



The strategies of Decentralization and Hybridization in Nadine Gordimer's *July's people*

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Abstract:

The dichotomy of centre vs periphery is a central idea in postcolonial theory and an important model to describe the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The aim of this paper is to examine the dichotomy of centre and periphery in postcolonial theory and how this dialectic is manifested in *July's People* by the South African prolific writer Nadine Gordimer. The African novel is an important off shoot of postcolonial novel since it documents the native's struggle to restore their lost identities. South African novel written by white authors is a unique version of this trend of fiction since it dramatizes the awkward ambivalent experience of white authors being torn between two opposing traditions: the European and the indigenous. The dichotomy of centre and periphery becomes subject to modification and revision in the newly born multicultural society especially after the apartheid.

Key words: Postcolonial theory, apartheid, South Africa, centre vs periphery, multicultural.

استراتيجيات اللامركزية والتهجين عند شعب يوليо عند نادين جورديمر

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الملخص:

تعتبر ثنائية (المركز والهامش) من الافكار الرئيسية في نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار لكونها تمثل نموذجا هاما في وصف العلاقة بين المستعمر والمحظى. الهدف من هذه الورقة البحثية هو تسلیط الضوء على كيفية عمل هذه الثنائية التي بدت واضحة في رواية شعب جولي للكاتبة الجنوب افريقية نادين كورد يمير. ان الرواية الافريقية هي بذرة مهمة من الروايات ما بعد الاستعمارية لكنونها توقي نضال السكان الاصليين من أجل استعادة هويتهم الوطنية المفقودة. تأخذ الرواية الافريقية بعين الاعتبار الاعمال التي كتبها الروائيون الافارقة من ذوي البشرة البيضاء لذلك تعتبر الرواية الافريقية من الروايات ذات التزعة الفريدة في الابد القصصي لأنها تعبر بطريقة درامية عن التجربة المريرة للروائيين البيض الذين أصبحوا متقسمين بين العادات والتقاليد الأوروبية من جهة وبين الموروث الشعبي لجنوب افريقيا الذي يختلف عن الثقافة الاوروبية اختلافا كبيراً. لذلك فإن ثنائية المركز والهامش أصبحت موضوعاً للتعديل والتقييم في المجتمع متعدد الثقافات حديث النشأة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، الفصل العنصري، جنوب افريقيا، المركز مقابل المحيط، التعددية الثقافية.

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1. Nadine Gordimer

The award-winning short story writer, novelist, essayist and political activist, Nadine Gordimer is acclaimed widely "as an astute observer and interpreter of South African society," after she wrote twelve novels, a number of essays and thirteen collections of short stories as well as literary criticism over half a century. Furthermore, Gordimer's novels have been translated into several languages. (Kossew,2005,289) In addition, she is actually regarded the only South African writer to have won the Noble Prize for Literature in 1991. (Kossew, 2004,2)

Gordimer began her literary career as a short-story writer earlier on in her life, she published her first short story for children in 1937 under the title "The Quest for Seen Gold" and was shown in the *Sunday Express* magazine. At the age of sixteen, she published her first story which is named "Come Again Tomorrow" in the South African magazine *Forum*. (Driver,1993, 7) As many notable South African writers such as J. M. Coetzee, Alan Paton and Andre Brink, Gordimer addresses in her literary works the moral, historical as well as the political issues in South African society in order to expose the dehumanizing impacts of the discriminatory apartheid regime on the whole population of South Africa regardless of their skin color.(Marsh-Lockett,1998,188)Another recurrent theme in many of Gordimer`s novels and stories is the theme of white African woman in search for self-realization and participation in the political conflict. As Kossew (2004,103) puts it, in Gordimer`s works "the negotiation between feminism and anti-apartheid politics is highlighted as a complex one: South Africa's patriarchal society and its apartheid ideology are often linked as dual systems of oppression in which the white woman activist is always problematically placed". The political and social events between the 1950s and 1960s such as the imprisonment of the black political leader Nelson Mandela and the censorship on black writings, helped Gordimer become the spokesperson for the blacks since she exposed controversial issues of race in her writing. (Marsh-Lockett, 1998, 188)



The majority of critics have divided Gordimer's novels chronologically into three categories: the first category deals with "early novels" which were published between the years 1950s and 1960s such as *The Lying Days* (1953), *A world of strangers* (1958) and *Occasion for Loving* (1963). These novels show the interaction between the Blacks and the Whites under the apartheid. The second category is concerned with "middle novels" which were written during the 1970s and 1980s and that include *July's People*. In this novel, Gordimer sheds light on the theme of "Africa emergent" which depicts a new age in which the "Native Other" will move from the margin to the center and the consequences of that change. To put it in other words, Gordimer envisions in her middle novels what kind of life South Africa may have after the demise of the oppressive regime. (Marsh-Lockett, 1998, 190-191) On the other hand, the third category includes "post-apartheid" novels which culminated in Gordimer's latter novels *None to Accompany Me* (1994), the year that witnessed the demise of the apartheid system as well as the first democratic polling in South Africa, *The House Gun* (1998) and *The Pickup* (2001). (Kossew ,2004, 292) Briefly, Nadine Gordimer, the Noble prizewinner, has been more than sixty years a prolific South African's white writer whose works document the chronicle of the South African state and development of this dialectic of centre and periphery under this milieu.

2. Chronological Background for the Apartheid Regime in South Africa.

South Africa has a complex and diverse history which is full of various forms of persecution and injustice from the racial policy of British imperialism to the oppression of apartheid regime. As Simon Gikandi (2005,54) writes, "in South Africa, for example, the policies of racial segregation practiced by the colonial government, which were to culminate in the establishment of the apartheid state in 1948, generated a literature of resistance ..." According to Phaswane Mpe (cited in Simon Gikandi, 2005,607), the land was possessed in South Africa by the white



minority due to the Land Act of 1913 which was passed by the Union of South Africa formed in the year 1910. The Land Act reinforces segregation since it dispossesses the land from the black population and "legislate[s] unlimited powers of land expropriation to themselves by whites" (Heywood, 2004, 39). In 1948, the Afrikaaner National Party won the elections in South Africa under the motto of apartheid which continued to 1994. The government of apartheid imposed a number of racial legislations and discriminatory restrictions on the black population that affected their everyday life. One of these laws is the "Immorality Act" and "Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act" which were passed in 1950. Both of these acts were concerned with the social restrictions and the ban on interbreeding relationships. (Kossew, 2004, 99) Another restrictive act is the Publications Act of 1963 which was used as an arm to surveil the authors and ban numerous literary works that criticize apartheid. As a result, many writers ended in prison or exile. This act was strengthened in 1974 to control "anything prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare or the peace and good order". (Warnes, 2009, 76)

Other discriminatory acts which were legislated during the epoch of apartheid are the Bantu Education Act and the Group Areas Act. The latter act "mandated the teaching of texts that reinforced the government's stereotyped notions of the races". To clarify this view, the racial policy of apartheid is to control the educational institutions and to consolidate segregation ideas in South African society to prevent any integration between races. The Group Areas Act decided where South African population lived according to their races to impose certain restrictions on the motion and the settlement of the black people "by consigning the vast majority of them to abject poverty in deprived rural communities". (Gikandi, 2005, 718), (Amoko, 2005, 272)



3. The Concept of Centre and Periphery

The first use of the concepts the centre vs the periphery originated in commerce. During the nineteenth century which is the age of Imperialism and colonialism, the dichotomy of centre vs the periphery started to refer to "a sense of identity" in which the centre is seen as active and advanced while the periphery is seen as passive and solven. Consequently, the evolutionism of the 19th century vindicated "a radical break between civilized centre and savage periphery to legitimize exploitation". (Michael Rowlands, Mogens Larsen and Kristian Kristiansen, 1987, 40) According to Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, the word 'centre' defines Imperial Europe geographically while the words 'margin' or 'periphery' are used to define all things that are set outside the culture, the power and the civilization of the imperial centre. Moreover, the object of colonialism is to put the margin under the influence of the imperial centre and this is the reason behind "the economic and political exploitation of colonialism". (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2013, 43) This indicates that the term "centre" can be used in postcolonial literature to refer to people who have the supremacy to control the society and the ability to record history form their perspective. While those people or groups that are oppressed can be described as the "periphery" or other.

Said's *Orientalism* (1978) which is regarded by many critics as the cornerstone of postcolonialism, displays how the binary stereotyped relationship between the imperial centre, or (the occident) and the colonial periphery (the Orient) which dominated the nineteenth century is carried out in the twentieth century by colonialism and imperialism. So in this case, Said asserts the idea that the western knowledge of the orient goes hand in hand with exploration, expansionism, and settlement. As a result, the relationship of the Occident and the Orient turns into a relationship of "power, of domination, of varying degree of a complex hegemony".(Said,5)Furthermore, Said suggests that the Orient is depicted in European writings as an "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, different" while the European is portrayed in a contrast way to the orient, as "rational, virtuous, mature, normal". European Literary giants like



Shakespeare, Flaubert, Austin, Conrad, Kipling, etc. established in their canonical works the perspective of the Occident toward the Orient. In Othello, Shakespeare represents the periphery as "outsiders having a special role to play inside Europe". (Said, 71,40)

The Indian scholar Homi K. Bhabha is one of the eminent figures in developing contemporary postcolonial theory. His works show the relationship between the centre and the periphery through highlighting the concepts of hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence that are regarded as the ways in which the oppressed people resist the power of the imperial centre.(Huddart,1) Originally, "ambivalence" first emerged in psychoanalysis to denote the idea of duality in which one likes and dislikes something at the same time, as Ashcroft (et al) (13) put it "a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite".In a colonial context, the periphery is not in contrast completely with the centre. To put it in other words, the colonized feels ambivalence in the sense that they are dazzled by the colonizer's education, technology and culture, so in this case they do not exactly hate the colonizer. Ashcroft (et al) (13) say that the term ambivalence "refers to a simultaneous attraction towards and repulsion from an object, person or action". As a result, the concept of ambivalence subverts the imperial discourse to stress, for Bhabha, the failure of this kind of discourse in producing a fixed and unchanging identities. (Loomba, 105) Therefore, the concept is characterized by the dynamics of resistance which as Bhabha states

is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or the exclusion of the 'content' of another culture, as difference once perceived...[but] the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference.

(Bhabha,1994,110)



On the other hand, the notion of hybridity in postcolonial theory can be considered as a kind of "resistance" since it subverts the orders of the colonization and their purposes. (Prasad,112)."The subverting dimension of hybridity" as Philip Nel (5) suggests, sheds light on the colonial policy of discrimination and disturbs the power of the imperial centre. Thence, the dichotomy of centre vs the periphery is going to be distorted because the cultures of both the colonizer and the colonized are going to create a form of interaction in which no one of the two cultures is totally pure. As Ashcroft (et al) (137) put it, the term hybridity highlights the "mutuality of cultures in the colonial and postcolonial process". To clarify this view, both of the colonized and colonizer have the same feeling for one another. Together the indigenous people and the settlers suffer from that feeling and experience since sometimes the colonizer himself sympathizes with the indigenous people. Therefore, Bhabha argues that the recognition between the imperial centre and the marginalized people is sometimes blurred. For him (1994, 86), mimicry is "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite." [italics in the original]. This means that the notion of mimicry is produced with a sense of difference and mockery so that it is considered as a menace because it suggests the idea that the identity of the periphery does not quite resemble the identity of the centre. Therefore, the process of mimicry indirectly refers to the fragility of the colonizers` hegemony policy to dominate the other races` behavior. (Ashcroft et al, 155)

Another important pioneer in the field of postcolonialism who paves the way for postcolonial theory is the Indian postcolonial critic and theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She is mainly known for her use of the term "Subaltern". As a matter of fact, this term is basically a military one employed to describe those who are lower in rank, especially for the officers who are under the rank of the captain. However, Spivak employs it to refer to those people who are oppressed in colonial and postcolonial society and hence relegated to a lower class.(Prasad,23)Another important contribution by Spivak is her proactive essay under the title "Can the

subaltern speak?" in which she talks about the problem of the "method of analysis" which is concerned with how discourse in postcolonialism is controlled by males who are in danger of producing another type of "colonization" of the subaltern gender of women.(Shirley Chew and David Richards, 23-4) Consequently, Spivak expands the aim of postcolonial theory to include the literatures that shed light on women who are marginalized and victimized. She criticizes the patriarchal and dominant role of males in society and shows the secondary and inferior role that is given to women. (Leitch,2193)

Moreover, the contributions to postcolonial theory are not restricted to eastern theorists such as Said and the Indian theorist, Bhabha. There are also prolific writers from the west who contributed much to the field, like Frantz Fanon and *Robert JC Young*. In his book, *Black Skin White Mask*, Fanon states that the concept of centre (whiteness) stands for purity, refinement and justice while blackness "represents the diametrical opposite: In the collective unconscious, it stands for ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality"(Fanon, xiii). In his attempt to eradicate the association of blackness with evil, the black man (periphery) will try to imitate the colonizer's culture. That is to say, the black people, through the mechanization of racism, want to imitate the white society, in Fanon's statements "The Negro is not. Any more than the white man"(Bhabha, xxiii) To put it in other words, the colonized become no longer than a copy of the white man. As a result of his influences in the practice of medicine and psychology, Fanon suggests that racism leads to such psychological damage that in turn blind the indigenous people to their subjugation to white's customs and estrange their consciousness. He believes that the psychological damage is the vilest dilemma resulting from racism. Bhabha looks at mimicry in positive terms while Fanon looks at it in negative terms.

In a similar way to Said, Fanon also recognizes the role of language in retaining the structure of segregation, violence and oppression as well as creating the concept of periphery, which is opposed to the concept of the centre which is in turn embodied in the



image of the imperial west. To state the matter differently, the linguistic construction reflects the hegemony of the white man over the black man. Thus, Fanon writes, "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization". (Fanon, 8)

4. *July`s People* and The Reversal of the Centre-Periphery Dichotomy.

July`s People is an apocalyptic novel that tells the story of a white family; Bamford and Maureen Smales with their three children who are displaced from their metropolitan city of Jonesburg because of the revolutionary violence which engulfs the city in opposition to apartheid such as "[b]ombs raining down on Johannesburg; the international airport closed; invasions from foreign territory by South African and other armies".(Clingman, 1992, 200-201). As a result of that bloody force, the Smales escape from Jonesburg by their small vehicle bakkie to the black land of their houseboy Mwawate who is known as July. July`s rural environment introduces the Smales into the culture of indigenous African natives and deprives them from their privileged power as colonizers because of the black revolution. At July`s land, the Smales cannot adapt with their new situation in which they lose their privileged position as whites. Only the Smales children can adapt with their situation and mingle with the blacks. Eventually, Bamford and Maureen collapse and their marriage is destroyed. Maureen leaves her family at the end of the novel and rushes towards an unknown helicopter (Carol P. Marsh-Lockett, 1998,194).

When the Smales family arrive to July's settlement, they live four weeks in his mother`s mud hut listening to their radio hoping for hearing good news so as to return to their luxury and comfortable home in the city of Jonesburg and urban life. (Robert Green,1988,559) In contrast to "a seven-roomed house and swimming-pool" (JP,22) the Smales in this hut have to



stay in the dark of the hut a long while to make out what was on the walls. In the wife's hut a wavy pattern of broad white and ochre bands. In others—she did not know whether or not she was welcome where they dipped in and out all day from dark to light like swallows—she caught a glimpse of a single painted circle, an eye or target, as she saw it.

(25)

The Smales have to stay in such a gloomy and dirty environment since they have no other choice and place to live. (Green, 561) What is more is that the white family have lost their omnipotence (Michael Wade, 1993,151) since they find themselves at a situation in which "they had lived out their whole lives as they were, born white pariah dogs in a black continent".(11) As Dominic Head (126) notes, "[t]he notionally traditional existence of July's community is an aspect of the regime's discriminatory fantasy, already doomed to a failure which will perpetuate economic dependency, and inequality". Therefore, it has been observed that the affluence and prosperity of the metropolitan centre were based on the poverty and disinheritance of the indigenous African natives.

The novel opens with the conversation between the Smales and July who bents at the gate and says, "[Smales] like to have some cup of tea?"(6). July's message violates his relationship to his white master since he does not use the word "sir" so as to equal himself with his masters. (A. Majeed Abdul-hameed, 2018, 35) Thus, the opening scene reveals the new situation and social role of the suburban white family who lose their privileged position and identity as independent individuals and begin to depend on their former servant July who is now "their servant, [and] their host" (6). As a result, the relationship between the Smales and July has been shaken and reversed; this is "the master-servant reversal" in Clingman's words, (199). In the light of this view, Robert Green (560)



states that the transformation of roles has cataclysmic effect on the Smales's personality especially Maureen turning her to "another time, place, consciousness"(25).

Bamford is transformed from an active architect to a powerless passive listener to radio. In his endeavor to restore his traditional job as an architect; the designer of "the house of the white race", Bamford Smales engages himself in performing certain tasks such as hunting and building "water tank" which indicates that Bam emphasizes his own identity among the indigenous people of July. (Rita Barnard, 2006, 62) In contrast, Maureen cannot "walk out into the boundlessness" (23) and cannot work with the black women. The traditional African woman Martha, July's wife, believes Maureen is an incompetent figure who is unable to perform any task in the field. (Marie Napierkowski, 1998, 201) Furthermore, Martha like the majority of "the women of child-bearing age had husbands who spent their lives in those cities the women had never seen".(64) In this regard, Martha emphasizes this sense of being husbandless. Nevertheless, Martha is suspicious about the coming of whites to her nomadic land that's why she addresses July by saying, "white people here! Didn't you tell us many times how they live, there. A room to sleep in, another room to eat in, another room to sit in, a room with books"(18) When July notices that Marth is upset with the coming of whites, he asserts his position as a master and says, "If I say go, they must go. If I say they can stay... so they stay". (63) (Gordimer's ellipses) According to Barbara (51), this scene represents the patriarchal role of July's black culture.

To amuse herself, Maureen attempts to read a novel just like *I Promessi Sposi* ;(*The Betrothed*) by the Italian Alessandro Manzoni., a historical novel of the nineteenth century which reminds her of her Eurocentric civilization (Barnard, 41), but no novel can grant her an escape from her bad situation since 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". (25) As a reaction to that, Maureen in a flashback scene recalls her childhood life



in the city and remembers her former black servant Lydia who always carries on her head Maureen's school bags which "contains the books and gym suit that prepare her for a life of mental work and physical leisure to which the black woman has no access". (Rosemarie Bodenheimer cited in Bruce King, 110-111) As Darren Felty remarks, "in her attempts to overcome the constraints of her current existence, Maureen actually discovers the limits of her former existence and the arrogance of her comfortable sense of personal worth". (Marie Napierkowski, 201) Through this scene Gordimer explicates the exploitation of black people and how they carry the burden of whites. Throughout the course of the novel, the identity of Maureen drastically transforms. This indicates the marginal place in which self-realization and new identity may be elucidated. In other words, the new environment in which Maureen lives in July's space affects her perceptions and self-realization in the novel. As Bhabha (1994,51) foresees "the access to the image of identity is only ever possible in the negation of any sense of originality or plenitude; the process of displacement and differentiation (absence/presence, representation/repetition) renders it a liminal reality".

When the white family is displaced to July's land, they lose their authority and possessions beside their political role as a prestige figures. For instance, July one day drives the bakkie without asking permission from Smales family. (Clingman, 199) According to Head (125), the vehicle is a "symbol of bourgeois status in normal use" since it becomes not an object, but a commodity which reflects the white's consumer orientation which loses its value from being a "superfluous leisure object into a 'vehicle' of salvation", a symbol of liberty for the Smales bourgeois family. (Bodenheimer cited in Bruce King,111) For Darren Felty, the bakkie means that July controls the only means of escape for the Smales and subverts their old master-servant relation. In this regard, the struggle between July and Maureen over the bakkie's keys is a kind of struggle over their new social roles. (Napierkowski, 201) Maureen wants to retain the power of her domination through her control of the vehicle which stands for "the technology that has allowed [centre]



to control [periphery] in South Africa" (JanMohamed, 1983, 140-141). Talking about the bakkie, July affirms his new role as a privileged person rather than a servant to the European family. Therefore, he says,

If they catch you, without a license . . . He laughed . . . Who's going to catch me? The white policeman is run away when the black soldiers come that time. Sometime they take him. I don't know . . . No one there can ask me where is my license. Even my pass, no one can ask me anymore. It's finished. (47)

The above excerpt is a direct reference to the abolition of the power of the white regime in South Africa. As result, blacks can pass freely without being questioned about their licenses to pass in the white district. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer puts it "the van becomes a 'vehicle' for the dissolution of the social contract under which whites own and blacks take care". (King, 111) July's taking the bakkie without permission from his former white masters leads Maureen to accuse him of getting benefit from war and getting the vehicle to "drive around like a gangster, imagining yourself a big man, important," (113). This view has been emphasized by Said (2003,332) who states that "the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society". Moreover, July is also a good example of Bhabha's concept of ambivalence since he mimics the colonizer to give himself a prestigious position among his African villagers through his ownership of the Smales's bakkie that he has never had earlier since a man draws his wealth from what he owns. That is to say, a man identifies himself strongly with the things he consumes. (Napierkowski, 202). In echoing Spivak's view, Gordimer gives July who stands for subaltern people a voice in the sense that July `s state of mimicking the colorizer represents as threat to the hegemony of the whites community. The whites lose their control and influence on blacks who try to assume the identity of their



colonizers through the possessing or sharing the objects of the whites. Rosemarie Bodenheimer writes,

In his own way July too must disinvest himself of his interests in apartheid capitalism. The possessive 'his white people' indicates a certain pride of status which the Smaleses confer on him in the eyes of his village, and he is at first prepared to save this 'possession' from revolution. He too associates his employers' identities with their things... (118)

For Head (132), the process of decolonization that calls for the revival of indigenous African norms cannot be easily reborn in the post-apartheid state since "[periphery] communities are already tainted by the ideas and effects of the capitalist system, which has artificially called them into being for its own exploitative ends". In this case, July has been tainted by the Smales` bakkie which is a symbol of the capitalist order. Unlike Bhabha, Fanon warns against the idea of mimicking the whites` culture and urges blacks to be themselves, i.e., rather than a "white man's artifact". (Bhabha, 6) In contrast to their bourgeois parents, the children of the Smales mingle themselves with the indigenous black culture. With reference to Bhabha`s word, white children also get hybridized by African values and traditions. That is to say, these children are absorbed in the black primitive community. (Robert Green, 559) As Carol P. Marsh-Lockett (194) states the fact that "only the Smales children remain functional indicates that the hope for white South Africa lies in a new and adaptable generation". Similarly, Head (123) highlights the same view and writes that the mingle of white and black children stand for "hints of a worthwhile future in the occasional actions and responses of the [Smales`] children in the novel, hints of how a reconstructed post-apartheid identity might emerge".



When Maureen views that her children absorb and integrate with African native culture and drift away from their Eurocentric culture through "abandoned shoes"(24), "playing with skeletal carts, home-made of twisted wire by the black children"(32) and their playing with the kittens, she drowns the kittens in "a bucket of water". (Clingman, 197) Commenting on this episode, Head (128) points out that comparing the scene of Maureen's drowning the kittens with that of killing the pig by Bamford suggests "the latent violence which underpins bourgeois power". Gina, the little daughter of the Smales family, eats her food "with her fingers"(32) and learns the language as well as the behavior of her native black friend, Nyiko. Consequently, the two little girls share the same cultural and social heritage. (Clingman, 197)

Victor, the Smales' eldest son, is in the beginning of the novel unable to adapt to African culture since he believes that the water in the tank which was built by his father belongs to the Smales only, "everybody's taking water! They've found it comes out the tap. Everybody's taking it! I told them they're going to get hell, but they don't understand. Come quick, dad! —... [water]'s ours, it's ours"(49-50) Commenting on this scene, Kiziltas and Uysal (175) state that whites "cannot even tolerate the possibility of sharing [even water] with anyone else". This vividly shows that they reject to share their objects with blacks. In another scene, Victor "wants to impress other children with his racing-car track". (Erritouni,2006 79) This indicates that whites always feel superior to blacks not only intellectually, but also economically.

As time passes, Victor learns some African gestures, especially "obeisance", a gesture which is performed by African children when they receive nourishment. (Head, 134) Victor performs this traditional native gesture when July gives him a gift: "Victor is seen to clap his hands, sticky with mealie-pap, softly, gravely together and bob obeisance, receiving the gift with cupped palms" (115). Moreover, the white children adopt with the African environment and learn the name of African words. For instance, the Smales' children become familiar with the name "gumba-gumba" which means musical loudspeaker, in the native



language and don't know the name of it in their language. (John Cooke, 1946,189) (Italics in the origin)

Another reference to this process of negotiating or exchanging culture is seen in Royce, the smallest child of the Smales, who wipes himself by using a stone instead of a toilet paper. Consequently, Maureen and Bamford become afraid that their children will turn into native blacks and lose their white identity. That is why Maureen notes that her children become more filthy than blacks since their white skin cannot bear living in rural nature and they become as if strangers to her. (Napierkowski, 190) Ashcroft et al (132) refers to this process as "going native" which focuses on "the colonizers' fear of contamination by absorption into native life and customs". Throughout the novel, Gordimer introduces the theme of "language and communication" which is regarded by the critic Jennifer Gordon, as a main theme since language is an "instrument of social change". (Head,129) In this regard, the failure of communication between Maureen and July reflects the transformation that has taken place in their social roles. In other words, the awkward negotiations between Maureen and July reflect their reverse social roles. However, Maureen's English language, which is regarded as a lingua franca, reflects her hegemonic power which enables her to

deny a genuine voice to July; July knows only scraps of English - orders and responses - acquired from subservient working situations ... July's English serves only a utilitarian function for his employers; it is merely a tool to extract useful work from him. For July, therefore, the English he speaks with his employers is a one-way channel only: however considerate the liberal Smales may feel themselves to have been, the imprisoning language they have imposed on their servant - their 'boy' as July insists on calling himself - confirms and reinforces the hegemony. (Head ,130)



To make the above quotation clearer, Maureen constructs July's English language as suitable only for spaces of "labor and servitude: 'kitchens, factories, and mines'" (Barnard,64). That is to say, she and July base their language on "orders [given by central] and responses [made by periphery], not the exchange of ideas and feelings" (73). This line refers to language as a symbol of power. So, in this case, power does not only relate to politics and economy, but it can also be related to language. Commenting on that use of language, Clingmans (200) suggests, "language in this context is a battlefield as [sic] much a battlefield as the realm of private and political relations it helps both constitute and conceal". To say the matter differently, the function of language under the apartheid rule is reversed since it becomes a tool of separation of division rather than communication. (Neill,1990,81)

Towards the end of the novel, an unknown helicopter lands near the village of July and nobody knows if the helicopter is manned by the army troops of the state or by the revolutionary fighters. Maureen attempts to escape from July's village by rushing to this helicopter in spite of the fact that she is oblivious what it will bring her "saviours or murderers"(116) because of her sufferings from internal crisis since she can no longer fulfil her role as both mother and privileged person. (Molin, 1997, 175) As a result, Maureen becomes bankrupt of everything. (Napierkowski,201) As Rosemarie Bodenheimer (117) puts it "[she has] no place as wife, mother, mistress or friend, she has the feeling of not being there as life proceeds around her".

Another point to consider is that there is no agreement among critics about the ultimate scene of Gordimer's *July's People*. As Stephen Clingman remarks, "the circumstances in which [the final scene] occurs are ambiguous...[Maureen] is running from old structures and relationships, which have led her to this cul-de-sac" (203) Rosemarie Bodenheimer (119) reads Maureen's dashes for a helicopter as a "flight toward the only source of power that has manifested itself in the bush, a desperate run for 'civilization' in its undisguised aggressive



and technological form". According to Rowland Smith, (98) that scene reflects the collapse of Maureen's identity. For Green (562) the helicopter, which is "the novel's deus ex machina", is unsuitable to regrade Maureen's impulse towards the helicopter as a treason to her family as well as her black protectors since these notions have been teared by the uprising. Additionally, Maureen prefers this unknown destination to becoming one of July's people. Robert Green writes:

She runs: trusting herself with all the suppressed trust of a lifetime, alert, like a solitary animal at the season when animals neither seek a mate nor take care of young, existing only for their lone survival, the enemy of all that would make claims of responsibility. She can still hear the beat, beyond those trees and those, and she runs towards it. She runs. (117-118)

Cooke (174) observes that Maureen's escaping stands for "[her] failure to make the transition to the world of the veld". That is to say, the helicopter symbolizes Maureen's past memories in Jonesburg. Therefore, she "continues to run, balancing and jumping from boulder to boulder with the skill of a ballet dancer that she has acquired in the city"(Quayum,1996, 23). Similarly, Nancy Bailey points out that the helicopter emblematises Maureen's "return to the illusion of identity created by the world of privilege and possession".(Napierkowski, 208)

To sum up, the novel has been set in a fictional narrative in which Gordimer prophesies a civil war in the future in which South African black armies engulf all South Africa in opposition to white leaders of apartheid. Eventually blacks overthrow the racial regime of the white minority colonizers who start struggling for their existence. That is why *July's People* has been viewed "as an act of preparing for the future". (Clinman, 196) That is to say, the authoress views the present state through an outlook vision. (Clinman, 202). What is more, Michael Neill (85) remarks that the text, "shows how revolutionary political change



necessarily requires linguistic transformation and how linguistic transformation must amount to an absolute metamorphosis of the self". Notwithstanding, the optimistic view in the novel can be found in the new generation which is presented in the novel through the Smaless children since they are ready to integrate and are not contaminated by the segregation polices of apartheid regime. This gives the hope of establishing a new multicultural society where whites and blacks co-exist as one nation in which centre and periphery are merged.

Conclusion

Regardless of being white South African novelist, Nadine Gordimer utilizes her literary talent to expose the everyday bad treatment and dehumanization of South African blacks under the tyrannous white regime of apartheid. Generally speaking, Gordimer's literary writings reflect the perspective and the experience of the marginalized community of her country and call for impartiality, independence and emancipation for all races and genders. Therefore, Gordimer visualizes the demise of apartheid in *July's People* in which the relation between centre and periphery have been completely reversed in the sense that the whites (the Smales family) become refugees in the land of their black servant, July who becomes the provider and protector of his European master.

What is more essential, *Gordimer* gives voice to July who is silenced for a long time by the hegemony of the white minority regime. This sense of silence functions as a weapon in the face of the oppressive regime of apartheid. As a result, the children of both European and African families, who represent the next generation, mingle with each other and understand their different cultures and languages. This indicates that the postcolonial communities will no longer be polarized, but they will be hybridized into newly rising harmonious societies. Hence, centre and periphery complete each other to constitute the fabric of South African society.



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