

prognostication of doom to the eventual gloom that only surrounded the consciousness of the left outs.

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Betrayal of Myth of Controlled Sexuality: Liberation through Sexuality in Nadine Gordimer's *A Sport of Nature*

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Abstract: What is sexuality? Sexuality is obviously connected with sex. Sex refers not only to sexual activity, it also marks the distinction between male and female anatomy. Sexuality is a social-political arena constantly reshaped through cultural, economic, familial and political relations, all of which are conditioned through prevailing social organizations at given points in time. Michel Foucault tended to regard sex itself as a phantasm that both constituted and contaminated sexuality. For Foucault, sex is no more than an “artificial...fictitious unity of anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures” that passes itself sensations, and pleasures” that passes itself off “as a casual principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere.” (Foucault, 1976, 154) Although society tends to think of sexuality as internally situated, sexuality also involves a learned relationship to the world. Female sexuality is seen as something to be contained and controlled: this labeling: good” women as virgins and “loose” women as whores. Such labels depict female sexuality as evil and dangerous if not constrained and imply that “good female” should repress their sexual feelings. But Nadine Gordimer demystifies the myth of contained female sexuality in her novel, *A Sport of Nature* through the portrayal of Hillela who is pictured as a new breed, 'a flash-in-the-pan', a political drifter who lives life through her skin and body.

Keywords: Sexuality, body-politics, apartheid, Hillela, Gordimer, postcolonial feminism, gender, identity, black, politics, sex.

Nadine Gordimer has never placed herself in the company of those who have suffered imprisonment, torture, exile and death, nor claimed the slightest sharing of experience with black South Africans. For herself, there was no direct involvement in political action beyond her work. In fact, she hates the labels “the anti-apartheid writer or post-apartheid writer. Her opposition to apartheid isolated her from English-speaking Whites. She is rare among white South Africans for having genuine and close friendships with blacks. Thus Gordimer reconstructs a world where 'art' and 'politics' like 'body' and 'mind', 'black' and 'white', 'betrayal' and 'commitment', have separated as binary oppositions. Thus her challenge is an intellectual and artistic as much as a political one. Whether it is in the way we dress, the gender we are or the shape we are, our bodies shape the way we think about ourselves and the way that society thinks about us. Our bodies are texts to be read, with meanings and values. When it comes to sexuality, despite sex being so naturalized in our society,

multitude norms, rules inhibitions are imposed on different kinds of bodies allowing them sexuality or denying it. Now the question arises: Who is allowed to be sexual and own their sexuality in public? I believe that body is the expression of the self, body as the target of shifting race, gender, class and sexual meanings and struggles and as the product of complex social processes, including culture, science, medicalization, objectification, commodification and globalization. Thus human body serves as a map for society and vice versa. For example, Gordimer says:

I think there may be a particular connection between sexuality, sensuality and politics inside South Africa. After all what is apartheid all about? It is about the body? It is about the physical difference? It's about black skin? It's about wooly hair? Instead of straight blonde hair and black skin instead of white skin. The whole legal system is based on the physical so that the body becomes something supremely important. (Gordimer, 1990, xvi)

Body politics was first used in the 1970s, during the second wave of the feminist movement in the United States. Body politics originally involved the fight against objectification of the female body and violence against women and girls and the campaign for reproductive rights for women. "The personal is political" became a slogan for equal rights. This form of body politics emphasized a woman's power and authority over her own body. Hillela is a girl without guilt, remorse, without the old responses that should tie her to her culture. She is a creature of circumstance, but she is never a victim, never used. She falls in with one man or another, one set or another, passing from the psychiatrist to a debonair ambassador, to a tricky journalist with an Irish passport. Turned out of the house by Pauline, her aunt, Hillela takes to the world, a curious and lively place. Gordimer writes: "Hillela had been seen with a coloured boy while she was enjoying on trust the privilege of going to the cinema with her classmates. She had used the opportunity..." (Gordimer, 1988, 14)

While growing up in South Africa, Hillela experienced so much emotional and moral prevarication that she trusts only her own body and feelings. She is a light-weight character who amazes the old couple Pauline and Joe, the serious-minded who do their best to support the cause of black liberation through political activities, with her liberal nature. Found in bed with her cousin Sasha, expelled from the house, she creates a totally new identity for herself, relinquishing all connections with her past in order to fit in. She is a social misfit with a racist society. Hillela simply drops one name and emerges with another. Similarly, she drops parents, relatives, friends, acquaintances and lovers as she goes. She seems to be an opportunist who regards people as means to an end, uses them, taking what they have to offer, and drops them everytime the possibility of climbing up the social ladder. It comes as no surprise that the author uses Hillela's body, her sensuality, her sexual affairs as

political metaphors. Her incestuous relationship with Sasha and its disruptive effect on the family make the point that there can be no family life for whites when lacks are denied it. Hillela is a visionary, symbolic figure through whom Gordimer tries to fill the “inter-regnum” between present and future. She is the “sport of nature” of its title who exhibits a departure from the parent stock or type. Sexual freedom is her road to salvation and revolution. Beginning her friendship with a ‘coloured’ boy, which alienates her from the white community, she is radicalized by her love for the fictional ANC leader, Whaila Kgomani who was later assassinated in his kitchen. After the murder of her husband, she accepts the political lineage of her husband's name. She moves on, but now her moves are by choice, with direction: determined by neither circumstance nor sex. She avenges Whaila's death by her marriage to a powerful West African general and statesman, with whom, finally, she watches the flag of Azania unfurl over “Whaila's country.” Hillela triumphs because she does not belong, she does not conform, because she is a selfish, amoral law unto herself. She is a new variety of Gordimer's white south African: a woman who is sexually, racially and politically liberated from all the old norms. Through Hillela, Gordimer signals her association from what she sees as the dead values of the past, imaginatively reinventing a new personality to fit a new country. This is how Gordimer depicts Hillela's sexual freedom:

Hillela's attitude to sex was that of an honorary man. She shook her head. Then she lifted her throat; strangely like a bird about to sing... He gave her the mimed kiss, small sharp blows on either cheek... (Gordimer, 1988, 223)

The white African heroine is victimized by her sex but privileged by her skin colour; her role as victim, rebel, or even revolutionary only obscures her collusion in the power structure by virtue of her skin in a society in which “race” is the determining factor. Hillela's strangeness, her otherness in White South Africa, enables her to manipulate the transition to the future. She embraces blackness fearlessly. For her alone among Gordimer's heroines, blackness is not alien, but rather her native element. In Gordimer's novels, which depict a white female/ black male relationship, the displacement of the black African women who have relationships with these men is barely mentioned. The black women in these books rarely speak, and when they do, no one seems to listen. The black men are free to womanize as they carry on their revolutionary activities, because their black wives are too powerless to object. Hillela is fully aware of these hidden women and their children, but she sleeps with and marries their men all the same. Each time she marries, Hillela knows that her polygamous husband is not hers alone; yet she is still just one of them though we never learn how Whaila's black wife responds to his relationship with Hillela. Thus we can say that in Gordimer's *A Sport of Nature*, which depicts a white female/ black male relationship, the

displacement of the black African women who have relationships with these men is barely mentioned. The black women in her books rarely speak, and when they do, no one seems to listen. Hillela's daughter is another female whose talent lies in using her body. Ironically, although Nomzamo is the daughter of a South African revolutionary, she is an erotic success in the western, capitalist world.

Miss Hillela Kgomani and her delightful small daughter, Nomzamo (named for Ms Nomzamo Winnie Mandela, wife of Nelson Mandela) joined us early this spring semester. (Gordimer, 1988, 302)

In Gordimer's fiction, the black other cannot be "selfed" by the white subject anymore than the female other can be "selfed" by the male subject. However the white self can be "othered". Through Hillela, *A Sport of Nature* continually brings into question the categories of good girls and bad girls. This binary is challenged by Gordimer who makes her case for Hillela. She challenges the reader with a woman of substantial abilities, who is comfortably exercising power in the public sphere and who also deploys her sexuality there.

Her sexuality, evident to every man watching her pass as he sat in the bush oiling his gun, or stood at attention for review ... Her small, generous, urging, inventive bodies was the desserts of success, some bodies are only made for consolation. (Gordimer, 1988, 359)

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault also confirms the secret of sex that why it has been repressed in society. In the first volume, he came to a double conclusion. On the one hand, sexuality does not exist as a given but is produced by instances of power, with the intent to control populations. It is reproduced by individuals every time they define themselves as subjects of their sexuality. On the other hand, an efficient process of resistance cannot rely on the identification mechanisms at work in the production of sexual subjects. He says:

We must not place sex on the side of reality, and sexuality on that of confused ideas and illusions; sexuality is a very real historical formation; it is what gives rise to the notion of sex, as a speculative element necessary to its operation. (Foucault, 1976, 157)

Gordimer presents Hillela as a sexually liberated woman as the protagonist of her novel. She is aimless and passive, incarnating the male dream of endless, undemanding sexual availability, always ready and never disappointing. Her lack of sexual prejudices, the sheer celebration of sexual freedom, can be interrupted as her lack of racial prejudices and her stand in favour of political freedom. Her relationships with blacks, Whaila and Reuel, can be interpreted as Gordimer's vision of a time when blacks and whites will be able to live happily together under one flag. But no doubt, although she rises to prominence in African liberation movements, it is not thanks to her superior wits, but her skill in bedding and delighting the right African revolutionaries. In a two days conference, Annemarie van Niekerk commented about sexuality: "Concentrating solely on the body is a distraction from the material

world in which its experiences are embedded. It overlooks social, ideological, and political determinants. (van Niekerk, 1991, 17) Hillela uses her sexuality to sleep her way to a position of power, but her power is only indirect and by her virtue of her marriage to a powerful man. Gordimer has created a female character whose wisdom, autonomy and political worth are unquestionable but her sexuality is still cast in terms more ambivalent and more comfortable than those of her male counterparts in the text. Chandra Mohanty in her Introduction to *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* emphasizes that our being women is constituted as much by race, class, nation and sexuality as by gender and that ideologies of womanhood as much to do with class and race as with sex. (Mohanty, 1991, 13) Gordimer has correlated sex and politics by showing man and woman of different colour and races making love in bed and thinking of 'rainbow family' as she believes: "Politics and sex-I don't know which comes first- have been the greatest influences on people's lives." (Gordimer, 1990, 275). In fact, she is highly influenced by characters like Hillela who acts first and thinks afterwards. Such people seem to be wrong in first instance but later on we realize that they are true to life and they are the ultimate survivors. Hillela brings revolutionary change in political system of South Africa through her candid sexuality:

Who have never known real political activists, imagine them as either monklike or nunlike. And I know that they are not like that at all. Having the revolutionary temperament, usually, goes along with very sexually attractive personalities, strong sexuality in both men and women. (Gordimer, 1990, 278)

When Hillela was in despair, when she was in exile, she could trust her own small body. Nobody was there to help her when she was loitering like a picaro from one place to another. Her own parents, aunts, cousin, all deserted her. At that time, only her small attractive body was the solace and soothing comforting thing which she could enjoy and rely on. In words of Gordimer, "She finds so little to trust that she comes really to the conclusion that the only thing you can trust is your own body and your own feelings. The bed, at least, is honest. You feel pain; you feel sexual pleasure." (Gordimer, 1990, 293) Why society controls woman's sexuality? Why certain norms are so powerfully transmitted through social structures and everyday life that it is impossible to imagine the absence of norms that control sexuality? In fact most of the images of sexuality remain inhibited and tabooed as having sex in public rather than private. Actually there is not such thing as truly free sexuality. That's why, to many critics and interviewers, Hillela seems to be an incredible character. For her, sex is fun, a sense of her body and feelings. In *The Gender of Sexuality*, Pepper Schwartz and Virginia Rutter comment:

It should be obvious, however that people engage in sex even when they do not intend to reproduce. They have sex for fun, as a way to communicate their feelings to each other, as a way to satisfy their egos... (Pepper Schwartz and Virginia Rutter, 2000, 2)