

REPRESENTATION OF THE MUSLIM WORLD: AN ETHNOCENTRIC
READING OF THE PICKUP BY NADINE GORDIMER WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO EDWARD SAID'S ORIENTALISM

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ABSTRACT

Representation makes sense of the world. It does not only represent the world but also create the world. This research aims to explore the representations of negative images of the Muslims and the Muslim countries represented in the novel *The Pickup* by Nadine Gordimer. This research also tries to investigate that how Nadine Gordimer's characters and places have been negatively stereotyped. It exposes that the Muslims and the Muslim world have been misrepresented and stereotypically portrayed. The images and attitudes towards the Muslims world clearly reflect that the Muslim world is under a cloud. The European countries have been projected positively while, on the other hand, negative images have been associated with the Islamic world. Donald R. Kinder and Cindy D. Kam's theoretical framework suits this research to analyze the text *The Pickup*. Further, Edward Said's "Orientalism" provides insight to explore the biased mindset against the Muslims and the Muslim world. Said argues that the line fabricated between the East and the West is based on false assumptions and misconceptions. The research finds that the images and the descriptions portrayed by Nadine Gordimer in *The Pickup* actually are the misrepresentations of the Muslims and the Muslim world. The Muslims and the Muslim world are treated stereotypically and negatively.

Key Words: Representation, stereotypes, images, the East, the West

1. Introduction

Representations make sense of the world. This research pursues to expose that the Muslims and the Muslim world have been represented reductively in Gordimer's *The Pickup*. Images and descriptions have been stereotypically portrayed in *The Pickup* which highlights the miserable picture of the Muslims and the Muslim world. Abdu [Ibrahim Ibne Musa] belongs to an unnamed Arab Islamic country while Julie Summers is a white South African woman belongs to a very strong and wealthy family. Abdu is an illegal immigrant living in Johannesburg where he comes into contact with Julie. Julie is also uncomfortable with her family. Abdu wants Julie's father to help him to stay there but all in vain. Later, both the characters have to leave Johannesburg and they go to Abdu's village. Nadine Gordimer in her novel *The Pickup* has allowed her characters to describe the Western biased attitudes towards the Muslims and Muslim countries. Her character struggles due to unfair Western prejudice. Abdu has become the victim of stereotypical approach towards the Muslim world. He struggles even having degrees and love for the West. The research also investigates that how the West is still controlling and shaping the lives of the people of the Muslim world. It also reflects the European mind set towards the Muslims and the Muslim countries. Stuart Hall (1997) defines, "Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully, to other people" (p. 15). Further, he claims that "representation connects meaning and language to culture" (Stuart Hall, p. 15). In this context, Islamic culture and the Muslims are represented as backward, irrational and passive through representations. Such representations present the Muslims and the Muslim world reductively because "representations always take away some aspects or add more to their originals" (Sarfranz, 2013, p. 3). The liaison between the East and the West is considered the relationship of master-slave. The false images about the Muslim world and its people have been constructed to express Western dominance over the East. There is much stress has been laid by the Post-colonial scholars particularly by Edward Said. Said explains in his ground breaking work *Orientalism* (1978) that the boundary between the West and the East is artificial and man-made (John McLeod, 2010). The Westerners do not give importance to the Eastern [Orient] even as a human being. He explains "not quite as human as 'we' are" (Said, 1978. p. 108).

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The false images have been presented in such a way to give logicality, credibility and legality to Westerner's supremacy, authority and European domination over the East (Ahmad Ghaforian & Ahmad Gholi, 2015, p. 1362). Abdul Jan Mohamed describes the "Other" [East] as the Self's shadow (1995, p. 24). S.R. Moosavinia, N. Niazi and Ahmad Ghaforian rightly claim that *Orientalism* is a western style which represents the West privileged, civilized, rational and the East as silent and an 'object of study' (2011, p. 103). Ahmad Ghaforian and Ahmad Gholi state that the Self represents the West as European, us, dominant, superior, active, the ruler and the Other as the East, dominated, them, non-European, inferior, the ruled and the passive (2015, p. 1362). According to Rana (2014), the basic aim of the West to represent the East as other is to 'exalt the Occident' [the West] (p. 1). He argues:

"In Orientalism, [Said] has focused on the way in which the 'colonizing first world' has inverted 'false images and myths' about the third world... these stereotypical image convenient justified western exploitation and domination of eastern and middle eastern culture and people (p. 2)."

Ethnocentrism is the view that one's own culture is superior and others are inferior to it. Ayşe Dilek Ogretir and Sezai Ozcelik (2008) analyze ethnocentrism as cultural narrowness where one's own culture is considered everything and superior to all other groups (p. 237). William Graham Sumner defines:

"Ethnocentrism is the technical name for this view things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it... Each group thinks its own folkways are the only right ones... ethnocentrism leads people to exaggerate and intensify everything in their own folkways... which differentiate them from others" (Sumner, Folkways, 1906).

Ethnocentrism influences the lives of the people negatively all over the world. It creates gaps among different strata of the society. Mekonnen Hailemariam Zikargae (2013) has the view that *Ethnocentrism* is a cultural superiority over other cultures and an unusual high regard for one's own ethnic, religion or cultural group. This research explores that the Muslims become the victims of ethnocentric attitude of the West and their knowledge is based on false assumptions and stereotypes about the Muslim countries.

Stereotypes are "[T]he beliefs we possess about a social group" (Kinder and Kam, 2009, p. 44). Stereotypes enable the people to make a set of beliefs about a certain group which become the identity of that group. Another view point, Pedro Bordalo, Katherine Coffman, Nicola Gennaili and Andre Shleifer (2015) claim, "stereotypes" highlight differences between groups" (p. 1). Donald R. Kinder and Cindy D. Kam (2009) elaborate the stereotypes as:

- i. Stereotypes exaggerate differences and sharpen boundaries: in-groups and out-groups appear more different from each other than they actually are.
- ii. Stereotypes tend to portray the members of out-groups as though they were all the same: individual variation is flattened, anomalous cases are set aside.
- iii. Stereotypes are permeated by affect. To say that "Jews are pushy" or that "blacks are lazy" is not only to make a judgment but also to express an emotion.
- iv. Stereotypes are easily activated and, once activated, influence judgment and behavior in a variety of ways. (2009, p. 45).

Stereotypes "exaggerate differences and sharpen boundaries" (Kinder & Kam, 2009), such stereotypical beliefs and false images have made a boundary between the East and the West. The false representations of the Muslims and the Muslim countries have made a gap and intensified the situations between the East and the West. Craig McGarty, Vincent Y. Yzerbyt and Russell Spears (2002) state that stereotypes are used to represent a specific group at a specific time (p. 7). Rey Ty, Awni Al-Karzon and E. J. Hunting state that Muslims face a discrimination and prejudice. They are stereotyped as "terrorist, extremist, savages and barbarians" (p. 5). In this context, the present research seeks to expose the misrepresentation of the Muslims and the Muslim world as backward, alien, savages and a threat for the West.

2. Review of Literature

The Muslims are stereotyped negatively and considered, according to John Sides & Kimberly Gross, violent and untrustworthy. The world particularly the Europeans countries mistreat the

Muslim world and the Muslims. Furthermore, the Muslims are assumed inferior and uncivilized (Said, 1978 & Ahmad Ghaforian and Ahmad Gholi, 2015, pg. 1362). Kam and Kinder (2007) claim that in the War on Terror, the United States faces [Muslims] a “strange and shadowy enemy” (2007, p. 321). The Muslim world is under a cloud (Rana, 2014, p. 33) and the Muslims are struggling in the present times. Andrew Sullivan (2001) expresses “Muslim civilization is under a cloud” in the novel *The Pickup* by Nadine Gordimer.

Andrew Sullivan also (2001) claims that *The Pickup* by Nadine Gordimer represents the difference of two civilization and where the Muslim civilization is in struggle. Abdu belongs to an un-named Arab Islamic country. Ellenor Gerdin has the view that “Islam is particularly important in Abdu’s life” (2006, p.4). In addition, Ellenor Gerdin explains that culture and social values also affect the identities of the people (2006, p. 3). Both, [Abdu and Julie], belongs to different cultures and different countries having different social norms and values which affect their lives. Andrew Sullivan claims that *The Pickup* is the story of love between Julie and Abdu. Julie is a white, wealthy and liberal while Abdu is a mechanic, illegal and inclined towards tradition and religion (Islam) (2001, p. 1). J.M. Coetzee (2003) also comments on Abdu as he is an ‘illegal’ (p. 2). He is living in Johannesburg [South Africa] as an illegal immigrant where he is an out-sider and alien. Franz Meier claims that Nadine Gordimer deals with the problems of race, class, bureaucratic arbitrariness and political issues not only on local or regional level but also on the international level. Further, he continues to explain other layers of meanings in *The Pickup* that the novel is a love story of Ibrahim and Julie who are not only culturally different but also different by race and class (2003, p. 2).

Andrew Sullivan explains that they do not understand each other completely. But physical attraction enables the both to keep themselves very close to each other. It is the physical union between Abdu and Julie which makes it possible for both to survive in different societies. Andrew Sullivan thinks that Nadine Gordimer gives a universal solution of one’s disruption but it is not right at all (Andrew Sullivan, 2001). M.J. Cloete (2005) argues that both characters [Julie and Abdu] are different. They come from two diametrically opposed worlds with totally different cultures but are bound together by love or perhaps “sexual attraction” (p. 53). J.M. Coetzee claims in *Awakening* that both [Julie and Abdu] the characters have nothing same but only sex is the cause of their relation (2003, p. 3). Sarita Chuang also further adds that “it is through physical involvement that the protagonist’s [Julie Summers] identity acquires meaning and substance” (p. 5). M.J. Cloete (2005) argues that both [Abdu and Julie] are from totally different cultures and backgrounds. Both [Abdu and Julie] are bound with each other because of love or may be due to ‘sexual attraction’ (p. 53).

According to Andrew Sullivan (2001), in *The Pickup*, Nadine Gordimer draws our attention on dissimilar couple, their constant misunderstanding and on the problems concerned with immigration as well. Anthony York states that Abdu is an illegal immigrant, an outsider and not comfortable among her friends in Johannesburg. Abdu has been ordered to leave Johannesburg by the immigration authorities (2001, p. 1). Sue Kossew states thematically the issue of migration has been discussed (2005). Ibrahim leaves for his village with Julie who also decides to go with him (Andrew Sullivan, 2001). Sue Kossew states (2005) in *Nadine Gordimer, The Pickup* that the novel throws light on the problems of “migration, exile, xenophobia, and shifting power”. It prompts xenophobia and ill feelings towards the outsiders (p.1). M.J. Cloete (2005) argues that Nadine Gordimer represents the theme of ‘otherness in *The Pickup* (p. 53). In this context, Sarita Chuang claims that “all of them treat Ibrahim as “the other” (p. 3).

3. Research Methodology

This study includes qualitative research and focuses on close textual analysis of Gordimer’s text *The Pickup*. It exposes how the Muslim world and the Muslims represented stereotypically in Gordimer’s novel. The present research involves Postcolonial paradigm focusing on Said’s views on Orientalist discourse. It adopts Kinder and Kam’s theoretical framework to analyze the text *The Pickup* by Nadine Gordimer. It delimits itself only to stereotypes to probe into the text *The Pickup*.

4. Analysis and Discussions

In *The Pickup*, Abdu whose real name is revealed latter as ‘Ibrahim Ibn Musa’ is the central character in the story. Ibrahim Ibn Musa or Abdu actually comes from an Arab Islamic country and wants to live in Johannesburg [South Africa] as its permanent, legal citizen. The whole story

revolves around the two main characters, Abdu and Julie. His love affair starts with Julie when he is called to repair Julie's car in the very beginning of the novel and it paves the way for further meetings between Ibrahim Ibn Musa and Julie. The story seems apparently based on the love affair between Abdu [Ibrahim Ibn Musa] and a South African, white woman, Julie Summers. But the close reading reveals that *The Pickup* actually also contains such images, symbols and descriptions, based on stereotypes, and which represents that Abdu and his mother land [an unnamed Arab Islamic country] have been stereotypically represented. Further, there are very severe descriptions have been narrated which highlight the negative image of the Muslim and the Muslim world. Space has not been provided for the people who belong to the Muslim countries.

In the very beginning of the novel, *The Pickup*, Julie's car breaks down on the road and she meets with Abdu for the first time who is working as a car mechanic in the garage as an illegal immigrant in Johannesburg. Nadine Gordimer states:

“So could you send someone to have a look ... the car's round the corner? He stared at his hands. Just a minute while I clean up (Gordimer, 2001, P. 7).”

Abdu's look is not satisfied. In the beginning, he hesitates but later when she offers him coffee at EL-AY Café he accepts her offer, “Why don't we have coffee-if you are free?” (Gordimer, 2001, p. 10). He joins her at EL-AY Café for coffee because she insists him to be there with her. But he has to face there an unfair prejudice and discrimination from Julie's friends. According to the stereotypes about the Muslims and the Muslim countries, Muslims and Arab countries are stereotyped as, “fanatics, irrational, primitive, belligerent, and dangerous” (W. Shahid & P.S. van Koningsveld, 2002, p. 171). Julie's friends describe his country in the same way as stereotypical images represent the Muslim countries.

“So that's where he's [Abdu] from; one of them knows all about that benighted country...a desert, corrupt government, religious oppression, cross-border conflict-composite, if inaccurate, of all they think they know about the region, they're telling him about his country (Gordimer, 2001, p. 11).”

Here word ‘*benighted*’ refers to the dark side of Abdu's country. Julie's friends never visited his country, as also described in the novel, but they comment on it as they have observed practically his native place very closely. Actually, their knowledge is the reflection of their biased mindset and stereotypes which highlight their attitude towards Abdu who actually belong to an Islamic country. Donald R. Kinder and Cindy D. Kam (2009) elaborate that stereotypes exaggerate differences and sharpen boundaries: in-groups and out-groups appear more different from each other than they actually are. He is stereotyped being a Muslim and because of an Arab Islamic country which is assumed a land of inferiors, aliens and barbarians.

From the very beginning of the novel, Julie's representation reveals that she possesses privilege and honor. She belongs to a white, wealthy family and she is dominating Abdu by race, status, power and money. She is independent in her decisions. She has her own car and still in search of a new one. On the other hand, Abdu is working as a ‘garage man’ (2001, p. 11) and living in Johannesburg as an illegal immigrant. And even he is not in a position to tell his real name ‘Ibrahim Ibn Musa’. He introduces himself as ‘Abdu’. As Nadine Gordimer points out, “I'll give a call to find out when it's ready-you're Mr....? Ask for Abdu (2001, p. 7).” And further, when Julie first time meets with Abdu, he is lying under a car and his clothes and condition tell that he is struggling in that country. “[H]e was young, in his greasy work-clothes, long hands oil-slicked at the dangle from long arms; he wasn't one of them...(Gordimer, 2001, p. 8).”

By comparing both the characters life style and conditions of their rooms, Gordimer highlights that Julie's apartment is very comfortable and luxurious. Julie is given honor and the representation shows her status. On the other hand, Abdu is living in a small room near the garage where he works as a mechanic. As pointed out in the novel, *The Pickup*, “Where are you living? He told her: there was a room behind the garage the owner let him have” (2001, p. 16). Abdu is not in a position to afford a room to live there comfortably. That is why, he has to accommodate himself in a small room which is also not his own and which is not as comfortable as Julie's. Here, the comparison of both characters' living room and their life style indicates that Julie's representation is the symbol of superiority while, on the other side, Abdu represents the inferiority of the people of the East as they are stereotyped. He is not respected as Julie. He is a well-educated person but Julie's friend mocks at him because he does not belong to in-group. He is an “outsider” that is why he is called a ‘grease-monkey’.

“One of them ponders, breaking a match over and over. An economist having to become a grease-monkey” (Gordimer, 2001, p. 12).

He is graduate in economics “[T]he ‘garage man’ has a university degree in economics” (2001, p. 11) but working as a car mechanic in a garage. It shows that even being qualified, he is not able to get a job for himself. Further, he is also marginalized. It does not matter that how much he is qualified or industrious but it is compulsory to be born in a privileged country so that he is respected. He is jobless even having a degree in economics and working as a car mechanic which clearly reveals the mistreatment of the Muslims like Abdu.

Another layer of representation reveals that this is not happened for the first time that he is rejected but whenever he makes an attempt to get a visa or a job in the Western countries, he faces always an unfair prejudice and discrimination. He struggles every time because of stereotypical images about the Muslims and the Muslim community. To support the argument, Rey Ty, Awni Al-Karzon and E. J. Hunting claim: “Muslims are survivors of name-calling and stereotypes in predominantly non-Muslim societies, such as U.S. they are given different blanket labels, such as anti-Christian, terrorists, savages and barbarians” (p. 5). So, Abdu is a Muslim that is why he is stereotyped and facing a lot of difficulties whenever he applies for visa in the Western countries. It is clear, as depicted in the novel by Gordimer, that Abdu is assumed an ‘other’ who belongs to a Muslim country. He faces biased behaviors by the Western people who do not allow him to enter and live in the Western countries. He is not given a proper place in the Western countries even having a degree in economics. Abdu remains an alien and a threat for the West as all the Muslims are considered. During his stay in Johannesburg, Abdu tells Julie:

“There is a litany of the countries he had tried that would not let him in. I’m a drug dealer, a white-slave trader coming to take girls. I’ll be a burden on the state, that’s what they say, I’ll steal someone’s job, I’ll take smaller pay than the local man (Gordimer, 2001. p. 14).”

It clearly reflects that how Abdu being a Muslim is stereotyped and marginalized in the Western countries. It does not important for the West that how much he is educated or has a wish to work in the Western countries. But they create a bias and a boundary for the people of the Muslim countries. Abdu, all the time, has been declared a smuggler and a burden on the Western countries.

Similarly, in *The Pickup*, we also observe that Nadine Gordimer has also described such descriptions which indicate that there are also some stereotypes which explore that the women in the Muslim countries are not treated positively. Women are depicted as the followers of their societal, cultural and religious norms and values. Julie is told,

“But it was arranged, she [Abdu’s mother] was married. And here she has been in this house giving us birth, feeding us, boiling water to clean us” (Gordimer, 2001, p. 84).

They are not free in their countries but totally dependent upon men. They are like slaves. They have no freedom as compared to the Western women. They have to follow some restrictions according to the norms and values of their culture and civilization. Gordimer points out in *The Pickup*:

“What we do know, is that the place is dangerous, a country of gangster political rivals, abominable lack of health standards-and as for women: you, you to whom independence, freedom, mean so much, eh, there women are treated like slaves. It’s the culture, religion (2001, p. 63).”

On the one hand, it explores again stereotypical views about the Islamic world that it is a dangerous place which is not safe to live and survive. And, on the other hand, it further also elaborates the stereotypes about the women’s condition in the Islamic world that Islamic world is actually a prison for women where they are not independent. Their condition is not good according to the stereotypes of the Muslim world. The Muslim countries are not considered safe and comfortable to live but always remain dangerous. These considerations actually support the stereotypes which are made by the West against the Eastern countries particularly the Muslim countries. Julie is warned not to go there because that country is the land of barbarians according to the stereotypes about the Muslim countries. Again the binary of the self and the other has been exaggerated with regard to the difference between Abdu and Julie. She has choices but Abdu is without choices. She chooses everything by her own choice. She does not depend upon anyone. Even she herself claims, “My life is my life, not theirs” (Gordimer, 2001, p. 26). She is free to

choose any culture or any country to travel at any time. She has no issue. But, whereas Abdu is concerned, it is very difficult for him to survive in any country except his own Arab Islamic country where he belongs. Julie is independent as depicted in the novel, *The Pickup*. She leaves her parents' house and lives in a separate apartment. She has a job and spends her time mostly with her friends at EL-AY Café. And now she herself decides to go with Abdu to live with him in his village.

Julie finally leaves Johannesburg [South Africa]. Throughout her life, she makes her every decision by herself. She doesn't depend upon anyone as Gordimer points out,

“She [Julie] had made her choice; here it was. She was the one with the choices. The freedom of the world was hers” (2001, p. 73).

She is free because she belongs to wealthy and strong family. She has choices to select according to her own taste. She is not like Abdu who is limited options in his life. Abdu is unable to understand why Julie has so many choices and opportunities to go and stay anywhere in the world. We also observe in the novel that Abdu has no choice. He is dependent upon Julie and the Western mindset does not allow him to get a job for himself or make a career as a successful human being in the Western world. The world is very limited for him as compared to Julie.

While on the other side, Julie belongs to a white race so she is always with choices. When she comes in Ibrahim's village, there she is again represented with choices. She has a strong background and that is why she can enjoy her status. Julie freely speaks her own language and “She makes use of her education to teach English to school children and anyone else in the village” (Gordimer, 2001, p. 102). She is represented according to the philosophy of “white man's burden”. She is not like other women in that country but there she also enjoys her privilege. Further, if she has to follow some restrictions due to Islamic culture, she takes it just as a new adventure for herself. She is not dependent upon Abdu even in an Arab Islamic country where she goes with Abdu.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, we can argue that the Muslims and the Muslims countries have been represented reductively. Representation of the Muslims and their culture is stereotypically portrayed in the text “*The Pickup*”. Ibrahim Ibn Musa is struggling and facing a lot of difficulties because he is a Muslim. Being a Muslim, the space has not been created for him. He remains a threat for the West. Similarly, his native country has been represented as backward, uncivilized and a land of barbarians. Ibrahim's country has nothing to facilitate the human beings. It lacks even basic education for the children. Women also have been represented as slave in Islamic culture. In comparison, Julie is the representation of privilege and superiority. She celebrates her superiority and choices. She is enjoying her status being white. She remains dominant throughout her life while Ibrahim is dominated. In short, we can conclude that representations of the Muslims and the Muslim countries have been negatively portrayed as uncivilized, backward and inferior. And all the reductive images have been attached with the Muslims as alien, barbarians, passive and a threat for the West.

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