



APARTHEID AND ZIONISM:
A POST-COLONIAL READING OF SELECTED NOVELS BY
NADINE GORDIMER AND S. YIZHAR

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Preface

The uniqueness of the colonial situation and its traumatic effects provide a fertile field for the study of the political, social and ideological contradictions within the opposing groups of oppressors and oppressed. This dissertation studies the South African and Israeli models and examines the oppressiveness of the colonial encounter embodied in the dismantled Apartheid system in South Africa and the ongoing Zionism in Israel.

There is a pattern of behavior, which is identical in its general lines exhibited by those settlers, who have formed political entities in non-European lands, namely South Africa and Palestine. In both countries, we have a "settler colonialism", which is different from the traditional colonialism because the settlers are permanently there, and permanently in contact with the indigenous inhabitants; the discriminatory treatment imposed upon the natives is more intense, systematic and brutal than that to which the natives were subjected to by the imperial authorities who were based overseas. Another thing which distinguishes "settler colonialism" from traditional colonialism, is the declared

exposure to discrimination based on race, color and creed by "settler colonialism".

Comparing the dissidence stance of two prominent writers belonging to these oppressive regimes, Nadine Gordimer (1923-) and S. Yizhar (1916-2006), this study tends to trace various manifestations of racism in the South African and the Zionist narratives. Unfortunately, the Zionist oppressive colonial system persists in Palestine in spite of the controversy about its colonial/postcolonial status. Throughout a history of oppression by virtue of belonging to a certain race, this study examines the psychological complexes rendered by such conditions as revealed in the works of Gordimer and Yizhar.

The colonial history of Apartheid/Zionism has been documented extensively by a wide spectrum of writers from many fields. Critics such as Edward Said, Abdel Wahab Elmessiri, Uri Davis, Michael Prior and Donald Akenson have tackled the analogy between Apartheid and Zionism either from a political perspective or within Biblical interpretations. However, this analytical study is one of the pioneers to explore the opposing interrelationships within the literary context of both systems. The dissertation delves deeply into the psychological realms of the colonial subjects

whether they belong to the side of the colonizer or the colonized. The study aims at exploring how both writers capture the reality of the two nations: South Africa and Israel. Both countries have had an aggressive and extensive history of oppression. The socio-historical background of each of these countries plays an integral part in the analysis of the selected novels. It does not only assist in the interpretation of the stories themselves but also helps us focus on the thematic concerns raised by the writers. As a result, a socio-historical approach is necessary in this study to show the subtle similarities and differences between the two systems which helps in making a comparison between the two writers.

Skin colour and ethnic interpretations become a means of classification and categorization of people into races and, in the context of Apartheid and Zionism, provide the basis for separation, discrimination and oppression. The history of colonization and of land occupation indicates that the political and social dominance of one nation over another is acted out within a racist discourse and under the justification of building a nation. Studies of race and nationalism often view national lands as sites of territorial conflict, focusing on the opposition between the colonizers and the colonized. This study investigates not only poles of opposition which

produce ambivalence in the colonial relation but also the psychic dilemma and identity crisis that often emerge in literature.

Not all resistance literature is written by the colonized other, since some is produced by dissenting voices among colonizers. The literature of both South Africa and Israel depict a nation struggling to express its voice and construct a national identity. The study proposes the works of Nadine Gordimer and S.Yizhar as distinctive dissenting voices of the social ethos. Gordimer is regarded as a representative of the South African writers who provide a nuanced picture of this racially divided country – its divisions, conflicts, and the unique psychological tensions under Apartheid. In the Israeli setting, Yizhar is one of the highly esteemed native-born writers who is known for his deep belief and strong devotion to Zionist ideals. His literary works, however, reflect a critical and an oppositional stance regarding the Zionist establishment. In his act of literary dissidence, Yizhar exposes the moral and the psychological conflicts of the Israeli soldiers as he gradually questions the morals and ideals on which Zionism was primarily founded.

The novels examined in this study depict abuses of power and their associated moral dilemmas, focusing on the consciousness of the detached self. The study focuses on *The Conservationist* (1974) and *July's People* (1981) to reflect the oppressive and racist regime of Apartheid in South Africa. The study then attempts to compare this Apartheid system with its Israeli counterpart by exploring Yizhar's novels, *Khirbet Khizeh* (1949) and *Preliminaries* (1992). How far and to what extent does each writer oppose/adopt the prevailing ideologies of his/her culture? How do they attempt to build a legitimate relationship to the land that rejects them and how is this complex relation revealed in their narratives? Attempting to resolve these ambivalent relationships, this study examines the writings of Gordimer and Yizhar within the theoretical framework of postcolonialism.

The study aims to discuss the South African and the Israeli models in the light of major postcolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha and Edward Said. Dedicating his lifetime to critical and theoretical practices against colonialism and racism, Fanon chose the field of psychology as his means of investigating the impact of oppression on colonial subjects. Fanon advocates the reconstruction of history and culture as the basis for new

postcolonial forms. Bhabha's central concern of postcolonial theory is the construction of identity discussing notions of hybridity and ethnicity. He examines the instabilities of the colonial identity resulting from the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized along with the problematic issues of dislocation and alienation. Said is concerned particularly with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination while his main contribution is dedicated to the Western conceptualization of the East as the different 'other'. He represents an analysis of the negative stereotypes and the colonial assumptions inherent in Western representations of the Orient.

The dissertation is divided into four chapters and a conclusion. As it has been shown, the theoretical framework of the study draws mainly upon Fanon, Bhabha and Said. Moreover, in order to reach a profound critique of the colonial situation and a comprehensive analysis of the proposed novels, the study also draws on George Hegel's and Albert Memmi's theories on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Moreover, the study benefits from Octave Mannoni's and Paulo Freire's psychological interpretations in reading the dynamics of colonialism.

Chapter one, an introductory chapter, lays some theoretical groundwork providing an overview of the colonial and postcolonial discourse, a definition of terms and a review of the socio-political formation of South Africa and Israel. Chapter two demonstrates an analogous representation of Apartheid and Zionism reviewing the socio-historical background of these two most debated systems. Chapter three examines the novels of Nadine Gordimer in the light of the proposed theories to interpret the colonial relationship in the South African setting. The fourth chapter of this study is dedicated to an analysis of S.Yizhar's novels reflecting the colonial ethos in Palestine. The study traces the contradictions and conflicts within the context of a changing political and social reality. The conclusion brings the dissenting voices together to discover common themes between the two models that represent an oppositional attitude to the dominant imperialistic attitude in their respective countries. Within the framework of postcolonial theories, the writings of Gordimer and Yizhar will highlight the dissidence stance of each writer and to what extent he/she upholds a liberal view and 'speaks the truth to power'.

Throughout the course of this study, the terms 'Black' and 'White' are employed to refer to the racial categorization imposed by the regime of South Africa. Therefore, the term

Black (with a capital letter) is to emphasize the definition attributed to them by the dominant system, Apartheid. From another perspective, it is unfortunate to refer to Palestine as the "State of Israel". In no way does this imply acceptance of their ideological affirmations. The dissertation, however, is obliged to use the terms without accepting or affirming any of their unjust implications.

Chapter One

'COLONIAL DISCOURSE AND POSTCOLONIAL THEORY': AN INTRODUCTION

The terms colonialism and postcolonialism have attracted much debate among scholars. This often makes it difficult to propose fixed definitions of the terms. This introduction attempts to highlight the most prominent features of each discourse in order to interpret the factors that influenced the writings that belong to each of them. These features are supposed to shed more light on the works of Gordimer and Yizhar, which are the core of this study.

Colonialism is a system established by European states which deliberately use brutal force for their economic advantage. This involves the prevalence of a dominant White world, in which the 'other' is rendered inferior and subordinate. Colonialism constitutes a racial order where the dominant minority subjugates the subordinate majority based on a politics of exploitation and supremacy of one group above another. This is achieved through the suppression of the natives, for the exploitation of land and natural resources on the one hand, and the institutionalization of slavery and

segregation on the other. This entails the domination and subordination of "racialized population" in many subtle ways and which is rationalized and justified by the "white man's burden" and his "civilizing mission". Abdul JanMohamed emphasizes these views by saying:

The colonizers' efforts towards absolute political, economic, and spiritual domination create in them a feudal spirit, supported by a series of familiar rationalizations: the superiority of white races, their mission to civilize the rest of the world, the inability of the natives to govern themselves and to develop their own natural resources... ("Economy" 3)

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon views colonialism in these terms:

Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him.(110)

In a situation where the prevailing values and ideals are those imposed by the oppressor, it is only natural that we find physical and psychological repression in the form of negating the native's past rendering him with no origins or roots. In other words, the settler or colonizer acts as a majority while the oppressed colonized is in the place of the minority. Thus, occupation of land, according to Fanon, entails occupation of psyches:

There is no occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of final destruction. Under this condition, the individual's breathing is an observed and occupied breathing. (*Black Skin* 65)

In her critical study on colonial discourse, Anne McClintock proposes two forms of domination where colonization "involves direct territorial appropriation of another geopolitical entity, combined with forthright exploitation of its resources and labour, and systematic interference in the capacity of the appropriated culture to organize its dispensations of power" (295). The first form of domination is manifested in the 'classic' colonization or the

'imperial' colonization in which a minority of colonists occupies land far from the colonial metropolis and exercise control over a majority of indigenous population. This involves a "large scale, territorial domination" with the political and economic oppression to exploit the natural resources and labour of the land. Another form of domination is marked by "internal colonization" where, by contrast, the natives are expelled by the colonial settlers who no longer have a mother country to return to. The authors of the postcolonial study, *The Empire Writes Back*, differentiate between these two forms of colonization in terms of settler and invaded colonies. The indigenous people in the invaded colonies "remained in the majority but were administered by a foreign power" (Ashcroft et al. 211). This concurs with the concept of classic or imperial colonialism. While, on the other hand, in the settler colonies people are expelled and dispossessed by the colonists following their arrival who, by time, ceased to represent the majority group. This form of colonialism is perceived in accordance with the concept of "internal colonization".

Edward Said agrees with McClintock and argues that colonialism represents the "domination and inequities of power and wealth" (*Culture* 20). It is a way of maintaining unequal privileges of economic and political power to