

FALSEHOOD AND DECEPTION IN NADINE GORDIMER'S THE PICKUP AND NURUDDIN FARAH'S A NAKED NEEDLE

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ABSTRACT

Most often than not, some people decide to build their relationships before marriage in falsehood and deceit. Many fail to be themselves hence, painting a false picture of who they really are to their partners and this explains why some relationships do not work. Some relationships do not also work because some individuals fail in their responsibility to guide themselves as far as what is obtainable in their various cultures and traditions is concerned. In the novels under study, some characters deliberately decide to build their relationships on falsehood and deceit which acts as a barrier or hindrance to the construction of a fruitful intercultural dialogue. From the prism of postcolonial theory therefore, this paper, hinges on the premise that Farah and Gordimer in their narrative fictions believe that falsehood and deceit act as opposing forces in building an intercultural dialogue.

Keywords: *Falsehood, deceit, relationship, postcolonial theory and intercultural dialogue*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of postcolonial discourse, the concepts of interculturalism and hybridization are of paramount importance. The reason for this preoccupation is the fact that the citizens of postcolonial countries are involved in an intercultural dialogue. However, despite the zeal and motivation by the postcolonial man to be involved in cross-cultural interaction, those concerned are most often than not, confronted with difficulties of trying to get used to, and understand another person's culture as well as struggling to satisfy or get used to ones in-laws as the case may be.

In Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* just like in Nuruddin Farah's *A Naked Needle* characters such as Julie, Abdu, Nancy, Barbara and Mildred find it very hard to incorporate themselves in South Africa as well as Somalia due to lots of challenges. This article aims at analyzing opposing forces that slightly or totally

hinder the characters in the novels under study from fully involving themselves in an intercultural dialogue. The article will consequently authenticate the view that social barriers such as falsehood and deceit are all impediments to intercultural dialogue and rapport. These difficulties will be seen from the correlative postcolonial concepts of centre and margin dichotomy and self and other.

Falsehood and Deception in Nadine Gordimer's The Pickup and Nuruddin Farah's A Naked Needle

In *A Naked Needle*, the black character Barre is one of the characters who builds his relationship with Mildred on falsehood and perpetual deceit. When he meets Mildred in America, they promise to love each other forever. The narrator states that:

Mildred and Barre met while in the States, a participant in an AID course at Minnesota, and Mildred and Barre exchanged mutual touch-wood touches and decided that each would love the other, decided on their making it to their maximum ability, swore that they would do it together, they would love each other till death did them asunder (27)

From the above citation, it is obvious that the relationship between Mildred and Barre started in a good footing but it turns out to be a fiasco because Barre told Mildred a lot of lies about himself, his family and his country. Perhaps, he did not also tell Mildred that he was in the States as a result to the AID he benefited from the Somali government.

In a conversation with Barre, Koschin who is aware of Barre's dishonest character poses the following rhetorical questions to him: "WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL HER THE TRUTH? WHY DID YOU TRAP THE POOR THING?" (34). The "truth" that Koschin is talking about in the above rhetorical questions has to do with Barre who gave Mildred a false picture of himself as well his country (Somalia). Koschin feels that Nancy is trapped by Barre because he is aware that he told Nancy a lot of lies about himself. In fact, he further interrogates Barre in the following words: "Why did you not - the poor woman, Mildred in chiaro - why did you not tell her that the poverty stricken people in Somalia would offer her, Mildred, their hate in abundance?" (34) If you want to maintain a true relationship, especially with someone who does not share the same cultural affiliations with you, it is absolutely necessary to be sincere at all cost and it is only in this context that a true intercultural dialogue can be achieved. Mildred does not share the same cultural background with Barre and it should be noted that he decides to tell her lies about his country. The following questions by Koschin justify this fact:

Did you not tell her you are rich when you were in the States - Did you not tell her your old man stank of wealth? Yes - Did you not tell her all your relatives were sweet and would be sweet and nice and she would be comfy, to use your own word? - Did you not tell her that Mogadiscio, the city in which she would live was not hot as other parts in the tropics? And she

would need warm clothes in the evenings the year round? (35)

The above rhetorical questions show that Barre told Mildred lies about himself, his people and about his country. About himself, he gives Mildred the impression that he as well as his "old man" (father) stank of wealth. About his people, he gives her the impression that "his relatives were sweet and that they would be sweet and nice to her and she would be comfy." Finally he gives her the notion that Mogadiscio, the city in which she would live has very good climatic conditions meanwhile from every all indications, Mogadiscio is a very hot city which cannot be favourable for her. In the next question Koschin gives us an insight on the fact that Barre also deceived Mildred that his people will accept her in their midst without any problem. Koschin comments that: "Did you not tell her that your kith and kin would welcome her into their midst as the daughter of the white daughter of the tribe, immediately she came to the country?" (36). From the above rhetorical question, we understand that Barre didn't tell his American woman that it will not be easy or that it will take time for his family to accept her. In fact, he gives her the impression that his family will be happy to accept and to accommodate a white lady in the family. These lies will convince most women to have a lot hope and confidence in a man but we realize that Mildred ends up having hatred for Barre for deceiving her. Koschin confirms this in the following words: "She hates you because you've told her lies. She hates you because you reek of poverty" (36). Any rational person will not hate Mildred for hating Barre because if Barre told her the truth about himself, his family and his country, she would have prepared her mind as far as the realities in Somalia are concerned and that is why he states that "... I have learnt where I made the fatal mistake of my marriage ..." (37). The obvious mistake of his marriage is the fact that he was unable to tell his wife the truth about himself, his family and his country and this is certainly why they broke up in the first place.

When things eventually become worst between Barre and Mildred, the former runs to Koschin for Solace but instead he asks him the following question "... If

you stop providing a woman with all the necessities of life wouldn't she cease being your wife?" (32). In fact, it is very clear that one of the reasons why Mildred hates Barre is because he can no longer provide for the family. Barre commits a monumental error because it is absolutely out of place to engage or marry "a white woman" when you cannot take care of her daily necessities. This is very obvious because according to Barbara, one of the reasons why the relationship between Barre and Nancy did not work is probably due to poverty. She comments that:

Perhaps this is all due to poverty, the unhappiness. But one could at least do something about it in the light of our understanding of the situation: that poverty is temporal, a provisional situation for two people who have all the future in their hands, their future ahead of them. But I doubt it. I doubt if all this is due to poverty (67)

It is absolutely true that the relationship between Mildred and Barre crumbles due to poverty. The real issue here is that Mildred despises Barre because he gave a different impression about himself and his family. Again, according to Barbara, Mildred is tired of the relationship with Barre because she "... must have disliked the people in her first few months" (64). It is possible that she disliked Barre's people in the first three months because none of them cared about her or better still because Barre didn't give her tips on how to deal with them. This situation where there is hatred and counter hatred cannot permit the intercultural acquaintance between Barre and Mildred to grow. This intercultural dialogue cannot also grow due to falsehood and deceit.

Towards the end of the conversation between Koschin and Barre the former learns that Barre saw Mildred in "someone's bed room" (30) and in this regards, he advises Barre thus: "If you were to send your wife away for good, which is what I would do if I were in your socks, you wouldn't torment yourself about it anymore, you know?" (36). Koschin feels that to have a peace of mind, the only option is to send away Mildred who has become wayward due to deceit and hatred.

Moreover, Barbara also blames Barre for destroying his relationship with Mildred because he decides to abandon her to his family who has little or no concern for her. Barbara opines that: "... But Barre, he leaves the poor girl with the tribe of whom none speaks a word of Ingeesi what is she to do then" (65). Here, Barbara insinuates that Mildred decides to depart from her husband because he abandons her to his family who hates her with all their hearts. It could also be argued that she decides to leave because Barre is very irresponsible and negligent and because she does not speak the language of Somalia.

Furthermore, Barbara also has a problem in the way Koschin handled the problem between Barre and Mildred. She argues that:

Barre came this morning here, had a beer with me, and told me all the things you had said to him. I was rather shocked at these things coming from a person like yourself, because to me, it seemed that you differed from your countrymen. My God! The impression I had about you before!" (65)

After a long conversation with Koschin, Barre goes to Barbara and gives her a different impression about the discussion he had with Koschin and that is why Barbara feels Koschin is not different from his countrymen who hate Mildred. One of the reasons why Barbara is supporting Barre is because she once had sexual relationship with him when her husband traveled to Senegal on mission. Talking about why he slept with Barbara, Barre opines that:

She asked for it. I gave it to her as a friend's wife, very gently, very gently. She said she never had it that way, she said. Mohamed was rough and ungentle. Mohamed had been away for a month on a seminar in Senegal, and she had complained nobody had attended to her wants, none of his friends, she complained. And I couldn't bear denying her kindness. She blessed me, she said. (29)

From the above citation, it is clear that when Mohamed is away, Barbara invites Barre to come and have sex with her. Here, one can say that Barbara claims to love her husband so much, but sleeps around with another man behind his back. Barbara in this case

can be considered as a deceitful and a nasty woman who finds it hard to respect her marital vows. It could also be argued that it is Barre's attitude of sleeping around with other women that partly lead to the failure in his relationship with Mildred. To build any relationship whether intercultural or not, it is absolutely necessary to be faithful and it is only in this context that people can live together as husband and wife with limited problems.

In *The Pickup*, the life of some of Julie's friends at "The table" is characterized by deceit, hypocrisy and falsehood. Some of them refer to Abdu by his name in his presence, but behind his back, they refer to him by nicknames in a mocking manner. Even though some members of the "Table" are united and ready to interact freely with everyone, some members of the group are just there to condemn and corrupt others.

In a post-apartheid society, interculturalism and multiculturalism is a reality however, a closer study of *The Pickup* shows that some individuals at the café are not committed and are also deceitful and hypocritical. When one of them is in serious trouble, the others avoid talking about his worry hence refusing to be deeply involved. For example, when one of them announces that he is diagnosed with AIDS, instead of showing concern, the others in the group start to discuss the origin of AIDS as "an ancestral curse" and another who makes the following comment: "meat-eaters, breakers of code of respect for creature life" (24). Ironically Ralph the victim bursts out into laughter perhaps to console himself, but according to the omniscient narrator, "No one had dared even to smile encouragement at him." (24). This indifference is also indicated in the group's attitude towards Abdu even though the group is composed of various people including whites and blacks but most of them treat Abdu as "the other", they refer to him as Julie's "oriental prince" and consider him "an element like a change in climate coming out of season, that waits for an unfamiliar temperature" (20). These above expressions describe the hypocritical nature of some members of the "Table" who claim to have concern for Abdu but in the real sense, they do not.

In another situation, Julie expresses her worries about the deportation order issued to Ibrahim, yet some of her friends in the "Table" hesitate to sympathize with her: "Their reactions duplicated hers when it came to surface manifestations; the others, the depths of fear and emotions they hesitated to approach ..." (57). The above example depicts how some of the group friends deliberately distances themselves from the serious issues related to their present lives hence justifying their lack of commitment and self-deceit. The way they hesitate to deal with most relevant issues at hand makes it doubtful whether any meaningful boundary crossing between different racial backgrounds takes place.

Furthermore, this issue of lack of commitment and falsehood is evident in the life of Abdu. When Abdu and Julie, who are now already married, go back to his desert country, he spends his time in the capital searching for visas to leave the country. One realizes that he is not committed because he does not care about Julie who is with him. The narrator states that: "He did not know of her hours with the desert; she didn't tell him because he avoided, ignored, shun the desert" (173). From this citation, one realizes that Abdu adopts a snobbish attitude, even to his own wife, because of the mentality he has already built that he cannot be successful in his country. Abdu, therefore, is the prototype of the postcolonial man who has made himself a social and political nomad in search for better living standards. The relationship between husband and wife is therefore in jeopardy due to deceit and lack of commitment and this enhances sharp conflict between Julie and her husband and it leads to the development of the story's plot in that the contradictory views of this couple end up putting them apart as Abdu abandons his wife for the United States of America while she decides to remain in the desert country where she feels belonging.

In fact, from the beginning of their relationship, Julie is blind to the motive of Abdu's acceptance of her invitation to the café. Despite Julie's insistent denial of possessing the Rover: "It's not mine! She claimed her identity! I'd like to have my old one back" (9). Here, Julie insists that the expensive vehicle is not her own but Abdu ignores her claim, focuses his attention

on the Rover, and accepts Julie's invitation. This is ironical and clearly shows Abdu's lack of commitment to their love because his interest lies in the expensive car, instead of Julie. Before leaving for the U S, Abdu also urges Julie to live with her mother because: "her husband got letters from important people so easy. Yes? He knows people. We see that. It can be he will find something good for me, he will put me in with the right connections..." (238). This citation clearly portrays Abdu's lack of commitment and here, one is tempted to say that Abdu is just out to use Julie for his selfish ambitions.

In a nutshell, one can conclude by saying that the character's zeal to be involved in an intercultural

dialogue proves difficult due to cultural differences, cultural xenophobia, hatred, deceit and falsehood. Here one realizes that this is going to slightly hinder some of the characters in the novels under study from fully engaging themselves in a fruitful intercultural dialogue.

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