

July's People: A Reversed Anticipation and Prediction of the Future Black Domination

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Abstract

Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*, is a good example of a contemporary novel that reverses the so-called naturel division between black and white people. As a matter of fact, black nation holds power and protection, which they lacked in time of the Apartheid system because it was on the hands of their controversialists -white people. This novel seems to be a prophecy of the decline of this arbitrary system that meant the declined of white people's privileged life that went from the sub-urban to a non-suburban life. From Derrida's theory of deconstruction, the reality of white people becomes upside down due to their color, origins and their presence in Africa. Therefore, they lost their position, their wealth, and at worse their power.

Keywords: Power, Protection, Deconstruction, Black, White, and Parody.

Introduction

Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*, is a Futuristic novel about the riots together with the decline of the Apartheid System that was basically about racism and segregation that prevented the Black people from their rights above all their humanity. This novel 1981 seems to be both a fantasy and a call of awareness. The writer deconstructs the old fallacy of White's supremacy due to power, knowledge and replaces it by the uprising of the Black force that did not only change their social statue, but also made the White people fear from them and experience their suffering and affliction. As a matter of fact, relying on Derrida's deconstruction most particularly the concept of parody through which Nadine Gordimer deconstructs the old belief of the white and their so called prominent history, while she constructs a new identity of the Black people as well as for the White folk that was the offspring of their mistreatment, "[t]he emergence of new political and social realities that would require white South Africans to fashion the contours of a new identity." (Erritouni, p.68). This novel is quite crucial and original work done by a White author through providing the usual voiceless with a strong voice that echoes power and domination. Besides, the ability to protect the usual, powerful that the reader time and again comes across in literature (the white). The aim of this study is to unveil the "new identity" when the dominator switches to be the dominated and vice versa.

Body

July's People by Nadine Gordimer cancels the so called "naturel division" between the superior and dominant white and between the inferior and dominated black that is believed to be from God in the holy Bible, where He (God) regards the black people as an inferior race due to their sins which actually seems to the mind as quite unreasonable and made on purpose to set hierarchy between different nations and moreover to manipulate and to hegemonies power and order. However, for them God appreciates and elevates the White people as reports Frantz Fanon from the New Testament, "We are the chosen people look at the color of our skins. The

others are black or yellow: That is because of their sins.” (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 30). In fact, the writer on one hand empowers the Black nation and seems to return back to them their humanity that was lost because of their dark skin color, and physical appearance that do not correspond to the White’s, she also returned back their rights of ownership of the land, their social statue that has been for so long neglected; at worse they were regarded as less than human beings, “In this novel, Gordimer presents two conflicting scenes in which roles are switched: the black servant, July, became a master and the master became a servant” (Shehabat, Zeidanin, p. 134). Nadine Gordimer on the other hand, reverses the fallacy of white supremacy and made them (the white people) the neglected ones, feeling in danger, surrounded with fear, living in unrest, torn out by confusion, lost in turbulence and at worse experiencing what the black people were living for so long.

This novel is an essential instance of deconstruction where the prominent becomes the marginalized and where the dominated becomes the master. Actually, this is the case of the Smales, the white family who had enjoyed life in South Africa, and had more rights than the appropriate owners of the land had. And so, outside their country they were lucky enough to live a better life than that in their mother land by playing the role of the “master” through having a black “subject” serving them, obeying their orders, and most importantly undergoing the life of the marginalized while living in the land of his ancestors that has become a normal thing and part and parcel of the blacks’ lives, “July bent at the doorway and began that day for them as his kind has always done for their kind” (*July’s People*, p. 4). Whereas, the Smales represents a quite perfect model of families above all because they belong to the white race, then to the civilized people who enjoy a high position in society due to their knowledge which provides them with power and the ability to hold command among others, Bam is a case in point he is not only a white man but also an architect who lives in South Africa the life of the civilized people, that Black people only hear of and not even dream to live it one day, “A room

to sleep in, another room to eat in, another room to sit in, a room with books (she had a Bible), I don't know how many times you told me, a room with how many books... Hundreds I think." (*July's People*, p. 16). As a matter of fact, he as a man has got the features of a normal human being coming from the dominant power such as being White, an architect having a family and living in South Africa where he doubly can enjoy some privileges because everybody there is inferior, therefore all are obeisant servants. Nevertheless, through the deconstruction of this narrative one can notice the following,

During the reversal of roles, July is mainly viewed as a black subaltern who is uncertain of his identity and of the new power that has been imposed on him by the new situation. Later at the end of the end of the novel, July became assertive of his new powers. In order to test the subaltern July's ability to speak for himself, he must be in a position of power where he could be heard and listened to. (Deyab, p. 343).

Nadine Gordimer came with this futuristic novel to reverse the scale, she made a prophecy upon a soon coming riots and the decline of the Apartheid system, which did not only blacken the lives of the black people, but it rendered them from oppressed to enslaved, from neglected to totally marginalized, from suffering due to racism to undergoing a more complicated situation, that of segregation,

The strikes of 1980 had dragged on, (...) While the government continued to compose concessions to the black trade unions exquisitely worded to conceal exactly concomitant restrictions, the black workers concerned went hungry, angry, and workless anyway, and the shop-floor was often all that was left of burned-out factories. (*July's People*, p. 8).

From the beginning of the novel one notices the reversed situation; therefore, the white people's lives (that are represented by the Smales family) were endangered. As a result, Bam,

his wife and his two children went to look for shelter after they had had a well accommodated house in a sub-urban city, asked just for a humble place where to protect themselves from the Black anger and the black forces and here again this shelter was that of their servant July that was described as being “a mud hut”, no matter for them unless it protects them, “[t]he trouble in town. The White people are chased away from their houses and we take.” (*July’s People*, p. 12). Their house has become their doom if they only stayed there they would have been killed or maybe tortured before being murdered, it appears to be their first loss of their property, that was followed by that of their car, which is indeed a symbol of luxurious and a prestigious life. In fact, the Smales Family was gradually losing their precious things that marked their privileged life in South Africa starting from the House then the car, “The seats from the vehicle no longer belonged to it; they had become the furniture of the hut.” (*July’s People*, p. 13).

During the riots, White people started to fear about their lives more than their properties. They were experiencing all what the Black people have been experiencing for so long in their mother land mainly by being prevented from their humanity due to their difference and because the white people refused to recognize the diversity of the world putting time and again themselves on the top for the sake of maintaining and exercising power, “People are burning those houses. Those big houses! You can’t imagine those houses. The Whites are being killed in their houses. I’ve seen it-the whole thing just blow up, walls, roofs.” (*July’s people*, p. 16). Nadine Gordimer employed the word “chasing” in page 17 that shows that things have been reversed and it is now time for the black people to exercise their power and to prove themselves for the White people and for the world as a whole that they are human being at first place, and can no more bear the presence of the white people among them chiefly racism and segregation that has no space in South Africa on the land of their ancestor. Nevertheless, they require a better life full of respect above all and then have to return back their confiscated lands and properties,

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 friends would not be there. It's true he can go where he likes. But when he gets there, he may be killed. (*July's People*, p. 17)

Nadine Gordimer created a real deconstruction of the white people's position in her novel *July's People* that is clearly represented through Smales family who are just a microscopic instance of the White people in South Africa in the twentieth century and July, who is another miniaturized example of Black people, who are no longer as before, i.e., weak, subverted, servants, dominated but rather than that they are now dominating the White and threatening their existence in South Africa, "July, once their servant now turns to be a person who saves them from harm." (Sistani, p. 33). Bam together with his small family went from a shelter givers to July, to totally the opposite the shelter needers. Furthermore, they were delving for protection underneath the roof of July's hut.

From Jacque Derrida's theory of deconstruction, the reader of *July's People* can remark that it is subverting the dominant and elevating the dominated with no hierarchy, yet a transformation of the situation parodying the fallacy of the superior and the inferior. From his point of view, it is making the black people "borrowing" the attitudes of the White's,

Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing the structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms (*Grammatology*, p. 24).

Accordingly, Linda Hutcheon perceives that parodying a postmodern literary work is related to both historical and political issues, exactly as it is the case for *July's People*. In fact, if one considers the political issues can illustrate the segregation that was employed on the Black

people in the heart of their country, as long as the historical issues that are chiefly concerned with the white supremacy and their assumption of all black people are less human than they are, “Linda believes that references to historical and political issues in the postmodern texts are parodic. They are parodic in using the abusing, constructing and deconstructing historical events in parodic ways.” (Sistani, p. 34). Actually, Nadine Gordimer deconstructed both the statue of the white people and their position among the blacks, while constructing a new and a most proper statue they deserve first of all as human beings and second of all as the true possessors of the land (South Africa). White writers seldom provide black people with a voice to speak, to defend themselves, or to respond to the humiliation they receive from the white folk. Nadine Gordimer as a white and a South African writer made of the voiceless highly voiced this is again another proof of her deconstruction of not only the hierarchy but also of history, “According to Gordimer, the black subalterns have commonly been silenced and marginalized, and it is her role as a writer to give them power and voice.” (Deyab, p. 342).

Deconstructing the dreadful reality of Black people in South Africa is not just a way to deliver their (Black people) sufferance and affliction, yet it seems a humanistic way to remind them of their equality to the white people, and to wake them up from a long nightmare of racism and segregation in nearly the end of the twentieth century, where they are still demonized while the white people are from more and more lionized for what? For nothing except their skin color, their bloody history and their fiendish civilization that they made on the back of others which means by decivilizing others like by colonizing, occupying, claiming lands that are not theirs, confiscating not only property but also humanity that is still continuing, while the Black people need to take action and to realize their dream of freedom, independence and restore their humanity. In fact, the very first quote by Antonio Gramsci on the top of the novel can reflect to what extent the sufferance is growing, “The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there a rises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.” (*Prison Notebooks*, p. 1).

From Gordimer's point of view it is necessary to valorize oneself in order to be respected by others. Therefore, Black people urgently need to wake up and react to the humiliation they are daily experiencing, "So, Gordimer revives the missing feature of self-respect of the black community was thing in them." (Anish, p. 184). Meanwhile according to her the problem is not only confined within the dormant black, but she considers that even the White people's lack of consciousness is also a main issue that requires to be solved for the sake of reaching equality and managing to co-exist and to survive peacefully (Black and White), "Gordimer observes the white consciousness as one of the greatest problem which separates the blacks from the whites." (Anish, p. 184). At the end, they have ever been different, and they will never be equal; they have different cultures, history, languages and identity and their sole solution in indeed not to remain fighting and to kill each other, yet to accept the diversity regardless the differences, just for the sake of humanity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Nadine Gordimer in *July's People* does not only appear to switch roles between July, Bam and his family who are a representatives of microscopic examples of the whole black and white nations in South Africa. She, in addition to that, seems to reverse the so called the naturel division between Black and White that is proved by the New Testament. Besides, she transformed the long history that is full of inequality, humiliation of the Black people who were time and again in various literary works at best and in reality at worse prevented from their humanity. Moreover, Black people have been always portrayed as inferior, weak with lack of power, command and knowledge; as always marginalized in the presence of the white and also as servants to the white folk that is a destiny not a choice. As a matter of fact, with this novel the whole hierarchy is reversed, it is on one hand deconstructing the roles, social statue and the fallacy of that the white people are the most powerful and

naturally privileged and loved by God. On the other hand, it is constructing the Black people's new and accurate statue chiefly in South Africa their home land and the earth of their ancestors.

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