

Interregnum in Colonial Space: Subversion of Power and Dispossession of Metropolitan Home Materials in Gordimer's *July's People*

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ABSTRACT

Nadine Gordimer's recurrent theme has been raising awareness about the unjust and discriminatory policy of Apartheid in South Africa. In one of her later novels, *July's People*, she depicts the impact of an impromptu journey of a white family into their black servant's hinterland. Apartheid atrocities and discriminations of the white government of South Africa cause black insurgency and the displacement of the Smales family. This dislocation into the primitive settlement of July disrupts the former exercise of power hierarchy between the Smales family members and July. The Smales family is also deprived of familiar home equipment and city facilities. Although July shelters them from city riots, he takes advantage of the Smales's predicament and appropriates new power in the new environment. The burden of this study was to examine July's treatment of the Smales family when they are emasculated from their former privileges. This study also attempted to show how this sojourn dispossesses all major characters from their city life styles and powers. Both linguistic and physical subversions of power relations cause a change in the conjugal relationships of the Smales family and confuse July with an in-between identity and attitude towards his master's family and his village community. This study examined the new relationships and life style changes in the light of post-colonial theoretical assumption.

Keywords: Colonial Zone, dispossession, power

INTRODUCTION

Nadine Gordimer was born on 20 November 1923 in Springs, South Africa. She is one of the most prolific South African writers. *The Conservationist* (1974), *Burger's Daughter* (1979), *July's People* (1981), *The Pickup* (2001), and *Get A Life* (2005) are some of her well-known works. Gordimer published *July's People* in 1981, thirteen years before the official abolishment of the Apartheid. She could aptly anticipate the inevitable collapse of the white government in South Africa. *July's People*,

after its publication, was banned in South Africa, owing to its wide exposure of racial segregations imposed by the white minority government of South Africa during the Apartheid. Like compatriots Alan Paton and J. M. Coetzee, Gordimer has dramatised the history of her country in her fiction to expose more awareness and truth of the unfair political situation of her homeland to the world. This study is based on the post-colonial theoretical approach to investigate how the black revolution dispossesses the white family of their power and urban home facility

and how it reversely empowers their servant, July, to appropriate some portions of their power and modern belongings.

A strong reason for the significance of place in the colonised societies “lies in the disruption caused by ‘modernity’ itself in the links between time, space and place in European societies” (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2001, p. 178). This study shows that not only the concepts of time measurement and urban space facility are significant, but also other modern equipment of a Johannesburg home that has affected Bam’s family when they are reluctantly dislocated. I borrow Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of “unhomeliness” reflected in his *The Location of Culture* (1994) to explore the impact of black resistance and revolution on the white family. This concept is not attributed to the black people and their exiled setting. On the other hand, it is viewed that the white family’s journey is not an exile but a flight under duress caused by black riots and fear of death when the whole underpinning structure of the state is dismantled. Bhabha notes that “this process is relocation of home to another territory where the occupants cross to another culture” (p. 13); however, “to be unhomed is not to be homeless” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 13) or shelterless. It is a condition that provides another house structure in an unknown space but cannot take the place of the former home with its materials and the occupants’ ties and affinities.

DISCUSSION

The novel is structured around two sets of relationship in this anarchy of interregnum; between Maureen and Bam, and the Smales with their black servant, July. The grammatical ambiguity of the novel’s title revolves around the economic context of material possession and dispossession, as well as the change of power relationship between the white and black people. The title is a play on ‘possession’ in several senses and leaves readers in a limbo as to who July’s people really are. Are they the Smales or the villagers? Everyone has his/her own definition according to the time and position of both July and the white family. The characters’

roles are reversed as the revolution transforms July’s master’s family into his impotent guests.

Gordimer starts *July’s People* with the epigraph from Gramsci’s Prison Note-books; “The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms”. The epigraph alludes to the novel’s plot in a moral and political intermission, during which “customary relationships have been overthrown and new ones are still embryonic” (Green, 1998, p. 562). In addition to the reversal of the roles, the idea of ownership and ambience of place is reshaped. The journey through the colonial space and the Smales’s movement from the centre (Johannesburg) to the periphery (indigenous land) is unlike the traditional colonial expedition and exploration that is associated with the power of commercialism, conquest, adventure or religious conversion. This journey is under the duress of the black revolt and causes subversion of power and dispossession of urban facilities benefited to the white family members. One of the consequences of the revolution and black insurgency in *July’s People* is that the white authorities are stripped of their civil power to protect the property, wealth and privileges of white South Africans. The white government resources are endangered by the revolt of black angry mobs armed by Mozambique and other African countries. The White South Africans’ policy of Apartheid and the racial inequalities had triggered them to become the target for the revolutionaries.

The black insurgency forces the white family to set up an impromptu flight to a space where black people who are geographically, historically and culturally separated before, now come into contact with each other and establish an ongoing relationship and the Smales’s escape to July’s native hinterland forces a reconfiguration of the power dynamic between the white family members and their servant, July. In the bush, they have to redefine the power hierarchy they exercised before. Maureen particularly realises that her “previous interactions with the world she inhabits, necessitates a reevaluation that encompasses race, class, and gender” (Lock, 2002, p. 6). As liberals, Maureen and Bam want

to belong to a multiracial society but they hold on jealously to their material possessions and privileges.

The Ambience of Home

To elucidate the tension between two specific modalities of 'being home' and 'not being home', Jeanette Treiber quotes Pratt's narrative about home, i.e. "'being home' refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries, 'not being home' is a matter of realising that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of difference even within oneself" (as cited in Treiber, 1983, p. 149). This modality of home is also applicable to Gordimer's *July's People* but the difference is that due to the political circumstances, the white family members are forced to leave home for a safer place. The Smales family, having driven through the bush for three days and nights, have to spend the night in a rondavel in July's village. Upon their arrival, they soon realise that they are an unwelcome burden to that small society as July's wife criticizes "why they do they come here? Why to us?" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 18). While the rondavel is a familiar African dwelling, and while this one is "the prototype from which all the others had come" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 2), yet the space, the interior design, furniture and details of other facilities they possessed 'back there' is not available at the rondavel. Gordimer describes the position of the rondavel in a meticulous detail:

"...stamped mud and dung floor, above her, cobwebs stringy with dirt dangling from the rough wattle steeple that supported the frayed grey thatch. Stalks of light poked through. A rim of shady light where the mud walls did not meet the eaves; nests glued there, of a brighter-colored mud wasps or bats" (p. 2).

All these features are contrasted to the Smales family's urban home, their familiarity with an expectation of their earlier surroundings. In one dwelling, Maureen observes "the tail of an animal and a rodent skull in the host's hut" (p. 29). She feels she is culturally displaced and is out of her familiar modern contact zone. Therefore, the sojourn they are experiencing disturbs them with an unhomely atmosphere. Sheila Roberts describes this uncomfortable one-room structure into which chickens and large insects wander, where there is the rustling of rats and mice at night, and into which rain-water leaks takes on "more disturbing ambience when, within its constricting space, the ordinary, satisfying, white middle-class marriage of the Smaleses' begins to destabilize" (Roberts, 1993, p. 80). Maureen expresses her deep dissatisfaction with their current stay in July's village. She nags Bam who has been emasculated from his both masculine power and the prestige of his city profession. "And there; what was he here, an architect lying on a bed in a mud hut, a man without vehicle" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 98).

Maureen's discontent highlights the uselessness of Bam's old identity in the new environment. Mike Madden also questions the "validity and the strength of his patriarchal authority" in the leadership of his family while they are dislocated in an unfamiliar place (Madden, 2007, p. 22). Bam is also upset with his stay because he is deprived of his third daily category of life 'back there'. "The third category, that organised suburban invention called leisure, did not exist" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 34). As Bam's urban leisure is removed, he tries to settle down into the "routine of survival" in this new and unfamiliar terrain but inadequate and unhygienic baths and toilets prevent the Smales from cleaning their sweats and bad odours and "there were no windows in the mud walls to open wide and let out the sour smell of this man" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 103). She finds the odour between her legs for the first time with the onset of her monthly period. In the absence of her private bathroom equipment, she emulates

the African women and uses old rags during her menstruations. Bam is also terrified at the scene of Royce wiping his back with stone at the dearth of toilet paper. This sojourn deprives them of a hygienic bathroom, equipment and medication that were earlier available to them in their own home.

Limited to a shelter without offering water, electricity and proper sanitation, Maureen is afraid to cook in the pot used by the native black people. She is certainly affected by the unhygienic scene that she observes and insists on Bam that she will cook 'on our own'. Gordimer continues to "expose civilized unease by manipulating the colonial traveller's fear of disease and unhygienic conditions. Maureen camouflages this fear with civilised etiquette July, we must make our own fire and she prefers to maintain control over her family's dietary habits" (Williamson, 1999, p. 101-102). Maureen does not only complain about the lack of her kitchen utensils but she also worries about the strength and structure of the native hut. She questions the safety of the thatches by saying "everything in these villages could be removed at the sweep of a bulldozer or turned to ashes by a single match in the thatch" (Gordimer, 1981, pp. 113-114). It reflects her discomfort with and insecure feeling about the residential place she is forced to shelter in and these are in contrast with the strong structured concrete and secure metropolitan house where she lived and is longing to return to. Ali Erritouni describes that "their new life is a far cry from and is starkly contrasted to the sumptuous life they have led before the revolution undermined the props that supported their privilege" (Erritouni, 2004, p. 112). Bam and Maureen owned "a seven-roomed house and swimming-pool" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 25), could afford to hire live-in servants, went on frequent hunting trips, had "growing savings and investments" and threw extravagant parties. In short, they led a comfortable middle-class life.

The morning they are supposed to visit the chief, they dress in clean but un-ironed clothes and look shabbier than July and Daniel in their attire because Maureen is reluctant to replace

her urban home appliance with the old fashioned iron heated on the fire. On their visit to the chief's settlement, Bam's expectations of his home with brick construction and rectangular shape do not come true. To his surprise, he observes a dwelling devoid of basic urban utilities. He doubts about the position and life style of the chief whose place has no church or cross and its school's sports facilities are on an open grassy space instead of a dust patch ground. The wilderness elements of the chief's district and the absence of some basic facilities make him think that the chief is also virtually dispossessed not only from the white modern infrastructure but also from the white cultural beliefs and Christianity.

In their dislocated sojourn, both Bam and Maureen are disoriented from calculating time and the type of unfamiliar home and protection July has provided them. Bam is constantly looking at his watch to check time and date but Maureen's perception of time measurement on the bush is that of a pointless matter to think about it. "On the bed, the man kept glancing at his watch but she knew hers was useless" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 43). The Smales, being deprived of home security, privacy, power, ownership, hygienic utensils, modern facilities and comfort, are left shattered with a nostalgic wish to return home. The family's traumatic experience of both physical and cultural displacement is best fit with Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness, because they are not at 'home' in themselves. They have no sense of belonging to this primitive house of blacks. Through the course of the novel, the nostalgic desire of 'back there' is constantly repeated and intensifies the depth of the longing they have for their privileged space, namely their lost urban home.

On a rare occasion of festivity in July's village, the Smales family enjoys a dinner of roasted warthog that Bam hunted. Returning to the hut, Maureen and Bam who are sexually aroused by the supposedly aphrodisiac strength of meat are deprived of their private bedroom; they then use the bakkie cabin to gratify their sudden sexual urge. When he wakes to see

menstrual blood on his penis, he experiences a momentary but horrifying hallucination that it is the blood of the dead pig. He did have sexual intercourses with her in their private, solace and modernised bedroom, but he did not ever experience her menstrual blood. The routine sexuality they had in the master bedroom, which is now in the village becomes an event of horror. "The quasi-castration image also underlies the extent to which, divested of the attributes of male power (bakkie and weapon, both commandeered by blacks) Bam is progressively desexualized" (Newman, 1988, p. 87). Later, Maureen with her undepilated and bad smell of her menstruation becomes asexual and she is no longer a source of sexual attraction in spite of her nude body and bared breasts.

The difference between the centre (white settler) and the periphery (black land) in the colonial zone is as distinct as its people's culture and their mode of living. Likewise, Gordimer presents July and the other men in his village as both economic and cultural products of the contact zone where they are positioned in between two phases of city technological development; the urban infrastructure and consumerist habitation and the rural primitive settlement. The man who brings a battery-operated amplifier to the village and July's western attire or the collection of his city commodities, like plastic cups and scissors, represent them as the active agents of introducing white metropolitan culture of consumerism and avarice of possessions. In July's narrative about the wonders of the city, Gordimer exposes the gap between the lifestyles of the affluent whites and poor blacks:

A room to sleep in, another room to eat in, another room to sit in, a room with books ...a room with how many books . . . Hundreds I think. And hot water. . . – the room for bathing- . . . [to] wash your clothes . . . there was a machine in some other room for that-" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 19).

Williamson argues that in the colonial interregnum space, Gordimer presents the black and white figures who confront their opposing socio-cultural systems. Apartheid's strict policy of separation suggests black and white contestation for power, capitalism and habit of consumerism (Williamson, 1999, p. 80). In this in-between culture and contact zone, both the 'coloniser' (white) and 'colonised' (black) are turned into refigured characters when they witness each other's dismantlement of former social status and exercise of power hierarchy. During the interregnum spent in July's village, Maureen's conception of her marriage to Bam and her position as a housewife breaks down; this will be discussed later.

Disruption of Familial Relationship

Despite the fact that Maureen, as a suburban sophisticated wife had been very much in a subordinate position to Bam back in Johannesburg, this relationship too begins to change as "Bam's position of male authority begins to crumble" (Rich, 1984, p. 377). The comfortable atmosphere of the seven-room metropolitan home she had defined with its "master bedroom *en suite*" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 4) is now obsolete. "What the Smales understood as a stable relationship of marriage is shown to be dependent on a middle-class environment and especially on the sense of ownership that props up the marriage" (Folks, 1998, p. 119). Even their desire for conjugal sexual relationship is debilitated as the "lack of privacy killed desire; if there had been any to feel" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 79). In her unwanted sojourn, she sees no womanly role available to her and she can see no substitute role to spend her daily time. Owing to her dissatisfaction with her current position, she fails to generate care and maternal love which she once performed in her city home. Instead, Bam has taken over her role. Her previous roles as suburban wife and mother have been erased and she is no longer worried about her children as they already know how to look after themselves like the black children.

She envies the black village women who have their work and roles in their own place. She feels she has been dislocated to a place that offers no meaningful role to contribute to the welfare of her family or community because “she was not in possession of any part of her life” (Gordimer, 1981, p. 139).

The Reverse of Roles and Relationships between July and the Smales

The Smales have always prided themselves on their egalitarian relationship with July, providing him with a room in their yard and paying him decently, giving him Wednesdays and alternate Sundays free, and allowing him to have his friends visit him or shack up with his mistress Ellen. However, in their helpless and marooned context, the Smales family members seemingly resist the “redistribution of inalienable home materials” they bring with them. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer puts it, “struggling unsuccessfully to maintain the rights of possession, the Smales couple manifests the ‘morbid symptoms’ of a dying consumerist culture in which identity is created by ownership and relationships are mediated by objects” (Bodenheimer, 1993, p. 109). Victor displays a materialistic emblem of the white figure who yearns to impress the black children with his city belongings. He brings his electric racing-car toy to the place that he is informed there will be no electric power to run it. He is only obsessed with showing his urban toy to the black children and is also worried about the native children possibly damaging his possession. He demands his mother “but tell them they mustn’t touch it. I don’t want my things messed up and broken” (Gordimer, 1981, p. 14). He also reacts with vehemence to the villagers using water from the tank which his father has installed: “Everybody’s taking water! ... I told them they’re going to get hell, but they don’t understand. Come quick, dad”. Undaunted by his parents’ dismissal of his complaint, he insists, “It’s ours, it’s ours” (Gordimer, 1981, pp. 62-3).

The conflict of power starts when July appropriates the bakkie key and drives it to the

Indian store to procure food stuff for them but it is not only hard for the Smales to entertain July’s claim over the bakkie without seeking their permission but also they see his newly-gained power as a threat that entails their material equalities. “Their reaction to his assertive use of the car betrays the limitations of their liberalism. As long as July was obedient and vulnerable, they felt outraged by the racism of Apartheid, but as soon as his relationship with them entails material equality, they resent him” (Erritouni, 2004, p. 117). In disbelief that July has contested his exclusive right to the bakkie, Bam complains, “I would never have thought he would do something like that. He’s always been so correct” (Gordimer, 1981, p. 58). The black man has overstepped the limits; he does not know his place any more. Interregnum and civil disorders have empowered July to acquire new skills of appropriating the bakkie key. Despite Bam’s warning, he tends to continue driving the bakkie without any fear of being arrested by the white police who would inspect his driving license or pass. “If they catch you without licence He laughed. Who is going to catch me? The white policeman ran away when the black soldiers came at that time” (Gordimer, 1981, p. 59). July not only belittles the authority of Bam but also questions the whole power of the white government in which the fugitive police is representing.

On one occasion, Maureen summons July to her hut to restart the hierarchical structure that characterised their relationship in Johannesburg; “Go and say I want to see him” (Gordimer, 1981, p. 68). However, he appears unhurried and without any sign of his former obedience. Maureen realises that now due to the sudden rupture of time and the normality of white place, July’s total dependencies and obligations have turned into an assertive exercise of new roles, as stated in “His refusal to ask for permission to use the car indicates his rejection of the Smales’ previous status as white bosses and a reminder to them that the old order is defunct” (Erritouni, 2004, pp. 118-119). With the “explosion of roles” caused by the revolution, he now imposes his demands and wishes. Bam has been

emasculated from his male authority, status and profession that he enjoyed in the city. The dearth of privacy in the hut and the lack of boundaries where everyone can intrude into their private zone have doubled Bam's understanding of his loss of authority as the head of the family and this reaches its climax when his shotgun is stolen. He is uprooted of his power and authority that he was proud of in his former life. Moreover, the absence of urban facilities, social security and infrastructures in July's village, such as lack of a phone to call the police, culminates in a feeling that makes him more hopeless, detached and deprived of his civil rights. Bam, in his desperate mood, assumes that if his shotgun was not stolen, it could function as a surrogate for the police and it could protect his family when they are out of the accustomed place. Bam desperately rummages for his shotgun in every corner of the hut, mistaking the minimum space of the hut with the vast space of his old home. Eventually, July and Daniel are the first culprits to lay the blame of gun theft on. Madden believes that the perceived theft of the truck and later shotgun, is itself a symbol of Bam's masculinity and his status as patriarch and it "destabilises the old balance in his relationship with Maureen, and initiates a small transfer of power to her within the marriage" (Madden, 2007, p. 22). Maureen is upset with her husband's loss of power, male authority over the family and the ambience of home. "The abdication in *July's People* reverses the guest-host relationship between July and Maureen; instead of July being encamped in the Smales' servants' quarters, the Smales now live in July's mother's hut" (Folks, 1998, p. 119).

In this interregnum, Maureen's relationship with July undergoes change and it reveals the inconstant economic bases of their existence. She assumes that her past communications with July in English indicates that their intimate relationships based on courteous service and generous reward meant that they understood each other but now the previous language of servant and master becomes not only ineffective but also empowers July to appropriate new form of language unspoken to them before.

As the novel proceeds, the Smales are virtually disabled to control or monitor their children's activities. Bam assures Maureen that "they have been drinking water wherever they find it, already...it's impossible to stop them" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 14). Royce, the youngest child, wails for his parents to buy Coca Cola but in its absence, he satisfies his thirst with water from the river side. The romantic novel, *I Promessi Sposi* (The Betrothed), that is supposed to strengthen her love to Bam or fill her leisure time is an ironical reminder that the tie of conjugal life and union of Bam Smales and Maureen Hetherington is weakened due to defamiliarisation with city life style and urban home possessions and power.

Battery is a precious commodity for them to get the signal from the radio to learn about the recent news of the city. In order to protect the new battery from the hut humidity, they have to raise the hut floor a level higher. Although Bam is an architect, he has almost lost his creativity to substitute bricks where they are a "cherished commodity; in every hut". He is dispossessed of building materials he had easily accessed in city construction and to degrade his city profession, Maureen suggests asking for a solution from July who has less experience than Bam.

Newman argues that this evolving confrontation among July and the Samles "dramatises Gordimer's concern as to whether people can make a common culture if their material interests conflict dramatically" (Newman, 1988, p. 86). July takes advantage of his master family's demoted position and as he removes his apparently honest and loyal mask, "an explosion of roles" ensues. Maureen confronts July's pilferage of small household articles which she rediscovers in the village and this destroys the good boy image of July she perceived 'back there'. She comes to understand that "as the economic base crumbles, so other abstractions (honesty, dignity, fidelity) disappear" (Newman, 1988, p. 89). To measure the degree of transfer of power, Williamson points out traditional travel narrative in which "the usual role of the native is to be a helper in an

expedition, who usually carries the White-man's luggage. In *July's People*, July is the leader of the expedition" (Williamson, 1999, pp. 93-94). He decides the itinerary and the composition of the expedition. July is not only in charge of the first expedition from Johannesburg to the village, but is also in charge of the second expedition to the chief's village. He not only decides the date and time of the visit to the chief, but also specifies who will be included in the delegation. While Maureen wants only Bam to go and visit the chief, July insists that the entire Smales family must go.

July not only reverses Bam's role as possessor of material goods and family decision-maker but also wrests Bam's masculinity. He also interferes with the Smales' conjugal relationships. Feeling empowered as a home decision maker, he defines Maureen's range of social interaction and prohibits her from the routine spinach gathering with the other women. Now the Smales, uprooted from their older home space and its power, are displaced and disempowered. "Recognising this transfer of power and change in social relationships, little Royce tells Victor to ask July, and not Bam, to buy him the little miniature buggies" (Williamson, 1999, p. 94). Royce begs Victor to ask July; "Why don't you ask July? Vic? (Gordimer, 1981, p. 87).

Gordimer further represents a transfer of power from White to Black in Bam's symbolic emasculation and July's increased power and control. July learns to drive the bakkie and decides who will drive on their visit to the chief. For Bam, the structure of power between July and the chief is redefined when he learns that July has no sole authority in his village and has to meet the demands of the chief. "My place it's here. But all people here, all villages; it's the chief's" (Gordimer, 1981, p. 100). It is very difficult for the chief to believe the "explosion of roles" and the seizure of the white people's authority, property and army equipment by black revolutionists. The chief, observing the white family's powerless state, takes the opportunity to assign Bam a new role as a weapon instructor. He claims, from the past

time, the white authorities had deprived him and his father of buying a gun, but now, Bam is able to compensate by teaching him shooting skills.

Bam is unable to grasp the fact that the social structure and the privileges granted by the Apartheid system are now dismantled, and consequently, the master-servant power dynamic that once existed is presenting towards July's benefit. Although July is relatively enthusiastic to appropriate some portion of the white power and possession, adversely on the other hand, he tries to maintain the master/servant relationship in his village to preserve the image of madam boy 'back there'. The former image of July's power and position as a housekeeper, nurturer and guard is belittled in the eyes of his extended family members when they witness the white family's desperate and helpless condition. July does not advocate the black revolutionaries but "he closely identifies with them. As a product of the white capitalist system, July understands himself in reference to that system" (Williamson, 1999, p. 88). He wants the white power to be restored because the Smales's loss of power and urban home possessions deprive him of his job and the leisure time he had 'back there' before.

Subversion of Language Hierarchy

Another significant challenge that the displaced people experience is the subversion of the language hierarchy that emerges between the master and the servant. In the novel's penultimate chapter, "the linguistic and social conventions that have hidden Maureen and July from seeing each other clearly for the past fifteen years fall away" (Green, 1988, p. 561). Linguistic confrontation and verbal violence occur between them and it turns into a bitter argument as she insists on finding the food for her family by herself. For the first time, July berates her in his own language when she threatens to disclose the tales of his city mistress (Ellen) to Martha. However, this last strategy she uses for July's disempowerment proves fruitless as she understands their total dependency on him. She tells July their former relationship has ended, that he is no longer a servant. He then shocks her

by asking if she is going to pay him this month. She is still preoccupied with the illusion of an urban home and wants to restore the domestic role she had 'back there'. She is not willing to digest her familial dependent status on July as long as they are bereft of their previous mode of leading a comfortable life with modern facilities. Meanwhile, July has been asserting himself more and more as he grows accustomed to being in the unwonted position of having power over Maureen and Bam.

The Novel's Closure

One of the 'morbid symptoms' of interregnum is the ending of the novel. Despite the diversity of the interpretations of the novel's ending and Maureen's run towards the helicopter, it reveals her desperate inability to live with the present hut condition and the possession it offers. Her final act also manifests her inability to give up the nostalgic feeling of 'back there'. Maureen reaches a 'traumatic impasse' when she sees no better future or hope to return to her urban home and is ready to risk her life at the cost of approaching a modern means of escape even when she does not know whether the helicopter crew are saviours or murderers. The helicopter also remains "as a final sign of the ambiguous status of power-objects in the transitional world" (King, 1993, p. 119). Maureen's run toward the helicopter indicates her confidence to embrace the unknown future lying ahead rather than continuing a frustrated life devoid of city possession and its ambience.

CONCLUSION

Gordimer juxtaposes sets of contrastive physical conditions between "the life back there" and the present accommodation, food, sports, hobby, hygiene facilities and economic status. A seven-room house versus a one-room hut, lavish food, morning milk tea and evening fresh fruit versus a meal of porridge and wild spinach, Bam's bird-hunting versus wart-hog hunting for survival, playing with toys versus playing with nothing in the real wilderness, clean and bathed body versus body odours and menstruation; and sense

of power and ownership versus disempowerment and dispossession. The Smales and July's disruption of their accustomed circumstances confuse them with a profound psychological upheaval. Bam is hopeless to restore the former prestige of his city profession; likewise, July's plan for the future and his dream to open a business in the white town is shattered. Home uprootedness culminates in losing command and authority and it enables July to misuse the powerless and dependent state of his erstwhile master. He takes possession of some of the Smales's belongings that are crucial marks of their differences. The power that notes of money gave them in the city to buy goods is no longer representing its value and remains a useless bundle of papers. Although Bam learns that his notes are not effective any more in the chaos of the interregnum, he sticks to his city standards and values and wants to pay July for his help. His zeal of the white civilising mission that leads to the building of a water tank for the welfare of villagers introduces more city goods unavailable to the black natives so far. With all these nasty experiences and unpleasant events caused by their displacement from their white standards, qualities, values and urban lifestyle, the Smales' world is irreparably destroyed and there remains little hope to retrieve their former life of middle class comfort or to rely on the black African's resources, settlement, facilities and infrastructures. Dislocation and dispossession has an internal impact on the personal and familial life of the Smales.

The identity transition of Bam and Maureen, through the course of the novel, reveals that in their new environment, Bam is still obsessed with his values, urban standard and quality of life he maintained in his former society. The unhomeliness wrought by the unwilling flight triggers Bam's cultural and psychological paralysis and it restructures familial, social, and cultural relationships. Bam and Maureen are uprooted both physically and psychologically from the very base of their home. In the end, Maureen in her deep frustration with her environment abandons her family members and sacrifices them for the sake of her own survival.

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