

## Women Portrayal In The Select Fiction Of Nadine Gordimer

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### Abstract:

Apartheid has been studied from different perspectives, and many writers from South Africa picked up on it, intending to reveal its heinous face to the world. However, one author, apart from disclosing the horrendous front of Apartheid, set a trend of empowering women by handing over the bonfire of revolution to the women. In 1979 while openly commenting on the woman's role in the struggle against Apartheid, an activist, Thenjiwe Mtshozi, said, "the problem is that black women are not yet politicized enough to realize that we are in a state of war. Unfortunately, the men have developed, but the women have been left behind". (Goodwin 22). In such a state of chaos, Nadine Gordimer lit the lamp of hope for the women living in racially affected states by offering her female characters the role of a political struggle beyond the horizon of colour bias. In 1979, she published her masterpiece *Burger's Daughter*, the period during which the second wave of feminism was at its peak in the west and demanded their sexual rights and domestic rights and, along with it, condemning patriarchy on several issues. Over many years, women of South Africa were deprived and omitted from providing her a political space, but Nadine Gordimer impasse woman's deprivation through her works *Burger's Daughter* and *My Son's Story*. The present paper discusses the woman's role in organizing the protests against Apartheid by analysing it in Deleuze and Guattari's theory of Deterritorialization.

**Keywords:** Women, Apartheid, Revolution, Deterritorialization.

### Introduction:

The association of women with domestic life and men with the public realm is an organizing principle of many societies. Although the relationship and boundaries between these social spheres vary across societies, the roles and activities associated with the domestic realm are generally ascribed lower status and give women less access to power in the public realms of society. It is these features of gender relations which contribute in large part to the subordination of women (Sideris 82)

The common consensus of society since immemorial times is that only men can perform in social and political struggles whereas the women were oriented to the four walls of home. The markers of identity given to men were bread earners, job performers whereas women identity was restricted to household chores only. In

a society which was suffering from the intrusion of Apartheid, woman's condition under such circumstances' event went more worse and it becomes quite necessary to study the social impairment engraved in differences of men and women from the angle of Deleuze and Guattari's Deterritorialization. So, man's territory flows beyond the home where as woman's territory remains fixed.

### Deterritorialization

Deterritorialization is one of the key concepts of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of creating concepts and it is more understandable by their own example of symbiotic relation between orchid and wasp. What they say is orchid attracts wasp towards itself by adopting the appearance of female wasp meanwhile wasp, a pollinator transfers the pollen from

orchid to the other flowers, that's why according to team Deleuze and Guattari, in this process of rhizomatic interaction of heterogenous elements, orchid becomes wasp and vice versa as they state, "The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus" (Deleuze and Guattari 10). From the example of orchid and wasp, the idea of territory and deterritorialization is aptly cleared by looking at how wasp overtook the territory of orchid and also shifted its identity from a wasp to become an orchid. Further, Deleuze and Guattari, anti-Freudian, in their approach states that desire is the path of attaining deterritorialization as it helps in decoding the fixed social structures like in the context of South African woman's conditions. By denying the Freud's concept of controlling libido, this team of philosophers admired the importance of desire in terms of becoming a revolutionary by deciphering the structuralist political policies of Apartheid system. First it was men who sprouted the desire of liberalism for South Africa because the racial and ethnic division occluded them from performing respectable jobs and they were bound to be enslaved under white's domination as a critic writes, "Apartheid's immediate goal was to control black men—turning them from political threats into compliant workers, to ensure South Africa's development into an industrialized state in which whites would enjoy growing wealth and political hegemony" (Healey Clancy). As men realize the suppression on their territory, they reacted by responding them through protests like Sharpeville Massacre and revolutionary moments like Soweto but women were still silenced. Besides that, the objective of African revolution would remain incomplete with the absence of women and their marginalisation would result only in the collective alienation from the broader vision of liberation, so Nadine Gordimer, comes in front to provide her the space from where she could also express her zeal and zest for freedom.

### **Burger's Daughter**

In the novel Burger's daughter, Rosa burger is the epicentre of novel with whom all the hopes of revolution are associated after the political assassination of her father Lionel burger. Though she herself is divided between the personal and public life as she witnessed the organized violence against the black people and their enforced social exclusion from the world attention as a research scholar expounds, "She has, in fact, reconceived the very idea of private experience and created a form that can accommodate microscopic details of individual behaviour and sentiment without suggesting for a moment that individuals are cut off from the collective consciousness and political situations characteristic of their societies" (Boyers 63). As her father died, she took flight from South Africa to France to look for peaceful life but her adopted brother Bassie made her realize the mission she said good bye to. By creating the face of Rosa Burger. As it was not her personal interest to involve in the incomplete project of liberation, she felt dragged by the comrades to settle down the chaos due to the death of her parents and also, she knew the forthcoming nuances of taking the protests further. She was looking forward to peace in her own life because since childhood she heard and saw many human causalities owing to the incessant wars. However, she resumed her parents' position to mellow down the pathetic position of South Africa. Not even a single comrade from his father's communist party could dare to assume the leading position of Lionel, here at this juncture, Nadine Gordimer deterritorializes by man's position from shifting the role of leadership. Nadine Gordimer broke the social disparity between men and women by sketching the characters like Nadine Gordimer. Along Rosa Burger, a white woman playing a crucial role in domain of South Africa's liberation, Nadine Gordimer also mentions the role of other women too like Mrs Daphne Mkhonza, who helped the rebels in providing assets near Soweto slums as she was a powerful capitalist woman who was also enlisted in the white's

newspapers as Nadine Gordimer writes, “Mrs Mkhonza is often ‘featured’ in the women’s pages of white newspapers as an example of what black people can achieve despite their disadvantages” (Gordimer 199). Besides that, she also went beyond the white’s law to help her people which determined her a specific position being a woman. Moving forward, Nadine mentions the name of another woman, who extends help on ground to those who couldn’t find any space to stay by using the branding of Mrs Mkhonza, as Nadine Gordimer, writes, “Marisa herself sometimes uses Mama Mkhonza, when it is urgent to find ‘somewhere to stay’ for one whose presence in Soweto is not open;” (200). Later on, Rosa after moving back to South Africa, started her political proceeding by finding the spark of revolution in youth who consistently mobilized mass agitations against the enforced settlements of whites as she believed that only young people can leave behind evergreen footprints for coming generations, for which Nadine Gordimer writes, “Children and children’s children. The catchphrase of every reactionary politician and every revolutionary, and every revolutionary come to power as a politician. Everything is done in the name of future generations” (339).

### **My Son’s Story**

Revolutionaries behold the fire of regime change by realising firstly their own subjugation which converts into the desire whereby they convert it into actions. In her novel *My Son’s Story*, Nadine Gordimer narrated the story of Sonny through the mouthpiece of her son William who went astray from the path of freedom with the entry of a white woman Hannah in his life. Sonny was the staunch preacher of self-respect and to eradicate the symptoms of white’s hypnosis from the black’s consciousness, he joined the position of a teacher in a school as he was the only well-read person from his community. On the contrary, he joined students in protests, where in he gave many speeches to mobilize the people against Apartheid and its unjustified

policies, due to his increasing fame and strong impact of his words, he was imprisoned by the white’s government. At the peak of his mission, when Sonny established his identity of a revolutionary, he lost his path as in prison, he took the line of flight from his aim to liberate the people to Hannah’s love, a white woman as William said, when his father released from prison:

There was my father; the moment we saw one another it was I who had discovered him, not he me. We stood there while other people crossed our line of vision. Then he came towards me with her in the dazed people emerge from the dark of cinema to light.

He said, You remember Hannah, don’t you- (Gordimer4).

A critical analyst writes, “Revolution is not a matter of tearing up the script, forgetting or destroying external political and economic institutions, as well as intenal conventions and expectations, for one is then left with no relation at all. Instead, revolution occurs through making additions to the script, bringing in unexpected amendments by borrowing strategies from elsewhere” (Goodchild 2). Moment when Sonny left his gusto for the cause he himself chose, Aila, his wife secretly jumps into his husbands’ mission and occupy his position in an aggression against his husband’s weakness for a white woman. Of this Aila’s gesture, Sonny felt his identity in danger and realised later on, that it was too difficult to recommence his goal. But when Aila joined the forefront, Sonny couldn’t his own self as Hannah retorted, “you don’t live for each other, the loving is contained within the cause, and there would be no love if you were to refuse, because of personal risk, something expected of you by the struggle” (Gordimer 87). Further, along with Aila, Sonny’s daughter Baby too joined the resistance movements as a response to her father’s betrayal and also, she couldn’t accept how his principles of self-respect dissolved into self-preservation.

**Conclusion:**

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that Nadine Gordimer justified the position of women in her novels. Being a woman, she recognized that the South African revolution was impossible without social and political inclusion of women. And it happened of the unique symbiotic relationship between men and women in the struggle against the white segregation law of Apartheid apparent in Deleuze and Guattari's example of the association between orchid and wasp. Likewise, Rosa and Aila are the orchids who adopted the role of revolutionaries, whereas, in the characters, Sony and Rosa's comrades got trapped. After women invaded the identity of male characters, they proved their worth in political struggle. Hence, Nadine Gordimer mentions the becoming of a new South African woman capable enough to battle all odds and stand for her nation.

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