

Apartheid in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*: A Racist Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper in hand explores Apartheid in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* from a Racist perspective. The study employs a qualitative research method to examine the interactions between characters within the confines of apartheid in South Africa. Based on the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT), this analysis examines the interconnected aspects of racial discrimination, social inequities, and interpersonal dynamics. This lens, enriched by cited contributions from scholars, facilitates a precise examination of how systemic racial prejudices infiltrate intimate relationships and shape individual identities based on race and apartheid. The study closely scrutinizes Gordimer's portrayal of various characters, revealing the paradoxes inherent in their relationship as a manifestation of larger racial hierarchies. A key finding of this study indicates that despite an ostensible sense of mutual respect and recognition, the characters remain embroiled in a cyclical trap of racial inequality, which reflects the inescapable grasp of apartheid on both the dominant and marginalized communities. Consequently, the plot of the novel extends beyond its specific historical context to serve as a timeless discourse on racial inequality, offering an unsettling but essential addition to ongoing dialogues about racial imbalances and social justice in societies around the globe.

Keywords: Racism, Apartheid, CRT, Black, White, Nadine Gordimer

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Racism represents a power structure that permeates societal, cultural, and institutional behaviors, advantaging white people to the detriment of individuals of color (DiAngelo, 2022). It is deeply ingrained in the social, economic, and political societies globally that manifests as both blatant and concealed discrimination, prejudice, and bias. Among the most severe instances of ingrained racism was apartheid in South Africa. This was a legal framework of separation and discrimination that prevailed from 1948 to 1994. During apartheid, the white minority government imposed rigid racial categorizations, deciding where people could reside, work, and receive education. Predominantly, the African population experienced coerced relocations from their residences, often being obligated to relocate to demarcated tribal lands, known as Bantustans (Matschiner, 2022).

Apartheid manifested as a harsh structure, demeaning people of African descent by subjecting them to unyielding aggression and subjugation. Established through various tactics, including law enforcement's excessive force, compulsory labor, and imprisonment, the system strengthened itself. Critical too was an elaborate schema for categorizing races based on epidermal hue and ancestral lineage, thus intensifying beliefs in Caucasian ascendancy over individuals of African origin (Jones et al., 2022).

Post-1994, after the cessation of apartheid, the ramifications of ingrained racial bias continue to beleaguer South Africa (Matschiner, 2022). Efforts aimed at challenging racial prejudice and promoting principles of equity, inclusivity, and social justice manifest themselves in various spheres. These range from scholastic environments to libraries and even extend to the field of information science. Research confirms that vocational training schemes that focus on race-related issues hold promise for instilling anti-racist attitudes and behavior among educators and diverse professionals (Matschiner, 2022).

1.2 Statement of Problem

The legacy of ethnic genocide and targeted policies in India and America continues to impact society today. In Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*, the protagonist experiences the inequities of the apartheid system and faces exclusion from other

women. Initially, Maureen deeply valued July's safeguarding. However, she starts feeling uneasy. This is a sign of enduring prejudices and subtle racial insults still lingering, even in people who try to oppose them. To gain a comprehensive understanding of these concerns, this analysis adopts an in-depth perspective on racial issues. It explores the reactions of the main characters in the book when confronted with separation and discord.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To explore the racist perspective under the Apartheid in *July's People*.
2. To analyze the CRT perspectives that are present under the Apartheid in *July's People*.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What racist perspective is presented under the Apartheid in *July's People*?
2. Why are CRT perspectives present under the Apartheid in *July's People*?

1.5 Rationale of the Study

While there have been various studies on apartheid, there is a need to examine the issue from a different angle to understand its effects fully. As far as this study is concerned, the current research aims to fill the gap in the literature by investigating the racist perspective portrayed in the novel and examining the main characters' experiences and responses to segregation, which sheds light on the aftermath of apartheid. The presence of racial bias in the world makes this exploration timely and relevant. Looking at apartheid through the lens of critical race theory, we want to pinpoint methods that help us fight against racial prejudice and encourage the acceptance and integration of all races. This study is crucial as it fills the gap in existing research. Moreover, provides a perspective on how apartheid has shaped societies. The findings of this research can inform policies aimed at promoting diversity and fostering unity.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Discrimination and exclusion remain global issues that fracture societies and individuals alike. This study highlights their causes and consequences, urging deeper awareness and inclusivity. By addressing systemic marginalization, the research contributes to fostering pluralism, guiding policies, and shaping social

practices that promote equity, dignity, and unity across diverse cultural contexts.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

This study focuses on instances of racial segregation and stereotyping of black characters in Gordimer's *July's People*, analyzed through Richard Delgado's five principles of Critical Race Theory, while excluding the biographical contexts of both the author and the theorist.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Donovan and Dubek (2022) provided a critical analysis of the representation of race and ethnicity in children's literature. Another study examined the impact of Darwinian ideology on the colonial mindset, particularly in shaping imperial ambitions during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Focusing on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Hesse's *The Journey to the East* (1932), the study examined how Africa and Asia are portrayed in colonial literature (Hussain et al., 2024). Furthermore, Hufft and Sibanda (2023) in their research explored the experiences of Black students at universities traditionally reserved for White individuals in South Africa.

Manzini (2023) analysed the intersection of racial and gender prejudices in Ramphele's autobiography. The scholar recognises Ramphele's narrative as a nexus between personal experience and broader societal constructs. By situating her existential standpoint philosophy within Ramphele's autobiography, Manzini highlights the often-overlooked dimensions of being both Black and female in a society plagued by manifold prejudices. Diko (2023) explored Saule's novel *Umlimandlela* from the perspective of racism. The scholar examines how Saule's piece serves as a formidable witness. This testament pertains to both colonial and apartheid lexicology deeply embedded in South Africa's historical fabric.

Thompson (2023) dissects the complexities of post-apartheid identities, especially in the realm of same-sex sexualities, through the lens of literary and visual mediums. His critical evaluation accentuates the restless nature of these identities. This restlessness emerges as they navigate spaces replete with historical prejudice and fresh hopes of societal acceptance. Westhuizen (2023) offers a lens into "Can We Unlearn Racism? What South Africa Teaches Us about Whiteness." The scholar uncovers multifaceted details embedded within the discourse on ingrained

racism and the construct of 'whiteness' within the South African tapestry. Ordu and Odukwu (2022) discussed the topics of racism and gender imbalance in two African novels: Peter Abraham's *Mine Boy* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*. They argue that the novels present a critique of colonialism and apartheid, shining a light on how these systems uphold racial and gender inequities.

Tiwari (2022) provided an analysis of Nadine Gordimer's fiction following the end of apartheid. The scholar argues that Gordimer's novels provide a context for transformations in South Africa's sociopolitical landscape following apartheid. Gbogi (2022) challenges the notion of Afropolitanism, a term used to describe a contemporary African diasporic identity that emphasises cosmopolitanism and global citizenship. Another scholarly article by Emsley and Montle (2022) discusses the experiences of black female pupils in South African secondary schools during their English literature studies. The authors of this research paper suggest that the syllabus often bolsters prevailing stories about race and gender, consequently silencing the voices and experiences of black female students.

In terms of literary analysis, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has emerged as a robust methodology for examining literary artefacts, going beyond mere theoretical postulation to shed light on often-overlooked racial dimensions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). Busey, Duncan and Dowie-Chin (2023) asserted that stories, poetry, and other literary forms have always held a mirror to society. They reflect our hopes, fears, values, and biases. In the context of racial dynamics, literature can often subtly or explicitly mirror societal attitudes towards race, and the Critical Race Theory offers a unique lens through which we can analyse and understand these attitudes in literature (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). CRT does not view racism as a peripheral issue but rather a central element that shapes the narrative and characters. CRT's application in literature allows us to question the assumptions, biases, and norms present in the text. One method for applying Critical Race Theory in literature is to analyse the representation of racial identities (Delgado & Stefancic, 1996).

Chakrabarty, Roberts, and Preston (2016) have explained that Critical Race Theory can be used to challenge such representations and ask questions about the role of race in a character's journey. Burrell-Craft (2020) reiterated that the focus of the authors, as well as their own race, inevitably shapes their perspectives and

experiences, ultimately impacting their writing. Pulliam (2017) shared his view by asserting that when considering novels set during eras of heightened racial tension, such as the American Civil Rights Movement, race is not just a backdrop but a critical component of the narrative.

Lynn and Adams (2002) explained that literature has always allowed readers to imagine alternate realities, as well as futures where racial equality might be fully realised. Hartlep (2009) holds the view that when Critical Race Theory is applied to literary studies, it can illuminate how racial dynamics are encoded in literature and provide a richer, more detailed understanding of both the literary works themselves and the society they reflect. Brooks (2009) has ensured the application of critical race theory as an analytical tool, illuminating the complexity of the narrative and its ability to challenge hegemonic discourses.

Johnson and Neville (2018) went beyond mere textual analysis and connected their work with the broader implications for the educational system. Al Adawiyah (2020) effectively uses critical race theory to analyse the novel and unravel the layers of racial discrimination depicted therein. Siegel (2020) investigates racial disparities in fatal police shootings in the United States, highlighting the undeniable reality of systemic racism within law enforcement agencies. His findings reveal a disturbing correlation between race and the likelihood of being fatally shot by the police.

Mills and Unsworth (2018) reveal the importance of employing diverse methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of race representation. According to Goldberg, opposition against this theory essentially acts as a vehicle for the reconfiguration and sustained existence of racial prejudice. There is the matter of critical race theory (CRT) in the selected novel. It is a valuable tool, one that has been applied across multiple disciplines to dissect and understand the perspectives on race. Therefore, the researcher will apply it to the selected work because there is a significant gap to be filled, and the CRT can help the researcher unpack the layers of *July's People* and highlight the racial dynamics at play in the backdrop of apartheid. Another piece of the puzzle is the personal impact of racism on the characters of *July's People*. In the selected novel, certain multifaceted characters with intricate relationships can all be colored by the overarching spectre

of racism. Further consideration is required regarding the narrative strategies Gordimer employs to convey the racist perspective. Gordimer's writing transcends the boundary of simply recounting events; it entails an intricate artistic process that crafts a specific narrative experience for the reader. The narrative progression, particularly the fluctuation in power dynamics between July and the Smales family, warrants an in-depth investigation. How does Gordimer manipulate narrative techniques to elucidate the subtle aspects of racism? These represent important research questions that, for the most part, remain unaddressed. The detailed analysis of the racist perspective of apartheid, as portrayed in the novel, seems to be a less explored area. Additionally, the potential efficacy of critical race theory in our examination of the narrative has not been fully harnessed. By addressing these research gaps, we can significantly enhance our understanding of Gordimer's oeuvre and foster a richer discussion concerning apartheid-era South Africa.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The present study employs a qualitative research approach, which is well-suited for in-depth and comprehensive investigations of new ideas and perspectives. The research method employed here is well-suited for a detailed analysis of the study's subject. The work "*July's People*" by Nadine Gordimer serves as the primary source of research.

3.2 Data Collection

Initially, the researcher commits to a close reading of the novel. This approach helps pinpoint key elements that elucidate racial dynamics and experiences of apartheid. To augment the primary data, scholarly articles, essays and critical reviews on *July's People* are evaluated. These secondary sources help relate the findings drawn from the novel.

3.3 Data Analysis

Critical Race Theory (CRT) becomes indispensable for interpreting the collection of textual evidence. First, a thematic analysis is conducted on carefully chosen excerpts from *July's People*, which are replete with explicit or implicit references to apartheid. Each theme or category assigned during the data collection stage undergoes

rigorous dissection through the prism of CRT. As this analytical endeavour gains momentum, cross-referencing with secondary data sourced from scholarly articles and critical reviews provides detailed perspectives.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is proposed by scholars such as Bell, Crenshaw, Delgado and Stefancic. It serves as an analytical framework for assessing how race interacts with various societal structures, including laws and institutions. CRT originated in the 20th century as an offshoot of critical legal studies. It advances the argument that racism remains embedded in societal norms and legal systems (Bell, 2018; Crenshaw, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

Regarding the theoretical framework, the guiding principle for this study is Critical Race Theory (CRT). This theory, proposed by Delgado and Stefancic (2007), posits that race is a social construct without biological foundations. Moreover, it indicates that racial prejudice is a deeply-rooted societal issue contributing to the continued economic gaps between leading and marginalised racial communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Additionally, it points out that racial slights, often minor but harmful, targeting people of colour are not uncommon. It also accepts that individuals from oppressed communities might uphold the objectives of leading white institutions, despite their own group's advancement.

The CRT outlines that people of colour are often depicted as naive, childish labourers who are satisfied with their servitude. Furthermore, it suggests that individuals of colour are exceptionally qualified to discuss their group's experiences concerning racism's causes and impacts. Critical Race Theory is instrumental in analysing apartheid in Gordimer's *July's People*. It provides an understanding of how race and racism are socially constructed. It also demonstrates how racial prejudices have sustained economic disparities among diverse racial groups. With the help of the CRT, the study aims to unravel the intricate mechanisms of racism in society and its effects on individuals and communities.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 The Racist Perspective under the Apartheid in *July's People*

This heading pertains to the first research objective. Under this heading, this section of the analysis encompasses a deep exploration of key excerpts or passages taken

from the novel that epitomise the manifold manifestations of the racist perspective under the apartheid, i.e., apartheid and racial prejudices—ranging from the apathetic perception of safety among white individuals to the evolution of racial self-awareness in young characters, like Royce, all the way to shifting paradigms of authority and racial hierarchy. The selected passages offer a diverse array of perspectives on the complications of racial relations. Grounded in CRT, the analysis dismantles racially charged presumptions, demonstrates the shift in racial awareness and highlights instances of authority subversion. With this analytical groundwork, the analysis makes a significant contribution to the broader understanding of apartheid as not merely a policy, but a complex nexus of sociocultural elements.

The whole village is out, now, poised in its occupations or its idleness, cringing beneath the hoverer, there is even some sort of cheer, probably from children [. . .]. They shriek all of them; a woman races past Maureen laughing in terror, the baby on back rocked amok. The whoop of their voices curves (158).

In the context of literary scrutiny, evaluating the portrayal of apartheid in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) affords a detailed approach. The text above indicates a society ingrained with racial biases, subtly invoking CRT's assertion that race has been socially fabricated, rather than biologically determined (Lynn & Adams, 2002).

The excerpt above suggests a panorama of emotions within the village, particularly when observed under the magnifying lens of CRT. The language used, i.e., "cringing," "cheer," "shriek", conveys a multidimensional context of experiences. Evidently, the overarching sentiment in the community does not remain confined to a single emotional category. With its highlighting of feelings ranging from cheer to shriek, the narrative exudes a degree of irony that evokes CRT's idea of racial prejudices as deeply ingrained in society. By portraying an apparent cheer among children yet revealing it to be a façade for more profound sentiments of trepidation, Gordimer reflects the CRT's notion that individuals from marginalised communities perpetuate ideologies that essentially oppress them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

One detects a somewhat ambivalent tone in the narrative; it seems torn between capturing the daily lives of villagers and exposing their discomfort under systemic

racism. Such an incongruity aligns impeccably with CRT's declaration that racial slights, although often trivial, are nonetheless harmful (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). It creates a cognitive dissonance in readers, who must grapple with the complexity of a society that endures racism yet participates in its own subjugation. Moreover, CRT upholds that the daily, casual instances of racial slights are an integral part of a larger, systemic issue, an issue that Gordimer's narrative intriguingly peels back.

The story shows a woman "laughing in terror." Such a paradoxical reaction encapsulates CRT's argument that people of colour are seen as naive, simple labourers content with their subjugation (Gbogi, 2022). This laughing woman carries a baby, a future generation, illustrating a cycle of systemic injustice that is both perpetuated and deeply ingrained. Despite the mirth in her laughter, her child remains unsettled, rocked amok— a vivid representation of the future state of the racial divide. Her laughter offers a striking commentary on how marginalised communities internalise and perpetuate societal norms that further racial gaps, consonant with CRT's broader framework.

The quoted segment signals an almost performative display of emotions that could be perceived as an antithesis to CRT's recognition of the harmful yet minor racial slights targeted at communities of colour. The village has its own agency in displaying emotional complexity, even if that complexity partly arises from systemic discrimination. CRT argues that individuals from such communities possess unique perspectives on the origins and effects of racism, evidenced by the amalgam of emotions displayed by the villagers in this instance.

Gordimer's depiction of a racially stratified society navigates a treacherous emotional and intellectual landscape that resonates profoundly with the tenets of CRT. It serves as a potent narrative instrument for unpacking systemic racial prejudices, especially those sustained within the infrastructure of South African apartheid. Given CRT's insights, Gordimer's text stands as a rich tapestry of racial paradigms, adroitly challenging societal norms while portraying a community grappling with its own complex, racially influenced emotions.

He would no sooner shoot a buck than a man; and he did not keep any revolver under his pillow to defend his wife, his children or his property in their suburban house (p.78)

Considering the text, a sentence such as "He would no sooner shoot a buck than a man" becomes freighted with implications (p.78). Viewed through CRT's and apartheid perspective, the statement raises questions about race and violence. When the character abstains from using a weapon against either a buck or a human, it seems, at first glance, to be an exemplification of egalitarianism. However, according to CRT's assertion that racial prejudice pervades society, one wonders whether the statement would hold if the hypothetical man belonged to a racial minority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

Furthermore, the absence of a revolver for self-defence in a "suburban house" can be dissected further. CRT proffers that marginalised communities are often unfairly depicted as threats (Mills & Unsworth, 2018). If the character feels safe enough not to keep a weapon, the narrative subtly suggests a social structure that provides one race with the luxury of perceived safety, but not others. The absence of a revolver extends far beyond the safety of a single household. By choosing not to defend "his wife, his children or his property," the character abdicates a sort of paternalistic societal role assigned to Caucasian males (p.78). However, in line with CRT, this action might be seen as a tacit reinforcement of a system that already protects his interests, while disregarding the rights of marginalised communities, which further indicates apartheid. Consequently, his non-action is interpreted as complicity in maintaining an already skewed status quo (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). A degree of caution should accompany any quick judgments. CRT also acknowledges that members of subjugated communities participate in systems that perpetuate their own marginalisation. The man's choice not to arm himself might originate from an internalised understanding that the system will inherently favour him. Therefore, the absence of a firearm is an unspoken acknowledgement of his privileged status that reflects CRT's notion that those in marginalised positions often sustain the ideologies of the ruling class. The ruling class in the novel has set a kind of constitution through which they can practice racial subjugation legally in the form of apartheid (Bridger & Hazan, 2022).

In the textual fragment above, an implicit paternalism is evident. CRT argues that racial biases result in the perpetuation of economic imbalances between different racial groups. The character's ability to live in a suburban house and make

a choice about the use of a weapon is a testament to these very economic disparities. By keenly analysing just a couple of lines, the multifaceted layers of a racially divided society surface. The text offers insights into how simple choices, such as forgoing a weapon for self-defence, can be deeply imbued with meanings that extend far beyond the personal sphere. They become microcosms of broader systems of racial discrimination, subtly affirming CRT's core principles.

Ultimately, Gordimer's narrative invites readers to confront an unsettling paradox. It suggests that even a decision seemingly grounded in ethics or personal choice can serve to perpetuate systemic inequalities. Indeed, the narrative indicates the tenacity of racial divisions, even within the seemingly benign decisions of everyday life. Thus, through the lens of CRT, *July's People* emerges not merely as a narrative of apartheid but also as a textured exploration of the numerous, often overlooked, ways that racial biases pervade human actions and choices.

"Her son, who had seen the white woman and the three children cowered on the floor of their vehicle, led the white face behind the wheel in his footsteps, his way the only one in a wilderness, was suddenly aware of something he had not known. —They can't do anything. Nothing to us any more." (p.102)

In the excerpt above, "Her son, who had seen the white woman and the three children cowered on the floor of their vehicle," the boy's observation speaks volumes (p.102). It elucidates a power reversal, one that is rarely portrayed in mainstream literature. While the traditional narrative, in alignment with CRT, tends to depict people of colour as subservient or powerless, here we witness the inverse (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). The white individuals are the ones lacking agency, a profound pivot that offers a mirror to apartheid's racial hierarchy.

With his realisation that "they can't do anything. Nothing to us anymore," the boy experiences an epiphany (p. 102). His awakening pertains not merely to a specific circumstance but can be perceived as a broader commentary on the waning potency of white supremacy. Such instances, CRT posits, serve as enlightening vignettes that illuminate broader societal complexities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). He becomes a vessel for understanding that the potency of racism thrives on ignorance and stereotyping, and once these are broken, the foundations of apartheid

crumble (Brooks, 2009).

However, a potent question lingers: does this newfound realisation imbue the boy with an understanding that can lead to liberation for his community, or merely foster a temporary illusion? CRT holds that societal constructs of race engender not just prejudice but also economic disparities, limiting the means of upward mobility for marginalised groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). The boy's epiphany, therefore, remains symbolic mainly if the socioeconomic infrastructure that supports racial inequality remains intact.

This moment of revelation is not merely confined to the boy; rather, it cascades onto the reader, urging them to examine their preconceived notions of power and racial dynamics. In the context of CRT, the text becomes not just a story but an exploration of the psychological dimensions of race, specifically how it shapes our expectations, interactions, and institutions (Mills & Unsworth, 2018).

It is a subtle, however momentous shift in perception that makes Gordimer's narrative a compelling study in the context of apartheid and racism. In a society where the codification of racial hierarchies was the norm, the boy's realization exists as a defiance, a brief glitch in a deeply flawed system. It resounds as a clarion call, beckoning to question and dismantle the deeply ingrained stereotypes that fuel apartheid's oppressive machinery. Gordimer's text, when interpreted through Critical Race Theory, serves as a nuanced exploration into the complexities of race in a society governed by apartheid. The boy's realization transcends the immediate circumstance, morphing into a metaphor for racial dynamics, not just within the narrative but in the larger societal fabric. By focusing on this particular passage, one uncovers layers of racial consciousness and exposes the fragility of an apartheid system teetering on the edge of its own internal contradictions. Hence, Gordimer's prose effectively unravels the tapestry of racial relations, offering a critical look at the fissures within the apartheid system.

The chief wanted them to move on; the three children running in and out the hut with their childish sensationalism, their complaints, their brief ecstasies, his wife knocking a nail into her sandal with a stone, and he, shaving outside where there was light. Would tell them to go. What business of the chief's to tell them where? He had not asked them to

come here. A wide arc of the hand: plenty place to go. And this was not their custom, but the civilized one; when a white farmer sold up, or died, the next owner would simply say to the black labourers living and working on the land, born there: go. (p.92)

In the text, "The chief wanted them to move on," we witness an exercise of authority and power that reflects the racial hierarchies typical of apartheid (p.92). Historically, such power has been predominantly held by white individuals. However, in Gordimer's narrative, this is not so. The chief's role demonstrates a reversal of expected racial roles, challenging the reader to confront the conditional nature of authority, often deeply associated with racial profiles. This observation aligns seamlessly with CRT's critique that racial prejudices can indeed alter the natural hierarchy of authority and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

Continuing, "And this was ... born there: go," elucidates the discriminatory practices entrenched in the norms of "civilised" society (p.92). These labourers, often depicted in societal discourse as naïve and content in their servitude, find their fates determined by the whims of their white masters. Such an interpretation resonates with CRT's assertion that marginalised individuals are frequently portrayed in inferior roles, thereby perpetuating stereotypes that justify racial discrimination (Siegel, 2020).

The phrase "plenty place to go" evokes an underlying assumption regarding the disposability of black labourers in the eyes of the landowners (p.92). The CRT framework emphasises that such dismissive attitudes are not isolated behaviours but rather symptomatic of systemic racial prejudice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Indeed, the exploitation of labour is intricately linked to the perpetuation of economic disparities between racial communities.

Further intriguing is the account of "his wife knocking a nail into her sandal with a stone, and he, shaving outside where there was light." These domestic acts exist in contrast to the looming presence of apartheid, as if emphasising that the commonality of human experience transcends racial barriers. However, even within these seemingly mundane activities, Gordimer subtly questions which societal norms are deemed 'civilised' and by whom these judgments are made.

The brilliance of Gordimer's narrative lies in its nuanced exploration of the

complexities of racial relations within the microcosm of apartheid. By delineating a reality where the oppressed can also become oppressors and vice versa, she proffers a keen critique of the system's inherent instability. CRT extends this point by positing that racial prejudices are inherently unstable constructs, continually challenged and reshaped by social dynamics (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

Gordimer's portrayal in *July's People* deals with the shifting sands of racial dynamics within an apartheid system. The selected passage critiques the societal norms that sustain systemic racial discrimination while questioning the very underpinnings of what we term as 'civilisation.' It communicates the cyclical nature of racial prejudices and serves as a vivid reminder of the lasting consequences of such bigotry. Therefore, this narrative serves as an invaluable tool for scholars and readers alike to interrogate the multifaceted relationship between race, power, and societal norms, all within the distressing confines of apartheid.

To be concluded, in the excerpt, "He would no sooner... suburban house" (p.78), the absence of a firearm suggests a subconscious belief in racial superiority. Essentially, the character deems himself sufficiently safe, despite a turbulent political climate, thereby indirectly trivialising the struggles faced by black communities. Within the framework of CRT, this assumption reaffirms how societal constructs often contribute to a false sense of security among privileged groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

"Her son, who had seen the white woman ... —They can't do anything. Nothing to us any more" (p.102), unearths a paradigm shift. Here, the child's realisation serves as a metaphorical undoing of established racial hierarchies. CRT asserts that people from marginalised communities possess unique perspectives on the oppression they face (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). This moment of revelation serves as a testament to CRT's recognition that the oppressed are often well-positioned to articulate their unique experiences with racial prejudice.

The excerpt, "The chief wanted them to move on; the three children running in and out the hut... A wide arc of the hand: plenty place to go" (p.92), exhibits the uneasy tension between presumed authority and racial identity. Despite the traditionally inferior role ascribed to him, the chief exercises his power to dictate the actions of others. The fact that he can direct white individuals where to go marks a

seismic shift in racial dynamics. CRT offers a suitable framework for understanding such transformations by recognising that racial relations are neither static nor biological, but socially and historically contingent (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). In scrutinising these excerpts, one can discern a multidimensional tapestry of racial roles, expectations, and systemic biases. Each excerpt serves as a lens through which CRT can illuminate the persistent, albeit mutable, issues of racial discrimination and social injustice.

4.2 Apartheid Through the Lens of Critical Race Theory Depicted Through Various Characters in *July's People*

This analysis yields a plethora of dimensions i.e., ranging from psychological aspects to institutionalized racial norms that contribute to a more holistic grasp of the apartheid system. Equipped with this understanding, the analysis sheds light on the interconnectedness of social systems and individual experiences, thus challenging the reader to extend the conversation beyond the novel. The result is a disquieting but vital discourse that expands the ongoing dialogue on racial inequalities and social justice, urging readers to ponder the deep-rooted racial imbalances that persist even today. In this manner, Gordimer's novel transcends its historical and geographical setting, establishing itself as a timeless resource for the study of racial dynamics across various societies.

What do the blacks think? What will the freedom fighters think? Did he join the people from Soweto? He took his whites and ran. You make me laugh. You talk as if we weren't hiding, we weren't scared to go farther than the river? (p.39)

The text above illustrates a diversified dialogue fraught with ambivalence, reflecting the conflicted consciousness of the characters. On one side stands July, the eponymous servant who has become a leader. On the other hand, the white couple, Maureen and Bam, have sought refuge in his village amid the collapse of apartheid. This particular dialogue appears fraught with an undercurrent of veiled accusations and self-justifications (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). While ostensibly referring to their present plight, the characters invariably face a significantly pervasive racial dynamic.

In this discourse, the question "What do the blacks think?" signifies more than

simple curiosity; it betrays the white couple's condescending detachment from the black community (p.39). The phrase itself reflects what bell hooks describes as "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy," where the white characters occupy a position of power even in their disempowered state (hooks, 1995). Conversely, July's line, "You talk as if we weren't hiding, we weren't scared to go farther than the river?" indicates his awareness of the omnipresent racial tension (p.39). This statement can be situated within Derrick Bell's concept of "racial realism," which suggests that racial discrimination constitutes a permanent feature of American and, by extension, South African society (Bell, 1992). July perceives the constraints of the system that defines him.

July's utterance also touches on something more profound: the inescapable psychological impact of apartheid, which imprisons both the oppressed and the oppressors (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). The term "freedom fighters" invokes a dichotomy; these rebels are saviours for some and threats to others (p. 39). For July and his people, the freedom fighters symbolize hope, a step toward egalitarianism. Maureen and Bam signify a terrifying shift in the social hierarchy. This condition validates Toni Morrison's assertion that the very concept of freedom is deeply intertwined with and compromised by the legacy of racial discrimination (Morrison, 1993).

Evidently, the emotional gravity of this dialogue lies in the characters' inability to escape from their socially conditioned perspectives. July cannot entirely abandon his subservient demeanour, nor can Maureen and Bam fully relinquish their white saviour complex. These psychological remnants of apartheid manifest as invisible barriers, almost as unyielding as the concrete walls that once segregated Johannesburg.

Gordimer's text, therefore, serves as an embodiment of what Critical Race Theory aims to expose: the inescapable, systemic nature of racial segregation and the enduring psychological scars it leaves on a nation's populace. Her characters live this oppressive dichotomy every day, making her narrative not merely a story but a psychological study through the lens of race.

Hence, *Apartheid Through the Lens of Critical Race Theory in July's People* finds a rich thematic playground in this snippet. Gordimer masterfully unravels the

complexities of the human psyche in a racially divided world, a mirror reflecting society's pervasive and enduring racial disparities.

Only a colourless texturing like combings from raw wool across the top of his head from ear to ear remained to Bam— he had begun to go bald in his twenties. The high dome reddened under the transparent nap. His eyes were blue as Gina's shining out of dirt. —Is it yours, July?—All three laughed in agitation. (p.166)

This passage concentrates on Bam, one of the principal characters, who is part of the white family seeking refuge in July's village. Notably, Bam's description in this scene, going bald with reddened skin and dirt-covered eyes, challenges the stereotypes of racial purity and superiority. At first blush, this portrait of Bam seems far removed from the picture of the privileged white male. It appears that the author is attempting to challenge the reader's notion of whiteness, echoing Edward Said's assertion that identity cannot exist without the "other" (Said, 1978). Thus, Bam appears deconstructed, nearly dehumanised, in a setting where the colour of his skin should ostensibly afford him power.

Here, the sentence "His eyes were blue as Gina's shining out of dirt" captures the essence of the paradox (p.166). One cannot miss the ironic juxtaposition of the stereotypically 'pure' blue eyes, muddled by the physical dirt. This mirrors Richmond and Valtonen's critique that whiteness derives its value purely in opposition to blackness (Richmond & Valtonen, 1994). Essentially, Bam's 'blue eyes' fail to insulate him from the gritty reality, which is an indirect assault on the socially constructed notions of racial purity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

The exchange "Is it yours, July? All three laughed in agitation" also suggests more than meets the eye (p.166). The ambiguous laughter highlights the uncomfortably shared space, where race and social roles are suddenly fluid, and yet, the tension is palpable. "Agitation" symbolises a collective nervous energy, reflecting their awareness of a social order that is both collapsing and being reconstructed simultaneously. It is this fragile racial atmosphere that Ian Haney López describes as "dog whistle politics," where racial codes become an unspoken but understood facet of interaction (López, 2014).

Moreover, the dialogue between Bam and July feels like a subversion of the

historical narrative. Typically, property and ownership are within the domain of the white population under apartheid, yet here, Bam asks July, "Is it yours?" (p.166) This role reversal unsettles the racial hierarchy, aligning with Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, which posits that power structures are complex and interrelated (Crenshaw, 2017).

In summary, the selection serves as a key element in destabilising the racial dynamics at play. The description of Bam breaks the illusion of white invulnerability and racial purity. It questions, critiques, and destabilises accepted norms. The passage, therefore, resonates with the broader theme of the story, and it eloquently captures the spirit of Critical Race Theory's critique of ingrained social systems that perpetuate racial hierarchies. Through this aspect, Gordimer offers us a valuable lens, focusing on the nuances of apartheid and its distortion of human relationships. It is this narrative complexity that elevates "*July's People*" from a mere tale to a nuanced social critique, encapsulating the very essence of apartheid through the perspective of Critical Race Theory.

Abstractions hardened into the concrete: even death is a purchase.

One of Bam's senior partners could afford his at the cost of a private plane—in which he crashed. July's old mother (was she not perhaps his grandmother?) would crawl, as Maureen was watching her now, coming home with wood, and grass for her brooms on her head, bent lower and lower towards the earth until finally she sank to it—the only death she could afford. (p.111)

The text above makes it evident that apartheid in South Africa provides an abundant ground for applying the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). The excerpt accurately conveys the racial and social disparities in mortality experiences.

In the initial lines, "Abstractions hardened into the concrete: even death is a purchase," Gordimer presents the stark reality of apartheid: the racial divide extends even into the realm of dying (p.111). Death, which seems a universal experience, obtains a price tag under the regime of racial capitalism. The phrasing here aligns well with Robin D.G. Kelley's concept that racism becomes commodified, even in aspects of life that are usually considered beyond monetisation (Kelley, 2017).

The contrasting fates of Bam's senior partner and July's old mother (or perhaps his

grandmother) provide a robust illustration of the racialised economic disparities that CRT seeks to interrogate (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Bam's senior partner can "afford" a death involving a private plane crash, emblematic of a life of excess, opulence, and ultimately, freedom even in death. The racial entitlement, embodied by the senior partner, dovetails with what George Lipsitz describes as "the possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz, 2007). This phrase encapsulates the myriad ways in which racial identities become invested with social, cultural, and economic capital.

On the other end of the spectrum, July's elderly mother embodies the deprivations and limitations imposed on black South Africans. Her only conceivable fate "bent lower and lower towards the earth until finally she sank to it, itthe only death she could afford." This depiction unveils how apartheid's brutality leaves its imprint on the very bodies of its black citizens, driving them into the earth, both metaphorically and literally. Here, Gordimer echoes Patricia Hill Collins' theory of "interlocking systems of oppression", where social identities are multi-dimensional, mutually constructing systems that affect black women differently than white men (Collins, 2015).

Moreover, the phrase "was she not perhaps his grandmother?" speaks a lot (p.111). The uncertainty surrounding the woman's relation to July lays bare the utter erasure of historical and familial ties inflicted by apartheid on black families. This generational ambiguity further demonstrates how apartheid decimates the social fabric of the black community. This observation finds resonance in the works of critical race scholars like Derrick Bell, who posits that the legacies of racism are deeply ingrained and have intergenerational impacts (Bell, 1995).

Gordimer's narrative serves as a crucible in which apartheid's racial and social complexities are heated, examined, and exposed. She reveals how even death, an inescapable aspect of human existence, is subject to the socio-economic disparities that apartheid maintains. By capturing the lives of these opposites Bam's senior partner and July's mother or grandmother, Gordimer implicitly challenges the reader to consider the racial imbalances inherent not just in life, but also in the very act and conditions of dying.

Thus, "Apartheid Through the Lens of Critical Race Theory in *July's People*"

gains vibrant thematic clarity in this passage. A tale that seems steeped in the unique sociopolitical context of apartheid South Africa finds universal resonance, posing challenging questions that CRT attempts to answer.

The master. Bam's not your master. Why do you pretend? Nobody's ever thought of you as anything but a grown man. My god, I can't believe you can talk about me like that... Bam's had damn all to do with you, in fifteen years. That's it. You played around with things together in the tool shed. You worked for me every day. I got on your nerves. So what. You got on mine. That's how people are.— She flowered into temper. —But we're not talking about that. That's got nothing to do with now. That's over. (p.77)

Examining the passage through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) sheds light on the dialectical subtleties and power dynamics that encapsulate apartheid. Nadine Gordimer's "*July's People*" conveys such themes through a conversation between two characters: Bam and July. The argument revolves around the complex notions of servitude, entitlement, and mutual animosity, hallmarks of apartheid's racial hierarchy.

Starting with the phrase, "Bam is not your master," Gordimer reveals the awkward space that apartheid creates. Despite the legal and systemic frameworks that label Bam as July's master, the personal relationship remains more intricate. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality highlights the complexity of power relations which do not adhere to strict, delineated roles but are subject to a variety of socio-cultural influences (Crenshaw, 2013).

The selected dialogue in *July's People* exposes the contradictions of race relations under apartheid, where claims of equality mask entrenched hierarchies. Bam's assertion of recognising July as "a grown man" reflects colour-blind racism, denying systemic inequality while reinforcing privilege. Similarly, dismissing history as irrelevant embodies a broader effort to erase the legacies of oppression and sustain dominant power structures. Even framing racial inequality as mutual irritation trivialises the lived realities of subjugation within a society shaped by systemic injustice. Read through Critical Race Theory, these moments reveal the persistence of racial ideologies that distort personal relationships and uphold

broader structures of domination, underscoring Gordimer's text as a critical exploration of apartheid's enduring contradictions.

However, the reality of these multi-layered relationships stands as a testament to the persistent racial divide and cultural complexities. Gordimer's novel, especially this carefully chosen excerpt, lends itself to an incisive CRT analysis. A close examination of the text within this theoretical framework not only highlights the tensions and imbalances endemic to apartheid but also offers broader implications for studies of racial dynamics and systemic inequality.

They will bring trouble. I don't mind those people—what do they matter to me? But white people bring trouble. (p.203)

The characters involved in this dialogue serve as representatives of broader societal and racial paradigms. In this passage, the sense of foreboding resonates through the words "They will bring trouble." Here, "they" implicates white people, embodying what CRT identifies as the power structure of racialized systems. Indeed, Derrick Bell's pioneering works in CRT assert that racial hierarchies are persistent, systemic, and deeply rooted in legal systems (Bell, 2005). The character's anticipation of "trouble" likely draws from experiences mired in apartheid's legal frameworks.

Dissipating any ambiguity, the phrase "I don't mind those people—what do they matter? The dialogue in *July's People* reveals that apartheid's effects endure beyond its legal dissolution, as victims internalize detachment and associate white presence with systemic disruption. This reflects the lingering psychological and social imprints of racial oppression, where privilege and subjugation remain entangled in everyday interactions. Viewed through the lens of Critical Race Theory, the passage highlights the intersection of race, identity, and power, illustrating how personal remarks reflect the weight of societal narratives. By capturing these subtleties, Gordimer's novel demonstrates literature's capacity to expose the concealed dynamics of inequality and to provoke reflection on the enduring legacies of apartheid.

A dissection of Gordimer's "*July's People*" reveals a complex aspect, exploring racial tension and systemic discord. One sentence: "How was she to have known, until she came here, that the special consideration she had shown for his dignity as a man, while he was by definition a servant, would become his humiliation itself, the

one thing there was to say between them that had any meaning" (p.39), encapsulates this fraught interplay of racial hierarchy and individual agency. Through a CRT lens, it takes on augmented significance.

In Gordimer's *July's People*, Maureen's reflections on July reveal the paradox of benevolence within systemic racism, where acts meant to convey dignity instead deepen humiliation. This tension illustrates the entrapment of both oppressor and oppressed in rigid racial roles, showing that apartheid's impact extended beyond legal structures into the fabric of personal relationships. Viewed through Critical Race Theory, the episode underscores how racism infiltrates even well-intentioned interactions, shaping identities, status, and intimacy in ways that perpetuate inequality. The discomfort Maureen experiences thus becomes a powerful lens for interrogating the enduring legacies of apartheid and the challenges of pursuing genuine social justice.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Findings

- The novel illustrates that racism permeates personal identities and societal structures, shaping psychological experiences, social hierarchies, and everyday interactions under apartheid.
- *July's People* presents a counter-narrative that challenges dominant racial discourses, exposing the persistence of privilege, inequality, and systemic oppression beyond the apartheid era.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, analyzing Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* through the lens of Critical Race Theory reveals the intricate and unsettling realities of apartheid, exposing how systemic oppression shapes both societal structures and personal relationships. The novel illustrates how privilege blinds the dominant group to its own advantages while simultaneously subjecting the marginalized to displacement, subjugation, and humiliation. Characters like Bam, Royce, Maureen, and July embody these tensions, showing that even well-intentioned acts of "benevolence" can reinforce racial hierarchies rather than dismantle them. Concepts from CRT, including intersectionality and Bonilla-Silva's notion of covert racism, illuminate how

apartheid operates not only through overt policies but also through subtle, everyday interactions that perpetuate inequality.

Ultimately, *July's People* offers no resolutions but instead underscores the complexity and persistence of racial prejudice. By dramatizing the erosion of white authority, the fleeting glimpses of empowerment for the marginalized, and the psychological toll on all characters, Gordimer compels readers to confront the enduring legacy of systemic racism. The novel serves as both a critique of apartheid and a broader reflection on the global relevance of racialized power dynamics. Its strength lies in nuance and discomfort, serving as a catalyst for critical reflection and urging continued pursuit of equity and justice in societies still haunted by racial division.

5.3 Recommendations

- Future research should integrate intersectional frameworks within Critical Race Theory to address gender, class, and sexuality in apartheid literature.
- Expanding comparative analyses with a broader range of primary texts can provide deeper insights into the varied racial and socioeconomic dimensions of apartheid.

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