

Dystopia and Displacement: Exploring Trauma in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981)

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Abstract:

This article aims to establish a link between historical trauma and dystopian literature in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) in the light of M. Keith Booker's conception of "Defamiliarization" as well as the Deleuzoguattarian conception of "Deterritorialization". It argues that the Deleuzoguattarian scholarship on dystopia offers new insights into contemporary dystopia by framing the Apartheid system as the historical trajectory of trauma, displacing trauma from the black to the white community. We argue that the link between dystopia and trauma lies in how dystopian narratives disrupt familiar social constructs to confront unsettling realities. By employing 'Defamiliarization', Gordimer's novel destabilizes the reader's perception of power dynamics, forcing such a reexamination of social hierarchies. Through deterritorialization, the dystopian narrative dismantles the boundaries imposed by Apartheid. Ultimately, this article demonstrates how Gordimer's dystopian novel serves as a lens that sheds light on enduring traumatic experiences rooted in South African history, revealing social scars left by an oppressive system.

Keywords: Dystopia; Apartheid; Trauma; Defamiliarization; Deterritorialization; Disruption.



1. Introduction

Literature is often a field where people's desires and challenges are explored. The novel gives the story a realistic environment, which is important for comprehending the problem from the author's perspective. Therefore, the novel may function as a literary representation of ordinary living and reality. Within this perspective, we find South African writers as highly driven by their country's history, particularly the Apartheid system. The 20th century witnessed the emergence of literature that was interested in the situation of Black South Africans. Many South African writers resorted to literature to explore the issues that faced Africans during the Apartheid regime. They examine the divisions created by Apartheid. Black, and even some white, writers try to make their

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culture clear to whites.

An investigation of South African writers' writings reveals the strength of their historical realities. The Apartheid policy and the identity crisis are the most significant themes in their works. Racial inequality and a divided society characterize the literature South African writers produce. Apartheid was not only opposed by blacks but also by whites. Many South African writers, such as J.M. Coetzee, Bessie Head, Athol Fugard, Lewis Nkosi, André Brink, and Nadine Gordimer, expressed dissatisfaction with the Apartheid system. Through writing, South African writers help the African and the non-African community understand their society in the light of the Apartheid's atrocities and injustice. Moreover, the novel in South Africa is successful in demonstrating comprehensive knowledge of the experiences of people across color lines by demonstrating how far the traumatic experience under Apartheid is damaging to South Africa as a whole.

This study explores how Gordimer's dystopian narrative novel functions as a vehicle that processes collective trauma through the reversal of power structures in South African Apartheid and the disruption of familiar social structures. In addition, we aim to demonstrate how the application of Booker's defamiliarization and the Deleuzoguattarian concept of 'deterritorialization' and 'reterritorialization' are crucial in reinterpreting the position of Apartheid in African literature, the dystopian genre in particular. Reassessing Apartheid from a dystopian vision opens new conceptual horizons that conventional approaches might overlook. Such an approach illuminates the psychological dimension of living within artificially constructed social categories—a form of psychological violence typically highlighted in dystopian literature. In addition, we argue that viewing Apartheid from a dystopian lens creates an analytical space to explore the way trauma operates across racial boundaries differently yet connectedly. Still, more importantly, the dystopian vision of the traumatic experience of South Africans under Apartheid reveals how the system traumatized both the oppressed and the oppressor (those who benefitted from it), revealing psychological damage. In this context, the dystopian narrative capacity to confront historical trauma is effectively demonstrated.

Before delving into the analysis, a review of related literature is crucial to examine existing scholarship on this topic. To begin with, Joseph Kamanda Kamanda Omoy's "Hospitality Versus Artificiality: Apartheid Social Barriers in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*" (2024) where he "aims at showing the importance of hospitality in the breaking of inequalities among people" and that "Hospitality in *July's People* (1981) helps to restore the mental and behavior of the characters to stop the fear experienced as a reminiscence of past events" (Omoy, 2024, p.6). As it is demonstrated from this quote, Omoy interprets the reversal of power dynamics between the white and the black characters within the

context of hospitality, suggesting that July's behavior towards the Smales, after the collapse of the Apartheid, is interpreted as a hospitable one with a purpose to reestablish better relationships between the races. This argument is limited by Omoy's assumption that fundamentally misses the traumatic nature of the power reversal Gordimer depicts.

Contrary to Omoy's argument, we argue that what Gordimer actually portrays is not hospitality but a deeply uncomfortable forced interdependence shaped by historical trauma. Based on our analysis, we believe that July's apparently or superficially welcoming and hospitable behavior towards the Smales exists within a specific psychological territory—it carries the weight of years of unequal power dynamics suddenly inverted. We also argue, through the Deleuzoguattarian concepts of Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization, that the Smales and July's displacement from their habitual settings resists limiting their new relationship to hospitality because offering hospitality as such would overlook the depth of the traumatic damage inflicted by Apartheid. Even the novel's eventual effect transcends giving easy solutions like hospitality as a reconciliation. The reversal of power dynamics is not healed through hospitality because it is an opportunity for the Smales in particular (the liberal whites) to experience how deeply the segregating Apartheid system has damaged the Whites and the Blacks' capacity for genuine human connection—damage that simple hospitality cannot heal.

Somnath Ghosh, for his part, in his article entitled "Contextual History in the Perspective of Nadine Gordimer's Novel *July's People*" (2022), highlights a profound dimension in Gordimer's novel through the Hegelian dialectical framework. He interprets the reversal of power under Apartheid and the characters' position under Apartheid—the White minority held the position of master, and the Black majority was relegated to the position of slave—suggesting "Hegelian dialectical collapsing of the White's prior position of master and thus metaphorically foreshadows the re-making of history or decolonization in South Africa." (Ghosh, 2022, p.152) In this context, Ghosh captures the Hegelian moment when the master's (the White's) consciousness faces existential crisis through dependency on the formerly subjugated. The reversal of the role of master and slave leads to the Smales family, Maureen in particular, experiencing the disintegration of identity when removed from the Apartheid structures that maintained their dominance. Ghosh's argument, though insightful, has significant limitations when examined from Booker's defamiliarization and the Deleuzoguattarian concepts of 'deterritorialization' and 'reterritorialization'. We intend to argue that Booker's defamiliarization reveals how the novel does not merely invert power but makes all social relations strange, creating unfamiliar contexts where Black and White characters' understanding of identity is disrupted. In other words, the defamiliarization effect goes beyond the Hegelian

dialectical opposition to create multilayered perceptual disorientation that the Hegelian reading does not fully capture.

Furthermore, Ghosh's interpretation focuses mainly on consciousness and recognition while underemphasizing the spatial dimension central to the Deleuzoguattarian analysis. Deterritorialization in the novel is not simply uprooting characters from their usual settings. However, it involves a profound spatial displacement that uproots established social structures, disrupts signifying regimes like Apartheid, and creates new assemblages beyond binary oppositions. Regarding the novel, the Smales' removal from urban spaces to July's rural village does not only reverse power—where July becomes a protector, and the Smales become dependent on him—but deterritorializes both Black and White identities from their previous identical contexts.

Still, more importantly, the Hegelian dialectical approach neglects how reterritorialization occurs in complex and incomplete ways throughout the novel. July's attempt to establish new authority, the villagers' ambivalent relationship with the Smales, and Maureen's eventual run towards the helicopter all represent various competing forms of reterritorialization that resist the neat resolution implied in the Hegelian perspective. The novel's ambiguous ending suggests Maureen's deterritorialization with no capacity for reterritorialization, showing how Gordimer's dystopian vision—which is also overlooked by Ghosh—captures the traumatic social change beyond dialectical oppositions.

Another important review lies in Shahram R. Sistani's article entitled "Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*: A Parodic Postmodern Revisitation of History" (2016), considers *July's People* a revisitation of Apartheid where the reversal of power dynamics is portrayed in a parodic form: "*July's People* as the representatives of the two main beliefs, white and black, which are presented as parodic figures and illustrate the disjunction between the Apartheid and the post-Apartheid mind" (Sistani, 2016, p.35). While this interpretation highly identifies Gordimer's exploration of ideological dissonance, it has significant limitations as regards the theme of the reversal of power dynamics. Basically, it oversimplifies the complex power dynamics by reducing characters to mere representatives of racial ideologies—the Smales represent the liberal whites' ideology, and July represents the Blacks' ideology—rather than focusing on their psychological responses to shifting power structures. Sistani's "parodic figures" diminishes the novel's portrayal of how the characters experience actual power transitions. In this context, through our theoretical framework by Booker and Deleuze, we aim to go beyond Sistani's postmodern parodic of power reversal to highlight Gordimer's dystopian vision which reveals power as an embodied practice rather than a merely ideological position.

In addition to all the previous reviews of related literature, we argue that approaching Gordimer's novel from a dystopian perspective, which is neglected

or overlooked by the stated scholars, significantly contributes to the traumatic experience of South Africans under Apartheid. In fact, the dystopian elements—societal collapse, power inversion, special dislocation, and temporal disruption—create a specific narrative that describes the traumatic effects of the reversal of power. In addition, unlike previous scholarship that basically focuses on dialectical power shifts or postcolonial reading, our dystopian reading demonstrates how the novel functions as a psychological terrain where the racial hierarchy of Apartheid is dismantled.

Methodologically, through the textual analysis of Gordimer's novel, the theoretical framework of Booker's concept of Defamiliarization in dystopian literature, and the Deleuzoguattarian concepts of Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization, we seek to reinterpret the socio-historical effects of Apartheid from a dystopian perspective. Through Booker's Defamiliarization, the social structures and the power dynamics of Apartheid are shown as reversed, strange, and unsettling. The white characters—the Smales mainly—are forced to see their formerly familiar privileges from an altered perspective. As for the Deleuzoguattarian concept of Deterritorialization, it manifests as the novel portrays the dismantling of established social boundaries of Apartheid. Literally, the white family is deterritorialized, meaning that they are removed from their familiar and psychologically comfort zone, which leads to a destabilization of identity and social position. The Smales' physical and psychological uprooting from their urban home to their black servant's black community and the eventual changes throughout their presence in the village break down the territorial divisions that maintained racial hierarchy. Reterritorialization, for its part, occurs as characters try to establish new identities and power relationships within the rural village setting; however, this process remains unstable and incomplete, reflecting the traumatic disorientation of a society in transition.

In the light of the previous context, this study makes various significant contributions to literary scholarship. First, in terms of theoretical innovation, it establishes a framework connecting dystopian narrative techniques with a historical traumatic experience. Second, it re-conceptualizes Apartheid by shifting the critical understanding of the Apartheid system from a conventional realist approach which might miss important issues to a dystopian vision that conceptualizes Apartheid differently. Moreover, unlike other studies that focus basically on Black trauma, this research uniquely examines how Gordimer inverts trauma dynamics to show that the traumatic experience of Apartheid traumatized all participants (whites and blacks alike). This perspective enriches understanding of trauma's circulation within segregating regimes. These contributions advance literary scholarship by demonstrating how the African dystopian narrative genre serves not only as a political commentary and warning on the prevailing Apartheid socio-political structures but also as a psychological terrain for

processing collective traumatic experiences.

2. The Apartheid System: The Historical Trajectory of Trauma in South Africa.

Within traumatic conditions, the “South African society came to be viewed as a conflict between classes, exacerbated by the concentration of power, land, and wealth in a conglomerate of white races.” (Heywood, 2004, p.25) The Apartheid system caused many atrocities in South Africa politically, socially, and economically. Robert Harvey argues that Apartheid in South Africa was more than a political system taking control all over the country, but an ideology, “Apartheid in South Africa was something more: it was the ideology of race, carefully elaborated in intellectual terms” (Harvey, 2001, p. 25)

From a political perspective, Apartheid resulted in the loss of political rights, oppression, segregation, and alienation of the black population. Socially speaking, the black majority was frustrated by their social rights; their human rights were violated as their access to education and health care was highly limited. The Apartheid promoted many human rights abuses. Economically, Apartheid led to the exploitation of labor in such a way as to exploit the nonwhites, the blacks in particular, and they worked for low wages and poor working conditions. These circumstances led to poverty and social class division. Within this context, the issues related to Apartheid were discussed in the literature in order to shed light on this political system as a trajectory experience for the black and nonwhite South African people.

The Apartheid segregation regime did not remain without opposition. The Liberal Party of South Africa, founded mainly by white liberals in 1953 and led by leaders such as Alan Paton and Helen Suzman, was a political party aiming to advocate for equal rights and non-racialism. It opposed the policies of Apartheid in such a way as to appeal “to the white conscience and asking whites to act on their behalf” (Sato, 2007, p101). However, the problem with the Liberal Party was its consideration as a generated form of Apartheid. In this context, an important argument is advanced in an article by F. A. Mouton, “During the long anti-apartheid struggle, (...) Liberalism was, in effect, just another form of Apartheid for the ANC.” (Mouton, 2022, p.91)

The case of the Liberal party in South Africa and its strategy to oppose and subvert the Apartheid system was so often problematic. The ANC (African National Congress) advanced conflicting arguments against the Liberal Party because the latter was linked to capitalism, wealth, privilege, and materialism. The role of the Liberal party, as an anti-Apartheid and multi-racial party, during the Apartheid era was not convincing for many South Africans because its role in opposing Apartheid was either not enough or because Apartheid itself limited or prohibited all oppositions.

The Apartheid segregation regime is the subject matter of Nadine Gordimer's novel, where she foresees a bleak future for South Africa. What is interesting about Apartheid is the way Gordimer sheds light on this authoritative and despotic policy, which created inequality for the nonwhite racial groups at all levels. Nadine Gordimer's writing on Apartheid is powerful, seeing that it shows how the system infused itself into every aspect of South African life. She demonstrates, through her understated characters and clear narration, the racist policies of Apartheid, which not only entrenched themselves in the public arena but also encroached into private lives and thus created a culture where inequality was systematically put into practice at every level. She is also skillful at showing the psychological toll of living under such a regime-how moral thought got corroded, human relationships distorted, and impossible choices faced by both the oppressor and his victim. Her work is both a literary testament and a social critique. Indeed, it shows how the architectural totalitarianism of Apartheid monitored even the space where one worked or lived, showing how it had become a prison where none could escape.

The tragic effects of this system led writers to create a body of fiction that marked South African history. The Apartheid segregating regime generated a significant body of fiction with rich narrative material. The system also produced distinctive social landscapes and power dynamics that offered unique settings for African literature. In this perspective, it is of great importance to reconsider the status of the Smales family in Gordimer's novel as a White Liberal family: is the Smales' Liberalism an oppositional power against Apartheid, or is it, in Mouton's terms, "just another form of Apartheid"?

3. Apprehending Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* as a Critical Dystopian Novel.

To answer the previous question, it is necessary to analyze Gordimer's *July's People* as a critical dystopian novel. *July's People* is a novel about a white Liberal family, the Smales, who fled Johannesburg because of a civil war as the Black Revolution started its movement against Apartheid. The family—composed of the mother, Maureen, the father, Bamford, and three children, Gina, Victor, and Royce—flees to its black servant's (July) village. There, they go through different experiences to discover the harsh reality of the Apartheid system, which traumatized the whites and the blacks as well.

The dystopian narrative genre is a type of speculative fiction where the writer sets the story in an imaginary future society in dehumanizing conditions and totalitarian despotic regimes. As Gregory Claeys puts it: "The word 'dystopia' evokes disturbing images." (Claeys, 2017, p.3) The disturbing images associated with dystopia reflect various scenes like those of horror, oppression, dehumanization, loss of freedom and individuality, identity crisis, surveillance, and control. The role of a critical dystopian novel is to provide a critical

commentary on the way things function in society. As M. Keith Booker points out, "Dystopian fiction is by design inimical to the authoritarian contexts of the societies depicted in it; such fiction is inherently critical, and such societies can brook no criticism." (Booker, 1994, p.37) To provide an important critical perspective on society's sociopolitical, cultural, and economic aspects, the dystopian narrative focuses on the deficiencies of the present (which are already worse). It expects the worst in the future dystopian society if the prevailing problems are not solved. As Booker argues: "dystopian fictions are typically set in places or times far distant from the author's own, but it is usually clear that the real referents of dystopian fictions are generally quite concrete and near-at-hand." (Booker, 1994, p.19)

Gordimer's *July's People* is set in a near-future South Africa where a civil war is about to put an end to the Apartheid system. In order to shed light on the deficiencies of the present South Africa, Gordimer focuses on the shift of power dynamics socially, politically, economically, and culturally. Theoretically, such a power shift is well elucidated through what M. Keith Booker calls "defamiliarization". In fact, among the various techniques which dystopian fiction employs is "defamiliarization", as argues Booker:

The principal technique of dystopian fiction is defamiliarization: by focusing their critiques of society on spatially or temporally distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable. (Booker, 1994, p.19)

To "defamiliarize", in Booker's terms, means to present familiar social, political, or any other matter in an unfamiliar way. In other words, it is to provide alternatives in an unfamiliar way. In Gordimer's *July's People*, what is defamiliarized is the question of power that is inherent in the Apartheid system; as Rita Barnard argues, "Apartheid, though inseparable from this global phenomenon, clearly represents an extreme and therefore starkly illuminating instance of the territorialization of power." (Barnard, 2007, p.5) In this perspective, it is such a reference to Apartheid as the territorialization of power that is made deterritorialized in Gordimer's *July's People*. Deterritorializing the power of the Apartheid political system requires challenging its oppressive sociopolitical and economic laws and structures.

Politically, in Gordimer's novel *July's People*, what we conceive as "defamiliarized" or "deterritorialized" is the shift of power from the White minority to the Black majority. The scenario Gordimer creates is an unfamiliar one: we all know that, during the Apartheid era, South Africa was ruled by the White minority. However, we notice the breaking down of political rules and traditional sociopolitical structures because of the Black liberation riots in Gordimer's novel *July's People*. The setting of *July's People* makes it evident that

there is no longer such a term as a “white master” or a “black servant”, but there is a power reversal. This is what the white protagonist Maureen Smales notices when she speaks about the white people being chased by the blacks: “they had to get out, they had to go. 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 blows up, walls, roofs. —” (Gordimer, 1981, p.23). Within this context, it is defamiliarization to read about a white family in a position of fear and inferiority compared to the blacks.

Socially, another scene of defamiliarization in *July's People* as a dystopian narrative provides the readers with concerns strangely presenting familiar aspects, namely the master-servant relationship. The hierarchical dynamic between Maureen as the white master and July as the black servant has a reversal in its function. At the beginning of the novel, Maureen undergoes a shift in her societal position as a white liberal woman. Her privilege as a typical white woman with a sense of superiority is apparent in describing the way she, and white people in general as well, lives:

White people here! Didn’t you tell us many times how they live, there. A room to sleep in, another room to eat in, another room to sit in, a room with books (she had a Bible), I don’t know how many times you told me, a room with how many books . . . Hundreds I think. And hot water that is made like the lights we see in the street at Vosloosdorp. All these things I’ve never seen, my children have never seen—the room for bathing—and even you, there in the yard you had a room for yourself for bathing? And you didn’t even wash your clothes in there, there was a machine in some other room for that. (Gordimer, 1981, pp.22-23)

This description of the Smales’ house refers to the privilege the Liberal white people enjoy; however, this world is turned upside down and defamiliarized when the family flees from the black riots and lives in their servant’s hut. The way the hut the Smales moved to deconstructs the big luxurious house they once inhabited. The effect Gordimer creates in her narration is moving:

She [Maureen] slowly began to inhabit the hut around her, empty except for the iron bed, the children asleep on the vehicle seats—the other objects of the place belonged to another category: Primus stove, left against the wall. The hen and chickens were moving there; (...) There would be mice and rats. Flies wandered the air and found the eyes and mouths of her children, probably still smelling of vomit, dirty, sleeping, safe. (Gordimer, 1981, pp.4-5)

These two juxtaposed images of the Smales’ shelter represent a very important factor in their lives because the shift from their luxurious house to July’s primitive hut constituted uneasiness. It is in this instance that we recall Mouton’s claim that liberals were maintainers of white privilege and critics of the

black revolution. The Smales left their social privilege and positioned themselves against the civil war because it was this very war that displaced and dispossessed them of their privileges. Furthermore, Gordimer's critical reference to the Smales' material possessions criticizes capitalism as the latter led people to behave like machines rather than human beings. The Smales' displacement to July's home "was not a village but a habitation of mud houses occupied only by members of his extended family" (Gordimer, 1981, p.15) marks the beginning of a great change in their lives. On the other hand, July's mud hut is an evident image of the social inequality imposed by the Apartheid political system: white people live in big luxurious houses, whereas black people inhabit primitive mud huts.

4. The Psychological Trauma of the White Liberal Dystopian Protagonist "Maureen".

Maureen, in particular, as a dystopian protagonist, could not get along with the black community; she could hardly cope with the life of the black people within the black territory: "She was in another place, time, consciousness; it pressed in upon her and filled her as someone's breath fills a balloon's shape. She was already not what she was." (Gordimer, 1981, p.35) Maureen's sense of loss and nothingness made her think about her "bourgeois" social position as something of the past no longer able to get back to.

As a dystopian protagonist, Maureen struggles to maintain her identity as a white liberal and bourgeois woman because she is—in Deleuze and Guattari's terms— "deterritorialized" from her social world. According to Rosenfeld, "One of the most striking absences from many dystopian novels is a social world for the protagonist to inhabit." (Rosenfeld, 2021, p.10) As a matter of fact, what is a social world for Maureen, and how important it is for her? Maureen's social world is her environment in the setting of the novel, her culture, and the societal structures with which she interacts; it refers to the customs, values, and norms that shape her behavior and influence her decisions. The importance of Maureen's social world lies in the fact that Gordimer uses it to provide a specific context, allowing her to reflect on real-world social issues. Gordimer deterritorialized Maureen from the white community and reterritorialized her in the black community to critique the Apartheid system within a dystopian lens.

Maureen also seeks to escape the consequences of the Apartheid through "survivalism"—a term used by Gregory Claeys in the analysis of Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* (1993) when he refers to the position of dystopian protagonists saying:

The protagonists feel they cannot change the state of society, and consider survivalism (an increasingly dominant American motif in this period), retreating from the city to live off the land. When their 'island community,

fragile, and yet a fortress' is finally assaulted and burnt out, they flee. (Claeys, 2017, p.480)

It is the same process for Maureen who feels that she can do nothing to change the way things go in her society at a time of a civil war and considers survivalism as the most important matter to consider at such a delicate moment, as she thinks, "lucky to be alive" (Gordimer, 1981, p.31). Maureen left her city, Johannesburg, to live in July's village; it was only then and there that she came across the terrible living conditions made by the segregational laws of Apartheid. Now, as a White woman, along with her white family, Maureen would witness the same harsh conditions that the black people witnessed.

There are many reasons behind Maureen's psychological trauma. To begin with, the loss of a white family's privileged lifestyle made her feel uncomfortable in July's village because she could no longer enjoy the same luxurious life of the city; in July's village, she could hardly afford food and water, and still more important, she had to work in manual labors to secure life supplies. Furthermore, what is unsettling for Maureen is her sense of loss of control and power in her environment. She was no longer that superior white woman with authority over the blacks. In the village, she was rather dependent on July to provide her with protection. Moreover, at the level of her mental and emotional well-being, she lives in constant fear and stress because of the effects of the civil war. The burning of her house and the death of many people she knew made her feel insecure and fear the future.

Maureen experiences another layer of trauma as she feels guilty as a liberal white woman. She was aware of the social injustices in her society before even the beginning of the Black Revolution, so her inhumanity towards the blacks as a liberal—whose task historically speaking is to defend the black liberation question and to stand in opposition to the atrocities of Apartheid—came to be as a feeling of guilt especially when she witnessed brutality and reversal of power dynamics.

To delve deeply into the reasons behind Maureen's psychological trauma, we find out that some various changes and transformations take place in Gordimer's novel; therefore, we resort to the Deleuzoguattarian conceptions of "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization", which refer to the process of breaking down established structures by moving away from fixed systems and disrupting the existing constraints. As Deleuze and Guattari illuminate further in their book, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization are fundamental processes that mark systems' evolution and the disruption of ideas in the form of lines of flight. These Deleuzoguattarian terms are integrated into dystopian studies. On the one hand, deterritorialization can be estimated as a contributing factor to the emergence of a dystopian society; in other words, deterritorialization in the dystopian context leads to the creation of dystopian conditions through the

disruption and tragic displacement of fixed ideas. On the other hand, dystopian studies often explore the consequences of deterritorialization.

As a dystopian novel, *July's People* explores the consequences of the power shift from the white minority to the black majority. Such a shift of power represents one example of deterritorialization because power is in the hands of the blacks. Maureen affirms to the black chief of the village: "Well, you know the trouble there. It's like a war. It's a war. We could have been killed. The houses where we stayed ... they've been burned, bombed—some of them. People had to leave, our children might have been hurt." (Gordimer, 1981, p.135)

The black South African people started their revolutionary movement as a process to deterritorialize the Apartheid system. Their revolution, in Deleuzoguattarian terms, represents a line of flight; this is why Maureen's trauma is the result of displacement, defamiliarization, and deterritorialization of her social world. In addition, her being a liberal white woman reminds us of the role of the Liberal Party during Apartheid. The hypocrisy associated with this party rendered Maureen's situation as a white woman complex because she cared more about her social situation as a privileged woman and was annoyed as regards the Black riots in the city rather than being satisfied because the blacks started their revolution to end Apartheid. Maureen's psychological trauma, manifested in her anxiety, depression, and loss of her privilege, reveals how deeply she had internalized Apartheid structures.

5. The Trauma of South African People through Dystopian Lens

Nadine Gordimer's novel *July's People* explores a dystopian society in Apartheid-era South Africa. The trauma Gordimer focuses on is experienced mainly by white people as the dystopian narrative genre allows her to provide the readers with an alternative reality based on the prevailing circumstances in the Apartheid system. Moreover, the trauma Gordimer demonstrates to the readers stems from her dystopian vision, which is itself based on the everyday practices of Apartheid. As Thomas Moylan claims: "Crucial to dystopian vision in all its manifestations is this ability to register the impact of an unseen and unexamined social system on the everyday lives of everyday people." (Moylan, 2000, p.xiii). Apartheid as a socio-political system is evident in the everyday life of Maureen's family as well as in the black people.

Once again, we come to Booker's concept of "defamiliarization" when he states that "dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable." (Booker, 1994,p.19) Historically speaking, the Apartheid system in South Africa as a political practice was for a long time considered "natural" and "inevitable"—to use Booker's terminology. In this context, the dystopian perspective intensifies the sense of defamiliarizing such political systems that have been taken for granted through what Deleuze and Guattari call

“Deterritorialization” and “Reterritorialization”. Gordimer deterritorializes the trauma from the black community and reterritorializes it in the white community. This is an image of defamiliarization: how come a white liberal family in experience is the result of their displacement? Gordimer did it on purpose to opt for a scenario where, unlike reality, it is the white South African people who suffer from the blacks’ violent reaction to the Apartheid regime. The collapse of the whites’ established political and social norms and their struggle to cope with the new power dynamics are important factors leading to their disorientation to an unfamiliar reality.

The trauma experienced by the white and the black characters (though Gordimer focuses more on the whites) stems from the atrocities of Apartheid as a segregating political system, which gives birth to a dystopian environment. If we delve deeply into the notion of trauma in Gordimer’s novel, we find out that there is an interplay between the notion of trauma and dystopia. In other words, there is a crucial link between trauma and dystopia in the novel: the various traumatic experiences of the characters combine to intensify the bleak atmosphere of the dystopian narrative genre. It is in this context that we come to notice that Maureen, as a liberal white woman, helped bring about her traumatic experience; in other words, her failure to adapt herself in the village (because of the terrible living conditions) reads like the failure of the Liberal party in changing things to the better. As such, she has to go through the same pain that black people go through.

One of the key aspects of dystopia in the novel is the collapse of the existing social and political order. The civil war disrupts the stability and hierarchy of Apartheid South Africa, with the white minority losing control and black resistance movements gaining power. This inversion of power dynamics challenges the Smales' sense of identity and exposes them to the harsh realities of racial oppression they were previously complicit in perpetuating. The dismantling of the oppressive system reveals the inherent injustice and moral bankruptcy of Apartheid, contributing to the dystopian atmosphere.

Another source of trauma in the novel is the breakdown of societal norms and the disintegration of traditional family structures. As the Smales family seeks refuge with July and his community, they find themselves in a foreign environment where their roles as privileged white individuals are rendered meaningless. The Smales' dependency on July for survival exposes their vulnerability and forces them to confront the power dynamics inherent in their relationship. The loss of familiar social structures and the erosion of their privileged position contribute to disorientation and unease, amplifying the dystopian atmosphere.

Gordimer also highlights the dystopian consequences of racial segregation and the dehumanization of black individuals under Apartheid. Through the

character of July, Gordimer challenges the simplistic stereotypes that have historically dominated representations of black Africans in literature. July's agency and complex humanity emerge, defying the dehumanizing tendencies of the Apartheid system. The novel forces the Smales family, and by extension, the reader, to question the basis of racial hierarchies and the oppressive ideologies that underpin them. In other words, Gordimer's novel uses dystopian displacement to create a powerful mechanism to interrogate social hierarchies and their ideological foundations.

6. The Effects of Deterritorialization in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*.

In their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue:

In any event, it is necessary to consider the effects of deterritorialization or denatalization on a given species at a given moment. Whenever a territorial assemblage is taken up by a movement that deterritorializes it (whether under so-called natural or artificial conditions), we say that a machine is released. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.333)

The process of deterritorialization in Gordimer's *July's People* is used as a literary device to delve deeply into important themes such as race, power, identity, and social structures during an era of political upheaval. The life of the Smales is completely defamiliarized and deterritorialized since they fled their city because of the chaos there.

Furthermore, the Smales' detachment from their social world destabilizes their identity. They can no longer behave as superior and privileged white people because they are uprooted from their urban life, and still, more importantly, they suffer the loss of their familiar roles as masters, dispossessed of their possessions and belongings, and they no longer enjoy their social status. They are no longer in a position of power; they hesitate to consider July as their servant. In terms of materialism, the material wealth that identifies them as a bourgeois family no longer exists; therefore, this detachment from material belongings symbolizes a detachment from the white identity of consumerism. In this context, the few possessions Maureen and Bamford took with them when they fled their house were "the bag of oranges Maureen had run back to fetch from the kitchen, the radio Bam remembered so that they could hear what was happening behind them as they fled" (Gordimer, 1981, p.13) A bag of oranges, a radio, a car called "bakkie", and a gun were the only possessions of the Smales.

The sense of loss creates a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty; Maureen, in particular, feels that she has to reevaluate her prejudices in the sense that she all the time confronts her presence in the black community with her past in her white community. However, she can no longer behave as a white woman nor integrate into July's village. Her up-rootedness from her world leads to an identity crisis. Eventually, we notice that Maureen's sense of a defamiliarized

social world results from the deterritorialized white community in terms of race, power, and social status.

Another important effect of deterritorialization lies in the power reconfiguration. New and unstable relationships emerge as the Black and the White characters are deterritorialized from their familiar power structures. For instance, July's gradual assertion of authority over the Smales' vehicle and the gun, or even over household decisions, represents shifting power structures into new arrangements that are not simply inversions but rather complex reorganizations of social relations. These effects collectively demonstrate how deterritorialization functions not only at the level of physical displacement but as a comprehensive psychological process that disrupts established ways of being, creating possibilities for both traumatic disintegration and potential transformation.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article articulates the link between the traumatic experience and dystopia as an inevitable effect of the Apartheid political system in Nadine Gordimer's dystopian novel *July's People* (1981). The latter presents a dystopian vision of apartheid-era South Africa, exploring the collapse of social order, the breakdown of societal norms, the dehumanization of individuals, and the struggle for survival. Through examining these themes, Gordimer raises important questions about power, race, and the moral implications of oppressive systems.

The theoretical framework based on M. Keith Booker's concept of "defamiliarization" and the Deleuzoguattarian concept of "deterritorialization" has been important in demonstrating the source of trauma, especially for the dystopian protagonist Maureen and her family. What is defamiliarized and deterritorialized in Maureen's society led her to go through a traumatic experience at the personal level as a liberal white woman, along with the socio-political level, which itself created the dystopian atmosphere of the novel. The link between trauma as a thematic study and dystopia as a narrative genre paved the way for a large space of dystopian literature that is colored with trauma. In this perspective, trauma studies are very important in literature as it has a significant role in interestingly having a social, political, ethical, and historical dimension.

Eventually, through our analysis, we have demonstrated how Gordimer's dystopian narrative genre serves as a unique literary mechanism for processing the historical trauma of South Africans under Apartheid. The novel's power lies in its ability to defamiliarize the normalized violence of Apartheid, making, as such, the psychological damage of characters visible. Gordimer creates a dystopian vision where trauma becomes evident in spatial relationships and social codes. This study contributes both to dystopian scholarship and historical trauma

studies by revealing how dystopian narratives function not only as political warnings but as psychological legacies of oppressive systems such as the Apartheid. In other words, the politics of dystopia in relation to Apartheid trauma represents a literary strategy to confront historical violence. By creating a dystopian narrative where familiar social structures become strange and unfamiliar, African dystopian literature urges readers to engage with the psychological effects of oppressive systems, like the Apartheid, that might otherwise remain unexplored.

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