

TREADING THE UNKNOWN AND DEFYING THE IMPOSSIBLE: A PHILOSOPHICAL READING OF NADINE GORDIMER'S THE PICKUP

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Abstract

The present study examines the existential approach adopted by Nadine Gordimer in portraying the main character in The Pickup. The study seeks to pinpoint that aspect of Nadine Gordimer's writing that is concerned with man's existence and being. It provides an in-depth textual analysis of the novel in question to explore the conflict between society and the individual. Here, the existential approach will be examined in terms of Gordimer's skill to weave the protagonist's prevailing social and cultural circumstances in two different communities in her attempt to come to term with the free choices she makes. The study also aims to go deep into the existential approach adopted by the writer to examine the protagonist's ability to make existentially free choices and demonstrate full responsibility for the consequences of such decisions. The study seeks to highlight how Julie Summers and Abdu –the two main characters- are portrayed as existential figures through investigating their concepts of self and the different perspective from which each of them looks upon the surrounding community, its values, and social norms.

Keywords: Freedom, existence, assertion, philosophical, responsibility, decision, challenge.

Introduction

The issue of man's existence and being has been a subject of interest for many people at different levels. It deals with how man sees the surrounding world and how to make life meaningful. Man's existence cannot be separated from their freedom. Since to exist is to construct such freedom. Hence, the issue of freedom has also been of paramount importance in every man's life. Human beings are to create a reality for themselves by freely deciding the directions of their lives and showing commitment to their free choices. Accordingly, one's creation of the values and truths by which he aspires to live means creating a new self or existence. Here, Existentialism as a philosophical

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tendency emerges to enlighten people about how they should live their lives.

Generally, Existentialism is a philosophy that is mainly concerned with the individual and how s/he sees the world around them. The notion here is that all people seek to find out what and who they are throughout life while making choices based on their personal experiences, beliefs, and outlooks. Every individual has a view of how life can be meaningful. Such an outlook or perspective determines how they consider the different codes, conventions, and rules that govern their world. It also determines their relationships with the people around them. According to Existentialism, humans come to the world as human subjects before being defined by any social, cultural, or moral codes that characterize the communities in which they live. Having come to the world as such, they start to create their essence and determine their beings through accepting or rejecting such codes. In other words, the existence of any individual is always particular as it centers on the investigation of their being through making personal decisions that are free and responsible for making life meaningful. Hence, the core of existentialism is that one's existence is constituted neither by nature nor by culture since to exist is to include this existence (Verstrynge).

Again, Existentialism is a twentieth-century philosophy that is mainly concerned with the analysis of human existence or being and the way human beings see themselves in the world. According to Existentialism, humans exist first, and then each individual spends a lifetime creating his essence. In simpler terms, Existentialism is a philosophy that is mainly centered on finding self and the meaning of life through making free choices that entail commitments. According to Existentialism, such a view of life complies with the basic principle of Existentialism that "Existence precedes essence." Though there has not been a specific definition of Existentialism among its founders, some general features can be seen as common principles of this philosophy. According to Existentialism, a human being is nothing but what he has become. "The nothingness he begins with is thus the source of man's freedom, for at each moment it is man's free will that can choose how to act. Man is or should be responsible for the consequences of his action." (Benét)

Sartre and Existentialism have been synonymous and can be separated by no means. To Sartre, freedom should be part and parcel of every individual's being. It is that Existential freedom that entails making free choices that entail responsibility and commitment. That freedom means rising above the socially, culturally, and morally imposed limitations. According to Sartre, freedom is not something one has; instead, one cannot escape. According to him, man's freedom is a

heavy burden on him because he takes a lot of responsibility (Chukwuokolo and Jeko)

Again, Existentialism sees one's essence as constituted neither by nature nor by culture since to exist is to include this essence. As Ihab Hassan, in his *Radical Innocence*, puts it, "society may modulate man's awareness of his situation, but only existence determines his stand." (Hassan)

In Existentialism, anxiety and alienation are two aspects that characterize the life of the existential individual. Anxiety means the sense of uneasiness that accompanies the life of the existential individual. Here, this will be seen in the character of Julie and the variety of experiences in the process of making her life meaningful. Also, alienation characterizes the life of the individual human being who pursues their desire to live away from the community due to not identifying with its social surroundings because they see it as meaningless. Here, such a surrounding and its people can be seen as the "Other" from which they are estranged. As illustrated in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, alienation is "a reaction to the socio-economic condition, accepting it as the eternal state of humanity and of social being while attempting to affirm its selfhood by retreating into her/his pattern of life." (Ali) Here, alienation as one aspect of existential freedom in the character of Julie will be pinpointed through her view of the community in South Africa, including her parents. Thus, both "alienation" and "anxiety" are common conditions of human existence. The study will be examined these two aspects in Gordimer's *The Pickup*.

Biography of Nadine Gordimer

Nadine Gordimer is an eminent South African writer born in 1923 in Spring, a small town close to Johannesburg. She is the daughter of an English mother and a Jewish father. While she was young, Nadine spent most of her time reading and developed a desire for writing early in her life. She published her first novel at the age of fifteen before joining the university. Gordimer's successful career has spanned a lot of generations. She has won many awards, including the Nobel Prize in literature in 1991. In most of her writings, Nadine Gordimer has shown a great interest in her childhood and her views of the South African people. She has written many protest novels that many of which have been banned by the government. Gordimer's novels provide an insight into the most crucial two periods of South Africa: the apartheid and the post-apartheid. In her novels, Gordimer underscores the importance of freedom for the individual. She thinks that the desire for freedom is inextricable from physical space restrictions. Much of

her fiction is concerned with the viability of individual freedom beyond the traditional confines of the place.

The Pickup

The Pickup is a 2001 novel that tells the story of an Arab young man (Abdu) who reaches South Africa from an Arab African country that is not mentioned or specifically referred to and a young white South African woman (Julie Summers). The two get acquainted with one another under some odd circumstances that soon become the beginning of a love story that is considered extraordinary. The two lovers are different in many respects, especially in their backgrounds. The storyline develops to show how the couple moves from one place to another and from one country to another to show how they eventually end up with their marriage and how, consequently, they move toward separation due to the difference in their outlooks of the future.

The Pickup deals with Gordimer's preoccupation with representing the self and the other. She is particularly interested in highlighting the impact of the prevailing power structure on the individual's private life. Julie Summers is the daughter of an affluent South African businessman. She causes uproar of obstruction traffic as her car breaks down in the middle of Johannesburg Street. The vehicle is taken to a garage where Abdu, an illegal Arab migrant, works as a mechanic at a workshop. Abdu goes to check Julie's car to repair. Love, at first glance, starts to find its way between the two characters. Julie takes the initiative in expressing her admiration of the Arab man. Soon she takes the man as her boyfriend, and soon they develop some attachment that is mainly accompanied by sexual pleasure. This attachment soon develops into a social one as a couple.

Being the only child of a divorced couple, Julie feels estranged from her parents. She finds her parents embarrassing; she is not interested in being in touch with any of them as the father is already a spouse of another woman and the mother is a wife of a young Casino-owner in the USA. She never finds solace or comfort in being close to any of them. Julie lives away from her father and refuses to lead a life of luxury in the suburbs. The suburbs is a community where the wealthy reside, a community that is characterized by financial prosperity. Julie leaves the suburbs and goes to live in the ghettos, humble life of freedom and independence. She is estranged from her family to enjoy personal freedom independently, not because of adverse circumstances. She sees that her trouble lies in the restlessness she experiences due to an unsuccessful marriage between two separated parents.

Living away from her family, Julie finds freedom in socializing with a group of multinational friends. This group of friends, known as The Table, represents Julie as a shelter and provides her with many things that she cannot find with her family. Julie's mingling with this heterogeneous group of friends enables her to spend most of her leisure time with them. She finds fulfillment in connecting with them. As the story tells, "She joins the friends as usual at The Table to which she belongs. After all her elective siblings, they have destined themselves from the ways of the past, their families, whether these are black ones still living in the old ghettos or white ones in the suburbs"(Gordimer). As a group of multicultural friends, they develop mutual understanding and harmony.

Abdu, whose real name is Ibrahim Bin Mousa, like many young men in many Arab countries, comes to South Africa for the materialistic purpose of improving his standard of living back in his home country. He is an immigrant in a foreign country that speaks a different language from his mother tongue. He works as a mechanic for a workshop owned by a black South African. He has to live in the custody of his employer and sleep in the cottage attached to the workshop. Abdu's official stay has expired, and he is an illegal expatriate in South Africa. As Tereza Stejskalova remarks, "He is neither wanted nor accepted. The more he is not allowed to move; the more he is inclined to move. ... He is reminded of his status wherever he goes. It is because of this status that he remains most of the time listening rather than speaking is his manner of communication, response in that other world. (Stejskalová).

Abdu shows a great interest in learning English to communicate appropriately with Julie and be able to get a job in any foreign country. In his communication with Julie, he insists on using English rather than his native language. Such insistence reflects his alienation from his native culture. As the story tells, "He slips from his own identity, here into a disguise, the nobody Abdu" (Gordimer). In another situation, "He is here, and he is not here... It is a state of suspension from the pressures of necessity." (Gordimer).

Having found in Abdu many things that she has been missing, Julie decides to make him one member of The Table. She introduces him to the group as her closest friend, whom she refers to as her "prince." To The Table, Abdu is known as the "grease-monkey," for he is a true subaltern. Abdu accompanies Julie on her way to the club regularly. He does not speak because he is not given the space to speak for himself. His remarks are not also taken seriously by them. He asks Julie, "Why do you choose those friends instead of your family"(Gordimer).

Abdu and Julie become so attached that she takes him as her boyfriend. Yet, things are not to go without hassles. The owner of the

garage, who has been protecting Abdu, turns against him once he sees Julie's interest in him. The former starts to show a lot of grudge toward the latter. He remarks, "It was a shame to see what she was doing with this fellow" (Gordimer). Moreover, the newly-adopted passive attitude of the native employer toward Abdu develops, and he goes to report his illegal condition to the authorities. Having realized the problem of Abdu's illegal overstay and that he is already reported it to the authorities, Julie spares no time or effort to find a way out. She tries her best to solve his problem so that he can remain with her in South Africa. The youthful woman goes to seek the help of her uncle's lawyer. However, he tells her that Abdu has violated the law by overstaying his residency permit. By the time Abdu and Julie have become very much attached, the former has already lost all credibility in South Africa and must leave. The lawyer says, "You have placed yourself in the position where you have a criminal charge waiting against you...You stayed on illegally, you shed your identity." (Gordimer).

Having failed in finding a way out of Abdu's crisis, Julie decides to seek the help of her father as he has a lot of connections with high-profile people who might help her solve Abdu's problem. Julie pays a visit to her father's house in the company of her lover. Abdu, who has never been to a house like Julie's father's, is so impressed and stunned and realizes how this house juxtaposes with the cottage where the daughter resides. It is a house with all the luxurious qualities of the rich where the best foods are served. Here, one can observe the difference between the two lovers in their reactions to the father's house. While Abdu is so impressed, Julie feels restless and shows a desire to leave. As the story tells: "But it is another house she's running away to hide in. she has never lived in this one...The sense of being ashamed of them, the shame of him seeing who she was, is, as he must be ashamed of what he is"(Gordimer). It is to his surprise that Julie feels as ashamed of her father. She never feels happy with his materialistic values., Abdu, on the other hand, feels ashamed of his poverty and the country from which he has escaped, referring to it as a "charity place" and sometimes as "hell."

The two lovers display a contrast not only in their backgrounds but also in many other respects. Though they are lovers who are emotionally and physically attached, they adopt two distinct attitudes toward how life should be lived. While Abdu shows an undying desire to stay as a foreigner away from his home country, "I'll go where they'll let me in," for the sake of materialistic gains, Julie insists on living away from her family to avoid enjoying the high standard of living and wealth of her father. Julie's depreciation of the kind of life led by her father comes out of her view of how life can be lived regardless of any consideration.

Here, such contradictory attitudes reinforce their existential status based on their desires.

Julie Character Sketch

Before embarking on discussing the contrast between Julie and Abdu, the researcher wants to shed some more light on the character of Julie as a beautiful young woman who finds resisting the norms of her community a means of asserting herself. She is a free spirit who never accepts to be restricted by the conventions of her country. Julie is capable of defending her stance. She is such a revolutionary character who sees everything as an adventure. She wants to lead a life of independence. Though she is free to decide for herself, she is not happy with this kind of freedom and ease that she already has. The type of freedom she seeks is that one that entails adventure and responsibility. She is fed up with such ease and wants to search for a meaningful life on her way. She wants the freedom that involves difficulty with a man she sees as her "dream-knight" and "orient prince." Julie cannot find the space she seeks in South Africa, and she endeavors to find it elsewhere. Thus, the kind of freedom she likes is accompanied by suffering, which is characteristic of existential freedom.

In her union with Abdu, Julie finds the kind of life she has missed for a long. She wants to affirm her liberty and justify her stand toward the local community as well as toward her parents by initiating a love relationship with an outsider. As Kirsty Hemsworth remarks, "The self-image of Julie is mostly constructed on her personal liberal views. She is capable of defending such views and making them valid"(Hemsworth). Though they are united in love, Julie has a different view of this relationship. She finds in this relationship a way to validate her existence on her terms. She is guided by her own mind. As Derek Barker puts it, she sees in her relationship, "The opposite of pure alterity because of the high degree of repulsion against what she feels she stands for... She rebels against her parents' values, and her rebellion leads her to settle for a relatively ascetic existence." (Barker 2007, 103)

Thus, Julie's story represented in her relationship with Abdu represents a new way of looking at her existence and how she can decide her being under the circumstances of her community. She and Abdu strive to find fulfillment in their being through their love bond but in two different ways. Each of them wants to circumvent whatever cultural or social barriers they face in achieving personal existence. Each of the two lovers chooses a path to follow regardless of the result. Commenting on the reality of the relationship between Julie and Abdu, Tereza Stejskalova states:

Apart from being somebody or anybody he chooses, he is an object of someone's devotion and devotion, an aspect of himself that he cannot fully control... She represents the other who is part of himself. She complements him; she knows devotion toward him that he feels he cannot reject. He feels responsible and committed to her feelings toward him. Her dedication to him guarantees authority and puts him in a vulnerable position(Stejskalová).

The contrast between Julie and Abdu

Generally, The Pickup is mainly a story of escape as a means of fulfillment. This escape is from the home country to another foreign country. It is a flight in which each of the two main characters shows a desire to migrate to the other's home country, and in the process, they are faced with a lot of difficulties that make them adopt two distinct approaches to looking at the situation in which they are involved. Julie can adapt to her new situation to come to terms with the responsible and free approach that she has adopted. On the other hand, Abdu represents a different model to Julie's approach. That is to say, though they are close to one another, they fail to constitute some common ground that binds them together in their looking upon the surrounding world. Each fails to understand the other's motive behind their escape. Abdu once remarks, "Like me, she wants to go back where she belongs. She looks for somewhere else"(Gordimer). Stejskalova points out, "Each of them rejects the place he has been assigned. Each makes a choice. Each picks up a different culture and is willing to be an outsider" (Stejskalová).

Having realized that her efforts to extend the man's stay in South Africa have officially failed, Julie decides to take the most extraordinary decision that a girl like her would take. She decides to accompany him on his way back to his home country. The decision is welcomed neither by her father nor by Abdu himself. She has her rationale behind this decision. It is a rationale that is absolutely her own regardless of the opinions of others, including that of Abdu. Julie disregards the difficulties and hardships that she is going to face. In this due light, Dimitriu points out, "She goes on a journey of personal self-discovery that has no boundaries other than those imposed on her by her inward dedication. Rejecting the landscapes of global opportunities, she identifies the map of her life as a new country of exploration. (Dimitriu).

Here, Julie's choice to be in the company of the pickup on his way back to his country is an existential free one that entails responsibility. She is absolutely free to choose where to go. She can pick any location. She decides to go places that others are not allowed to travel to. She chooses to tread the impossible and the unexpected. Julie's decision is

considered odd by her group of friends, The Table, and her family. As Tereza Stejskalova highlights, "Her act is challenging and unexpected. Her action and statu make her exceptionally unique, one of a different kind in both communities" (Stejskalová). The father never complies with his daughter's desire, and he is greatly shocked to know of her audacious decision. He tries his best to prevent her, yet, all his attempts prove to be in vain. The father says:

You lack consideration for what you do indirectly, to your family, I suppose I've spoilt you ... You are nearly thirty. And now you come here without any warning and tell us you are leaving in a week-time for one of the worst, poorest, and most backward of the third world countries, following a man living here illegally. (Gordimer).

Again, finding his daughter relentlessly complying with his warning, the father touches upon some aspects of Julie's character that he sees as very crucial and essential in the light of the kind of life she has been leading. He knows that she values freedom and independence. She never likes restrictions or confinement. He also knows that she takes her mind as the only dictating instructor that guides and controls her actions in a world whose she does not accept values and conventions. The father is quite aware of many facts about the conditions of life and living in the country where his daughter is willing to leave for. He is quite aware that his daughter will never feel comfortable there. He is frightened of the kind of life she is going to experience. As Dana Mount remarks, "He wants to move her feminism against her by invoking racist stereotypes of women in non-western cultures" (Mount).

Furthermore, the father expresses his disapproval of Julie's decision by turning his disapproval into a piece of advice as a last resort by warning her against what she will experience. He says, "You, you to whom independence and freedom mean so much, women are treated like slaves. It's the culture, religion You are out of your mind, what more can I say. You choose to go to hell in your way" (Gordimer).

Julie no longer feels at ease in her relationship with her native friends. As the narrator tells, "The struggle to stay clenched tightly inside her. It possesses her, alien to them.... She feels she never knew them... They are strangers, and he is the known" (Gordimer). Having realized that life without Abdu in South Africa is impossible, Julie buys two tickets, one for her and the other for her lover. The action that is even more surprising or rather shocking for Abdu. It is a stage in her life that she realizes that Abdu is the closest person in the whole world, and it is indispensable for her to live away from him. The tickets are the documents that demonstrate her ability to make individual choices entirely her own. It is a clear demonstration of her existentially rebellious nature. Julie's option does not allow or leave any scope for negotiation with anybody, including Abdu himself. On the other hand,

Abdu goes to express his shock at Julie's buying of the two tickets, saying:

Who asked you to buy two tickets? You said to me? Don't you think you said nothing to me? Don't you think you must discuss? No, you are used to making all decisions, you do what you like, no father or mother, nobody must ever tell you. And me -who am I, don't ask me- you cannot live in my country, it's not for you, you can wish you were dead, if you have to live there, can't you understand? I can't be for you responsible (Gordimer).

Julie insists on joining her lover and the latter tells her that accompanying him is against the conventions of his native country to live with her (as a stranger) without marriage and, eventually, decides to marry her. He says, "If you must leave with me, then we must marry. He adds "I cannot take a woman to my family like this" (Gordimer). It is a decision that Julie happily receives and complies with. A personal decision that represents a turning point in the young woman's lifestyle. As Kirsty Hemsworth puts it, "She alters from a daughter of liberal success to one who is yearning for inhabitation in a new foreign community that has its different types of restrictions"(Hemsworth). It is also a choice that she sees as her own, no matter what her parents' opinion is. She has decided to change her life, and the decision is free. Here, Julie's disregard for her father's advice and acceptance of Abdu's marriage manifests her existential status.

Despite her awareness of the unknown awaiting her, she is inwardly ready to accept its consequences. She is not willing at all to look back. She never appears hesitant in making her decision. Malika remarks, "Julie chooses where to be a global citizen in this due light. And what comes to settling in a place, she doesn't care about a Western family, even with her father's serious attempt. He tries to persuade her not to go to the East." (Mallika). Julie has decided her fate and finds it overwhelming as the story tells, "She is the one with the choices. The freedom of the world was hers" (Gordimer). She is capable of defending her views and making them valid. She decides to accompany her "orient prince" in a way that validates her liberty and reinforces her existential stance regardless of what should be or should not be.

New Journey of Self-discovery by Julie

Julie is a revolutionary, strong-willed, and audacious character. Her decision to leave her family and her father's wealth and to join her lover is an existentially demonstrated. It is a decision that must be quiet clear to her regardless of its being clear to others. Again, Julie's trip to Abdu's country is a journey of self-discovery. It is a journey for fulfillment in which she seeks the unusual and the strange. It is a

journey that brings out new potentials in the face of the odd. A journey that brings out the best in her. She discovers herself by following a path full of hardship and risk. Having reached the place where Abdu's family lodges, Julie feels strangely new to the members of the family and strangely new to herself as well. As the narrator tells, "When she moves forward with her new husband to meet his family, she does so with an intruded detachment" The narrator adds, "She went forward to his family in the state, with him, the son who belonged to them, while finding that if she was strangely new to them, she was also strangely new to herself". (Gordimer)

Already in Abdu's country, Julie starts to see and know what she has never thought of. The first shocking experience she has to undergo is that there is no hot water. She is badly needed for a hot bath, yet her request will never be fulfilled. Here, she realizes that she is losing the privileges of her former luxurious life. As the narrative tells, "There was no bathroom. Had she thought of that when she decided to come to terms with it? This place is buried in the desert. Had she any idea of what a burden she would have? The narrator explains, "He was angry-with this house, the village, these are his people to have to tell her once and for all what her ignorant obstinacy of coming with him to his place means when she failed, with all her privileges, at getting him accepted in hers.(Gordimer)

Again, having settled in the village, Abdu introduces the newcomer to his family as his wife. Julie has to discover the world around her. The people speak a different language and have another religion. In the village, people do not have alarm clocks to awaken them, and the call for prayer by Muazzin awakens them. It is also there that women are not allowed to eat with men, and they have to cover their heads. Here, Julie realizes that she has to accept all the differences to adapt to the new community. She has to learn a new language. She has to know the unique traditions of a new religion. She has to get acquainted with all the rules and conventions of the new community, such as food customs and the acceptable social behavior of females, and how they are conducting themselves in the context of a Muslim community.

Already back in his home country, Abdu uncovers his real name, Ibrahim, is Ibn Mousa. Julie starts the process of adjusting herself to the new government. She goes to learn Arabic to be able to communicate with the members of Ibrahim's family. She says, "I have to learn the language" (Gordimer). Despite her reliance on Ibrahim to teach her Arabic, she develops a desire for self-learning. As the story tells, "She reads aloud to herself as if to hear in the natural emphasis of delivery which had been the passage came upon life-in these choices out of much advice and exhortation, inspiration and consolation people find in the religious texts. (Gordimer)

Having a firm conviction in what she is doing, Julie decides not to be guided. She is doing everything of her own free will, and she is not suffering from any kind of pressure or compulsion. While learning Arabic, Julie wants to benefit others by instructing them on her language; that is English. "Julie was teaching English not only to Maryam and these quiet young neighborhood girls and awkward boys who sidled into the lean-to whispering and making a place for another cross-legged on the floor ... She agreed in exchange for lessons in their language". (Gordimer). Hence, Julie's willingness to teach English to her husband's family members is greatly appreciated by them. As Barker points out, "Though her ability to interact with members of the new community is simple, the need of this community for an English teacher provides her with a good sense of purpose." (Barker)

With time, Julie shows a remarkable ability to adjust to the new kind of life she has to experience. She can pick any place she wants. She chooses to go to places that others never take a risk to travel to. She adopts an approach that makes her accepted and loved by the milieu. Soon Julie is able to restore her previous confidence. She starts to get accustomed to many of the traditions of the new community, such as rising at dawn at the sound of Azzan. She goes to fast during Ramadan as a sign of compliance with the already existing customs of fasting. She shows a lot of signs of disavowing her former life. In a word, the new kind of life brings a lot of things into focus for Julie.

Already a member of the family, the newcomer is first kept away from women of the same family until they learn how she is willing to be helpful to them. She never gives up her attempt to get familiarized with all the members. She accepts those limitations placed on her like any other woman in the community. She becomes so close to the female members that she starts to learn more about the different norms that govern them. Julie develops some intimacy with them, and, soon, this intimacy becomes mutual that they start to consider her as one of them. As Dana Mount states:

Julie's indulgence in women's space is an gateway to actively participate in the stream of everyday life in the town. However, the status of the young woman as an outsider implies that while living into that sphere, it confines her less than the other female members of the same family. Her moves are an example of her individual independence. (Mount)

It takes Julie no time to get closely attached to Ibrahim's sisters-in-law. Generally, household work is divided among the female members. In the beginning, she is not participating in the female activities. However, Julie grows curious about these limitations placed on her by her gender. Gradually, she develops a desire to learn more about those spaces that she can inhabit. It is in this environment that Julie finds

what she has been missing. She starts to experience what she has unconsciously looking for in her own country: spirituality, solidarity, commitment, and family union. Julie shares the love of family members for the first time. She says, "I've never loved in a family before, just made substitutes out of other people's ties, I suppose I didn't realize that either. There are things between people here that are important and necessary to them". (Gordimer)

Thus, Julie's acquaintance with the new community with all its conventions and codes reflects her ability to achieve personal acceptance on her own. She never appears reluctant about accepting the situation she finds herself in. Her involvement in the family life and her being so much attached to her in-laws justify her existential status. In this due light, Braine Worsfold points out:

Julie Summers finds a strong affinity with the other women from another African culture she interacts. Meanwhile, she is drawn by the minimalism of the kind of new life in the desert village. She is especially enamored of the close, spontaneous, sincere relationships that she could establish with her sisters-in-law: Maryam and Amina.(Worsfold)

On another level, Julie can adapt to Ibrahim's home country's religious and familial restrictions. Such restrictions dictate a perspective code to which she willingly adheres. It is here that she finds that space that dictates her new identity. She goes to identify herself with the place and the people. She can face hardship in her way. She can overcome whatever difficulties and obstacles in constructing a new meaningful life.

Ibrahim's mother welcomes Julie as a daughter-in-law and finds herself very attracted to her. Julie also sees the mother as particularly admirable. She has a lot of respect for the older woman. She is impressed by the mother's religious commitments and obligation to offer prayers and fast Ramadan. As Braine Worsfold remarks, "Julie is impressed by the natural dignity of the woman and the stability that her Muslim code allows her to persist in facing great hardships. (Worsfold)

Both lovers do not have a degree of mutual understanding. While Julie is inclined to escape her privileges, Ibrahim wishes to have such privileges. Commenting on how different Julie and Ibrahim are, York points out, "In spite of the romantic intimacy between the two lovers, they remain strangers, each on a personal journey. They can see beyond themselves, instead of attempting to grasp the truth about each other,." (York) Already back in his country, Ibrahim still has the desire to leave for a foreign country for a better life. He wants to leave for America in the company of his wife. Yet, to his surprise or rather to his shock, he knows that Julie is not at all interested in leaving the place

where she has just settled. Though the destination country is the country where her mother lives, a country that suits her culture and lifestyle, Julie refuses to join him. For Ibrahim, America represents a dream. It is the land of promise. He buys two tickets, but she decides not to leave. For Julie, Ibrahim's country is the place she loves, while for him, it is the place he detests. In this due light, Derek Barker contends, "Something intrinsic perhaps inside the cocktail of a western female in relationship with a Muslim male, might be the essential difference that renders such a relationship impossible ... Though they are physically sharing the same space, their worlds are apart". (Barker)

Again, Julie's decision not to accompany her dream knight to America is existentially free and responsible. It is a deeply felt one that enforces her existential status. Though the decision and its consequences are pretty obvious for her, it is not necessarily clear for others, including her husband. Having obtained the visa to depart for America, Ibrahim insists that Julie accompany him. She says, "I'm not going—coming to America"(Gordimer) She is neither willing to go to America nor back to her home country. In his reaction to this unexpected decision, Ibrahim goes to express his shock, stating, "What are you talking about? What is it you are not going to America? That is what you say? You are not going to your home. That is what you say?"(Gordimer). In another situation, Ibrahim wants to press her hard to join him. Yet, she never changes her mind. She is determined to complete what she has already started. She takes a stance that can never be changed. Though the decision is quite understandable and obvious for her, it is not the same for her husband. Commenting on this, Ibrahim says, "I don't know out of the sky somebody has changed your mind, driven you crazy? Where did you get the idea from, how, where?"(Gordimer)

Julie always takes decisions that entail full responsibility and commitment. She decides to live with her husband's family while living away in another country. She feels at home while he is away. She develops a kind of affinity that is her own. As J.M. Coetzee contends, "Her spirituality is affected by the spirit of the place. The desert starts a few blocks away from the family's house. It has become Julie's habit to rise so early at dawn and to sit at the edge of the desert, allowing the desert to enter her." (Coetzee) Ibrahim leaves, and Julie finds herself alone to face a completely different culture, language, and religion. He leaves her, hoping that she will change her mind and join him one day. A wish that will never come true. Commenting on Julie's current status, Monique To Every points out:

Julie finds belonging within the borders of Ibrahim's family and their proximity to the desert. At the same time, the husband leaves the wife and his family behind to search for better opportunities in the Western world. These strategies for attaining a sense of belonging provide

insights into how societal understanding of a home has shifted in a world marked by migration. (Every)

Having become a permanent member of the family and a permanent resident in the community, Julie validates her existence in that community through benefiting herself as well as those around her. She goes to identify herself with the new community. Consequently, she finds a new space to construct herself afresh in the desert. She goes to adopt a plane to invest in the land through farming. She decides to make the best of her money by financing a rice field in the adjacent oasis. She starts up a new business in farming in the same place that she loves and becomes very much attached to. Julie also finds in the new company another means that enables her to construct a sense of home. She displays complete control of her situation. In a word, Julie has already trodden the impossible and has found it impressive thanks to her free and personal decisions that have entailed full responsibility. She could validate her existence in a way that could justify her existential status. In this due light, Thendral remarks, "Julie represents any woman who searches for her own personal freedom and finds it. She dares to turn the extraordinary consequences of her personal decision into ones of success. She is able to handle the situation in which she finds herself" (Thendral and Devi)

On the whole, Nadine Gordimer has skillfully provided Julie and her lovers with all the potentials and presented them in situations that could present them as pure existential figures.

Thus, *The Pickup* is a narrative of a feminist existential outlook on how the life of a liberal woman can be lived under very complicated circumstances. Julie has shown a great ability to have control on her life by making free choices that entail responsibility. What Julie has done is an example of how individuals can shape their lives under any given circumstances. Julie has striven to find fulfillment in going beyond the borders of her home country. She has circumvented all the social, cultural, moral, religious, and economic barriers in a foreign community of a completely different background. She has chosen a path that is riddled with hardships and difficulties. Yet, she has never felt down about what she has decided. She has never felt distracted or confused about her choices throughout the different stages of her life. She has had that inner peace that makes her stance firm and steady to gracefully accept whatever adverse consequences of her decisions and choices without any regret. She is capable of demonstrating full commitment to all her decisions: her decision to have Abdu as a boyfriend, her decision to desert her friends, her insistence on marrying Abdu and accompanying him to his country, her individual acceptance of a new culture and adopting a different religion, her resolution of not joining in his decision to leave for America and her inclination to invest in the new land. Julie considers her mind the sole

legitimizing authority that guides and controls her actions. She has proved that she can validate her existence on her terms. In a word, Julie is a genuinely existential figure in the sense of making free and responsible choices regardless of any consideration.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, reading existentialism and assimilating the different aspects that underlie it are very important for everyone to realize the kind of life he/she is leading in any given society. From an existential point of view, *The Pickup* offers an open invitation for all to find some way to come to terms with what life offers. It is an invitation to adopt whatever strategies at whatever cost as a means for achieving authentic existence. In this novel, Gordimer could succeed to a great extent to portray Julie and her lover as existential figures in terms of making free choices and showing commitments to the consequences of these choices. One major finding of the study is that charting the directions of one's life through making free and responsible decisions and choices is the best way to achieve self-actualization at the personal level. One more finding of this study is that reading Gordimer's *The Pickup* provides existential experiences through the choices made by the two major characters and this might influence the readers' approaches in making similar choices and decisions in their lives to achieve self-complacency.

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