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Remembering and Belonging: The Gift of Death in Nadine Gordimer

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The present paper examines Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974) in order to present a postcolonial reading of it in light of Homi K. Bhabha's ideas. It firstly discusses the significance of this novel and its narrative style, along with its context (Apartheid and the Zulu culture). Then it examines the central characters (Mehring and Jacobus) with the help of Bhabha's key concepts of hybridity and mimicry. The paper analyzes the relationship between the foreign white master, Mehring, and his native black servants, and underlines that the displaced colonial subjects (such as Jacobus) can, through mimicry, defy the oppression of imperial hegemony from within. In the text of Gordimer's novel we can witness the formation of new cultural hybrids. It is characteristic of Gordimer's fiction to reflect upon interactions between European and indigenous cultures. It is also argued that the funeral at the very end of the novel is in fact a transformation; for one, it brings about a change of focus and the readers shall end the novel bearing the memory of the black man in their minds.

Keywords: Bhabha, belonging, hybridity, mimicry, unhomeliness, othering, death.

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> The Black presence ruins the representative narrative of Western personhood.
> —Homi K. Bhabha, "Foreword" to *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. xiii.

Prologue

Nadine Gordimer's 1974 novel, *The Conservationist*, won her the Booker Prize and, expectedly, the world acclaim. It describes a white industrialist, Mehring, who owns a farm in the country (in South Africa) and has made a habit of going there, at the weekends. For Mehring, managing the farm is a pastime. However, one day he is made aware of the presence of a dead man on his property which gradually changes his life. It becomes his obsession and eventually forces him to leave his farm behind.

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Gordimer's novels mainly reveal different stages in the social/cultural/political history of her homeland. They would roughly be divided into Apartheid novels and post-Apartheid ones. If in *The Conservationist*, *Burger's Daughter* (1979) or *July's People* (1981), she depicted the deplorable defects of racial segregation—which was a demanding topic in Apartheid days—she was also sharp enough to spot the most exacting topics for her post-Apartheid fiction. It is not accidental that she wrote her 13th novel *The Pickup*—which dealt with globalization, migrancy, and exile—at the very beginning of the third millennium. With Apartheid era gone, she (in *The Pickup* [2001]) turned to the larger subject of migration which was ensuring its place as a topos of world literature at the very beginning of the 21st century.

Gordimer's Apartheid novels, especially *The Conservationist* and *July's People*, usually end prophetically, with the writer showing and assuring, directly or indirectly, that the old order (imposed by generations of white imperialist masters) is going to be cracked. This is a point over which to pause and ponder: the possibility of change. This important issue will be examined in this paper. Also, we will try to read the novel (*The Conservationist*) on the basis of homi K. Bhabha's (1949-) key ideas, especially his concept of *mimicry* having been described as a sly, subversive form of agency on the part of the colonized. We will show how much the mimicry of the oppressed such as the Jacobus can *intervene* in the master narrative of the dominant discourse and frustrate it. Overall, reading Gordimer's *The Conservationist* with the help of Bhabha's ideas reveals "the emergence of a hybrid national narrative that turns the past into the disruptive 'anterior' and displaces the historical present—opens it up to other histories and incommensurable narrative subjects" (Bhabha, 2004: 248). Eventually, the novel ends up with a prophecy of the return of the oppressed.

Discussion and Analysis

The Conservationist is a turning point in Gordimer's writing career. It is in this novel that she finds her voice. Gordimer left the traditional style of novel-writing behind, and made her forays into modernist form. She probes the psyche of her white protagonist, "where the interior monologue of Mehring encapsulates a limited white point of view, an internalization and appropriation of the experience of Africa" (Head, 1994: 17). The method of narration alternates between an external narrator and internal monologue. Gordimer tries to expose the hidden aspects of Mehring's life. In an interview with Stephen Gray, Gordimer says, "Mehring, who so lacked self-knowledge—not through lack of intelligence, but out of fear—it was absolutely necessary to let him reveal himself, through the gaps, through the slightest allusions" (Gordimer 1981: 266). However, this self-revelation comes as an uncanny shock to him and drastically changes his life. We will later come back to this point.

The central character of the novel, Mehring, a director of an investment fund, seems to lead a comfortable life on his farm; however, as we read on, we come to see the dark side of his life: his unruly son, his Leftist mistress, his ex-wife in the US, and so forth. He is "the [so-called] conservationist" of the title; however, he is not in tune with his land and this is the irony of the

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title: “the first time he saw the place [. . .] he was possessed only by the brilliant idea of the farmhouse as a place to bring a woman” (Gordimer, 1974: 38). What Gordimer is trying to imply here is that the imperialists such as Mehring can hardly act as conservationists; they can only hide behind these names and labels temporarily. At the end of the novel, Mehring comes to know that, though he has papers to prove his ownership of the land, he is not welcome there and the land is indeed the legacy of the black folk, “he’s going to run, run and leave them . . . He was leaving that day for one of those countries white people go to” (Gordimer, 1974: 250-1). He has to leave the farm to the real owners of the land.

It is quite telling that Gordimer begins her novel with the following poem by Richard Shelton, which is a summary of the colonial contact and its prospect:

> I must have been almost crazy
> to start out alone like that on my bicycle
> pedaling into the tropics carrying
> a medicine for which no one had found
> the disease and hoping
> I would make it in time …
> *tell me who moved the river*
> *where can I find a good place to drown.* (Gordimer, 1974: 7)

Before the reader actually set on reading, Gordimer prepares them mentally to believe that imperialism is, more or less, similar to carrying a medicine for which no one had found the disease.

The next core technique Gordimer employs is incorporation of the subtext of Zulu mythology in her novel in order to imply “the existence of a *submerged* heritage of African ownership and continuity” (Head, 1994: 101). In this way, she integrates Zulu culture into the dominant narrative of the novel which, in a way, deconstructs Mehring’s story. Therefore, the style of the novel also comes to strengthen the theme of decolonization and restoration of the land by the natives. As we read on, this residual subtext gradually sways its way to the surface and becomes the dominant theme of the story.

There are also some references to segregation policy of the Apartheid regime which, obviously, engendered an unbridgeable gap between different groups in society. To cite an example from the novel, the writer refers to thousands of people in the so-called “the location” that was cut off from the others. Here is its description:

> The location is like the dump; children and old people […] scavenge. People waiting at the roadside for buses cover their mouths with woolen scarves against the red dust; so do the women who sit at their pitches selling oranges or yellow mealies roasting on braziers … Looking on at boys their own age gambling they saw one pull a knife and thrust it into the back of the other’s hand. They ran. But they went back; always they went back. (Gordimer, 1974: 78-80)

“The location” is segregated by walls from other areas. According to John Cooke, Gordimer tends to depict these kinds of “psychological barriers” in her novels in order to “establish a sense of the distinctive kind of alienation fostered by apartheid society” (1978: 534). The separationist discourse of the Apartheid regime is the foremost legacy of European imperialism.

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In *The Location of Culture* (2004), Homi K. Bhabha praises writers such as Nadine Gordimer and Toni Morrison for their attempts to build, in their writings, a house of racial memory for the displaced (18).

On Hybridity, Mimicry and Othering

> Identification […] is always the return of an image of identity which bears the mark of splitting in that 'Other' place from which it comes.
>
> —Homi K. Bhabha

Colonialism and hybridity are inseparable. Generally, when two differing cultures meet, there will always be some giving and taking (either consciously or unconsciously). That might be the reason why Mary Louis Pratt used the term 'contact zone' to refer to a space where "disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination" (qtd. in Ashcroft et al. 2007: 48). Thus emerges hybridity. This point is implied in Gordimer's references to the separationist politics in the novel, where black people are quarantined in "the location". Gordimer helps us see "[t]he clash of cultures that colonialism invariably provoked, rather than producing a neat bifurcation between colonizer and colonized, encouraged the formation of new cultural hybrids" (qtd. in Werbner and Modood, 1997: 264). To reach back to a pure origin is not a possibility for the colonized cultures. Many traditions are lost in the abyss of time; some are blended with those of different cultures—even without our knowing. Therefore, culture's new look is hybrid. In the text of Gordimer's novel we can witness the formation of new cultural hybrids. In fact, it is characteristic of Gordimer's fiction to reflect upon interactions between European and indigenous cultures. It is probably the result of living as a white minority in an African country where the majority of the people are black. According to Dominic Head "South African literary identity, in Gordimer's conception, is really a quest to construct a *hybridized* cultural expression" (Head, 1994: xii, emphasis added). This concern with cultural syncretism is recognized in most of Gordimer's novels; *The Conservationist* is a telling example. Such a hybrid form enabled Gordimer to cut loose her narratives from the fetters of censorship under the Apartheid regime. It was not an easy task to write such a revolutionary novel under the heavy censorship of the regime. Gordimer's writing was an act of cultural survival; she kept aglow the light of hope for the ultimate liberty.

European colonialists who conquered the African countries tended to think of the land as *terra nullius* and, therefore, took them upon themselves, as bearers of the light, to civilize (Westernize, in a sense) the land. They did this by applying *their* patterns in order to erect a second home. However, what they did not take into account was the politics of *difference*; therefore, as we can see in Gordimer's *Conservationist*, they are threatened by a persistent *lack*. Moreover, this difference might spawn a kind of ambivalence in the colonial relationship, and

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then this ambivalence might uncover the fissures hidden in the colonial discourse, and that would make way for resistance.

In Gordimer's fiction, identity is raised out of the constant negotiations of difference. She implicitly warns us against the dangers of the fetishism of identities in the colonial contact zone. Having invaded the colonial territories, the colonizers feel the need for an (ideological) apparatus to keep their dominance uninterrupted. Representation provides them with such apparatus. Through the use of stereotypes, they smear the picture of the natives and question their ability to rule over their own land. The way Mehring treats his farm hands is an instance. We will examine this relationship later.

Nonetheless, hybridity, as a general term, has different manifestations—in culture, language, etc. In terms of culture and identity, hybridity is a space or a site of transformation (or creation, in a sense) where any kind of binary thinking is frowned upon. On the other hand, according to Bhabha, “hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (2004: 162). One of these “denied knowledges” is the Zulu mythology that Gordimer proficiently incorporates within the dominant narrative of her novel.

Through a series of references to Zulu mythology, Gordimer tries to revitalize the African cultural heritage which has been trampled during the imperial invasion. She quotes ten passages from Henry Callaway’s *The Religious System of the Amazulu* (1870) and tries to make this subtext appear more forceful than Mehring’s story. Gordimer has carefully chosen these passages, because from the very first passage the reader feels the theme of heritage and ancestorship: “I pray for corn, that many people may come to this village of yours and make a noise, and glorify you …” (Gordimer, 1974: 35); or, “I ask also for children, that this village may have a large population, and that your name may never come to an end” (1974: 55). Gordimer cleverly points to the real inheritors of the African land.

Mehring (the leading character) belongs to the white European minority who rule over the native majority in South Africa. As the novel attests, he is a “prominent industrialist associated with the economic advancement of the country” (Gordimer, 1974: 249). However, his ‘prominent’ position is actually predicated upon the exploitation of the Blacks (Mehring’s farm hands such as Jacobus, Solomon and the others). Generally, this is one of the ideas behind any imperialist agenda. Peace and prosperity of the metropole is gained at the cost of the devastation of the colonies. For instance, Mehring does even employ illegal workers as long as they work for his benefit,

> D’you think he’s ever asked about *your* papers? He doesn’t care if anyone’s got papers or not, as long as you work. That’s all he knows. And if the police catch you, he can just look in your face and say he doesn’t know who you are, that’s all, you’re someone hiding with his boys on the farms. What has he got to worry about? (Gordimer, 1974: 85).

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In the novel, Mehring is referred to as "one of the biggest employers of exploited black labor" (Gordimer, 1974: 169), and people like Jacobus, the native Africans in general, are "temporary sojourners where they were born" (1974: 108). These Africans are not given a 'right to difference'; they were not allowed to recognize their difference so as not to negate the dominant discourse or to free themselves from the fetishistic clichés of race, class, gender and culture. In fact, the problem arises when the colonial discourse fixates its *others* in representations. Stereotypes loom over the relationship of the whites and the blacks. For Mehring, Jacobus is an "old devil", one of "those 'simple' black you don't have to talk to" (1974: 168-9). "The poor devils don't know what's good for them" (1974: 76). Homogenization is one of the defining characteristics of imperialism. The dominant does not attempt to recognize every one of the unprivileged subjects. They are just referred to as "them" (the others) in sheer opposition to "us" (the self); therefore, in the novel,

> A violent egology is thus profoundly evident as Mehring integrates everything around him into his 'self-centered, interested, dominating consciousness'... The disempowering anonymity assigned to those around Mehring is reflected, for example, in his reference to 'a familiar black face among black faces' . . . The many references to black people as 'them' also imply their collective identity as his objects rather than acknowledging any differentiation that might suggest an existence independent of his epistemological freedom. (Monson, 2004: 39)

Mehring's references to black people as '*them'* negate their individuality and only further the distance between. His claim to knowing everything and everyone puts him in a position of power.

In general, the function of stereotype was for the colonialists to solidify their identities; however, ambivalence (which is inseparable from stereotyping) penetrates the alleged solid façade of their identities and makes way for anxiety. Mehring leaves South Africa because he could no longer cope with the feeling of anxiety. When the white colonialist witnesses that his fantasies and dreams about his originality and mastery deflate, he is then threatened by the presence and the difference of non-white others. Therefore, difference comes to generate anxiety.

Next significant point is that Mehring is not just looking for the labor of the black servants. He desires to have their respect, to be recognized by them as master. Mehring looks for respect from Jacobus and other farm hands, "Jacobus respects me. Perhaps. Old devil. They respect the people they know they can't fool. They know where they are with me. I'm the one who feeds them" (Gordimer, 1974: 169, emphasis added). The italicized word 'perhaps' shows that, in his mind's eye, Mehring is not sure of the respect he desires from the blacks, the others; and this could be seen as a sign that intimates the emergence of anxiety. "It is an anxiety which will not abate because the empty third space, the other space of symbolic representation, at once bar and bearer of difference is closed to the paranoid position of power" (Bhabha, 2004: 143). This sense of uneasiness and anxiety tails the colonial discourse everywhere. Moreover, Mehring, like the majority of colonial masters, desires to be recognized as having great autonomous power; however, the persisting presence and threat of the Other [in this case, the corpse he

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found in his farm] comes forth to destabilize the freedom of the ego. We thus see the dissolution of Mehring's subjectivity.

As mentioned, Mehring looks down at his black workers and yet desires to be respected by them, "Only then does it become possible to understand the *productive* ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse—that 'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity" (Bhabha, 2004: 96). Bhabha emphasizes this kind of 'difference', for it has the power to create an enunciatory space for the others of the colonial discourse. Bhabha refers to the ambivalence of colonial stereotyping. From the colonizer's perspective, the colonized is savage and yet submissive. This makes them at once an object of derision and desire. In the novel, Mehring derides the blacks as 'devils' or 'fools'; however, deep in heart he believes that "they're more honest than any white you're likely to get in a menial yet responsible position" (Gordimer, 1974: 158). It is this doubling that reveals the shakiness and ambivalence of colonial discourse. This sort of discursive undecidability lays the ground for the intervention of the unprivileged. (What happens at the end of the novel is an example of such an intervention—intervention of the natives' rituals, their remembering and holding memories of togetherness.)

We have so far discussed the character of Mehring, 'the conservationist'; now, we shall examine the character of Jacobus, the chief herdsman. There exists a kind of master/slave relationship between Mehring and Jacobus (and other black farm hands). To draw on Fanon's ideas, this Manicheanism would lead to the "psychic alienation of the black man" (Fanon, 1968: 48). Fanon goes on further to say, "ego-withdrawal as a successful defense mechanism is impossible for the Negro. He requires a white approval" (Fanon, 1968: 51). In such an unhealthy kind of relationship, the white master desires to be recognized, respected and also loved by his black servants. In this situation, 'mimicry' seems to be the last resort for the black others. They can pretend to respect and love while nourishing the seeds of hate. By mimicking Mehring, Jacobus does not desire to become another Mehring; he wants to fend off Mehring's possible attacks in order to reclaim his own individuality.

In the first pages of the novel we shall read "Jacobus is not without sycophancy" (Gordimer, 1974: 11); "he [Jacobus] was himself half on the side of the authority it mocked, he earned his privileges by that authority", or "Jacobus did not talk to the Indian as he did to a white man" (Gordimer, 1974: 30); "Jacobus . . . agrees with everything that Mehring says, rather than gives an independent answer" (Gordimer, 1974: 52); however, "they [Jacobus and other black servants] are busy complaining about *him* in the safety of their own language, they retreat into it and they can say what they like" (Gordimer, 1974: 69). That is why Lacanian idea of *mimicry* is referred to as camouflage, for it hides the doubleness and duplicity of action: "Mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" (Bhabha, 2004: 122). Hence, mimicry is at the same time resemblance and threat. Mimicry is a subtle and sly way of opposing the dominant discourse, because "the menace of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of

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colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (Bhabha, 2004: 126). The important point here is that the colonized might not always consider decolonization in terms of violent acts; they might find other sly methods to help them restore their long-awaited national and cultural independence. The beauty of Bhabha's ideas is his emphasis on the potentiality of agency even under oppression. Mimicry is one instance of such an ability. We should refer to the novel again. As mentioned before, Mehring visits his farm mostly at the weekends. When he is not there, Jacobus does somehow become the owner: "they knew Jacobus was the boss of the show, he ran that farm while the white man lived in town" (Gordimer, 1974: 33); Jacobus claims, "I'll get everything from him [Mehring]" (Gordimer, 1974: 85); "He [Mehring] comes in as always, like a stranger" (Gordimer, 1974: 91); "There'll be dissatisfaction because they [the black farmhands] were here when he [Mehring] came, … Everyone pretends he's not there" (Gordimer, 1974: 192); furthermore, when Mehring is away, the black farm hands hold a party and use his stuff; their children play with his favorite and rare guinea fowl eggs "which soon there will be nothing left in the country" (Gordimer, 1974: 10). These extracts refer to Bhabha's idea that the people of a nation can become performative subjects, and affirm that mimicry is a sly form of resistance.

Here Gordimer tries to show that the dominance of people like Mehring would not last long; they simply do not belong there. The ending of the novel is interpreted as a prophecy of the coming of a new era in which the natives are no longer subject to Western masters. Throughout the novel Gordimer indicates it is the native blacks who will eventually inherit the land:

> That bit of paper you [Mehring] bought yourself from the deeds office isn't going to be valid for as long as another generation. It'll be worth about as much as those our grandfathers gave the blacks when they took the land from them. The blacks will tear up your bit of paper. No one'll remember where you're buried. (Gordimer, 1974: 168)

Gradually Mehring comes to know that the country would be "everybody's except the whites who occupied it unlawfully" (Gordimer, 1974: 132). Gordimer voices her hope for the coming of another generation that would inherit the land, their country.

Language

Postcolonial theory takes language into sharp consideration, and it is all due to language's importance as a medium of power transmission. To speak another language is partly to be absorbed into its culture. Ismail S. Talib in *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures* claims, "Language had a part to play in the expansion of the British Empire" (2002: 6). His idea is too general; though, the role of language in cultural conditioning (language as a means of power) seems to be incontestable, language use is not an absolute one-way process. Code-switching is a vivid case to point here. It is a hybridization of language, a penetration of the elements of native culture into another language. It is a wily strategy to re-place the monotony of centers with metonymic hybridity of margins. Approbation of code-switching parallels an abrogation of 'Standard' language (English, in this case). It is a kind of will-to-difference.

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Jacobus uses Mehring's language; Mehring speaks in Afrikaans. Therefore, code-switching is not unexpected in the text of the novel. They use language for different purposes and in different manners, "Jacobus did not talk to the Indian as he did to a white man, nor as he would to one of his own people" (Gordimer, 1974: 30). Mehring seems to be able to speak Afrikaans; however, the locals tend to "ignore his ability to speak Afrikaans. Their insistence on talking to him in English demarcates the limit of his acceptance, out here …" (Gordimer, 1974: 44-5). Therefore, language can mark out the limit of someone's acceptance in a place. Language, in this sense, sets up spatial boundaries.

Another important issue concerns the way language represents culture. Language is a cultural phenomenon. In fact, as Fanon thoughtfully declares, "to speak means […] above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (Fanon, 1968: 17-8). When a person such as Mehring or Jacobus has to take another language to convey his message, he is in a sense taking another culture, and this can be regarded as an epitome of hybridization.

Fanon associates this hybridization of language to a kind of 'dislocation'. He believes that when a black person "adopts a language different from that of the group into which he has been nurtured, is evidence of a dislocation, a separation" (Fanon, 1968: 25). Perhaps, one can claim that hybridity brings about constant *re*-location (if not dis-location). Hybridity works as a strategy of survival. This is the characteristic that marks the liminality of colonial situation.

Colonial subjects use the language of their masters; however, they cannot use it in a perfect (native-like) manner. Therefore, they somehow *de/re*-form it by inserting elements of their language into it and making it their own. In this way, when the colonial subject speaks the master's language, the master would not witness the purity of his language anymore; instead, what he finds there is a degenerate mélange which he might not quite welcome. The blacks borrow the language of the masters, 'split' it and then return it deformed. It might be regarded as an instance of Bhabhaian "sly civility".

Death and Memory

> Death is the place of one's irreplaceability.
> —Jacques Derrida

In his inspiring long essay, "Donner la mort", which is translated as *The Gift of Death* (1995), Jacques Derrida focuses on the matters of responsibility, faith, death and also the rites of gift giving. Derrida, drawing on Heidegger, explores the concept of dying *for* the other. Heidegger is quoted as saying, "No one can take the Other's dying away from him" (Derrida, 1995: 42). This moving sentence becomes more resonant after we read the last paragraph of the novel. To regard death in this sense is to believe in its power to bring about changes. (One famous literary example is the deaths of Romeo and Juliet at the end of Shakespeare's play which put an end to a bloody cycle of retaliatory killings.)

In this part, we should examine the significance of the corpse and its funeral at the end of the novel. *The Conservationist* ends with this paragraph:

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> The one whom the farm received had no name. He had no family but their women wept a little for him. There was no child of his present but their children were there to live after him. They had put him away to rest, at last; he had come back. He took possession of this earth, theirs; one of them. (Gordimer, 1974: 252)

The ending of the novel has been an interesting subject to many of its interpreters. They all, more or less, seem to agree that the dead black man without a grave may betoken the whole Black community and their final inheritance of the land.

Mehring made every effort to wipe the dead body off his territory. However, the result was quite the contrary. Gordimer shows the black presence is indeed something essential to South Africa and cannot be re-placed or expunged. It is indeed a kind of *palimpsest*. The trope of palimpsest refers to “ineradicable traces of the past which remain part of the constitution of the present” (Ashcroft et al., 2007: 158). It can be applied to the way colonialism attempted to write its story over the old narrative of the colonies. The novel expresses that Jacobus, Solomon and other black workers are displaced. Although they live in their own country, they are on the margins; the sense of ‘home’ for them has undergone through radical changes. However, the concept of nation and nationhood continued to live in their memories. As Bhabha declares, nation realizes its horizons in the mind’s eye (Bhabha, 1990: 1). According to Derrida, “The nation is rooted first of all in the memory or anxiety of a displaced or displaceable population” (qtd. in Byrne, 2009: 16). The displaced and colonized people may well take their refuge to the realm of memory and imagination; there they are liberated and free. Therefore, by incorporating Zulu mythology into her fiction, Gordimer tries to refresh the African culture in the memory of the readers.

The blacks have been oppressed for a long time. They desire an acknowledgment of their (national/cultural) identities, their denied history. The colonizers have to accept this or, like Mehring, they will be forced to face “The Horror! The Horror!” of the consequence. The colonial subjects will eventually find the opportunity to enunciate their presence. (The extracts of the novel that I listed before may affirm their powerful presence.) At the end of the novel, Mehring abandoned the land and left “for one of those countries white people go to. … Jacobus must look after everything nicely” (Gordimer, 1974: 251). From now on, the farm is in the hands of Jacobus and other black folk. This might be looked at as a sign of decolonization, of gradual dissolution of the white dominance.

In his article “Adagio” (a tribute to late Edward Said) Bhabha interprets the concept of ‘death’ as “neither a cessation of life nor an afterlife, but a slowing down, a transformation that eases away from the administrative and executive burdens of life and labor and turns into the meandering ways of memory” (2005: 380). This in-between situation is forceful enough to slow down or transform the narrative of life. The funeral at the very end of the novel is in fact a transformation; for one, it brings about a change of focus and the readers end the novel bearing the memory of the black man in their minds.

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Here the notable point is the way Gordimer renders a picture of the colonial contact. We do not find her trying to obliterate the presence of the white (European) masters and their exploitation of the native blacks; instead, she seems to be looking for a new interpretation of the old narrative, with a sharp eye on the souls of the black folk. According to Bhabha, "we must not merely change the *narratives* of our histories, but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces, both human and historical" (2004: 367). Therefore, death at the end of the novel transforms the meaning for the readers, because they will remember what it means to be a black colonial subject.

Moreover, the fact that the corpse has no name symbolically represents the whole African natives. In "Conserving the Cogito: Rereading Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist*" Tamlyn Monson makes uses of Levinas' and Kristeva's ideas on subjectivity and alterity to discuss the novel. If we regard the dead man (symbolically) or the whole black workforce as Mehring's the other, therefore, as Monson says, "The disturbance the other creates cannot be resolved—it is neither an annihilation of, nor a fusion with the subject" (2004: 36). Also, Bhabha in *Nation and Narration* (1990) states: "The 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'" (4). Therefore, Mehring's cannot get rid of his 'other'. Actually, the subject has to move toward the other. Not only should he encounter it, he has to acknowledge its presence as well, but Mehring fails and flees.

The corpse can also be associated with the feeling of *uncanniness*. In describing the uncanny moment, Bhabha makes reference to Freud's concept of Das Unheimliche (the uncanny) and declares, "for Freud, the *Unheimlich* is 'the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'" (2004: 14-15). David Huddart also defines uncanniness as follows: "the uncanny is not something that we can control or access directly […] the uncanny would better have remained hidden—what returns to haunt you is actually something that you do not want to face again" (2006: 55). Mehring cannot come to terms with the presence of the corpse on his farm. It seems as though the corpse was a mirror and he has seen his own destiny in it. "Come. Come and look, they're all saying. What is it? Who is it? It's Mehring. It's Mehring, down there" (Gordimer, 1974: 250). The corpse had evoked some irksome memories in his mind. He simply cannot tolerate it. "The feeling of uncanniness is, therefore, the feeling you get when you have a guilt-laden past which you should really confront, even though you would prefer to avoid it" (Huddart, 2006: 55). Mehring's "guilt-laden" past is the long night of colonialism. Long years of exploitation of the Africans by Mehring's forebears can be regarded as the guilt-laden past which comes back to haunt him. Stephen Clingman in "History from the Inside" states: "Structurally, Mehring has had a hand in the fate of this [dead] body […] the 'peace' which he enjoys on the farm is dependent upon the institutionalized social violence which keeps the location politically subdued and quiet" (1981: 190). Having encountered the corpse on his farm, Mehring gradually becomes self-conscious of his guilt. Therefore, Mehring's leaving of the country at the end of the novel is

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actually a running away from whatever he knows. Furthermore, in a country whose majority is comprised of the black workers, a white capitalist would not be at home. According to Homi Bhabha, "in the attempt to mediate between different cultures, languages, and societies, there is always the threat of mistranslation, confusion, and fear" (qtd. in Huddart, 2006: 75). Mehring's experience in South Africa has, for sure, not been without a sense of anxiety, confusion and fear.

Jacobus and the other black natives live on the margins of the society; however, according to Bhabha, "the margins of the nation displace the center; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history" (1990: 6). These marginal people are 'unhomed'; however, to be unhomed does not mean being homeless. In general, unhomeliness is a postcolonial experience. The unhomely subject obtains the power of adaptability and this might come to serve them as *a strategy of survival*. The colonial subjects find themselves belated, they find themselves in a strange place which is both theirs and not. It is a space where the "relation of 'subject' to identity is always split and doubled" (Bhabha, 1992: 145). This truly affirms our claim that hybridity is indispensable from colonial contacts.

Conclusion

> There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.
>
> Walter Benjamin

This study was an attempt to examine Nadine Gordimer's "lyrical" novel *The Conservationist*, using Bhabhaian concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and unhomeliness. It tried to analyze the relationship between the foreign white master, Mehring, and his black servants, mentioning that the displaced colonial subjects (such as Jacobus) can defy the oppression of imperial hegemony from within. They can articulate their difference by resorting to 'communal' negotiations, not necessarily through violent insurgencies. In fact, living under colonial repression teaches them the art of (national/cultural) negotiation.

In *The Conservationist* Gordimer tried to depict the life of a white industrialist in an African country. The novel shows that Mehring and other (foreign) imperialists like him do not fit in the African culture. Many critics have discussed the importance of the novel's ending. For example, J. M. Coetzee in his review of Gordimer's novel *The Conservationist* refers to the idea of annihilation of the legacy of colonialism. Michael Thorpe, regards the corpse as the "ancestor motif" (1983: 184) and also associates it with the truth; therefore, "Mehring follows his wishful desire to bury truth" (1983: 187). Thorpe discusses the motif of "ancestral continuity and a secure sense of inheritance" (1983: 189). This security is in sharp contrast to Mehring's feeling of insecurity and fear of the future.

However, the writer tried to tie Mehring's mental disintegration at the end of the novel to his failure in facing his *other*, the corpse which represents the long history of the exploited blacks. I also did associate the corpse with Bhabhaian uncanniness, "where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different*" (Bhabha, 2004: 159). This

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difference begets hybridity which disrupts the homogenizing narrative of the dominant and, by sustaining undecidability, perturbs any binary operation. Therefore, it blurs the boundaries and it is then that ambivalence emerges.

Overall, the novel ends with a prophecy. The memory of the black corpse lingers in the memory of the reader. Gordimer leaves the readers with their memories, for she believes that the origin of any splendid feat is rooted in the mind's eye. In "The Interpreters" she declares, "a future […] existed in the realm of imagination" (Gordimer, 1970: 11). This recalls a famous quotation by Milan Kundera which says, "The struggle of man against tyranny is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (qtd. in Gordimer, 1997: 37). What is of notable significance in Gordimer's fiction is the concept of "racial memory" that comes back to haunt Mehring. Hence, it is up to the people such as Jacobus to cherish the seeds of nationhood and Africanize their country.

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بررسی مفهوم مرگ در اثر "طرفدار محیط زیست" از نادین گُردیمر، با تکیه بر آرای هُومی بابا

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چکیده

مقالهٔ حاضر به بررسی رمان *طرفدار محیط زیست* اثر نادین گوردیمر (۱۹۷۴) می‌پردازد تا با بهره‌گیری از آرای هومی بابا (۱۹۴۹–)، خوانشی پسااستعماری از آن ارائه دهد. ابتدا به طرح کلی داستان اشاره و اهمیت این رمان خاص بررسی می‌شود و سپس به سبک روایت، شخصیت‌پردازی و زمینهٔ رمان (آپارتاید و فرهنگ زولو) پرداخته خواهد شد. در این رمان نیز مثل بیشتر آثار داستانیِ گردیمر می‌توان مفاهیمی همچون تلاش برای حفظ هویت ملی (آفریقایی)، مخالفت با هرگونه تبعیض نژادی و سرکوب‌گری، پیوندخوردگی (هیبریدیتی) و برخورد فرهنگ‌ها را مشاهده کرد. از رهگذر اشاره به شکاف‌ها و دوسویگی‌های گفتمان استعمار و نیز با بهره‌گیری از مفهوم «تقلید» که همی بابا مطرح می‌کند، می‌توان در روایت قدرت مداخله و آن را مختل کرد. در نظر بابا، پیوندخوردگی و تقلید از راهبردهای بقا در وضع نابرابر به‌حساب می‌آیند و فرودست را در مسیر مقاومت و کنشگری یاری می‌دهند.

کلیدواژگان: نادین گردیمر، *طرفدار محیط زیست*، هومی بابا، پیوندخوردگی، تقلید.

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