



RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN AFRICA AND JULY'S PEOPLE

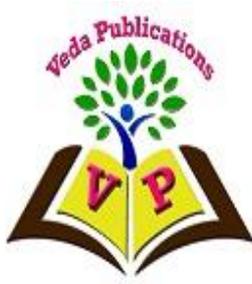
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ABSTRACT

In Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*, an equivocal standpoint on the part of the central narrative consciousness towards a hypothesized revolution, that overturns the system of apartheid, brings about several perplexing questions many of which contest claims of any favorable repercussions of the upheaval. The narrative presentation of the revolution negates all the ethics according to which successful revolutions are undertaken. Instead of fulfilling on the level of the narrative a utopian vision of post-apartheid South Africa with a promise of liberation, *July's People* persists in foregrounding and underscoring a Manichean polarized realm within which blacks are stigmatized as tepid numbs who lack all potential and prowess and thus are unfit for self-rule.

Keywords: *Racial discrimination, Downfall, Flaw, Inferiority of the Blacks*



Nadine Gordimer was born on November 20, 1923 for a family of white minorities; her father was of Jewish decent, and her mother was of English decent. This would influence and inspire her after that when dealing with the Apartheid system and the relation between racial groups in South Africa. Gordimer's first confrontation with racism started in her childhood. She noticed that the library she frequented was not allowed to black children.

July's People persists in foregrounding and underscoring a Manichean polarized realm within which blacks are stigmatized as tepid numbs who lack all potential and prowess and thus are unfit for self-rule. On the other hand, whites are depicted, in conformity with their commendatory image as industrious and inventive people who are caught in the dilemma of interregnum and thus arouse the sympathy of the readers. The paper investigates the puzzling issue of how the revolution and its devotees are extraneous to the parameters of the text. It also examines the ways in which *July's People* conveys the discrepancy in upholding the revolutionary ascendancy of blacks in post-apartheid South Africa while reinforcing in admirable ways white superiority and eminence represented by the Smales' family in their forced existence among the black community of July, their ex-servant.

Although she lived through an era of conflicts all over the world, Nadine Gordimer did not base her writing style and themes on them. She devoted her writings, however, to her country interests and oppression which was occurring in it. She was, as she always claimed in her writings, chosen by the subject rather than she chose it. Her speech for the blacks and coloured was in order to "coax the issues under

public scrutiny, although her work is not lacking the inevitable presence of voids and silence of the oppressive culture of which it is born" In other words, Gordimer by her writings wanted to make others understand their own society with its entire components.

Although she had a minor education, she devoted herself and writings to develop her country and make it better. Since her first writings, *Oral History* and *July's People*, she "devoted her life to writing collections that dealt with the racial tension that plagued her home country" (3). Gordimer, in fact, is the only writer born from a non-South African parent who "did not eventually return to the metropolitan culture which gave birth to the literature of empire. She remains in South Africa [as she believes to be one of its people], determined to invent an identity for herself as an African writer"(227). Her writings, though written in English, did not represent the English style, but it was presenting the South African style with all its aspects. Another aspect that critics focused more on is Gordimer's skin colour. They argued that she belongs to the white who are the

Cause and inventors of racism and Apartheid regime; so, how could she write appropriately about those she does not know well? However, although she is a white, she did not describe Africa like other whites did. Her fiction "inhabits a very different Africa"(228), not an empty world ready to be colonized by whites, nor a sad place of the modern Apartheid state. Gordimer political view expressed in her writings, especially in *July's People*, was based on what white English-Speaking group, to which she belongs, was facing in the twentieth century. The twentieth century was characterized by the emergence of



African nationalism and the success of Afrikaner nationalism. English-speaking people in South Africa found themselves in a very difficult situation which is more like discrimination than any other concept. They could not be part of the Afrikaner nationalism because of the linguistic and cultural differences nor be a part of African nationalism because of their physical appearances. In *July's People*, this awkward situation is revealed through the confusion of Maureen the protagonist of the novel between either to integrate in the black society like other members of the family, especially her three children, and reject her past life attitudes, or to flee out and restore her previous prestigious life. Gordimer did not see herself as an English descendent, but "the politics of South Africa make her an "outsider" to the experience of the majority of her country men, and the literature of empire still haunts of her fiction". To be an outsider in what you think it is your home lead her to adopt the British literary aspects to describe her view to what is happening in her country. This attitude due to the nature of the atmosphere in South Africa where is "a book is measured of political rather than literary forces". She believes that the author, and she is one of them, should be interested on the important details of human life, and do not limit him/herself in its own context i.e. his/her cultural and racial background. Nadine Gordimer as a nationalist South African argued about the South African "super-identity". This super-identity has been formed because the South Africans needed it to avoid crisis and split. Gordimer's sensitivity to the mood and discourses of the current moment in South Africa is shown through her writings. One of her influential and famous novels is *July's People*.

Gordimer's *July's People* shows the relation between whites and blacks in South Africa and how blacks kept their own identity through *July's People* is one of the aims of this work. *July's People* is one of Nadine Gordimer famous novels. It was written in 1981 before the collapse of the Apartheid regime as her own interpretation of how it would end. It was banned after its publication in Gordimer's own country home South Africa. The novel is set in fictional space where South Africa goes through a civil war between blacks and whites. Whites lose their power and dominance over blacks. The author situates the Smales at an unconscious period between black and white where the whites could not realize what was happening and the blacks were not sure of what is happening. The Smales is a white family living in a black village with their previous black servant as a refugee from the war in Johannesburg. The novel is a good sample of Nadine Gordimer's works which discusses and illustrates the actions of whites toward blacks and how these lost respond. It represents the author's vision and her search for "her own African perspective in a country with deepening divisions between blacks and whites". Also, the novel represents the writer's protest against the government decision to use Afrikaans instead of English as the language of study in some African schools. This act by the government was in order to reduce the blacks' access to the wider world, and to force them to accept their situation as inferiors by learning the native language of Apartheid.

July's People, like any other novel of Nadine Gordimer, is centered on the relation between the races illustrated by the relation between Maureen,



the protagonist, and other characters especially her servant July. Also, the novel expresses a shift of the balance of power. "White people gradually deprived of power and at the mercy of increasingly empowered black men". This shift could explain the situation that whites were taking before upon the blacks, and it is clear that the black is considered always as a servant to the whites rather than anything even he is their saviour. On their very first morning in the native village of their servant July, while living in the July's mother-in-law's hut, the odd situation for the Smales family starts. In *July's People*, Gordimer speaks of a segregated society, which is presented and embodied in her fictional characters.

In this work, when referring to the act of racism, it is not strictly limited to the physical separation, but it is more mental racism. This is because physical and mental racism generally go together; the racist acts of a person are likely done without thinking. In other words, they are done carelessly without taking into consideration the results of the person's behavior. When it comes to the physical separation, we notice two parts that whites and blacks are described as separated in the novel. The first one is their separation before the war which we can perceive through the description of their past house in Johannesburg. The second case is when the Smales are in July's village where they are living in July's mother-in-law's hut.

This physical segregation is accompanied by a mental racism and segregation. The mental racism is embodied by the bad behaviour of Maureen toward July. Maureen is July's boss for fifteen years, and she still behaves like that. Although she acknowledges in her speech his act of saving them like what she

expresses in the novel by "frog prince, saviour, July", she does believe that it was his duty as a servant to do so. Gordimer saw Maureen as "the last colonial woman" because she is directed and took care by men who are related to her from father to husband, even July, the black servant, took care of her and tried to keep her out of problems and at ease. These acts are "a typically colonial attitude-that the white woman has a man who looks after her"(581). Maureen identifies Bam's shameful behavior and inability to save them from the situation, as a betrayal. Just as July's refusal to hunt down the gun an ultimate protector of white power is a betrayal of their long-time relationship that she arrogantly assumed was based on their mutual regard. Female white mistresses, especially educated, liberal ones that Maureen represents, were as guilty as the masters of unconscious patriotism during the apartheid era. For Maureen prestigious and racial value, the change she went through is so fast. The changing of the sequence of her past life leads her to "another time, place, and consciousness". She feels very soon after their arrival in the village that she has been transformed utterly: "She was already not what she was. No fiction could compete with what she was finding she did not know, could not have imagined or discovered through imagination". This would explain the transformation of their life and power from whites, who thought themselves as superior, to blacks, the former servants

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