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Imagining our end: South african apocalyptic fiction

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CHAPTER 2: *July's People*

"…the world is jolted out of chronology" (*July's People* 4).

Stephen Clingman's authoritative study, *History from the Inside,* first published in 1986, offers valuable insight on the political development of Nadine Gordimer's apartheid novels, beginning from *The Lying Days* (1953) and ending with *July's People* (1981). It offers a comprehensive interpretation of the Nobel laureate's instinct to interrogate "the personal experience of the political world" and to discuss the obstinate reoccurrence of Gramsci's "morbid symptoms", which, with personal insistence, become Gordimer's "roving ground" in exploring South Africa's apocalyptic present[1]. Her eighth novel, *July's People* (1981), uses apocalyptic rhetoric to challenge critically a conclusive future in a post-revolutionary South Africa. Rather, the future is both indeterminate and incomprehensible in the post-apocalyptic interregnum. The fall of apartheid as a "Last Thing", and the resultant anxieties of well-intentioned liberal whites, who are blinded by the errors of their ways, leave the latter emotionally lost and in a state of stasis. The novel stages the violent destruction of an old order but it contests that revolution, as a rupture, will conclusively resolve injustice by bringing an end to political hegemony and oppression, and will lead heroically to a free, utopian South Africa[2].

Written after the Soweto uprising (1976), *July's People* is set in the near future at a hypothetical time at the end of apartheid. Johannesburg, the metonym of white capitalist power, is in the throes of a revolution intended to alter the historical trajectory from subjugation to liberation. Eschatological trepidation dominates the consciousness of whites, who fear reprisal and reverse apartheid in the dystopia that is about to destroy them as they become "marginalised white subject[s]" (Clingman 1992, 219). Historical dislocation from former power and dominance leaves them feeling disoriented and vulnerable, yet paralyzed in their intent to move beyond the present dystopia. Their moral positioning is exposed as they ignore their imbrication with apartheid, unable to sever themselves from the wealth and privilege it has offered them. While in the *middest*, their emotional turbulence and fear have compounded their confusion further, inhibiting a vision of a future. The crisis and the sense of disorientation it brings, framed by the revolution itself, which happens mainly off-stage, is described tersely. This intensifies the unease for the reader, who is left to witness vicariously the unfolding and unpredictable events in the novel. While the revolution holds the promise of "transformations of myth and parable", we are unsure of its success or failure, and infer

only that a new order is imminent, but even those particulars are left as an amalgam of uncertainty (Gordimer 1981, 9). Its intentionally ambiguous dénouement challenges the notion of eschatology and casts the apocalyptic in doubt. It suggests the complexity of the representation of the apocalyptic as a stark and an ambiguous reality facing South Africa's post-apartheid period. Countering expectation of the *apokalyspsis* (revelation) where fear is transformed to hope through individual reflection, it is cautionary in its resolution. It calls into question the consciousness of a white, liberal family who, relative to the failure of apartheid, are blinded by their lack of dignity and the lack of accountability in their intersubjectivity.

Gordimer supports the need for moral consciousness through social knowledge (O'Leary's *doxa)* as the only viable possibility for a deferred end. The apocalyptic narrative relates impressionistic and dramatic descriptions of the crisis. It becomes a measure of the political injustice of apartheid and the limitations of white liberalism. In this study, I suggest how Gordimer's vision of a future South Africa may not be reduced to Manichean principles of an "either/or" where the "good" is recognised while "evil", as the enemy apartheid, is purged. Rather it suggests a fragile and different future where the contest rests not in avoiding change but rather in "an insidious living-on" in a country that has traversed an agonizing political order and will continue to meet challenges in the future (West-Pavlov 2013, 93).

The text opens in the middle of the revolutionary crisis, situating the reader to experience vicariously the disruption and disorientation of the dystopian present, and the apprehension of the white liberal protagonists. Fearing for their safety, the Smales escape from their suburban, affluent northern suburb home in Johannesburg leaving their survival in the hands of their servant of fifteen years, July (Mwawate), who offers them refuge in his rural village six hundred kilometres away. Bamford (a successful architect), his wife Maureen, (a housewife and former ballet teacher, whose consciousness is the focus of the text) together with their three children: Victor, Gina and Royce travel for three days to July's homestead[3]. The insurgency, which begins "prosaically weirdly", bears "them away from the gunned shopping malls … and the heat-guided missiles" that strike planes "carrying those trying to take off from Jan Smuts Airport" (Gordimer 1981, 10 – 11). The refuge from the dystopia in Johannesburg is "so far beyond the norm of the present", that it leaves Maureen and her family feeling stunned, "dislocated" and "in delirium" (Gordimer 1981, 3). Within a short time, their former life of white privilege and power is a distant recollection, "vanished…[in the]

past" (*Ibid.* 3). In their new geographic space they need to negotiate a new form of living stripped of their political supremacy and the privilege that has been afforded them during apartheid. Where previously nothing "made them so happy as buying things", the Smales are now forced to grapple with a different reality, their identity and former ways now visibly anachronistic (*Ibid.* 7). As "liberals" they see themselves as victims of the revolution, exempt from and unaccountable for any actions that have led to the crisis itself. The events of these "Last Things" present the Smales, and in particular Maureen, with the potential to interrogate the implications and limits of intersubjectivity, in particular her inability to engage with July with any genuine reciprocity, but even these becomes a challenge and defiance, irresolvable in the dystopian present.

The text paints a country in distress, requiring much-needed political change from its long history of colonial hegemony. It opens up a precarious critique of the tragedy of apartheid as the "evil", the enemy, and the impact on a white liberal family who have incongruously shaped their views from the position of white power, marginalising the very people they profess to understand and respect. Injustice, racial violence, political and personal betrayal are symptomatic of a political system intent on protecting a white minority. Gordimer disputes Fanon's view that violence, which is "comparable to a royal pardon" is the only way the "colonized man finds freedom" (Fanon 85). Despite the urgent need for change, the novel presents the ambivalence that mutability itself holds in South Africa, challenging the belief that it is a fixed utopian outcome of a revolution. The future is an interregnum, a hiatus of an old order having ended with a new order struggling to be born. Gordimer's vision of an ambiguous future trapped in the interregnum, is inspired by Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, written between 1929 -1935 after Gramsci had been imprisoned by the Italian Fascist government. For Gordimer, the period of the interregnum best describes the paradoxical conditions that she envisages at the end of apartheid as one of "disintegrated consciousness, of contradictions" (Gordimer 1988, 269 – 270). It results in a vacillation between the need for eschatology of an old, "shameful" order to be "discarded" (*Ibid.*) However, a new nascent order is marred by the "morbid symptoms" – the haunting past impacting on the present as an obstinate dependency erroneously ossified in the belief that white liberalism successfully endorses freedom and dignity for all. Further, these "morbid symptoms" are evident in the whites' failure to recognise that – despite their liberal outlook – they have contributes to the compromised lives of the black population. Former patriarchal values, accepted as a norm, haunt the "here and now", as

they continue to impact on present choices, with morbid obstinacy. Thus, the contradiction that "the new cannot be born" remains ambiguous and precautionary in the interregnum of post-apartheid South Africa (Gramsci as quoted in the epigraph to *July's People*). Gordimer asserts that in such a period of interregnum, "the black knows he will be at home at last", while conversely the white "does not know whether he will find a home at last" (Gordimer 1988, 270). The title of the novel frames the ambiguity of the text and shows the "morbid symptom" of the tragedy of apartheid on individual lives. It invites discussion on defining who "July's people" are. On the one hand, the title could suggest July returning to his people and being integrated in his community once again, but that in itself is problematic as July finds it difficult to be fully entrenched in a life from which he has been removed while in Johannesburg. On the other hand then, the reader is to consider whether the Smales are "July's people", having served them while in their employ and, in return ironically, considering whether they, as marginalised whites, become one of "July's people" in the community? The intentional ambiguity in the title points to the dual identity of July, as a "morbid symptom" of apartheid.

The novel suggests the possibility of a prudential revelation, of only a glimmer of apocalypse, revealing the scant possibility of creating a means to live on out of the chaos presented. The characters, while lost in the *middest,* are unable to find a means of sense-making and a viable future. Eschatology has the potential of apocalypse but in order for this to be recognised and acted upon, different choices are necessary[4]. While in the *middest,* the characters should move from Kermodian *tic* to *toc,* from *chronos* to *kairos*, by making choices that will facilitate the possibility to make sense of their present. The truth that could potentially be revealed to them, then, will be made possible by genuine self-reflexivity of thoughts and actions. Former ways of relating to people, especially those of a different race, are prejudiced in the present dystopia because they are still positioned from the stance of white power. They need to develop a genuine empathy for and understanding of those around them, so that reciprocity can become a possibility. Gordimer asserts this in an interview when she quotes Serote's famous dictum:

> white people are white people, they must learn to listen;
> black people are black people, they must learn to talk
> (Gordimer quoting Serote in an interview with Jeyifo 925).

Past illusions, however difficult, need to be disposed for there to be any hope of a positive future. Part of this is the acknowledgement that experiences are not singular

but part of a shared, folded experience that demands introspection and accountability[5]. Humankind cannot remove itself from its socio-political environment and be exempt from accountability as the human is what Mohammed A. Quayan refers to "as a *zoon-politician* – a social and political being" (Quayan 13). It is the fine balance in the recognition, that humankind's choices are shaped primarily by the unfolding events of history in a social context, that will possibly enable South Africans to move beyond the interregnum, from *chronos* to *kairos*. However this only remains a cautionary possibility in the novel, never fully realised by all the characters. The novel's development to a climactic conflict between Maureen and July is counterposed by the anti-climactic ending, which offers no definitive future. A collective, new society with a new discourse and a different mode of inter-subjectivity is merely hinted at in the Smales' children adapting to their new geographic space and way of living. While discussing the unpredictability and uncontrollable nature of revolution as a precursor to intended change, Mahmoud Radwan (2015) in his excellent study of *July's People,* declares that Gordimer's text "equivocates between the utopian and dystopian post-apocalyptic realms" (Radwan 2)[6]. He further states that:

> Ambivalence and vacillation are central factors in the setting of *July's People* where characters exist in an interregnal space in which one discourse is ending and another one is in the process of emerging (*Ibid.*).

The dissolute dystopian mood that pervades the text is never relinquished and remains a continuing threat of eschatology and fear for a life of reverse apartheid. In Kermodian terms, the threat remains imminent as the devastation and suffering unfold with no reassurance that they will definitively end. The Smales feel defenceless and insecure at the scant information about the status of the revolution. Contact with a world out of the community complicates their sense of alienation, preventing any connection to the reality that has framed them in the past. For them, the crisis in all its confusion, appears never-ending. At different moments in the novel, Bam is obsessed with getting radio updates, but even those appear unreliable and he concedes, "the service had always been concealed" (Gordimer 1981, 107). Yet, Kermode reminds us that even though we think of crisis as "Fictions of the End" and being more concerned with the "here and now" and the imminence of the crisis itself, the apocalyptic rhetoric develops our understanding that the end is not imminent but rather immanent. The Smales find themselves oscillating in the interregnal space between the immanence of the crisis and

the ensuing emotional distress and fear of the imminent end itself. In the interregnal *middest,* the characters vacillate between eschatology of the "Last Things" of the demise of the old order, and an inability to facilitate within their own thinking how the new can be born. This contradiction creates confusion and intensifies the dilemma presented. The novel suggests considerate reasons to persuade those not convinced how best to move forward and to guide the choices of behaviour. For the reader, who shares vicariously in the fear presented, the apocalyptic rhetoric is gravitational, creating an expectation of "unveiling", yet often countered in being precautionary. The reading experience becomes apocalyptic in its didacticism as the reader observes the Smales's interaction with July and his people and witnesses, ultimately, the consequences of Maureen's choices and her self-righteousness. The novel offers a dire warning of the crisis to white liberals, that they need to redress their present in the "here and now" to prevent a similar fate to that of the Smales in the future, drawing together eschatological fear and sporadic hope.

Whilst the novel traces the crisis of the Smales family, Maureen as protagonist forms the focus of the text, as we witness her reticence at understanding her present crisis. Central to moving from *chronos* to *kairos* is an understanding of the limits of liberalism, an obsessive concern for Gordimer, and how these narrow parameters curb the quality and form of human dignity[7]. The novel exposes how apartheid thinking impacts on all, even disguised in the progressive "liberal" views of whites, like Maureen and Bam, who, while rejecting apartheid, ironically are its beneficiaries. The upsurge of crisis reveals something different, and in varying cautionary degrees, to each of the characters, both black and white. One may consider, for example, that the crisis renders the greatest challenge and upheaval for the Smales (and even each of them responds differently to it). The attitude towards the revolution of July and his people living in the rural village is sceptical; as eschatology, its impact is ironically, in most ways, limited, its outcome compromised. July's family is ignorant of the impact and purpose of the revolution. They tragically remain in the interregnum, unaffected by any political change the revolution is intent on bringing. The life in their community is not much different to what it was prior to the revolution, other than the presence of the white family, whom they view with mistrust. The chief of the village, as an example, is unconvinced of the revolution's success and feels that his status will be threatened in a new dispensation. In fact, the life of the community has not been miraculously transformed by the revolution, which is but a

> gilded façade beneath which lurks the deep-rooted prejudices and racial supremacy waiting to pounce on the black uprising. The imagined revolution does not transfer the South Africans into a state of autonomy and recognition; instead, they turn to be suspicious, dubious and even resistant to amendment and change. Hence, the imaginary revolution revives and underlines unexpectedly the rudiments of the age-old white supremacy instead of uprooting and eliminating them (Radwan 3).

Even though the novel opens at an "End time" of apartheid, the first twelve lines of *July's People* casts doubt on the political change it is purposed to have made. It reaffirms that in this interregnal space, change is a "gilded façade" (*Ibid.*). Old apartheid rituals of tea in the morning are not abandoned and seem no different to the past. July, as servant, offers Maureen and Bam a cup of tea as expected of "his kind… for their kind" (Gordimer 1981, 1). July, "bent at the doorway", suggests a pose of submission ironically in a politically revolutionary time which is intent on eradicating this:

> You like to have some cup of tea? –
> July bent at the doorway and began that day for them as his kind has always done for their kind.
> The knock on the door. Seven o'clock. In governors' residences, commercial hotel rooms, shift bosses' company bungalows, master bedrooms *en suite* - the tea-tray in black hands smelling of Lifebuoy soap (*Ibid.*).

In the interregnal space the ambiguity of the moment is jarring. The revolution and the crisis renders the ritual of tea-making ludicrous, but as a "morbid symptom" of apartheid, July is in limbo, repeating the ritual with obsessive regularity as if his life would be less meaningful without it. The next paragraph, written from Maureen's point of view, describes, by contrast, the new dystopic environment accentuated by the lack of punctuation, broken syntax and stark, bleak images:

> no door, an aperture in thick, mud walls, and the sack that hung over it looped back for air, sometime during the short night. *Bam, I'm stifling; her voice raising him from the dead, he staggering up from his exhausted sleep* (*Ibid.*).

These scenes cast doubt on eschatology that July and the Smales are entrenched in their former roles of relating to each other, and it impacts on their present

intersubjectivity. David Medalie suggests that *July's People* is a "novel of reversal…of humanism, not as an assertion of a potential equality that is liberating, as the Smales…would like it to be, but as a creed that demeans by refusing to take cognisance of the contingencies that work to constitute identity"(Medalie 1997, 46).

July's People defies the impulse to represent the much-feared South African apocalypse and rather intimates the impossibility of such a representation. It foregrounds the upheaval in the lives of the Smales and presents them as helpless relics of a political regime that has ignored truth-seeking and genuine compassion for all. The dislocation from their former lifestyle moves the Smales to experience chaos, disorientation and anxiety in the dystopia of their new world. July, as a central part of their lives for fifteen years, receives unreciprocated generosity and kindness by having saved the Smales from the dystopia in Johannesburg. The apocalyptic rhetoric is central in the events that unfold, especially in the interaction between Maureen and July, as he ironically becomes a reminder for the reader of past injustice and the need for new, different discourse. David Medalie (1997) situates *July's People* as a version of a shipwreck narrative that interrogates, in a South African context, relations between the coloniser and the colonised[8]. Maureen and Bam's encounter in an environment and life that is so removed from their own leave them feeling disconsolate and alienated as castaways.

David Medalie suggests that the Crusoe subtext reverses ideas of Enlightenment, common in colonial writing, an inner innate goodness that would survive a revolution and bring to an end the apocalyptic crisis. Rather, like castaways and removed from legislated privilege, the Smales feel abandoned, unsure of their own life and relationships, confused by their current outcast-state. In their dystopia, "the old" begins to break down and ceases to have meaning. Maureen finds herself in an existential impasse, unrecognising of her ways and unsure how to move forward. We read that the yellow bakkie, "anchored in the khakiweed" is "[a] ship that had docked in a far country. ..[i]t would rust and be stripped to hulk, unless it makes the journey back, soon" (Gordimer 1981, 18).

The structures that have supported Maureen's former identity of selfhood lack purpose and scope and leave her helpless and lost. Considering *July's People* as a novel of reversal drawing on the shipwreck narrative, Medalie comments that "the cruellest blows to the fond liberal-humanism of Maureen and Bam Smales" lies in that "they become strangers to one another in that strange place"(Medalie 1997, 46). Unlike traditional shipwreck narratives, such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* or Wyss's *Swiss Family Robinson,* as

cited by Medalie, where the resourcefulness of the castaways is drawn from their collaborative strength and reliance on one another, here, relationships collapse, becoming dysfunctional and damaged. In her early encounters in the village, Maureen attempts to join the women in finding wild spinach but the task becomes a moment that draws attention to the scepticism of change:

> At first the women in the fields ignored her, or greeted her with the squinting unfocused smile of those who have their attention on the ground (*Ibid.* 110).

The physical contrast of the black women and Maureen working in the field becomes an instance of ridicule when "July's unsmiling wife…laugh[s]" (*Ibid.* 111). We read that the black women are secure "on firm ground" with their strength visible in their muscular legs as "their feet spread, ooze coming up between the toes, like the claws of marsh birds" (*Ibid.*). On the other hand, Maureen with her jeans rolled up "yellow bruises and fine, purple-red ruptured blood vessels …blue varicose ropes behind her knees" becomes a sign of disempowerment, pathetically incapable of sharing adequately in the life of the community. The black women, powerful and confident, take root in the soil, an act that Maureen cannot share. Maureen's actions here are a patronising attempt at asserting power to show that she can assimilate in the community life, but the feeble action, marked by white power and control, fails dismally. Even her personal relationship, now stripped of privilege from the past, is tested in the apocalyptic crisis. Maureen and Bam, within this interregnal space, are emotionally distanced. No longer referred to by name, they become "this man" and "this woman" brought together as "a divorced couple" (Gordimer 1981, 172). In this dystopia, away from white capitalist privilege, they have nothing, not even their companionship. The deconstruction of female gender stereotype of white wife, mother, liberal reveals her disempowerment. No longer the dancer in leotards, her body's altering state of growing sourness and odours, her asexual body "like a man stripped in a factory shower", is noticeable (*Ibid.* 109). The children and Bam do not recognise her as "her expression was closed to them"(*Ibid.* 176). Unaware, as yet, of the action to take, Maureen alienates herself further, holding onto the last indices of power. Her obsessive determination to find the keys of the bakkie and the gun become a compulsive assertion of her unwillingness to relinquish her white power. The fragmented family relationship in the dystopic present renders the Smales incapable of drawing on each other's strengths to survive.

In this unfamiliar world, time and space intensify their disorientation. Time becomes a disjuncture and creates *chronos*, "a moment of crisis … when 'the foundations of life quake beneath our feet'" (Kermode 47). Medalie argues that in versions of the shipwreck narrative, attempts to impose logic of linear time is a standard device to maintain rationalisation of space and locale. Gordimer subverts this logic, intensifying Maureen and Bam's psychological and emotional disorientation in the apocalyptic crisis. Maureen's obsession with monitoring time is her attempt at maintaining a linear sense of space and milieu. Time, as a logical conceptual understanding of past, present and future, is problematised for Maureen and further contributes to her marginalisation and abjection. As she becomes emotionally embroiled in her *chronos,* she finds it harder to maintain a clear sequence of events admitting that she has "regained no established point of a continuing present from which to recognize her own sequence" (Gordimer 1981, 170). Maureen finds that looking at her watch is now a meaningless action. Rooted in the past, she finds difficulty coping with and understanding her present. Time and contact with the old world is a chaotic, obsessive recollection.

At another moment in the novel, having brought with her Manzoni's classic *I Promessi Sposi*[9] Maureen finds that the "pleasure of reading…a false awareness of being within another time" is "not possible" (*Ibid.* 34). Written in 1827, *I Promessi Sposi* (*The Betrothed*) is a historical Romantic novel and draws on western, in particular, central European tradition and culture. Manzoni wanted to rewrite the historical novel from the perspective of the lower classes. The protagonist, Lucia Mondella, from the lower class offers her world view of events as the voice of a new growing lower class. Like Maureen, Lucia is dislocated from her environment, left to make sense of her crisis. While attempting to read Manzoni's classic, Maureen's understanding of being localised in "another time and consciousness" renders the act of reading futile, Manzoni's world inaccessible now in her present crisis:

> But the transport of the novel, the false awareness of being within another time, place and life that was the pleasure of reading, for her, was not possible. She *was* in another time, place and consciousness; it pressed upon her and filled her as someone's breath fills a balloon's shape. She was already not what she was. No fiction could compete with what she was finding she did not know, could not have imagined or discovered through imagination (*Ibid.* 34 – 35).

Maureen's recognition that she "was already not what she was" suggests that she does not lack insight potentially to reflect on her current errors in *chronos* but, her selfishness at recognising only her present suffering as opposed to July's compromised life for fifteen years in her employ leaves her in the interregnum, fearful of delving further. Maureen's rationale that "if she did not read, they would find a solution soon; if she did read the book, they would still be here when it was finished" speaks of her contradictory feelings while being trapped in the interregnum, unable to move to *kairos* (*Ibid.* 35). The present holds no conceptual understanding of time as she knows it and complicates her ability to move into the future. Thus trapped in the confusion, she is obsessively drawn to the past, as mythologised memories secure her belief that she is a victim of the political revolution, not guilty of insensitive treatment of others, especially of July. In her recollections, she prides herself for being a "liberal" believing that her actions are just and fair. Nostalgia, in linking past and present, is central to the study of apartheid and post-apartheid apocalyptic rhetorical texts as they display the inclination "to look at the present with dismay, the future with trepidation and the past with nostalgia…conveyed in part through the delineation of dystopian qualms, ambivalences" (Medalie 2010, 36). Svetlana Boym (2001) identifies nostalgia as a historical theme recurring at moments of heightened trauma, especially historical trauma. She identifies it as "a symptom of our age" with both retrospective and prospective potential (Boym xvi). Her research discusses how recalling events in memory through nostalgia, supports the yearning for a lost, vanquished time. Differentiating between "reflective" and "restorative" nostalgia, she attests that the former calls on an idealised recollection for a "time out of time… a sentiment of loss or displacement…[which suggests] an ache of temporal distance" (*Ibid.* xiii). "Reflective" nostalgia is emotive and can be called upon with degrees of fantasy and embellishments. However, "restorative" nostalgia is transhistorical, and is characterised by memories of national icons with the intention to mythologise these.

Maureen's subconscious selections of events are woven to form "reflective" nostalgic recollections of the past. These serve to validate her relationship with July in her mind and thus prevent her from engaging in a future that demands an end, or "Last Thing" of power roles from the former regime. For her now in the Kermodian *media res*, the future is incomprehensible. Emotionally lost, Maureen's consciously composed self, as the white, dedicated daughter of the patriarchal mining shift boss, is under threat. Maureen seeks comfort from her present crisis by drawing on "reflective" nostalgic

memories that present her as a liberal, convincingly assured that she is unaccountable for the dystopia that has beset her and her family. Her intransigency to see beyond the present trauma, entices her to call on her time past "back there". Nostalgia creates a superficial, sentimental tableau of memories and becomes a means of her rewriting her historical past from her white perspective. The sentimentalised images as "reflective" nostalgia point to Maureen's subconscious unwillingness to recognise the needs and sensitivities of other people and to recognise the ethical injustice of a privileged life while July remains as a servant. She plays out scenarios that pit power relations of submission and white supremacy in her youth, offering a tangential reason for her becoming a liberal, yet never fully grasping the finer complexity of this, deferring the opportunity for genuine introspection. At one moment in the novel, she recalls her life of privilege growing up on the mining town: of "summer-afternoon humming", holding her housekeeper, Lydia's, hand "loosely and easily" while "Jim cleans the shoes and digs in the garden" (Gordimer 1981, 36 – 37). Her recollection of the photograph for the *Life* coffee table book of a "white schoolgirl and the black woman with the girl's schoolcase on her head", poses her to question glibly (*Ibid.* 40):

> Why had Lydia carried her case?
> Did the photographer know what they saw, when they crossed the road like that, together? Did the book, placing the pair in its context, give the reason she and Lydia, in their affection and ignorance, didn't know? (*Ibid.* 40)

In the interregnum, Maureen wrestles in her desolation and plays out her incomprehensibility of her current crisis and the apprehension associated with it, not understanding that as a white "liberal" she is accountable for duplicitous double standards which prevent her from moving from *chromos* to *kairos*. Her "reflective" nostalgia cements her unwavering belief that she is a "liberal" and exempt from carrying out any form of oppression. She is thus merely a bystander of the revolution, caught up in its crisis. She mythologises liberalism without fully understanding its demands and responsibilities, thus exempting herself from any accountability. Her recollection of the photograph of the *Life* coffee table book potentially points to the need to question with a social conscience the double standards of liberalism, yet the opportunity that is unveiled to her is thwarted, subverting the potential of the apocalyptic crisis to foster growth.

Medalie (2010) argues convincingly that it is reductive to view the literature of nostalgia simplistically as either an obsessive "clinging to the past" or as a literary ploy that juxtaposes "the dystopian present" from "the utopian past" (Medalie 2010, 36). This, he asserts, undermines the significance of imagination (*Ibid.*). His study grants us a more precise understanding of Maureen's nostalgic recollections. Alluding to the studies of Linda Hutcheon, Immanuel Kant and Sean Scanlan, he suggests that literary nostalgia is complex: at times it is used as an escapist mechanism with simplistic and tenuous superfluity, whilst at other times it is a sophisticated technique that magnetises the past to the present. Both Hutcheon and Medalie refer to Kant's observation that nostalgia is not a yearning for a place or an experience, but rather a moment of lost, irretrievable time, such as youth. Using Anne Landsman's *The Rowing Lesson* and Jo-Anne Richard's *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* as examples, Medalie traces the complexity of nostalgic modes and suggests that nostalgia as a stylistic technique "enables one to understand better the complexity of the relationship between past and present, as well as the interwoven nature of utopian and dystopian impulses" (*Ibid.* 37). Medalie's "evolved nostalgia" is where "the present invests in narratives of the past [along with] … the constructedness of memory" (*Ibid.* 40). Nostalgia in this instance, while calling on past memory makes important links between past and present, and revisions the present by understanding the wrongs of the past. Understanding the past and how it has impacted on the crisis here and now, can lead to evolved, developed choices that will facilitate a better future.

In unreflecting forms of nostalgia, however, the past is a static utopia, lost forever with no links to the present other than a superficial gesture purposing "to expose the utopia of the past as a dystopia masquerading as a utopia…[as] the gesture lacks substance" (*Ibid.* 37). Unreflecting forms of nostalgia negate the correlation between catastrophe and revelation. The past as myth, is presented as an ideal: a sadness for what has been lost. For Maureen and Bam, the past bears no relationship to their present apocalyptic crisis. Maureen finds herself transported from the debilitating present to moments in her life which grant her a temporary reprieve: the recollections severs connections to her present apocalyptic crisis. Recollections of Lydia where they would "sometimes giggle", sharing a coke "mouth-about…some gum or chocolate" serve no purpose other than to feed myth-making, which Kermode reminds us prevents engagement with the future (Gordimer 1981, 38), the recollection of the mutual "sweat of love-making" (*Ibid.* 125), memories of her "school shoes, cleaned by Our Jim…outside the door" (*Ibid.* 4). Her nostalgia is solipsistic, intent on protecting herself

from the responsibility of the crisis. Derek Hook (2013) draws on a similar understanding of the importance of nostalgia. His studies on nostalgia make references to "fetishistic" nostalgia being "a loving relation to a version of the past which is often recalled and taken as a cherished status or a protective function" (Hook 2013) The sentimental mythologised images fail to enact a sense of moral injustice in Maureen- to highlight the *topos* of evil. Her memory of the relationships with Lydia and Our Jim are patronising from her position of power and do not result in the interiority required for sense-making.

Reality in the "here and now", on the other hand, juxtaposes the mythologised images of the past as the dystopia is depicted with graphic precision:

> 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, 5)

A growing body of studies links the dynamics of power relations to psychology and indicates that subconscious racist thoughts prevent one from adopting a fully-fledged and uncompromising liberal stance. Derek Hook (2013) argues that power dynamics, especially those related to racism, are subliminal. In turn a psycho-analytical synergy between politics and psychology can point to expressions of racism being unconscious thoughts interpreted as racist actions. It is only in allowing the unconscious to move to the conscious that racism can be truly addressed. This proves an interesting observation as a "liberal" Maureen festers unconscious racial thoughts based on narcissistic needs and this hinders her "sense-making". It is Frantz Fanon (2004), in his iconic study on post-colonialism, that aptly observes that whites "are sealed in their whiteness", and rather than engaging with the full spectrum of liberalism, become selective in adopting liberal actions that that do not compromise their privileged lifestyle (Fanon 166). These may be unconscious thoughts that, when challenged, will be unsettling and disorienting. As such, nostalgia is engaged in as a defensive mechanism with the potential either to solidify subliminal racism or, with interiority, to destabilise "by unseating prevailing norms and orthodoxy" much like the nostalgic recollection of Maureen (Hook 171).

The dynamics of the triangulation of power slowly move towards "an explosion of roles" where Maureen, Bam and July act out social roles of the white coloniser and black colonised in an interregnal space that cannot secure transformation (Gordimer 1981, 117). July who has come home only occasionally in his fifteen year employment with the Smales, vacillates in the interregnum. At first obliging in his submissive role as

servant to the Smales, he is confused when on one such occasion he fetches the Smales' clothes for the women to wash. When Maureen refuses his help he "stood in a manner of one who will not go away without what he has come for" adding that he "must carry water" for Maureen (Gordimer 1981, 33). Having been separated from his family, he finds the adaptation to the village difficult. Martha is the one who assumes control in the village having learnt to adapt to a life without July. He knows that servitude with the Smales has been his only opportunity at receiving a financial wage "because [his]…wife, [his]…children, [he]…must work for them." (*Ibid.* 88). With time, July begins to move hesitantly to *kairos* as he sheds his role of subservience to adapt to the village life again, developing a genuine self-worth based on his own values rather than those imposed by his white master. In another incident, when July justifies to his family the reasons for bringing a white family among them, July's mother makes "gobbling exclamations" and sceptically asks what the white family will do to them now in their village (*Ibid.* 28). July's reply is an acknowledgment that here, in their village, as the old ways are dying, white power has lost its force:

> Her son … was suddenly aware of something he had not known. – They can't do anything. Nothing to us anymore – (*Ibid.* 25).

In the interregnal space, moments that hold an opportunity to move away from former patriarchal values are lost, resulting in challenging power relations. The apocalyptic potential is thwarted. For both black and white, the old needs to be stripped away and destroyed and needs to become a "Last Thing". As old roles become visibly anachronistic with diminishing white power, former communication between master and servant becomes strained and testing. After their first two weeks, Maureen sends Royce to find July in his house. When Royce returns July's reaction tests her authority:

> - Did you find July?-
> -Mmm. There at his house.-
> -Is he coming?-
> -He says it's all right, he's there, you can come.-
> …
> -Go and say I want to see him.-
> …
> The children did not return. She thought she heard him singing, way up in the bones of his skull, the hymns he breathed while he worked at something that required repetitive, rhythmical effort, polishing or scrubbing. But

> when he appeared he was merely coming over to her, unhurried on a sunny day. Nothing sullen or resentful about him; her little triumph in getting him to come turned over inside her… (*Ibid.* 83)

The Smales, having been thrust in "a habitation of mud houses" are required to change their former rituals and behaviours associated with privileges afforded them by the apartheid regime. Maureen and Bam's frustrations result in a puerile reaction to their crisis. Maureen, in particular, displays a selfish lack of acknowledgement at the generosity shown by July and is blinded by her continual lack of regard for her own interactions with him[10]. She refuses to see what is unveiled to her and thus remains in her apocalyptic crisis. Confident that she knows July and his thoughts, Maureen comments that "he had worked for her for years", and that while Bam could not fully follow his broken English, "he[July] and she understood each other well" (*Ibid.* 11). However, she knows him merely as a "decently-paid and contented male servant" in their service for fifteen years (*Ibid.* 11). She is unaware that July's name is Mwawate and details of his family are mostly unknown to her until her arrival in the village. The relationship with him is positioned from the perspective of white power: "for only the master and mistress can choose to ignore the fact that the servant is a servant; for the servant himself, that is never an option" (Medalie 2007, 47). Having a social conscience is more than being the "girl in leotards teaching modern dance to blacks at night-class, under the eyes of her architect boy-friend with his social conscience" and joining "political parties and 'contact' groups in willingness to slough privilege"(Gordimer 1981, 127, 10). Bam and Maureen's children, on the other hand, offer a glimmer of hope in the crisis by adapting with time to their new social environment. Maureen observes one of her children playing with dried faeces and interacting with the other children from the village.

Bam's self-confidence weathers when the keys of the bakkie are taken and the gun stolen, both fetishes of masculine pride and patriarchy. He however begins to move from *chronos* to *kairos* in measure as he recognises his and his children's suffering and helplessness. He relinquishes his former patriarchy and supremacy by interacting with the men of the village, seen in the boar hunt and using his knowledge to build a water tank for the community choosing to live on the best he can. Maureen, however, distances herself from this, clinging to her ways and remaining belligerent and myopic. We read:

> The closest *July's People* comes to anticipating a more equitable future may be the automatic, ritual generosity of

> July in offering his home and of Bam in sharing his food. The Smales' children learning of African languages may articulate the need for a new language for the future, a total absorption into a new culture as when Gina can 'disappear' into the community, 'taken in' by the locals and feeling 'at home' with them, in a way Bam and Maureen never could (Lovesey 135).

In his role as servant "from his other life, his other self", July has been led to believe that the Smales had treated him fairly (Gordimer 1981, 8). In the city, they entrusted him with the keys of the house; they refused to call him "boy", in turn July calls his master "sir". Never in control, July accepted his subservience and the assumed kindness shown is an expected norm for being considered loyal and trustworthy. Maureen and Bam arrogantly boast that they are "liberals", non-racists.

Rather than viewing dignity as a comfort and superfluous need, Medalie positions it as "a fundamental (and bitter) element in the quasi-apocalyptic struggle, which is raging" in the novel (Medalie 2004, 56). For Bam and Maureen, their shallow form of liberalism aspires to endow their loyal servant with their version of what they understand dignity to encompass. "But it emerges gradually that the dignity that the Smales couple confer on July is an imposition, inseparable from the power they wield over him" and is a selfish satisfaction of their own needs (*Ibid.* 56). It leads to an adversarial master-servant relationship articulated in July's confrontation with Maureen when she demands the keys of the bakkie:

> Myself, I'm not say you're not a good madam – but you don't say you trust for me. – *It was a command.* – You walk behind. You looking. You asking me I must take all your books out and clean while you are away…*The master he think for me*…I know for myself what I must do (My italics. Gordimer 1981, 86).

The novel challenges the apocalyptic as Maureen remains myopic, unwavering in her determination. In the final confrontation with July, rather than accepting her failure, she feels confused and distraught, unable to articulate her confusion as "her lips moved with the words formed but not spoken" (*Ibid.* 189). In an interview in 1992, Gordimer reflects on Maureen's reaction at this point:

> Yes, she can't understand, but she knows that what's being said is an absolute rejection of her … not horrible, but painful (Gordimer as quoted in Jeyifo 928).

The climactic confrontation here leaves us with a sense of urgency for alternatives based on social responsibility and accountability. The historical past and present in the novel braid into one another in Gordimer's vision for a distant transformative possibility for a different future. We turn to Gordimer who, in an interview, comments on the complexity of interpersonal racial relations and the fused "foldedness" of characters:

> …here is this woman, Maureen and *she* again is handed from father to husband[11]. But she has two husbands, because Bam, her real husband, looks after her, but the black man, July, who is the majordomo in the house, she is also totally dependent on him, without realizing it of course. And she has this illusion that she has this great friendship with him. In other words, she is a combination of dependent and liberal attitudes. This is the ultimate neo-colonial white woman. She doesn't realize that she indeed has two men, that she doesn't exist without them. The white man without his business, and without his gun – when the gun is gone, he can't look after her. And then the black man – she is amazed to discover that he doesn't belong to her; she doesn't belong to him either, but he's got his own people there and there is that scene when he actually tells her the fact (Gordimer as quoted in Jeyifo, 928)

Maureen's volatile outburst denies any understanding and accountability of the crisis. She humiliates July as a man having abandoned Ellen, as a servant having pilfered small objects, of compounding dystopia by being a usurper and one "who will profit by others fighting", reducing everything to another "wreck like all the others. Another bit of rubbish, -" (Gordimer 1981, 185 & 187). Her denigration of July echoes an "established hierarchy…[which] represents the power of the old order and the attribution of overriding equality … of a very specific kind of old power – in this case, liberal capitalist power" (Medalie 1997, 47). July refutes the master – servant roles of old power. Assertively, his rejection is powerfully commanded by selecting to speak in the vernacular rather than the accommodated language of his master. He "becomes, by inversion, the beginning of the end of Friday-like docility" (*Ibid.* 47):

> - Me? I must know who is stealing your things? Same like always. You make too much trouble for me. Here in my home too. Daniel, the chief, my-mother-my-wife with the house. Trouble, trouble from you. I don't want it anymore (Gordimer 1981, 184 – 185).

The confrontation between the old order, Maureen, and the new order, July, intensifies as we read that:

> [she] understood everything: what he had to be, how she had covered up to herself for him, in order for him to be her idea of him. But for himself – to be intelligent, honest, dignified for *her* was nothing; his measure as a man was taken elsewhere and by others. She was not his mother, his wife, his sister, his friend, his people (*Ibid.* 186).

While "intelligent", "honest" and "dignified" are aspirational goals in Maureen's shallow liberalism, they become, as Medalie suggests, meaningless items on a check-list seen from the white master's perspective. Dignity is not an absolute, unaffected by social and racial imbalances, but rather folded in both. It is considered as "a special moral worth and stature" irrespective of "social position…race, gender, nationality, ethnicity or other markers of social hierarchy" (Meyer as quoted Medalie 1997, 50). It is this aspect that is problematized in *July's People*, to show how, as a limiting classification of society, the lack of dignity exposes the disparity in South Africa. Unwilling to acknowledge this truth, Maureen ignores the ethical possibility for what is presented in her present crisis, unable to recognise that her anxieties are a result of her duplicitous stance as a "liberal". Maureen's confusion and bewilderment persist in the close of the novel as she has ignored the potential opportunity for truth. Rather, she fails to acknowledge that her past relationship and interaction with July has lacked the required reciprocal respect and dignity. Her defensive and self-righteous attitude defies the possibility of accepting that her past actions and choices have impaired her ability to move forward. In a desperate attempt to validate her "liberalism" and choices, she fails to recognise that her treatment of July is positioned from the perspective of white supremacy. She can no longer speak for him. She taunts him, using his relationship with Ellen as a means to humiliate him. Further, her selfish disregard for July prevents her from empathising with the complexity of his separation from his family and home during his employment in Johannesburg.

While the Smales feel trapped in their geographic space as one of July's people, their emotional contestation is suggested by the boundary of the river, the impassable border until Maureen runs towards the helicopter. The river delineates the ambiguity in the interregnum as it suggests both the journey from the past and a possible trajectory

towards an obscure future. The closing moments of the novel do not resolve the period of interregnum for either Bam, or Maureen or even the reader. There is no miraculous release from the apocalyptic crisis presented. Vincent Crapanzano (2004), anthropologist and literary theorist, refers to the dilemma among South African whites as a "paralytic time of waiting" suggesting that being caught in the interregnum, in what he refers to as "the structure of waiting" typifies "the South African experience" (Crapanzano 115). Mufti (2013) agrees that "the text withholds the conclusion to this historical interstice" as the characters are caught in a "a paralyzed transit" that contests eschatology (Mufti 64). Confusion and ambiguity dominate the ending of the novel, as the reader is transported through a potential apocalyptic equivocation at one moment, to a juxtaposed anti-climax at another, emphasising the endlessness of the period of interregnum and insecurity further[12]. The helicopter's sound is "a racket of blows that shakes the sky" producing a "high ringing in her ears, her body in its rib-cage is thudded with deafening vibration, invaded by a force pumping, jigging its monstrous orgasm" (Gordimer 1981, 158).

Medalie's reading of the novel as an inversion of the shipwreck narrative, challenges notions of eschatology. The ending does not suggest "Last Things" but a fundamental ambiguity in that regard. Maureen's rush towards the helicopter might be the "Last Thing" but conversely, it may also be a "first thing" of something different but challenging. The end, rather than being apocalyptic, casts the apocalyptic in doubt:

> Gordimer's refusal to assuage the apocalyptic rush into the unknown by offering some indication of the new order that is being ushered is another kind of inbalance, for there is little sense of historical *replacement*. Instead a point of balance from which one could survey a disintegrating past and the gathering future, there is only the uncontrollable space of the interregnum, the space between dying and birth (Medalie 1997, 49).

The present in the novel is one that is so skewed that it cannot end the defamiliarisation and chaos. There "is no stable fulcrum with which to bring the skewed world back to order" (Medalie 1997, 49). Medalie considers the ending as "obfuscatory", "deliberately and provocatively opaque", "a textual knottiness" (*Ibid.* 49). The old order haunts the present and the choices made in the present, leaving the Smales caught in the impasse of the interregnum. The hypothesised revolution, intent on creating a new democracy, has not succeeded in its outcome. The present and the future cannot be

divorced from the past and it is only when the past is processed and understood as a failing of the present that there can be a possibility for a future. Gordimer problematizes the nature of the future in shedding the past entirely, and goads the reader into engaging in the dialectic of shedding the past *alongside* a future. "Thus, even as Maureen seems to undergo a sort of baptism or rebirth, plunging into the river and moving through it 'like some member of a baptismal sect to be born again'…and runs towards *trust*, the antidote, apparently, to the fear that has paralysed her all her life, the narrator who has all along tended to signal her distance from Maureen in practical and political terms, refers bizarrely to 'the romantic forests of Grimm and Disney"' (Medalie 2007, 49). Where July fulfils in part his new role free of submission, Medalie states that for Maureen there is nothing but ultimate annihilation as she runs towards the helicopter leaving the message of the text to rest in dystopia:

> Perhaps in a post-apartheid South Africa there will be a new place for dignity, but *July's People* does not take us there and so we do not know (Medalie 2010, 59).

Even though the ambiguous ending can suggest that Maureen's attempt to run towards the helicopter could be self-destructive, Gordimer encourages us to regard the novel as "a sort of Pascalian wager" where there is an acceptance that "the home of the white African exists" (Gordimer 1983). In particular, she suggests that "if you stay in South Africa and look at the future, you have to accept that wager, that a society under a black majority will be a real democracy for everybody" (Gordimer as quoted in Seymour, 238).

Some critics have thus read the closing scene as apocalyptic (Erritouni 2006, Clingman 1992, Folks 1998). Clingman considers that the novel suggests a glimmer of hope as Maureen runs "from old structures and relationships" while also "running towards her revolutionary destiny" (Clingman 203). Even though the nature of the destiny is ambiguous in that it may bring either "life or death", it is all that "she knows". (*Ibid.* 203). The future for Clingman, although ambiguous, remains the only "authentic future" and hope feasible (*Ibid.* 203).

The role of Bam and Maureen's children, who seem to have adapted to their new environment with greater ease than their parents, is the flicker of the apocalyptic hope. Erritouni views the open-endedness of the ending as both utopian and dystopian. The bifurcal interpretation proposes that, on the one hand, Maureen cannot take any role in

the future in a democratic South Africa, as she is unwilling to remedy the economic disparity that exists between whites and blacks. This, for Erritouni, suggests reversal of power roles. It is only when whites consider ways in which to forego capitalist power that a future in South Africa will be actualised. For Maureen, apocalyptic crisis occurs without *apokalyspsis* or revelation and, confronted by what she considers as betrayal, she evades the truth and runs away from knowledge. On the other hand, the reading suggests apocalyptic crisis with revelation, as the future rests ultimately on the next generation, the children, who have forged a new identity by sharing new values, seeing themselves as African first and whites second. Unlike Maureen and Bam who do not learn the vernacular and regard language as a barrier to communication, the children adapt their language to incorporate words from the vernacular. One recalls that in the final confrontation between July and Maureen, it is Maureen who does not understand July as he argues, more forcefully, in the vernacular, asserting that he is no longer in his role of servitude, even though as yet he is very uncertain how this will impact on his life. The novel suggests that a new discourse of a decolonised South Africa, removed from the dictums of power, is apocalyptic and necessitates a precarious dialogue. Erritouni's argument limits the richness of reading the text as a narrative in the interregnum: he echoes the fears presented in the text as the crisis continues. He reads the text as apocalyptic, concluding that "the text depicts a utopian life for the Blacks, who will 'emerge victorious from their struggle for … economic justice,' and a dystopian future for the white liberals, who will find themselves in 'a subordinate position, ruled by blacks'" (Shehabat, Zeidanan 2012, 135).

The apocalyptic is cautionary in the novel. It serves to intensify, with dramatic fervour, the collective anxieties of a white community and the deconstruction of their physical selves, their identity and their relationships. It leaves them feeling muddled, unsure even why as "liberals" they need to succumb to the present trauma and crisis that appears to challenge any future oriented vision for survival. Egocentrically, they consider that, as liberals, they blindly believe that they are the ones who have been slighted and traumatised by a crisis for which they were not responsible. Gordimer subtly draws the reader to experience events in the novel to create a greater understanding of what is required in the "here and now". The interregnal space in the novel draws attention to the schism in the racial divide perpetuated by apartheid. For July and his people, the mud houses, the crawling insects and dry environment form part of their quotidian world which is "home". For the Smales on the other hand, the space becomes a dystopic

disjuncture from the privilege to which they were accustomed back home. Rituals of a former life-style of master servant and material objects are no longer of value or significance in this space, which in turn emphasises the necessity to abandon values from the old regime. Gordimer's ending is open-ended and intentionally encourages the reader to interrogate the fate of the Smales as well as the question of whether there will be any ameliorated life style for July and his people. Gordimer encourages us to read the ending as a Pascalian wager, and while the reader may sense an anti-climax in the aporia of the ending, it warns that the future need not necessarily be a continued crisis. Change is inevitable, however difficult for everyone, as life needs to continue with all its challenges. The revolution has not resulted in the valiant transformation of a nation, nor has it negated its future. There is no miraculous interiority on Maureen's behalf which renders her accountable for her intersubjectivity with July. The novel does not end with a transformative relationship between Maureen and July. The apocalyptic is prudent in that life continues in bursts of possibility, however difficult. Confronted, at the climactic moment with July, Maureen, unable to confront her present crisis, runs impetuously across the boundary of the river towards the helicopter unaware whether it is going to save her or not. However in doing so, she breaks free from the stasis that she has felt while being one of July's people. If eschatology and the fear of the end is dependent on human choice, as espoused by O'Leary, then Maureen running towards the helicopter holds the message for its readers; apocalypse is cautionary in its focus of "I unveil it by telling it" (O'Leary 88). The text helps us understand the essential purpose of the crisis as "interpretative devices for lending meaning to personal and collective experience" (O'Leary, 92). Moral choices, however difficult and indeterminate in their outcome, are central to prudential renovation: in the face of *topos*.

Even in her final flight, Maureen continues to feel vulnerable, hopeless and alone. In the face of *topos*, she has yet to internalise her moral choices as a "liberal" – of understanding genuine dignity. She understands however that the present crisis is untenable for her. In the end, her choice of abandoning her family and running towards the helicopter is her moment of making an impetuous choice to move forward at any cost. The intentional inconclusiveness of the text suggests that her journey as such will continue, but there is no indication of whether that journey will be difficult or perhaps manageable. Moments of interiority and altered ways may still occur in the future, but not yet. The future for her remains an enigma, a cautionary possibility. Human actions offer open choices about how to live on. Eschatology is not postponed but rather

contingent on what is unveiled and the subsequent choices made. In an early description of the landscape, Gordimer entices our thinking to open up the possibility that we need to live on in the face of a crisis as like the clouds "the savannah bush formed and reformed under the changes of the light" (Gordimer 1981, 31). Her journey following the helicopter's sound, moving across her boundary of the river "like some member of a baptismal sect to be born again" is a final desperate attempt at a possibility for a different future, as yet undefined (Gordimer 1981, 194). It is a plea for living on with all its resonances in a world that will be challenging, difficult and most times unwelcoming. *July's People* , like *I Promessi Sposi* that Maureen had difficulty reading earlier in the text, offers the opportunity to be sensitized to the voiceless members of society. The potential to unveil this truth for Maureen to draw parallels to her current environment and relationship with July, is a moment which is lost in her futile attempt at reading the Manzoni text. Manzoni's masterpiece is a love story, set during the Spanish occupation of Lombardy and the debilitating Thirty Year War (1618 – 1648). War and its resultant dystopia and eschatological fear draw parallels between the two novels. The descriptions of Milan gripped with hopelessness whilst suffering from the Bubonic plague augments the intense suffering of its citizens famously referred to as "gente di nessuno" ("nobody's people") emphasizing that the poor and marginalized are treated in a demeaned, senseless manner. (Manzoni, chapter XI). Ultimately though, utopian vision becomes the victor with the two protagonist lovers marrying thus pointing to a sense of thematic justice for the dystopic events portrayed in the text. One could suggest that *July's People* portrays "nobody's people" both for the Smales, whose name even suggests their smallness in their need to share the power they had in apartheid South Africa. July and his people are also "nobody's people" as they grapple with a changing South Africa.

Because the end of the old order is concomitant with the difficulties of the nascent new, we leave *July's People* feeling that both the old and new societies remain fragile. Eschatology opens up a possibility for prudential apocalyptic. Bam, as patriarchal master of the old regime, is emasculated and defeated. His bakkie and his gun, symbols of former relics of power have been lost and no longer hold their control. Bam's personal relationship with Maureen has collapsed. Yet, his submission is not nihilistic. He too recognises the need to live on. His change is measured and cautionary, as seen in his collaboration with the community in building a water tank and being part of the hunt. Additionally, his patriarchal role is reversed as he assumes both a paternal and maternal role with his three children, signalled in the final moments when he is playing with his

children in the river. The apocalyptic is intimated in our understanding that perhaps he has not achieved a state of genuine reflection and whether he will remains one of the opaque moments of the novel. There is a glimmer of hope that life will go on, under different conditions, however difficult. In this final tableau of Bam playing in the river with his children, what is unveiled to the reader is the cautionary engagement with a different kind of future as one of "July's white people" (Gordimer 1981, 173). For July and his people, the price for docility and living a life subjected to oppression, is the realisation that power roles need to evolve. Economic enfranchisement remains a hope for the future and in the present, that challenge remains a constant, but rather than allowing themselves to be overcome by hopelessness in the expectation of change, they too live on in all the complexities that change affords. West-Pavlov reiterates this forward-thinking message in his discussion of art forms in post-colonial spaces. Commenting on Michael Titlestad's description of the makeshift trolleys of South Africa's recyclers as examples, he suggests that rather than looking backwards at the piling refuse and rubble behind them, they move forwards towing the rubble in the makeshift trolleys:

> Rather than the endemic catastrophism that Titlestad's piece… addresses, the image of recycling proposes an ongoing, if fitful process of making-the-future-out-of-what-the-present-offers (West-Pavlov 2015, 7 – 8)

The arrival of the *gumba-gumba* at final moments of the novel seems out of place and an irony considering the gloominess of *July's People*. But it makes a pertinent case here. Arriving from the outside of the village, it heralds a significant moment, though it is unclear what occasion it marks. In the interregnal space it is an enigma: is it in eschatological terms, a metonym celebrating the end of an old order or is it a symbol of an obstinacy of continuing in the interregnum? One cannot ignore that the red *gumba-gumba* lifts the spirit of the village - the infectious joy visible:

> Music began swirling unsteadily from the amplifier. Already they were passing round the thin beer that was the same colour when drunk and when vomited. Their fun had its place in their poverty. It ignored that they were in the middle of the war, as if poverty itself were a country whose dispossession nothing reaches (Gordimer 1981, 173).

Ignoring the reality of being "in the middle of war" the *gumba-gumba* invites living on in the best possible manner even if "the thin beer was the same colour when drunk

and when vomited" (*Ibid.*). July's people, together with his new "white people" remain threatened by new perils, which in turn they need to confront to make choices that will best serve them to live on. The end of the novel thus cannot be viewed as a catastrophe. *July's People* should not be considered as an apocalyptic narrative in the obvious sense, rather the apocalyptic narrative is cautionary, prudently offering a possibility to continue living under difficult and complex situations. In the interregnum, there will be the continued belief that whatever the complexities of the new life, they are not a compromise of the old. Maureen's new landscape will create new metaphorical boundaries. Thus what was imminent now has become immanent. Gordimer's text describes "the broad strokes of history by which human beings are moved" (Zamora in Rosen 2008, xi). The violent crisis that confronts characters in her text does not guarantee that Gramsci's "new" era will be born but it is an attempt. A need for interiority and a changed moral choice for egalitarian society remains a distant hope. The transmutation of the fall of the old order and the possible nascent new one rests on understanding that the past does not "precede the present as it is contained it" (West-Pavlov 2015, 172).

Russell West-Pavlov's (*Temporalities* 2013) makes a final case here. Extending on Kermode's ideas of the amorphous nature of time, he suggests that time is not absolute but changing, moving in multiple temporalities. Time heralds both a change and transformation. The process of transformation, of becoming, is in itself time. Narratives about the future give shape to time. Specifically, he suggests that temporalities about future imaginings are moulded by anxieties from and about the past, the present and the unknown future. *July's People* engages with problems about futurity and explores the duality of past history and present crisis. For July and his people the fine balance between July's individual rights and the obligations for the safety of the community, seen in the harmonised synergy of Martha and the women working the land, need to be protected from outsiders: whether those outsiders are the Cubans, the rebels and/or the whites. The anxiety in July's village experienced by both his family's apprehension about outer threats or the Smales's anxiety about their safety grows out of a "notion of over-lapping, non-segmented temporal planes" in the construction of South Africa's history (West-Pavlov 2013, 172.*)*.

The idea of the apocalyptic as a revelation, and an obsessive presentation of crisis and eschatology in this novel, as in others in this study, direct authors' need to present a troubled and traumatic nation. *July's People,* in using apocalyptic rhetoric as a

precautionary, intensifies the urgency for necessitated change, both politically and intersubjectively. The novel critiques the consequences of political and personal solipsism and suggests that the future is a feasible glimmer, but one that needs to be embraced. The apocalyptic rhetoric has been deprived of the grand narrative of hopeful rejoinder. Rather, it ends on a possible escape into a future which is elusive, difficult but nontheless a living on.

END NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO:

[1] See "Remembering Nadine Gordimer". *The Conversation.* 15 July, 2014. http://theconversation.com

[2] Recognising her novels as heuristic, the Nobel Committee identifies her literature as being "of very great value to humanity…[as she] takes the question of the justification of the privileges of white people – even benevolent white people – to its extreme" (Nobel Award 1991)

[3] Jeffrey Folks (1998) comments that the interregnum space of the novel, as suggested by Gramsci's extract in the epigraph is further emphasized by the names:

> "the Smales have named their sons 'Victor' and 'Royce' ('royal')and their daughter 'Gina' ('Regina'), as contrasted with July, the 'Julius Caesar' whose force ushers in change and who is perhaps representative of more plebian life"(Folks 115).

[4] Collins, in her discussion about the value of apocalypse in *Crisis and Catharsis* (1984), suggests that in the performative world of apocalypse and eschatology, the reader is drawn to a narrative that builds a cataclysmic crisis. The narrative reveals the possibility that crisis need not be carried into the future as an incomprehensible present fear. If addressed, it has transformative potential since it encourages sensitivity (to understanding the need to reflect) and thereafter adapt. As such, it points to an acknowledgement of shared responsibility in the crisis itself.

[5] In an interview, Gordimer described South Africa as a nation "deformed by history" and points to the importance of writers in altering perspectives and modes of behaviour. For Gordimer, a writer's sensitivity draws him/her to create narratives which intently foreground suffering and barbarism in imaginary scenarios that borrow from history's deformed reality. The implicit didacticism of the text affords the writer to share socio-political vision by not only presenting the imagined scenarios of the historical deformity based in human truth, but also to direct the understanding that transformation is possible (*The Guardian*, 1). Presenting a paper at the Tanner lectures on human values (University of Michigan), Gordimer emphasised the importance of a writer sharing a social conscience with her readers. As such, she validates the purpose to draw on a "conscionable self-awareness…that would claim the right to call all …to account"(Gordimer, 1984 (a), 5). Supporting the view held by Roland Barthes that the "writer's world is his essential gesture as a human being", she accords that writers in oppressed societies need to be the spokesperson for the oppressed (*Ibid.* 7). Further, similar to Collins's pretext of aggrieving the non-aggrieved, Gordimer exacts the particular task of a white writer writing in apartheid South Africa to "raise the consciousness of white people who unlike [her]self have not woken up" (*Ibid.* 7).

[6] Mahmoud discussed the ambivalence inherent in political revolution. Quoting Hannah Arendt, he explores how both triumph and defeat are paradoxical outcomes of revolution even if the

original hope for one outcome is ultimately thwarted, the essential understanding is that revolution pre-empts the need for eschatology for a different historical trajectory (see Mahmoud 2015).

[7] See Wagner (1993) and Brighton (2002) who discuss Gordimer's liberalism in her writings.

[8] July's name reminds us of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as both names relate to calendar names. David Medalie explores *Robinson Crusoe* as sub-text in *July's People* (see Medalie 1997).

[10] Bam's and particularly Maureen's petulance may have contributed to Gordimer considering "July's Children" as a possible title to the novel (see John Cooke. "'Nobody's Children"': Families in Gordimer's Later Fiction" in King, 26).

[11] In the interview quoted, Gordimer compares Bray's white lover (*A Guest of Honor)* to Maureen (*July's People)* and comments that they are both the "colonial white female product" (Jeyifo, 927)

[12] Interestingly Nicholas Visser (1993) explores how the reading of the novel as an *interregnum* has resulted in different reception at different historical moments. While he views the Smales as white victims of apartheid policy and owing to their complicity with the system by being able to gain economically, the novel exposes "the intractable contradictions inherent in the lives of such people" (Visser 137). It also suggests that the novel resonates differently to different audiences at different times of reading. He explores how teaching the novel in the 1980s in the dark years of apartheid (where fears of a black revolution was imminent) was markedly harsher than the reading it in the 1990s (see Visser 1993).