

Identity Crisis in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*

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Abstract

This research paper is concerned with exploring and analysing the crisis of identity in the South African society of apartheid during a transitional phase of a violent political change. Also, it exposes the social and political dichotomies inherent in the apartheid society of South Africa. The paper therefore seeks to unveil both the possibilities and obstacles to the future of South Africa's democracy. It analyses the mistakes of the past as well as the profound influence of the past in shaping the present. It focuses on racial tension, violence brought by the transfer of power to blacks and the reversal of roles and responsibilities. It further examines the contradictions of the present as a consequence of the repetition of the binaries of the past that still exist in the present. Throughout July's People, Gordimer depicts a situation of political impasse between the overthrow of the previous white supremacist regime and the emergence of black majority rule. Gordimer uses uncertainties, anxieties, contradictions and ambiguities that characterize the situation to foreground her views on racial unity incumbent upon a redefinition of identities within the new social and political forces. While she acknowledges the inevitability of the end of white rule, she is doubtful of the future in terms of what it holds for and indeed has to offer different races as well as their roles and responsibilities in a new emerging complex society.

Key Words: Nadine Gordimer July's People Identity Crisis Apartheid

أزمة الهوية فى رواية "قوم يوليو" لنادين جورديمر

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ملخص البحث

يتناول هذا البحث عرض و تحليل رؤية جورديمر لأزمة الهوية فى رواية "قوم يوليو" خلال فترة الإنتقال العنيف للسلطة فى مجتمع الفصل بجنوب إفريقيا. حيث يسعى البحث للكشف عن التناقضات الإجتماعية و السياسية وثيقة الصلة بمجتمع الفصل بجنوب إفريقيا لإزالة الستار عن إذا ما كانت هناك إمكانية لتحقيق الديمقراطية فى مجتمع جنوب إفريقيا, ذلك من خلال تحرى أخطاء الماضى و معرفة إذا ما كانت عامل ما زال يؤثر فى هيكله و تحديد شكل الحاضر لمجتمع جنوب إفريقيا. تناول البحث عرض أزمة الهوية و إشكاليات علاقة الذات بالآخر و ركزت الرواية بالأخص على أزمة الهوية فى فترة التغيرات السياسية العنيفة عارضة توابعها المجتمعية و السياسية خلال فترة الصراع. من خلال تحليل هذه الرواية, سعى الباحث لالقاء الضوء على موضوعات محورية مثل التوتر العرقى, و العنف نتيجة إنتقال السلطة من يد المحتل لصاحب الأرض و ما ترتب عليه من تبادل الأدوار و المسؤوليات. أيضا تحرى التناقضات المجتمعية بجنوب إفريقيا بالماضى و الى اى مدى يرد ظهورها من جديد كمكون بحاضر ومستقبل جنوب إفريقيا.

تعرضت الهوية الأصلية لمجتمع جنوب إفريقيا للطمس و التشويه على مدار سنوات الإستيطان. فعلى المستوى المجتمعى الهوية هى الثقافة من وجهة نظر المجتمع الجنوب إفريقيا و هذا ما يبرر ضرورة الربط بين هوية المجتمع و ثقافته. و لهذا السبب, هناك صعوبة تتمثل فى ضرورة التخلص من أزمة الهوية كونها السبيل الوحيد للقضاء على الحساسية العرقية. و هذا عائد لعدم قدرة طرفى المجتمع على إيجاد وجهه مشتركة تجمع العرقين (الأبيض و الأسود), و أيضا عدم تقبل المحتل لمسألة المساواة السياسية و العدل المجتمعى مع أصحاب الأرض بمجتمع جنوب إفريقيا. و ترتب على ذلك, عدم قدرة أصحاب الأرض على الخروج من تلك النفق المظلم, نفق الدونية و الإغتراب, غير قادرين على تجاوز الفكر الدونى و سيادة الرجل الأبيض (المحتل).

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Black and white identities, in the society of South Africa, have been ravaged through the false definitions imposed and fixed by systematic racial obsession. At the social level identity is culture and this is why politics and culture are so deeply intertwined in South Africa. There is no easy way out of the South African crisis, away that can end enmity and prejudice. The whites and the blacks fail to reach a moment of final mutual recognition and forgiveness. The former masters are still overwhelmed by a clear inclination to power and pride that make them refuse the idea of social and political equality with the blacks. The blacks are also still governed by a sense of inferiority and insist to see the whites as colonizers and strangers. Within this context, Kathryn Woodward defines 'identity' in her book, *Identity and Difference*, as follows:

Identity gives us an idea of who we are and of how we relate to each other and to the world in which we live. Identity marks the ways in which we are the same as others who share that position, and the ways in which we are different from those we do not....Identities are frequently constructed in opposition such as man/woman, black/white, straight/gay, healthy/unhealthy, normal/deviant. (1-2)

According to Woodward, identity determines one's own being, how he sees others and how others think of him. It also tells whether one shares others the same feelings, behavioral patterns, personal characteristics and traditions or whether he is different. A group of people are gathered because they share specific characteristics, whereas others are marked out. Another important point here is that the idea of opposition is embedded within the concept of identity. And always one part of this opposition is favorably regarded by society, while the other is usually disapproved of. One's identity, being described as appropriate or inappropriate, is determined by the roles society assigns for each member and also by how society expects one to act. This relates to what is called 'identity crisis'. In *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, identity crisis "occurs when the integrity of a person's SELF-IMAGE is threatened, disrupted or destroyed, usually in a conflict of loyalties or aspiration"(404). It also occurs when one has a self-concept of himself in the past different from the present one. The paper avers that the revolutionary war depicted in *July's People* evokes a crucial crisis of

identity that underlies the whites/blacks relationship, and constitutes the pivotal theme in Gordimer's novel. In addition, "the revolution ends apartheid, but it does not face the crisis of identity"(Aboud, 116). Both blacks and whites are entrapped in their historical roles. The apartheid policy of South Africa creates an irreconcilable hostility that weakens the possibility of making the dream of an emancipating identity unifying both the blacks and the whites in one organic whole attainable.

The ideological conflict in *July's People* between the oppressive regime of apartheid and the various liberation movements, and the possibilities of either going towards a violent revolution or ethnic cleansing were all "morbid symptoms of the interregnum". The novel at the same time explores the possibility for the birth of a new order in which Gordimer's identity is challenged and impacted on by aspects of the Black Consciousness Movement. The epigraph is related to Gordimer's personal liberalism and her radical sympathies with the liberal values of the African National Congress and United Democratic Front. Thus, in *July's People*, she discusses the role whites will play in South Africa that is emerging after Black Consciousness. Within this context, Katie Gramich has argued that, Gordimer "return again and again to the utopian idea of a shared space, a place where people can meet and live together free from the artificial fences erected by repressive regimes"(78).

In spite of a focus on revolution, liberal thinking and values are subjected in the novel to the most relentless scrutiny. There is ambiguity about the meaning of revolution as it is allowed to interpret it on at least two levels: revolution in its widest liberal sense as a radical culmination of justice, equality, liberty and rationality, and on another level, revolution as an eruption into the kind of chaos and violence. Having these two levels of meaning means that Gordimer's narrative discourse can explore both these possibilities as a way of reshaping a new identity in a new order. Thus, the imagined revolution in *July's People* is a smart fictional strategy to unveil the crisis of identity embedded in the whites/blacks relationship. And Gordimer uses this hypothetical revolutionary context to put the whites and the blacks in confrontations to examine the possibilities of future reconciliation.

The title of the novel, *July's People*, suggests a narrative about the people of July, the black South African servant whose name, as Abdul Jan Mohamed notices, "is derived from a calendar, is reminiscent of Defoe's Friday" ("Friday Updated: Robinson Crusoe as Sub-text in Gordimer's *July's People* and Coetzee's *Foe*, 140). The whites are seen as his people from the beginning and also they appear as the villager's creatures. The grammatical ambiguity of the novel's title embodies their

altered relationship as the revolution transforms July's owners into his gusts. Paul Rich, in this concern, remarks that the novel has become:

a study on the changing power relationship between the whites and the blacks as the structural underpinnings of the white rule are removed, leaving the former white employers very much at the behest of their servant July, who now has almost the power of life and death over the fugitive Smaleses. ("Apartheid and the Decline of Civilization Idea", 376)

This apocalyptic vision is used as a cautionary prophecy to enquire about the alternatives South Africans would face when confronted by inevitable political change. The whole existence of whites in South Africa is called into question. The white people in South Africa have to redefine themselves within the new order. Gordimer, in *The Essential Gesture*, further asserts this stating that, "...the past has begun rapidly to drop out of sight. Historical coordinates do not fit life any longer; new ones have couplings not to rulers, but to the ruled "(220). The metaphor of upheaval and chaos does not apply to the revolutionary activity of the radicals alone; it also applies to the upheaval in personal lives and relationships. Indeed, it is the upheaval in personal lives and relationships that Gordimer is preoccupied with. Although one is given a summary of the disturbances, one is directed almost exclusively to the upheaval and chaos in the household of the Smales and to the new changed situation and their relationship with July. For instance, the destruction of the means of communication indirectly puts pressure on the white protagonists and makes them live in continuous fear, always worried about their survival. Moreover, leaving behind the comforts of a middle class life makes the Smales lead an anarchic life in the village and finally leads to the breakdown of their relationship. Here, Gordimer is seriously interested to show how the political and social stability of the whites breaks down. In this concern, Katie Gramich comments stating that *July's People*:

is a novel which nevertheless demonstrates a sudden and un wanted sharing of space in South Africa, a moment when Maureen and July and all that they represent 'step across fifteen years of no-man's-land...duelists who will feel each other's breath before they turn away to the regulation number of spaces, or conspirators who will never escape what each knows of the other'. ("The Politics of Location: Nadine Gordimer's Fiction Then and Now", 84)

Gordimer, in *July's People*, makes a symbolic comparison between apartheid and revolutionary South Africa. This comparison is crystal clear when the Smales left Johannesburg in the chaotic fight of "the gunned shopping malls and the blazing, unsold houses of a depressed market...the burst mains washing round bodies in their Saturday morning grab of safari suits, and the heat – guided missiles that struck Boeings carrying those trying to take off from Smuts Airport" (*July's People*, 9). The imagery of upheaval reveals how the Smales' life is turned upside down. They are not any more able to stay in their white neighborhood with all its former privileges. The scene is an image of Eden that turns into hell.

Everywhere is the same. They are chasing the whites out. The whites are fighting them. All those towns are the same. Where could he run with his family? His friends are also running. If he tried to go to a friend in another town, the friend wouldn't be there. It's true he can go where he likes. But when he gets there, he may be killed. (*July's People*, 20)

The Smales' disaster that causes their fleeing from their white suburb to the wilderness is the result of a chronic state of an increasingly uprising and reactionary urban violence which spreads all over the country. This is the natural result of a long history of oppression and denying human rights for non-whites. As city riots become part of life, the Smales flee the fighting in the streets and seek the help of their servant. Bam and Maureen and their children are shocked to encounter the daily preventions which have been July's lifelong norm. Gordimer explicates this stating that:

That was how people lived, here, rearranging their meager resources around the bases of nature, letting the walls of mud sink back to mud and then using that mud for new walls, in another clearing, among other convenient rocks. (*July's People*, 26)

Here, the new reality affects Maureen and creates in her a total destabilization. She is culturally shocked by the new space. She is unable to believe her eyes, therefore in fever-like hallucinations she remembers the past: "People in delirium rise and sink, rise and sink, in and out of lucidity" (*July's People*, 3). In her mind, Maureen visits the comfortable past and compares it with the hard present. She remembers her childhood in the mines and the life of her family as middle-class people, fully comfortable and fully served by the black nanny who used to take care of her and carry her bag to school. In addition, she remembers the good old days with her husband Bam and her children fully served by July. Indeed,

the fact that the narrative shifts from Maureen's experience of the present reality to her remembrance of her past life may be seen at several levels. One can say that she is placing herself in another time and place in order to find a secure anchor with which to fight the new threat to her identity. In addition, encountering the poverty of the villagers at close, she is forced to make comparisons, which reveal how her comfortable identity has been built on illusions implanted by colonial ideologies. All these illusions are built into the liberalism of the Smales and the discourse of *July's People* focuses on how these old identities may be reexamined within a future revolution. This accords with what Gordimer states in her essay "Where Do Whites Fit in" that "whites must undergo a long process of shedding illusions in order fully to understand the basis for staying in South Africa"(196).

The removal of the Smales from their comfortable middle class life to July's village alludes to the stripping of the symbols that mark their identity as white middle-class South Africans. The collapse of the material structures and loss of the symbols of power leave the Smales helpless and incompetent in a culture and a situation which they cannot interpret. This situation uncovers the hollowness of the values of the bourgeois life. Their unexpected removal to July's village also reveals that even as liberals they are not different from the majority of white people who have grown up in Africa without a sense of belonging to it. The Smales' life has turned upside down. This is clear in the novel's opening scene when the Smales are awakened to their new make-shift quarters in July's village.

An antithetical sense of continuity and change is suggested in the opening scene. The fact that July "began that day as his kind has always done for their kind" suggests a static continuity that contradicts the radical change of setting from "governor's residence, commercial hotel rooms, shift bosses' company bungalows" to the "aperture in thick mud walls" that now serves as the Smales' front door (*July's People*,1) . The change of setting, which is also suggested by the transition between the "knock on the door", and the phrase that follows "no door", exposes the Smales to a new class structure represented by July's native people. A real sense of insecurity and loss is expressed by Maureen when she asks Bam "How to get out of here?" (*July's People*, 35). They could not know "What could come next; what to do next" (*July's People*, 26). The gradual degradation of the Smales' civilized form of life imposes new roles upon Maureen and Bam and provokes an equally primitive nature that lies behind their white masks the moment they are exposed to the wilderness in July's village. In addition to this, the change in setting introduces an

inversion of power that characterizes the Smales' new dependence on July, their savior and protector. In other words, whereas the "master bedrooms" of Johannesburg provide a setting in which the Smales exercise authority over July, their displacement to July's village invests July with a degree of power over them.

The white's displacement from their urban life to July's village makes the village itself the center of description. While the city is characterized by death, chaos and anarchy, July's village provides the Smales with peace, safety and security. The house in the city where the Smales used to live, with its several bedrooms, its bathroom with white china lavatory, its big hall and swimming pool, is reduced to a habitation of mud that the family now occupies. The master bedroom which has been lost "jolted out of chronology as the room where her [Maureen's] returning consciousness probably belonged" is replaced by a mere small hut (*July's People*, 4). This image of material prevention is clear when Gordimer states:

The hut around her, empty except for the iron bed, the children asleep on the vehicle seats—the other objects of the place belonged to another category: nothing but a stiff rolled-up cowhide, a hoe on a nail, a small pile of rages and part of a broken Primus stove, left against the wall. The hen and chickens were moving there; but the slight sound she heard did not come from them. There would be mice and rats. Flies wandered the air and found the eyes and mouths of her children, probably still smelling of vomit, dirty, sleeping, safe. (*July's People*, 4)

Here, the deterioration of place foretells the decay of a more civilized life as the primitivity of July's life outweighs the sophisticated life of the Smales. The pink glass cups of tea and the small tin of condensed milk are substituted by clay mugs and goat's milk. Furthermore, "the clay vessels Maureen used to collect as ornaments are now her refrigerator and utensils" (*July's People*, 85). More importantly, the Smales' children Royce, Gina and Victor bathe in the river not caring for the sanity ideals. Gina eats an African meal with her fingers. Victor steals a bag of oranges and more seriously he has forgotten how to read.

Maureen understands the importance of the surroundings to the formation of value. Removed from the master bedroom, Maureen and her husband lose all sexual desire. Maureen is aware from the beginning of the cost that transformation exacts: "It was a miracle; it was all a miracle: and one ought to have known, from the suffering of saints, that miracles are horror" (*July's People*, 11). Here, Gordimer offers a devastating

critique of the "human creed", the brand of liberal humanism which Bam and Maureen embody. Central to this ideology is their belief that it is very important that their servant, July, be invested with dignity. The major disruption in the identity the Smales have built for themselves as liberals comes in their relationship with their servant July. The Smales have always assumed that whatever made their relationship with July a kind and humane one was the result of their own kindness and liberal humanism. However, the narrative shows that kindness and humanness only covered what was a power relation. The change of surroundings, the new domestic arrangements and the fact that July is now responsible for them, shifts the balance of dependence and power.

Thus, the survival and safety of the liberal white family (the Smales) depend on July. By assigning this mission to him, he becomes the Smales' "forge prince". As utilitarian liberals who always think of exploitation and benefits, the Smales thought that July would be their savior. Thus, they accept July's offer to host them in his village. Here, the Smales' removal from the white suburb and middle class neighborhood to the village is intended to give the Smales a new experience that would force them to question the basis on which they have built their identities as white liberals in South Africa. Gordimer here is advocating the need to break from the old beliefs that perpetuate white hegemony over blacks. By so doing, she espouses the need to catch the conditions that make it possible for the cycle of exploitation to be repeated.

The paper, therefore, unveils the obstacles to July's attainment of self-consciousness revealing Maureen's failure to acknowledge or recognize his being. The paper presents Maureen as a symbol of resistance to change and presents July's actions as an instance of desire for recognition. It unveils the failure of the central characters to achieve self-realization and to, in Hegel's words, "recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another" (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111). Thus, Maureen's refusal of July's world of existence, a claim that is predicated in this paper, implies a denial of July's attempt to achieve self-actualization. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel notes that "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that it exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (111). The feature of reciprocal recognition is crucial to the attainment of self-consciousness for it is only in so doing that "the unity of itself in its otherness becomes explicit for it" (111). Therefore, since self-consciousness exists for another self-consciousness, it follows that any attempt by a consciousness to prevent the other from achieving self-recognition is characteristic of denial of recognition of the other's being

and constitutes an act of resistance to the other's quest for self-realization. In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon describes the self as essentially embedded in the concept of recognition. He states:

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. (216-217)

Within the context of *July's People*, Fanon's claim becomes credible in the dynamics of Maureen/July relationship. Uprooted violently from her familiar environment, struggling to maintain her marriage in the absence of its material and social props, and trying to make sense of her situation of dependency on July, who had been her servant for fifteen years, Maureen clings to the elements of the old structure of power, privilege and identity that apartheid engenders. The point here is that even though Maureen confronts the changing circumstances of her life, she "sheds layers of her past identity, but falls short of emerging into something new" ("The Dignity of the Unfittest: Victims' Stories in South Africa", 854). Maureen's inability to emerge as a new individual rests in part on her adherence to the privileges of the past. Thus, by clinging to the dictates of a social system that privileges whites over non-whites and by its laws and policies reinforce white supremacy, Maureen fails to acknowledge the existence of the other, July, and denies him his human reality. This lack of reciprocity on Maureen's part constitutes her refusal to "go beyond [her] own immediate being [to] apprehend the existence of the other as natural and more than a natural reality" (*Black Skin White Masks*, 217). Thus, Maureen's relation to July is characteristic of negative resistance to change and an objectification of July. And by virtue of her flight at the end of the novel, she rejects the possibilities of social transformation of both races that the revolution offers.

Central to the master/slave dialectic is the concept of desire. Fanon presents desire as a consequence of resistance and a drive to achieve "independent self-consciousness" (*Black Skin White Masks*, 219). July's possession of the keys to the bakkie becomes an instance of manifestation of desire-his drive to achieve human dignity and control. Therefore, Maureen's request that the keys to be returned represents her resistance to July's desire and the resulting confrontation between them illustrates July's refusal to be in Fanon's words, "sealed into thingness" (218). July yearns for recognition beyond his status as servant. He wants to be accepted not as a physical presence confined in time and space to the

Smales' home but as possessing an identity and worth far beyond that reception of him. In July's perception, Maureen's acceptance of his possession of the keys implies recognition of his worth and self-esteem as a person. This recognition would signify Maureen's trust in his ability and his humanity whereas her request for the keys would imply that Maureen betrays her trust in him, devalues the fifteen years of service he has had with them and more importantly undermines his humanity.

Indeed, *July's People* reverses the concept of inferiority and dependency of the slave on the master, for it creates a situation whereby whites would begin to re-perceive and rethink blackness and otherness as inclusive and natural rather than exclusive and reactionary. By bringing Maureen to the village, Gordimer forces her to see July at close quarters and to realize that her liberal attitude towards him is based on a misconception and misunderstanding of him and his people. Inevitably, Maureen has to demolish the image of otherness of July and reconstruct a new paradigm to come to terms with July's humanity. However, in their effort to maintain their old identity, Maureen and Bam cling to the old structures of power and status that apartheid has ascribed to them.

In "Living in the Interregnum", Gordimer remarks that the issue of reorientation is complementary to the process of transformation. In her critique of the white perception of blacks as a symptom of the interregnum, Gordimer in a statement that recalls the Hegelian concept of being for others, notes: "The hierarchy of perception that white institutions and living habits implant throughout daily experience in every white, from childhood can be changed only by whites themselves, from within"(265). The quote alludes to the need for black recognition and acceptance by whites. To achieve this status, whites must begin to see black not as a racialized other but more importantly as a presence, physical and natural. Gordimer, in "Living in the Interregnum", writes: "In the eyes of the black majority which will rule, whites of former South Africa will have to redefine themselves in a collective life within new structures"(264). Therefore, redefinition is not limited to identity only but becomes a process whereby the collective identity replaces the individualized one in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and tolerance between all parties.

The Smales' identity as non-committed liberals is revealed in the narrative. They are ineffective liberals whose passive position before the revolution helps in the continuity of apartheid oppressive regime. They have never participated in any action against the racial policy of apartheid nor risked their privileged position or life by helping the freedom fighters. Both Maureen and her husband relieve their conscience by joining several

liberal organizations that show sympathy with the black cause without taking real radical action against the oppressiveness of the apartheid policy. Even the Smales' relationship with their servant July in the white suburb is determined by this kind of limited liberalism. They accept July's offer to take them to his home away from the chaos of the revolution, thinking that they can still depend on July as a servant, that he will not change, and that after the revolution they can return back to their former life in the city.

The various confrontations between the Smales and July are very significant because they divulge how their relationships were constructed under the apartheid regime. These confrontations uncover the unequal and authoritative basis of the liberalism which the Smales represent. More than that, they expose how July reshapes his relationship to them in the new spatiotemporal context and how the Smales reject his new concept of his self and the new state of power he is endowed with. This is clear in the confrontation over the symbols of authority and power, the bakkie and gun, which the Smales want to preserve as a definitive part of their identity. The multiple phases of the Smales' confrontations with July are therefore ways of demonstrating how they act towards black people when they no longer have the power and the authority which define their status and mark their identity under apartheid society of South Africa.

The narrative's presentation of the recurrent struggles between the Smales and July reveals how even the Smales' identities as husband and wife have been built by the patronizing structures of apartheid and how ideas of manhood have come out of the masculine ideology of apartheid. Within the patriarchal world in which Maureen and Bam Smales have been socialized, masculinity is derived from the power and the ability to defend wife, children and material possession. And when Bam finds himself unable to do this in the new circumstances, he becomes weak and helpless. The Smales have never examined the basic assumptions of their fake liberalism. They have not realized its core dimensions in the old structures. They do not even recognize how their conception of husband/wife, manhood/womanhood are all linked with the socio-political constructions and ideology of apartheid. Consequently, in the face of the new context for which their lifelong history of racial supremacy has not prepared them, their relationship begins to dissolve.

Equally important, the Smales' deprivation of their privileged position affects the intimacy between Bam and his wife Maureen. The rupture in the relationship can be attributed to the collapse of identity, the dirt on their bodies, the bad smells and lack of privacy and loss of the symbols of power. Fear of disease and death by the revolutionaries continues to occupy their minds and replaces their usual intimate

conversation. In addition, the feeling that they live under the control of July, who has changed and acquired power over them, puts so much stress on the Smales to the extent that as a man Bam feels as if he has been castrated.

Maureen realizes that the absolute nature of intimate relationships between human beings, which is part of her definitive code, does not apply in July's village. She thinks that all people experience emotional satisfaction and deprivation in the same way or else there can be no claim for equality of need. She realizes that human interactions are not absolute but rather modified by the spatial context, which is determined by material conditions. Obviously, the narrative emphasizes the economic/political point of view. This emphasizes Gordimer's sympathy with Marx who states that one's "super structural consciousness", perhaps the "human creed" which "depend on such a belief in absolute human relationship", is neither innate nor autonomous but rather determined by the nexus of "productive forces" and "means of production" that form the structure of a community's material and economic base (2). So, one can argue that the sterility of Bam and Maureen's sexual life is caused by their preoccupation with daily survival. Maureen works in the field and Bam goes for hunting to provide the family with a decent meal. Being materially dispossessed, the Smales face an economic loss which imposes new roles upon them and hence affects their most intimate relations.

Indeed, the growing crisis in the relationship of Maureen and Bam suggests that their identities are in a significant sense inextricable from the order of experience and power that is under military attack. Both become disorientated in a community into which they cannot assimilate because of the effects of the apartheid race politics that hinder any possibility of reciprocity and integration. Maureen is the embodiment of the loss and deterioration that happen to the whites in South Africa. For Maureen, the explosion of rules ends the inspiring hope that South Africa represents. Her racial character makes her reluctant to accept her new life in the wilderness, or even to imagine the retreat of her race and the advance of the other.

Maureen is not only displaced from Johannesburg to July's village, but also from one cultural orientation to another. Her past culture hinders any possibility of communication with the other culture. The bush becomes for Maureen a symbol of "the perils western ego is exposed to in the continent" ("Africa in the Fiction of Nadine Gordimer", 18). The tidy life of the white master which Maureen used to live does not continue in July's village. The whites have no real relation to the land (South Africa). Maureen's displacement from her former life "back there" with all its

urban manifestations to the primitivity of July's village has resulted in a loss in timelessness. She no longer recognizes time as a system of order; she does not know "where she is in time in the order of day as she has always known it" (*July's People*, 17). Since that first morning when she awakens in the hut, she has realized that "she is not in possession of any part of her life" (139). The annihilation of the past and the vagueness of the present create a state of loss for Maureen.

In other words, the interregnum not only tests the roles of both Maureen and Bam Smales, it also tests those who are now called upon to create the new identity of South Africa. It is as difficult for July to assume his true identity as Mwawate, signifying the "village patriarch", as for Maureen to find her renewal. If Maureen is enslaved by a deep-rooted sense of mastery, July is enslaved by an overwhelming sense of slavery. His consciousness does not reach the limit that allows him to conceive a real sense of self. Although he becomes the savior of Bam and his family, he cannot overcome his inferiority complex. First appearing in the novel in his familiar house-servant role, July thus insists to imprison himself in his traditional role being Maureen's "boy", the South African term for the male servant. Even his insistence on keeping the keys of the "bakkie" becomes a symbol of his imprisonment in the role of being the whites' boy.

July is a practical example on the wicked influences that apartheid policies had on blacks. July is enslaved by his past. He has been for a long time the victim of colonial culture. Thus, he is not expected to become suddenly the champion of decolonization. In fact, he even could not drop the term 'master', as if there was no word to replace it. July even lacks the language that copes with his new role. Here, July only gradually faces the gap that fifteen years of alienation have left in his consciousness. Even the people in the village seem unaware of the revolution. At that time they appear as very poor, marginalized and without guns. They are still caught in perpetual poverty. The narrative reveals that they do not have decent houses; they live in primitive huts and depend on the waste from the material life of whites, such as old clothes, cartons, papers, rags and sacks. In short, Africans in the village are leading a very poor life. The episode of the gumba-gumba man is clear evidence of their poverty. At the same time, "their fun had its place in their poverty. It ignored that they were in the middle of a war, as if poverty itself were a country whose dispossession nothing reaches" (*July's People*, 126).

In *July's People*, Gordimer demonstrates what can be regarded as a critique of the black's consciousness. Gordimer states in her essay, "Living in the interregnum", that "in this time of morbid symptoms there

are contradictions within the black liberation struggle itself"(268). Nearly all the people in July's village have little interest in the radio news about the revolution. The revolution and the transformations that follow appear very complicated and raise many unresolved questions for them. A clear embodiment of this confusion and lack of consciousness that the blacks suffer from is the local chief of July's village. He sees the change as a threat to his little power and asks Bam to inform him about the events.

More seriously, both Maureen and July are incapable of abandoning the roles of the past. A history of the past is so embedded in their relationship that its outcome can only be destructive. Gordimer, in this concern, raises doubts about the possibility of mutual relationship between the two races. Maureen's experience in the bush demolishes all pretensions about the false ideals of her liberal stance. Yet, Maureen insists to play the same old role of the white liberal. This is clear when Maureen says to July "When did we treat you inconsiderably-badly? Nobody ever thought of you as anything but a grown man"(*July's People*, 71). Gordimer, here, exposes Maureen's lack of the human ideals that can enable her to accept July in his new role. She is not able to go beyond the fixation that "she was a white woman, someone who had employed him"(66). Maureen is not ready to accept a relation of subservience or even of equality. For fifteen years the one thing there was to say between them that had any meaning was "your boy".

Actually, the failure of Maureen's liberal foundations adds to her identity crisis. When the white loses his role as master, everything changes in his life. Decay happens at all levels, in her physical appearance and in her role as a wife and mother. Even her whiteness, the only side of her identity that remains unchanged, becomes a source of alienation. Accordingly, she realizes the hollowness and emptiness of their whole past, and of their political stance. Gordimer emphasizes this stating that:

They sickened at the appalling thought that they might find they had lived out their whole lives as they were, born white parish dogs in a black continent...They had thought of leaving, then, while they were young enough to cast of the black rejection as well as white privilege to make a life in another country. They had stayed; and told each other and everyone else that this and nowhere else was home (*July's People*, 8)

Here, Gordimer shows how largely deterioration extends to Maureen's relationship with her husband. Gordimer connects the deterioration in Maureen's private relationship with Bam with the overall social structures which they fit in. After a period of living in July's village, Bam cannot even recognize his own wife. Maureen returns the collapse in her life to July and his people. July, therefore, becomes the symbol of all forces that causes her deterioration. Maureen's relationship is with a former servant called July, not with a man called Mwawate, the name by which July is known in his village; and because she has no purchase on the cultural and social contexts that pertain there, she has not the means to understand how self-definition and dignity are achieved in that environment. But her failure does not mean that they do not exist, as the narrator states: "his measure as a man was taken elsewhere and by others" (*July's People*, 152).

The terms of the relationship between Maureen and July now become a tug for power, a struggle on her part to dominate and a struggle on his part to reject that domination. They both manipulate each other. In this struggle over power, Maureen becomes both prosecutor and victim. As a prosecutor, she deals with July as a predatory and cruel individual who loves to dominate others and keep them under her authority just like the apartheid system. On the other hand, the new circumstances make her appear as victim because they reveal her weaknesses and vulnerabilities. At one moment she is obsessed with the desire for domination and destruction, at another moment she sees herself as the victim who is humiliated by July's new power. Indeed, July establishes a new relationship between himself and Maureen with his "insulting" words that he has been her boy for fifteen years, using the word "boy" as a weapon to spur Maureen toward the admission that real trust had never existed.

Gordimer goes a step further by making the characteristic aspects of white culture in South Africa bound to a radical and penetrating analysis. The crisis of identity is announced at the very beginning as Maureen wakes up in the hut after their flight from the revolutionary violence of the town to July's village. This is clear in the following words:

Stalks of light poked through. A rim of shady light where the Mud walls did not meet the eaves; nests glued there, of a Brighter—colored mud—wasps, or bats. A thick lip of light round The doorway; a bold fowl entered with chicks cheeping, the Faintest sound in the world. Its gentleness, ordinariness produced Sudden, total disbelief. (*July's People*, 2)

The "culture shock" depicted here is crystal clear. Waking to the sights and sounds of a rural existence in July's hut, Maureen responds by rejecting the empirical evidence of being in a different spatiotemporal world through a conscious sense of self as something which does not belong here. Thus, she reminds herself of her former identity and that of her husband by recollecting the titles of a bourgeois society, which are bestowed through marriage, through business partnership, and through children's high cultural competition. The villagers' lack of material possession is what first affects Maureen, the daughter of a white miner and a wife of rich architect.

The continuing power that the Smales have drawn from their bourgeois identities gradually fades out as their titles become meaningless in the face of revolutionary dissolution of the institutions which validate them. Thus, Maureen's assertion of her identity by reminding herself of such titles entails an inexplicit invocation of power that she has lost. Maureen tries to protect the symbol of her class indicative of the Smales' bourgeois privilege. As July rides the bakkie, she shifts through the family's belongings in search of her shaken class identity.

In an attempt to defy the termination of a recently civilized life Maureen adheres to some of its norms. She takes with her "toilet soap", "toilet rolls" and a book. Bam, likewise, fetches the radio and some money. Ironically, Maureen and Bam soon recognize that their first world material privilege fails to translate coherently into the third world structures of July's village. For instance, the children bathe in the river not caring about soap and Royce wipes his behind with a stone. Even Maureen's book cannot provide her with what she calls the pleasure of reading and that is the false awareness of being within another time, place and life. In such a place, imagination becomes a reality, an ugly one. She lives in another time and place, "No fiction could compete with what she was finding she did not know, could not have imagined or discovered through imagination" (*July's People*, 29). Even, the packets of notes which the Smales are willing to pay in order to reward July's family for its hospitality are bits of paper in this place. They do not grant Maureen the refrigerator full of frozen meat and ice-cubes, the newspaper, water-borne sewage or lamps. In the bush money cannot afford them with such emblems of their former luxurious life.

In her relationship with July, Maureen both destructs their former relation, and jeopardizes the possibility of establishing a new one, on future standards yet to be decided upon. Obligated to depend on her own interior substances result only in the cognizance that "the shock, the drop beneath the feet, happens to the self alone, and can be avoided only

alone"(*July's People*, 41). For Maureen, the alteration is catastrophic, cluttering the order of her past life, transferring her to another time, place, and consciousness. Soon the Smales' old certainties are progressively fallen apart the moment they are obliged to get out of the dead shell of the past into a vague present.

More seriously, Gordimer shows how the primitivity of July's village evokes an implicit violent identity of the white man as she employs a series of scenes implying a wart-hog hunting trip in which Bam understands for the first time that he is a killer. Bam realizes his capacity for violence after this incident. Gordimer's portrayal of Bam's killing of the "wart-hog" proposes a dismantling of the highly esteemed role of the architect who now turns out to be a "butcher like any in rubber boots among the slush of guts, urine and blood at the abattoir"(*July's People*, 78). Head, throughout this scene, asserts the solid connections between violence, sexuality and bourgeois identity. After slaughtering and eating the wart-hog, Bam and Maureen make love for the first time since their migration, which underlines " a latent violence in the bourgeois channeling of male sexuality, an aspect of appropriation and ownership which is merely one aspect of the male's socially encoded power"(*Nadine Gordimer*, 128).

Along with this, Gordimer uncovers the connection between colonialism and latent violence which sustains bourgeois power represented by the Smales. For instance, Maureen asserts her own capacity for violence. "Did you find someone to take the kittens?" Bam asks Maureen. "I drowned them in a bucket of water", she answers (*July's People*, 89). Maureen's response is absolutely cruel. Bam is shocked by the ferocity supposedly forced upon Maureen. Bam's reaction to the incident reveals his racist prejudices. What appears to be annoying for Bam is not the act of drowning as much as the fact that it has been performed by his wife, whom he never expects to be a savage and primitive as the other women in the village.

The incidents of colonial violence suggested in the previous scenes declare Gordimer's critique of the white culture in the South African society. She explicates that such culture turns out to be double standard. For instance, Maureen grudges the fact that July, her servant, has stolen small things from the house such as her scissors and her mother's knife grinder. Ironically speaking, she has looted malaria pills from the pharmacy after blacks attacked the shops .Yet, Maureen does not find her act blamed or condemned in ware time. Likewise, Victor does not condemn his act of stealing an empty orange sack that one of July's villagers utilizes to make ropes. Victor is more offended by the fact that a black man accuses him of theft as an unexpected act of disloyalty but

Maureen and Victor's same act is justified and somewhat excused. Maureen tries to establish some equity between them; however, she often returns to an authoritative manner entrenched in her nature. When July refuses Maureen's request to work in the fields, she tells him that "I like to be with other women sometimes" (*July's People*, 97). The word "Sometimes" exposes the white's inexorable belief in the temporal and transient nature of such explosion of roles and affirms the deeply rooted racist doctrines.

Likewise, Black people are still imprisoned in their past. They cannot abandon their old roles. July's wife, Martha, and his mother remain unchangeable and afraid of the revolutionary outcomes. For the chief of July's village, the revolution is mere fighting in all towns. The authorial voice creates a sense of comfort and familiarity with apartheid for both the whites and blacks. At the same time both of them are unfamiliar with and suspicious about the interregnum. Maureen shows her anxiety and suddenly teaches nationalism to the blacks: "You are not going to take guns and help the white government kill blacks, are you? Are you? For this-this village and this empty bush? And they will kill you. You mustn't let the government make you kill each other. The whole black nation is your nation" (*July's People*, 120). Both Maureen and Bam assay to do without their former privileges, but they must also: "forget the old impulses to leadership, and the temptation to give advice backed by the experience and culture of western civilization-Africa is going through a stage when it passionately prefers its own mistakes to successes that are not its own" (*Nadine Gordimer*, 34).

In addition, Gordimer unveils the failure of white culture to fit in. The Smales try hard to slip into the life of the people in July's village. They are willing to do their share of work like anyone else in the village and make friends. They seek a relevant context in the new spatiotemporal world. Yet, they fail to adapt to the new life in July's village. Cooke returns the Smales' failure to fit in to their preoccupation with their old codes, which is the main reason why "they cannot find a new one in the veld" (*The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: Private Lives/Public Landscape*, 166). For instance, Bam and Maureen's major interests in the novel are maintaining possession of two things brought from the city, the bakkie and the gun, neither of which is indeed useful to them now because they can no more buy gasoline and, in July's village, they do not need the gun; they are safe.

Throughout presenting the Smales struggling to come to terms with their new world, Gordimer demonstrates a brilliant reversal of roles. The black people are not seeking to fit into the new world created and

maintained by whites. Conversely however, it is the white family who is looking for acceptance by less privileged class. In July's village, Maureen strives to be accepted by the other women in the village. One may argue that it is not just lack of a common language which isolates Maureen, but her lack of suitable knowledge needed for adapting to the physical demands of those agricultural and domestic tasks that make up the other women's lifestyle. "Maureen cannot tell the difference between a plant that even a cow will not chew and the leaves that would make her children strong" (*July's People*, 131).

Maureen is an outsider. She does not belong to the new setting around her. Maureen's detachment and her inability to establish a meaningful relationship with the other women are opposed to her children's ability to immerse in the new African life. The children start to behave like their black companions. "They are generally around as the black children are always about their adults. They even begin to cough in their sleep the same cough that one always hears from black children" (*July's People*, 50). Probably, Gina's ability to learn July's language, something which is beyond Maureen and Bam, is the most obvious aspect of fitting in. On the contrary, Head argues that these hints in the novel are "tenuous and do not amount to a serious projection of future reintegration" because the new order (black community) to which the children begin to adapt themselves with is "tainted by the dying order which had initially constructed it" (*Nadine Gordimer*, 134).

More seriously, Maureen's desirous thinking of making a trip home with July "to see where he lives, how he cleverly builds houses" and "[t]elling everybody at home we actually drove him all the way to the bundu, visited him as a friend" truly occurs in the most unpredictable way (*July's People*, 38). It is July who drives them to his village. He is also the one who is fully responsible for the journey and they are on his ground. Here in July's village, July is the one who knows what the best is for the Smales. In contrast to the Smales' powerlessness without July's protection, July is described among his people as a powerful master.

His head moved from side to side like a foreman's inspecting His workshop or a farmer's noting work to be done on the Lands. He yelled out an instruction to a woman, here, Questioned a man mending a bicycle tire, there, hallooed across The valley to the young man approaching who was his driving Instructor, and who was almost always with him, now, in a city youth's jeans, silent as a bodyguard (*July's People*, 73).

The portrayal of July's character in the previous lines explicates how he becomes the "metropolitan center" which Ashcroft defines in *The Empire Writes Back* as "the location of power and order". The image of the other as follower and powerless is dismantled in a brilliant reversal of roles. By stripping the Smales of all means of power, Gordimer elucidates how centrality or the idea of the center as permanent is radically changed. While the "metropolitan center" is marginalized through a dismantling of the image of the white self as a source of power, the black other becomes a source of authority.

Here, the explosion of the master/servant power dynamic highlights what George Hegel depicts as the conditions of "the master/slave dialectic". In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel argues that no matter how separate, seemingly antithetical or contradictory ideas can be adjusted into dialogue or conversation with each other by means of their "dialectic" apposition. According to Hegel, the master is a "consciousness" that defines itself only in mutual relation to the slave's consciousness. It is a process of integration and mutual interdependence. Thus "[the master] is not certain for existence for self as the truth; rather, his truth is the inessential consciousness and inessential action of the latter [the slave]"(95). In other words, both master and slave acknowledge their own beingness only in relation to the other. So, the master/slave "dialectic" suggests the idea of reciprocity and mutual interdependence between master and slave. As a consequent, the slave satirically shares in the master's power because the master defines himself only in order to legitimize his comparative privilege. In the context of *July's People* this claim is credible, to use Hegel's terms, the "thesis" of the Smales and the "antithesis" of July are merged into a "synthesis" in which both factions depend on each other for the formation and legitimation of identity.

The Smales' relation to July is not simply defined by the blanket opposition subservience/dominance but, following Hegel, it reflects a mutual interdependence which is dictated by self-interest. "Back there", Maureen has treated July as a "grown man", she "indulged" him because she "[has] been afraid to lose him [for] the comforts he provided"(*July's People*, 64). In the wilderness, the Smales' need for July is even more urgent because he turns out to be the chosen one in whose hands their lives are to be hold. By contrast; on the other hand July's privileged status as a servant (privileged because he is "decently paid", allowed to "live in the Smales' yard", given "Wednesdays and alternate Sundays free" and even "allowed to have his friends visit him and his town woman sleep with him in his room") ironically depends on the status of the Smales (*July's People*, 9).

Along with this, the outcomes of Maureen's involuntariness to learn an African language even the jargon of the mining camp are spotlighted by her alienation from the village, her inability to understand the local radio and her inability even to keep step with Gina's understanding of African language and culture. Early in the novel, Maureen believes that she and July have a special understanding. She is the one who understands him the way he expresses himself. She understands his "broken English and especially his use of tenses" (*July's People*, 95). Even when Maureen finds herself unable to understand July's spoken words, she would "give some noncommittal signs or sounds, counting on avoiding the wrong response by waiting to read back his meaning from the context of what he said next" (*July's People*, 97). Jennifer Gordon, in this concern, affirms that "the book demonstrates the need for a common language as a prerequisite for social integration and advancement in South Africa" ("Dreams of Common Language, Knowledge and Identity in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*", 19).

By contrast; on the contrary, the last events of the novel foretell Maureen's failure to communicate with July who espouses a different role now. The linguistic relationship between Maureen and July which is considered to be a successful one is renounced by July. He rejects the language of his mistress and his broken English which is structured to serve the interests of Maureen and to deny him a genuine voice. "His English is the one learned in kitchens, factories and mines. It is based upon orders and responses, not exchange of ideas and feelings" (*July's People*, 96). In other words, July's language serves only a utilitarian function for his employers. It is merely a means to read orders and perform the required work. July's acknowledgement of his sense of self and his power as the Smales' shielder stimulates July not only towards a rejection of the imprisoning language the Smales have imposed on their servant, but also towards a recognition of his long frustration and humiliation. It is really horrifying for Maureen to learn that the language she had used as a means of conciliation is for July nothing more than the medium of his everyday oppression and humiliation.

There is a reality to Maureen's relationship with July that now overthrows its previous mystification of language, and turns with an ironic vengeance. Maureen is deluded by her conception that she is able to comprehend July's unuttered intentions. When July opposes Maureen's attempts to fraternize with the other women and forbids her to work with his wife, she threatens him with what she knows about his former personal life, his town woman. Consequently, he denies her an access to his personal life and rejects her language. It is only when he speaks to Maureen in his own language that she acknowledges the falseness of her

position. July has been compelled into muteness by a culture that dominates means of communication. By restoring his native tongue July is able to defeat this silence and eventually espouses his role as a speaking voice.

More importantly is Maureen's granting of "his [July's] measure as a man" in terms of measurement that she no longer controls or defines. But it emerges gradually that the dignity the Smales confer upon July is an imposition, inseparable from the power they wield over him. Their conception of dignity as expressed in relation to their servant may be regarded as a version of what Gordimer terms as a "false consciousness". Dignity, from the perspective of the Smales, becomes "a form of humanistic chauvinism", a baneful misinterpreting of July's identity under the guise of good intentions ("Friday Updated: Robinson Crusoe as Sub-text in Gordimer's *July's People* and Coetzee's *Foe*", 56). Thus, the imposition of dignity upon July is shown to be much more than an act of misguided idealism, it constitutes a denial of the circumstances of July's life-and therefore of his true status in apartheid society.

The failure of Maureen and July's relationship is ironically conveyed through the sexualized description of their final confrontation which reflects the impossibility of any meaningful connection between them. This excerpt refers to Maureen's attempt to establish a sexual bond with her previous servant which may be her only and last chance to save their relationship. Stripped of a proper context and a meaningful relationship, Maureen is left only with animal instinct: "alert, like a solitary animal at the season when animals neither seek a mate nor take care of young, existing only for lone survival, the enemy of all that would make claims of responsibility"(*July's People*, 160). Maureen runs towards the illusion of her former identity created by a world of privilege and possession. She does not find any source for rebirth. There is no way for reconciliation; Maureen and July's "contact zone" is one of struggle and conflict, which finally breaks down their intimate relationship. Gordimer's presumed revolution, Rich argues, fails to "transcend the superstructure of [bequeathed] consciousness"("Apartheid and the Decline of Civilization Idea", 380). Maureen has uncritically accepted the consciousness that she has been taught in childhood and adolescence. She resembles many white South Africans who, in Richard Peck's phrase, "continue to wait remarkably isolated from the struggle around them in their private gardens"("Condemned to Choose, But What? Existentialism in Selected works by Fugard, Brink and Gordimer", 74).

Thus, a sense of mutual entrapment of both races is noted. Maureen does not move beyond her pre-revolution stance, and July does not give

up his unjustifiable submission. By Maureen's flight at the end of the novel, intersubjectivity is denied between her and July, and Maureen stultifies July's transformation. They remain in Hegelian terms "unequal and opposed, and their reflection into a unity has not yet been achieved, they exist as two opposed shapes of consciousness; one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live to be for another"(115). The master/slave dichotomy is still in place and July is held in subjugation. He must struggle to free himself from the chain of domination to come to the recognition that he exists essentially and actually in his own right.

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