

# A Study of Speech, Silence, and Selfhood through the Portrayal of Rosa Burger from Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*

Ashima Arora\*

Naveen Kumar Mehta\*\*

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## Abstract:

Nadine Gordimer wrote *Burger's Daughter*, her seventh book in 1979. It is a novel inspired by the historical and political events that occurred within South Africa in the mid-1970s. The characterization of Rosa Burger, the protagonist, by Gordimer reveals that she is the heir of the legacy of her parents, who were revolutionaries. Cathy and Lionel Burger, her parents, died in South Africa fighting against racial injustice. Their greatness as heroes puts a pressure on Rosa, who is having difficulties in forming her individual identity. She starts to wonder who she is besides being the daughter of her revolutionary parents. She, therefore, leaves behind the forceful political terminology of her parents. Instead, she prefers keeping silent because silence is the way she can get out of their shadow. Silence is illustrated through her prison experience, her time in another country and even when she returned home to South Africa. The silence both secures her, gives her some room to think over, and it also becomes a kind of silent protest. The identity formation that takes place in Rosa is physical. She employs her silence through the body and the suppression of her physical senses to resist her political destiny. This paper examines how speech and silence both define the trajectory of Rosa, who breaks free of the social constructs and lives in accordance with her personal decisions.

**Keywords:** liminality, selfhood, silence, legacy, autonomy, language

## Introduction

The setting of *Burger's Daughter* by Nadine Gordimer is in apartheid South Africa. The book demonstrates the consequences of apartheid on both the black and white lives as portrayed through the eyes of a young woman, Rosa Burger, who is dominated by the political martyrdom of her parents. Her life, decisions, and inner turmoil are congenial to the political and social processes of apartheid, since it began

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\* PhD Research Scholar, Department of English, Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies, Sanchi, Raisen (M.P.), aroraashima95@gmail.com

\*\* Associate Professor PhD, Department of English, Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies, Sanchi, Raisen (M.P.), nknmehta@gmail.com

with the election of the first Nationalist party government in May 1948, the year she was born, through her years of childhood and adolescence, when she witnessed the Treason Trials and Sharpeville massacre. The novel follows Rosa as she strives to reconstruct her identity and create herself outside the expectations of her parents' legacy, unlike most narratives of revolution, where identity directly stems out of inheritance.

The tension is apparent in her journey which includes visits to prison, exile and unwilling return to South Africa, as she tries to find herself in a society where language is weaponised, and speech is enforced. White liberal groups played the primary role in anti-apartheid struggle because of the apartheid policy of an imposed separation (Powell, 2017: 226). This has created a dissociation of the voices and interests of blacks since whites were talking and blacks were listening (Powell, 2017: 226). Black Consciousness criticized white liberals for their inability to bring about any major reform. They argued that white dominated liberal groups were only willing to fight against apartheid peacefully rather than through violence, breaking the law, or armed conflicts (Powell, 2017: 227). This political environment informs us of the ways that Rosa thinks about her own role. The Black Consciousness movement compels her to change her mind, and move away from the idea that she wants to be a saviour of Black people, the way her parents were, to the idea that she would be a silent buddy in the background. This difference, however, is uncongenial to her but it is the evolution that must be made towards the real equality. Powell recommends that Black community often shunned away the well-intentioned white people who wanted to combat the racism. Yet, this pushback never occurred only at the time of protests or meetings; this rejection was also present in their social life, their personal contacts and friendships (Powell, 2017: 228).

The decisions that Rosa makes, such as her re-engagement to oppose critiques and avoid falling into the same trap as white liberals, have the connotation of a conscious act of independence. She opposes performative rhetoric, and finds strength in the nonverbal acts: holding hands in jail, an inhibited thinking overseas, or silently working as a physiotherapist, nursing the wounded in the wake of the Soweto riots. She and her friend Marisa collaborate to make the spirits of the prisoners high and convey the messages to those outside of the prison (Powell, 2017: 233). Rosa's choices give her the power to act beyond what words can do, enabling her to defy perceptions and seek her own self-liberation (Powell, 2017: 238).

To gain an insight into the predicament of Rosa, it is necessary to know the theoretical structures that shed light on her struggle. As Judith Butler points out, language is not descriptive, but performative as well (2021: 24). The title of *Burger's Daughter* is made to weigh Rosa down

right at the start. This name itself performs a strict political identity for her even before she gets a chance to speak for her own self. Michel Foucault's concept of discourse explains how Rosa's mindset is completely conditioned by the vocabulary of the revolution (Foucault, 1972: 49). Since discourse acts as a strong system of power, Rosa is influenced by them much before she can even raise a question. Her entire journey is basically a sincere attempt to uproot herself from this inherited discourse. Taking a cue from Gayatri Spivak's ideas on subaltern a question arises that whether those sitting outside the power structures can even raise their voice (apud Riach, 2017: 15). In this context, Rosa is caught in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, being a privileged white lady, she enjoys a high status in the society. But on the other hand, because she is trapped in a grand revolutionary legacy, her voice is always already steered by others. Therefore, her continuous silence becomes a major subject of enquiry. Are these silences just a failure at communication, or are they deliberate boycott and refusal to participate in a discourse that fails to carry her true self?

Gordimer positions Rosa's liminal existence between identities, places, and speech as a form of embodied resistance. This liminality, defined as "a state of in-between-ness and ambiguity" (Beech, 2011: 288), where one is "neither one thing nor the other" and "interstructural" (Beech, 2011: 285), is central to Rosa's experience. *Liminality*, originally a concept from anthropology, describes individuals or groups in "socio-cultural spaces" that fall outside of clear-cut social categories and exist in an ambiguous, transitional state (Brunsma et al., 2013: 483). Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the *borderland* extends this argument. It is pertinent to note that the borderland describes the condition of individuals who live between cultures, languages, and identities (Anzaldúa, 1987: 19). In the present context, Rosa lives in such a borderland. She is neither inside the revolutionary world, nor outside of it. Furthermore, she is neither South African, nor European; neither political, nor private. While living in this borderland is a painful experience, it becomes the ground for awakening a consciousness. Adding to this discussion, Brunsma and his colleagues have proposed the framework of an "identity matrix" to describe how individuals occupy multiple, overlapping social positions that shift from one context to another (Brunsma et al., 2013: 485). Upon examining the character of Rosa, the identity matrix of her character includes her race, gender, class, her political inheritance and her personal desires. These classes do not fit perfectly; on the contrary, they tear her in many ways. It is not her agency to get out of this matrix, but to find her way in it.

In *Burger's Daughter*, the initial identity of Rosa is determined through the elements of her parents' political radicalism that form the

“everyday mythology” (Gordimer, 1979: 111) of the story. This is the identity that is based on her position as the Burger’s Daughter and limits her personal freedom and social relations. Apparently, she indeed wanted to study law, yet it did not seem to be worthwhile because, likely enough, she would never have a chance to practice it as the daughter of Lionel Burger. Thus, she was compelled to choose another career, something that would not be offensive politically, and medicine seemed to be a viable choice for somebody like Rosa (Gordimer, 1979: 63). The story illustrates how this self-perception was eventually broken, and she had to rebuild her sense of self (Beech, 2011: 287).

Stephen Clingman, in this regard, analyses the novel as a work that goes back to trace “history from the inside”, showing how the political events transform the consciousness of people (Clingman, 1992: 8). The crisis that Rosa is going through is not a personal problem; instead, it is a historical issue. Dominic Head notices that in her novels Gordimer addresses the “problem of the white writer in South Africa”, who has to cope with a problem of loyalty to the struggle and awareness of the racial status to which she belongs (Clingman, 1994: 12). So, this contradiction is evident in Rosa herself.

The body of Rosa can be discussed in terms of the battlefield in this respect, where the conflict between her legacy as a public figure and her personal identity are fought. She opposes with her body by pushing away and closing up her feelings instead of arguing and protesting. She explains that her cognitive awareness is pulled to the pain in her pelvis that continues to exist. Her body gives away the very things she has been trying to keep within herself. In that space, she is trapped in the monthly cycle of her body. She becomes her womb, understanding that a year before, she had not realized its physical existence (Gordimer, 1979: 15-16). This is the point when Rosa retreats into embodied experience out of political talk. The womb, which is a reproduction site, is used as a symbol of her denying the heritage of her parents. Her suffering is not figurative, it is physical and hers. In a world that requires political speech, the focus on her body by Rosa is one way of resistance, which is not vocal. Nic Beech believes that liminality is not a passive entity but a process of identity formation, in which people are trying out new identity forms (Beech, 2011: 290). This experimentation is symbolized by Rosa, who distances herself physically.

Her physical resistance and silent rebellion eventually help her take back her own self from everything that the legacy of her father had placed on her, and show that selfhood can thrive within the spaces between phases. It is an active and directed act of identity, illustrating a versatile toolset to be used (Brunsma et al., 2013: 481) to claim agency in a multifarious and evolving social reality.

The paper claims that Rosa's selfhood is shaped by the spaces between her political speech which she inherits and silences which she chooses, as opposed to absolute opposition to the legacy of her parents. The research is based on the theories of performativity, subalternity, and borderland consciousness, and the analysis will show how her non-use of language turns out to be a way of expressing her own identity. It follows Rosa's relationship to political discourse and looks at how her withdrawal into silence and exile and her eventual return become a way of redefining the question of selfhood as something that is lived and negotiated through the body.

### **Rosa Burger as a Liminal Woman**

Liminality was first coined by Arnold van Gennep in his book *Les Rites de Passage*, which was written in 1909. The idea which originated in anthropology was subsequently expanded by Victor Turner. He described liminality as the transition phase of rites of passages, which entails to the situation in which initiates are caught between two definable states (Gennep, 1960: 11). Turner developed this notion and defined liminal figures as those that are neither here, nor there, standing in between worlds (Turner, 1969: 95). Rosa Burger's identity is characterized by the instability of existing between two worlds (Beech, 2011: 287); this liminality is rooted in uncertainty as she navigates her self-discovery." It is possible to interpret Rosa and her experience in the traditional three-step context of liminality: separation, transition, and reintegration (Beech, 2011: 287).

It starts with her decision to distance herself from the identity assigned to her by the radical political world of her parents. She longs for a free life because she is disillusioned with their programmatic lifestyle (Head, 1994: 114). One in which she is not confined to this inherited burden. Her move to go to the South of France is, therefore, not merely a journey, but a respite from the "Burger legacy". It is where she tries to find her own place (Powell, 2017: 233).

In Europe, Rosa gets into the transitional or so-called liminal stage. It is also characterized by a sense of confusion and a breaking away from the set roles which she previously occupied (Beech, 2011: 287). She eventually has the room to discover her own emotions and desires. In this sense, Nic Beech states that liminality is not a passive experience but rather a process through which people can explore possible alternative selves, which they provisionally embrace before they settle on a reconstructed one (Beech, 2011: 290). This experimentation can thus be seen clearly in the time that Rosa spent in France. She becomes a lover of Bernard Chabaliere, an observer of

European leftists, and finally she emerges as a modern woman liberated from political pressure. Her identity in this in-between condition is not fixed around her, but is fluid and can be remodelled by her experiences (Head, 1994: 122). Her in-between position in society is reinforced by the rejection she experiences from Black radicals, including Duma Dhladhla which deepens the break in her identity and her sense of belonging to the society. This fear is evident when she meets the Duclos family. Although they provide her with a refuge against South Africa, their inquiries about apartheid bring her down to the position of a spokesperson for a suffering that she cannot embody. Consequently, she retreats into silence and cannot express her stand. According to Gordimer, Rosa is exposed in their midst, since their interest intrudes on her privacy (Gordimer, 1979: 214). The emotional core of this disoriented stage of self-discovery is anxiety and a consuming feeling of rejection (Beech, 2011: 287).

We observe Rosa as she assembles her narrative by a set of thoughts directed at various individuals in her life, something which enables her to discover her own thoughts gradually, with a sense of genuine subtlety (Beech, 2011: 289). She communicates with these people in her head, and this is her way of thinking. In doing so, she is pushed inside herself, handling a tangle of dismay, anxiety and profound inner turmoil (Beech, 2011: 289).

Then there is the phone call which transforms everything. The voice is that of Baasie, an old childhood friend, but the old familiarity has now been replaced by anger and accusation. It is his verbal attack that puts her through an earthquake as he criticises her over her involvement in white repression (Head, 1994: 221). Baasie informs her that she and her family exploited him under the guise of being generous to him. Gordimer captures the reaction of Rosa in her fractured reaction. She cannot self-defend as there is something that he has said that carries some truth she has dodged. At the beginning, Rosa is compelled to perceive the identity projected onto her. She has to face the heartbreaking fact that what she viewed as benevolence he regarded as humiliation. This agonizing discovery brings her to the long-awaited and actual change in the definition of her own identity (Head, 1994: 221).

The last phase in her journey is the reintegration: her arrival back to South Africa. She bases her change on the real world by serving in the Baragwanath Hospital, where the majority of patients are Black. Rosa treating the victims of the Soweto uprising is not political speech, but an expedient interaction with the outcomes of apartheid. Consequently, her body becomes both a withdrawal place and a place of care. It is not only a geographical homecoming. It is a conscious, multifaceted re-identification with her past, and a recognition of the obligations that make her what she is. Rosa attempts to rebrand herself by acting,

reflecting, and finding a new sense of meaning. She is involved in the Black Consciousness struggle but this time as a supporter (Head, 1994: 122). This time she consciously retreats, assuming a humbler position. According to Stephen Clingman, the novels by Gordimer are able to trace history as an inward process, showing how the activities of the political forces influence the consciousness of the individuals (Clingman, 1992: 8). Thus, there is nothing personal about Rosa's return, it is a historical issue. She goes back to a South Africa that has been transformed by the Soweto uprising. Her move to join the Baragwanath Hospital is a viable reaction to such political reality.

It is not only her who feels redeemed (Powell, 2017: 233) but also creates an opportunity of a new demand of white allies in the struggle. Yet the issue that still lingers on is of the acceptance, and with this half-acceptance, she is once more brought back to the in-between state. According to Powell, Rosa's journey is a kind of self-liberation, which is an endeavour to balance the political and the personal (Powell, 2017: 238). Her return is therefore not a yielding to her parents' heritage, but reclaiming of what belonged to them on her own conditions. She does not deny history and is not caught off guard by it. In this regard, according to Brunnsma and colleagues, identity is a matrix of overlapping categories which change in different contexts (Brunnsma et.al., 2013: 485). In South Africa, it is because she is white and therefore is privileged; in the liberation struggle, she is an activist and is a comrade; and in the Black Consciousness circles, she is an outsider by virtue of her race. These categories do not align, and her liminality consists of dwelling within these contradictions.

Finally, Rosa comes back, however, to no final destination. She stands in-between the world that she has left and the society she wants to help create. This in-betweenness is not a failure, as it appears to be the only place she can truly remain in. The novel leaves an important question with the reader, which is whether this state of liminality is one that can support a life in the long run.

### **Journey of Rosa Burger: Struggle between Political Legacy and Personal Autonomy**

Being the daughter of Lionel and Cathy Burger, Rosa witnessed a white-led fight at home, which she never wanted to engage in. Her parents' open house which was a place of mixed marriages was near to being a historical heritage (Head, 1994: 111), the only thing that was left behind by her parents after their death and the responsibility of maintaining the heritage was a liability that saw her become detached from the communist doctrine. Rosa's life, beginning in 1948 with the start of the apartheid era, parallels its trajectory, culminating in her

detention in 1977. This event compels her to review her family's exemplary life and question whether it truly serves as a model for her identity (Head, 1994: 112), which leads her to search for herself.

In pursuit of self-discovery, she fled to Europe (Head, 1994: 118), the act that was later criticized as reckless and irresponsible. She lived with Lionel Burger's first wife, Katya (Colette), who had left him. Katya's ideology of living for oneself tempts Rosa, but the temptation is temporary as her upbringing demands activism and engagement with injustice. In this regard, Judith Butler's concept of performativity explains this conflict. Rosa's identity as Burger's daughter has been performed since childhood through acts of political solidarity. Abandoning this role means risking losing her sense of identity and confusing herself and others (2021: 24). Katya offers an alternative of a private life, but Rosa cannot sustain it. The habit of being an activist is simply deeply rooted into her brain.

Thus, the time she had spent abroad was seen as apolitical and rash escapism from the expectations of her South African heritage. However, this judgment ignores the liminal function of her exile. As Beech points out, liminal spaces allow individuals to experiment with provisional selves (Beech, 2011: 290). In France, Rosa tries living a life free from political expectations. The fact that she cannot sustain this is not a failure, but rather a discovery.

A turning point came in London when she came across Zwelinzima Vulindlela, a Black man, her acquaintance since childhood. His thoughts that she and her father were no different from any other white oppressor shattered her belief of being on the same side as him (Powell, 2017: 232). In this context, the Black Consciousness movement, which started in South Africa in the late 1960s, refused to make exceptions for white activists (Powell, 2017: 227). Zwelinzima reflects this ideology. He clearly tells Rosa that white people are not needed in the Black struggle. He argues: "He doesn't live black, what does he know what a black man needs? He's only going to tell him" (Gordimer, 1979: 159). This situation can be understood through Gayatri Spivak's question: can the subaltern speak? (Riach, 2017: 15). Even though Rosa is not a subaltern, her attempts to show solidarity are rejected. Zwelinzima points out that her voice cannot escape the history of white people silencing Black voices. Her silence to this rejection becomes the only honest response. Michel Foucault's concept of discourse explains this problem. He defines discourse as a system that creates positions from which a person can speak (Foucault, 1972: 49). Within the Black Consciousness movement, the role of a "white ally" does not exist. Rosa cannot speak here because this system has no place for her.

The same thought process is shared by Duma Dhladhla, another activist, against white communists when he states that “All collaboration with whites has always ended in exploitation of blacks” (Gordimer, 1979: 159). This criticism left Rosa with no other choice but to rethink her role in the political struggle. Gloria Anzaldúa’s idea of the borderland helps explain Rosa’s position. According to Anzaldúa, people living in such borderlands develop a “mestiza consciousness”, which is the ability to hold opposite views together at the same time (Anzaldúa, 1987: 19). Since Rosa is rejected by Black activists and also cannot return to a private life, she has to develop this exact mindset. Therefore, she learns to live with a contradiction: she remains committed to the struggle, but she accepts that she cannot lead it.

Her return to South Africa brings to her a new sense of purpose. She takes action to prove Zwelinzima wrong and differentiate her political praxis from that of moderate white liberals (Powell, 2017: 237). This can be seen in her work as a physiotherapist at Baragwanath Hospital, where she works with the injured patients. In this case, she is involved in body work and not political rhetoric. She is not protesting with signs or writing manifestos, but directs her attention to massaging muscles and rehabilitation. This is a political pledge devoid of rhetoric as presented by Gordimer. Rosa is a contributor and not a leader, and also, she associates by touch instead of speech. In this way, this embodiment of solidarity turns out to be her functional answer to Black Consciousness critique.

Subsequently, when thrown into prison, her devotion sets her apart of the generalization of white liberals who will pay, but will not fight (Gordimer, 1979: 322), a phrase she had used to insult Zwelinzima, but this was what she was trying to avoid in politics. But Gordimer does not give blank comparisons. Although the two women are in a close proximity, they are not equal. Marisa is the dominant, and Rosa the contributor. In this regard, Powell mentions that Rosa takes a subservient position (Powell, 2017: 233). This reveals her definite decision to contribute to the cause and not to take the initiative.

The story is carried until the two women are seen working in prison together, which depicts unity. However, this hope is not unconditional: it is due to her contacts and family background in the radical activist environment that Rosa was able to join the struggle (Powell, 2017: 233). Her own success cannot be equated with a far-reaching social shift. According to Powell, the story of Rosa is an example of self-liberation when she does not allow the Black Consciousness critique to paralyse her (Powell, 2017: 238). She does not make an effort to pass as Black, nor does she pose to be unaware of her

race. Rather, she is able to see a practical means of operating under the confines of her personal stance.

The conclusion is a question mark, can the younger generation of the black South Africans ever be completely integrated into a similar culture as the whites? The tension between the ideal of racial equality and the principle of racial separation is central to Black Consciousness. Gordimer, through Rosa Burger, interrogates the painful but needed reality of Black Consciousness, which is that black self-liberation driven by the need of true equality, required separation from whites. Because of this tension, the possibility of a truly shared culture seems distant for now, likely for at least another generation.

Rosa returns, but she does not reach a final destination. She stays in the middle: she is accepted, but not fully included. This is not a failure; rather, it is the reality of her situation. By avoiding false hope, the novel leaves Rosa exactly where she has always been, on the threshold.

### **The Politics of the Personal: Rosa Burger's Body as a Site of Resistance and Reclamation**

Rosa's journey from the conflicting inheritance of her political legacy towards selfhood is inscribed upon her physical body and the spaces she occupies. The comparison of her facial features to that of her father, coinciding of her first menstrual experience with the detention of her mother, mingles personal shock of puberty with public shock of arrest. Her fall to her knees and vomiting, uncontrollable shivering, and sobbing from the humiliation and self-loathing she felt after the phone call from Zwelinzima Vulindlela, all of these events show that her journey is personal, but also connected to outside real world that shapes and defines her identity.

Michel Foucault's work on the body and power helps explain Rosa's situation. According to Foucault, power in modern societies works through discipline imposed on the body rather than just physical violence. As a result, the body becomes a place where political forces place their demands (Foucault, 1972: 49). This is precisely the place of Rosa since she was a child. The state follows her and the political movement takes possession of her. It is quite obvious that she is the daughter of her parents and this shows in her face, particularly the way she looks like Lionel, something she cannot avoid. Moreover, the concept of the gaze developed by Foucault provides the explanation of why Rosa is constantly monitored. She is aware that all the time she is observed by the state, her father's friends, and history. This unrelenting observation dominates her behaviour even before any action is actually applied on her. Thus, her body does not belong to her fully, as somebody is always examining it (Foucault, 1972: 52).

The fact that she recalls leaning on the prison wall to console her father is a political act in which her physicality is regarded as the support of the movement. By that time, Rosa was already performing all the responsibilities of her mother at home, including supporting her father who was later to be arrested, too. On this day, he had put the issues of other people ahead of his. Nevertheless, he was aware that he could rely on his school-going daughter, who was completely devoted and was with the family in their united struggle (Gordimer, 1979: 12). The situation in this scene summarizes the situation of Rosa. Her body serves as an instrument of political unity, as she is pushed up against the wall that isolates her father from the outside world. Her job is to comfort and not to speak, to support and not to command. Therefore, while she physically serves the movement, the movement does not serve her.

In this regard, Judith Butler's concept of bodily performativity adds another point. Butler states that our identity is shaped by the actions we perform repeatedly (Buttler, 2021: 32). Thus, Rosa plays the role of Burger's daughter every time she stands at a prison wall or visits someone in jail. These regular actions actually create her identity. Therefore, to reclaim her life, she must act differently and do new things to build a new identity.

Space is a means of control that makes her body a public text, Burger's daughter. She, therefore, is subject to constant scrutiny of the state and her father's companions. This external labelling of who Rosa is and what her body should represent compels her to rebel, "I was struggling with a monstrous resentment against the claim – not of the Communist Party! – of blood, shared genes, the semen from which I had issued and the body in which I had grown" (Gordimer, 1979: 62). This passage is significant because it focuses directly on the physical body. Rosa does not object to the Party taking her time or loyalty. Rather, she dislikes the biological claim and the genetic traits visible in her own body. As a result, her rebellion must also be a physical one.

The fact that her first period happens exactly when her mother is arrested is the novel's first sign of this bodily politics. At the moment the government takes away her mother, Rosa turns into a woman. It is shown through her body as she demonstrates that she is capable of reproduction at a time when the state demonstrates its control over her family. The personal and the political do not exist independently in this situation; they are united in her physical body. Gloria Anzaldúa observes that residents of such borderlands tend to experience physical manifestations of their in-between conditions such as illness, pain, or numbness (Anzaldúa, 1987: 25). Thus, such experiences of the body as receiving her period, vomiting, and shivering are not personal problems of Rosa. They are material forms of her marginal situation.

Her defiance is not vocal. She does not make speeches or arguments and resorts to protesting using her body, by retreating into numbness. Elaine Scarry notes that the physical suffering may even ruin the powers of a person to speak any language, leaving them only able to make some basic cries or just remain silent (Elaine, 1985: 4). The physical reactions that occurred in the case of Rosa are her vomiting and shivering following the call of Baasie. She is unable to verbalize her shock and her body merely speaks on her behalf.

However, her gradual reclaiming of her body is her process of self-recovery. To some extent, her flight to the French Riviera is the process of reclaiming her physical being from the political arena and experiencing it as a source of personal enjoyment. Rosa also feels her body in a totally different way in France. She goes swimming in the sea, she has fun in the sun and she even gets into an affair with Bernard Chabaliere. Although they are not political activities, they are reclamatory ones. It is the first time that her body lives for her own personal pleasure rather than for the political movement. This is not an escape out of politics, but a move in the direction of embodiment.

The way that she reclaims herself is through her return to South Africa and rejoining the political struggle. Previously, her hands were put against the walls of prisons just as a symbol of support. These hands are now actually at work healing people. Thus, according to Gordimer, this real work is far more authentic than her political actions in her youth.

Rosa, when confined together with a Black woman, Marisa Kgosana, in a prison cell, shares a close proximity. Rosa shares her transformation with her. The most optimistic image in this novel is this common room. It is not the answer to the profound questions of race and politics, but it reveals them literally, in the way that only words alone cannot.

This is why the politics do not only happen in the mind of Rosa; it happens in the body, too. The body is the real foundation of her identity predicament. Between the prison wall and the French sea, between vomiting at the call of Baasie and the use of her hands as a physiotherapist, her body responds to the things which can be solved neither by political ideology, nor by the words alone. Her way of reclaiming her life is not by means of speeches, but through the physical acts: withdrawal, pleasure, labour, and closeness. This does not mean she turns away from politics. Rather, she turns it into something personal, in a way that her parents' generation could never have imagined. Eventually, the body of Rosa is not only that of Burger's daughter, it is finally her own.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This paper elaborates that making an identity by merely rebelling against the legacy of parents is not constructive of Rosa Burger. Her identity rather establishes itself in the transitional zone between the political speech she inherits and the silence she prefers. She experiences clear separations, transition, and reuniting. This indicates that in an oppressive regime, the identity of a person cannot be simply revealed, it must be harshly built.

Liminality does not only impact an individual in terms of identity, but also subjects one to crisis, disruption, and deep ambiguity. Such a volatile situation requires reconstruction of identity with respect to the social structures that surround the individual. As this is a transitional state, it is usually triggered by certain events that compel an active dialogue between the self-identity internally and the social-identity externally, leading to a new uncertain identity formation.

Rosa explores her way to selfhood within the liminal areas she lives in. She stands at the borderland of the political heritage of her parents and her own wishes, between being an exile and being a native-born South African. It is hardly a passive in-between status: it turns out to be the very trigger of her independence. It is within such thresholds that fixed identities lose their grip and she is able to break down inherited role of Burger's daughter and form her own identity. This dismantling occurred in very specific phases as observed in the analysis. To begin with, she dissociated herself with the world of her parents. Then, she experienced a transitional period when she was in Europe. At last, she came back and assimilated back into the society on her own conditions, as opposed to simply accepting what she had been given.

Ultimately, her silence is not lack but action, the most essential tool in her transformation. It is a tactical abandonment of performative politics and meaningless rhetoric. She has chosen not to talk and in doing so she exits a story she has not written for herself. The performativity theory as presented by Judith Butler provides the reasons as to why this is significant. When identity is created through repeating the same actions, denying to perform those actions becomes a form of agency. Rosa just ceases to play the role of Burger's daughter. By stopping this, she begins to become herself. The question posed by Gayatri Spivak in her query on whether or not the subaltern can speak also applies here, although Rosa is not a subaltern in the strict sense of the word. Her silence is not her weakness; it is definite denial. She just chooses not to speak a language that has no space for her.

This silence provides a safe environment to reflect and finally allows a deeper, more embodied resistance. Her practice as a physiotherapist is its supreme manifestation: a language of action and

care that does not involve the use of words at all. The concept of discourse by Michel Foucault presents us with the fact that the language is not a simple or impartial tool. Instead, it is a system which in that determines the very space where one is permitted to speak. The language of the revolution had practically drove Rosa into the given situation into the fixed role of Burger's daughter. So, in order to be truly herself, she had to step outside this system, even to the extent of choosing to remain absolutely silent.

Rosa turns into a living embodiment of her own resistance and her physical body is turned into a site of personal liberation. Her numbness and sensory withdrawal are an early protest of the body, a reclaiming of her own self from the constructions placed on her by others. This corporeal freedom, first explored in Europe and later directed towards her work of care, enables her to create her own meaning in her life. It is evident that the final position of Rosa is described through the concept of the borderland by Gloria Anzaldúa. According to Anzaldúa, individuals in such borderlands form an awareness which is capable of living with the idea of opposites simultaneously. This state of mind is precisely the one that Rosa arrives at in her final condition. She remains a dedicated member of the political struggle and does not speak up; she is not heard, but she is present and moves according to her own direction rather than the one given to her. In the end, she makes no attempt to solve these contradictions. Instead, she just learns to co-exist with them.

Her last acts demonstrate that the self cannot be merely spoken into existence, but must be lived and felt. This truth is expressed not in words but in the silent, steady and determined language of the body. Thus, liminality as Gordimer presents is not a weakness but a space of transformative possibilities. It is not a fixed identity into which Rosa is placed but an ongoing state of purposeful action. She creates a selfhood, founded upon silent companionship and physical care, that shows that selfhood is not something to be restored, but something to be continuously made through the pauses and silences in between.

This reading of Rosa Burger highlights the fact that there is more to identity in the repressive regime. The novel by Gordimer is a clear indication that one cannot attain a true sense of self by merely inheriting languages or by pursuing roles that were imposed on him or her. Instead, it must be built within the spaces between them in silences, in the physical body, and in those areas where official systems fall out of control. Although this is a bitter pill, it is a liberating one. When no language is able to fully represent who you are, there is nothing wrong with remaining silent. Rather, it is the first and most necessary step towards becoming genuinely authentic.

The personal journey of Rosa has been the primary focus of this paper, yet the larger political issues brought out by the novel have not been represented here exhaustively. What becomes of white activists after the Black Consciousness movement? Is it possible for a common culture to grow out of such a painful history of segregation? Although these questions are not the focus of this analysis, they are also very critical. To conduct future research, it is possible to consider how the issues, introduced in *Burger's Daughter*, are addressed in subsequent novels by Gordimer. As an example, *July's People*, once again, has the eyes on a white activist in a crisis. This demonstrates that the case of Rosa was not a very isolated incident, as a matter of fact, it was a theme in the lifelong interest of Gordimer on race, politics and identity.

Her narrative ends with the statement that real power is to establish oneself in the grey fertile spaces between. That is the real agency. Rosa Burger does not emerge as a heroine like her parents. Rather, she is turned into something far less common, her very own self. She finds no ideal solution in the gap between what she inherits and what she personally wants, the gap between being vocal and silent. Instead, she simply chooses to live her life. According to Gordimer, this is enough.

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