms of their sense of self when it is considered within the context of the colonial discourse. In one of Vera's parties an English man shows up "in a catfish-patterned dashiki" while a "small black woman wearing the western antithesis of her white husband's outfit satin trousers and a string of pearls in the neck of her tailored shirt, stood by looking up now and then to others in the manner of one watching the impression he was making" (Gordimer, 1994, 145). The woman explains that his "clothes does not make him a black man" and that she

is his party piece...so they can be impressed he's married a black.

Don't you know I'm his passport? I'm his credentials as a white

foreigner. Because he can produce me, it means he's on the right side

That gets him in everywhere. (Gordimer, 1994, 145)

The behavior of that white young man shows that he is experiencing difficulties regarding his sense of self. He needs the support of the colonized to appear whole in front of a post apartheid South Africa

and ironically it is he who mimics the colonized, not only in appearance, but also in his political tendencies. In his “Of Mimicry and Man”, Bhabha uses a psychoanalytic concept “the scopic drive”, to explain mimicry as a visual strategy, thus connecting it with the stereotype. The scopic drive highlights one of Lacan’s concepts, “camouflage”, “which refers to blending in with something in the background that none the less is not entirely there itself” (Huddart, 46). Bhabha declares that he uses these psychoanalytic concepts to clarify how mimicry exceeds the colonial authority. The visual aspect of mimicry proves that colonial and racist discourses cannot be separated, something which he reiterates by the rewriting of his famous formulation: “almost the same but not quite” which became “almost the same but not white” (Bhabha, 1994, 89).

Mimicry, as Bhabha explains it, is “an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners and ideas” (39). In this way mimicry is also “a form of mockery” (29), not servitude since exaggeration is also a sort of difference. Bhabha’s postcolonial theory is therefore “a comic approach to colonial discourse” (Huddart, 39). In his theory he mocks and undermines the pretensions and allegations of colonialism. Zeph Rapulana is an example of mimicking the colonizer aware of his insecurities. He always appears neatly handsome in elegant European clothes. His status in his rural community is secured by “neat clothes” (Gordimer, 122). This appearance, however, infuriates Odendaal, the white farmer, who considers it boldness and an attempt on the part of a black to be his equal. Odendaal actually feels insecure at seeing a black, so similar to him, shaking awry the beliefs that justify his position as a colonizer and with them his sense of self. Rapulana shakes Odendaal’s selfhood by not conforming to the stereotypical picture he cherishes for a black, his preconceived picture of the colonized. As a colonizer, Odendaal wants his stereotypes to be fixed.

Vera, the white activist embodies Gordimer’s undergoing a “phase of increasing literary self-consciousness” (Head, 46). In other words, Vera is striving to answer Gordimer’s “perennial question: where do whites fit in?” (46). In this novel the question is posed in two parts, “where do whites fit in? and where blacks?” (46). The

division of the question is itself a comment on a hitherto straggling hybridity. Hybridity should not indicate an exchange of positions or a replacement of the colonizer by the colonized. Thus Gordimer employs “technical adaptations that...run in tandem with her investigations of the adjustments required of all groups in the new power-sharing, with its attendant political complexities, compromises, and ambiguities” (46). This aspect of hybridity is explored through the themes of “space” and “sexuality.” The theme of space is “a major preoccupation of Gordimer’s” (47). In previous novels her presentation of geopolitics has been wrapped in symbolic or mythological hints, but in *None to Accompany Me*, issues are presented more literally by the outspoken Vera who, nonetheless, is equally capable of denouncing the white extremists’ idea of “ultimate laager” (47). She explores the theme of rural and urban control as “an index of repression” and as “a focus of political resistance” since apartheid was based on “zoning” (47). Gordimer’s stance is that finding a utopian impulse in the values of indigenous black community, should not “eschew the actualities of deprivation in the peripheries of South African urbanization” (47). The idea that a hybrid culture is still out of reach is emphasized by Gordimer’s ample reference to who should control a certain space and whether this is done in harmony with other bits and rags of everyday life. Space and architecture is one domain where blacks fail to achieve mimicry to the extent of “almost the same, but not quite.” Practical politics and how it is translated into tangible change in the life of blacks can be reflected in the treatment of urbanization.

Huddart maintains that psychoanalysis is so vital to Bhabha’s work because “postcolonial criticism is itself a project aiming to analyze the repressed ideas and histories that allowed the West to dominate so much of the world” (52). He explains saying that “the colonized nations offer striking resources that transform our rigid sense of the grand narratives of modernity and... an uncanny echo of histories that modernity might prefer had remained hidden” (52). The “uncanny,” in the case of Gordimer’s female characters, seems to act as a positive element endowing them with the power to move forward, in the case of Sally, or confront and reform the past, in the case of

Vera. The uncanny is connected to what Freud calls “repetitious compulsion,” which refers to “the way the mind repeats traumatic experiences in order to deal with them” (55). In this sense, the feeling of “uncanniness is... the feeling you get when you have a guilt-laden past which you should really confront, even though you would prefer to avoid it” (55). When whites try to absolve themselves of past injustices by offering blacks flats in classy suburbs evidence of these injustices prove indelible. The confrontation between Sibongil and her mother-in-law, when the latter denounces black traditions thereby announcing an affinity with western ways of life is highly diminished in value when examined in context. The encounter takes place in a

house with its broken-pillardstoeps and dust- dried pot-plants, battered relic of real brick and mortar with two diamond-paned rotting windows from the time when Alex was the reflection of out-of-bounds white respectability, yearned for, imitated, now standing alone on ash-coloured earth surrounded by shacks, and what had once been an aspiration to a patch of fenced suburban garden now a pile of rubbish where the street dumped its beer cans and pissed, and the ribcages of scavenging dogs moved like bellows. (Gordimer, 1994, 50)

The past keeps coming back haunting the present and moulding it in the very shapes that the guilt- ridden person is striving to forget or at least avoid. The reason that Bhabha uses the uncanny is that “it is possible to compare the childhood of an individual with the beginnings of a modern western history: in both cases, something is repressed but inevitably breaks through the veneer of civilization” (Huddart, 52). The neighborhoods where Gogo and Oupa live is also an example of the failure to create a hybridity between the European modes of structure and the African ways of life. The ample description of squatter camps and the neighbourhoods where black people live is a proof of this failure. Mimicry fails in the field of architecture when it depends on “the adoption of trappings without attention to the material

underpinnings” (Head, 48). The projects of housing blacks in neat apartments built after European styles collapse proving Gordimer’s rejection of the imposition of Eurocentric modes of art and architecture on the realities of African life. Gordimer’s definite rejection of Eurocentrism is also reflected in Vera’s anxiety at the end of the novel at a possible romance between her grandson and Mpho although she assures him that her fears are not related to their difference in colour. The writer is obviously concerned lest certain European cultural modes should be “potential limitations on black African experience if not put to some new hybridized purpose”(52).

The way Vera reacts to the gradual replacement of whites by blacks is quite consistent with her attitude towards apartheid. Apart of Vera feels that that house of hers was “acquired dishonestly.” It was her “loot by divorce” (Gordimer, 1994, 304). It came to her through her first in-laws who did not know whether “they...were part of Europe or part of Africa.” (304) Vera’s hesitant sense of self makes her convert the patio “meant for white tea parties... to a study where strategies for restoring blacks to their land were worked out.” (293). She allowed the Maqomas to “pragmatically [make] use, as of right-and this was recognized unembarrassedly by the Starks- of the advantages [the house of] the white couples had” (39). Alone in the house, Vera feels they (herself and the house) are like “old partners in a crime” (304). To compensate for this feeling and restore her sense of self, Vera gives up her position as a hostess to become the tenant of a small annex to the house of a black activist and capitalist-ZephRapulana. On Sundays, she serves him, an act rich in symbolic value,

for it rebalances the century-old injustice the blacks have suffered, and puts everybody in his or her right place- the black, who is the original owner of the land, as the landlord;  
the white, who is a guest and passerby in Africa, as his tenant.(Vivan)

According to Dominic Head, Gordimer’s heroines prove that “a public role can be allied to personal need and expression” (49). The expression of Vera’s sexuality “fits her political commitment. This

kind of politics of the body has always been important for Gordimer, and it has, of course, a special relevance in South African fiction” (50). In the 1950s South Africa, trans-racial relationships were banned, so exploring these relations sheds light on the issues of resistance and hybridity. Free, especially adulterous, sexual relationships in Gordimer have a liberating influence on the involved parties. The utter failure of the Oupa/Mpho episode proves that hybridity could also be a black- black issue especially for blacks who spent considerable time away from their native community exiled in different places. Head maintains that throughout her career, “Gordimer has been preoccupied with how such cultural hybridity can be achieved for postcolonial Africa in general and South Africa in particular” (50). On the other hand Vera’s intimate relation with Otto Abarbanal inspired feelings of pride and freedom, but never betrayal while it lasted. This intimacy helps her overcome her revulsion at the knowledge that he is a “Hitler baby” and helps him exorcise the Nazi experience. For Gordimer, “sexual expression and transgression flout the biological policies intended in the racist social structure of South Africa; and the biological hybridity implied in free sexuality indicates, by extension, a cultural hybridity” (50), in agreement with Bhabha’s view about the hybridity of cultures as a “mixedness” or even “impurity of cultures” (Huddart, 4). He applies this “mixedness or “impurity” to the sense of identity for colonized and colonizer. He explains that as subjects “we both create and are created” because our identities are constructed partially by the choices made by other people whose identities are also constructed by the choices we make (14).

Often in Gordimer’s novels “political commitment goes hand-in-hand with free (especially adulterous) sexual expression” (Head, 50). Considering the failure of the Mpho-Oupa episode, which, certainly not haphazardly, is also situated in *One-Twenty-One*, this free expression could be seen to denote a failing rather than a successful hybridity. This is another instance where the “the domestic and historical spheres invade each other” and “uncannily, the private and public become part of each other” (Bhabha, 1994, 9). Having an extramarital affair while unaware of the hardships of black neighbours

indicates a separation rather than a merging of cultures. It almost empties the episode of positive significance and again raises the issue of “almost the same but not white,” as Bhabha rewrites his statement (89). Vera receives uncanny signals from One-Twenty-One that remind her of past injustices on the domestic and historical levels. That flat is where she betrayed her husband and spent her time neglecting her daughter who grows up into a man-hating lesbian. Unaware of “the squalor of the subletting above Otto’s bed,” Vera almost echoes Mehring of *The Conservationist* who embodies a “parallel between geographical and sexual acquisition” (Head, 51). This idea is further strengthened when a parallel is also made between Oupa’s failure to keep One-Twenty-One and the fiasco of his extramarital affair with the westernized girl. Freud is specific when he explains how the uncanny works in such cases when a guilt-ridden person is forced to confront a reminder of the past. For him, “any repression is necessarily incomplete, and so any past is just about to break through into the present. For psychoanalysis, the traces of past beliefs and experiences remain present in the mind” (Huddart, 55). Before she has to confront all this Vera perhaps believes that she is a self-sufficient person, but she cannot be unless she confronts the past and builds her hybrid identity not excluding the colonial experience. In this sense the uncanny is “something that might inspire us to reevaluate our identities [it] opens a space for us to reconsider how we have come to be who we are” (65).

Concluding her novel, Gordimer, gives her statement about the wished for hybridity indicating that man has been striving to achieve it for much longer than he thinks. She hopes “the violent brotherhood of Cain and Abel can be transformed into the other proclaimed brotherhood only if it is possible to devise laws to bring this about” (1994, 316). White and black, East and West should find new ways to deal with each other on equal bases putting in mind that they do not have to be the same or almost the same. Barbara Temple-Thurston indicates that according to the novel, “cultural as well as social harmony is [still] extremely difficult to achieve” (Sakamoto, 3). ItalaVivan, however, believes that the situation that Gordimer creates at the end with her white heroine keeping her limits as a tenant of the

annex to a black man’s house is a good start. This situation “allows her to build a new and original position in the South Africa world by putting the white writer (and her heroine) at its margin. It is as if the white intellectual had understood that that it is now time for her to listen to blacks and be at their service” (Vivan). The important thing at the end is that Gordimer finds it possible to move beyond the restrictions of race and colour in discussing her characters especially the young. The classifications of black and white, oppressed and oppressor have no future in South Africa. Everyone is everywhere doing everything. Ivan and Ben (white characters) move to London where they fit better, but so does Mpho. Adam, son and grandson of white people, leaves London to Africa where he seems to blossom. The boy lives his life beautifully dating girls regardless of race and almost innocent to the knowledge of black and white. The writer and her characters seem to have developed the ability to move beyond the past.

## **Bibliography**



## Nabila Ali

---

- Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin, Helen. (eds). (1995). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.
- (eds). (1998). *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. NY: Routledge.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- . (1990). *Nations and Narration*. New York: Routledge.
- . "Art and National Identity: A Critics' Symposium." *Art in America* (September), 79(9), 82.
- . (1991). "The Third Space: Interview with HomiBhabha." Jonathan Rutherford (ed.) *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 207- 21.
- . (1992). "The World and the Home." *Social Texts* 10, pp. 31-2, 141-53.
- . (1983). "The Other Question." *Screen*. (November—December 1983), 24(6), 18–36.
- . (1995). "In a Spirit of Calm Violence." GyanPrakash (ed.) *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 326–44.
- . (2000). "On Minorities: Cultural Rights." *Radical Philosophy* 100 (March/April), 3–6.
- , Breckenridge, A. and Pollock, Sheldon. (2000). "Cosmopolitanisms." *Public Culture* 12(3) (Fall), 577–89.
- . (2002). "Making difference: HomiK.Bhabha on the legacy of the culture wars." *Artforum*(April), accessed at <http://www.findarticles.com/cf—dls/m0268/8-41/101938552/pl/article.jhtml> on 5 December 2003.
- Bribk, Andre, Coetzee, J.M. (ed). (1987). *A Land Apart, A Contemporary South African Reader*. London: Penguin.
- Brownley, Martine Watson. (2003). *Deferrals of Domain, Contemporary Women Novelists and the State*. New York: St. Martin Press.
- Clingman, Stephen. (1992). *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer, History from the Inside*. Second Edition. U of Massachusetts P.
- Diala, Isidora. (2005). "Nadine Gordimer: The Mandela Myth and Black Empowerment in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *English in Africa*, October, 32, No. 2, PP. 35-54.
- Dimitriu, Ileana. (October, 2006). "PostcolonizingGordimer: The Ethics of Beyond and Significant Peripheries in the Recent Fiction." *English in Africa* 33, No. 2, 159-180.
- Edgar, Andrew and Sedgwick, Peter. (2002). *The Key Thinkers*. USA: Routledge.
- Freud, Sigmond. (1919 [2003]). *The Uncanny*. David McLintock (Trans.) *The Uncanny*, London: Penguin.
- Foucault, Michel. (1970). *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. A.S.Smith. London: Tavistock.
- Gordimer, Nadine. (1988). *The Essential Gesture, Writing Politics and Places*. New

- York: Knopf.
- Gordimer, Nadine. (1991). *Living in Hope and History: Notes from Our Century*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- . (1994). “History of the Human Heart, Review of NAM by Nadine Gordimer.” *Weekly Mail and Guardian (Literary Supplement)*, September.
- Gordimer, Nadine. (1994). *None to Accompany Me*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Hale, Dorothy, J. (2006). *The Novel, An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*. USA: Blackwell.
- Huddart, David. (2006). *Homi K. Bhabha*. NY: Routledge.
- Huggan, Graham. (2008). *Postcolonialism Across the Disciplines 1, Interdisciplinary Measures, Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies*. UK: Liverpool UP.
- Kakutani, Michiko. (2008). “Learning to Lose the Self in a Cause.” *The New York Times Book Review*. (September 16).
- Kelly, Mark. (2003). “Racism, Nationalism and Biopolitics: Foucault’s Society Must be Defended.” *Contretemps 4*, September, 2004, PP 58- 70.
- King, Richard. (1999). *Orientalism and Religion, Postcolonial Theory, India and ‘The Mystic East*. New York: Routledge.
- Macey, David. (2000). *Frantz Fanon: a biography*. New York: Picador USA.
- Madsen, Deborah L. (2003). (ed). *Beyond the Borders, American Literature and Post-Colonial Theory*. London: Pluto Press.
- McBride, Christopher Mark. (2004). *The Colonizer Abroad, American writers on Foreign Soil, 1846-1912*. NY: Routledge.
- McQuillan, Martin, Macdonald, Graeme, Purves, Robin and Thomson, Stephen. (eds). (1999). *Post- Theory, New Directions in Criticism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Moller, Karin. (2003). “Writing (on) the Wall: Ethics, Literature and Nadine Gordimer.” *European Journal of English Studies*. Vol. 7, No. 2, PP. 165, 175.
- Rattansi, Ali. (2007). *Racism, A Very Short Introduction*. NY: Oxford UP.
- Rice, Philip and Patricia Waugh. (2001). *Modern Literary Theory*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. USA: Oxford University Press.
- Rivkin, Julie and Michael Ryan. (2004). *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Second Edition. USA: Blackwell.
- Royle, Nicholas. (2003). *The Uncanny*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Robbins, Bruce. (1998). “Comparative Cosmopolitanisms.” *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*. (ed). P. Cheah and B. Robbins. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, pp 246-64.
- Phillips, Caryl. “The Beat of History.” *The New Republic* (October 24, 1994) Farrer, Straus and Givoux, 34-36.
- Said, Edward W. (1978 [1995]). *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Penguin.
- Sakamoto, Toshiko. (Spring, 2001). “Black Women in Nadine Gordimer’s *None to Accompany Me*.” *Africa Updates Archives*. Vol. 111, Issue 2: South Africa.

**Nabila Ali**

---

[http://www.ccsu.edu/afstudy/upd8\\_2.htm](http://www.ccsu.edu/afstudy/upd8_2.htm)

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/02/01/home/gordimer-accompany.html>

Sпивак, GayatriChakravorty. (1999). *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason, Towards A History of the Vanishing Present*. London: Harvard University Press.

Thurston, Barbara Temple. (1999). *Nadine Gordimer Revisited*. New York: Twayne Publishers.

Tyson, Lois. (2006). *Critical Theory Today*. Second Edition. USA: Routledge.

Vivan, Itala. (1997). "Black in the White's Gaze: The Presence of the African in South African Literary Texts in English 1883-1994." [Online]. Retrieved February 15, 2008 from

[www.club.it/culture/culture97/itala.vivan97/note.vivan97.html](http://www.club.it/culture/culture97/itala.vivan97/note.vivan97.html)

Young, Robert JC. (2001). *Postcolonialism, An Historical Introduction*. USA: Blackwell.