Women's Quest for Selfhood

In

Selected Novels of Nadine Gordimer

By

Thouraya Al-Nasser

Supervisor

Dr. Fadia Suyousie

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (Literature and Criticism) at Yarmouk University. December, 2003
Committee Members

1. Dr. Tadia Syoufie (Chairman)

2. Prof. Mahmoud Kharbutli (Member)

3. Dr. Mahmoud Al-Shetawi (Member)

4. Prof. Nedal Mousa Al-Mousa (Member)
Abstract

Women's Quest for Selfhood
In
Selected Novels of Nadine Gordimer

By
Thouraya Al-Nasser

Supervisor
Dr. Fadia Syoufie

This study examines women's quest for selfhood in three selected novels by Nadine Gordimer: Burger's Daughter (1979), My Son's Story (1990) and The House Gun (1998). These novels represent three major historical periods of the history of South Africa: the apartheid era, the anti-apartheid transitional era, and finally the post-apartheid era.

It is noticed that, in these three representative periods that violence is considered as the destructive force and, at the same time, the motivating force for Gordimer's heroines. On that one hand, external violence causes the heroines living in South Africa under the regulations of Apartheid regime to feel confusion and lack of self-awareness. Moreover, it causes them to live in an insecure atmosphere, where apartheid brutality reaches everyone equally. On the other hand, violence is simultaneously considered as the motivation for the heroines' actions. It drives them to seek their real role in this society and to assert themselves in the midst of this chaos. At the same time, Gordimer's heroines, in these novels, find themselves facing internal influences that affect their self-
awareness. Therefore, we find that domestic instability, just as external violence, prompts Gordimer's heroines to reassess their personal scale of priorities.

My contribution lies mainly in tracing patterns of the heroines' self-assertion in Gordimer's novels which have not been discussed in previous studies by focusing on the concept of self from sociological and psychological perspectives. I investigate particularly the reasons that cause Gordimer's females to re-examine their role in this life by focusing on the external political violent conditions as well as the domestic issues which influence their personality and cause each to re-examine her beliefs to accord with the new self she asserts. Moreover, the study analyzes the phases each heroine goes through which eventually lead to her self-assertion. It is noticed that the three heroines start their self-quest, each according to her socio-cultural background. Furthermore, this study proves, despite Gordimer's frank statements that she is not a feminist writer, that her writing unconsciously betrays feminist concerns.

The thesis consists of three main chapters in addition to the introduction and the conclusion.