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**Finding Fulfillment in All the Wrong Places: Female Actualization
in Three Contemporary Novels**

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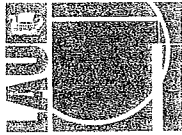
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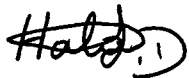
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To my parents,

I dedicate this work to you because you never stopped supporting me and praying for me.

Thank you very much,

To Dr. Seigneurie,

Thank you for your constant encouragement and support, and for always believing in me.

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Abstract

This study deals with Nadine Gordimer's 2001 *The Pickup*, Laura Esquivel's 1989 *Like Water for Chocolate* and Hanan al-Shaykh 1980 *Hikayat Zahra*. All three works are fundamentally different in terms of language, culture and plot. However, they share the representation of a female character who finds some kind of fulfillment by actualizing an inhospitable space. The novels recount stories of cultural conflicts and female resourcefulness in achieving fulfillment. These women find happiness in the places where, according to the feminist paradigm, they shouldn't. In *The Pickup*, the female protagonist Julie leaves a country that promotes a certain level of freedom and moves to an Arab country where she constantly contends with cultural constraints placed on women. In the unnamed Arab country, the constraints she faces allow her to discover aspects of herself that she was unaware of in her middle-class South African environment. In *Like Water for Chocolate*, Tita experiences fulfillment in spaces that are even less propitious: the kitchen of her house and the house of a white American male doctor. In these spaces, she finds the means to free herself from her struggles and explore her feelings. In *Hikayat Zahra*, Zahra tries to find a secure place and finds it paradoxically in war-torn Lebanon during the Civil War. This thesis examines how the representation of spaces and spatial relations in those novels contribute in the construction of character identities. The purpose of this thesis is to understand how the representation of space in each novel conveys a range of possible models of female liberation. Thus, this thesis situates itself as a contribution to an ongoing revision of feminist studies.

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Women on the Move: Space and Gender in Three Contemporary Novels

Although feminism can relate to many areas and aspects, its common base is the thesis that “the relationship between the sexes is one of inequality or oppression” (Macey 122). Many have tried to explain this inequality, bringing out the question of women’s social, political and economic rights. Since the 1850s till the 1990s, historians spoke of three different waves of feminism with different demands ranging from social, economic, educational, and political to the sexual. First- wave feminism originated in the changes that transformed the western society in the early 1900s. To begin with, one might speak of the “industrialization which undermined house-hold production and established a hierarchy between the male-dominated public sphere and the female-dominated private.” Women’s rights movement called for single sexual standard, dress reform, higher education and an improvement in the wages of working-class women (Code 208). Second-wave feminism was also characterized by different goals and demands: greater sexual freedom for women, liberalized divorce laws and equal pay for equal work. Second-wave feminists sought recognition for the work that is traditionally done by women (209). In the 1990s, third-wave feminism becomes a standpoint feminism in general, inspired by strands of existing feminism and concerned with personal, social and academic changes. These changes pushed women to challenge their confinement to the private space and their exclusion from the public one.

This private/public duality creates gendered social space for men and women (412). There is an important link between the concepts of space/place and the concept of gender. In fact, Doreen Massey explores in her book *Space, Place and Gender* the different levels that relate gender to space and place such as the construction and understanding of gender within space. Massey sees space not as some absolute independent dimension, but as constructed out of

social relations (2). She also focuses on the symbolic meaning of space and place and the clearly gendered message they transmit. Both space and gender have an effect on identity; for instance the limitation on women's mobility in terms of space and identity is considered subordination. To confine women to the private space is also to restrict their identity (179). Therefore, women must expand their spatial limitations in order to achieve freedom and fulfillment; they must expand their limitations beyond the confinement of the private spaces into the public ones.

This thesis will examine how the representation of spaces and spatial relations in those novels contribute to the construction of character identities. In my analysis, I rely on selected contemporary theories of narratology that deal with space. Self-evident yet vague, the concept of space is an important element of narrative (Bal 132). Bal differentiates between spaces and places. She writes, "places can be mapped out, in the same way that the topological position of a city or a river can be indicated on a map." Places are related to the mathematically measurable shape of spatial dimensions. More importantly, these places do not exist in fiction, as they do in reality. She defines spaces however as places seen from a certain point of perception (133). As these women move from one space to the other, the connection of space and place with gender and gender relations emerges. Relying on Doreen Massey's study of the social nature of space and place and their relation to gender studies, this thesis will examine how gender relations vary as these women move from public spaces to ostensibly unfavorable private spaces. It will focus on the aspects that make these spaces empowering for these women, and on the features that render the construction of an independent female identity possible despite the difficult circumstances present in these spaces.

In this study I have chosen three works that deconstruct this now dominant notion of female emancipation which has it that freedom for women developed with their movement from

private spaces to public ones: Nadine Gordimer's 2001 South African novel, *The Pickup*, Laura Esquivel's 1989 Mexican novel, *Como Agua Para Chocolate* (Like Water for Chocolate) and Hanan al-Shaykh's 1980 Arabic novel, *Hikayat Zahra* (The Story of Zahra). All three works are fundamentally different in terms of language, culture and plot. However, all depict a female character who finds some kind of fulfillment by actualizing an inhospitable space that she is either removed to (in *Like Water for Chocolate*) or voluntarily goes to (in *The Pickup*, and in *Hikayat Zahra*). The novels recount stories of cultural conflicts and female resourcefulness in achieving fulfillment. These women find happiness in the places where, according to the feminist paradigm, they shouldn't. Each novel features a number of spaces that contribute to the fulfillment of the characters. The purpose of this thesis is to understand how the representation of space in each novel conveys a range of possible models of female liberation. Although feminism is an immense field and can relate to many aspects, this thesis focuses on public and private spaces and the role they play in women's liberation. This thesis will examine, through close attention to the spaces they inhabit, how female characters in these three contemporary novels re-explore their identity in unpropitious spaces. It will also argue that these novels present alternatives to the classic narrative of female empowerment. This project is divided into three chapters, each one dealing comprehensively with one of the novels. My choice of these texts of different languages gives this study an intercultural aspect. An examination of the spaces, practices, and social and cultural codes in these three novels of different cultures expands the western frame of female liberation to include liberation within other cultures.

The first chapter of this thesis deals with Nadine Gordimer's 2001 novel *The Pickup*. Published in 2001, the novel brought the first South African Nobel Prize winner more international attention as she won the 2002 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Best Book

from Africa. Deeply involved in the anti-apartheid struggle, Gordimer writes novels that reflect the social background she comes from and provide an insight into the struggle of belonging and existing in a post-apartheid Africa. In fact, the novel partly takes place in the author's homeland, post-apartheid South Africa, with the question of identity as one of its central themes. *The Pickup* tells the story of Julie, a young white South African woman. She distances herself from her rich father and picks up the dark-skinned, illegal immigrant, Muslim car repairman Abdu. They gradually get to know each other. Their story becomes a story of intercultural encounter and search for identity as Abdu tries to find a country that would accept him, and Julie tries to find a place where she would fit in. Gordimer is able to represent the racial and cultural opposition in two different backgrounds as Julie and Abdu move to his unnamed Arab country where Julie manages to re-explore her identity in both places and unexpectedly finds fulfillment in the Arab country.

With its publication in 2001, *The Pickup* earned a lot of attention from critics and reviewers. Even though there are no full-length studies of this novel, several articles offer different interpretations of the work. With a plot that revolves around a rich woman falling in love with a poor black Muslim man in post-colonial and post-apartheid Africa, *The Pickup* is often interpreted as reflective of the East and West opposition. The aspect of the cultural other is discussed in a paper published in 2003 and titled "Picking up the Other: Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*" in which Franz Meier considers Gordimer's novel to clearly build on the opposition of Occident and Orient but in an ironic way. He attributes this structural irony to the fact that the East, traditionally depicted as inferior, feminine and black, is represented by a man. In contrast, the West, traditionally dominant, masculine and white, is represented by a "white woman from South Africa, a country belonging to a continent which traditionally has been more closely allied

with images of the Orient than of the West.” Moreover, Gordimer depicts a “New South Africa,” one with Western features that Abdu terms as European, and a stereotypical Arab country as its cultural other. Meier emphasizes the notion of how each character views this cultural other: while Abdu rejects it, “Julie increasingly finds in it what she obviously had been missing in the ‘New South Africa’: values such as commitment, solidarity, family spirituality.” What is interesting about Meier’s reading of the novel is the link he makes between the cultural other and identity. Both protagonists want to escape from their culture. Julie defines herself in contrast to her South African culture, and Abdu also rejects the culture of his past and seeks to identify himself with a Western culture that would accept him.

Furthermore, identity in post-apartheid African literature is also at the center of a study by M.J. Cloete revolving around Gordimer’s *The Pickup*. Cloete adds an interesting insight to the question of identity. The article examines the theme of identity against two different backgrounds. Defining identity as the qualities, beliefs and ideas that make a person, Cloete bases this study on the assumption that “identity is unstable” (2005). She examines the question of identity and otherness by examining the paradoxical nature of the novel. This is expressed in Julie’s and Abdu’s cultural identities both in South Africa and in the desert country, in their beliefs, aspirations and desires. The difference between their cultural identities is also clearly evident as Julie distances herself from her middle-class South African parents and as Abdu further identifies with the very aspects she rejects. Furthermore, Cloete’s reading of *The Pickup* focuses on the shifting of identities as the couple moves to another country and as both protagonists find the sense of identity that they are seeking.

I find Cloete’s interpretation of the shifting of identities in *The Pickup* persuasive, for she defines identity as a shifting process that is influenced by the individual’s experiences. I depart

from her analysis with my focus on the elements of space and their role in the exploration of an identity. More specifically, I focus on Julie's movement from private to public spaces and how that movement reverses the traditional tale of female liberation. I focus also on the novel's shuffling of social and cultural codes which expands the western frame of female liberation to include self-realization in a country where traditionally it cannot be achieved, in a traditional Arab country. My objective in chapter I is to add to the work previously done by other critics in order to show that a study of place and space can offer a new perspective on the issue of identity.

Chapter II deals with Laura Esquivel's Mexican novel *Como Agua Para Chocolate* (Like Water for Chocolate). The novel was published in 1989, and in 1990, it became Mexico's number one best-seller. It was translated to English in 1992, and in 1994, it won the prestigious ABBY award. Esquivel often explores the relationship between men and women in Mexico in her novels. The novel takes place in the early 1900, around the time of the Mexican Revolution. *Like Water for Chocolate* tells the story of Tita, the youngest daughter of a very strict mother who runs a ranch in Mexico. Tita is condemned to spend her life in the kitchen, unmarried in order to take care of her mother as the very old tradition dictates. Tita becomes the cook, caretaker and healer of the family after her sister's marriage to Pedro, the man Tita loves. Consequently, the space of the kitchen becomes an important space for Tita in order to find fulfillment. Tita's story in the kitchen among the recipes and the practice of cooking offers a perspective on the relationship between women themselves and between men and women as Tita, just like Julie in *The Pickup*, sets out on a journey to find fulfillment in the one place where she traditionally wouldn't.

Written by a Latin-American author in 1989, Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* belongs to post-boom literature of the 1980s. One of the characteristics post-boom literature

inherited from the period of the Latin-American boom is magical realism, and Esquivel's novel was interpreted for its use of magical realism. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris briefly discuss *Like Water for Chocolate* in their book *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* where Faris explains in her article "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction" the characteristics of magical realist fiction as they are found in *Like Water for Chocolate* and other postmodern texts. Faris explores the "irreducible element" of magic which means "the disruption of the ordinary logic of cause and effect." This disruption allows for the real to seem amazing or maybe ridiculous (168). This element is prominent in the novel. Tita's tears have magically infused the cake, but the tears that the guests experience are real. Another element is the descriptive detail which represents the realism in magical realism. "Realistic descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in, in many ways by extensive use of detail" (169). The real recipes in the novel are magical and impart wisdom at the same time. Another important element which sets Tita's story in motion is the underlying of an ancient system of beliefs in magical realist narrative, mostly those set in rural areas (182). In Tita's case, it is the old tradition dictating that the youngest daughter is to remain unmarried in order to take care of the mother for the rest of her life. According to Faris, the ending of the novel combines the magical and the real, for it ends not with Tita's and Pedro's passionate fire which is the culmination of their love and all the magical moments but with the passing on of Tita's recipes (185).

More recently, in an article entitled "Post-Boom Magical Realism" Molly Monet-Viera adds an interesting insight to the magical realism reading of *Like Water for Chocolate*. Just like Zamora and Faris, Monet-Viera finds that the novel uses many of the typical elements of magical realism such as the presence of spirits (Nacha and Mama Elena), hyperbole, and the coexistence

of the natural and supernatural realms. Similarly, she finds that “marvelous events are depicted without any surprise...Events transgress the laws of nature, but they are never questioned by the narrator or the characters” (102). However, Monet-Viera adds a feminist reading to the aspect of magical realism. Even though Tita’s magic is empowering in certain situations, for example when she sabotages her sister’s wedding, “she never transcends the limitations imposed upon her by Mexico’s patriarchal society” (103). What I find most interesting about this feminist reading is that it considers Tita’s aspiration to the traditional roles of wife, mother and cook meaningless since it takes place outside the public sphere where meaningful decisions are made, “thereby simply rearticulating women’s oppression” (103). She also considers Tita as passive in the face of all her struggles, and that all her desires are realized with magic. Perhaps what I find most challenging for my thesis is her claim that Tita’s passivity contributes to the women’s marginalization and that women can rise above oppression without action or struggle. However, after her mother condemns her to the kitchen, Tita uses that space as a personal one in order to establish an identity (Johnson 31). She does not give in to her imposed fate. I believe she finds the resources to fight it and achieve what she desires. Susan Lucas Bobrian writes in her article on *Like Water for Chocolate* that rather than reducing cooking to an innate knowledge, the kitchen becomes a space of creative and magical events. Esquivel has redefined Tita’s cooking skills and the female domain of the kitchen (60). In this chapter I argue that by narrating Tita’s story in the kitchen, the novel offers an alternative to the traditional female notion of self-realization. This novel expands the frame of female liberation to include one of the most unpropitious private spaces, the kitchen.

The third chapter deals with Hanan al-Shaykh’s 1980 *Hikayat Zahra* (The Story of Zahra). Due to its portrayal of sexuality, *The Story of Zahra* was banned in seven Arab countries.

In fact, al-Shaykh could not find a publishing house that would accept to publish the novel, so she published it at her own expense. Hanan al-Shaykh writes about women who play an important role in her work. In fact, *The Story of Zahra* revolves around its eponymous hero who narrates her story as she goes through experiences that leave a great mark on her. As a young girl, she gets involved in an affair with a married man, but she is not satisfied and does not feel a part of it. She tries to escape to her uncle in Africa, thinking that she might be safe there. However, he makes inappropriate advances towards her, and that pushes her to marry his friend who condemns her for not being a virgin. Following her divorce from her husband, she decides to come back to Lebanon in the middle of the civil war where she gets involved with the neighborhood sniper. Of all the spaces she occupies, Zahra finds a kind of fulfillment in the last one, one of the most unfavorable spaces, the space of the home in war-torn Lebanon. By bringing Zahra back home in war time, the novel reveals the space of the home as an unlikely space of fulfillment.

The Story of Zahra is the author's first novel to be translated into English. After its publication, the novel received a lot of attention due to its intricate plot, complex female character and multiple narrators. It also sparked an interest with its detailed portrayal of human relationships and the Lebanese civil war. There are some interesting readings among the studies done on this novel. In 2001, Ann Marie Adams explains in her article "Writing Self, Writing Nation: Imagined Geographies in the Fiction of Hanan al-Shaykh" how "the main character herself is clearly represented as a symbol of the embattled nation." Zahra is identified with Lebanon; her exiled uncle sees her as a citizen of his beloved country, and her husband Majed sees her as a symbol of the respectable country he never had access to previously. Consequently, neither man is able to understand or help Zahra, for they both want something different from her

(203). Adams presents an interesting reading on the relationship between men and women, feminism and nationalism. According to her, Zahra is a “troubled young woman whom various men attempt to constrain and understand within the dogma of their own nationalist politics”

(204). Adams acknowledges the role of the men in Zahra’s life represented by their narratives in the novel. In fact, al-Shaykh herself says in an interview that women are victims of society more than victims of men because the men are also sometimes victims of their society since they have to obey it (Sunderman 1992).

The element of the home is another important aspect since the novel begins and ends in the same place and space: the home in Lebanon. This aspect was also discussed in several articles. In an article on the representation of interior spaces in Lebanese war fiction, Samira Aghacy analyses the space of “the home and its gendered associations” (89). Aghacy argues that the space of the home is a space of violence and that Zahra feels imprisoned within this confining site of exploitation and sexual abuse, where the male figures in her life “are intent on harassing and restricting her” (93-94). Most importantly, I find most persuasive her argument that the space of the home is transformed into a space of self-realization. Moreover, Aghacy argues that by venturing into the masculine space, Zahra challenges the male order and pushes against the boundaries set by men in order to “transcend the role gender has imposed on her” (95).

In the third chapter, I argue that *The Story of Zahra* shows how the space of the home, which is a private space from which women try to free themselves, is a space of fulfillment. Zahra’s return to the home is not a simple return to the previous conditions that reigned over her life; it is an opportunity for her to reconfigure that space. Again, by examining the different

spaces in the novel, this chapter will show how *The Story of Zahra* reveals an unusual space in the tale of female fulfillment.

The Pickup, *Like Water for Chocolate*, and *The Story of Zahra* differ in many aspects, but they all share one similarity: a female protagonist who manages to find fulfillment in an unexpected, unfavorable space. These novels present alternatives to the traditional Western frame of female liberation.

Identity in Place: Female Actualization in Private Spaces in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*

But they want to decide for themselves. They don't want anyone to tell them to wear the chador... They want to study or work anywhere they decide outside the kitchen, the modern world where men still think we're the only ones to have a place.

Nadine Gordimer

These words uttered by an Arab male in Nadine Gordimer's 2001 novel *The Pickup* evoke a now classic – and somewhat Eurocentric – split between private “women's” space and the public spaces of male prerogative. The novel, however, sets up this polarity only to undermine it. This chapter will argue that Gordimer's novel traces a wholly unexpected movement on the part of the white female South African protagonist living in an unnamed Arab country. In depicting the character's movement from public to private spaces, the novel reverses the traditional notion of female emancipation and therefore broadens the horizons of female self-actualization. This chapter's examination of spaces will show how *The Pickup's* shuffling of social and cultural codes expands beyond a western frame to include liberation within a traditional Arab country.

The plot of *The Pickup* recounts the story of a young South African publicist named Julie Summers. Julie is the daughter of a rich white middle-class man; however, she has distanced herself from her father's bourgeois lifestyle and moved out of his house in the suburbs into a cottage. In the beginning of the novel, Julie's car breaks down, and this event sets the story in motion, for she picks up and falls in love with the mechanic who repairs her car. Abdu is an illegal immigrant from an unnamed Arab country who works as a mechanic because it is the only way to remain undetected. Abdu's and Julie's relationship develops as they spend more time together in her cottage and with her mixed circle of friends who meet around the Table in the

El-Ay Café. Soon afterwards, Julie's blissful situation changes as Abdu is faced with deportation from South Africa. Refusing to ask her father for his help, Julie tries her best with her connections to help Abdu remain in the country. But Julie's efforts are not enough, and Abdu has to leave. Spontaneously, Julie decides to accompany him, so they get married because Abdu cannot present her to his family as a girlfriend. The second part of the novel takes place in the unnamed Arab country. Ibrahim (as Julie learns later is Abdu's real name) and Julie settle in the lean-to room in his parents' house. Ibrahim immediately starts reapplying for immigration to any western country that will take him while Julie, much to Ibrahim's surprise, finds her place in her new environment. She connects with his family, especially his sister, and finds inner peace in the desert that begins at the end of the street. At the end of the novel, when Ibrahim is finally granted a visa to America, Julie refuses to go with him and chooses to stay in his country with his family, giving the novel a final ironic twist.

Nadine Gordimer does not divide the novel into chapters or parts, but since the story takes place in two different settings and countries, the novel is divided into two almost symmetrical parts. The first part takes place in South Africa, more specifically and as we find out towards the end of the novel, in upper-middle-class Johannesburg where the female protagonist, Julie, enjoys all the freedoms she is entitled to. As she moves with Ibrahim to his unnamed Arab country, the second part of the novel begins in a totally different setting where Julie apparently enjoys less freedom.

Through Julie's experiences, the novel re-inscribes the traditional notion of female liberation which has it that women's liberation follows a spatial path from private to public spaces. The public/private dualism existed long before "first-wave" feminism came to contest it in the early twentieth century. Women in the west were socially defined as naturally suited for

private spaces, the home, the kitchen (Code 412). “First-wave” and “second-wave” feminism brought many changes to the situation of women in the western world. Among these changes was the breakdown of the public/private dichotomy. Social reform movements “propelled a wide spectrum of women to challenge their exclusion from the public realm” (Code 208). In her book *Space, Place and Gender*, Doreen Massey links the issue of women’s mobility in space to identity. She says, “One of the most evident aspects of [the] joint control of spatiality and identity has been in the west related to the culturally specific distinction between public and private. The attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control on identity” (179). Therefore, confining women to private spaces controlled their identity by preventing a minimal level of mobility in order for women to be “free.” By effecting these changes and moving out of the private to the public sphere, women were seeking equality, freedom and a sense of fulfillment that they could not achieve in the private sphere alone. Today, many Western women have achieved a level of freedom that allows them to co-exist with men in the public sphere. However, the matter differs in the Arab countries where women still face some constraints that restrict their freedom and confine them to the domestic space.

Mieke Bal defines place as locations “related to the physical, mathematically measurable shape of spatial dimensions” (133). Places become spaces when they are “linked to a certain point of perception... That point of perception may be a character, which is situated in a space, observes it and reacts to it” (133). In other words, the events that unfold in the setting and the characters’ actions and reaction there transform places into spaces. Even the physical features of those spaces have an importance. “Objects have spatial status. They determine the spatial effect of the room by their shape, measurements, and colors” (135). Therefore, the spaces in any novel

and in *The Pickup* in particular acquire functions and meaning different from those of geographical places.

The Pickup presents an alternative to the classical narrative of female liberation and fulfillment by having Julie leave the Johannesburg spaces she knows to go live with Abdu in his family home near the desert in a country which unexpectedly offers her the fulfillment that she constantly aspires to but never achieves in her own country. She finds fulfillment in the private spaces of that desert country more easily than she ever did in the public spaces of her country. In her contact with the cultural other, she manages to explore aspects of herself that she was unaware of. In her husband's country, she explores social norms and practices that were "strangely new to herself" (Gordimer 117).

The Johannesburg and Arab spaces are so different they can be described as functionally opposite. Bal says, "strategically, the movement of characters can constitute a transition from one space to another. Often one space will be the other's opposite" (137). In Johannesburg, we are introduced to three main places/spaces: the Table at the El-Ay Café, the cottage and the father's house in the suburbs. In the second part of the novel, and in what could be considered the opposite of Johannesburg, the unnamed Arab country, we are introduced to two main places/spaces: Abdu's house, more particularly the lean-to room, and the desert. Again, as a result of the dialectical relation between these spaces, Julie manages to re-explore her identity and find fulfillment.

Julie's sense of identity and fulfillment is put to the test in her country and more precisely in the three spaces mentioned above. To begin with, Julie is a single woman, living in Johannesburg. She is the daughter of a rich white man who lives in a big fancy house in the "Suburbs". Capitalized throughout the novel, the Suburbs area, and more particularly the

father's house, is the meeting place of the older generation, of her father and his similarly rich guests. The scene of the Sunday lunch at the father's house is essential in setting the standard of what Julie is not and what she does not wish to be: the daughter of a bourgeois man who controls a big part of stocks, base metals and chemicals. Along with Abdu, the reader is introduced to the world of economy and capitalism. The father and "the principal guests he was cultivating" talked about buying and selling with little concern to "robbing the poor of their jobs [and] killing the industry" (43). In Marx's terms, the father and his guests would form the capitalist class who possesses the means of production and consumption (Bottomore 54). Her father's house in the suburbs is not the first space that we see Julie in, but it is an important one to understand Julie's alienation. Her father's house is described as very luxurious, with very luxury-craving people as guests, and a sophisticated and worldly stepmother – Danielle. The choice of adjectives used to describe the house suggests a degree of opulence, "the cushioned chaises longues and flower arrangements are an extension rather than a break from the formal comforts, mirrored bouquets and paintings in the room" (Gordimer 40). Even the food is presented in an exquisite manner, "the food, already set out by the time the daughter of the house arrives, is the cold Norwegian salmon with sauces and kaleidoscope-bright salads" (40). These objects, the chaises longues, the flowers, the food, take on more meaning than just objects. They acquire in Bal's terms "spatial status" (135), and, hence, reflect the father's lifestyle.

The passage describing the father's house begins with a statement that uses the pronoun you and a command and therefore can only be said by Julie to Abdu as she takes him to her father's house for the Sunday lunch, "Don't be too sure you know what's to come, that set struck and rebuilt for the same scene every Sunday all over The Suburbs" (40). In this case, we have

two different levels of narration. *The Pickup* is told by an omniscient narrator who chronicles the story and has complete access to the events, characters and dialogues. Throughout, the story is narrated objectively in third-person singular:

The signals of the personal language situation refer to the language situation of the narrator, we are dealing with a perceptible narrator. When the signals refer to the language situation of the actors, and a clear change of level has been indicated by means of a declarative verb, a colon, quotation marks, etc., we speak of a personal language situation at the second level (Bal 48).

However, when Julie speaks these words, “Don’t be too sure you know what’s to come” (Gordimer 40), the change of level was not indicated clearly by either a colon or quotation marks. In this case, “We have text interference... The words of the actors are represented at the first level (that of the narrator), so that the narrator adopts the actor’s discourse” (Bal 48). Julie defies the “narrative convention” by saying these words to Abdu, showing that there is no one fixed identity for her yet just as there are no clear narrative changes. When Julie finishes her words, an unexpected shift in perspective back to the narrator occurs as s/he describes the father’s house, “these guests are not exposed, in every sense, half-clad to the sun and plastic chairs round a swimming pool her father is not bending a belly over grilling meat” (40). This unannounced shift in perspective leads the reader to believe that Julie is the one to say these words. It also lets the reader in on Julie’s thoughts. Interestingly, the use of the negation “not exposed” and “not bending a belly over grilling meat” expresses a certain implied comparison; in other words, the description of her father and his guests implies that Julie’s standards would be the opposite of her father’s social gatherings. Hers would be a social gathering where guests would enjoy the sun on plastic chairs around the pool and the host would grill the meat himself.

In addition to that, at the end of that same paragraph, we learn through the narrator Julie's feelings towards that situation and her discomfort, "Julie comes upon it as always: sinking into a familiar dismay" (40). Even her stepmother knows that Julie prefers to distance herself from that lifestyle. Referring to Danielle's reaction to Julie and Abdu, the narrator declares, "Either no reaction other than hostessly; or more likely one of no surprise that the girl would turn up with what was no doubt the latest wearying ploy to distance herself from her father" (41). She distances herself from that lifestyle to the point that "she is overcome by embarrassment" and afraid of what "those people" might say in front of Abdu (45). "Julie is so sickened by the pretence of her father's house that she escapes the company by fleeing into the house. The description [of the interior of the house] captures the essence of her loneliness and spiritual neglect among the pomp and splendor of her so-called home" (Cloete 2005). The narrator says, "but it is another house she's running away to hide in; she has never lived in this one. This is not the upstairs retreat of the house where she was a child...Rejection implies hidden – her rejection hid this origin of hers now expansively revealed before him" (Gordimer 45). Julie related the sense of comfort that one would get when at home to memory. She remembered what "her" house used to be like, her bedroom with adolescent posters of film stars on the walls and the worn panda from her father. However, "each room she looks into up there – no one of them is the room that was hers" (45), and that image simply doesn't meet with what she remembered. Hence, this is not where she belongs. Her father's house becomes the symbol of the affluence she refuses, just like the car she borrows from her father in the beginning. That car is also described as a "car from the Suburbs" (8). Julie worries a lot about being seen in that car to the point that she once denies her connection to it, "it is not mine! She claimed her identity: I'd like to have my own old one back!" (9). She hates that car and the attention it attracts from Abdu. She hurries to