Chapter Four

Cultural Diversity

South Africa, the ‘rainbow nation’ with its fifty million people is known for its diversity in languages and religious beliefs. An ethnically diverse nation, South Africa with the largest European, Indian and racially mixed communities is, “more than a cultural melting pot, its’ a big warm potjie of culture, full of different ingredients and yummy surprises and developing its rich flavour over centuries” (n.pg). Of the seventy nine percent of the South African black population, there are varieties of ethnic groups, speaking different Bantu languages. It is a multiracial society demarcating distinct subgroups by the colour of skin. There are several major and minor groupings in the traditional black culture. The major part of the population is classified as African or Black, which is not culturally or linguistically homogeneous. Many ethnic groups which include the Zulu, Xhosa, Basotho, Bapedi, Venda, Tswana, Tsungu, Swazi and Ndebele speak Bantu languages. Much of South Africa’s cultural activity centers on the family and the ethnic group. Art, music and oral literature serve to reinforce existing religious and social patterns.

South African Literature occupies a significant place among the new literatures of the commonwealth for its vigour, vitality and freshness. As serious, intellectual and cultural enterprise emerged from the hardships and
suppression of the natives, all their writings are at once literary pieces, social protests and media of political reassertion. One of the most outstanding features of South African Culture is that it is not one single culture, but rather of different cultures representing every level of a stratified community. Hybrid mixtures of these different cultures also co-exist, making South Africa one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. Black literature flourished under the antagonistic conditions of apartheid and at present, there is no black writer, playwright or journalist with the eminence of Eskia Mphaele and Alex la Guma from the 1950s, through the 1970s to exhibit the suffering of the native Blacks of South Africa. The white population of South Africa continues to produce eminent world class literary artists such as Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer, Booker Prize winner J.M. Coetzee and distinguished bilingual African novelist Andre' Brink.

Gordimer enjoys an outstanding place among the white South African writers and is lauded for genuine portrayals of black African culture. The values of political colour, 'black' as the signifier of convergent histories claimed priority over diverse identifications of ethnicity and race. Like the nineteenth century African novelists, “Gordimer writes vast scope with minute attention to the ordinary” (Reddy 93). Gordimer, through the novels, tried to change the positioning of the Blacks as the unspoken and invisible "other", of the dominant aesthetic and cultural discourses. As an heir to more than one cultural tradition, the novelist represents the multicultural reality of South Africa. Her father Isodore Gordimer, a Jewish emigrant from Lithuania settled
in South Africa and her mother Nan (Myers) Gordimer came of English
descent. Gordimer grew up in South Africa, where quite early in life, she
became conscious of the gravity of 'colour question'. Her focus is on the "…
complex network of cultures, so that when she talks about South Africa, she
does so in terms of world force intersections and exchanges” (Dimitriu 161).

The term ‘culture’ originated from the Latin word ‘cultura’ or ‘colera’
which means to cultivate. The concept of culture which first emerged in the
eighteenth century in Europe, insinuated as a process of cultivation or
improvement in agriculture. In the nineteenth century, it was referred to the
betterment and refinement of the individual, especially through education and
then to the fulfillment of national aspirations or ideals. Culture is described as
the love for perfection and is a study of perfection. Mathew Arnold, the poet,
critic and essayist used the word ‘culture’ to refer to an ideal of individual
human refinement of “the best that has been thought and said in the world”
(n.pg). Kenneth Parker opines, “culture is the whole life of the human spirit in
communities; it is the means, … the end of civilized living” (116). Cultures
are virtually all varieties of ‘long term’ coverage against both external and
internal threats – “self dissolution, loss of identity or repression, assimilation,
attachment or attack from neighbouring or foreign cultures” (Gates 61).
Culture signifies a body of artistic and intellectual work of agreed value to a
whole way of life. Regan claims of culture as, “imaginative creativity and …
lived experience” (100). It also means a society’s structure of feeling, the
shifting intangible complex of its lived manners, habits, morals, values, and
the pervasive atmosphere of learned behaviour and belief.

Literary criticism is also concerned with culture, as a body of values, transmitted from the past to the future through imaginative works of men. As such, culture implies the accumulation of discriminations of race and ethnicity. From the beginning, the cultural orientation characterized South African literature as, “... refreshingly innovative and foreshadowed a similar movement to other discourses” (Darby 180). Multiculturalism refers to the,

... social political movement and, or position that views differences between individuals and groups to be a potential venue of cultural strength and renewal; multiculturalism celebrates and explores different varieties of experience stemming from racial, ethnic, gender, sexual and class differences. (Regan 57)

The multicultural, multilingual and multicontinental origin of the nation known as South Africa has produced a cultural tapestry woven from a wide variety of customs and lifestyles.

From birth to death, from home to school, from the farm to the market, from the pasture lands to the minefields, from shrines to mosques, from synagogues to churches, from the rural to the urban and from the local to the national, life and activities are
guided to various degrees by a wide range of customs and ceremonies. (Wordiq web)

The basic elements of cultural expression such as myth, rituals and symbols are basically inter-related. Various myths, ceremonies and rituals provide meaning and validity to life and existence for many groups, peoples and races in Africa.

Myth, derived from the Greek word ‘muthos’, means anything uttered by word or mouth. Homer used ‘muthos’, to mean a narration or conversation, but not fiction. Later the Greeks used ‘muthos’ to mean fiction. To Plato, ‘muthos’ denotes, “Something not wholly lacking truth but for the most part fictitious” (Cuddon 71). At present myth symbolizes fiction but not that which carries psychological truth. Myths are living social events, intelligible only in the context of real humans in real places involved in social interactions. They are commonly described as stories. Myth is defined as a story that explains or justifies and prolongs existing social and geographical boundaries. According to the myth and ritual theory, “myth does not stand by itself but it is tied to the ritual. Myth is not just a statement but an action” (Segal 61). Thus all myths have accompanying rituals and all rituals have accompanying myths.

The relationship between myth and literature has taken varying forms in literature. Every community has a rich mythological heritage and the writers use myths to narrate contemporary events, expose public follies, problems and mysteries of life and death. Behind modern political doctrines,
there are innumerable myths and stories which form the background of African Literature. These countless incomplete myths and stories were not written as the art of writing was quite unknown to the Africans. The Africans, like other races have many religious beliefs; of these some are philosophical and are often subjected to myths. Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* remarks, “myth has the task of giving historical intension a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal” (142).

Gordimer has employed the natural structure of the novel to express the true culture of South Africa through the use of myths and rituals. The novels are laden with the use of myths and rituals and the novelist is confrontational in the portrayal of South African culture through a wide variety of myths, rituals and beliefs. In her novels, Gordimer encapsulates the South African culture and they are unshakeable testimony to cultural discourses of the racially divided South Africa. Her masterpiece, *The Conservationist* is mapped by inter textual and mythical spaces. As Itala Vivian has pointed out, “The map is part and parcel of the game of representation and as such it may skip the readers’ attention, in a way not dissimilar from that of narrative discourse. Both map and narrative adopt fictional techniques and a strategy of veiling/unveiling leading from cartography to cryptography” (50). Mythical spaces define boundaries between different parts of Mehring’s farm; farm and society and insiders and outsiders. Historical, Biblical and Zulu myths are aptly used in *The Conservationist*. The enigma between safety and danger is itself rooted in the myth. One of the myths found in *The Conservationist*
emanates from early colonial times. European colonies managed to spread the image that Africa was not only barbarous, but foremost ‘empty’ and ‘blank’. Taking it as an advantage, the early colonists who wanted to claim land in Natal, wrote to the authorities of Cape Town stating that the land was uninhabited. Gordimer connects the historic Zulu myth with Mehring’s way of looking at landscapes. Although his views are narrow, there is a juncture where Mehring takes control of the whole farm and its surrounding. When Mehring is driving towards the farm, the road takes a turn;

From that point on you could see the farm, the mile of willows… in the declivity of two gentle rising stretches of land, see the Katbosrand in the distance, see the house nobody lived in. No one would believe… the city was only twenty five miles away, and the vast location was just behind your peace. The upland serenity of high altitude, the openness of the grassland without indigenous bush or trees; the greening, yellowing or silver browning that prevailed, according to season. (24)

As Mehring remarks, the serenity of the picture portrayed is not only dependent on the absence of bushes or trees, but of the absence of the indigenous people, who are really not absent at all. The black people who live permanently in the high grounds are the real farmers.

Over at the compound, a kind of swarming in the air, a thickening of sound and activity. It’s in full swing. Every now
and then a reck of burning meat, burning offal - ... He goes into
the barn; no sign there ever was a goat. Old goat Jacobus. Old
devil. One story about a witch – doctor; another story about a
sick man (154-55)

Mehring does not describe the houses of the workers; he does not seem to see
them. Anyway, they are all at the compound. Similarly, on his frequent walks
from the farm to the valley, he passes the compound observing the plants at
his feet. Once at the valley, he lies down hiding the view behind the reeds.
The mere presence of the compound and the inhabitants are the mythical Zulu
which Mehring does not want to know. The irony is that Mehring himself is
the real absentee, the owner of the empty house, the one that is not to be seen,
hidden behind the reeds.

The novel *The Pickup* pictures the cultural transition in the
protagonists Abdu and Julie. Gordimer employs the same mythical spaces
technique in *The Pickup* where Julie travels from the cosmopolitan
Johannesburg to the small Arab town, probably in North America. Her
frequent walks from Abdu’s home to the ‘mute’ desert, is always a pleasant
task for Julie. Julie loves to be in the edge of the desert and it becomes her
habit to rise before dawn and sit at the edge of the desert, allowing it to enter
her as she is mesmerized by its beauty. She walked through,

night-cooled sands in the desert... the houses flocked together
behind her. The goats with the Bedouin women appeared before
her in the desert as if conjured up… the women turned out to be hardly more than a child… For a few moments the desert opened, the two saw each other, the woman under her bushveld hat, the girl-child a pair of keen eyes from a small figure swathe against the sun. (199)

Just as Mehring in The Conservationist becomes the real absentee, in The Pickup, the house woman and the child are also absent in the desert. Julie’s mind craving for life and prosperity is pictured by Gordimer in the most striking way.

According to Burke, an American critic “myth is ultimately the expression of non temporal truths …the expression of them in story form… story is still what makes myth myth” (qtd. in Segal 85). Specific kinds of myths such as hero myths exist in literature to exalt the cultural traits. English folklorist Lord Raglan equates the hero of the myth with the God of rituals. He discerns, “many events in the life of the hero are superhuman… the hero must die but his death must accomplish a god-life feat…” (Segal 89). Gordimer, deeply fascinated by the myth of Nelson Mandela as the savior of the Blacks, consistently uses this myth in the novels to equate the heroes of fiction with Mandela. The novels Burger’s Daughter and July’s People are illuminated by the presence of the mythical heroes Lionel Burger, the white Afrikaner communist leader, and July, the black African servant. Gordimer’s None To Accompany Me initially reinforces the Mandela myth; “with no
character demonstrably modeled on Mandela - *None To Accompany Me* makes clear reference to Mandela—‘the leader’, ‘the great man himself’—thus placing him at a remove and inscribing him as the generic hero” (Diala 37). Gordimer projects Mandela god-like and affirms enormous attributes to him. Mandela as an icon, the demythologized god of her non-fictional discourses cast the towering shadow of a deity in fiction.

Gordimer draws on the self-sacrificial devotion of the true leader Mandela and his struggle for liberation of the Blacks in the novel *Burger’s Daughter*. Lionel Burger, the white physician and disciplined revolutionary, is a man of overwhelming moral integrity, who dedicated his life for the Blacks. Gordimer equates the sacrifice and devotion of Mandela to his mission with the character of Lionel Burger. The myth of ailment and possible death in the prison, which enabled Mandela to create a South Africa free from the clutches of apartheid, illustrates his will to sacrifice himself for the cause of freedom. The sacrifice of Lionel equally replicates Mandela’s symbolic suffering in prison. Lionel, adored and loved by the people of South Africa as their saviour had struggled to liberate them from the Whites, as is evident when Fats Marguerete speaks of his greatness to his daughter Rosemarie Burger: “The African people we thanks the Lord for what your fath-a was doing for us, we know he was our fath-a” (147). Gordimer easily links saviour Mandela with Lionel Burger, who is placed in a position near God by the poor South Africans for redeeming their lives from the clutches of apartheid.
Gordimer paints the portrait of Lionel more as a proud hero than a common leader. "Everyone there was fiercely proud of Lionel" (127) aptly boasts of the greatness of Lionel. He was judged with life sentence and in, “the third year of his life sentence, Lionel Burger developed Nephritis … and died in prison” (32). Thus his dedication for the blacks as alive and dead, made him a hero among the South Africans. He never regretted when he was life sentenced. He himself confessed, “I would be guilty if I were innocent of working to destroy racism in my country” (130). He is compared to Mandela who has sacrificed his precious twenty seven years in Robben Island prison for the redemption of the crushed down black South Africans. Mandela is called a saviour by his people as he has redeemed them from slavery and suppression. Lionel too has sacrificed his life for emancipating the Blacks and they glorified him as their saviour.

Biographies of celebrated personages turn them into near God's men and their "sagas into myths" (Segal 53), due to their astonishing deeds. The Romanian historian of religions, Mircea Eliade’s criterion for myth is a story which refers to its subject, a deed and an exceptional fact so as to turn its subject into a super human figure. Myth describes how, "in primeval, 'sacred' time, a god or near-god created phenomenon that continues to exist” (Segal 55). Gordimer explores the god life feat of the mythical hero discourse in *July's People*, where July, the black African is exalted from the position of a servant to that of a saviour. The novel presents the flawed attempts and the restricted endeavours of the Whites to come to terms with black culture. It
discusses elaborately the interdependency due to their racial and cultural barriers.

Gordimer depicts the life of a liberal, white South African family, the Smales, who are forced to flee to the native village of their black servant, July. In order to escape violence in Johannesburg, the Smales have to accept the charity of July and live a life that made them comfort their beliefs about each other. July is held in high esteem by his white master Bamford Smales and wife Maureen for his charity. Gordimer pictures July as the saviour, who is responsible for the four lives of his master's family. He is shown as a loyal and a courageous servant, who provides shelter, though there is the possibility of being killed or punished under law for accommodating the Whites. The honest servant July is pictured by Gordimer as: “The decently paid and contented male servant, lying in their yard since they had married, … turned out to be the chosen one in whose hands their lives were to be held; frog prince, saviour July” (9), thus relating July’s service of charity to Mandela's mission and exerts the mythical story to heighten the dedication and sacrifice of the black July towards the white Afrikaaner family.

Gordimer's depiction of mythical heroes find an apt representation in Burger’s Daughter and July's People. Lionel and July, like the mythical heroes serve as models for behaviour. They are, “… persons, past or present, real or fictitious, who possess characteristics that are highly prized in culture” (Narasimhaih 51). Lionel and July belong to the past but are living today as
real figures though fictitious. They are praised highly as mythical heroes of post-apartheid South Africa. Maureen and Bam see July as their Saviour who saved them from being burnt. The revolution is at its peak when, "they are chasing the whites out … people are burning those houses … The whites are being killed in their houses” (19). July saves them, brings them to his hut and serves them politely. All these services of July and finally his responsibility for their lives make Maureen and her family grateful to him. All these great feats made July as “a frog prince saviour” (9) in their eyes.

Religion has a strong link with the culture of a society. Since the beginning of mankind, there has been one common thread that ties together all cultures and religions of the world. The myths that come under religion are traditional ones. Rudolf Bultmann, the grandest exponent of traditional religious myths reads myth symbolically. He, demythologizes myth which does not speak about the world but turns out to be about the human experience in the world. In Bultmann's words, "the real purpose of myth is not to present an objective picture of the world as it is, but to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives. Myth should be interpreted not cosmologically; but anthropologically, or better still, existentially” (qtd. in Segal 48). Myths, religion and beliefs originate when a society experiences its environment at a specific time. Lord Ragalan, a folklorist, is of the view that, "myth is about the creation of the world” (Segal 5). Creation myths vary among African ethnic groups emphasizing similarities and differences in belief system and societal structures. There are many factors that contribute to
the creation myths for each individual group. Survival issues domineer many myths, "suggesting origins of land, the ability to cultivate land and the benefit of experiencing what one has cultivated" (Encarta Web). When defining a society, creation myths become meaningful. In Gordimer's *The Conservationist*, the protagonist Mehring's South Africa becomes paradoxical. Biblical myth is found in many of the novels. In *The Bible* there are two narrations regarding the creation of the world. (Genesis 1 and 2), the Garden of Eden Story (Genesis 3) and the Noah's Story (Genesis 6-9) are bounded as myths by Gordimer.

Gordimer connects *The Conservationist* to the creation myth. Both the vlei and the farm are looked at as the Garden of Eden, where Mehring, the lonely Adam finds the Eve in the valley. To describe his relationship with Jacobus, Mehring uses another discourse. He repeatedly calls himself, "the farmer" and Jacobus his "herdsman" who “has the authority of the dreadful knowledge” (12), thereby in the first place making use of a British Colonial rhetoric, the 'rural myth', in which settled farming and land ownership is associated with white Christian civilization…” (Postel 51).

Gordimer makes use of the story of Cain and Abel in *The Conservationist* and *Get a Life*. According to the Book Genesis, in *The Bible*, Cain and Abel were brothers. In *The Conservationist*, 'the farmer' Mehring and the 'herdsman' Jacobus are Cain and Abel. Cain, the farmer is jealous of the bond between Abel, the herdsman and God and so Cain killed his brother
Abel and is expelled from the Land of God. God told Cain, that he would be a homeless wanderer on the earth. King James version of *The Bible* says: “When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield into thee her strength, a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth” (Genesis 4:12). Cain's descendants were believed to be city people like Mehring, travelling around the world making money in iron. In the eyes of the poor landless blacks, "whites … were seen as the descendants of Cain, accursed by God” (Crais 139). In *The Bible*, Cain and Abel, the farmer and the herdsman are in a post paradise space, the Land of God. Similarly, Mehring too is in his paradise, the farm of, “A high-veld autumn, a silvery-gold peace, the sun lying soft on the hard ground, the rock pigeons beginning to fly earlier, now, the river he can hear feeling its dark tongue round the watercress and weeds, there inside the reeds” (42), where he enjoys his life, with women and nature.

When first confronted with the dead man, Mehring does not want the body to be in his farm. The presence of the corpse in his, “‘Genesis-made veld’ turns him into the man who killed his own brother. Mehring can be seen as the unidentified murderer who is haunted by the ghost of his victim” (Postel 51). After Mehring’s hallucination about the young man for months, the latter has become a character in the novel. His resurfacing is the turning point in every myth; Death ends life in paradise. Cain is identified as a murderer and an illegal alien; the vlei woman aborts the child and deserts her man. Like Adam, Cain and the unborn baby, Mehring too has no choice but to leave.
Gordimer's *Get a Life*, a novel of inner lives depicts the story of Paul Bannerman’s alienated life diagnosed with thyroid cancer, and he leads a lonely life away from his wife and children. As an ecologist his visit to a wildlife preserve to view a breeding pair of eagles becomes a meditation on both beauty and thermal relatives of survival. There is a place where the eagle, he has not forgotten, its species, is free and he determines to, “… find the eagle. Flights of small birds scattered the sky above the cliff. He scanned the cliff again and again and discovered the two nests, if the haphazard collection of dry black twigs on ledges were nests” (162). His mother rejoins Paul who reads out to his wife further information he has found in an array of pamphlets on a bench. Paul brings in the story of a similar episode of Cain and Abel relating to the life of two chicks.

Only two eggs, that’s the entire clutch. It’ll happen next month, June. The first egg laid hatches and is followed about a week later by a second. The two chicks, known as Cain and Abel. The first-born, Cain, has already grown when Abel comes out of his shell. Cain and Abel fight and generally Abel is killed by Cain and thrown from the nest. (167)

Paul thinks of the episode in relation to the dam he opposes, for it would lead to the loss of their own land, later recognizes that the dams could end poverty for thousands of people, “…and if Abel has to be thrown from the nest by Cain; isn’t that for a greater survival. The eagle allows this to happen, its all
powerful wings cannot prevail against it” (168). When thinking of survival, Paul comments, “co-existence in nature is limited brutally – Cain throws Abel out of the nest – among creatures of which we’re an animal species” (168).

July in July's people is transformed from the ordinary human status to the elevated Noah of The Bible. The story of Noah and flood from The Bible, is aptly connected to July's act of bringing Maureen, Bam and their three children in the 'yellow Bakkie'. God told Noah to take his family, all birds and animals in the ark because, “I, event, I do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to dispose cell flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven, I everything that is in earth, shall die” (6 : 17). Noah too withstood the forty five days rain and flood and was ultimately saved from death. The story finds a parallel reflection in July's act of saving his master's family in the Bakkie. When the situation becomes worse, July, unmindful of his life, braved to take his master's family on the Bakkie, the ark of Noah. Like the Biblical Noah, July is selfless and sacrificing. The yellow Bakkie is the glorified ark of Noah in July's people. The use of the Biblical myth once again magnifies July to the position of saviour where he, the Noah of the Smaleses fits himself to, "myth is not just a statement but an action” (Segal 61).

The biblical verses of creation in The Bible illuminates the novels thus bringing out the pressures of the protagonists, Paul Bannerman in Get a life and Mehring in The Conservationist are mapped to the Garden of Eden. Mehring's farm becomes the Garden of Eden where he searches his Eve,
whereas Paul's Garden of Eden is his childhood garden which plays a vital role in the growth of his life.

The endless hours he seems to spend in the garden. No book, no radio. Imagine, an attempt to leave the state behind in this prison-home. No-one could conjure that. It’s more than a physical and mental state of an individual; it’s a disembodiment from the historical one of his life, told from infancy, boyhood, to manhood of sexuality, intelligence and intellect. It’s a state of existence outside the continuity of his life. (67)

Mehring, the Adam enjoys his life with his woman, the Eve in the farm. As the sinned Adam and Eve were expelled from the Land of God, Mehring too flees to an uncertain land from his farm. In contrary, Paul's hours in the garden, linked with the legend of Adam, changes his view on life. His new perceptions could no more be unlearned than the knowledge of good and evil, and so he is expelled from unthinking happiness. Genesis suggests that paradise would always be lost, that mistakes are irreparable and the elder brother, Cain will always kill Abel. Likewise, the novel suggests that Paradise would be destroyed and regrets that the past could not be escaped and the whites have to realize the truth that they have to leave the paradise in future. The Garden of Eden brings light in the minds of Mehring and Paul. Mehring leaves the land to its owners, the black Africans and Paul understands his mission of saving, earth and his life with his wife Bennie.
The Zulu traditions and culture are a way of life in South Africa. The 'Zulu' means people of heaven, a proud nation that preserves their heritage and of people who are always hospitable. *The conservationist* of Gordimer owes much to Zulu tradition. The Garden of Eden brings light in the minds of Mehring and Paul. To Gordimer, the myths narrated in Callaway's book are part of a traditional Zulu Subtext that is "buried like a Blackman but eventually rise to the surface of the novel and repossess it, obliterating the paper possession of Mehring and his story" (Postel 52). When reading Callaway's book, a parallelism is seen in naming everything in *The Conservationist*, where Mehring is seen as Adam; the vlei seen through the eyes of Mehring resembles Eve and Paradise. Inkosazana is Mehring's lovable picnic site with its willows, the reeds and the shallow grave, the farm and vlei which are shaped by Biblical discourses, and of the myth of the Zulu origin.

Evidently, Gordimer uses Callaway's text as an intertextual source, which is known as South Africa's third creation myth. Out of Eden came Adam and Eve; out of frontier missions came white and black South Africans condemned to co-exist and co-operate with each other but always finding ways to shut each other out. Mehring and Jacobus are seen as the great grandchildren of Callaway and Mbanta. Just like Mbanta who narrates the stories in Callaway's book, Jacobus after Mehring focalises the great part of *The Conservationist*. Jacobus controls the whole story with Mehring and he always takes the side of Mehring in all his endeavours. When the dead body was found in the farm, Jacobus could not decide what to do. But, “that the
farmer has arrived” and “the herdsman Jacobus has found the firmness and support of an interpretation of the event…” (13). “The farmer takes the car to get up to the farmhouse and Jacobus accompanies him, sitting carefully with feet planked flat on the carpeted floor and curled hands together on neat knees” (31) shows Jocobus’ dedication towards his farmer as a herdsman. The farm workers too knew that “Jacobus was the boss of the show, he ran that farm while the white man lived in the town” (37). From the beginning of the novel to the final pages where he “had put him away to rest” (267), Jacobus rules The Conservationist.

Africa is associated with another myth, which relates it to a female. The country, in colonial terms was not only empty but also female. In colonial fiction, “she was a mysterious and treacherous woman, who had to be tamed, penetrated and ruled” (McLuskie 40). Black writers such as Chinua Achebe, David Diop and Maya Angelou address Africa as “Mother Africa”. In the eyes of Mehring, his farm is shaped like a woman’s body. The farm house and its surrounding barns with the machinery represent the head, where all the decisions are made. On the high grounds, is the heart, the compound where the farm workers live. Mehring once “…heard the heart beat, when drums were being played” (Postel 51). The life giving vlei is described in terms of a woman’s lower body. Mehring with his unsuccessful love life, ignores the heart of the farm woman and feels uncomfortable with her head. He never felt safe and secure with his vlei woman. Like Africa’s emptiness, the image of the country as a woman implies danger. As Mother Africa discards the white
intruder, Antonia, a political activist, with whom Mehring is in love betrays and deserts him. Just as the Whites have to leave the land for the Blacks, Mehring too leaves his farm to the poor landless blacks and flees to an uncertain land.

Myths collectively share a plot, and myths like creation myths, and flood myths too are widely used by Gordimer in the novels. Tylor specifies that, "Myth tells how a God decides to cause a natural event, but not what the God is like or how the God acts" (qtd. in Segal 86). In the ninth excerpt of Callaway's book, Zulu gardens are carried away by flood. The myth has a direct impact on Gordimer's fiction *The Conservationist*. Like the flooded Zulu gardens, the novel ends with the flooding of Mehring's farm, announcing changes. Thus flooding bears symbolic significance to the tragedy of ownership. The violence and ravage occurring in South Africa are expressed through Zulu metaphor, which speaks of a flooding, “…streamed over marbled pink statuary of pig-carcasses; …no landmarks are recognizable …” (233) and covering the dead body. As described in *The Conservationist*, flooding from a monsoon threatens to drown the white man’s civilization; roads are submerged and cars are swallowed up, “as if South Africa was sinking back into its marine identity of the palaeozoic era” (Smyer 77). Mr and Mrs Loftus Coetzee are found drowned in the car from which they are unable to get out, deep in the new river that has made its bed for them;
…the reason why their car had been so difficult to find was that the water had carried them to, and flooded, one of those wide pits between the disused mine dumps that had been long been a graveyard for wrecked cars and other obstinate imperishable objects that will rust, break and buckle, but cannot be received back into earth and organically transformed. (236)

In *The Conservationist*, apart from Mehring’s distress and loss of profits, the flooding permits the reappearance of the black corpse, which forces decent burial. Water, a symbol of purification, purifies Mehring’s farm by bringing the dead body out, and giving a ritualistic burial there by satisfying the ancient spirits.

Another threat to the farm of Mehring is fire. Mehring is utterly shocked, when he discovers that the vlei has been burnt. In African ritual, the fire is “a common means to purify a location or even a human body from the influences of witchcraft” (Crais 134). To Mehring, the fire looks like a threat, since in modern times, capitalism and white power are associated with witchcraft. The fire in Mehring’s farm has purified the land from the witchcraft of white power. Fire starts on the other side of the river and severely burns a portion of Mehring’s property. It stops far short of cattle, but devastates his favourite resting spot in the third pasture. The water reeds and willows are also badly burnt. The fire revitalizes the pasture down the river. He knows well that the scarred land will heal quickly, but he is upset, for his
inner heart beats to him about the forthcoming events. Thus fire plays a vital role in *The Conservationist* where,

...the reeds are cropped by fire so that they present a surface like a badly – barbered crew-cut head...Blackened, hacked: the whole thing exposed, brought down to less than eye-level, all around. And there’s nothing. Nothing to be seen in those reeds, now that everything is bared and revealed. Not a trace. No place to be recognized from any other...The fire’s territory.... (94)

From a biblical perspective, the fire reminded Mehring of the burning sword that expelled Adam and Eve from paradise. Gordimer’s presentation of fire in the *The Conservationist* symbolizes the burning sword which expels Mehring from the farm, his own paradise though he himself flees to an uncertain land. Another meaning of fire is, “a temporal marker separating past and present” (Crais 130). This fire which breaks out all of a sudden presents a significant portrait of the past and the present situation of Mehring and the farm. When the productive land is burnt by fire, the farm becomes nothing; “…There’s been another fire. There’s a fire-break, all right,...the fire from the vlei has gone through the kraal too...The ground is marked by the heat of the braziers everywhere. An enormous ash-heap beside their rooms...Burned mealie-cobs lying about where they have been eating” (108-9). Gordimer realistically presents of flood and fire in *The Conservationist* highlighting and enriching the cultural carpet of South Africa.
Like Myths, rituals also have a unique place in the culture of South Africa. Myths glorify the cultural entity of the nation with accompanying rituals. According to Bruce Lincoln, ritual is, "…a coherent set of symbolic actions that has a real, transformative effect on individuals and social groups” (qtd. in postel 55). The most important rites are those accompanying birth, marriage and death. Funerary rituals are termed as rituals that guide a person during the transition from one state to another. The burial of the dead is “one of the most ancient cultural practices” (Belsey 64) of Zulu. According to Zulu rituals, the dead have to be properly escorted to their graves and to be watched until they have reached the world of ancestors, or else witches would take power over their bodies and souls. In *The Conservationist*, the improper burial given to the black man denied him the right to be merged with his ancestor. As per the Zulu belief, it is considered as an act of sacrilege and the improper burial of the dead man invokes the anger of their Gods. The account of attack on Solomon by the unseen spirits in the third pasture confirms their belief. Solomon, “… was attacked in the night by a spirit: there was something down there at the third pasture … But the children did not go to the third pasture…. They stopped one another, hung back. There is something there. No one had seen it, had frightened one of the little ones … something there” (92). Mehring feels that he is haunted by the spirit of the dead man. He could never enjoy the beauty of the farm with his mistress Antonia and “… he hears his own crashing footfalls as if he were being followed” (28). Phineas's wife too behaves in a strange manner. “ … She held her shoulders like someone whose
back has been burned by hot water and winced if anything touched it … Panting like a skinning dog chasing a rat in the vlei, she was after those dreams of hers, rambling, pursuing, speaking of leopard and chameleons … speaking of snakes …” (165). Mehring and Phineas's wife have the sensitivity to feel the dead man's presence and communicate with him. Mehring's two real opponents are two nameless beings – a woman and a dead man.

The culture of Africa encompasses and includes all cultures in the continent of Africa. Sociologists and anthropologists entertain a broader view of culture which constitutes various beliefs and social practices of all segments of society. Rituals are, "collective activities, sometimes superfluous in reaching desired objectives, but are considered symbolically essential" (n.pg). They are carried out most of the times for their own sake such as way of greetings, paying respect to others, religious and social ceremonies and customs.

South Africa's cultural nest is more authentically woven by Gordimer. As a living witness to all the multiracial and multicultural diversity of South Africa, Gordimer presents the truth and becomes a representative of South Africa. Though South Africa is ethnically diverse, Gordimer speaks only of the Muslims, the Zulu, the Indians, the Coloureds and the domination of the beliefs of the Muslims and the Christians in the novels. Gordimer's creation of genuine Muslim characters adds to the cultural richness of the novel *The Pickup*. The novelist's insight into Islamic beliefs and the Muslim families
who see themselves not only in the context of their own villages but in the larger world are noticeable in the novels. *The Pickup* is undeniably the discerning love story of Abdu, the Muslim and Julie, the Christian from two entirely different cultures. Gordimer’s depiction of Islamic culture highlights the novelist’s skill in presenting the cultural traits of each individual. The way in which the protagonists Abdu and Julie cope up with the necessary cultural adjustments is beautifully imagined and narrated by the author. *The Pickup* picks with it the black Muslim Abdu/ Ibrahim Musa and the white South African Julie. Gordimer brings in a cultural shift when the scene moves from cosmopolitan Johannesburg to Abdu’s small Arab town in the desert. Julie, a true Christian not only carries Abdu in her mind but also strongly merges with him and the family thereby accepting their customs and values.

The rituals and practices interwoven in *The Pickup* are everyman’s culture practiced by the community for communal harmony. Islamic rituals portray a poignant hold to the story. Julie, born and brought up in Christian background is ready to embrace Islam and its culture for the sake of Abdu, whom she had picked up from the garage. The ritualistic practice of wearing scarf over the head of the girls is highlighted in *The Pickup* too. The English Translation of *The Quran* says, “O prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (When they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognized and not annoyed” (33:59). The members of the family of Abdu are very adamant in following the strong ritual; Abdu’s mother wants Julie to wear a scarf over her
head. Abdu “has sharply, resisted his mother taking him aside to insist that his wife put a scarf over head when leaving the house or in the company of men who were not family....” (123). Gordimer's unique exhibition of Islamic rituals in the novel is still in practice among the Muslims of the universe. The call to prayer reminds each Muslim to be consciously aware of the time for prayer. “Five times each day the voice of the Muezzin set the time frame... She would set her watch to and live a local hour different from the one in the country left behind” (124). Abdu never missed the Friday prayers in his life, when he was at his own desert country, and “went to prayers with his father” (125).

Abdu's life in the desert is highly impoverished whereas Julie finds solace in her new life. She finds her position in the new house and adapts to the customs and traditions of his family. Gordimer sharply strikes the pageantric ritual of fasting during the month of Ramadan. The Quran in the chapter “The Cow” emphasizes,

The month of Ramadan in which was revealed The Quran; guidance for mankind and clear proofs of the guidance and criterion (of right and wrong). And whosoever of you is present, let him fast the month and whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, let him fast the same number of days Allah desireth for you ease. He desireth not hardship for you; and that ye should complete the period and that ye should magnify Allah for
having guided you and that per adventure ye may be thankful.

(2-185)

This ritualistic practice is strictly followed by all Muslims and Gordimer draws in the ritual in the *The Pickup* where Julie, with the whole family of Abdu holds Ramadan fasting. “Reaction to the span of the Ramadan day was exactly like the reaction of body and mind to the time-change on” (153). It is strictly forbidden for Muslims, “that a husband and a wife must not retire together to their bedroom during the daylight hours of Ramadan” (154). In *The Quran*, “It is made lawful for you to go unto your wives on the night of the fast. They are raiment for you and ye are raiment for them …. strictly observe the fast till night fall and touch them not, but be at your devotions in the mosques” (2:187). It is evident when Gordimer speaks of the ritualistic practice in *The Pickup* as, “Between them was knowledge of taboo, to be observed absolutely, that a husband and wife must not retire together in their bedroom during the day light hours of Ramadan, when and intimacy between men and women is forbidden” (154). Julie readily complies herself with all these ritualistic practices. As Gordimer herself has envisioned, the South African culture is a portrait of harmony in a pluralistic society of Whites and Blacks.

Belief always strengthens the lives of human beings. In *The House Gun*, Gordimer illuminates the minds of Harald and Claudia with their belief in prayer. It is believed that when difficulties crop up in life, a person
faithfully prays to God. Gordimer uses the tactic of God-man link through prayer in *The House Gun*. When Claudia, Duncan's mother was upset by the news of Carl's murder by Duncan, her maternal love starts submitting herself and her son's life to God's feet.

Prayer as a form of intelligent concentration is secularized in a way Claudia has had to accept. She has done this by separating the intelligent concentration from the who or what is addressed; then it is not a communication with a supposedly existing God, but a heightened means of communicating with one's own resources in solution of guidance through fears, failures and sorrows. (27)

Claudia and Harald pray to God for their son, Duncan. Belief and faith are reflected in all diverse cultures. Gordimer's portrayal of the rituals reflects the novelist bringing together the mingling of all cultures that make South Africa a richly woven tapestry of cultures.

Language and culture are inseparable and their interrelationship is rooted from the classical period. The ancient Greeks distinguished the civilized people and barbarians from their use of languages. The fact that different groups speak different unintelligible languages is considered a more concrete evidence for cultural differences than other less obvious cultural traits. Culture, "... includes languages, and the arts, also includes regularities, the procedure and rituals of human life in communities" (Rivkin 1025). The
German romanticists of the 19th century such as Herder, Wundt and Humbolt, saw language as a direct expression of a people's culture.

Franz Boaz, founder of American Anthropology, affirmed that the shared language of a community is the most essential carrier of its common culture. Boaz stresses on the fact, that, "…. though culture and language are not directly dependent on one another, the understanding of the language of a cultural group was the key to understand its culture" (n.pg). Thus, culture, a kind of language, is communication and communication reflects culture. Gordimer, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Nuruddin Farah pay special attention to the relationship between language and nation, nation and race, as well as culture and language. Gordimer, in her novels, reveals an increasingly complex use of fictional form, and patterns of language which are combined with narrative aspect to create special richness and cohesiveness.

Language becomes a part of culture in Gordimer’s novels. People use language as a way of expressing identity with one cultural group and difference from others. The opening page of *The Conservationist* introduces, the protagonist Mehring, the White who gets annoyed by the sight of the black children playing with the guinea fowl eggs. For Mehring, eggs mean conservation. He warns the impudent black children playing with guinea fowl eggs and his reprimand goes unnoticed as the children fail to understand the language of the farmer. In anger, he asks,
… a question of the cross-legged one and there are giggles. He points down at the eggs but does not touch them and asks again. The children don't understand the language. He goes on talking with many gestures. The cross-legged child puts its head on one side, smiling as if under the weight of praise and cups one of the eggs from hand to hand. (9-10)

The absolute absence of communication between the Blacks and the Whites forms one of the characteristic features of the novel. Repeatedly Gordimer demonstrates that the individual living in South Africa is alienated from his own acts and speech. The unyielding formalization of speech codes constrains options and leads to partial vocabulary and incomplete communication and is particularly true in the communication between Mehring and Jacobus, his black caretaker.

Jacobus admires the trees although they are nothing to see, this small, because he is told they are special trees. He asks a great many questions about them; he thinks this is the way to please, he knows how to handle the farmer… - I think I can taste that nuts next year—that wily character knows he is exaggerating, he may speak the language but he understands the conventions of polite conversation all right. (211)

In July's people "Often Bam couldn’t follow", July’s "broken English…” (13). Maureen does not have the motivation to learn the new
language while her children pick up the local languages quickly and are able to communicate with their playmates. Gordimer pictures the love for harmonious living through the children's cultural adaptation. "Gina wavered through a lullaby she had learnt from her companions in their language" (79) is an evident portrayal of cultural adjustment. When Maureen fails to understand July,

… it was her practice to give some non committal sign or sound, counting on avoiding the wrong response by waiting to read back his meaning from the context of what he said next…. Bam did not have this skill and often irritated him by a quick answer that made it clear, out of sheer misunderstanding, the black man's English, was too poor to speak his mind. (97)

Martha teaches Maureen a few Afrikaans words she knows and some slang from the mines and cities. Bismillah, the Indian shop owner in The Conservationist could speak some words of the African's language to communicate with them in his trade. He "… spoke the few necessary words of their language in the pidgin form that had evolved in the mines; he knew well, the pidgin Afrikaans and English used by black on the farms" (119).

The Blacks and the Whites in the novels of Gordimer suffer from language and cultural difficulties. Julie’s decision to learn the language of Africa’s community in The Pickup indirectly marks the importance of language in a society to know each other and live together for the harmony
and peace of the society and of an individual. At times the limitations of Abdu’s use of the language of Julie brings misunderstanding, “… although she thinks she lovingly has taught herself to interpret him instinctively” (62). Julie could not communicate with Abdu’s sister due to the unknown language of the unknown town of Abdu. So, “The two young women looked at one another in deep incomprehensibility, each unable to imagine the life of the other; smiling. It was perhaps right then that she made the decision: I have to learn the language” (121). Gordimer’s living characters in *The Pickup* such as Julie, Maryam and Khadija are optimistic to twist their lives and adjust with the current situations and they are happy to pick up the other’s language. In the family house, “Maryam has gathered her sister Amina, who had just given birth, and Khadija, wife of the son missing in oil fields; they and others come unobtrusively to join the exchange, picking up Julie’s language, Julie picking up their’s” (150). The intermingling of Julie with the family members, and her cultural adaptation of Abdu’s landmarks marks the significance of relationship in the novel. The filial relationship portrayed in the novel justifies Gordimer’s vision of pluralistic South Africa in peace and harmony. Through the novels, the novelist points out the importance of language for better communication and welfare of the society and societal members.

In *Burger’s Daughter*, Rosa Burger, a significant character portrays an Afrikaaner who merges with African culture, playing dominant roles in politics and in her personal life. Rosa’s urge to make it clear what she meant, becomes vain as she speaks in Afrikaans and not in French.
He would not have understand, anyway, even if he had not been deaf with fear, because I was not speaking in French or Fulani or whatever it was would have meaning for him. And if I had appealed to the people around us- they would not have understood either. I did not have the words to explain the hand in mine. (239)

Rosa feels isolated and lonely in France and Paris and as an alien could not speak their language. Gordimer pictures the confusion and strange situation of Rosa as, “The girl did not seem intimidated – I’m used to it. I’ve been speaking two mother tongues all my life and I’ve always been surrounded by other languages I do not understand” (275).

Cultural bafflement springs up when there is a break in communication between one group with the other in the society. Gordimer brings in the clash of culture in July’s People too. Maureen’s lack of motivation to learn the native language of July contributes to her isolation from the people around her. Frustrated by her sense of incomprehension, Maureen wishes to learn the language of the mines, but her problem lies in the fact that she is not forthcoming to shed her cultural baggage. She keeps on clinging to the sophisticated ivory tower white life that she and her family had in Johannesburg. In Get A Life, across the width of the lawn, Paul is grateful to Primrose for, “… breakfast, showing off his smattering of Zulu, the only African language he’d usefully acquired for work in rural areas, thought by
whites to be some kind of African lingua franca” (22). Paul calls back an opening for some exchange, “… but the few words composed in Zulu are not responded to except for a grin that might or might not be incomprehension, may be the grammatical construction is laughable or the man speaks another language” (37).

Gordimer’s fiction covers all the threads of the cultural tapestry of Africa such as myth, rituals, music, dress, food, and language. Gay culture too finds an apt sketch in the novels such as The House Gun and Burger’s Daughter. Cultural Studies focus on subcultures like, “…punk culture, working culture and gay/lesbian cultures that articulate resistance through adaptation of distinct styles of dress, speech, music and social behaviour” (Barthes 114). Unlike the other novels, The House Gun is the personal tragedy of a mother and father whose son, in a crime of passion, murders human values along with the man he kills. Duncan lived in a garden cottage inhabited by a group of laid back young professionals, gay men David Barker and Carl Jesperson, who led cheerful, multiracial life with unplanned parties, listening to classical music and jazz. Carl Jesperson, a sardonic hedonist was killed with ‘the house gun’ by Duncan. Gordimer portrays the gay life of Duncan and friends as, “…he lived as a homosexual. Everyone who shared the house was homosexual” (207). Gay culture is not an infringement of law in South Africa. Homosexual relationships, “…as existed in the common household, are commensurate with ‘acceptable standards’ in our country” (271). They never feel ashamed to accept that they are homosexuals.
Gordimer indicates it clearly through *The House Gun* as she pens, “You, David Barker, Carl Jesperson and Duncan Lindgard. You are all homosexuals… Jesperson was having an affair with Duncan surely that wasn’t surprising, in your set-up?” (222). Harald and Claudia hears Duncan’s voice coming as if Duncan is talking to himself.

…Because Carl was not interested in women. Except as friends.-

Why were you sure of this?

He was a gay. A homosexual.

…He lived as a homosexual. Everyone who shared the house was homosexual.

…At one time I had a relationship- with a man…One of the men in the house?

…With Carl. (207)

Carl, an active homosexual, from the age of twelve loves David and is heavily involved with him. To Khulu “Duncan and Carl Jespersen were lovers at one time” (114). Even Natalie says that Duncan “had a homosexual affair with one of the men in the house? (188). “The old singer was surrounded by young homosexuals as by a large family, affectionate, bored and dependent” (255), and “One of the old girls, the Lesbians or beauties from the nineteen thirties…” (308), in *Burger’s Daughter*, exhibits gay culture, which is a part
of South African Culture. Gordimer skillfully presents each minute persona of culture that makes the novels highly rich in the portrayal of the cultural canvas South Africa.

Music, another sphere of South African life, exemplifies the range and diversity of its culture. Culture is associated with “...art, literature and classical music” (Rivkin 1025). Music and dance are very significant in African culture. Since reading and writing came late to Africa, music and dance were the primary form of communication. African music and dance were based on oral tradition where storytellers relied on their body movements as well as musical instruments to tell their tales. African music is characterized by its unique rhythms, beats and harmonies. Though early African musicians were masters of many instruments, the archetypal African instrument is the drum which keeps the beat and drives the dance. Dance as a prime means of artistic expression, together with music find excellent representation in the novels of Gordimer. In _The Conservationist_, Christmas is celebrated with feast to ear and body.

Dancing and clapping and singing were fired by meat and drink and the two oil- drums covered with hide sometimes beat so strongly they vied with shouting and laughter, sometimes lazily dropped to a panting mark-time, but never ceased, never broke the tempo of pleasure, of excess, that regulated everyone’s blood…(171-2)
Jazz and pop music are played by the Africans in the concerts and in the streets. In *Burger’s Daughter*, “A black pop group that transforms the rhythms of the street” (129) and in *Get a Life*, the attendant Primrose enjoys the, “…thudding pop music of one of the African language radio stations…as she works…” (29), thus sketching the significance of music in their lives. Music has the charm to lighten the hearts of the human beings from pain and friction. Paul, Adrian and Benni in *Get a Life* in, “most evenings listen to music. Adrian has a remarkable collection, not only CDs but rare LPs, even 78s, and the gamut of equipment, antique and the latest, to play them” (34).

PreColonial African cultures produced a wide range of artistic artifacts such as, “…clothing and personal adornment, beadwork, basketry, pottery and external house decoration and design” (n.pg). The country has a wide range of craft works styles: tribal designs, Afro-French wire work, wood carvings, world-class pottery and bronze casting, stained glass, basket weaving, clay and stone sculpting; paper from elephant dung and ornaments from waste. Gordimer exhibits these craft works in the novels to show the South Africans’ way of life. Gordimer is very proud enough to say that the black South Africans who were suppressed and neglected by the Whites are so artistic and imaginative that they bring out the most beautiful creative craft works. *Burger’s Daughter* is a fine display of the South Africans’ craze for arts and artifacts. When Rosa hunts for a beaded belt for Swede in the shops, she is reminded of his words in the letter: “…he wanted a beaded belt like the one he had bought here, did I remember the shop? the shop is a good-works affair,
marketing the objects tribal blacks make for their own use and adornment, rather than tourist handicrafts” (129). Some of the big stores have boutiques to sell African crafts to demand of, …

...the wave of nostalgia for the ethnic in parts of the world where ethnics are put to no sinister purpose. It’s currently fashionable merchandise that’s on display, rather than anything understood as national culture; Buy South African refers to manufactured goods and not to the carved bowls and ostrich-shell necklaces hanging somewhere between small leather-goods and cosmetic counters. (130)

Rosa is keen in observing the shops and the minute artifacts they sell. She sees the blacks, “… selling, all day, bean-necklaces and crude masks and snakeskin wallets, shaking West African rattles in the Tuileries to attract custom” (239). In The Pickup, the small Leila likes to decorate herself with beaded necklace. Julie, amusing Leila, “who liked to spend time in the lean-to decking herself out in the few Ndebele and Zulu bead necklaces that had somehow been tossed into the elegant suitcase, had sent the child out to join the Friday gathering” (181).

Food is a part of culture and it features in every rite from hunting and healing to wedding and puberty rituals. Gordimer could turn trivial matter into an excellent work of art with supreme skill of perception. Food as presented in the novels depicts the novelist’s observation of the diverse cultural traits of
African Cultural tapestry. Food is a significant factor that features in all the African families. In *The Conservationist* Alina, the servant maid knows Mehring’s usual items of food that she, “…set out tomato sauce, marmalade, honey, mustard” (73) and bread, mealie and beans for him whenever he comes. The,

toasted bacon and egg…she has wrapped the white paper genteelly round the lower half of the sandwich, whose fatty smell is sickening against the freshness of the eucalyptus, but she speaks with her mouth full, showing hits of egg on good teeth, inoffensively….(258)

by the woman with Mehring in the Mercedes car strikingly features the significance of food in their day to day life. People like, “…the grass drinking wine and eating crisp lamb” (23). They are banging away at “their drums somewhere over the river” …with, “… usual beer – drinks” (41).

In *The Pickup* Julie is taken up by the delicious dishes prepared by her mother-in-law. In the celebration for the new couple’s arrival,

…there were bowls of fruits and sweet meats…small children ate with concentration and … the food was delicious; when she had had her full of couscous and vegetable stew the women brought mutton chops, salad and handed round the honeyed sweetmeats; …sweet synthetic drinks took the place of wine. (120)
to make the day a wholesome festive one, a wedding feast and a son’s home-coming. In *Get A Life*, Jacqueline, Paul’s sister who lives with her accountant husband, sends him, “…home-made concoctions … Pork sausage rolls … a baked banana pudding … a good slosh of brandy” (35). In the lunchtime, “Primrose has left salad and fresh bread set out, coffee on the electric hot tray…” (39). Susan, his sister married to an ostrich farmer becomes unexpectedly prosperous due to the worldwide demand for low cholesterol streaks. “Tea and toast on an electric hot tray, fruit and yo-hurt, honey, a cereal he doesn’t know still existed, must have been something his mother remembered in connection with him as a child” (17). Claudia gives them, “…pork sausages, coming from the tin like plugs of wet pink cork” (41) in *The House Gun*.

*Burger’s Daughter* is yet another work where, Gordimer pictures the change in their habits of food as, “We’re moving away from the sandwiches and rolls, concentrating more on soup and curry and … hot things are very popular. And then we have salads, of course” (102). In *July’s People*, July “… came back and forth with porridge, boiled wild spinach, and even pawpaw, hard and green …” (9) and the custom of the family in finishing a meal with fruit is ritualistically observed by them.

Culture is expressed through, “…language, traditional wisdom, politics, religion, architecture, music, tools, greetings symbols, festivals, ethics, values and collective identity” (Mathai 160). *The Cambridge Advanced
Learner’s Dictionary defines identity as the qualities of a person or group which make them different from others. According to The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary, identity is the individual characteristics by which a person or thing can be identified. The Millennium World Book Dictionary (1048) explains identity as “who a person is or what a thing is, which aspects form his/her individuality” (1048). Culture gives people a self-identity and character. It allows them to be in harmony with their physical and spiritual environment, to form the basis for their sense of self-fulfillment and personal peace. It enhances their ability to guide themselves, make decisions and protect their interests. It is their reference point to their past and antenna to their future. On the contrary, in the absence of culture, a community loses self-awareness and guidance, and grows weak and vulnerable. It disintegrates from within, as it suffers from lack of identity, dignity, self-respect, and sense of identity.

Identity has always been a motif in the writings of Gordimer and is featured prominently in them. Having grown up in postcolonial South Africa where she happened to be one of the staunchest critics of the apartheid system that deprived people of their identity, Gordimer has become the representative voice for the voiceless Blacks in South Africa. Her earlier novels focuses on the characters’ struggle to attain political or racial rather than personal freedom, while her later ones examine the construction of individual identities.
The Pickup has continued the search for identity, but against a new and interesting perspective, that is in line with the political transformation of post-apartheid South Africa after 1994. The novel examines the theme of identity against South African background and then against the backdrop and of an unknown town somewhere in the desert, probably in Northern America. The ensuing analysis of identity in The Pickup would be underpinned by the assumption that identity is unstable and “is a post-apartheid world of global, unfixed identities” (Dimitriu 31). Gordimer portrays the characters’ wish to belong and exist and search for identity against a rich and finely woven tapestry of cultures locally, nationally and globally. The novelist presents the clash of culture in The Pickup. Gordimer’s style heightens the reality that though their bodies have found a common geography, the upper class white woman, Julie and the poor immigrant Muslim, Abdu in South Africa are unable to understand each other and their views. “She is ashamed of her parents; he thinks she is ashamed of him. Neither knows either, about the other”(38). Abdu never shares any matter with her. “No more news. He would say nothing to her, nothing at all, of the progress he was making, this time, this one time, and she knew so little about the delicacy of such business, she was too ignorant to be able to read the signs” (218). He would tell her neither about his journey nor the progress of the immigration works. From the beginning, he underestimates her due to her privilege, accusing her of not taking things seriously, and of seeing life as a camp trip, and adventure. He uses her family connections to obtain visas to another new country, America
and reproaches her for not using that favour. He does not acknowledge her minor tenderness in offering the towel and razor, when she wants him to consider her to have a child. He shouts angrily, “Are you crazy? … What do we want with a child. We are not Zyad and Suleiman and the lot. We will be gone. What a way to make a start, you sick, giving birth, a little baby to look after” (169).

The protagonists Julie and Abdu prefer the respective ‘other’ which represents their ideal self and preference for other’s family structures to his/her own. Abdu has contempt for his land of birth, which he feels is not a proper country, “… somebody else made a line and said that is it” (15). To him, it is a patch of desert marked by lines, some Europeans once drew on a map. His burning ambition is to become a legal immigrant preferably to a wealthy western democracy. Similarly, Julie too finds nothing glorious about her country and its culture. She never finds solace and comfort in the home land. Abdu sees in the Arabic-Islamic culture little more than the prison he desperately wants to escape from, whereas Julie increasingly finds in it what she obviously had been missing in the liberal ‘new South Africa’. Both of them could not fit themselves into their own cultural ring. They long to search for another cultural identity in an unknown world. For Julie, Abdu’s desert town is the ‘other’ place she is longing for and for Abdu the longing is for the ‘other’ in Julie’s materialistic world.
Gordimer presents Abdu and Julie with no common backdrop, past or future together, they live only in the present. It is full of honest ambiguities, gentle ironies and intriguing parallels. Though they both love each other, they have little things and likes in common. Julie reads Dostoevsky; and he reads newspaper. She likes to be with her friends circle in The Table at EL-AY café; but he dislikes her circle of friends. Julie hates her father’s capitalistic values and privileged life style and friends. On the contrary, Abdu prefers Julie’s father and his banker colleagues, of whose stupid values and emptiness in life Julie herself is ashamed of. The gulf between Julie and Abdu hint at an unnerving gap between individuals and their cultures. Despite their intimacy, they remain strangers to each other, each on a personal parallel journey.

Identity for Bhabha is a “luminal reality – constantly moving between positions, displacing others and being displaced” (139). Although Gordimer’s earlier novels such as The Late Bourgeois World, A Guest of Honour and The Conservationist focus on the struggle of the characters to attain political or racial, rather than personal identity, the subsequent works reveal the quest for personal identity. Burger’s Daughter and July’s People increasingly focus on the construction of individual identities, as encapsulated in Rosa Burger’s words in Burger’s Daughter: “what is the meaning of any kind of commitment if there is no self to commit (59). Gordimer brings out a clear portrait of the characters displaced in the journey of life to assert their roots. In July’s People, the novelist uses the relationship between Maureen and July to portray the clash of cultures in the post-apartheid South Africa. Maureen is
shocked to see the events that take place in the present life and imagines the future as strange. The comfortable and civilized life in the city is a dream for them and the primitive life of the village becomes their future, which Maureen and Bam fail to grab. They begin to long for everything to come to an end. Maureen and Bam “yearned for there to be no time left at all, while there still was. They sickened at the appalling thought that they might find they had lived out their whole lives as they were” born like wandering street dogs “… in a black continent”(8). It is impossible for the Whites to experience what the Blacks live with and through. Hence, they remain confused throughout the novel without any hope for the future. Thus the novel provides glimpses of hatred and misunderstanding between the two entirely different worlds of the Blacks and the Whites.

The world of the Blacks and the Whites pictures the mental state of the societal members of South Africa conditioned by the existing atrocious dehumanizing force apartheid. Gordimer accepts Philip Gilbert Hamerton’s view on high culture which always “isolates, always drives men out of their class and makes it more difficult for them to share naturally and easily the common class life around them” (n.pg). Maureen and Bam find it hard to cope up with the existing social order in July’s People, which presents the flawed attempts and the restricted endeavours of the Whites to come to terms with the Black culture. Quayam rightly remarks that “Gordimer brings out…and admonishes the liberals of their many illusions, lies, ambiguities and contractions” (Folks 118) in the novels. July finds it difficult to accept
Maureen’s way of treating him like a servant in his own village. There exists a state of physical and temporal dislocation. The white Maureen and Bam feels dislocated in July’s village. Their sense of displacement is intensified by the echoes of their old life, wrenched out from them. Maureen represents a culture where women are not accustomed to play a subservient role to men, particularly black men. She is in a predicament because she could not believe or accept the social changes that have turned not only her life but also the activities of the whole South Africa upside down. She could not acquire the initiative and spontaneous way of working like the native women, where each woman goes about her work individually, “yet keeping the pattern of a flock of egrets, that rises and settles now there, where the pickings are the best” (92). Maureen is described as a “…solitary animal at the season when animals seek a mate nor take care of young, existing only for their survival, the enemy of all that would making claims of responsibility”(160). Panicked by the new reality she runs. She is given a chance to redefine her relation with the former servant July, now her protector. She is offered the chance to transform herself into a fellow African. But, Maureen fails to fit herself to the entirely different social and cultural structure, nor could she get back to the former systematic and safe world. Gordimer states Maureen’s mental pain at the end of the novel as, “she runs” (160). Maureen’s flee from the black community and the village is, as same as that of Mehring in *The Conservationist*. Mehring leaves his farm to the Black, giving their land to them. Metaphorically, Maureen too leaves the land of the Blacks to them and runs away to an uncertain land.
In Gordimer’s fiction, the white characters such as Mehring, Rosa, Maureen and Julie are in search of their individual identity and their Western-European as well. They are “luckless Europeans who found only graves, not gain and glory in Africa” (Dangwal 102). They take self-preservative flight into exile and isolation. *The Conservationist* is the romantic longing of Mehring, a practical man of business for his identity in the land of the Blacks. His sexual partner, Antonia, an anti-government political activist, who is self-exiled in England to avoid arrest, laughs at Mehring’s idea of being buried on his farm in his purchased soil. His idea of preserving his identity after death is futile because Antonia predicts that the native would take back the land from Mehring’s children and “No one will remember where you are buried” (251). Antonia mocks at Mehring’s futile hope of insuring the survival of his name by passing the farm on to his son, “the 400 acres isn’t going to be handed down to our kids, and your children’s children” (177).

Mehring finally becomes what he has feared, he was all along, the dead African. As he sits in his powerful car, protective and aggressive at the same time, he feels totally dislocated from his surroundings. The moment of his psychic seizure is analogous to Helen Shaw’s insight of horror in the May day riot scene in *The Lying Days*, shut in a powerful car but immobilized in her white safety. Helen Shaw is incapacitated to act and decides to leave the country in utter compulsion. Similarly Mehring flees in terror: “A shudder of tremor comes up the back of his neck to his jaw and he jerks to engage the
gear. Unnerving: but it happens to everyone now and then. The single syllable chatters away crazily at his clenched jaw” (251).

*Burger’s Daughter* is a self – study of Rosa; the story of a young, white, South African woman’s search for identity. It is through Rosa, that Gordimer examines the predicament facing the inheritor of a revolutionary tradition in the context of South Africa of the 1970s. A quiet, private person, Rosa constantly searches her memories to find herself, to grasp the heritage that weighs her down. Rosa grows up identifying with her father’s many qualities- bravery, vision, dignity, love, kindness, tolerance and firmness. She is made more familiar as “Lionel Burger’s daughter” (4) and is not identified as Rosa, but as Burger’s daughter. Rosa longs to have an individual, unique identity and so has been moving from one place to another seeking identity for her own persona. She faces the suffering because she is Burger’s daughter, and confirms her identity through her love. Her first love towards Conrad, then with the Swedish journalist and later her engagement with Noel de Witt firmly pictures out Rosa thriving hard to seek identity; she finds nothing, but the shadows of them and is thoroughly upset by the life attempts which pull her against the waves of life. All “this ordered life surrounded, coated, swaddled Rosa; the order of Saturday, the order of family hierarchy, the order of black people out in the street and white people in the shade of the hotel stoep” (56). Yet she determines to face life with the thought of: “The will is my own. The emotion is my own. The right is to be in-consolable. When I feel, there is no ‘we’, only ‘I’”(48). Rosa’s quest to establish identity for herself in
South Africa is in vain, for, being known as Burger’s daughter, she is expected to carry out the mission of the father, the liberation of the Blacks.

Rosa’s days with Dick, Ivy and Clare make her to move in another range seeking her identity. She used to come in through the backyard gate from a lane as she has always done. “As a named person she was forbidden by law to visit Ivy and Dick Terblanche, both restricted people under bans…” (93). Seen as Lionel’s daughter, she is denied the freedom to go elsewhere as an ordinary girl and is often named as Conrad’s lover, Noel de Witt’s girl, Burger’s daughter and also as the mistress of Swede but never as Rosemarie Burger. Rosa in her own words says, “… I am making my own metaphors for suffering” (198). She realizes that South Africa is where her normal happiness lies, as Rosa and not as Burger’s daughter. Burger’s daughter becomes Rosa in her own right. As the novel ends, Gordimer pictures Rosa with a stable identity of herself as an activist for the liberation of the Blacks. Lekan Oyegoke comments on Rosa’s return to South Africa as, “She returns to South Africa with cast-iron determination, resolving to take up action to fight against racism, oppression and exploitation. After her full self-discovery, she identifies her mission and embraces her destiny with enthusiasm.” Her understanding of events are noble, perceptive and deep. Gordimer’s concluding sentence of the novel, “No one knows where the end of suffering will begin” (369) tells about the stern and courageous intention of Rosa to dedicate her life completely for the Blacks and their liberation. The novelist employs the various traits of culture to enhance the life of the people of South
Africa. Her way of presenting the cultural adaptations gives the indigenous culture a new face value for South Africa.

The beautiful cultural tapestry finds apt sketch in the novels of Gordimer. The novels express realistically the culture of South Africa through the use myths and rituals. Myths and rituals take varying forms in South African literature and the novelist displays those cultural traits of South Africa to picture public follies, troubles and ambiguities of life and death. The cultural clashes portrayed in the novels brings to light the realities of the South African society and the author explores an array of experiences emerging from racial, ethnic, gender, sexual and class differences.

The picturisation of mythical heroes as models for behaviour, heighten the dedication and sacrifice of such heroes, who possess characteristics that are highly prized in culture. The significance of hero myth is well exemplified in the novels where the common South Africans could find their life vibrant and seething because of the heroes. Hero myth exhibits the life of South Africans who are liberated from the clutches of apartheid and the Whites. Through the myth, Gordimer unMASKS the real life situations. She is authentic in portraying their cultural adaptation. Creation myths highlight similarities and differences in belief system and societal structures among African ethnic groups. Fire and water are devised by Gordimer to strengthen the beliefs of the South Africans. The novelist illustrates the magnitude of language in a society to know each other and live together for the synchronization and peace
of the society and of an individual. Food, music and dance are exemplified to
paint the portrait of harmony in a pluralistic society. The Zulu tradition and
the culture shared in the novels present the way of the life of South Africans.

Rituals portrayed in the novels logically exhibit the cultural
magnificence of the society to which the author is committed. Religious
beliefs and customs are presented with an intention to present everyman’s
culture. Cultural adaptations in the novels reflect the harmonious living of the
Blacks and the Whites in the future South Africa. Gordimer exhibits gay
culture to display the reality of South African Culture. Culture of South
Africa, well knitted by the novelist becomes a canvass for her excellent
painting. She is the pioneer of writers who has brought out the nuances of
culture through her conscious words and conscience.