

Exploring Diasporic Struggles and Cultural Tensions in Nadine Gordimer's "Six Feet of the Country"

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Abstract

The topic of mapping culture has long been a source of intense discussion as it has connection to language, culture, behaviour, identity, name and social storytelling. A man is being pushed into the deep valley of destruction because of his desire and greediness in man's nature. As we the human beings are against natural resources, environmental issues are getting worse every day. The most severe causes are seen in their tyranny, low pay, unemployment, and servitude. African writers have documented cultural concerns, identity crisis, racial issues, and soil improvement in their literature. The main factor is the mindless copying of western practices. Here, Nadine Gordimer's "Six Feet of the Country" has brought up each of these concerns.

Keywords: Cultural issues, environmental and racial problems.

Introduction

Alfred Nobel once said that Nadine Gordimer has been of very great benefit of humanity. Gordimer, a South African writer and political activist who was born on November 20, 1923, won the 1991 Nobel Prize in Literature. The moral and psychological difficulties of her racially divided native Africa, as well as moral and racial issues such as apartheid in South Africa, have long been subjects of discussion in her literature. She joined the African National Congress and actively fought for the cause of HIV/AIDS and been active part of the anti – apartheid movement.

Gordimer, the white South African political novelist, began to write in her teens. She has published three novels, ten short story collections, and a number of non- fiction writings. Gordimer spoke on behalf of black writers who were main targets of bans and court cases.

The majority of Gordimer's readership consists of white elites from abroad and locally, which is actually paradoxical. It has given that her writing has consistently challenged the present's confines and subsystem of privilege. In part, this is because the audiences are the ones who have access to Gordimer's work due to the imbalances apartheid has created, as well as the tradition and intricate literary framework that she writes within.

Gordimer penned in support of the unprivileged. However, the impoverished masses lacked access to her writings. She shares the experiences of the common people while illuminating the quandaries and decisions. Her characters are complex and multifaceted, with their choices revealing more about them than by their professed identities and faiths. Her first novel was *The Lying Days* (1953). Few other novels are *Occasion for Loving* (1963), *A Guest of Honour* (1971) which won The James Tait Black Memorial Prize. *The Conservationist* (1974) which won the Booker Prize, *Burger's Daughter* (1979), *July's People* (1981). *The House Gun* (1998), *The Pickup* (2002) and *Get a Life* (2005). On the whole, the paper analyses the Problems of Diaspora and Culture in Nadine Gordimer's short story "Six Feet of the Country".

The word Diaspora means "Scattering or dispersion". It is the dispersal of the individuals or migration of the people away from their ancestral areas. Actually, it refers to the act of leaving one's country of origin and relocating to a temporary or other nation. As old as human history is migration. As described in the Bible, the Israelites' flight from Egypt to Canaan, the Promised land. Every day in various parts of the world, there are exoduses of various kinds and purposes.

In the history of the world, the term "diaspora" refers to the Jewish people's dispersion over the globe, away from their ancestral land. The Greek word "diasperian" - etymological source of the phrase "diaspors". The word "Dia" means "across" and "sperian" means "to sow or scatter seeds". The term diaspora now refers to the displaced communities that have been uprooted from their native country due to migration, immigration or exile. Another highlighting movement in history is Black African diaspora, which started with the slave trade in in sixteenth century.

Through the notorious middle passage, West Africans were forcibly removed from their homeland and dispersed into the new world- North America, south America and the Caribbean. Since from that period the phrase "middle passage" has been used metaphorically to describe all these kinds of forced relocations. Diaspora, in today's rapidly changing world, describes the displaced individual and the communities that migrate across the world. It serves as a catch- all term for any departures from one's home land or culture.

"Six Feet of the Country" by Nadine Gordimer is a freakish encounter between South Africa's Blacks and Whites. It depicts the way of life native Rhodesians, who work as labourers for the White man. These individuals are referred to as illegal immigrants, and without a permit, they

aren't allowed inside the nation. The plot revolves around a farm laborer named Petrus, who's the protagonist of the tale. Who battles white officials to bury his deceased brother properly. In this story, immigrant experience is the main facets of the postcolonial diaspora topic.

It is matter of preference in a personal way to be diasporic. The life's path turns into an investigation of one's concept of 'self' and a 'search' for the emancipation of human spirit. As there are people, there are unique and many different possibilities. The characters that are involved in this short story offer a key to deciphering diasporans' quest. They do have varying perspectives on indigenous people and their immigration status. These individuals migrate in order to forge new identities, establish growth areas, settle cultural disputes and create new cultures.

The story's narrator and his wife, Lericé are the farmers residing ten miles outside Johannesburg. The farm is looked after by Lericé and her spouse is a partner in thriving luxury - travel agency. The narrator is not accustomed to that scent of the animals and fowls that Lericé breeds. Due to that reason, narrator has little interest over managing the property. The term "picannins", which translates to "Black child", refers to the farm lads who work with Lericé. These boys are Native Americans, entered into the nation without any authorization. So they were referred as the undocumented immigrants.

The narrator states:

Out in the country, even ten miles out, life is better than that. In the country, there is a lingering remnant of the pre-transitional stage; our relationship with the blacks is almost feudal. They brew their sour beer without the fear police raids. In fact, we've always rather prided ourselves that the poor devils have nothing to fear, being with us. (117)

Lericé with all the skill of a lady, who has never given birth, looks after these native youngsters. Whenever they fall sick, she treats everyone- adults and children alike – like newborns.

Albert, a worker arrives at one winter's night to break the awful news. In the farm, a young man's deceased body is discovered. This is the very first time the farm has experienced an event of this nature. Pneumonia is the cause for the boy's death. The farm was unfamiliar with dead boy. Not even a single person was aware of his identity. Even neither Lericé nor her husband. They subsequently come to know that the deceased unfamiliar dead body was the sibling of Petrus, a

farm worker. From Rhodesia he had come to Johannesburg in search of employment. As a result, he had been ill at his brother Petrus's hut. From his arrival three days' prior, having stuck in a chill from sleeping on his way of journey.

According to the narrator, "Rhodesian natives are barred from entering the Union unless they have a permit: the young man was an illegal immigrant" (119). To employ themselves these natives, risk their life by residing in the country without any legal permission. They face imprisonment or death if they are found. Even from the proprietors, who give them a job are given the same treatment. Gordimer describes these immigrants' lives in a pitiful manner:

...several times before, a number of relatives must have walked the Seven or eight slum townships that is their Egoli, City of Gold – the Bantu name for Johannesburg. It was merely as matter of getting such a man to lie on our farm until a job could be found with someone who would be glad to take risk of prosecution for employing an illegal immigrant in exchange for the services of someone as yet untainted by the city. (119)

The information was reported to the police and health authorities about the young man's death and then the body was sent for post – mortem. A few days later, it was announced by the officials that the boy died of pneumonia and then the body had been properly disposed. For Petrus, who wanted to give his dead brother a dignified funeral, it was such a huge shock. However, it was too late to go get his corpse, since they already buried his body. Lerice tells Petrus, "You see, he was a stranger. They knew he wasn't from here, and they didn't know he had some of his people here, so they thought they must bury him. It was difficult to make a pauper's grave sound like a privilege" (121). She also tells him that "white men have everything, can do anything, if they don't, it is because they won't" (122).

Unfortunately, retrieving of the body was not insurmountable. It was little strange, but they couldn't decline the authorization for the exhumation because the requirements of hygiene had been met. However, the process of the exhumation cost twenty pounds with the undertaker's fees in addition to it. The cost of the process was huge for the boys to afford. Nevertheless, by some sort they managed to get money from their pals who do work in farm. The narrator everywhere, I thought, who stint them – selves the decencies of life in order to ensure decencies of death" (123).

It had taken all of the time for the authorities and the undertaker to finalize the decision for

transferring the body after it had been buried for two weeks. Finally, the coffin was given to Petrus. An ancient cart, two donkeys, few ladies and men, the lads from the farm, and Petrus's aged father all helped to organize the funeral procession. There aroused gossips and confusion from Petrus's father while the funeral procession was taking place. As the body was taken in coffin, he cries out "my son wasn't heavy" (123). As his son is a lean guy and he finds that coffin to be heavy. The crowd is getting shocked by the old man. Everybody surrounded there thought, he was mad, but they need to put their ears to him. The old man started to take the lid off using both of his own hands and the people surrounded there helped him out.

There was a great shock for them as they opened the coffin, they found that it was a body of a stranger, whom they haven't seen before: In the coffin was someone no one had ever seen before: a heavy built, rather light – skinned native with a neatly stitched scar on his forehead – perhaps from a blow in a brawl that had also dealt him some other slower-working injury, which killed him" (126). In order to get the right body narrator quarrelled with the authorities to give away the correct deceased body. By their own mistake in a laconic style, the authorities were shocked on it. To put anonymous dead confusion in a correct way they were helpless over it. The only issue that was going on was they didn't recognize the right identity of the deceased person. They tell the narrator, "We are still making inquiries. There! Lift up the sheets, look for him – your poultry boy's brother. There are so many black faces – surely one will do?" (127)

The highest level of discrimination of racial prejudice against Native Americans is the statement which was made by the authorities. Even they face discrimination in the time of death as they got discriminated when they lived. Since nobody was very much sure where Petrus brother's deceased body was, they could not recover his body.

Somewhere in a graveyard as uniform as a housing scheme, somewhere under a number that didn't belong to him, or in the medical school, perhaps, laboriously reduced to layers of muscles and strings of nerve? Good –ness knows. He had no identity in this world anywhere. (127)

Conclusion

From this short story, Gordimer illustrates the existence of the immigrants who fight to lead their life under White man's domination. They denied their rights and these people are regarded as illegal. In the tales of Gordimer, it does not lead to a proper, clear resolution. She said in an

interview with Hermione Lee that each and every occurrence that takes place has its own consequences, which means that story's endings are never definitive. She has learnt that writers who write only present a small portion of the human history. There is no resolution. She says, "All you can do is to contribute your bit of insight. You pick up a life and when you created it, watched it, seen it move this way or that, you put it down there but, it doesn't end there" (Gordimer. Int. with Lee 4). This shows the similar view of Virginia Woolf who said that she was offering 'a slice of life' in her words.

As Gordimer speaks about the dispersed or scattered natives in South Africa, she can be considered as the Diasporic writer. Her writings inspect the atrocities that are happening in South Africa against the Blacks. Her works "bore the torch to stir the European elite to see the South African reality" (Indrani 122). In this short story, *Six Feet of the Country* the narrator represents Gordimer who stands against and fights for their cause of Natives in South Africa.

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