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**Domination of White Minority Over Black Majority in Nadine Gordimer's  
July's People: A Critical Perspective**

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***Abstract:***

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the effect of white supremacy over black identities in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* and how society was affected due to white domination. This article is to portray the identity of black and white people in the novel that the apartheid authorities forbade. *July's People* examines the ethnic ties and dominion battles concerning the two groups of black and white in South Africa, in addition to highlighting the issues associated with race and gender generally. However, during the apartheid era, this book prophesies the fall of the system, which occurred in 1994, thirteen years after the novel was published. Thus, a black insurgency tactic that has not yet been put into practice, is depicted in the fictitious work. The study will demonstrate how ethnicity plays an important role in classifying into superior and inferior groups. In addition, it will examine how the old power structure transforms into a fractured one and how the characters respond to the shifting circumstances. Gordimer's work *July's People* is a complex, scathing commentary on the white liberals, indeed powerful! The research will also evaluate the themes that are central to the discussion of this research article.

**Key Words:** Apartheid, White domination, Black oppression, Identities of black and white people.

## **Introduction:**

### **The System of Racial Segregation Under Apartheid:**

In the years 1948–1990, South Africa and Southwest Africa (now Namibia) had institutionalized racial segregation under apartheid, particularly in South African English. It is also known as the separateness system. Apartheid was a practice or system of racial segregation or discrimination in South Africa. The African National Congress Party (ANC) opposed the policies of racial segregation during Apartheid which became the history of the nation among nonwhite majority and dominant white minority. *July's People* (1981) was written by South African author Nadine Gordimer. It takes place in a near-future South Africa when a civil conflict ends apartheid. Before apartheid was abolished, Gordimer predicted how it would end in her book. Following its publication and later under the post-apartheid government, the book was outlawed in South Africa. The apartheid regime occurred in South Africa from 1948 to 1994 which means apartness. The distinct racial groups were required for growth from this system. On record, it mentioned that the representation of cultural groups will be treated as equal growth, however, this did not happen in reality. The law was issued through apartheid. This forced racial groups to live in separate places from whites in extremely unequal ways and they will use public facilities separately. It was an effort to prevent multi-racial unions and racial amalgamation in society. This was the worst time in which friendships among diverse races were often hindered. Furthermore, apartheid's socioeconomic structure severely disadvantages the majority of the population just because they lack the rulers' skin tone. Many people were maintained just over the poverty threshold because they were 'non-white.' There were some uncommon essential alterations relating white and non-white people of South Africa. When they conquest by the Afrikaner Nationalist Party in 1948. This was the worst time when diverse races were often hindered to be friendships with other races. The major cause is to be segregation of racial groups which became mandatory through law. The groups were brutally and mercilessly separated if anyone rebel, he will punish by a terrifying governmental system. The apartheid was distinguished as ensuing significantly more horrific than separation while it was affected at a time when other nations were stopping racist practices. The West did not consider racial prejudice as seriously earlier World War-II. During that period Africa was colonized. The racial problems were there in WW-II however, one can find the global change in attitude to decolonized this serious issue.

Many people wonder why a particular policy was put into place and how it obtained the great support. The root causes are interconnected for the encouragement of apartheid. The crucial reason was the belief in racial superiority. The idea of superiority was influenced by racism. They considered that one must be superior to one another all over the world. These types of viewpoints are assigned by all demographic classes. Moreover, White minority were dominated to black majority that's why they were afraid of losing their job, culture, and language. It reveals the mentality of the period, this is the reason the majority does not support apartheid. The idea of white supremacy is that white people should rule over people of other races because they are superior to them. The argument is in favour of protecting and keeping any advantage or authority that white people may have. The origin of white supremacy was a fundamental defence of European colonialism and is a scientific racism humiliated doctrine. It enforces and assists the cultural, social, political, historical and institutional dominance of white people and their non-white followers.

Nadine Gordimer was born in racially divided South Africa. She is one of the renowned authors who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991. Gordimer

throughout her life, worked as an activist, writer, and teacher. During the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, many of her writings were prohibited or outlawed. Clingman utters that “Through her fiction, she has become ‘the interpreter of South Africa,’ as over the years, her country has marched down its doom-ridden slope of apartheid.” (Clingman- Introduction- *The Essential Gesture*). This helps us in positioning Nadine Gordimer and provides insight into the socio-political influence on her writings. In South Africa, when the South African government considered the African National Congress (ANC) to be an unlawful organization, still Gordimer joined it. For her, the ANC represented the best chance of changing South Africa’s treatment of its black population. A provincial education department temporarily removed *July’s People* and other anti-apartheid authors’ works from the required reading list for schools.

### **Political Background to *July’s People*:**

*July’s People* (1981), has its roots in the essay titled ‘*Living in the Interregnum.*’ The novel was published thirteen years before the official demise of apartheid. The questions that Gordimer concerns herself within the novel are expounded in great depth in the novel. Questions like: What would happen to the whites when the apartheid regime goes away? How could the miniscule section of society of whites, that plans to stay on, be of help to the new collective life within new structures? Also, how the whites need to discard their racist lenses and perceive the world afresh, while the whole society is being restructured in black consciousness. She believed that the white South African’s mindset needed to drastically shift. This is a description that many literary and political leaders objected to because Gordimer perceived it as a serious offense and she took it as a grave insult. Her two pieces, *July’s People* (1981) and *Burger’s Daughter* (1979) were set in political environment, both took place in a political setting and had a global impact. After the horrific children’s crusade of 1976, when school-age protesters led uprisings in Soweto to purify the conscience of their elders, these works came into existence. The government’s decision to require Afrikaans rather than English as the primary medium of instruction in select African schools, limiting blacks’ access to the outside world and making them study the language of apartheid, turned out to be the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. Thus, these events have an impact on both novels, which causes Gordimer’s perspective of her circumstances as a South African and a writer to significantly change.

### **Symbols of Power:**

July is the black house boy serving the Smales. It is after him that the novel takes its title. July accommodates the Smales family at his native place when a civil war rages in Johannesburg. He can switch roles dexterously. Especially during his confrontations with Maureen, as he does not wish to break the hierarchy and does not wish to enter any other relationship with the whites. As he has recognized that the base of their relationship is purely materialistic. The idea of giving July their bakkie (vehicle), one of their emblems of power that genuinely serves their needs, makes the Smales cringe. The primary conflict in the story is the seeming transfer of power from the Smaleses to July, and the ongoing arguments between Maureen and July serve as the ‘new battleground.’ He faithfully fulfills his responsibility to care for Smales throughout. Bamford Smales, an architect by trade, is forced into passivity during the interim. Bam does not believe he has done anything wrong at all, in contrast to Maureen who travels to the past to find peace with the present. The bakkie and the shotgun which are the focus of power belong to Bam. The keys to bakkie, have proven to be the ‘bone of contention.’ The protagonist and most fascinating character in the story is Maureen Smales. There has been an ‘explosion of roles’ during the interregnum. This is

difficult for Maureen to accept as previous titles do not hold any longer, due to which a loss of power and a resultant vacuity is experienced. Maureen shares a formal relationship with July. She feels she is very democratic with July. However, this illusion is broken by July through all the confrontations that take place between them. The time she spends in July's hometown compels her to reflect on all instances of improper behavior towards black people, whether it was on the part of her father when he used derogatory language towards the mine boys or on her part when she gave July the unsightly items she didn't need. This, however, does not assist her in accepting her condition; rather, it isolates her from all of her relationships, demonstrating a lack of inner strength in dealing with adversity. Finally, she flees like a wild animal, following her instincts in the direction of a helicopter, an uncertain source of hope.

### **Analyzing the Domination of White Minority Over Black Majority:**

Matthew Arnold's *The Grand Chartreuse* in which he depicted the protagonist's dilemma through this line. He comments that "Caught between two worlds, the first dead and the second incapable of birth," he accurately captures the predicament of the white Smaleses family who have fled Johannesburg and sought safety in the hometown of their black male servant, July. The situation of the white South Africans is dangerous because of the civil war that is happening in Johannesburg. The family leaves in a yellow bakkie. Armed with money and basics like toilet paper rolls, Malaria pills (that are looted from a pharmacy by Maureen, when the shops are attacked), the shotgun and radio, the family sets out on a 'forced quest.' The Smales are accommodated in July's grandmother's hut. The well-to-do Smales find it difficult to adjust to the utterly unhygienic and impoverished conditions. According to Brighton J. Uledi-Kamanga, "*July's People* is the first novel in which Gordimer depicts the decline of white supremacy in South Africa" (119). Thus, she discussed the decline of white supremacy and the irony of apartheid in this book.

Gordimer made a significant contribution to the freedom of Black people while being a white South African author. She had been the representative voice for the apartheid system of South Africa in 1948. Due to this various of her works were banned in her country. She was attacked directly by criticism and provoked by the politics of the apartheid regime. Gordimer comments, "She does not write about apartheid, but about people who happen to live under that system." (Brighton J. Uledi-Kamanga, xvi). In her own words, Nadine Gordimer painted a clear picture of South Africa, and it is well known that she resided in Johannesburg, the country's largest metropolis and the 'white city.' Another city, black Johannesburg, is located close to the white city, mainly to the west and north. Small Coloured (mixed blood) and Indian populations, which are also segregated from the rest of society and one another, only slightly muddy the margins of this stark black-and-white picture. Naturally, Africans will be found in every home in the white metropolis because every home has a servants' quarters that must be built at least a set minimum distance from the white home. The term 'backyard life' is used by sophisticated Africans to describe a lifestyle that puts them closer to the kennel and the outhouses than to their homes' occupants. However, no black guy resides predominantly in the white city. If they have rich and honour then they will be allowed to rent a home on the same street near white residents. Thousands of white individuals frequently go their entire lives without ever speaking to a black man who is comparable to them in terms of social class and culture because of this. Their perception of Africans is that they are all servants and part of a massive army of boys that distribute or carry things, such as milk boys, butcher boys, grocery store boys, and dust boys. One will see that, based on this experience, it is easy for white people to assume that black people are a less-than-human race. For independence and self-identity, Black writers battled against the

restrictions of race and sexuality. The Black writers' tenacity saw them through all hardships and enabled them to write about their experiences. Beginning with the oral tradition and supplemented by song—a potent African communication and community-building tool—black literature emerged in South Africa. The bulk of Black authors wrote in English to reach a wider audience.

The South African writers made a deliberate attempt to break free from the literary stigma associated with Western authors. They eliminated the preconceptions and interests of the Europeans who had distorted South African literature through their writing. The most well-liked author in South Africa, Gordimer, has distinguished herself among them via her work. Some contemporary authors who share significant leadership roles with Gordimer. She is well-known throughout the world as a spokesperson for South Africa who courageously exposes the nation's political upheaval, racial segregation, and investigation of the system's consequences on the entire country's White, Black, and Coloured people. Black people will perform entirely heavy work in the country because white people do not wish to dig a road or load a vehicle. However, there are restrictions and employment reservations that keep the black man out of every type of labor a white man wishes to do. African-Americans are unskilled and semi-skilled employees in the building trade and industry, and they are not allowed by law to change their status. They are not allowed to work behind the counters in stores or alongside white employees. Wherever they work, they are not permitted to use the canteens or restrooms used by the white employees. The African man or woman has no place in any community's restaurants, taverns, hotels, clubs, or coffee shops. They assist in all of these, but they are unable to enter and take a seat. They cannot enter museums, theatres, golf courses, sports facilities, or even libraries. They are serviced at separate counters in all government institutions, including post offices.

The protagonists of the novel, a white South African couple named Maureen and Bam Smales, narrate their journey out of Johannesburg with the assistance of their children and their black helper July. They travel to a remote village in search of protection, where July, their servant of fifteen years, will offer them shelter and safety. They set out on a new trip from this point on, unaware of the significant changes July's town would undergo. This will soon transition into a period of ambiguity between the old and new administrations, during which time it will be challenging to comprehend societal ideals and standards. Now July leads Maureen and Smale to stay in his home and hides them with his family. It was the challenging test of interracial connections to keep aside the hate. The whites and blacks' hierarchy had been overturned nationwide. This has primarily resulted in widespread murder. Similar to the Smales family and July, except with a black man defending the white people instead of the other way around. The book thoroughly examined interracial friendships while also addressing the larger political climate in South Africa. As the roles of the Smales couple and July are reversed. Earlier they had power now they are dependent on July. The writer investigates the character of power and the prospect of equal opportunity. The major barriers to reaching equality originate from Maureen herself as her inherent suspect of black charity comes as tensions between her and July grow. Even though Maureen and Bam identify as liberals and proponents of black liberation, Maureen was raised under apartheid. She begins to question the man who is protecting her family as her childhood memories resurface.

The mixing of whites and blacks in this area reflects a significant social structure divide. The people in July's village caricature the whites because they call them that so frequently. They associate whites as being great, strong, yet untrustworthy beings. The absence of interaction between the native and white people is likely what has led to distrust. It becomes clear when Gordimer describes how July's mother feels the first time she interacts

with someone who has white skin. Since the whites are viewed as colonizers, the native blacks are stereotyped as being deceitful, devious, and destructive to them, which is why With the presence of white people, July's mother is concerned that they are no longer safe; she claims, "What will the white people do to us now, God must save us ... White people. They are very powerful, my son. They are very clever. You will never come to the end of the things they can do" (JP 20). The most crucial way to bridge the communication gap is through language, which affects practically all essential areas such as education, the economy, and culture. Not only can't the whites comprehend the blacks, but the Smales also have trouble understanding because they can not speak their native African tongue. However, July's and the Smales' communication methods were generally "based on orders and responses, not the exchange of ideas and feelings" (JP 67) indicating that language served a purpose in separating the two races from one another.

### **Results:**

- Gordimer made a significant contribution to the freedom of Black people while being a white South African author. She had been the representative voice for the apartheid system of South Africa in 1948. Due to this various of her works were banned in her country.
- White supremacy is the idea that white people should rule over people of other races because they are superior to them. The argument is in favour of protecting and keeping any advantage or authority that white people may have.
- Their perception of Africans is that they are all servants and part of a massive army of boys that distribute or carry things, such as milk boys, butcher boys, grocery store boys, and dust boys. One will see that it is simple for white people to believe that black people are a less-than-human race based on this experience.
- The most crucial way to bridge the communication gap is through language, which affects practically all essential areas such as education, the economy, and culture. Not only can not the whites comprehend the blacks, but the Smales also have trouble understanding because they can not speak their native African tongue. However, July and the Smales generally "based on orders and responses, not the exchange of ideas and feelings" (JP 67) in their communication, indicating that language served a purpose in separating the two races from oneanother .
- Nadine Gordimer believed that the white South African's mindset needed to drastically shift. This helps us in positioning Nadine Gordimer and provides insight into the socio-political influence on her writings.
- In addition, because the majority of the population did not share the rulers' skin tone, apartheid's social structure severely disadvantages them. Many people were maintained just over the poverty threshold because they were non-white.

### **Conclusion:**

According to Gordimer, “I am not saying, nor do I believe, that whites cannot write about black, or blacks about whites” (46). He makes this statement in *Living in Hope and History*. She finds it challenging to be acknowledged by society as a voice for civil legislation as a white writer. She successfully tried depicting contemporary reality in fiction in artistic terms. Despite their efforts to build a solid foundation in this African country and probably with the locals as well, due to their lack of commitment to preserving societal standards and performing as expected by society, Bam and Maureen Smales become victims of society. As a result, they still feel like outsiders and distant subjects. Gordimer makes an effort to highlight the challenges and tribulations that white families face during the interim by moving them: “They might find they had lived out their whole lives as they were, born white pariah dogs in a black continent” (*JP* 8). The Smales must therefore adapt to the local ethnic and cultural values since they can no longer live their prior Eurocentric lifestyle. As a result, their qualities begin to disintegrate. The impact of the white minority over the black majority on society brought to light the issues of race and gender on a larger scale.

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