

Ambivalence – a Psychological Constipation in Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter

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Article Received: 05/07/2022, Article Accepted: 15/08/2022, Published online: 22/08/2022,DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2022.7.3.29

Abstract

Gordimer's Burger's Daughter locates the actual political situation and complicated background of apartheid. Apartheid incorporates many issues, including racism, segregation, alienation, psychological victimization, and ambivalence. The protagonist, Rosa Burger, faces various political, social, economic, and even psychological problems in her native country for being the daughter of a white privileged activist family. Negligence brings ambivalence; it refers to a simultaneous attraction towards the repulsion of an object, person, and action. Conflicts and controversial propositions lie wants at the center of ambivalence. It completely occupies Rosa's mind; she has to locate her identity, which was drowned by the apartheid policy. Neither white supremacy nor the concern for oppressed people does not allow her to fulfill her desires. Her assertion of her father's identity and her eventual acceptance of the universe in negotiating a life that is both private and political. Ambiguity brings hostility towards her desires, and in the end, she gets what she deserves.

Keywords: apartheid, assertion, conflicts, identity, society.

Ambivalence deals with the fluctuating connection between mimicry and mockery. It is a term first employed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and its opposite. Adapted into colonial discourse theory by Homi K Bhabha, it represents the complex relationship between colonizers and colonized. In this respect, it is not necessarily disempowering for the colonial subject; instead, it can be seen as ambivalent or 'two-powered.' Ambivalence also characterizes how colonial discourse relates to the colonized subject, for it may be both exploitative and nurturing or represent itself as encouraging at the same time.

Nadine Gordimer is one of the outstanding contemporary novelists highlighting the postcolonial issues faced by the people. She is at her best in bringing out the psychological turmoil of the inhabitants of South Africa during the apartheid system of governance. Her

Burger's Daughter (1979) is an excellent work unearthing the psychic traits of the ones affected in the colonized context and discriminated against based on race. This novel is studied in psychological, historical, and materialistic contexts. The role of the character Rosa Burger, the protagonist, has been designed with a domestic web. The interplay between the protagonist's personal feelings and political attitude is employed effectively. The writer's strategy is to highlight the independence of the heroine's character, who was born to a politician-father and brought up in a political background. In this, the writer examines the various complex relationships, like the structures of the personal, familial, and political atmosphere. The political identity of Rosa brings an odd life to her. She wants to be calm and composed. She wants to lead a simple, ordinary, and peaceful life like others. The fact is that her father's name and his popularity influence her life. It is a psychological factor that inhibits her from functioning freely in society and affects her private life very much.

This novel, *Burger's Daughter*, is set in the 1970s and describes the critical historical events like the Soweto uprising, trials, and treasons explicitly linked with national political occurrences. Apartheid is the novel's warp and weft that determines the story's course. The anti-apartheid groups and activists play a seminal role in the plot. Rosa Burger struggles to overcome her non-defined or unwilling identity of her father's position.

Ambivalence denotes the simultaneous and contradictory attitudes or feelings toward a person. The particular

person may be unable to make a decision quickly and adequately. Either to cope or to quit, this occurs in everyone's life at some point. The chaotic situation sometimes brings better solutions and sometimes gets worse than before. It plays a leading role in desolates life because companionship may bring light to the emptiness. Ambivalence occupies a significant part in literary contexts. This paper discusses Ambivalence – a Psychological Constipation in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*.

Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* dominates the psychological and historical materialistic context. The novel employs the domestic design of the protagonist, Rosa Burger. The character interplays personal as well as political feelings. The writer's strategy is to analyze the independent woman nature, who had a political background. The writer examines various complex relationships like personal, familial, and political structures. At first, Rosa's identity brings an odd life to her. She wants to lead a simple and ordinary life like others. The fact is that her father's name and his life dominate her life. It represents society's inhibiting function in her private life.

Lionel Burger, the father of the protagonist, Rosa Burger has been praised as God for his anti-apartheid activism but it becomes a curse to his daughter Rosa. His political activism occludes his family concerns. She has been identified with her father, which hurts Rosa psychologically. She wants to be a unique personality and longs for a simple and ordinary life. Only after Lionel Burger's death does she find

herself relieved from all the political commitments. This paper explores the dynamics of personal and political struggles of Rosa and her attempts to negotiate her domestic life.

The novel is constructed with many divergent frameworks within the personal and political backgrounds of Rosa Burger. Before the colonies and divisions had been formed, society depended on race. Humanity faces many divergent issues like oppositions, identity crises, economic crises, societal problems, etc. The characters are caught with one or the other issues. These interventions arise complicit among the characters' relationships and bring complex realities to their life. Moreover, it affects the individuals and their independent life within the social conventions.

Rosa Burger struggles with unresolved childhood issues, which mark a scar in her entire life. Gordimer focuses on the protagonist from her point of view, so it is easy for her to interlock with Burger's emotions and feelings as a woman. Of course, the more significant part of African national literature focuses on racial issues and black oppression. Here, the writer wants to exhibit the young woman's emotions for her ambivalent state. Critic Spenser points out that the "emerging female writers (who) focus on representing conflicting, contradictory and ambiguous identities and revealing the complexities of the female experience in both public and private spaces"(67). Ambivalence followed by chaos determines the personality of her life, and it results in transforming her into a revolutionist.

The activist's children are brought up in a constructed system of ideas and norms like the other children, manifest in social (interpersonal) and symbolic (structural) ways. Even the activist's parents are involved in the processes of socialization. Sometimes it may bring complex interactions with society and family relations. It enlarges its wings during the pre-apartheid, apartheid, and post-apartheid periods. This crucial socio-political change dominates not only the oppressed black people but also the life of the white people who involve or support black people. It emerges as a new concept and becomes a different experience for the self and society.

Identities based on race, class, and family background involve one in society losing one's identity because one is colored by race, style, and family background. This highly resonates with Lacan's mirror stage of identity formation, mainly concerned with its projection of self under how others perceive it. In the case of Rosa, she is aware of herself as an object of observation, which helps her overcome her ambivalence. The novel focuses on employing Rosa's psycho-analytic traits by locating the intersection between her and society. This interlock includes a complex relationship between a young chap, Conrad, and a married man, Bernard Chevalier.

Rosa's lonely life longing for affection. She wrote a letter to her mother, who was in prison when she was studying in school, "Dear mom, hope you are all right...Dad and I are fine and looking after

everything. Lots of love from both” (10). The above line shows her fondness for her mother, and she continues searching for her companion—moreover, Lionel's ignorance of Rosa's needs and desires frustrates her. For instance, he sent her to Jail to visit Noel de Witt, his friend and a member of ANC. She had to pretend to be a fiancé to Noel, which made it easy to transform their letters and messages. She confessed the situation and said,

The prison visiting – room dialogue between Noel and me, although – as it was to be with my father later – several other prisoners were in their stalls talking to their visitors. I remembered word for word, his exact turn of phrase, his cadence—so that, decoding his meanings, glancing from one to another for confirmation of interpretation, my father, mother and I could rely on each nuance. I had found a way to convey to him the messages I was entrusted with (63 - 64).

Later Noel sends a message to Lionel to thank her for her cheering by conveying messages while in prison days. But Rosa falls victim to Lionel's responsibility.

Lionel does not bother her sensibility. This sense of conflict was her ideological experience. She had attained adolescence and was treated only as *Burger's Daughter* but not as

Rosa. These conflicts made her come out of a chaotic psyche. She enables self-realization and self-fulfillment to reach her individuality. Rosa finds herself in search of both physical and psychological space. Rosa is unable to balance her father's ideology. *Burger's daughter* is directly concerned with the identity crisis. The very title of the novel indicates that Rosa is identified as Burger's Daughter rather than Rosa Burger. Her society partially isolates her. After her father's death, she realizes the importance of a unique attitude and selfhood. From childhood, she has taught her parents traits and identified with them. But simultaneously, she attempts to find an alternative in her life and lives with Conrad. Conrad's individualism is directly opposite to Burger's communism. After many confrontations, she wants to move away from South Africa to avoid social conflicts. She reaches a new village called Nice, where she gets a unique experience and a new relationship with Katya, her stepmother. Conrad's influence makes Rosa examine her selfhood in society. Still, she cannot move on and becomes highly self-reflexive under Conrad's influence.

Rosa's name is an amalgamation of the political stalwart Rosa Luxemburg, a Communist, and her father, Lionel Burger. Her personal development has been delayed because of her parent's involvement and

influence in politics. She does not know the real value or power of the political conscience. She lacks motivation because of the political struggle. After the death of her father, the influence of Conrad and a donkey whipped by a black man shows the painful apartheid life which she confesses in the following lines of the novel,

Not seeing the infliction of pain broken away from the will that creates it; broken loose, a force existing of itself, ravishment without the ravisher, torture without the torturer, rampage, pure cruelty gone beyond the control of the humans who have spent thousands of years devising it(211).

She claims that she does not "know how to live in Lionel's country" (210), meaning it is impossible to remain apolitical in her country. So she chooses a path that is suitable for her.

Rosa does not want to involve in any of the women's movements in South Africa, but she hopes for the possibility of a better future for her country. Until she witnesses violence against the donkey by the cart driver, she wants to prevent the black owner from apartheid. Rosa confines that the owner of the donkey himself is a victim, but the abuse takes place due to the prevailing apartheid system. In this way, she cannot escape from appellation and desires to take action and continues to threaten society.

Rosa finds Bernard Chabalier's relationship in the new village and becomes friends. Chevalier offers Rosa an opportunity to remain in Europe indefinitely. She becomes closely

associated with him and wants to become his mistress. Her identity has shifted away from her father to another patriarchal figure. That is from Lionel Burger to Bernard Chevalier. Instead of escaping her father's ideology, she falls under another man's influence. Once again she fails to recognize her liberation and maintains her imaginary world.

Rosa comes across new and intimate relationships with her stepmother Katya, Chabalier, and Baasie; her childhood adopted black brother. Basie's controversy greatly hurts Rosa; it explores his community's sufferings and oppressions which are powerfully explained in the novel. By accusing Rosa Baasie, she tries to defend herself but fails to answer his questions. Chevalier attempts to console her, but Baasie's questions make her uncomfortable. Soweto riots and their subsequent violence have changed her lifestyle. She wants to end the suffering of the oppressed blacks and finally succeeds in her motive.

Rosa's great attempt has succeeded. She has realized that she does not need an ideology like Conrad's intellectualism, Chabalier's Euro-centrism, or Lionel's Marxism to act against the apartheid government. However, Rosa's final political and personal affiliations have been left unresolved, but she is partially satisfied with her achievement. She sacrifices her relationship with Chabalier for the oppressed blacks' welfare. Still in each and every moment, her life goes with ambivalent thoughts. She aims for one and succeeds in another. Her ambivalence occurs due to the negligence of her familial

legacy of political fame and, at the same time, her quandary on helping the poor by involving in politics. She was confused about finding out the right path to lead her life. She needs some psychological boosters to make a firm decision. Ambivalence is a blessing in disguise for her. She firmly believes that politics is the suitable medium to serve humanity in general and the downtrodden in particular and her stand of indulging in politics materialized after so much confusion and chaos.

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How to cite this article?

M.Sathya, T.Alagarasan“Ambivalence—a Psychological Constipation in Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter”, Research Journal Of English(RJOE) 7 (3), PP: 223--228,2022, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36993/RJOE.2022.7.3.31>