

**White Women In South Africa:
An Inferior Gender Within a Superior Race**

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Introduction

Because of the social and cultural situation in South Africa, white South African women have had a unique experience in their struggle to come to terms with their image of self and their options in life. The country's continuing history of social and political repression has served to impede the development of not only black South Africans, but members of the white community as well. White women, living during the colonial period as well as under present-day apartheid, have persistently tried and inevitably failed to create a meaningful definition of self. South African society's ideologies on race and gender have continually inhibited these women from achieving a higher level of consciousness. Thus, the absence of a strong, positive image of self affirms for these women that they have been and still are inescapably an inferior gender within a superior race.

This study explores the mentality of Victorian and twentieth-century white South African women in a broader attempt to reveal the role self-perception plays in understanding the past and creating the future of a society with such a flawed social order. The sources cited here do not reflect those commonly found in a historical essay, for an accurate description of consciousness must come from actual participants, not just observers. Rather, the information chosen comes primarily from novels written by two white women who have lived in South

Africa, Olive Schreiner and Nadine Gordimer. The fictional characters that these two writers so sensitively create offer special insight into the psychological process of the unique, collective consciousness of such women. Through these novels the women of South Africa, both past and present, share their search for a higher level of consciousness and the experience of discovering their spiritual, emotional and intellectual resources.

In 1855 in Cape Colony, South Africa, Olive Emilie Albertina Schreiner was born the ninth of Rebecca Lyndall and Gottlob Schreiner's twelve children. Out of frustration and loneliness in an unhappy family life, she began writing novels at the age of twenty-one. She published her first novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, in 1883 under the pseudonym Ralph Iron. The book received international acclaim and prompted her to continue writing. Her other two novels, *Undine* and *From Man to Man (Or Perhaps Only)*, also brought her praise from a receptive public. In the late 1880's and 1890's Schreiner wrote many short, allegorical pieces which she published in periodicals. She also explored the status of women in her society through a series of political and philosophical essays. Although unfashionable at the time, Schreiner advocated political and economical equality for all people in South Africa and died in South Africa in 1920 a devout feminist.¹

¹Carol Barash, Introduction to *An Olive Schreiner Reader*, (London, 1987), pp. 1-20

Born in 1923 and also raised in South Africa, Nadine Gordimer has spent much of her artistic life exploring the effects of apartheid-a system she abhors. She published her first novel, *The Lying Days*, in 1953 and has been writing ever since. Often controversial, over the years her books have been periodically banned in South Africa. Gordimer has received various literary prizes for her novels and short stories among them the James Tait Black Prize for *A Guest of Honour* and the Booker Prize in England for *The Conservationist*. As one of Olive Schreiner's most avid readers and fans, Gordimer has written reviews on various publications of the late author's biography. Nadine Gordimer presently lives in South Africa and continues to write.²

Although written in different centuries, the novels of Olive Schreiner and Nadine Gordimer clearly document the self-exploration of consciousness of white South African women. Schreiner's only three novels, *The Story of an African Farm*, *Undine* and *From Man to Man (Or Perhaps Only)* obviously provide the best sources for this investigation. Of her nine published novels, *July's People*, *The Late Bourgeois World* and *Burger's Daughter* represent a good mix of the range of characters Gordimer so brilliantly creates. The female characters in these novels do differ in relation to their respective time periods. Yet, the similarities between these women enforce the idea that the

²Nadine Gordimer and David Rosenblatt, *Lifetimes Under Apartheid*, (New York, 1986), Adem.

difference of a century has not eased the struggle of white South African women to come to terms with their image of self or their options in life.

The Works of Olive Schreiner

*I
I thought I stood in Heaven before God's throne, and God
asked me what I had come for. I said I had come to
arraign my brother, Man.*

God said, 'What has he done?'

*I said, 'He has taken my sister, Woman, and has
stricken her, and wounded her, and thrust her out into
to the streets; she lies there prostrate. His hands are
red with blood. I am here to arraign him; that thy
kingdom be taken away from him, because he is not
worthy, and given unto me. My hands are pure.'³*

The works of Olive Schreiner reveal the intense psychological process of a Victorian woman's fight to discover and implement her full potential as a human being. Schreiner's characters experience the conflicts of expressing individuality as women in a nineteenth century society fully dominated by men. Her women have few options in life. They can pursue marriage and motherhood or they can lead a disreputable life as a mistress or prostitute. Most often, Schreiner's characters feel dissatisfied with these alternatives and embark on an exploration of self. Through their search, all of Schreiner's women encounter feelings of isolation, confusion, dependency and inferiority and inevitably meet the same end. The results of their struggle for self-awareness and fulfillment leads these women to their

³Olive Schreiner, *Reader*, p. 150

death. In some instances her characters die a physical death, but more often they die a psychological one.

Schreiner's women undergo a unique and fascinating exploration of consciousness. Her characters experience a series of phases in their struggle for self-actualization. She begins her stories with her characters as children and meticulously traces their psychological journeys through life until they reach their ultimate end. All of Schreiner's women follow a similar course in their search which manifests itself in five distinct stages. They begin with realization, and then move through exploration, battle, resignation and finally end in death.

Schreiner's women experience the first stage realization at a very young age. At some point in their early lives, her characters acknowledge their status as a subordinate female in a male dominated society. The young girl carefully observes the life ambitions of the female parental figure in her life. The role model or mother figure focuses her attention not on intellectual or spiritual enlightenment, but on finding a man to provide for her who she will in turn serve. The women considers the search for a man as her purpose in life and, in finding him, she also finds her meaning. In seeking a male perspective, the young girl finds that the men in her life strongly support the idea of a women needing a man to serve and to obey. In realizing the subordinate status of women in her society, the girl perceives herself as an inferior being. And, in her awareness of her own

inferiority, the girl makes one of two choices. She either accepts her position in life and pursues the same path as that of her female parental figure or she rejects this imposed ideal and moves on to the next psychological phase.

The second stage exploration usually lasts the greater part of the character's life. These women, failing or unwilling to find their purpose and meaning in life through their male counterparts, turn inward to continue their search. In doing so, they begin to discover repressed talents, interests and strengths. Feeling confined and stagnated by those at home, the young women leave the farms on which they grew up in the hope of further developing their newly found individuality. When Schreiner's women take their search away from the boundaries of the small world of the farm, conflicts emerge with the male characters in the novels who can not and will not accept the woman's struggle to achieve a new image of self.

These negative reactions initiate the third stage battle which usurps much of the character's newly revealed strengths. Unwilling to resign herself to live as an inferior and subordinate being, the woman fights every obstacle that inhibits her from achieving her desired level of consciousness. Yet, because of the life options denied to the woman and the repressive conditioning she received during childhood, she needs the acceptance of the male figure to continue her search. Unable to gain approval from her male counterpart, the woman internalizes the battle which

provokes her to question her motivation and which results in intense feelings of confusion and self doubt. The inner torment experienced by the woman leaves her physically and emotionally exhausted.

The fourth stage resignation occurs when the woman can no longer struggle with the external and internal forces that prevent her from attaining her desired level of consciousness. She understands that in order to reach her full potential she must be allowed to implement her skills and strengths and share her inner knowledge. Lacking the means with which to acquire the necessary outlets for such self-expression and refused the help of those who have them, she can not win the fight to define herself. She must resign herself to live the life she had fought so hard to escape. She now knows she can not free herself of her dependency on her male counterpart. Thus, she ends the confrontation-- she gives up.

Shortly afterwards, the fifth and final stage death occurs. Although Schreiner's characters finally understand they can not escape their role in life as inferior humans, they do not accept the definition society has imposed. They refuse to acknowledge their subordinate position by shutting out those that have denied them their right to discover a unique and meaningful image of self. So, the woman withdraws from the rest of society into a world where purpose and fulfillment need not exist. In order to release herself from constant pain and inner torment, she brings

about her own self-immolation. And for these women, death of the body or the mind represents the ultimate form of isolation- the only escape.

In her first published novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, Olive Schreiner takes the protagonist through such a psychological process. The novel traces the lives of two cousins growing up on the wide sandy *Karoo* of South Africa in the late 1800's. The girls are raised as sisters by their Boer aunt Tant' Sannie, as both were orphaned at a very young age. The story primarily focuses around Lyndall, the eldest of the two girls. Schreiner follows the younger cousin through life as well, but Em never experiences the struggle to achieve a higher level of consciousness.

Our introduction to the young girls takes place late in the afternoon on a hot South African summer day. Seeking relief from the heat, the cousins sit under a shelving rock on the side of the *kopje* furthest from the homestead. The girls begin to discuss their respective futures as grown-ups. Em, who will eventually inherit her father's farm, offers to share it with Lyndall who has no legal claim. Lyndall refuses the offer for she believes that "[t]here is nothing helps in this world but to be very wise, and to know everything-to be clever."⁴ Em verbally agrees this would be very nice but to her "it seemed a dream of

⁴Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*, (Chicago, 1883) p. 13

quite too transcendent a glory ever to be realized."⁵ And throughout the novel we find Lyndall in pursuit of this dream and Em content not to have one.

In her quest for knowledge, Lyndall develops a close relationship with Waldo, the son of the German overseer of the farm. Lyndall and Waldo talk for hours during the long summer days. She speaks to Waldo of her dismay at her aunt's persistence at finding a husband. She can not understand why Tant' Sannie feels so desperate and unhappy without a man. When Lyndall confronts her aunt on the subject, Tant' Sannie laughs at the girl and says "[s]he'll be a nice mouthful to the man that can get her."⁶ Through these discussions and observations, Lyndall makes the realization that she, as a female, may remain trapped in the role society has defined for her. One night in bed after being punished by Tant' Sannie for her freshness, Lyndall makes a promise to herself: "When that day comes, and I am strong, I will hate everything that has power and help everything that is weak."⁷ In her unwillingness to accept her inferior position as a subordinate woman, Lyndall leaves the farm and Em to attend school at the age of seventeen and embark on an exploration of self.

During Lyndall's stay at school, Em continues her usual life on the farm. Interestingly, the younger girl never develops a desire

⁵Ibid., pp. 11-18

⁶Schreiner, *Farm*, p. 93

⁷Schreiner, *Farm*, p. 67

to achieve a stronger image of self as does her cousin. Instead of experiencing a discontent with her lack of options in life, she surpasses the earlier stages in the process and moves directly to resignation. She does not question her destiny to become a wife and then a mother for she knows nothing else. Yet, her resignation represents a psychological death for Em. For undiscovered spiritual and intellectual resources do not constitute nonexistent ones.

With Lyndall still away at school, Em begins to see her desire to marry become a reality. Gregory Rose, an Englishman, comes to the farm as a hired hand. Within months of their meeting, Gregory writes home to his sister proclaiming his love for Em. Frightened by his aggressiveness and her own feelings of attraction, Em hesitates in accepting Gregory's proposal. Eventually, she verbally returns his love and agrees to the marriage. Without undergoing the full process of self-discovery, Em still reaches the final inevitable stage:

Every day when Gregory came home, tired from his work, he would look about and say "Where is my wife? Has no one seen my wife? Wife, some coffee!" and she would give him some.

Em's little face grew very grave at last and she knelt up and extended her hands over the drawer of linen.

"Oh, God!" she said, "I am so glad! I do not know what I have done to be so glad. Thank you!"⁸

⁸Schreiner, *Farm*, p. 167

Em has accepted a life in which her very existence revolves around another being's needs and demands. She has found significance and meaning not by discovering her own inner resources, but by serving the spiritual and intellectual desires of another. And she feels glad to have found some kind of purpose in life. With her grateful thanks, Em has affirmed her own psychological demise.

Shortly after the marriage, Lyndall returns home to the farm. Through her education, Lyndall has provided herself with an added option in life which has broadened her exploration of self. Lyndall's discoveries have made her bitter about her predicament in life. She feels all women are cursed. She explains her philosophy of life to a puzzled and bemused Waldo:

We all enter the world little plastic [sic?] beings, with so much natural force perhaps, but for the rest-blank; and the world tells us what we are to be and shapes us by the end it sets before us. To you it says-Work! to us it says-Seem!... And so the world makes men and women.⁹

Waldo disagrees with this philosophy claiming that some women have power and the means with which to use it. Lyndall concedes to this observation and in doing so enters the third phase of battle.

During her visit home, Gregory begins to develop more than brotherly affection for Lyndall. Out of her confusion in her ambivalent feelings of hating those with power yet longing to

⁹Schreiner, *Farm*, pp. 174-175

use her own strengths, Lyndall acknowledges Gregory's emotions in a controlling and cruel game. Lyndall has fully come to terms with the potency of her abilities as a woman. She understands the only method she has to use them like all women "who, having power, but being denied the right to exercise it openly, rule in the dark, covertly, and by stealth, through the men whose passions they feed on and by whom they climb."¹⁰ She wields this power to tease and torment Gregory who, with each act of cruelty and rejection, falls deeper in love. Unable to win the desirable response from Lyndall and pained at hurting Em, Gregory leaves the farm with no definite plans of returning. As Em can not blame herself for who and what she has become, she can not blame Lyndall for her destiny either. Thus, she accepts the loss of Gregory with hurt but not hate.

During Lyndall's last stages of battle, she receives a male visitor from her past. She had met the man during her stay at school and he had fallen in love with her. Lyndall returned his affections, but with less fervor and need. The man had come to ask her one last time to marry him. Lyndall once again refuses, explaining: "You call into activity one part of my nature; there is a higher part you never touch."¹¹ But she does care for him and, in sensing his pain, accepts his proposal and leaves the farm to be married.

¹⁰Schreiner, *Farm*, p. 179

¹¹Schreiner, *Farm*, p. 230

Although Lyndall has taken the most acceptable option for a woman in nineteenth-century South Africa, she has not yet reached her state of resignation. She believes she will achieve an even higher level of consciousness by leaving the farm and exploring previously unknown areas of South Africa, love and life. However, during their journey, Lyndall discovers her pregnancy. The prospect of having a child and being responsible for another human being frightens Lyndall terribly. She quarrels with her husband, refuses to let him touch her and eventually rejects the man and the marriage. Still pregnant, she leaves her husband and travels to another village. Eight days after her arrival she gives birth to the child. The baby died only two hours later. Weak and sick from the birth, Lyndall begins the fourth phase of her psychological process.

Without the man or Gregory in her life and even the death of the child that frightened her so, Lyndall experiences a great sense of loss and solitude. Her newly found power and self-understanding seem useless now. She begins to reevaluate her self-worth and her individuality. Without her male counterparts, Lyndall can not affirm her self-conception and realizes her unrelenting need to identify herself through those from whom she had fought so long to escape. She finally understands and, at the same time, detests herself for her dependency. She had lost her meaning in life just when she thought she had found it. She had lost those who made the purpose seem real. And she resigns

herself to this for "the beautiful women finds her fullness of bloom only when a past has written itself on her, and her power is then most irresistible when it seems going."¹²

Lyndall stays in the hotel in which she gave birth to her child. Gregory returns to the farm expecting to find her there. Upon discovering her absence he tells Em he can not stay there and that she may dispose of his belongings as she sees fit. He then decides to look for Lyndall and spends months doing so. Afraid she will refuse to see him, he disguises himself as a woman and arrives at her hotel. The Lyndall he finds holds little resemblance to the one he left. She is half starved and near death. Sick from refusing to eat, Lyndall drifts in and out of consciousness. She never notices the tall figure in women's clothing who stands watching her at all hours from the corner of the dark room. And when Lyndall finally dies Gregory ironically wonders:

*Had she found what she sought for-
something to worship? Had she ceased from
being? Who shall tell us? There is a veil of
terrible mist over the face of the Hereafter...*¹³

And Lyndall has discovered inescapable isolation.

Published after her death, Olive Schreiner's first written novel *Undine* and her last and unfinished work *From Man to Man (Or Perhaps Only)* also trace the lives of young women

¹²Schreiner, *Farm*, p. 233

¹³Schreiner, *Farm*, p. 285

desperately searching for self-expression and self-actualization in colonial South Africa. The protagonists in these two novels follow the same kind of psychological progression as Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm*. Although their stories vary according to their individual circumstances, all of Schreiner's women must confront repressive Victorian ideals in their struggle for self-fulfillment. None achieve their ultimate goal in life. And all meet a similar end.

The story of Undine begins with the young girl trying to reconcile her evil thoughts about God and her rejection of religion. Undine perceives God as cruel for he instills the fear of hell in his believers. She feels she "would much sooner be wicked and go to hell than be good only because I was afraid of going there."¹⁴ Much to the astonishment of her family and teachers, Undine pities the devil for she believes that God destined him to a life of evil. Instead of religion, Undine directs her enthusiasm towards reading fairy tales and philosophy books she steals from her father's library. Because of her curiosity and outspoken nature, her tutors call her stupid and her family tells her she grows more vile and ungodly everyday. They continually try to make her realize that unless she changes her ways:

wherever she might go her hand should be against every man's, and every man's against hers... wherever she might go, love and sympathy would be denied her... she

¹⁴Olive Schreiner, *Undine*, (New York and London, 1928) p. 18

*would have to walk on alone, alone unloved,
misunderstood right on to the end...¹⁵*

Through conversations about her wicked thoughts with her young cousin Frank who refers to her as the "little women", Undine does make a realization, but not of the kind that her family had hoped for.¹⁶ She perceives herself as others see her. Undine internalizes her family's description of her and begins to feel as sinful as the image she projects. She hates herself for her wicked disposition. Yet, she realizes that her ungodly notions come not from inherent evil, but from ignorance. She feels she has been denied the right to develop her own beliefs and convictions and this has left her void of the knowledge she needs to achieve a higher level of consciousness.

Undine leaves the farm in the early stages of exploration to study in England and live with her cousin Frank's family. Through her struggle to find a satisfactory image of self, Undine begins to discover that the life role's imposed on women in South Africa exist in England as well. Undine finds no new options in this new country so she turns her self-hatred towards all women for the legacy they have left her, "[I] wish I was not a woman. I hate women; they are horrible and disgusting, and I wish I had never been born rather than to be one."¹⁷ Yet, Undine refuses to give up her struggle. She decides to take the only option offered to her

¹⁵Ibid., p. 69

¹⁶Schreiner, *Undine*, Adem.

¹⁷Schreiner, *Undine*, p. 49

by society in the hope it will aid her in her search. Undine marries the father of the man who betrayed her and, unhappily, gives birth to a child who dies soon after. Like Lyndall, Undine cares for her baby out of a sense of responsibility not of love. But, unlike the other woman, Undine undergoes this experience while still in the exploration stage. Shortly after the death of her child, her husband too passes. While Undine feels relieved of an unhappy marriage, the loss of the child and the man triggers something in her psyche and initiates the next phase. Without notice to her relatives, Undine leaves England and returns to South Africa to begin her battle.

Undine directs her battle more towards society than any one particular person. Although she now knows she can not force the world to accept her ideas, she can rebel against the ones that society has imposed on her. Upon arriving in South Africa, Undine chooses not to return to her family. Instead she decides to travel by ox wagon to the Diamond Fields in Kimberly thinking:

Why should a woman not break through conventional restraints that enervate her mind and dwarf her body, and enjoy a wild, free, true life, as a man may?-wander the green world over by the help of hands and feet, and lead a free rough life in bondage to no man?-forget the old lives and longings? live and and enjoy and learn as much as may before the silence comes?¹⁸

Undine ends her journey in a suburb outside Kimberly.

Determined to survive and defy any restraints, she finds work in

¹⁸Schreiner, *Undine*, p. 245

a poor section of town ironing gentlemen's pocket handkerchiefs and nightshirts. She works hard and diligently through the long hot nights until utter exhaustion forces her to drop to the dirt floor of the tent she now calls home. One morning, Undine awakens to find her possessions and what little money she had gone. Once again she finds work this time sewing children's garments for a wealthy woman. Hungry and weak, she works long into the night only to have the woman reject the product upon its completion. In her persistence, Undine manages to save enough money to purchase an iron and board so she can independently earn her living. She had fought every obstacle that stood in her way to becoming an individual- a whole person whose purpose and meaning had finally emerged from her own definition. Yet, Undine's struggle has not brought her self-fulfillment. She finds no joy in her hard labor and impoverished life. Although she finally has her freedom, she can not extract any happiness from her present state in life: "she had allowed her pride to keep her from her own class, from the white-handed, silver-voiced people of refinement and polish-that was the only reason she had fared so ill."¹⁹ She feels confused by this awareness which only induces more misery.

In her final stages of battle, Undine nurses a sick Englishman back to health and eventually falls in love with him. The man appreciates Undine's care and nurturing but, already engaged to

¹⁹Schreiner, *Undine*, p. 296

be married, he returns to England upon regaining his strength. Although heartbroken and ill herself from the added work of caring for him, Undine accepts his decision. She understands his passion and inner longing for this woman. She too felt the same for the man who betrayed her long ago. Shortly after his departure, a well speaking English servant comes to pick up the ironing for his sick master. Undine discovers he works for the man she had loved long ago. The next time she sees the servant he informs her that his master has died. The overwhelming loss of the only two men she has ever loved forces Undine to make a final decision in life and in doing so she enters the next phase.

In the stage of resignation, Undine finally accepts the life-role society defined for her as a woman long ago. She decides she can no longer fight these restraints for she realizes that she gave in to them years before. Undine had struggled relentlessly to make a full life for herself, one free of inferiority, subordination and dependency. But she now understands that very essence of her existence depends on the traits she so detests. After such a long and fierce battle, she has nothing but her iron and her board. She sees a woman whose only skill reflects that of servitude, a woman whose livelihood depends solely on the existence of men. And, a woman can not escape the confines of the inferior status of all those of her kind. She can not live with the image she sees. So, she resigns herself to die with it.

As the shortest phase in Undine's process, death occurs only in the last few pages of the text. Weak from grief and hard work, Undine retires to her bed-- her sleep disturbed only by tormented dreams of her childhood. Until late one night:

The racking pain, the fever, the dull confusion of brain, all had vanished. Free from pain, calm and clear as she had never felt before, she lay there, yet cold, strangely cold. What did this mean this strange feeling?... Then the truth came to her suddenly.

Death-only that, nothing more. What she had longed for and prayed for; what she had looked for in the muddy pool; what she had sighed for in days of emptiness-it had come at last.

And at last, so had freedom.

Olive Schreiner's last and unfinished novel, *From Man to Man (Or Perhaps Only)*, once again tells the story of two sisters growing up on a farm in colonial South Africa. Unlike *African Farm*, however, Schreiner has both women experience the full psychological process of self-discovery without surpassing any of the five stages. The novel begins with a prelude entitled *The Child's Day* which had been published independently from the rest of the text in various collections of Schreiner's short stories after her death.

The short piece depicts the eldest of the sisters, Rebekah, as a child of five. During her play time, she hears the agonized screams of her mother. Rebekah runs to the house to discover she has a newly born sister. But, when her father asks her to kiss the baby, Rebekah refuses claiming she does not like the

child and leaves the room. Looking for relief from the hot afternoon sun, she ventures through an open window into the spare room at the back of the house only to find another baby sleeping peacefully there. Rebekah begins to talk to the child when Old Ayah the maid bursts into the room demanding to know how the girl got through the locked door. Before Rebekah can explain, the woman hurries her out of the room and away from the dead twin. While the young girl tries to understand the death of the second child, she falls asleep under a tree and dreams she finds a baby of her own in a large snow-white pod by the water.

In her dream, she tells the child:

Don't be sorry you are come into the world, my baby. I will take care of you!... My baby, I shall never call you 'a strange child'!....I'm so glad you are a little girl...

Rebekah eventually awakes and returns to the house.

Reluctantly, she goes to her mother's room where she knows the real baby sleeps. When she arrives, she finds the mother resting in bed with the new child. Rebekah asks if she can take the infant to her room to sleep with it. When her mother refuses, Rebekah screams and cries until she gets her way. Later, Old

Ayah goes to the girls bedroom to retrieve the baby:

But when she turned down the cover she found the hands of the sisters so interlocked, and the arm of the elder sister so closely round the younger, that she could not remove it without awakening both.

Schreiner ends the prelude here and continues the story of Rebekah and Baby Bertie in the text she calls *The Woman's Day*.

The novel picks up with sisters at a much later stage in life. We find Rebekah at age twenty preparing to marry her cousin Frank. Bertie, now fifteen, also plans for the arrival of her new tutor from England. Although quite close, the sisters display very different qualities and characteristics. Rebekah has grown to become shy and introverted, while Bertie exhibits precocious tendencies. The older girl adores intellectual activities especially science, but the younger of the two "had no greater appetite for books and learning than her hand-lamb for carrots...".²⁰ Yet, despite their differences, the sisters develop a close, trusting relationship that continues throughout the novel.

The lives of the sisters follow the same pattern as those of Lyndall and Undine. Both girls search for a higher level of consciousness and a satisfactory image of self within the confines of Victorian society. Rebekah's marriage turns sour when she discovers her husbands' infidelity. She turns her attention away from the man and retreats into her writing and other intellectual endeavors. She tries again and again to reconcile the marriage. For the sake of her children, Rebekah chooses to stay with Frank in the hopes that someday he will need only her for a companion.

Bertie also leaves the farm to start a new life, but her departure comes not out of choice. The man who had taken

²⁰Olive Schreiner, *From Man to Man (Or Perhaps Only)*, (New York and London, 1927) p. 52

Rebekah's place, a tutor, ends up seducing Bertie and out of guilt and shame she flees the farm in order to forget. Yet, Bertie's secret torments her to the point of having to reveal it to all those she encounters in her journey. Her pain and humiliation only increases when those who now know of her impure past reject her and send her away. Bertie continues searching for acceptance throughout the novel, but never finds the understanding she so desperately desires.

Schreiner's choice of skipping certain periods of time in her character's lives somewhat obscures the path these women follow in their search for self-definition. Rebekah seems to have reached the stage of realization by the time Schreiner introduces her in the prelude. We see the child's acknowledgement of her inferiority as a female in the stories she tells the baby in her dream:

*[I]t's called "What Hester Durham Lived For."
...And so the lady went away to India...and the
black soldiers (they call them sepoys) wanted to
kill them...They were only women and children
there; and all of them were very frightened... But
Hester Durham was not afraid...They hadn't been
so afraid because she was there to comfort them.
And at last the sepoys did come in, and killed
them all; but- 'to comfort those frail women and
children in their last hour of despair, that was
what Hester Durham lived for'...It's a rather
difficult story; but you'll know what it means
when you're grown up, when you are five years
old-I did...*

Rebekah interprets the role of women as being one of sacrifice, placing the needs of others before her own even if it brings about her death. Interestingly, the heroine in her story takes the form of one fearless woman among many frightened others. Yet, *Hester Durham* does not prevail in the battle. Her strength can not hold off the forces of the sepoys. Thus, she dies taking those of her kind with her. Ironically, Rebekah will also meet the same fate.

Rebekah moves on to exploration during the lapse of time between the two sections of the novel. She looks for herself in her studies and continues her search well into her marriage. Although she realizes early on that the life of a wife and a mother entails servitude and sacrifice, she does not reject the option. She believes that her love for this man can only open doors in the process of self-discovery. Her stage of battle begins when she learns of her husband's unfaithfulness. Feeling as if she provoked his behavior, Rebekah internalizes the fight and by transcribing her agony in a private journal she never shares with Frank. When she begins to equate her failed marriage with her sense of self-worth she enhances her anguish and withdraws even further into herself. Unable to openly express her pain and perceiving herself as weak and inadequate, Rebekah passes into the resignation stage. She resigns herself to this unhappy marriage for she believes that, like Hester

Durham, as a woman she must sacrifice herself for the sake of others.

Although quite different, Bertie's search for self-definition results in as much disappointment and pain as that of her sister. For Bertie realization comes with the loss of her virginity. Shortly after the seduction, the tutor leaves the farm to return to England claiming he must tend to his sick mother. Bertie feels bewildered at the man's sudden departure: "[t]here was in the large eyes the look that an animal has when it is in pain; the mute fear of a creature that cannot understand its own hurt."²¹ Yet she knows she has been abandoned and credits this not to an uncaring lover but to her own failings. She reveals her low self-esteem one evening to her sister:

Rebekah, I wish I was different and not like I am! I wish I was clever. I am so big and heavy! I am so stupid!...I can understand about work and such things...but I can't talk about books and all clever things people talk of...-sometimes I wish I were dead. I want so to be different! Rebekah, do you think anyone could ever love me who was very clever and not stupid like I am? ²²

Although aware of her inferiority to those with great intellectual capacity, Bertie only defines her shortcomings in terms of her own individuality. She does not apply the same image to all women for Rebekah certainly possesses the qualities Bertie feels she herself lacks. Yet, Bertie has

²¹Ibid., p. 69

²²Schreiner, *Man*, p. 90

acknowledged a personal sense of inferiority that for her, in time, will come to represent that of all women.

Soon after the tutor leaves, Bertie receives a proposal of marriage from her cousin John-Ferdinand. She feels she can not hide her secret from the man she will marry. When she tells John-Ferdinand about the tutor, he responds to the confession with hurt and then pity which further enforces Bertie's unsatisfactory image of self. She senses and then verbally acknowledges his pain but he tells her: "It is not pain that matters, Bertie, it is sin."²³ But he tells her that he will marry her anyway if she feels he must follow through on his commitment. Bertie refuses the proposal for she can not bear to be perceived by John-Ferdinand as evil, as a sinner. She quickly packs her bags and leaves the farm to live with Rebekah and begin the phase of exploration.

Bertie's exploration of self leads her from relative to relative in search of acceptance for her past. At each place she stays, she reveals her secret to those she feels she can trust and who in turn will love her unconditionally. Only through the approval of others can Bertie come to terms with her mistake and go on to build a strong and unique image of self. But Bertie constantly faces rejection and humiliation by those who refuse to understand her pain. So she begins to use her suffering as an

²³Schreiner, *Man*, p. 109

armor with which to fight anyone and anything that holds her back and inevitably enters the stage of battle.

Bertie's secret eventually becomes her weapon. When she has found the someone who truly loves and trusts her, she lashes out at him with the sins of her past. They once again reject her for the pain her betrayal has caused leaves them feeling they have no other choice. Bertie also feels she has no other option but to hurt others, for her secret has become her identity. She perceives herself as a sinner therefore she behaves like one. Bertie no longer feels dismayed at the cruelty of those who will not accept her for she now knows she provokes them to behave in such a manner. She enters resignation with the understanding that she can never escape her past. The image and role that others defined for her in her exploration has become the only one she knows. Thus, she takes this new level of consciousness and carries it with her for the rest of her life.

Schreiner never completed *From Man to Man*, so the two women never reach the death stage in the actual text. However, she briefly told her husband, S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner, her plans for its ending which he includes at the end of chapter thirteen. After she had disappeared from sight for a number of years, a close friend of Rebekah's (Drummond) finds Bertie "in a house of ill fame at Simon's Town, stricken down by a loathsome and terrible disease."²⁴ He brings the sick woman back to her

²⁴Schreiner, *Man*, pp. 461- 462

sister's house where Rebekah tries to nurse Bertie back to health "[b]ut, alas, the rescue came too late; the ravages wrought in this tender but helpless woman were too far advanced; and her death approaches."²⁵

Rebekah lived on. She had previously developed a close fellowship and mutual love with the man who found Bertie. Through her love for Drummond, Rebekah had discovered a purpose more satisfying than any she had ever known. Yet, neither could leave the lives they had built for themselves in marriage and family. So, "it therefore became inevitable that she must give up and leave the one man who she felt could be her life's close companion..." and the self-definition he helped to provide.²⁶ Rebekah finally understands that her meaning in life had always come from outside sources, never from within. But her strengths have been usurped by the sacrifices she made in the search for her true image of self. And she, like all of

Schreiner's women, has no desire to continue the quest:

*We are weary with seeking for truth and being baffled everywhere by subterfuge and seeming... [t]he love which is not planted on a naked sincerity, which needs subterfuge and self-deception and the deception of another for its life, is a plucked flower stuck into the sand; what matter how soon it dies-it has no real life.*²⁷

²⁵Schreiner, *Man*, p. 462

²⁶Schreiner, *Man*, p. 463

²⁷Schreiner, *Man*, p. 159

In her "last hour of despair" Rebekah too dies and finally lays her mind and spirit to rest.

Through her novels, Olive Schreiner has successfully traced the struggle of white, colonial South African women to find a self-definition greater and more meaningful than the one their Victorian society had offered. The lives of Lyndall, Em, Undine, Rebekah and Bertie reveal an intense psychological dilemma faced by women who feel trapped in the imposed ideals and expectations of their nineteenth-century male counterparts. The roles of servant, nurturer and the keeper of morality prove unfulfilling for these women whose needs become obscured and often ignored by the men they must obey. In their desire for inner knowledge and understanding, they confront overwhelming obstacles that ultimately consume the strength and energy that drives their search. The men in Schreiner's novels continually repress and stagnate the women with their demands, stern judgements and sometimes even their love.

While so desperate to find a higher level of consciousness, these women often forget that they lack the necessary options in life to fully discover and implement their intellectual and spiritual resources. They forget that they can not close off the only avenues open to them in their journey to self-discovery. They can not yet reject the male ideals (the available options) until they have developed their own means of finding self-

fulfillment. But the pain they suffer in their confinement does not allow them to reason as such. They know they must free their minds and bodies of the oppressive bonds of male-dominated society. However, because of their inherent dependency on their male counterparts, they inevitably fail. Death does signify a method of escaping for these women. But, the release from pain does not free them or the rest of their kind from the crippling imposition of remaining an inferior gender.

The Works of Nadine Gordimer

*There she sits, gazing, gazing.
An old and lovely world, gardens and gentle beauties
among gentle beasts. Such harmony and sensual peace
in the age of the thumbscrew and dungeon that there it
comes with its ivory spiral horn*

there she sits gazing

bedecked,coaxed,secured

at last

*by a caress-O the pretty dear! the wonder! Nothing to
startle, nothing left to fear, approaching-*

There she sits, gazing, gazing.....

*Sits gazing, this creature that has never
been.²⁸*

Like the women Olive Schreiner, Nadine Gordimer's female characters also search for an image of self in a repressive environment. However, the time lapse of almost a century has changed the experience for these women of coming to terms with their identity and role in society. The world of Gordimer's women offers them a much larger selection of life options in career, education and even relationships with men. These twentieth-century women also experience a release from the blatant and consuming subservience displayed by Schreiner's female characters. Gordimer's women must deal with the

²⁸Nadine Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter*, (Great Britain, 1979) p. 341

institutionalized system of apartheid and the increased isolation from a large aspect of South African society and culture it perpetuates. Yet, even after almost one hundred years, the men in the lives of these women still inhibit their exploration of self and serve as a controlling force in directing these women to their ultimate end.

Despite the changes in the societies of these two types of women, Nadine Gordimer's characters also undergo a series of psychological discoveries and transformations. Unlike Olive Schreiner, Gordimer rarely begin her stories with the protagonists as children. Most often, the lead characters begin their search for self as adults. Although the process occurs in a shorter period of time, Gordimer takes her characters through as intricate a cycle as those of Schreiner's and has them experience the same feelings of isolation, confusion, dependency and inferiority. Her women undergo six phases in the process of self-discovery. They begin in false image of self and move through realization, exploration, confrontation, resolution and finally end in rebirth.

Ironically, Gordimer's women seem to begin where Schreiner's have left off. Gordimer introduces her female characters in a stage similar to psychological death. Her women have created a false image of self, void of any animation or vitality and one that has never been explored or achieved through an inner struggle. They define their existence in the same light as did

Schreiner's women when they reached their final phase.

Gordimer's women believe that their life-role pertains to the definition that society has dictated. Yet, unlike Schreiner's characters, they accept these terms without question. South African society still limits these women by stressing the necessity of marriage and motherhood. Although many choose options outside marriage, they never escape the unrelenting pressure to lead a conventional life. More often than not they subside to this pressure and live their life as expected, in isolation from a unique and personally defined sense of self.

Gordimer's women move into the second phase realization after an unexpected event intrudes into their stasis and forces them to reevaluate their life situation. The phase strongly resembles that of Schreiner's women with the exception of the unanticipated occurrence. Like Schreiner's women, Gordimer's character's also acknowledge their inferior status in society during this stage of the process. They begin to comprehend their lack of self-defined purpose and meaning in life in addition to their ingrained dependency on others for their own survival. Unlike Schreiner's characters, however, Gordimer's women rarely share this new awareness with their male counterparts. They keep their realization private and, after carefully analyzing this new knowledge, enter the next phase of their process.

Gordimer's women enter exploration with an intense feeling of apprehension. Although these women do desire a new and

unique image of self after realization, they fear the necessary steps they must take to reach a higher level of consciousness. Like their present definition of self, they interpret the search as being imposed on them. Yet, because they can not find complacency within their new awareness, they know they must continue regardless of their hesitation. During their exploration, Gordimer's characters bring into question not only their role of inferior woman but, in addition, their status in South Africa as members of the superior race. They begin to feel as if their existence has a dual nature--as if they must create two separate definitions of self in order to comply with the standards and laws South African society has developed. The confusion that evolves from this dilemma forces these women to direct their search outward and enter the fourth stage.

The fifth stage confrontation occurs in two separate, but intricately related, forms. After restricting their search for a new image of self to the confines of their own gender and their own race and failing to achieve their ultimate goal in that realm, Gordimer's women turn to a previously untapped resource. They find themselves looking towards an African man to further them in their search for self-definition. The confrontation takes root in the actual encounter as well as in the minds of the women. They now must face the man in a new and uncomfortable manner. They feel as if the roles have been switched in the familiar relationship. Although they recognize their dependant feelings

for the African as a man, they must struggle to come to terms with the new sense of inferiority that stems not only from their gender but, in addition, from their race. After confronting these feelings, they move on to their fifth phase.

After struggling with the implications of their newly found option in their search for self-actualization, Gordimer's women move into resolution. This phase lasts only a short period of time yet, it drastically alters the character's perception of herself and the society in which she lives. During this stage, the women have come to the understanding that they can never return to their former life. They will not accept the definition society has imposed on them as women and as members of the white race. They decide to cast off all remaining ties to the world that has confined them to an unfulfilling and repressive existence. This resolution gives way to a long awaited feeling of freedom for Gordimer's women which reveals itself in the sixth and final stage.

The final stage of struggle for Gordimer's women rebirth takes place at the end of her novels. By this time, her women finally feel ready to accept their previously repressed ideas and spiritual and intellectual strengths. Emotions of isolation, confusion and dependency seem to disappear and they feel they can begin again with a new image of self and a higher level of consciousness. With the surfacing of these new discoveries the

women feel elated, relieved and, most importantly, alive.

Gordimer always ends the story here.

In *July's People*, Nadine Gordimer takes her protagonist Maureen Smales through such complex transformations of self. The story takes place during a violent and terrifying revolution in South Africa. Maureen, her husband Bam and their three young children seek refuge from the fighting in the native village of their servant July. Taking only what necessities they can fit in their *bakkie* (jeep), the family leaves behind their life in the familiar surroundings of the white South African suburbs and follows July to hopeful safety. Gordimer begins the novel with the family already in the village and Maureen content in the first phase of the process.

Maureen Hetherington Smales grew up in Kruger Park as the child of a shift boss. She married Bamford Smales at the age of twenty-four and their children came shortly after. The Smales considered themselves liberal whites. Early in their marriage, they had thought of leaving South Africa to make a new life in another country for "[t]hey sickened at the thought that they might find they had lived out their lives as they were born, pariah dogs in a black continent."²⁹ Yet, because of financial reasons, they decided to stay in the country they knew as home and built a life for themselves full of white privilege and African servants. And Maureen understood her place in this

²⁹Nadine Gordimer, *July's People*, (New York, 1981) p. 8

world. She felt comfortable in her role as mother, wife and mistress of her household. She had watched her mother perform this function throughout her childhood and could emulate the part with ease. She never felt the need to look for any other identity or image of self for each had been passed down to her with understanding that her role in life, like that of all women, had been successfully defined by others long ago. In this sense, Maureen has affirmed and even helped to create a false image of self, one that came not from an inner exploration, but from an imposed set of values and ideals.

Maureen makes her realization a few days after she arrives at July's village. Life in July's hut proves difficult for the woman and her family. Without the comforts of home they feel disoriented and deprived. For Maureen, life in the village represents more than just mud floors and a lack of hot water. It means a sudden separation between herself and the world that had given her purpose: "Maureen was aware, among them in the hut, of not knowing where she was, in time, in the order of a day as she had always known it."³⁰ She sees her husband in a different light as well. Removed from his ordinary surroundings, Bam can not function as an independent being. She recognizes his reliance as well as her own on July for their very survival. She realizes she has nothing- no possessions of any real value in the self-sufficient village nor the comfort and stability of her

³⁰Ibid., p. 17

former life. But, most importantly, she realizes she has no unique and concrete image of self:

In their houses, there was nothing. At first. You had to stay in the dark of the hut a long while to make out what was on the walls... Commonly there were very small mirrors snapping at the stray beams of light like hungry fish rising. They reflected nothing. An impression-sensation-of seeing something intricately banal, manufactured, replicated, made her turn as if someone had spoken to her from back there.

Unable to accept herself in this state of new awareness, Maureen knows she must look for something more. Something meaningful and real. And in her fear she begins her exploration.

Like all of Gordimer's women, Maureen enters exploration with reservations. She knows she must come to terms with her image of self, but she feels afraid of what she might find. She considers how her relationship with her husband has changed since they came to live in the village. Back home, Bam had provided her with all the necessities in life. He had given her a house to live and raise her children in and supported her financially. Here in the village, however, Maureen sees him transform into a weak and dependant man. She also begins to sense her own inability to compensate for what she had left behind.

Removed from the shelter of her former life, Maureen begins to understand her own limitations as a women. She remembers that back home, "[s]he had had various half-day occupations over the years...[when] she drove away to her type-writer, newspaper

files, meetings, every morning."³¹ She now compares her former activities to those of the other women of the village. Maureen sees these women take the responsibility of gathering food for their families as well as her own. Thus, she begins to perceive her part-time jobs as inferior and insignificant in contrast. Maureen senses satisfaction in the companionship of these women and believes she can learn from their strengths. She decides that she too must join in their efforts. In the fields, Maureen removes the barrier between herself and July's wife and for once allows herself "to be seen in her weaknesses [and] blemishes as she saw the other woman's."³² But when July discovers that she has been working with the other women he tells her she can not return and initiates the fourth phase.

Although Maureen looks to the other women of the village in her search for self-definition, she can only do so with July's permission. Only through July and what he commands can she reach a higher level of consciousness and rid herself of her feelings of inferiority. In denying her this opportunity, Maureen enters confrontation with the knowledge that she now not only depends on July for food and shelter but, in addition, for self-fulfillment and inner meaning. And she feels ashamed of this dependency. Unable to accept his decision she asks him:

Why? But Why?... Before her, he brought his right fist down on his breast. She felt the thud as fear in her

³¹Gordimer, *July*, p. 96

³²Gordimer, *July*, p. 92

*own....She had never been afraid of any man...she was feeling no personal threat in him, not physical, anyway, but in herself.*³³

Maureen now understands that the kindness she had been taught by white society to display towards her servant had become July's humiliation, as his generosity and compassion had become hers. The special favors and the extra wages she had taken such care to provide for him had only left July feeling pitied and inferior. No longer in her own territory, Maureen feels powerless. Yet, she must accept July's decision although, this time, *his* denial has brought *her* humiliation. She finally realizes that the ignorance of not only her gender, but also her race has perpetuated her inferiority. July knows this as well and attempts to use his status as a man- his superior gender- in retaliation. Maureen now has two choices. She can obey July's command or she can break away from the restraints that have stagnated her, and many others before her, for so long. She chooses the latter for: "[s]he was unsteady with something that was not anger but a struggle: her inability to enter into a relation of subservience with him that she had never had with Bam."³⁴ Maureen has won the confrontation and has now entered resolution.

The fifth stage resolution lasts only a short time for Maureen. Near the end of the novel, July must take the family to the house

³³Gordimer, *July*, p. 98

³⁴Gordimer, *July*, p. 101

of the chief in order to determine whether they can continue living in the village. Maureen goes through the motions of preparing herself and her children for the trip. When they arrive at their destination she notices "how everything comes easily to her now as if she didn't know what was expected of her she did as she liked."³⁵ After questioning the family about their reasons for leaving their home and deciding July had been treating them well, the chief gives Maureen and Bam permission to stay.

Although relieved by the news, Maureen realizes:

*She was not in possession of any part of her life. One or another could only be turned up, by hazard. The background had fallen away; since that first morning she had become conscious in the hut, she had regained no established point of a continuing present from which to recognize her own sequence.*³⁶

She can no longer stay in the hut with her husband nor care that her children swim in a river infested with water-borne diseases. She can not articulate what she feels her self becoming and she can not go back to what she was. Yet, she knows she must continue her search. She resolves to find an image of self that promises fulfillment and freedom no matter the cost.

Rebirth occurs for Maureen in the last few pages of the text. The discoveries she has made during her life in the village have given her the strength and courage she needs to accept a different definition- a new image of self. Alone in the hut one

³⁵Gordimer, *July*, p. 114

³⁶Gordimer, *July*, p. 139

afternoon, Maureen hears an unfamiliar sound. The cries of the people in the village bring her to the doorway of the small dwelling. She recognizes the sound now for the image of the helicopter has passed through the clouds. She knows it has come for her and she feels afraid. She steps out of the hut and begins to run. She runs through the high grass, past the voices of her husband and children towards the river. She enters the water "like some member of a baptismal sect to be borne again" and wades to the other side.³⁷ And still she runs:

*...trusting herself with all the suppressed trust of a lifetime, alert, like a solitary animal at the season when animals neither seek a mate nor take care of young, existing only for their lone survival, the enemy of all that would make claims of responsibility. She can still hear the beat, beyond those trees and those, and she runs towards it. She runs.*³⁸

The beat Maureen runs towards comes not from the helicopter, but from the promise of a new self- that higher level of consciousness that exists beyond the trees and the high grass.

In Nadine Gordimer's *The Late Bourgeois World*, Elisabeth Van Den Zandt must come to terms with the suicide of her ex-husband Max. Although divorced for quite some time, Max's death forces Elisabeth to reevaluate herself and the life she leads. Like all of Gordimer's women, Elisabeth acknowledges her lack of a unique and concrete image of self and begins a process of

³⁷Gordimer, *July*, p. 159

³⁸Gordimer, *July*, p. 160

discovery. Gordimer takes her through the same six stages as she did Maureen, allowing Elisabeth to find a new definition of self through rebirth.

Much of the first stage of false image of self takes place before the actual story begins. Gordimer reveals this phase, however, through Elisabeth's memories of her husband and their relationship. Married and pregnant at eighteen, Elisabeth felt lucky to be Max's wife. While not the perfect man, Max provides her with shelter of marriage--a concept her parents ingrained in her throughout her childhood. Because of this attribute, Elisabeth manages to forgive Max for his inability to cope with their son Bobo, his refusal to keep a dependable job, and his need to rebel so destructively against his parents ideology of a united South Africa. Elisabeth participates in Max's political activities and, in time, makes them her own convictions. She works for the COD (Congress of Democrats) "printing propaganda for the African National Congress, and so on".³⁹ She even continues to work for them even after Max abandons their cause. Soon after, however, Max's political fanaticism, his extramarital affairs and constant endangerment of Bobo gives Elisabeth no choice but to leave her husband, taking her son with her.

Gordimer begins the story here. Elisabeth at age thirty lives alone in a flat in Johannesburg. She works for the Institute for Medical Research "analyzing stools for tapeworm and urine for

³⁹Nadine Gordimer, *The Late Bourgeois World*, (Great Britain, 1966) p. 42

bilharzia and blood for cholesterol."⁴⁰ Her lover, Graham, practices law and defends people on political charges. Bobo, now twelve, attends boarding school outside of the city and sees his mother every other Sunday. Elisabeth no longer affiliates herself with any political organization. She does not actively accept the idea of white supremacy, nor does she actively reject it. Although she has left behind her life with Max and the identity she found there, she has not replaced her image of self with anything substantial. She has chosen not to replace it at all in the hopes of avoiding any such struggle.

Upon receiving notice of Max's unexpected death, Elisabeth can no longer ignore her lack of inner knowledge. She quickly enters the second phase realization. She begins to understand that the choices she has made have isolated her in a world free of conflict and confrontation. Elisabeth knows her escapism serves to hide her feelings of inferiority and her inability to develop a sense of purpose on her own. She had tried to find definition in her relationship with Max, but when the marriage crumbled so did any sense of meaning Elisabeth had discovered. So she decided not to look again for fear of another failure. She sends her son to boarding school not to rid herself of the responsibility of caring for him, but because her need for definition would be a detriment to Bobo:

And yet I had to do it; I have to cover up my reasons by letting it be taken for granted that I want him out of

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 37

*the way. For the truth is that I would hold on to Bobo, if I let myself. I could keep him clamped to my belly like one of those female baboons who carry their young clinging beneath their bodies. And I would never let him go.*⁴¹

Max's death forces Elisabeth to realize that she must develop a stronger image of self, for her son's sake as well as for her own.

Elisabeth begins her exploration with the same degree of reservation as did Maureen. Although the prospects of what she might find frighten her, she knows she must move on. Her visit with Bobo reaffirms feelings of her own inadequacy for she sees him without the indispensable units of a mother, a father and family that she "was taught was a sacred trust to provide for any child [she] might 'bring into the world'."⁴² She understands though, that this conventional life does not always yield much needed feelings of fulfillment and a sense of inner strength for she sees what she has become. She can only hope that Bobo looks for his security elsewhere than in the white suburbs. Through her search, Elisabeth discovers more than her weaknesses as a woman whose sheltered and formulated life has left her void of any sense of inner knowledge and understanding. She also recognizes that the confines of the privileged sector of white South Africa have served to further debilitate her. After accidentally taking a wrong turn on her way home from her visit

⁴¹Gordimer, *Late*, p. 11

⁴²Gordimer, *Late*, p. 11

with Bobo, she drives through an industrial area of the city and gets stuck behind a truckload of workmen:

*There was a young one with a golfer's cap pulled down over his eyes who held on by one hand while he used the other to poke obscene gestures at the black girls. They laughed back or ignored him; no one seemed outraged. But when he caught my smile he looked right through me as though I wasn't there at all.*⁴³

Elisabeth now understands that the isolation of her childhood has become the isolation of her color. She now understands that she must consider both forms of detachment in her search for one image of self.

Confrontation occurs for Elisabeth when Luke Fokase, a member of the PAC (Pan African Congress) and an old acquaintance contacts her a few weeks after Max's death. Luke asks Elisabeth to deposit overseas cash in her (or a willing friend's) bank account for legal fees to aid PAC members under house arrest. She initially refuses, claiming she knows no one who could accommodate Luke's request. After he leaves, however, she spends the night reconsidering her decision. She senses more than just a reentry into the political sphere from an involvement with Luke. Elisabeth feels he can help her transcend her limitations as a woman and a member of the white race. Yet, she feels afraid that she would come to depend on him in the same way she relied on Max and her parents for self-definition. But Elisabeth's yearning for a life beyond the one she lives now

⁴³Gordimer, *Late*, p. 21

and the desire to achieve a higher level of consciousness outweighs her reservations. She resolves to help Luke.

Elisabeth's fifth stage of resolution lasts only as long as the time it takes her to make her decision. She makes plans to deposit the money in the bank account of her elderly Grandmother--a safe alternative to her own. She feels at once frightened and relieved on the verge of her rebirth :

It's so quiet I could almost believe I can hear the stars in their courses-a vibrant, infinitely high-pitched hum, what used to be referred to as the 'music of the spheres'. I've been lying awake a long time, now. There is no clock in the room now since the red clock that Bobo gave me went out of order, but the slow, even beats of my heart repeat to me, like a clock; afraid, alive, afraid, alive, afraid, alive...⁴⁴

Elisabeth has reached the final stage.

Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* recounts the psychological process of a young girl's attempt to come to terms with her identity after her father's death in prison. Rosa, the protagonist, experiences a series of traumatic events during her early life. Her brother drowns in their backyard swimming pool, her mother dies of cancer while being detained and her father must stand trial for illegal political activities. Left alone while still in adolescence, Rosa must make a place for herself in the turbulent environment of present-day South Africa. Gordimer takes the women through the same complex phases with all the

⁴⁴Gordimer, *Late*, p. 95

emotion and sensitivity displayed towards Maureen and Elisabeth. And through her journey, Rosa too can arrive at last at a fresh understanding of herself and her life.

Interestingly, Rosa's false image of self comes not so much from the repressive demands of South African society but from the man who gave his life to break free from them. Rosa lives in the shadow of her father's political activities, even after his death. She can not escape the image of her father for all those she encounters invariably equate her with him. They assume her political and ideological convictions do not differ from her father's for Lionel Burger would never instill any other values in his children. Rosa feels the constant pressure to emulate her father and sees herself not as an individual but an extension of one who took the burdens of South African society into his own hands. She believes she should want to do the same, but she can not abandon the idea that she might have been destined for something else- something different from her father, something unique and her own. This new understanding completes the stage of realization.

Rosa's phase of exploration lasts the greater portion of the novel. Unable to continue living her life as just her father's daughter, Rosa feels forced to reevaluate herself and the world around her. After a series of unsuccessful attempts, she finally obtains a passport with the help of her lover and leaves for Europe to contact her father's first wife, Katya. Rosa hopes this

woman whom she has never met can help her escape from the man who even in death governs her existence. Yet, after spending some time with Katya, Rosa realizes the woman can only provide her with an unsatisfactory solution:

I wanted to know how to defect from him...I see it all the way he did; smiling and looking on, charmed by you although you've grown fat and the liveliness Katya must have had has coarsened into clownishness and the power of attraction sometimes deteriorates into what I don't want to watch- a desire to please- just to please...⁴⁵

She can not accept the option Katya has chosen, for to Rosa it symbolizes a part of herself she has been trying to leave behind. She interprets Katya's desire "just to please" as a representation of her own inability to become an individual- her own inferiority. Yet, Rosa does not understand how women who have lived in the privileged white sector of South African society, like Katya and herself, can not achieve a more meaningful level of existence. She looks back to the social and political contradictions of her country and realizes that "being white constitutes a counter-definition...".⁴⁶

Rosa's confrontation occurs when she encounters a young African in London. Rosa has a new lover now, Bernard Chaballier, a married man she had met in Paris. With Bernard, Rosa has managed to temporarily free herself from the haunting ties of her father but she has not yet discovered her own personal

⁴⁵Gordimer, *Burger*, p. 264

⁴⁶Gordimer, *Burger*, p. 123

definition of self. The lovers travel to England together and Rosa registers under a false surname in a local university. One evening at a party, Rosa hears a familiar voice from her past. During her childhood, her father had opened his home to the children of his servants so that they too might enjoy his backyard swimming pool and other advantages. The children became part of the family, sharing in the love Lionel Burger found so easy to give. After his imprisonment and eventual death, Rosa lost track of those she had come to know as her brothers and sisters. She turns towards the voice and recognizes the speaking man as Baasie, the son of her parent's former maid. But when Rosa tries to rekindle the past, Baasie rejects her attempts. He calls her flat later that night to chastise her for something she has no control over, the constant fascination so many people have with Burger's daughter:

Lionel Burger, Lionel Burger, Burger- Everyone in the world must know what a great hero he was and how much he suffered for the blacks. Listen, there are dozens of our fathers sick and dying like dogs... [g]etting old and dying in prison. Killed in prison. It's nothing. I know plenty blacks like Burger... Tell them how your parents took the little black kid into their home, not just the backyard like other whites, right into the house. Your little boss-kid that was one of the family couldn't make much use of the lessons, there was no private swimming pool the places I stayed.-why do you think you should be different from all the other whites who've been shitting on us ever since they came? ⁴⁷

⁴⁷Gordimer, *Burger*, p. 322

But Rosa knows she is different. She must be for her father would not have it any other way. Baasie's harsh remarks force Rosa to make the most important discovery she has ever made: "[t]hrough blackness is revealed the way to the future".⁴⁸ And she moves into resolution.

Unlike most of Gordimer's other women, Rosa does not completely discard her former way of life in resolution. She knows that she must define her own image of self but not in isolation from that of her father's. She also realizes that the results of her search will depend primarily on the lives of others. Through Baasie, Rosa has discovered that as the daughter of Lionel Burger and all he stood for she must claim some kind of responsibility for the pain of those she shares her country with. She understands that she can not correct all the injustices of South African politics nor the mistakes of her father. But she can continue to fight for the ideals she has come to learn she shares with the man who held her back for so long. Rosa then returns to South Africa.

Rosa's rebirth takes place shortly after her return and the occurrence of the Soweto riots. Gordimer does not make it clear whether or not she participates in the protest. However, "[s]he was detained without charges."⁴⁹ While in prison, Rosa receives a visit from an old friend of the family. The women reports back

⁴⁸Gordimer, *Burger*, p. 135

⁴⁹Gordimer, *Burger*, p. 353

to her husband that Rosa looks well and fairly unchanged "except she's some how livelier than she used to be."⁵⁰ In our last glimpse of Rosa she writes letters from her cell on a make-shift desk of old fruit boxes, much like the one her father had used.

Like Olive Schreiner, Nadine Gordimer has taken the concept of consciousness and brought it to life through her character's struggles to come to terms with themselves and the world they live in. Her novels clearly indicate that, although the circumstances have changed in the last century, the search for inner knowledge and strength remains just as difficult for her women as it did for Schreiner's. Gordimer's protagonists certainly have more options in life concerning career, marriage and parenting, yet society still pushes these women to live their lives as did previous generations. Maureen, Elisabeth and Rosa each experienced the conflict of having to break free from the constraints of the conventional white suburbs and the isolation and inferiority they perpetuate. These women also acknowledge their dependency on the men in their lives for their present image of self, artificial or not. And they too feel this reliance increase in their quest for a new and more meaningful definition.

The greatest contrast between the two types of women emerges in the last phase of struggle. Unlike Olive Schreiner, Nadine Gordimer allows her women to turn their inherent

⁵⁰Gordimer, *Burger*, p. 360

dependency into one last, unexplored option. Only with the help of the African male character in the novel can Gordimer's women replace the last phase, death ,with rebirth. Twentieth-century South African society does not offer Gordimer's women this added option, rather they create the choice for themselves. Ironically, while African characters appear periodically throughout Schreiner's novels, her women never turn to them in the hopes of furthering their search. They never even think to look outside their own culture and race for an such an outlet for they can not conceive of its existence. The explanation for this phenomenon lies in the mind-set and life options of nineteenth and twentieth-century South African women outside the realms of the literature of Olive Schreiner and Nadine Gordimer.

An Inferior Gender: Consciousness of Colonial and Present-day White South African Women

For nineteenth-century white women, colonial life offered an ideal situation in which to implement Victorian notions of domesticity and female dependence. Yet, life in the colonies also provided many women with opportunities not found in Europe "where their options were limited by their social class, a 'shortage' of marriageable men, difficulty in finding adequate employment, or the lack of 'heathen souls' to be converted."⁵¹ In addition to these new options, the strange and exotic environment of South Africa contributed to the attraction of colonial life. Primarily the wives of colonial officers, these women performed important social functions in an effort to further the status of their husbands. They also developed a unique and complex mistress/servant relationship with the indigenous people. Yet, despite the advantages of colonial life in South Africa, nineteenth century white women remained economically, politically and ideologically subordinated.⁵² The way in which these women perceived their male counterparts, the indigenous population and, most importantly, themselves,

⁵¹Margaret Strobel, "Gender and Race in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century British Empire", p. 376

⁵²Idem.

aids in revealing the inner workings of their collective consciousness.

To these women, colonial men represented a sense of familiarity and stability in their new environment. They perceived them as self-sufficient, determined and even all powerful in their ability to govern a foreign country and its people. Because of Victorian ideology, colonial women felt incapable of reproducing these qualities within themselves. Thus, they depended on these men to provide them with pertinent necessities such as financial support and protection. In return, they performed various domestic and social duties to guarantee the continuing prosperity and contentment of their husbands. They viewed these men as their sole source of survival in a strange country where the normalities of their previous lives ceased to exist. Because of their inability to successfully remain in South Africa without their male counterparts, colonial women lived a life in which the status and well being of their husbands became more important than that of their own.

Colonial women had very limited contact with the indigenous population with the exception of the mistress/servant relationship. They did hold positions of missionaries and teachers but the most common encounters took place within the domestic sphere. Because these servants came from poor, low status groups and were rarely seen in their own surroundings, their mistresses often developed an inaccurate conception of

their lives and cultures. Colonial women established a paternalistic relationship with these servants which reinforced the ideology of racial superiority. Thus, this interaction alleviated some of the inferior feelings these women experienced in their subordination to colonial men.⁵³

Colonial women's perception of indigenous men in general differed from that of the servant. Although African men did fill positions of domestic service, their relationship with colonial women involved an added element. Colonial men feared that European women aroused the sexual appetites of indigenous men and passed laws that prohibited sexual intercourse between the two parties. Since colonial men established these sanctions without consulting their female counterparts, the existence of any fear of attack in the minds of the women becomes obscured. The concern of these men, however, did effect the way colonial women perceived African men. The forbidding attitude of colonial men served to further distance these women from the African community by creating an element of tension that might not have previously existed.⁵⁴

Colonial women's image of self, like their perceptions of colonial and African men and the indigenous population, found its roots in the morals and ideals of Victorian society. Expected to be the keepers of morality, an inspiration to men and children,

⁵³Strobel, "Gender", Adem.

⁵⁴Strobel, "Gender", Adem., Vincent Crapanzano, *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa* (New York: Vintage Press, 1986) p. 72

and the epitome of beauty and grace, colonial women certainly felt tremendous pressure in fulfilling their life role. Yet, these women did not fill the positions of power one would expect to occupy as the "preserver of civilization". Rather, they organized social functions to secure the achievement and success of their husbands. Although imperative to the maintenance of a European cultural identity, these women felt their activities paled in comparison to those of colonial men. Without political or economic independence, however, they had no choice but to comply and derive their sense of purpose from this necessity. This dependency on colonial men for identity left these women without a firm grasp on their own individuality or a self-defined meaning in life.⁵⁵

The novels of Olive Schreiner certainly reflect the mentality of colonial women in South Africa. Although Schreiner's characters do not live during the early stages of colonial rule, they are born into the legacy it perpetuated. As we have seen, all of her women struggle with the Victorian notions of marriage and motherhood as the only acceptable options in life. They too have few outlets beyond the domestic sphere for self expression. The relatively infrequent appearance of African characters in her novels also affirms the distance between these women and the African community. Although many of her women, like Lyndall

⁵⁵Strobel, "Gender", Adem., Beata Lipman, *We Make Freedom: Women in South Africa* (London: Pandora Press, 1984) Adem.

and Rebekah, look for an alternative path to self-discovery outside of marriage and family life, they only meet with obstacles too overwhelming to conquer. And, like so many other women of the colonial period, Schreiner's characters must either define their identity and find their image of self through the men in their lives or die without one.

The inability to view twentieth-century South African women in retrospect makes the assessment of their mind-set a difficult one. Unlike those of the colonial era, the evolution of present-day female consciousness has not yet been completed. However, since many of the values and ideologies of the colonial period still apply to present-day South African society much of how these women perceive themselves and the world around them can be determined.

The element of time has not made a drastic impact on the way in which white South African women perceive themselves and the society they live in. Although these women have a broader range of options in life, after almost a century they still feel the weight of stagnation and subordination. White men continue to impede their development of a unique image of self which inevitably leads to feelings of inferiority for these women. Yet, the span of almost a hundred years has allowed

these women to conceal and even evade their lack of self-definition.

South African society still advocates marriage, motherhood and family life as the most acceptable options for women. The emphasis of a permanent male/female relationship has had a similar effect on twentieth-century women as it did on those of the colonial period. Many present-day women still interpret their significance in society in accordance with the social and economic standing of their husbands. They still look to the men in their lives for purpose and definition. Like those of the colonial period, these women still can not find self-fulfillment and understanding through the existence of another. Many married women seem to mask this deficiency by acquiring outside interests such as part time jobs or volunteer work. Yet, in comparison to their husband's financial and intellectual rewards through career, these women judge their activities as insignificant and even inadequate.⁵⁶ In an effort to avoid facing their feelings of inferiority, many present-day South African women choose an option not open to women in the nineteenth century. South Africa has one of the highest divorce rates in the world.⁵⁷ In removing themselves from a situation that continually reminds them of their shortcomings, these women

⁵⁶Crapanzano, *Waiting*, pp. 133-153, Helen Joseph, *Side by Side* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986), Adem.

⁵⁷Crapanzano, *Waiting*, p. 140

have found the most efficient to evade their lack of self-definition.

The most significant difference in the mind-set of colonial and twentieth-century white South African women seems to lay in their relationship with the African community. The mistress/servant relationship still exists for many with its elements of paternalism and racial superiority, yet others have opted for a different kind of interaction. The emergence of a liberal ideology in South African society has allowed some women to volunteer their services in various political and ideological movements advocating equality for oppressed peoples. These women have involved themselves in the causes of others and have strived to make them their own. These women like, Helen Joseph and Ruth First, have abandoned their ties to the idea of racial supremacy, spent time under house arrest and in prison, risked their lives and even died for the freedom of others.⁵⁸ In essence, they have tried to find inner fulfillment and purpose through their activities with the African community. Yet, the extent to which these women develop a unique and concrete image of self through this new relationship remains questionable.

Like Olive Schreiner, Nadine Gordimer has revealed the inner workings of the consciousness of her female contemporaries.

⁵⁸Joseph, *Side*, Adem., Ruth First, *117 Days*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1988) Adem.

Gordimer's fictional women display many of the characteristics found in the lives and thoughts of those outside the realm of literature. They too experience the pressures to conform to a kind of life that offers them no valuable outlets for self-expression and understanding. They too search for definition in their relationships with the men in their lives. Failing to find meaning there, they opt for outside activities to veil this deficiency like Maureen or choose divorce like Elisabeth to escape from the constant reminder that they lack their own self-defined identity. And, like a small minority of twentieth-century white South African women, all of Gordimer's characters look towards the African community (or more specifically the African male) as an alternative path to a higher level of consciousness. Through this option, the search for a new and greater image of self, superior to the one they presently possess. Yet, the implications of this method of discovery, fictional or not, reveal a different kind of end for white South African women than Nadine Gordimer chooses to depict.

A Superior Race: The Image of the African in the Novels of Olive Schreiner and Nadine Gordimer

Although Olive Schreiner rarely illustrates her character's interaction with the African community in her novels, she does manage to reveal some valuable insight into such relationships. The African characters in Schreiner's stories usually fulfill the roles servants or nannies, make brief occasional appearances, and have no influence on the direction of the plot. Most frequently, the limited association takes place during the childhood of the protagonist and the young girls tend to speak more of the African characters rather than directly to them. Despite the infrequency of such interaction, the image of the African in Olive Schreiner's novels does reveal the reasons Victorian women lacked the option available to their twentieth-century sisters.

While Olive Schreiner did campaign against racism before many of her time, the notion of racial superiority plays an important role in how she portrays and how her characters perceive the image of the African. Throughout her novels, both she and her characters refer to African servants as possessions rather than by name as they do other white characters: "Tant' Sannie is a miserable woman...Only this morning she told her Hottentot that she would have you beaten for breaking the

plate."⁵⁹ Her characters often equate the African with what they consider to be negative and inferior as does Rebekah in *From Man to Man (Or Perhaps Only)* as she speaks to her imaginary baby: *When you grow older, I'll teach you the multiplication tables and spelling, because you can't grow up if you don't know these things...Kaffirs grow up without learning tables or spelling...You can climb trees and tear your clothes; but if you find any birds' nests, you mustn't take the eggs...Especially cock-o-veet's eggs you must not take! Kaffir boys take birds' eggs.*⁶⁰

The portrayal of Africans in this light does not reflect an innate sense of prejudice in these characters. Rather, these young girls try to reproduce the behavior displayed by the adults in their environment as all children do. Yet, the concept of supremacy does serve to distance Schreiner's women from the African community at a very early age.

Like nonfictional colonial women, Schreiner's characters perceive African men separately from the rest of the culture. The fear on the part of colonial men and the laws that kept African men and white women apart helped to create unfavorable opinions: "I don't like live boys: they are something like Kaffirs. I am glad I'm not a Kaffir man's wife."⁶¹ Because Schreiner's women had the least contact with African men, they often viewed them as more foreign than they did the rest of the

⁵⁹Schreiner, *Farm*, p. 12

⁶⁰Schreiner, *Man*, p. 18

⁶¹Schreiner, *Man*, p. 26

community. To these women, African men represented something that could not be touched nor understood:

*It was one of them, one of these old wild Bushmen, that painted those pictures...To us they are only strange things that make us laugh; but to him they were very beautiful.*⁶²

Schreiner's women fear more the unfamiliarity and their lack of understanding of African men than they fear attack. However, regardless of where this anxiety found its roots, Schreiner women can only regard it as such and further remove themselves from the African community.

Schreiner's women perceive the African community similar to the way in which they perceive themselves. To these women, Africans represent inferiority, alienation and negativity.

Schreiner's characters see in the African community oppression and a failure to break the bonds of servitude. This weakness and incapability reflects the way they feel about themselves. To turn to the African community for help in a search for self when the African does not struggle to redefine his inferior image not only seems impossible but, more importantly, useless to Schreiner's women. Because colonial environment instilled in their minds the image of the African as an inferior being, Schreiner's women never look for self-definition in that community. Even had society in some way offered these women

⁶²Schreiner, *Farm*, p. 18

this option, unless they could somehow replace their image of the African they could not make use of it.

Nadine Gordimer's representation of the African community holds little resemblance to that of Olive Schreiner. Her women interact much more frequently with this culture and create invaluable relationships with African characters. Gordimer also allows members of this community to portray roles other than servants. African characters appear as friends, political associates and, in the case of Rosa Burger, even siblings of her women. Gordimer also uses this interaction as a primary plot mover and has these characters reappear throughout the lives of her women. The image of the African in Gordimer's novels and the way in which her women perceive this community reveals the key component to the differences between the final stage of self-discovery for both types of women.

As in the novels of Olive Schreiner, the element of racial superiority exists unavoidably in Gordimer's novels. Yet, her women do not see the African community as inferior for the same reasons as their colonial ancestors. Their view comes not from prejudice or racial intolerance, but rather from years of witnessing the African in a subservient position. While Gordimer's women never advocate white supremacy, South African society has conditioned them to contribute to its perpetuation. They sense this contradiction in themselves and often try to conceal it by attempting to ameliorate the situation.

Maureen in *July's People* felt that she had always tried her best to make July feel as if he were more than just a servant. When he confronts her with the idea that she might have done the opposite Maureen acknowledges her mistake:

*If she had never before used the word 'dignity' to him it was not because she didn't think he understood the concept, didn't have any-it was only the term itself that might be beyond the grasp of his language.*⁶³

In her own way, Maureen has enforced the notion of racial superiority. She can not deny that she has employed July to attend to her needs as well as those of her husband and children "as his kind has always done for their kind."⁶⁴ Thus, she must see the man in this light.

Yet, Gordimer's women also sense something in the African community that Schreiner's failed to notice. Schreiner's characters saw a reflection of their own inferiority and, once they recognized this, they turned away and did not look any further. Gordimer's women move a step beyond. They too see the similarities between their oppression and that of the African. But, unlike Schreiner's women, they also observe the African's aspiration to overcome the restraints of white South African society. They see African men and women strive to find meaning and self-definition in a country that continually creates insurmountable obstacles to stand in their way. Gordimer's women understand their pain for they too fight to free

⁶³Gordimer, *July*, p. 72

⁶⁴Gordimer, *July*, p. 1

themselves from such restraints. When Baasie confronts Rosa in *Burger's Daughter* she realizes he has achieved what she so desires, a sense of inner knowledge and understanding:

The voice from home said: Rosa.

-Yes-

-Yeh, Rosa.-

-It's you Baasie?

-No.- A long swaying pause.

-But it is.-

-I'm not 'Baasie', I'm Zwelinzima Vulindlela.-...

-You know what my name means, Rosa?-

-Zwel-in-zima. That's my name, 'Suffering land'. The name my father gave me.⁶⁵

Rosa returns to South Africa with the knowledge that she is not alone- there are others that must struggle just as she. And, she takes solace in this: "The comfort of black. The persistence, resurgence, daily continuity that is in the mass of them. If one is not afraid, how can one not be attracted?"⁶⁶ For Rosa, Maureen and Elisabeth the kind of fear experienced by Schreiner's women has changed. The African community no longer represents unfamiliarity, but just the opposite.

The philosophy developed during the colonial period of keeping white women and African men apart has not become obsolete under institutionalized apartheid. South African society still frowns upon such interaction. However, all of Gordimer's women turn to an African man in their search for self. Through these men, her women make their most important self-discoveries.

⁶⁵Gordimer, *Burger*, p. 318

⁶⁶Gordimer, *Burger*, p. 143

Without the confrontation with an African man, her protagonists can not enter the final stage of rebirth. To Gordimer's women, African men serve as a vehicle for self-actualization. Her characters turn to July, Luke and Zwelinzima because they identify not only with their plight but, in addition, with their gender. Maureen, Elisabeth and Rosa find the idea of searching for self through a male a familiar one. Like those before them, South African society has conditioned twentieth-century women to believe that self-definition can come only through a relationship with a man. And, failing to find a satisfactory image of self through the men of the white community, Gordimer's women turn in to the African man in the hopes of finding it there- regardless of South African laws and racial ideologies .

Nadine Gordimer does not document the experiences of her characters after rebirth. She takes them up to the point of discovering this new option in life and then she leaves them there. She never fully reveals the actualization of self, only the new possibility of reaching it. Thus, rebirth does not necessarily signify the end of her character's search for a meaningful image of self. Rather, it represents the beginning of a different one. Their ultimate success once again depends upon another being. Yet, this time they must cope with an added implication. Gordimer's women must obtain the acceptance of the African in order for them to begin a new exploration. They need the consent of men like July and Zwelinzima who have continually been

humiliated, abused and oppressed by the culture Gordimer's women claim as their own. And, they must be ready to face rejection- they must be ready to accept the isolation of a superior race and the confines of an inferior gender:

No one can defect.

I don't know the ideology.

It's about suffering.

How to end suffering.

And it ends in suffering... ⁶⁷

⁶⁷Gordimer, *Burger*, p. 332

Conclusion

Both nineteenth and twentieth-century white South African women have struggled relentlessly to come to terms with their image of self and their options in life in a repressive and stagnating environment. South African society's unique social situation, both past and present, has served to create a dichotomy for its white female members. Unlike women in other countries, white South African women have not been able to unite in a collective feminist movement because of continuing male domination. In addition, South African society has not experienced an African political and civil rights movement. Thus, the ideology and political application of racial supremacy has become an intricate factor in the acculturation of white South African women. As an inferior gender within a superior race, these women face extraordinary obstacles in their efforts to find self-definition and meaning.

The novels of Olive Schreiner and Nadine Gordimer offer great insight into the evolution of the consciousness of white South African women. Their literature reveals the sensations, emotions and volitions of these women who strive so arduously to achieve a greater, more complete image of self. The works of these two writers have brought about a better understanding of the

mentality of colonial and present-day white South African women. In addition, they have revealed invaluable insight into the changed experiences of such individuals.

South African society offered few options in life to white South African women. Restrained from becoming politically, economically and even emotionally independent, these women felt and still feel driven into marriage and motherhood. Although life in the colonies provided some new opportunities for nineteenth-century women, Victorian morals and values confined them to the domestic sphere and left little room other outlets of self-expression. Their need for financial support and protection in a strange environment left them increasingly dependent upon their male counterparts.

The relationship between colonial women and the African community remained extremely limited and controlled. Contact with Africans usually took place within the home and revolved around routine duties such as cooking, cleaning, child-rearing and social planning. Outside the home environment, rules of conduct furthered the restricted interaction between the two parties. In addition, colonial men passed laws that made many other kinds of contact impossible in an effort to sanctify their race. Because they rarely encountered the African in his own surroundings colonial women perceived them as strange and, in many cases, unapproachable beings. Most importantly, however, nineteenth-century women saw in the African community what they

themselves had fought so hard to overcome-an inability to escape a subservient and inferior position in society.

For nineteenth-century South African women, image of self reflected the ideals of colonial men. These men perpetuated Victorian notions of domesticity and female subordination by imposing these values on their female counterparts. Colonial women perceived themselves as the wives of their husbands, the mothers of their children, the keeper of morality and the preservers of civilization. If the image proved unsatisfactory or void of any meaning, Colonial women had no choice but to accept this as their definition and purpose in life for they lacked they necessary outlets to achieve anything higher.

For twentieth-century women, the experience of living in South Africa has changed in many respects. Although South African society still advocates marriage and family life as the most acceptable and fulfilling options in life, present-day women have a somewhat broader range of opportunities from which to choose. Many women have acquired some economic independence by establishing careers for themselves outside the home. Others have developed alternatives to the conventional marital/familial relationship such as single parenting or living with a mate with no legal bindings. The emergence of a liberal ideology in South African society has also given way to the involvement of twentieth-century women in political activities and other causes.

Present-day South African women's perception of the African community has also evolved and changed from that of colonial women. The ideology of racial supremacy still exists for many women, yet the belief seems to stem less from racial intolerance than it does from years of societal conditioning. Twentieth-century women have, however, developed a new image of the African in addition to the one that had already been established. These women perceive the African in a more humane light. They recognize the struggle of this community to come to terms with their own image of self and options in life. In doing so, these women can identify and form a psychological connection with the African.

The search for self of South African women has also undergone a few transitions. Women no longer feel that this exploration must be confined to their own culture and their own race. They have discovered new means with which to acquire self-actualization. Failing to find a fulfilling image of self within the white community they have turned towards the African in the hopes of achieving a higher level of consciousness. Many twentieth-century women have devoted their lives to helping the African community overcome the restraints and limitations placed on them by South African society. And, in doing so, they feel a sense of inner knowledge and understanding- they feel they have defined for themselves a new and satisfactory image of self.

Yet, the most significant aspect of white South African women's experience of coming to terms with their image of self and their options in life has not changed. They still look for self-definition through something or someone other than themselves. Whether the vehicle to self discovery comes in the form of a white man and the white community or an African man and the African community, South African women have still remained unable to achieve a higher level of consciousness through the use of their own personal strengths. They continue to depend on the energies and capacities of others to acquire a kind of awareness that pertains only to themselves. White South African women have not yet learned to tap their spiritual and intellectual resources without the aid of outside forces. And, the discovery of a satisfactory, unique and true image of self can really only come from within. Thus, like their colonial sisters, twentieth-century white South African women still remained trapped in what seems to be an endless cycle. And, until they can conquer this weakness, this inferiority they will continue to remain trapped- inescapably.

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