

# Shifting Identities: A Contemporary Dimension of Cultural Hybridization in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*

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## Abstract

The realities of belongingness especially in Postcolonial Africa is rooted in the quest to migrate for greener pastures in continental Europe and America as a result of poverty, natural disasters or social unrest. African writers among others creatively document fictional experiences of migrant characters who engaged to embark on daring journeys as a strategy to breakout from lingering political insecurity and economic hardship of their respective countries. This paper re-examines the concept of migration as an empowering tool, for Gordimer in *The Pickup*, the feeling of fulfilment even in an unknown rustic Arab environment as against an emotionally sterile and unproductive life in a well-off background as represented by her female protagonist gives a sense of belongingness. It investigates the complexities of emotional disconnectedness and dislocation before migration. It also attempts a contrastive inquiry of characters who grow out of emotional displacement and are able to re-define their sense of home and belonging and others who remain displaced as a result of external influences. This paper concludes by creating a more encompassing understanding of belongingness and migration.

**Keywords:** Migration, Identity, Cultural Hybridity, Postcolonial Theory, Displacement.

## Introduction

Africa is no stranger to mass migrations. For more than one hundred millennia, following their initial evolution, which may have been in the coastal area near the present-day borders of Namibia and Angola, Homo Sapiens moved northwards then migrated out of Africa for the first time some 70,000 years ago (Tishkoff et al., 2009). There are more than 200 million migrants working and living in places as diverse as North America, Australia, Myanmar and China. An extended refugee crisis in Europe, including regular xenophobic violence in South Africa, suggests that the issues surrounding migration, whether political or economic, are more visible than ever. Following the founding fathers of African literature, contemporary African writers are gradually showing deeper concern for this issue in their works of fiction (Harzoune 2015). A look at most literary productions, in the last fifteen years, suffices to convince the doubtful mind of the recurrence of migration in African literature, Chris Abani's *GraceLand* (2004) tells the story of Elvis, a teenager who wishes to get out of poverty and violence in Lagos. In Baingana's *Tropical Fish: Tales from Entebbe* (2005), set in Entebbe, Kampala, and Los Angeles, Christine, the protagonist of this novel, migrated to America and returned home to Uganda where she struggled to adapt to her former home. Brian Chikwa also narrates in *Harare North* (2009) the story of his unnamed hero as one of the thousands of illegal immigrants seeking a better life in London,

with a past in strife-ridden Zimbabwe he is reluctant to hide. Osondu's collection of short stories, *Voice of America: Stories* (2009), portrays a mother who writes to her migrant son in United States asking for support, and also many other characters who have ties in America. In *Americanah* (2013), *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and the collection of short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), Adichie shows a deeper concern for the issues of migration, especially that of women. Because these works are telling depictions of what goes on in contemporary society, they are meaningful indications of the large-scale migration dramatized in contemporary African literature. Dustmann and Weiss (2007) migration theorists say that throughout human history, “economic motives for migration, and motives related to natural disaster or persecution . . . are the two main reasons why individuals migrate.” (2). In fact, for ages, people have been migrating as a result of poverty, natural disaster or social unrest. The International Organization for Migration (2015) sees human migration as the movement of people from one place to another with the intention of temporal or permanent settlement. This movement may be within the national landscape which conveys the notion of internal migration and migration outside the interspace of national borders, which is external migration. Migration can also be temporal in the sense of movement for the purpose of pilgrimage, tourism and leisure travel. Nomadic movements, and movements across borders or permanent; which entails an intention of the immigrant to create a new life in the host country. Migration can also be regular or irregular, these convey the notion of the legality of the immigrant's stay in the host country. Regular migrants are registered immigrants who are eligible to stay in the host land either through the instrumentation of a legal visa for the purpose of work or study or a transmutation of one's citizenship through marriage and other host land policies. Kornert (2007) demonstrates that migration is however, caused by pull and push factors which are the terms used to demonstrate the different shades of forced migration and voluntary migration. Push factors represent migration caused by wars, poverty, insecurity, ecological degradation amongst others, pull factors are largely influenced by socioeconomic and sociological reasons like unemployment, cultural clashes amongst others. Kornert clarifies the notion of Pull factors from the African immigrant perspective by noting that African migrants flee their homeland due to violent conflicts there. He states that between 1993 and 2002, 27 out of 53 African countries witnessed internal strifes which contributed to the fact that as at 2005, 18% of Africans were refugees. Using the 2005, International Organisation for Migration estimate, he states that African refugee migration contribute one-third of the global refugee population. In his explication of pull factors as one of the many reasons behind migration to other landscapes. He notes a penchant for Africans to emigrate to Europe because of the perceived socioeconomic advantages, given the fact that all of the 20 least developed countries are African countries due to political and socioeconomic instability. Young Africans therefore consider Europe, especially countries of their former colonial masters as countries to find personal, socioeconomic and political freedom, which in reality is only a facade. Rodney (1972) demonstrates that the true human development and liberation for the majority of the people was through the transformation of their own lives in a struggle to replace and reshape the new colonialist government that dominated their society and prescribed their existence. This fact could be attributed to colonialism which has set the pace for the 21<sup>st</sup> century migration. The colonialist has left most African countries with the mind set to migrate, in that they have developed within the others a sense

of inferiority, so much that Africa in a post-colonial era, voluntarily conditions herself to the dictates of the West. That is the reason it seems okay for the West to come to the various regions of Africa and set up colonies whether settler or otherwise to cart away raw materials and labour for European markets, such as the triangular trade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. yet the Africans get much of discrimination as immigrants in Western landscape. It also seem alright for the West to initiate forced migration during slave trade by taking Africans in chains, who in a post-colonial era, Africans still voluntarily follow the same trend of migration due to failed economic system. These accounts for the reasons why they take the hides and skin from Africa to Europe and later sell back to them(Africans) as expensive shoes, bags and leathers. It also accounts for the reason they transport cotton from Africa to China and sell back to them as expensive textiles. America also transport crude from Africa and later sell back to them as expensive premium motor spirit (petroleum). These are all shades of the triangle trade. These unequal and imbalanced relation necessitate a social collapse. Therefore, the idea of a better life via migration is only but an illusion. Amnesty.Org has provided mostly a definition of migration from the point view of Forced or Involuntary migration. Involuntary Migration is the movement of peoples caused by unstable political happenings in a landscape such as wars, famine, political conflicts, human rights violations, exile as a result of political or social dissidence amongst others. Voluntary migration is usually caused by socioeconomic factors and it is usually recognized by the choice of the migrant to leave the homeland to a foreign landscape. In Nigeria, the latter is often a deliberate decision which is largely informed by the disillusionment that characterized post independent Nigeria. Kehinde (2011:63) asserts that:

The degree of voluntariness to migrate to foreign lands can be weighed against the backdrop of the absence of an environment capable of offering its citizenry the opportunity for a meaningful existence. As a result, what may, therefore, be described as voluntary may betray a good degree of compulsion, since people are compelled to make choices under the pressure of the absence of basic amenities, security and probable sources of livelihood.

The implication of this is that voluntary migration may not be entirely voluntary because migrants in this case are compelled by hardship in the failed system to search for a better life elsewhere. Upon examining post-colonial African literature that deals with migration, one comes to the realization that the generally known migration story for African migrants is that of fleeing from poverty or war. Most discourse on migration is dominated by an emphasis on the host country's political and procedural concerns, and little attention is placed on the experiences of the migrants. This is where literature offers us a unique perspective. As suggested by Paul White in the essay *Geography, Literature and Migration*, literature “has the power to reflect complex and ambiguous realities that make it a far more plausible representation of human feelings and understandings than many of the artefacts used by academic researchers” (1995:15).

### **Postcolonial Literary Theory**

By analysing the experiences of fictional characters from the postcolonial perspective, we can work towards creating a more encompassing definition of fulfilment and belongingness. Thus, Postcolonial framework, with its emphasis on globalisation, migration and cosmopolitanism, provides the theoretical groundwork for this study. The field is not characterised by a single overriding theory, being rather a collection of related and complementary perspectives that engage with a wide variety of issues

such as fractured identities and societal inequalities. Initially, postcolonial studies focused 'inwards' in its emphasis on specific national issues, social oppression, activism, revolution and 'writing back' to oppressive power structures. The declining influence of the traditional concepts of colonisation coupled with “growing uncertainty over nationalism” and increased globalisation has prompted a shift in the postcolonial focus (Smith 2004:247). Therefore, in more recent years, the postcolonial research field has focused less on national issues and more on global issues like migration, diaspora, cosmopolitanism and the experiences of the migrant. This more outward-looking focus has allowed postcolonial theories to become increasingly mainstream (and relevant) in global and cultural literary debates. Despite the field's outward-looking shift, it has not lost its concern for the experiences of the minorities, the marginal and the outsider. In today's political climate, it is often migrants who occupy these positions, being “socially expelled as a result of, or as the cause of, their mobility” (Nail 2015:235). This interest in the experiences of minorities makes postcolonial literary theory uniquely suited to the analysis of migrant literature. As Fatemah Pourjafari and Abdolali Vahidpour have suggested, migrant literature, at its core, deals with the actual and emotional experience of leaving home whether willingly or by force and with arriving and living in a foreign country (2014:680). In recent years, however, the idea of migration has expanded to include a wide variety of cultural and social border crossings, which challenge accepted notions of identity and belonging (685). Regardless of the type of border crossing, the migrant experience arises from the recognition and consequences of difference and is characterised by loss, hybridity, ambiguity and dislocation. Often, it leaves migrants on the margins of society, outside the “hegemonic power structure” (680) and unable to find a safe space of belonging.

### **Migration in African Literature**

Migration and displacement have had an overwhelming influence on African Literature so much that in defining African Literature, migration and the diasporic experiences come to the mind in undermining or shaping the factors that define African literature. Daria (2007) highlights the fact that migration to the West and the stylistic influence garnered from diaspora shape the formative years of the African narratives in the homeland and the new experiences from the hostland. Ugwanyi (2010) further highlights exile as relocation, fleeing or movement of people from one social space to another willingly or forcefully. Nwagbara discloses that exile as a movement of several cultural and social baggage, has a tendency to produce roots of transnationalism in other climes, amidst the fact that exile embodies the discontentment of displacement. Linda Bakker et. al (2014) explains that immigrants are increasingly living dual lives by acknowledging their otherness that is co-extensive with the solidarity for the homeland. However, for refugees this solidarity cannot be expressed because of the circumstances of departure. Refugees have a tendency to hold on to the pains and anger towards a regime that led to their condition. This is coupled with the fact that their reduced economic existence in the host land and the resultant threat of personal persecution will give no room for remittances.

Lester (2016) describes the urgency and the disillusionment of migration from Africa. He explores the other in the short story of Seffi Atta, titled 'Twilight Trek'. He depicts Europe as the 'Self' while Africa as the 'Other' and claims that Africans have a desire to migrate because of the perceived socioeconomic imbalance in both worlds. In 'Twilight Trek' the migratory route is a voluntary one but an illegal one, one

in which Jean-Luc has to navigate the Sahara Desert, the Mediterranean Sea and the civil guards in an attempt to escape otherness. He is not the only one who carries the baggage of otherness with a promise of civilization, there are living characters like Patience and Obaeze, and lived characters like the Senegalese, the Malian and the Nigerian whose experiences are recounted through a dream sub-consciousness. There are barriers to the quest to Self-hood which is predisposing landscape of the Mediterranean as Self and the Sahara Desert as Other which undermines cosmopolitanism.

There has also been an engagement of migrant experiences in Nigerian poetry. In the paper, *The Antimony of Exile: Ambivalence and Transnational Discontents in Tanure Ojaide's 'When It No Longer Matters Where You Live'* (2008), there is an expression of discontent in a manner that relates the transnational flows to the articulation of cultural, social and economic contradictions amongst migrant realities. This does not evade the activist role of literature in Nigeria, which serves as one of the roles of a writer championed by Tanure Ojaide nor does it reduce the cultural affiliation of Ojaide to notions of Niger Deltan progress, but it elevates the writing of Ojaide to a pedestal of transnational and diasporic discourse. Ojaide's (2008) contribution to the discourse of Migration is also worthy of note in the paper *Migration, Globalisation, and the Recent African Literature* where Tanure Ojaide exposes his basis of migrant literature. "Migration, globalisation, and related phenomena of exile, transnationality, and multilocality have their bearing on the cultural identity, aesthetics, content and form of the literary production of Africans abroad" (Nwagbara 2008: 1). As much as he advocates for the aesthetic engagement of these transnational matters it is also important to delve into the political as well as the economic consequence of globalisation and exilic reality as expressed by Said (2002), where he notes that exile and migration may lead to the underdevelopment of the peoples of the Other. Said notes that amidst the attempts of literature to portray migrant and exilic experiences and realities, it is profoundly limited in presenting the true traumas of identity, survival and nostalgia.

Ojaide succinctly bundles these migrant realities and the co-extensive loss of homeland natures and homeland loyalty to an imbalanced hybrid in his poem 'When It No Longer Matters Where You Live', Ojaide (2008) also noted that African writers are using the currency of migration and displacement, as well as globalisation in their writing.

Nyiste and Iorhii (2012) describe migrant literature as Diaspora literature in its explication of dispersal and the collapse of nationalism in the work of Ike Oguinne *The Squatter's Tale*. The two scholars have described the landscape of America as a pastiche of migrants but have also noted that recent gaze of otherness have shifted to African-Americans who were descendants of enslaved Africans. Nonetheless, it is important to note that migrants contribute immensely to the dispersal and population of the world in different shades and in different landscapes. Friedman (2009) stated that genes and genomes have crossed several borders before the theorising of migration. This means that migration, dispersal and other cultures of mobility has always been a feature of humanity. Therefore, Friedman noted that movement whether forced or sought out, is the foundation of human evolution and the history of change on a global landscape. While some of these migratory states are caused by Wars, famine, political crisis and dissident stance, one of the original diasporas often referred to by scholars is the exilic journey of the Jews. Migration is therefore a growing motif of African literature that depict the in-between realities and angst of cosmopolitanism that challenge the nationalist loyalty of migrants. Migration could lead to a

re-imagination of homeland as well as the possible generation of loss and marginality in the face of racism. This could be found as stories of alienation in post-colonial literature, as it has over the years thrown up thematic concerns on displacement, crisis of identity as well as an attempt to recover the values of the homeland with the corresponding baggage of the West, leading to a possible hybridisation. In Kehinde's (2011) view, Exile is caused by several factors among which are the search for security and greener pastures. This may extend to the fact that in third world countries there are weak systems that allow for political and economic instability, violence and lack of basic infrastructures diseases and social security.

In Adichie's (2006) *The Thing Around Your Neck*, there is an encounter with the character Akunna in the collection of short stories, who felt a strong certainty of socio-economic progress but soon realises the choking circumstance of living in a host land. Her notion of quickly acquiring cars and the good life is bludgeoned by the realities of a dark racial prejudice against blacks and the economic subjugation of migrants. This shows the present realities of the economic traps that most Nigerians and Africans find themselves. Amidst their wealth of certificates which has created a mirage of globalised equality they are found as cleaners, morgue attendants and taxi drivers in the place perceived as the land of hope. This parallels the narrative in Afolabi's novel (2007) *Goodbye Lucille* where the main character, Vincent had to construct a new reality of love by concretizing a fling with a foreigner, Claudia, instead of marrying Lucille, a fellow Nigerian based in London. Vincent, a freelance photographer is thrown off balance by the fact that he is unable to find his dream job. His dream of becoming a high profiled photographer is dashed and this reduces his aspiration and motivations. He feels greatly displaced therefore leaving London for Berlin and also tries to escape his reality by drinking in clubs with a fellow Nigerian friend, Tunde. He also employs escapist strategies such as casual sex, heavy alcohol consumption to escape his socioeconomic displacement.

### **The Idea of Home and Migration**

Migration can be traumatic especially as migrants struggle with the perception and reality of home, it is pertinent to examine the different ways in which we understand home. Like any other social space, the idea of home is not neutral, it is both constructed and regulated by a combination of cultural and social norms that may not be immediately apparent. While traditional understandings of home suggest a physical dwelling place within the confines of one's country of origin, more contemporary definitions tend to focus on the relationships and activities that play out within the boundaries of a home or nation (Mallet 2004). According to Shelley Mallet, this is best expressed through the family home, a place that “holds symbolic power as a formative dwelling, a place of origin and return, a place from which to embark upon a journey” (2004:62). The concept of family home deals with a sense of security and familiarity, closeness, rootedness and strong emotional connection. It also functions as a source of personal identity and status, making room for its occupants to control and structure their time “functionally, economically, aesthetically and morally and where domestic communitarian practices are realised” (64). Home is a place where one begins to learn and enact the cultural norms of our given societies and, for some, the idea of home is inextricably linked to the notion of family, both immediate and extended (2004:64, 74). Migration forces one to come to terms with the way in which home is constructed and to evaluate the usefulness of those definitions in an entirely different social and cultural

landscape. Extreme environmental conditions, economic, or political instability have made migration both more necessary and more frequent than ever before (Nail 2015:1). Even for those who do not migrate in the traditional sense, modern life is defined by mobility: “people relocate to greater distances more frequently than ever before ... they tend to change jobs more often, commute longer and farther to work, change their residence repeatedly, and tour internationally more often” (Nail 2015:1). This increased social movement means that previously separate and distinct social groupings are coming into contact with radically different people, ideas and cultures; prompting not only an examination of the nature of home but also the suitability of home-based identities. Migration not only forces one to question the traditional understandings of home but also the terms related to it: identity and culture. Majority of what we learn about our home culture implies that it is essential to who we are and how we understand our place in society. Migration forces the subject to confront the fact that culture is not “essential or innate, but is always something whose apparent closure is performed and learnt” (Smith 2004:251). Furthermore, because culture is learnt, it can also be copied, something which disrupts the idea that culture is a “unique expression of a single community” (252). Essentialist ideas of community nation are, therefore, challenged by such a realisation, making them unstable points of identity. In fact, migration forces one to reconsider all the categories used to form one's identity, because “it reveals these identities as stories which are acted out in life but which are not interchangeable. It also shows how they often smother and silence competing stories” (249). By opening the migrant up to new influences, migration highlights the fluid nature of identity and encourages one to find new linkages, new points of identity and new ways of understanding ourselves. Changes to individuals in a social grouping eventually filter through to the group's social identity, leading to changed economic status, secularisation and even an “a reassertion of cultural (religious) distinctiveness through a re-energising of attributes of distinction” (1995:3).

Migration calls our previously stable understanding of home and identity into question. It makes us aware of the fact that home is not always a beneficial place, that for all its “familiar, safe, protected boundaries” (Mohanty 1988:196), there are spaces of control, exclusion, and in extreme cases, violence. Migration explains how traditional perspective of home can confine and limit the way in which we interact with society. The realisation that home is intrinsically unstable is a traumatic experience that results in an emotional imbalance, which has been theorised as a state of emotional dislocation, something well documented within the postcolonial literary theory. It is worthy to note that the male and protagonists in the novel are fully aware of home and the place of home in their individual lives but are disconnected from it. They feel unhomey and displaced thus they long for a better place called home which leads to shifting and identities, doing meaner jobs and adapting comfortably in a supposed patriarchal society in the search for self.

### **Migration and Displacement**

The concept of migration is one that is varied and complex. It concerns movement from a particular landscape to another based on the socio economic imbalances, political dissidence, the shocks of wars, famine, and poverty which produces refugees and asylum seekers. Amnesty.Org notes that migrants face vagaries of danger such as racism, discrimination, and all forms of exploitation. Migration occurs

in different continents especially from war ridden countries, or countries with high levels of poverty, socioeconomic dissatisfaction and political instability, corruption and the oppression of the people's human rights which are described as the push factors. Some examples are the migration of Mexicans and other South-Americans to the United States due to poverty and the search for personal freedom. The movement of Africans and others to Europe based on socioeconomic needs. Amnesty. Org states that more than 230 million people live outside their country of origin, and this estimate comprises 3% of the world population. A recent reality of migration is the movement of the peoples of the Arab World, North Africa and the Mediterranean to Europe in January 2015 based on the citizen's response to dictatorship which brought about a political instability and a rise of terror organizations as fillers to the absence of governance in Syria and the Levant. There is also a possibility of migration of peoples within the national landscape, either from one's place of origin to a major city, which is described as rural-urban migration or from one rural area to another, which is described as rural-rural migration, or suburbanization, where people move from urban spaces to rural spaces. This is generally described by scholars as internal migration. Amnesty.Org also explicates the situation of internal refugees, known as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) whereby there are individuals who are displaced from their place of origin but remain in the national landscape. Migration is also recognized when movements occur due to seasonal changes. Seasonal migration can be within the seasonal migratory routes necessitated by climatic changes within a national landscape or outside the borders of a nation.

Asiegbu (2010) notes also that the migration of Africans to Europe was caused by the consumerist culture that was instilled in Africans by Post-colonial mercantilism. It also claimed that the colonials handed down a legacy of dependence with an education that was meant to oil the lower rungs of the colonial work instead of managing the affairs of the country. For Asiegbu, it is this challenge that has laid the foundation for migrants who move to countries of their former colonials and who despite their legacy, have created a collaborative fortress against irregular entry into their countries. Asiegbu admits that African migration may also be disruptive of the social, economic and environmental structures of Europe especially when it comes to manage the influx of African refugees from war torn and poverty embattled regions of Africa, but declaimed that Europe stands at an advantage when skilled manpower moves from African countries to Europe in their droves in order to aspire for greener and palatable environments to work. In the explication of the post-colonial dilemma, Asiegbu asserts that Europeans linger with the ideas of ancient European philosophers like Hegel and writers of the Enlightenment Period, who saw Africans as inferior human species which necessitated the justification of slavery and later colonialism. This also contributed negatively to the African psyche so much so that Africans have the urgency in their hands to prove that they possess the skills, knowledge and elitism that the West sets as standards for civilization. It is important to note that Asiegbu did not shy away from the realities that most Africans live below a dollar a day, have to face harsh economic conditions due to the tyranny and irresponsibility of the governments of their homelands as well as internal conflicts within African nations or the continent. However, he claims that the foundation for a conflict prone African landscape was laid by the European powers who used the African landscape to fight proxy wars during the World War II, to back and engage African tyrants in order to secure the resources and the embezzled funds of their countries, to become indebted to the West as a result decimating the African socio-economic



structures which gave rise to mass movement of skilled manpower from their homelands to Western countries. Waters, Kasinitz and Asad (2014) explicate the influence of immigrants on the landscapes of the United States of America. It stated that African Americans are faced with a competitive challenge between themselves. African Americans and other immigrants who often face the same racial problems thereby fostering a fluid legal rights system that is inimical to the growth of African Americans. Other immigrants also create enclaves away from the residential and cultural spaces of the African Americans. This immediately leads to a sluminisation process that is engendered by segregation. The influx of African immigrants into the United States started in the 1990's as refugees from war torn countries with tyrannical government began to seek asylum in the United States of America.

### **The Concept of Belongingness and Re-definition of Self**

Migrants' experiences show us that it is possible to “escape the control of states and national borders and the limited, linear way of understanding” (Smith 2004:245). It is important to recognise that migration opens up the world in new and interesting ways our experience of migration and our access to the positive dimensions are dependent on our circumstances of birth and the ease with which we navigate the world. As Smith points out, migration can “involve forms of domination as well as liberation and can give rise to blinkered vision as well as epiphanies” (246). Thus, it becomes necessary to redefine belonging and home in a way that empower migrants, restore and improve their sense of self, though in a different and new way. This view is shared by Marangoly George, who encourages us to re-examine our “varying notions of home to see what can be recycled in less oppressive, less exclusionary ways” (1996:33). In order to redefine home, it is first necessary to consider the nature of the boundaries we create and our tendency towards a singular, defined identity. By acknowledging the difference without stiff impermeable boundaries

As Clingman explains, “the self becomes capable of many phases, possibilities, connected elements, both within itself and in relation to others” (2009: 16). In addition, Clingman suggests that such an identity formulation protects us from both essentialist identity definitions (ones that seek to suppress difference) and representational ones (stereotypes associated with an entire grouping) (15). In addition to rethinking how we formulate identity, Clingman redefines the nature of the boundary as a way to “recognise difference without assuming anything like hard and fast boundaries, which will cater to the reality of differentiation without cutting off the possibility of connection” (2009:6). The broader definitions of identity, borders and belonging can lessen the negative impact of the liminal space. In addition, it encourages the migrant to consider alternative understandings of both home and belonging.

### **Synopsis of *The Pickup***

*The Pickup* (2001) is Gordimer's first novel to shift its focus away from South African issues of apartheid, to a more global perspective. Thereby, it touches on the issues surrounding migration, globalisation and belonging in the modern world. Viewed in the context of Gordimer's works under apartheid, *The Pickup* is a radical departure from her inward-looking, South African, focus. However, it is symbolic of a larger shift in her world-view, as she herself exemplifies in an essay published in 1999, “Living on a Frontierless Land: Cultural Globalisation”. In this essay Gordimer discusses the benefits and risks of cultural globalisation, encouraging each country to consider how to “go about moving beyond itself to procreate a culture that will benefit self and others” (1999:212). The novel tells the story

of a young South African woman and her undocumented lover and their struggle to find belonging in two different countries: in modern-day Johannesburg in South Africa and in a small, unnamed Arab community. When Julie's car breaks down in central Johannesburg, she meets Ibrahim, a mechanic at a nearby garage. Ibrahim is an undocumented immigrant employed by a garage, despite his lack of paperwork. He lives in a small room behind the garage workshop and goes by the name Abdu to avoid the attention of the Department of Home Affairs. In contrast, Julie is a young, middle-class white woman who lives and works in the city. She attempts to distance herself from her wealthy background by socialising with a young, multi-racial group of friends ('The Table') who place a high value on the connections they form with others. This group's outlook prompts Julie to form a connection with Ibrahim that grows into a physical and romantic relationship. It is a relationship that is lopsided from the start, both emotionally and materially. Gordimer continually implies that Julie's feelings tend more toward love and emotional connection, while Ibrahim sees Julie as a convenience, a respite from the harshness of his situation. When Ibrahim is issued a notice of deportation, this imbalance is heightened by the difference in their legal statuses. After the couple exhausts all possible options for Ibrahim to extend his stay, Julie makes an impulsive decision to follow Ibrahim to his home country; the two marry and leave South Africa within two weeks. In Ibrahim's Arab home country, which remains unnamed, Julie finds herself faced with an entirely different culture, language and religion. Ibrahim lets her deal with these differences alone, while he aggressively pursues permission for legal entry to any western country that will take them. While Ibrahim focuses on leaving, Julie is building relationships with Ibrahim's family and, when Ibrahim eventually secures legal entry to America, Julie chooses to stay behind in his family home. Julie and Ibrahim's story is, at its core, a story of migration and the physical and emotional experience of leaving home and arriving and living in a foreign country (Pourjafari and Vahidpour 2014:680). The dual setting and contrasting stories of migration influenced by, race, gender and privilege allows Gordimer to investigate the consequences of migration in the modern world

### **Gendered Perception of Belongingness: Julie Summers**

Julie Summers, a twenty-nine years old female protagonist, is the well-to-do daughter of a rich family in contemporary Johannesburg. She distances herself from the bourgeois background in which she was raised and took life into her own hands. As a result she rents a small, backyard cottage on someone else's property, unlike the outwardly wealthy home of her father, Julie's cottage represents a conscious effort to distance herself from the traditionally white, conservative suburbs of Johannesburg, drives an old second hand car, and spends her leisure time with a group of multiracial and liberal friends that are referred to as "The Table". The narrator describes the cottage thus:

...sufficiently removed from The Suburbs' ostentation to meet their standards of leaving home behind, and was accepted by the blacks among them as the kind of place that they moved to from the old segregation, her outhouse turned cottage was comfortable enough, its under-furnishings nevertheless giving away a certain ease inherent in, conditioned by, luxuries taken for granted as necessities. (2001:18)

Julie's home functions as a symbol of the self, a reflection of how she sees herself and how she would like others to see her. By distancing herself from her wealthy, middle-class childhood, Julie is seeking to belong in a different kind of social group. Her friends and the suburb she lives in are a more important

part of her understanding of home than the building in which she resides. She provides insight into the way that race, class and gender can influence one's understanding of home. Her character demonstrates how one's knowledge of home shifts as one ages. Julie's suburban childhood home was a reflection of the social mores of the time: racially segregated, conservative and patriarchal. As a young, middle-class white woman in post-apartheid Johannesburg, Julie uses her home to make a statement about how her personal beliefs differ from those of her father. By doing so, Julie demonstrates an individualistic understanding of home, one that is separated from the expectations and social mores of her nuclear and bourgeois family and instead focused on home as a site of self-expression. Meier insists that the Julie's home is an attempt to "emphasise her independence and identity by moving into a flat in a formerly black district of Johannesburg, earning her own money in the rock 'n roll business and driving an old, second-hand car"(2003:4)

This group of friends functions as a replacement for Julie's nuclear family; she approaches them for guidance and values their opinions. It is interesting to note that, like the traditional family, Julie's group of friends operates according to a complex set of social codes but instead of emphasising privacy and boundaries, they prioritise openness, encouraging each other to "be open to encounters", to not ask questions or judge and to put "the claims of friends [...] before lovers" (2001:10, 22, 31). The attention on openness makes it possible for Julie to approach Ibrahim as a person instead of a greasy mechanic repairing her car; in my opinion, their eventual relationship is a logical extension of the way she understands home. Her sense of identity is rooted in the people with which she mingles with, and her relationship with Ibrahim gives her a new opportunity to express herself. This is in keeping with Aviezer Tucker's description of home as the place where we "can be ourselves, feel at ease, secure, able to express ourselves freely and fully...the environment that allows us to fulfil our unique selves through interaction with the world" (Tucker 1994:257). Julie describes their first sexual encounter by saying "all was as it should be" and that "they made love beautifully; she so roused and fulfilled that tears came" (2001:27). Her deep and sincere emotional and physical connection to Ibrahim is so compelling that it covers any questions about the couple's compatibility. When Ibrahim has no other option but to leave South Africa, Julie unhesitatingly leaves her job, home and family to follow him. While still in Johannesburg, Julie's sense of home and belonging is rooted in meaningful relationships, and she works hard to surround herself with people who share her outlook on life. Once having arrived in Ibrahim's country, these types of relationship are no longer readily available to her, so she is forced to reconfigure her understanding of herself as now belonging in a new cultural environment. By the end of the novel, Julie has found a sense of belonging in the rituals and routines of the women in Ibrahim's family. Perhaps more importantly, she has formed a deep connection to the desert, an entirely foreign physical location. Julie's eagerness to learn Arabic is an excellent example of her desire to understand Ibrahim's family and culture. When Ibrahim refuses to teach her - his excuse is that he needs to practise his English - Julie asks his sister Maryam to teach her Arabic in return for English lessons (2001:135, 150, 151). These lessons attract the attention of the wealthier women in the village and Julie ends up teaching a weekly English class (143). Cloete suggests that such solidarity indicates that Julie has had a "real change of heart, an attainment of contentment and commitment as she devotes herself to teaching Ibrahim's family English" (2005:63). Julie's friendship with Maryam also facilitates her entry into the Musa household's

community of women, and Julie is frequently invited to take part in the women's daily routines: fetching water, cooking and even becoming involved in the planning of Maryam's wedding (2001:169, 196). Julie's sense of belonging is here based on inclusion and familiarity. She may not fully understand the significance of all the customs, but by the repetition of daily tasks, she has found what Appiah calls "points of entry to cross-cultural conversations" (2006:97). Following a routine established during Ramadan – the family awoke early for the pre-dawn meal - Julie wakes before Ibrahim and walks to the edge of the street where the town ends, and the desert begins (2001:167, 168). This daily ritual takes on an almost spiritual element as Julie contemplates her identity in relation to the physical space in which she finds herself. Cloete suggests that for Julie, the constancy of the desert - she refers to it as endless, out of time and undisturbed by growth or seasons (2001:168, 172) - comes to represent the stability, solidarity and spirituality of Ibrahim's family (2005:64). Similarly, Meier suggests that Julie's attachment to the desert develops precisely because it represents "what she obviously had been missing in the liberal 'New South Africa': values such as commitment, solidarity, family, spirituality" (2003:8). As Julie spends more time in the desert, she gains a deeper understanding of her own desires. Although in South Africa, Julie had played the role of the 'independent woman', her previous identity had been dictated by family, friends and even by Ibrahim; paradoxically in this desert space, she starts embarking on a reconstruction of herself. Julie's trajectory from dislocation to a redefinition of home appears to be successful. Her decision to remain with Ibrahim's family is indicative of her expanded understanding of home and belonging.

#### **Male Understanding of Belongingness: Ibrahim Ibn Musa**

Abdu is from a third world country. The community that he grew up in is Islamic and its culture very conspicuous. It is a primitive society with a micro bourgeois class. Abdu's family doesn't like and approve western and European culture. They think western culture is corrupted. Ibrahim's insecure home-away-from-home (the garage) at the start of the novel is an excellent example of how a home might meet one's basic need for shelter, but fail to provide the security and stability necessary for growth and self-determination. His status as an undocumented immigrant means that the home he inhabits at the start of the novel is, by nature, temporary. His sense of belonging is further complicated by the fact that he is not entirely welcome in South Africa: he is considered undesirable because of his race, background, religion and class. Ibrahim's unique situation provides an interesting lens through which to consider home and belonging. As an already displaced person, his understanding of what it means to be 'at home' in South Africa is already unconventional. Gordimer presents how their differences extend beyond social and legal status to the way they approach their relationship. Their different attitudes also manifest in the way in which they understand home. Ibrahim defines home by the social status and material benefits that a specific place or person provides for him. When Ibrahim and Julie first meet, he lives in a small room behind the garage in which he works. It is dirty, greasy and has no shower or consistently running water (2001:20). It is a purely working space that provides him shelter and a measure of security and privacy. This room represents the bare minimum of what a home can be, a physical dwelling or shelter" (Mallet 2004:65). Peter Somerville suggests that being at home is more than occupying a building and that it also "involves the power to control one's own boundaries, and this means the possession of a certain territory" (1992:532). Ibrahim has little or no control over the space that he occupies: his privacy is

limited and living in his place of work restricts his ability to rest or relax - his continued residence being at the mercy of the owner of the garage. Ibrahim's Johannesburg home at the beginning of the novel is unstable, despite this, he does not appear to be concerned about his position. He has lived like this before, and the novel seems to suggest that Ibrahim considers such a precarious home as an inevitable part of his long-term goals:

It's hard, nothing is nice, at the beginning, Julie. Without proper money to live. You are a stray dog, a rat finding its hole as the way to get in... it can be bad, bad. I can't take you into it [...] I don't mind for me – because this time I have the chance to move out of all that, finished for ever, for ever do what I want to do, live like I want to live. (2001:226)

Although this quote is from the final chapters of the novel, it offers insight into Ibrahim's understanding of a precarious home. His willingness to live with hardship in exchange for the promise of opportunity implies that he views his future home as a place where he can live securely and pursue his dreams. Ibrahim's understanding is similar to that suggested by Tucker where he sees home as a place "where we could or can be ourselves, feel at ease, secure, able to express ourselves fully and freely, whether we have actually been there or not" (1994:257). Thus while Ibrahim's temporary home does not provide him with the control or privacy of the traditional home, it does give him hope as a launching pad in pursuit of a proper home. Ibrahim is:

...a double outsider: he is an outsider in his own world because of his restless quest to join western society, and he is represented as being unable to form any bond with the desert landscape of his home country because of his yearning for the world of western cities and affluence where he has yet to establish a foothold or identity. (2001:85)

Ibrahim came to South Africa hoping to find a home that offers him the opportunity to attain a sense of belonging through social status and material benefits. When he is unable to attain these things before his visa expires, he chooses to stay in the country illegally, under a false name, Abdu (2001:18). While this is by no means a desirable situation (as Jacobs suggests), it allows Ibrahim to consider himself part of a new kind of community. At the end of the novel, Ibrahim - having secured legal entry to America (2001:267) - leaves Julie behind in his family home. Even though his life there will be characterised by hardship and humiliation, it is yet another opportunity to pursue his dream of "permanent residence anywhere other than at home" (Jacobs 2016:279).

### **Contrastive Analysis**

*The Pickup* portrays home, belonging and the effects of human movement. The novel is particularly interesting because it offers two completely different portrayals of migration. On the one hand, there is Julie Summers, a young, middle-class South African woman who migrates legally and with relative ease. On the other hand, there is Ibrahim ibn Musa, an undocumented immigrant from an unnamed Arab village. As I have demonstrated, both characters are shown to be disconnected from their 'traditional' homes: Julie has cut herself off from her wealthy parents, and Ibrahim has been living in Johannesburg under an assumed name to avoid deportation to his home country. Julie's experiences suggest that one's understanding of home depends on changes in one's understanding of social and cultural dynamics. Her discomfort with her family's continued privilege in the new South Africa prompts her to redefine her notion of 'home' in a way that reflects her progressive cultural values. In contrast, Ibrahim's

understanding of 'home' is rooted in the perceived material advantages of any given relationship or location. At the end of the novel, he chooses to continue pursuing his goal of obtaining permanent residence in the west, even though Julie remains behind in his family home. Ibrahim's apparently single-minded search for economic opportunity is hampered by racial and religious prejudices.

Ibrahim's family home is radically different from the homes Julie has lived in before, both materially and socially (2001:114, 122). Musa household provides Julie with a sense of community and belonging that she has never associated with family life: a home that is "strongly associated with the rites and rituals of family" (Dupuis and Thorns 1998:34). As a result, she comes to understand home in its most traditional form, "a space inhabited by the family - a familiar, comfortable space where particular activities and relationships are lived" (Mallet 2004:69). Unlike Julie's relatively cold and emotionally distant family context, the Musa household is a place where the daily practices of human life play out: children are born, marriages celebrated and deaths mourned. It is a space that is structured and controlled by a strict set of cultural, familial and religious rules that Julie slowly comes to understand and, in her desire to belong, enact spirituality and the day-to-day rituals of a small community. Her feeling of being at home is cemented by the community of women in which she is involved, demonstrating that new, meaningful connections can be formed despite seemingly insurmountable differences; language, culture and religion.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined new understandings of home and belongingness as represented through the experiences of the migrant characters in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* which provides insight into the way in which South Africans experience home and belonging in the post-apartheid years. The research considered different experiences of migration based on gender, as Julie the female protagonist adjusts her understanding of home more successfully than Ibrahim the male protagonist. Studies have shown that migration tends to challenge traditional gender roles, empowering women by affording them greater economic opportunity in their host countries as compared with their original cultures.

*The Pickup* has highlighted an attitude of openness and a willingness to engage with culture and communities that are different from one's own. The ability to find alternative points of connection can help those who are alienated within their home or host communities to find common ground and, as a result, a new understanding of what it means to belong.

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