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The impact of cultural and social backgrounds

- Julie and Abdu in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*

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1. Introduction

People have always moved around the world and mixed with people who are different than themselves in terms of cultural and social backgrounds. Many of these people end up settling in another country in which they build a home and family in some cases with a person who has a completely different upbringing than they have. The consequence of this could be that some of them struggle to keep a relationship together due to their different ways of thinking which could partially come from different social and cultural backgrounds. That is why it is highly interesting to investigate how backgrounds affect a person. The novel *The Pickup* by Nadine Gordimer depicts the love between Julie and Abdu, two people with completely different cultural and social backgrounds.

This essay addresses the behaviour of two people: a middle-class, white South African woman and a working class Arabic man. The question that arises is: How do their different backgrounds explain how they act, think and behave differently or similarly? This essay argues that because of the two protagonists' different backgrounds they both act and behave in different ways. However, this is not always the case, since when they are together they sometimes act and behave similarly. Their different and similar ways of acting make them both start thinking; they start thinking about how they behave and about their current situation and so forth. Consequently, the study also investigates how differences can be an asset, can bring positive new perspectives for example, for a couple. This essay also intends to make aware for people about the impact that cultural and social backgrounds have on people's identities. According to Steven Lynn in the book *Texts and Contexts: Writing about Literature with Critical Theory* it can be argued from a cultural studies point of view that human beings are shaped by the underlying assumptions and values of a culture (152). This essay analyses from a cultural studies point of view the two main characters in the novel and it also does a character analysis of the two protagonists. However, background is not the only

element that has an impact on how a person behaves, naturally personality and many other factors also influence the actions and behaviours of a person. Thus, background is not everything.

This essay will begin by defining what cultural and social background means. The concept of cultural background comprises religion and many other things. In the novel, Islam is particularly important in Abdu's life. A country's dominating national values can also be included in the term cultural background. In the case of *The Pickup*, these are Arabic values and white South African values. Alessandra Fogli and Raquel Fernández state in their essay "Culture: An Empirical Investigation of Beliefs, Work, and Fertility" that cultural background includes values that are derived from the religion and the society that a person lives in (2). Social background refers to families, and family structures including extended relatives. Furthermore, friends and class, assets, privileges and living standard can also belong to a person's social background. Charlotte Lauer claims in her research paper "Enrolments in Higher Education in West Germany-The impact of social background, labour market returns and educational funding" that social background comprises family, living standard and class (17).

2. Julie

Julie, a white South African woman, is one of two protagonists in the novel and the character with whom the novel begins.

Julie shows her affections and emotions openly because for her and her friends showing emotions in public is normal, they always do so. This is nothing 'wrong' or embarrassing among her friends. Julie does not have a strong family bond. That is why when a problem arises she first asks her friends for advice and not one of her parents. Thus, it is her friends that are her stability and security, not her own family. She also asks her uncle Archie for help because she feels comfortable with him, she feels he knows and understands her

better than her own parents do. Her poor relationship with her parents is also demonstrated by her inability to speak directly to them even about daily matters. She cannot even ask her father if everything is alright with him, instead she simply gazes at him when she wants to ask him this simple question. This is because she feels she cannot be herself with her father.

Because of Julie's family background she grows up wanting to become a lawyer but due to various factors she does not end up doing this, instead she finds herself working as a PRO and as a fundraiser, attending various benefit dinners and celebrity concerts. However, she is not happy with these jobs and she wants to do something else but she is not sure of what. Partly because of her unhappiness with her job situation Julie decides to follow her husband Abdu to his country to start a new life.

Julie is adventurous and unafraid; she does not mind taking certain risks such as travelling to countries which she has never heard of before. She also likes to camp out in 'wild' Africa, in the outback. There in the outback she and her friends live the simplest of lives, bringing with them only absolutely necessary equipment. "I've camped out all over, stayed in villages, you know my friends- we didn't exactly look for tiled bathrooms-" (111). Even though she is a rich man's daughter she has experienced simplicity and she does not feel the need for luxuries. Franz Meier claims in his article *Picking up the Other: Nadine Gordimer's The Pickup* that Julie has distanced herself from her middle-class background which is manifested by the fact that she for example drives a second hand car and lives in a non-luxurious apartment in a former black part of her town (2). Furthermore, although Julie was used to being surrounded by luxury when growing up, she feels completely content in her husband Abdu's family even with the smallest of things (when thinking of materialistic items) in exchange for unconditional love from Abdu's family. Sue Kossew states in her article *Nadine Gordimer, The Pickup* that Julie has had too little love in her upbringing therefore Julie feels comfortable in Abdu's family (1).

Julie is sure of herself when she is still in South Africa, she knows who she is. She knows her identity and she has good self-esteem. But at her arrival in Abdu's country she feels that she does not know who she is anymore as the following quotation shows: "... she was somehow as strange to herself as she was to them: she was what they saw [a stranger]" (117). This quotation suggests that Julie knew who she was in South Africa but when she comes to Abdu's country she does not entirely know who she is since her role in this new country is different. In South Africa she is a working, white, bourgeois woman whereas in Abdu's country she is merely seen as Abdu's wife, nothing else. She feels lost. Therefore, Julie searches for her place in this new society but naturally she carries her South African identity with her. She is not entirely lost however. Declan Barry, Robert Elliott and E. Margaret Evans argue in their article "Foreigners in a Strange Land: Self-Construction and Ethnic Identity in Male Arabic" that immigrants try to adapt to the new culture they find themselves in. When people settle in a new place and environment they take their cultural background with them and mix it with the new culture (134). Thus, questions concerning Julie's own identity in the new country are brought on by her upbringing.

In Abdu's country, family seems to be the most important foundation in every person's life whereas in Julie's South African family bonds are less important. South Africa is seen as a Western country by many people nowadays since the country seems to have many features that are associated with other western countries such as the USA. Barry, Elliot and Evans claim that Western countries are individualistic (134). This individualism is reflected in Julie's behaviour and personality. She acts according to what she feels she can benefit from such as going to Abdu's country on her own without any of her friends. Julie has been raised to be independent and her parents have for many years been divorced which may have brought on the need for Julie to be somewhat independent. Georgina Horrell states in her article "A Whiter Shade of Pale: White Femininity as Guilty Masquerade in 'New' (White)

South African Women's Writing" that today it is fairly common that white South Africans especially white South African women, are not sure of their identity (767). Therefore Julie's minor identity crisis is not surprising. Furthermore, the fact that her mother lives in another country, a country in which she is not a native, proves to Julie that there are possibilities. These possibilities imply that she can survive and make a good living in a country that is not her own.

Due to her background Julie has some kind of power, a power to do things and to get things done. Her power stems from having ample money and being white, although she is not enormously rich herself, her parents and her relatives are which the following quotation shows: "a rich man's only daughter" (212). Their money is money which she can rather easily get access to in case she needs it. The money enables her to build a better future for herself, for her husband and for his extended family by, for instance, drilling a well for water in the vicinity of Abdu's home town so that the inhabitants can build a rice plantation, a plantation that Julie then becomes the owner of. Her money also enables her to go with Abdu to his country, that is, to buy flight tickets for her and for Abdu. However, she will not have any other source of income other than this money to live on in Abdu's town. She has to find a way of supporting herself in Abdu's country one way or another.

Another part of Julie's power, at least in Abdu's country, is that she has English as her mother tongue since English is one of the languages of the world that is widely used. Julie's fluency of English is a "door opener" in the Arabic country. This means that she can begin to earn some money through teaching English, which she also teaches in exchange for learning some Arabic, allowing her access into Abdu's society. Julie's knowledge of English is her key, a tool, to becoming part of Abdu's family because members of his family want to learn English better. Speaking English can open up opportunities for them such as getting better jobs or it can enable them to apply to University.

Julie's determination to learn some Arabic is proof that she really wants to live in Abdu's country because learning Arabic is difficult. Andrew Hammond claims in his book *Pop Culture Arab World!* that Arabic has a rich, big and diverse vocabulary and is difficult to learn (318). This shows that it really is a big effort Julie is undertaking when she decides to learn Arabic. It illustrates her determination.

In his article "The rainbow nation? Identity and nation building in post-apartheid South- Africa" Gary Baines points out that multiculturalism is a part of modern South African's identity (4). For Julie, to mix with all kinds of people is something she does every day. Julie is always open to new encounters. Melissa Steyn claims in her book *Whiteness "Just Isn't What It Used To Be" White Identity In a Changing South Africa* that South Africans nowadays normally socialize freely, white people mix with black people (89). Julie's friends at "The Table" are a great mixture of people especially when it comes to ethnicity. Julie sees herself as a South African, but not so much a white (European) South African. That is why she does not consider it strange to fall in love with an Arabic man. She sees him as an equal. Some other people (not her friends) do not think she should be with him "he's bad news...he's not for you" (32). This means that they think she should be with someone more similar to her when it comes to background. But Julie is firm and knows what she wants and she sees nothing wrong with her choice which her friends do not do either.

Julie has a multicultural way of thinking -. For instance she believes that all humans are equal with regard to status no matter what cultural group they belong to. This is part of the reason why she is able to adjust to Arabic society. Because she thinks in a multicultural way, she tries to not only think from her own white South African perspective but also from her multicultural friends' perspective, she is open-minded, open to new and different ways of thinking and to different ways of acting. Through Abdu she gets to know a different culture very intimately. She gets to know a culture with different values; values

which she can take to her heart and make a part of her pattern of thinking. Julie does not like her own family's values, which mainly originate from white South African culture, and that is why she takes Abdu's culture's values to her heart. In a sense, Abdu's family's values, such as concern, strong commitment to the whole family (including relatives) and consideration fill a hole within her. Meier claims that Julie finds in Abdu's country/culture what she has been missing in the "liberal South Africa" such as the values of spirituality and commitment. He explains this further by stating that the other culture, Abdu's Arabic-Islamic culture, "borders on the psychological" (8).

The authors of *Nobel Laureates in Search of Identity and Integrity: Voices of Different Cultures* claim that the women in Nadine Gordimer's later novels have energy and vision (44). When it comes to Julie's dreams and visions, they change somewhat over time, especially from the moment when she meets Abdu to when she decides to stay in Abdu's country. Additionally, Julie's visions and dreams change through different locations and surroundings. One of the goals she strives for in the beginning of the novel is to have her lover by her side and to have him living in South Africa. Further on in the novel when Julie and Abdu is in Abdu's Arabic country Julie's vision is to have a good life, "making our [referring to Abdu and herself] own living doing something [...] Useful" in Abdu's country, to make a good living in this vastly different culture (216).

Kossew claims that one of Julie's other visions is to escape from her inherited privilege (2). She wants to get away from her bourgeois family background and get to another place as the poem by William Plomer states: "Let us go to another country..." (88). This poem truly speaks to Julie's heart and puts words to her feelings. For Julie, the words from the poem mean that she wants to get away from South Africa, but not alone. She imagines that the "us" in the poem refers to herself and Abdu. Furthermore, Julie realizes through the poem that

she can do without “The Table”. That specific period in her life is over and done with. She desires a different life.

Julie’s visions are closely linked to her fairly abundant amount of energy. In order to be able to do something about her situation she has to have energy. When Julie lacks energy in the first part of the novel she gets it back from her friends, again it is not her family that give her strength but her friends. Kossew claims that Julie’s family is cold (1). From cold (fictionally speaking) you do not get strength. It is warmth that gives energy. Therefore, in the second part of the novel, the love which Julie obtains from her new family and surroundings gives her additional energy. This energy bestows her with strength enough to be able to have visions and to be able to get close to fulfilling her desires.

In addition, her energy also comes from the fact that she is an independent woman and always has been. She makes her own choices and decisions in life, such as going to another country without telling her parents about this decision beforehand. Although she has actually had a family to fall back on even though they were cold they were still a family. However, as she has lived with divorced parents she has had to be sturdy and she has a mother whom after the divorce has managed to build a new family. Her mother is strong. According to Julie’s mother Julie is just like her.

Another example that shows that Julie is strong is that she stays behind in the Arabic country when Abdu leaves, or rather when he escapes from his own country. His family gives her strength partly because she feels loved by almost all of the members of his family. She fits in in Abdu’s family and Julie even connects with Abdu’s mother, although at first the relationship between Julie and her mother-in-law was quite strained. One reason for this connection may be that Abdu’s mother resembles her own mother, she has the same positive features such as being a very strong and determined woman. The mother is strong even though she lives in a society that is much patriarchal. Rejwan argues in his book *Arabs*

Face the Modern World that Arabic countries are patriarchal (225) (by which he means that those countries are more patriarchal than other countries) and that might be a reason why Abdu's mother is strong since she has to several times endure that men controls matters such as deciding how much money should be spent on food and clothes because they are earning the most money for instance.

Another aspect of Julie is that she has grown up in the big city Johannesburg and is living there when she meets Abdu. She leads the big city life and earns good money and is used to having a good living standard. Kossew claims that Julie could live there in Johannesburg for the rest of her life but this life is a life without much excitement (2). Julie merely meets her friends regularly at the café and works as a promoter for a rock and roll agency. Meier claims that when Julie goes to Abdu's small Arabian town she begins to feel an affinity to that specific town, especially to the desert to which she almost develops a mystical affinity (2). Julie feels content and happy there in Abdu's home town. She especially feels good by the desert, which lies close to Abdu's home, which does not change in any way, it is simply always there. This feeling of contentedness triggered by the desert comes from the fact that her own feelings as a human being change all the time: "The desert is always; it doesn't die it doesn't change, it exists." (229). These feelings of happiness to live by the desert that Julie feels also comes from the fact that the desert is full of peace and quiet. It is like a church is for others in a big busy city. Julie feels that since her mind is full of different non-coherent thoughts she needs the tranquility of the desert. The desert is her breathing space where she can get energy when she feels tired and confused of all her thinking for instance.

To live in this Arabic town which is utterly different, in some parts of the town it is full of life whereas other parts such as by the desert it is quiet, from Julie's home city is what she may need after her chaotic upbringing, of living with divorced parents (of being forced to take one parent's side at times). The desert by the city becomes a breathing space for

Julie, a place for meditation and tranquility, a place where she truly can discover her own being. She needs a daily dose of the desert. Thus, the desert is part of the reason why she decides to stay in Abdu's country when he goes away. The desert has a strong hold on her. The desert symbolizes much that is diverse from her former life in South Africa. The desert is a desolate place, there is much silence there, a kind of silence Julie has never known before. In her city Johannesburg there is always some sound of distant traffic as Abdu says in the novel. The part of the desert she feels is important is the desert she sees at the end of the street near her home in the Arabic country and the inhabitants which are there and which she sees every time she walks to that specific place. The desert brings harmony to her in the same way as the ocean can bring harmony to some people.

3. Abdu

Abdu does not show strong emotions openly. It is not something he does. He saves those emotions for more intimate places and occasions. He is a man from the East, an Arabic man. In his family and with his friends no such emotions are shown in public. That is why Abdu dislikes it every time Julie tries to kiss him or hug him in public. Therefore when Julie acts in that way he restrains her.

Abdu - hides or tries to control his feelings. He restrains his own feelings after the first time he makes love to Julie in her apartment. He does not allow himself to feel love for her when he goes back to his place. He feels that it would be no good for him to feel such strong feelings. Those feelings are a luxury, a "temptation" (28). Furthermore, he does not let himself feel much anger either. The few times he does so he explodes, for instance, when Julie says she will come with him to his country. The reason why Abdu does not let himself feel may be because it costs him a lot of energy and strength which he thinks he better save for fulfilling his dreams and visions. The visions he has are for example to escape his own country because he does not want to live there.

Meier claims that family is important for Abdu (4). Abdu has strong bonds with his family, especially with his mother. Part of the reason why he goes to South Africa in the first place is to earn enough money so he can send it back to his family since he wants to give them a better life; he wants to bring them out of the poverty that he feels they are in. He is willing to suffer for them; he would do almost anything to improve their living conditions and to make them feel better. This is the reason why he works as a grease monkey in South Africa even though he has a University degree in Economics from his home country. But since he is an illegal immigrant in South Africa he cannot work with what he is qualified for. The most important person for him in his family is his mother; he has a special bond with her. It is especially for his mother that he goes on struggling to earn money. This is shown in the novel by the following extract: “...*his mother* whom he wanted to bring away to a *better life*” (123). The italicized words “*his mother*” seems to be emphasized in the sentence and therefore, showing the importance of Abdu’s mother. The italicized words that follow also seems to be emphasized indicate that Abdu really wants to change his mother’s current situation to something more excellent.

Abdu feels responsible for his family, especially since he is the oldest son. He therefore feels he must be successful not only in order to make himself feel accomplished but because he has responsibilities towards his family. Abdu feels some pressure to be successful and to make something really good of himself. This is illustrated in an episode where he feels ashamed when he returns to his family empty handed with only his bride, a Western wealthy bride who has nothing to bring them except very little money. The following illustrates this responsibility Abdu feels: “He was coming back and it was *not* as the *successful son* who had made a better life [...] but as a *reject*, with nothing but a wife” (114). The italicized words “*not*”, “*successful son*” and “*reject*” show that Abdu feels ashamed and thus, illustrates his responsibility feelings.

Another aspect of Abdu's feelings of responsibility has to do with the importance he places on his mother. It is towards her he feels most responsibility. Abdu's mother indirectly signals what she expects of her son such as by certain actions such as being the one responsible for arguing that her son should work for Uncle Yaqub, a successful business owner, when he needs a workshop manager. This job would normally have been offered to a son of Yaqub's but he has no son. This job offer indicates that Abdu's mother wants him to be successful which in this case means to earn a lot of money, to have a maid of his own and to live in a luxury apartment and so forth. But Abdu does not want to accept this job offer. His decision makes him feel bad because he feels pressured to accept the job offer. This pressure is illustrated in his dreams in which he torments himself.

Out of consideration for his family, Abdu marries Julie before going back to his family and country because he cannot bring a woman to his family unless he is married to her. It would be to do something very wrong and it would hurt his family, something that he is already doing, at least he feels so, by not bringing them back a decent amount of money or stories of a successful life in a Western country. He feels he is a failure.

Although Abdu truly loves his family, he does not feel comfortable in it after his return to them. Meier claims that Abdu cannot fully identify with the traditional duties in his family (4). This is one of the reasons why he desires to go away again to another country. He wants to go anywhere where he can get a visa. When he has become successful, that is, when he has made a good life with a job and a family of his own, he wants to fetch his mother. Additional evidence of this specific will is that he kindly refuses a job offer which his family gives him.

Abdu's vision is to live a life like Julie's in Johannesburg because he does not want to live in his 'dirty' country where a great many things are bad. According to Abdu there are 'bad' politicians in his country who do no good for the country because they are somehow

influenced by the country's rich people. Abdu also thinks that the life quality in his home is brought down by the great poverty. Abdu does everything he possibly can to escape the poverty in his country. He tries to escape to be able to get a better life than he knows he could ever have in his home country. Meier argues that Abdu feels trapped and restrained in his country and culture, in the Arabic-Islam culture (8). Therefore he wants to escape from it because he admires Julie's father's way of living to a great extent. He wants the "jet set world" and, of course, admires and wants to be like Julie's father's successful business partners. He wants to have cultural liberty, to be able to choose how he wants to live without any pressure from society. This kind of freedom of choice he believes exists in Julie's country. Also, Abdu regards being successful as one of his foremost important goals. He will be happy with nothing less than that. Therefore a consequence of his way of thinking would be that he cannot be fully happy without a top career and without living in a liberal country and culture. Abdu additionally suffers in his country from the lack of freedom of expression and of movement. This is what contributes to Abdu's feeling of entrapment in his country.

Due to his background, some of the conditions when he grew up such as the fact that men most of the time have the responsibility of taking care of women, Abdu is a protective person who wants to make sure everyone is alright, especially Julie since Abdu believes that men should take care of the women. He does not like that she goes out alone. When they both arrive in his country he does not even let her go to the toilet alone. This is because his country it is not so safe to live in, partly due to the fact that the country is poor and "backward", a "Third World country" (98).

Additionally, Abdu is a 'thinker' and before he makes a decision he thinks a great deal about it. He is not firm in his thinking; he cannot help thinking about his decisions over and over again because he feels pressured by many factors and responsibilities. He

torments himself: "...turning in bed, rubbing his feet one against another in affront, in turmoil" (186). But his thinking also comes from his discontent with his situation.

When it comes to Abdu's identity he is a man who is sure of himself, he knows who he is and what he wants. He has a stable family, his parents are living together and are married and they live together with his younger siblings and other relatives. They are all in one place which is common in an Arabic country. Suresh Roberts claims in his biography of Nadine Gordimer that Abdu's good self-esteem is shown through the fact that he does not give up the search for a better life (616). Abdu knows what he wants and will do anything to get it and foremost he knows how he can get it. Meier argues that Abdu's determination is shown through his application for visas to many of the Western countries such as Australia and Canada (2). He devotes a great deal of time to these applications since they are very time consuming. Every time he gets a refusal he does not become sad or depressed, at least not consciously, he solely keeps on applying and keeps on hoping for a positive outcome. Thus, he is very determined to reach his goals.

Moreover, regarding Abdu's great determination, if there are any obstacles in his way he is not afraid of trying everything he can to get over them. He only sees the goal he must reach not the obstacles. He is like a missile solely aiming for the target without stopping _ until it has reached its target. Thus, Abdu does not give up easily, even though he is constantly rejected when applying for visas. His great determination pushes him to keep on applying even though the countries which he applies to reject him on the bases of being "a burden on the state" (19). The word "burden" is a word that in this circumstance indicates something negative therefore, it shows that the states which Abdu applies to seems to regard him as a bad person, not suitable to be allowed to emigrate to one of their countries.

Furthermore, Abdu's great determination to live in another country is exemplified by the fact that he is very eager to improve his English. This will of his can be

shown by when he is with Julie; he always wants to talk to her in English even when she is learning Arabic. Thus, Julie tries to speak with Abdu in Arabic but he insists on talking English. Abdu feels he needs to speak English as he says: “I must speak English [...] if I am going to get a job anywhere.” (152). The words “must” and “anywhere” indicate Abdu’s necessity of talking in English.

Roberts claims that Abdu is a person who vastly likes the American thinking of invulnerability (like the Americans thought before September 11.) and this when thinking of what some Americans have done in past times: “Colin Powell who, despite a fitful [not regularly or steady] multilateralism [something involving three or more participants] and Jamaican immigrant origins, lent himself as the military muscle of the first Gulf war and the diplomatic muscle of the second one” (618). In short Abdu sees American thinking and values, American culture, as something excellent. For Abdu, American culture represents freedom and individuality, everything that his Arabic country is not. Meier states that Abdu sees his country’s culture, the Arabic-Islamic culture, as a prison (8). That is why Abdu is very happy when he finally gets a visa for the USA and why he gets angry when Julie does not want to go there with him.

Abdu believes that women and men are equal which means that he does not want to dominate women even though he comes from a patriarchal society. But Meier argues that the country Abdu comes from is a highly patriarchal culture in which men most of the time dominate women (6). The men dominate by being the persons making important decisions for example. Abdu’s views on equality come from his family where his mother is the one who is in the top of the family hierarchy. His mother is the ‘boss’, the one who has the power in his family because she is strong. She has the power in the domestic sphere in Abdu’s family. How come she dominates in this specific domestic sphere and has less power in the rest of the society? Outside the household clearly men dominate for some reason which does

not seem clear-cut. Evidently Abdu's culture allows his mother to be in the top of the family hierarchy but not outside it. For the reason that Abdu believes in equality he lets Julie have a job outside the family and lets her be independent.

Because Abdu is alone in South Africa, he starts talking to Julie. He has a need to confide in someone since he cannot talk to his family about everything over the phone. In the novel it seems as though Abdu needs to be with a real living person of flesh and blood. This need can be illustrated by the words "the desire to confide in her overcame him" (17). This quotation illustrates Abdu's need of an intimate contact with any human being.

Abdu is changeable and flexible. Sometimes he likes to take action and to be the person who takes initiative, who gets matters done such as deciding where Julie should christen her car. While other times he lets matters be such as when he is with his family. For instance he follows his religion's rules and stays with male friends and relatives for Ramadan during the daytime. He does what is expected of him even though he desires to be with Julie.

- Abdu is flexible due to the fact that he has certain responsibilities to his family at the same time as he feels that he has responsibilities towards himself. Therefore he has to be in one way when he is with his family and in another way when he is with Julie.

Abdu works as a mechanic in South Africa because he has an uncle who owns a car repair shop/business and as a young boy Abdu liked cars. Through this childhood hobby of his he has gained knowledge about the car mechanics and it is one of the few things he can work with except for working in economics since he has a degree in economics. This indicates that Abdu does what he can do and what he needs to do to be able to survive because he comes from a poor country where he has had to learn how to be able to survive with little means.

Abdu is a man who is willing to take risks to get what he wants such as going to countries he knows little about. Abdu does not mind taking risks because he knows he can

gain from it. He is not afraid of what might happen to him since he feels he has no other choice. If Abdu would not take chances he would not get anywhere. He would not have gotten to South Africa and met Julie. He would not get away from his country that he really does not want to live in. Since Abdu is willing to take risks he has to be unafraid. This courage is shown by his eagerness to apply for visas to many of the Western countries. He is not so much afraid of the consequences of his actions such as meeting his family even though he has not made a success of himself. He simply feels ashamed. Abdu is not afraid because he has a family to fall back on, a family that he trusts with his whole heart. They are his security. He can always get help from them morally and emotionally.

Abdu is a listener, who carefully watches and listens before he speaks. He really tries to get an idea about the other person who he talks to before he opens his mouth. Abdu finds it is better to do so. He often talks very little and only says what he thinks is relevant, he keeps his talk brief and orderly.

Abdu is careful, considerate and “soft-voiced” (95). Abdu’s carefulness and consideration is shown by him not telling Julie when he knows, although not for sure, that they might have some chance of getting a visa to the USA. He wants to be completely sure before he tells her. His consideration comes from the fact that he is a man who cares deeply about his family and friends. His family has taught him what love is.

4. Julie and Abdu

Julie is sometimes very emotional. She shows her emotions with her whole body when she is, for example, upset. She is not afraid of expressing her feelings to Abdu since she is used to displaying her emotions to her friends at “The Table”. She has no inhibitions concerning public display of emotions whereas Abdu on the other hand does not let himself have emotional outbursts. He keeps his feelings inside most of the time because he was raised in a society where men should be strong. Strong may sometimes mean not showing emotions.

Abdu can sense Julie's outburst. He can see them coming and therefore he can comfort her: "Something will happen, tears, an outburst- he must come quickly over to avert" (91). The words "Something will happen" shows that Abdu can sense what is about to occur. Additionally, the words "must" and "quickly" indicate the immediate necessity of rapid action of Abdu, the need for him to act.

Both Julie and Abdu want to do something different than what they are doing. Julie wants to find a better job, a more meaningful and exciting job than the job she currently has in Johannesburg. For this reason she goes with Abdu to his country. Julie wants to have a more meaningful job since she has always wanted to become a lawyer and also because she comes from a prominent and highly educated family. Many of Julie's relatives have top jobs such as lawyers, doctors and so forth. Abdu, on the other hand, is an illegal immigrant in South Africa working illegally as a car mechanic. He does not want to work outside the law but he is more or less forced to do so partly due to his cultural background. These similar wishes, to change their current situation, make them stay together. The fact that Abdu accepts that Julie accompanies him back to his Arabic country even though he at first finds it difficult to accept it proves that Abdu wants to be with Julie. It shows that he is willing to sacrifice for her and thus not abandon her. This difficulty of accepting Julie's decision is shown by Abdu's sudden explosion of emotions, he becomes very angry, which is very unusual for Abdu. Meier argues that neither Julie nor Abdu tries to dominate the other; they have a "mutual tolerance" (5). They accept each other's decisions even though they might not approve of them.

When Julie is with her family, for example, she does not talk much with her father or stepmother or listen to their advice on any matter. She does not listen to them since she does not approve of her parents' worlds. Julie does not like their world of friends and their values and so forth; thus she does not condone their way of living. Julie rather likes her friends' anti-bourgeois values. However, Abdu understands and likes Julie's family's world.

In conclusion, Julie and Abdu both like each other's families. Meier states: "self-definition through difference" (4). That is part of the reason why they are together, both have something the other one likes or admires.

When Abdu talks to Julie he talks briefly - . He asks direct questions and is very straightforward whereas Julie talks longer and gives more details, both relevant and irrelevant details. It takes longer for Julie to get to the point. Therefore, when Abdu asks Julie a question he does not get a straightforward answer. Since Abdu is a person who has certain goals such as getting a career he for instance has a need to be straightforward. To be able to get out of his country he has had to be straightforward to get matters done.

Julie shows with her body how she feels, for instance, she turns her head back and forward when she is unsure about something. She thinks and twists her body at the same time. Julie is like an open book to Abdu, showing intricately with her body what she feels. Why she does this is because she does not have an open relationship with her family. She finds it more easy to use body language. Abdu can therefore read her very well. It suits him because he thinks a great deal before he talks: "he [Abdu] suddenly speaks out of *one* of his silences" (37). The reason why "*one*" is italicized is that seems as the word is emphasized and therefore indicating that Abdu many times are silent, it occurs frequently. He contemplates and then after some time talks.

Julie and Abdu are both active people who always have and want to have some sort of mission such as driving around in villages or exploring the vicinity of their current place of living. They both want things to happen; they cannot for instance simply be in their house waiting for something to occur. They have to do something. Active is what they like being. They have a will to get matters done whatever they might be. It seems as though they constantly want to see new places and locations and they are not afraid of exploring new parts of themselves. One possible explanation to this might be that they move around a great deal

and often find themselves in unfamiliar situations (at least for one of them for each new situation) such as when they go from South Africa to Abdu's Arabic country. Abdu and Julie have learned to adapt to different situations. Abdu has a need to adjust and Julie must adjust as well when she comes to Abdu's country. Meier claims that Julie and Abdu have the ability to adapt (4, 6). They are both adaptable and do not dislike it either. This adaptability is one of the reasons why Julie and Abdu stay together. They have become accustomed to each other and like what they have together, their unity. Also they accept each other's different personalities.

5. Conclusion

This essay's purpose has been to investigate how different backgrounds explain how the two protagonists, Julie and Abdu, act, think and behave differently and similarly. It argues that their different backgrounds have an impact on their identities. Julie feels content in Abdu's family since she does not have strong family bonds. She has poor communication with both of her parents for the reason that they feel alien to her. Julie's feelings of happiness does not only derive from her liking of Abdu's family but also from that she feels she has found her place, as a English teacher for instance, in the Arabic country and by its desert. Abdu on the other hand does have a strong family bond; he has a good communication with them. But because of his discontentment with his country's values he takes any opportunity he can to get away. Therefore, backgrounds do have impact on Julie's and Abdu's behavior, thinking and acting.

6. Works Cited

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