Life in the Interregnum: *July’s People*

Nadine Gordimer’s *July’s People*

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År 2011

Uppsats, kandidatnivå, 15 hp
English Literature
Kursnamn English C

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to describe and examine differences in social behavior and social interactions in Nadine Gordimer’s *July’s people*. Specifically, attention will be given to the interim order that occurs after the collapse of the former South African regime and before a new regime has been established. In short, the essay attempts to answer the question how power is redistributed after the black revolution that occurs in the narrative. Antonio Gramsci’s Neo-Marxist theory is used to examine who dominates and who is subordinated among the novel’s main characters.

Keywords: Nadine Gordimer, July’s people, Interregnum, Hegemony
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1. Introduction.

Nadine Gordimer was born in 1923 and she grew up in the mining city of Springs, South Africa. Her mother originated from London and her father, who worked as a watchmaker had a Jewish background from Eastern Europe. Even as a young girl, Gordimer was aware of the differences between people and injustices between social classes in society. She also recognized the impact of racism and how black people were considered to be the lowest social group in society. Gordimer recalls: “Only many years later was I to realize that if I had been a child in that category – black – I might not have become a writer at all, since the library that made this possible for me was not open to any black child” (Nobel lecture).

For decades, Nadine Gordimer has been a spokesperson against the apartheid system, which was introduced in South Africa in 1948. The riots in Sharpeville in 1960 and the arrest of one of Gordimer’s best friends as well as the Nelson Mandela trials were important events and became the starting point for her political engagement. She was also deeply involved against the government’s practice of censorship which, she claimed, was the tool that prevented the free thoughts of writers. The consequences of the Soweto riots and violence during the 1970s resulted in an intensified fight among black people, and contributed to a growing support to the black trade union movement as well as to a stronger ANC (African National Congress). It is during this period that Gordimer speculated over the forthcoming black revolution and its consequences. In her opinion, the means to achieve a united culture must include extensive reforms within politics and economics in the South African society. Moreover, such reforms would require that white people renounce their material assets. In addition, it is essential that former behaviours from the past, such as white repression of black people must be abolished. Throughout Gordimer’s authorship, her main theme has been framed by a cultural-political perspective. In the novel, July’s people
she examines the cultural relationship between of the white and black classes in South Africa. The novel was written in 1981 and it is a prophecy of a future black revolution in South Africa that instigates a collapse of the apartheid system.

2. Purpose.

In addition to Nadine Gordimer, there are several other white South African authors, such as André Brink and Breyten Breytenbach, who have been deeply engaged and participated in the struggle against the apartheid regime. Primarily, the reason for selecting Nadine Gordimer for this study is her long career as an author and that she was the first South African writer to receive the Nobel Prize in 1991. Moreover, in *July's people*, she outlines a fascinating perspective of transformed identities after the black revolution and the lack of norms and values that occur without a ruling regime in the society. The aspects of social disorder in the novel arouse questions regarding how people socially interact within the kind of disarray described in the novel. Literary essays on *July's people* have mainly focused on the perspective of feminism but the purpose of this essay is to specifically describe and examine differences in social behaviour and social interactions during the interim order that occurs after the collapse of the former regime and before the new regime has been established. In short, the essay attempts to answer the question how power is redistributed after the black revolution.
3. The novel’s narrative framework.

“The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great
diversity of morbid symptoms – Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks” (Epigraph,
Gordimer, Nadine, July’s people)

The epigraph of the novel suggests the loss of previous identities as well as the absence of new
identities among the protagonists in July’s people. “The interregnum”, as mentioned above in
the epigraph, refers to the sense of being in-between; a vacuum that occurs between the old and
the new regime, which creates chaos where norms and values are unfamiliar. In contrast to the
armed revolution that occurs in July’s people, the apartheid system was abolished in 1994, and
fortunately without the violence which was predicted in Gordimer’s novel. The Smales family
lives in a suburban area of Johannesburg. Bam is a well-know architect, his wife Maureen is a
housewife and a former ballet dancer. They have three children, Victor, Gina and Royce. Due
to riots and violence during the black revolution the family escapes Johannesburg with the
assistance of their black servant, July. The Smales abandon their sheltered middle class
existence and encounter a completely new life in July’s village. Their new life in the village is
experienced as a primitive one without their previous possessions and social positions.
Maureen, Bam, and July encounter difficulties in adjusting to new roles and to new identities
when their former existence in the suburban area of Johannesburg has been shattered.

4. The essay’s interpretive framework

As mentioned previously, the aim of this essay is to apply a cultural studies perspective to the
time of political interregnum and to examine how the protagonists’ social interactions alter when no distinct structures of power exist and where former roles vanish. I will attempt to examine how the protagonists adjust into new roles when their habitual patterns are shattered. Thus, I will examine how the protagonists try to find new references within a new social context.

The enforcement of hegemony, a concept for which the Italian Neo-Marxist Antonio Gramsci is well known, is an often discussed topic in cultural studies. Mainly, Gramsci’s theory outlines that the dominating power in society is culture, even more powerful than the political and the economical aspects of society. Furthermore, in hegemony, the ruling group presents its ideals and transforms them to be the common ideas and values held among subordinate groups in a society. For the ruling group, the procedure to achieve common consent for its opinion is scarcely noticeable; the subordinate groups accept the ruling group’s ideals and opinion as part of the social structure in society. Consequently, the ruling group can preserve its power without using any overt violence. However, according to Gramsci, hegemony is power that is achieved through agreements between groups from above and below in society and the outcome is characterized by acceptance and opposition between the groups. The structure of power as well as the control of culture in a society is arranged by specially assigned leaders, who are characterized for their social diligences and they are designated by Gramsci as “organic intellectuals” (Storey 81). These persons can be identified by their duties within a society and there are only certain individuals who are considered to have the requisite skills for such tasks.

The main features of classic Marxist theory is that the upper class represses the lower classes in order to profit from their production whereas Gramsci’s Neo-Marxist theory claims that the structure of power is a process of co-operation between the classes although such negotiations must not intervene with the economic class struggle.
Interestingly, the setting of the novel is during the interregnum, where no distinct structures of domination exist although attempts of domination can be discerned. Therefore, Gramsci’s Neo-Marxist theory is more appropriate to use as a critical theory for the analysis of the novel.

The discussion will examine the structure of power in July’s village; who dominates and who is the subordinate among the protagonists will be explored. Moreover, I will attempt to analyse how the protagonists adjust and adapt to the culture of the village during the interim order. The discussion begins with analysing Bam’s, Maureen’s and July’s different social behaviours as well as their different social interactions. Furthermore, the discussion proceeds with exploring Bam’s and Maureen’s altered interactions in their relationship and continues by examining the different social interactions of the Smales’ children. Finally, the discussion ends with an analysis of the different social interactions between July, and his wife Martha and his mother.

5. Bam.

In Bam Smales’s former life, his profession as an architect meant a social position which included properties, cars and a comfortable suburban life. Here, in July’s village, he is merely the white man with his family under July’s supervision. However, both Maureen and Bam are grateful for July’s assistance with their escape from possible violence and death during the riots. Primarily, life in July’s village implies primitive conditions and the loss of possessions. “They had nothing” (29). The remaining possessions from their past is the car, (the bakkie) and Bam’s gun. Upon their arrival to the village, Bam and Maureen fear that their car may arouse suspicion in the minds of the villagers signifying that they possibly may forward information regarding their presence to the rebellions.
However, they have not acknowledged July’s new position of power; he has told everybody that he possesses the car since he received it as a gift from them. In addition, July argues that everybody is aware of the fact that white people are chased from their homes and that blacks have taken command of white people’s possessions. Thus, the villagers presume that July’s ability to drive has been acquired during his years in the city.

In order to obtain food and other necessities for the Smales, July drives away in their car, with the assistance of his friend, Daniel, to the nearest store and without their permission. Both Bam and Maureen are extremely upset by his wilful conduct. The bakkie was Bam’s own birthday gift and it was his vehicle for hunting trips. Moreover, it has been the means for their escape from the riots in Johannesburg. Thus, the bakkie is considered Bam’s possession and serves as a symbol of his previous social position. After July’s return from the shopping errand, Bam’s behaviour demonstrates a distinct master manner. “Bam had not greeted him [July]. Maureen was unbelieving to see on the white man’s face the old, sardonic, controlled challenge of the patron. – And where were you yesterday? What’s the story? (53) Bam’s reaction as the patronizing white master of July is an indication of his resistance and fear of being deprived of his possessions. Maureen is surprised and upset by Bam’s behaviour and she tries to soothe his attitude and instead telling July that they had been worried and she also wished to add that their worry concerned him. Gradually, as July takes over Bam’s role as the decision-taker and since he is in command of the Smales’ car, Bam loses a part of his former social status. Later in the narrative, after the theft of Bam’s gun occurs, Bam’s loss of power is further emphasized.

Although Bam expresses indications of resistance against the deprivation of his possessions, he appears to adjust to the new existence in the village. His days seem to be filled with work; he assists July with mending the farming tools and he also makes his own arrangements, such a water tank in order to facilitate the water supply for the villagers.
Bam’s engagement with the daily tasks of the village impresses the other village men, and therefore he is invited to their beer-drinking gathering on a Saturday. After that invitation, Bam feels the acceptance of the other men which may facilitate his adjustment to the culture of July’s village. “Bam’s adaptation is a remarkable and hopeful indication of a species characteristic essential for survival” (Bailey 219). Mainly, the reason for Bam’s integration may depend on the fact that he did not approve the ideas of the apartheid regime; he considered himself to be a liberal during their life in the city. Before the revolution, the Smales joined political groups whose primary aim was to abolish the advantages for white people that the apartheid regime once had established. The collapse of the apartheid regime was anticipated by both Bam and Maureen and they even tried to imagine living in South Africa without the privileges for white people (8). Possibly, the work with political groups had mentally prepared Bam for the renouncement of their possessions although his reaction is ambiguous after July takes their car without their permission. In contrast to Bam, Maureen has, although she used to consider herself a liberal, not prepared herself mentally for the deprivation of their possessions.

Another aspect of Bam’s changed behaviour can be discerned when he contributes to the supply of meat in the village. He shoots wart hogs with his gun which originally was intended for hunting birds. The thrill he used to experience during his previous hunting trips, where killing appeared to be a pleasure and a game, is completely altered here in the village. Instead Bam becomes aware of the reality of hunting and he seems to pity the wart hogs he killed and compares the sight of them with the birds that he used to shoot during his former hunting trips. Noteworthy, in contrast to his suburban life, Bam appears to have a more fatherly attitude towards his children, mainly because they constantly follow him during the days:

“- the children were generally around, as the blacks’ children were always about their adults” (35). The existence in the village has given Bam the opportunity to emphasize the social
interactions with his children in comparison with his former life where he was devoted to his career as an architect.

To sum up, there is a mixture of elements that contributes to Bam’s shift and adaptation to the cultural behaviour of the village. Firstly, Bam’s status as a hunter facilitates his social interactions with the men of the village. He also puts his former skills to use when he arranges for the water supply. Furthermore, Bam’s past gender role is modified during the life in the interregnum due to his frequent social interactions with his children.


For Maureen, the escape from Johannesburg signifies a feeling of displacement in life. As a housewife in the suburb, she used to be fond of reading and it was her way of escaping from reality. However, the existence in the village offers constantly new impressions and reality surpasses fiction and therefore she is unable to focus on her reading. “She was already not what she was” (29). Maureen’s former preferences and social behaviour vanish and are replaced with new ones. As a result of Bam’s dispossessed city status, Maureen appears to increase her autonomy within their relationship. Additionally, her new independence is obvious in her relationship with July, as she confronts him and questions his decisions that concern her family. Stephen Clingman (199) argues that Maureen’s mental growth is obvious since she more actively deals with issues that concern their everyday life. Maureen thus demonstrates a changed social behaviour when she steals the Malaria pills from the pharmacy after the revolution occurred. As Rose Pettersson describes (191-2), the existence in the village means that Maureen no longer relies on her husband in matters that signify the best for the family and consequently she has become more independent and now she takes initiatives on her own.

As Maureen’s growing independence increases, her sense of motherhood diminishes, partly because the children manage on their own in the company with the other children but also
because they participate in Bam’s daily activities in the village. Hence, she is aware of the fact that she does not fulfil her duties as a mother according to the norms and values of the village; circumstances have changed radically, which means that Maureen is unable to provide for the children as before. In July’s village, women attend to strenuous work, such as carrying the wood and water to their families. Moreover, the women also provide food for their families. When Maureen expresses her desire to join the women in the fields, it is July who strongly urges her to refrain from working with the other women. July’s denial of Maureen’s desire to participate in the daily tasks can be explained by the fact that he stills considers her to be his mistress. Likewise, Maureen also expresses her intention of washing the family’s clothes which July claims is an inappropriate occupation for her. July is very determined in this respect and strongly dissuades her from attending to these matters as he considers that such tasks should be handled by the women in the village.

From Maureen’s point of view, she considers that she and July used to share a mutual understanding for each other; in contrast to Bam, she has been able to communicate with July. However, the new existence seems to affect their previous relationship. During one occasion, while Bam is hunting wart hogs, she asks her son to go to July’s hut and tell him to come to her. At this moment, July demonstrates his new role as the master and forwards a message to Maureen that he is ready to receive her in his hut. Maureen dismisses July’s disobedience and once again she forwards her demand and asks him to come to her. Finally, he turns up in the hut but without any signs of irritation. Evidently, this occasion signals differences in structures of power between July and Maureen. July’s reluctance to obey Maureen’s order is to show her that he is now in charge of them and also that his authority increases. On the other hand, by refusing to go to July, Maureen reveals her intention to retain her control over July and to remain his mistress.
Another example of their changed social interactions is obvious when Maureen disapproves of July’s holding of their car keys. July declares that he has noticed Maureen’s different attitude in the village in comparison to their life in the city; then he was allowed to keep all their keys without being questioned. He also expresses his disappointment of her disapproval and states that he had been their servant for fifteen years and they used to rely on him. Primarily, the reason for Maureen’s questioning July’s holding of the keys without their permission is her sense of losing control of their possessions within this unfamiliar social context. Their discussion ends with July in charge of their keys. Since July keeps their keys as well as driving their car without their permission, it is obvious that his authority gradually increases. From Gramsci’s theory of hegemony one could argue that July’s use of power is scarcely perceptible; July’s ideas concerning the possession of the keys is presented by him as a natural part of the social structure since he is the Smales’ provider and he should therefore be entitled to be in charge of their possessions. The perspective of hegemony implies consent between the groups in a society where the dominating group introduces its idea to be the common idea among all groups; a natural part of the cultural structure. Consequently, the idea of the dominating group is accepted among the subordinate groups. Thus, during the interregnum in July’s village, there is an inverted order of authority where Maureen has become subordinate to July; and as July argues for his role as their provider, Maureen finally admits to his hold of their keys.

Furthermore, the days in the village imply inactivity for Maureen and she confronts July and expresses her desire to do something useful; she wants to harvest spinach like Martha, July’s wife, and the other women in the village. This request is denied by July since he considers such tasks are unsuitable for her and should be performed by the women in the village. Maureen tells him that she has been able to communicate a little with Martha in Afrikaans, but July continues to argue that it is inappropriate for her to mix with the other women. Maureen’s reaction to July’s denial is that she states that July does not want her and
Martha to become acquainted since he fears that Maureen may reveal his secrets from his city life. Even though Maureen does not mention Ellen, July’s woman in town, they both know what she insinuates. At this point, the shift of power between the master and servant is obvious and July appears to dominate instead of Maureen when denying her to work with the other women in the village. “Similarly, the novel breaks the mould of a liberal myth of reconciliation attendant upon the masters-and-servants theme. There can be no reconciliation between masters and servants, no saviours’, miracles, moment of mutual recognition and forgiveness, or easy way out” (Clingman 203). Maureen sticks to old social structures and values, because she is unable to accept and to adjust to the present social disorder.

In addition, the incident with the theft of Bam’s gun arouses questions in Maureen’s mind and she confronts July regarding his possible involvement in this matter. They discuss July’s friend Daniel, whom Maureen suspects has stolen Bam’s gun. Maureen demands that July return the gun to them and due to July’s reluctance to reveal the truth; she becomes furious and accuses him of stealing from them in the past. During July’s years as a servant with Smales family, Maureen overlooked his theft because she believed July to be the person who was suitable for them. She is now aware of the fact that his values do not correspond to her values. “She was not his mother, his wife, is sister, his friend, his people” (152). From this moment, Maureen understands that she has had an idealized image of their relationship as the liberal mistress and the grateful servant. She has tried to shape him into somebody he has never been and never will be. July is deeply offended by her accusations regarding the theft from the Smales. As a way of retaining his power and authority of her, he communicates in his own language. Although Maureen does not understand his words she understands his message; July’s face mirrors his emotion and the tones from his voice clarify the context. “July begins to talk passionately in his own language and denies the existence of any relationship between them” (Folks 122). First of all, the reason for communicating in his own language is an attempt
to distance him from Maureen and the life as an oppressed servant. Moreover, he also wishes to expose his dignity for Maureen; and through his language he proves that he is a man and that he belongs to his own people and not to the Smales. Maureen realizes that July’s former dependency on them corresponds to their present dependency on July. For years he has been obliged to ask for their permission for whatever he required or needed; everything in the house belonged to the Smales. As Ali Erritouni states, the reason for July’s adopted assertiveness is an act of reconsideration of the social status of his former employers (72). Evidently, the gun is stolen by July’s friend Daniel, and the aim of the theft is to join the rebels in their war against the whites. July’s exposure regarding Daniel’s theft emphasizes their tense interaction and in a state of fury Maureen expresses her opinion about July:

You’ll profit by the others’ fighting. Steal a bakkie. You want that, now. You don’t know what might have happened to Ellen. She washed your clothes and slept with you. You want the bakkie, to drive around in like a gangster, imaging yourself a big man, important, until you don’t have any money for petrol, there isn’t any petrol to buy, and it’ll lie there, July, under the trees, in this place among the old huts, and it’ll fall to pieces while the children play in it. Useless. Another wreck like others. (153)

With the theft of the gun, Maureen vents her anger at July and she criticizes July’s behaviours, both from the past and from the present. According to Maureen, July will never achieve his goal of being a man of importance due to his poverty.

At the end of the novel, there is a sound of an approaching helicopter and without hesitation Maureen leaves the hut, crosses the river and runs towards the landing ground. The escape demonstrates a different behaviour of Maureen as she flees from her role of motherhood when she leaves her three children behind. Moreover, she leaves her husband, whom she hardly
recognizes any longer. As she runs, she anticipates to be rescued, but from the novel we are never told about the identity of the people on board; whether they are black rebels or not. The end of the novel has engaged literary critics immensely in trying to interpret the outcome of Maureen’s future fate. Stephen Clingman predicts:

She does not know what destiny may be, whether it will bring death or life. All she knows is that it is the authentic future awaiting her. Nor does she do this out of weakness. For the first time since leaving Johannesburg – and perhaps for the first time in her life – she has found some personal integration; she runs says the text, with all the suppressed trust of a lifetime (203).

Therefore, the escape may be evidence of Maureen’s new experience of independence. The reason for her decision to escape from the village implies that the existence in the village is unbearable for her; she clings to her former behaviour, such as maintaining her social control over July. However, her previous norms and values change; Maureen considered herself to be liberal in her previous life, but now she seems to have difficulties in adjusting to a new social order in a different social context and also to a changed power structure where July is in command of their life.

In conclusion, if one considers Maureen’s escape from a Neo-Marxist critical perspective, one could argue that she as a member of a subordinate group in the village and she has never accepted July’s dominance and the dominating culture. As John Storey explains, the perspective of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony involves both opposition and acceptance between the dominating group and the subordinate group (81). The revolution and the existence in the village signify changes in the roles of the protagonists. Upon their arrival to the village, July has become the master of his former master and mistress. In his village, the Smales, as
dependents of July, belong to the subordinate group, where both opposition and acceptance can be discerned among them. The indigenous people belong to the dominating group since their culture and norms control the existence of the village. Among the villagers, July has adopted the role of authority. However, in spite of his dominating status of the Smales and the villagers, July is subordinate to his chief, who is the man who controls power in the village and who is the authority with regards to matters of importance; such as bringing the Smales to their village.

7. July

For July, the interregnum implies a new course in life where former familiar roles are altered. “As servant is thrust overnight into authority, and as master and mistress have to learn their new arts of dependence, each figure is shown, suddenly deprived of the social supports of a previous identity, struggling desperately for a new frame of reference” (199). Unfamiliar roles appear since there are no distinct structures of power and for July his new role is ambiguous; he is now in charge of the Smales although he retains certain characteristics as their former servant.

During the years in town, July’s behaviour was satisfactory and they had nothing to complain about; he was considered to be reliable. From the Smales’ point of view, their unequal relationship worked without major problems and they felt they could trust him. However, now in the village, July takes his own decisions and his initiatives without asking for Bam’s permission. In July’s opinion, it is quite natural that he is in charge of the car keys as well as of the car since he provides them with the necessities during their stay. Moreover, July’s annoyance is clearly apparent after they make their remarks regarding the missing keys. The Smales are now deprived of their possessions and consequently their relationship with July, as master and as servant, is different. Rose Petersson argues that July’s dominating
attitude is discernable when he instructs Bam and Maureen in the presence of their children and clarifies for them that they are obliged to come to him whenever he sends for them (182).

Although July as the master appears to dominate the relationship between him, Bam and Maureen, he is reluctant to completely take over the role as the protector of the Smales family. Nancy Bailey explains that July’s hesitation is due to his inability to rescue the Smales, let alone himself in case of attacks from the rebels in the village (218). Also, it is clear that there are limitations of power even for the village chief. During the Smales visit to July’s chief, July informs them that the chief is a man without actual power:

He’s talking talking. Talking too much. How can he fight? Did you see him fight when the government is coming, telling him he must pay tax? When they saying he must kill some of his cattle? He must do this or this. He is our chief but he doesn’t fight when the white people tell him he must do what they want – they want. Now how can he fight when the black soldiers come, they say do this or this. How can he fight? He is a poor man (122-123).

As July ironically concludes, his chief is merely the leader of the village and a man in poverty and a man without power. Bam realizes the chief’s powerlessness when the chief asks him to instruct him on how to handle the gun as he has never been entitled to buy a weapon during the white regime. The intention of the instruction is that chief wishes to defend him against attacks from the rebels. Bam protests against the chief’s plans of killing his own people and explains that the gun is aimed for shooting birds and not people.

Finally, there are also differences in July’s manner of addressing the Smales. Frequently, he always uses polite and humble phrases when addressing Bam and Maureen. However, we discover subtle nuances in July’s language after he has taken the car into his possession for the
first time and when he returns to Bam’s and Maureen’s hut with their groceries. “You say I can come inside? - He used to have the habit of knocking at a door, asking, The master he say I can come in? and they had tried to train him to drop the ‘master’ for the ubiquitously respectful ‘sir’”(52). At this moment July refrains from using either ‘sir’ which they try to encourage him to use, or his former word ‘master’. The reason for avoiding these words when addressing Bam may imply that July’s social position and power has increased. “Throughout the novel it becomes clear that language in this contexts is a battlefield – as much as battlefield as the realm of private and political relations it helps both to constitute and to conceal” (Clingman 200). Thus, manners of addressing each other appear to be a tool for emphasizing the redistribution of power during this interim order.

8. Bam and Maureen.

When they lived in the suburb, Bam’s and Maureen’s marriage was based on their social position which included their possessions and therefore they never reflected seriously about the state of their relationship. Evidently, village life transforms their gender roles which have a deep influence on their relationship. In his thoughts, Bam considers the possibility to leave the village and therefore he thinks that they ought to communicate with each other. But the duress they experienced during their escape has created a distance between them that still remains in their relationship. One example of the obvious distance in their marriage is when Maureen observes July’s return to the village after he drove away with their car without their permission; she refrains from telling Bam that their car is back although she is aware of his concern over this matter. “She kept her knowledge of the vehicle as a possession to which she was curiously entitled, had no incumbency to reveal” (52). Maureen does not appear to be regretful when she withholds the information from Bam. Her silence may indicate her newly acquired independence as she wishes to decide for herself when the moment is appropriate to forward
the news to him. Clearly, Bam and Maureen seldom talk to each other, merely occasionally when they discuss matters that concern their family. Even during such discussions the distance in their relationship is apparent; Maureen questions their escape to the village and accuses Bam for this decision. Her accusations are rejected by Bam who firmly states that the escape was a common decision made between them. Their discussion is marked by agitated feelings and lacks mutual respect and understanding for each other. Bam ends their discussion by asking Maureen to terminate her accusations. However, there seems to be less time for communication; the children follow him constantly and he is busy with various tasks, such as the arrangements for the water supply in the village. Another aspect of their deteriorated marriage is the obvious lack of intimacy between Bam and Maureen. This is obvious during one occasion when Bam and Maureen are alone together in the hut and she suddenly takes off her clothes in order to shake away the fleas. “The baring of breasts was not an intimacy but a castration of his sexuality and hers; she stood like a man stripped in a factory shower or a woman in the ablution block of an institution” (90). Their difficulties in retrieving former roles as husband and wife may depend on the fact that they are deprived of possessions and every modern convenience during their existence in the village.

During their stay they are requested to meet the chief of the village. Before being introduced to him, Bam contemplates on his relationship with Maureen and the lack of communication between them:

Her. Not ‘Maureen’. Not ‘his wife’. The presence in the mud hut, mute with an activity of being, of sense of self he could not follow because here there were no familiar areas in which it could be visualized moving, no familiar entities that could be shaping it. With ‘her’ there was no undersurface of recognition; only moments of finding each other out.” For the children she chose to appear as ‘their mother’, his
‘wife’, this morning. But she was no one to whom he could say that the chief was going to tell them to go. He had no idea how she would deal with his certainty. There was no precedent to on, with her. And he himself. How to deal with it. (105)

Obviously, Bam does not perceive Maureen to be the woman she used to be in their former life and therefore he hesitates when introducing her to the chief. Bam hardly recognizes her now; she has become a different person and demonstrates a growing independence in their social interactions. Mainly, the reason for their changed relationship is the deprivation of their possessions and consequently they make endeavours to find new roles in the village.

To sum up, as a cause of Bam’s dispossessed status, Maureen becomes more independent as she questions and interferes with various matters in the village. Furthermore, she appears to be more confident than before. The structure of power between them has been transformed; Bam is no longer the head of the family. ”She looked down on this man who had nothing, now. There was before these children much worse than the sight of the women’s broad backsides, squatting.” (145). From Maureen’s point of view, Bam’s dispossession is discernable for Maureen as well as for the children. Although the life in the village signifies a stronger and a more independent position for Maureen compared to Bam, she does not appear to endure the hardship in July’s village. For Maureen, the deprivation of their former facilities from her suburban life affects her integration significantly as she perceives the existence in the village as a primitive one. In contrast to Bam’s acceptance by the village men, Maureen is not socially accepted among the women; they appear to consider her more as burden than a help when she attempts to assist them in their daily work in the fields.

The Smales’ children demonstrate hopes for the future as they appear to adjust and adapt to new culture and its values. During their previous life, possessions always seem to be their main pleasure. They were overwhelmed with joy the first time when Bam showed them his car, the bakkie. However, their interest in possessions seems to vanish in July’s village since they adopt the activities of the village children.

First of all, Gina, the Smales’ youngest daughter, finds true friendship with Nyiko, a little black girl from the village; the girls are always together and they are smiling and keeping secrets for each other. Therefore, Gina has the opportunity to learn the language quickly and to integrate to the culture structures of the village. In contrast to her parents, she is frequently invited to the huts of the villagers. During one occasion, Gina demonstrates her cultural adaptation to village ways when she sings a lullaby in the local language for her family after they have had their meal. Furthermore, when the family visits the place of July’s chief, Gina immediately joins the black children and when it is time for the Smales to return, she refers to July’s village as if it were their real home. Primarily, the reason for Gina’s integration is her friendship with Nyiko, whom introduces her to the social behaviours of the village.

Moreover, Victor, the oldest son in the family, demonstrates his former possessive white attitude since he wishes to show his racing-car track for the children in the village although they lack electricity. He firmly clarifies for Maureen that the other children are merely allowed to look at it since he fears they will break it. Another example of Victor’s former values is exposed is when the villagers take water from the water tank that Bam has arranged in the village. The water tank is filled up with the rain and is aimed for all villagers. From Victor’s point of view, the water tank is the Smales’ property and he is extremely upset and urges Bam to stop the villagers from taking their water. Bam explains to him that the water tank is available for all villagers. Victor is provoked when Maureen questions who the owner of the
rain is. To console Victor’s anger July tells him to be proud of a father who has the intention of doing well for all people in the village. Even though Victor’s previous possessive attitude is distinguishable, he gradually integrates with the norms and values of the village. This is evident when July provides him with some equipment for fishing; Victor expresses his gratitude in the same manner as July used to do in the presence of his parents.

In conclusion, the children adapt more easily to culture of the village than their parents. Primarily, the reason for the adaptation is that children interact more actively socially with other children in comparison with the social interaction of the adults. They adopt the behaviours of the dominating culture, namely the black culture of the village. However, in spite their adaptation to the dominating culture, I will argue that Gramsci’s concept of hegemony cannot be applied when examining the children from a critical perspective. Since they are children, they lack financial interests as well as previous status and professions, and consequently they cannot be perceived as authorities as they do not participate in the process of power in the village. As mentioned before, Gramsci argues that the concept of hegemony is the outcome of a co-operation between powers from above as well as from below in a society.

**10. July, Martha and July’s mother.**

For fifteen years, July has been the provider for his wife Martha and his family. During his annual visits he was treated more as a guest than the patriarch of the family. However, when he brings the Smales family to the village he attempts to exercise more dominance than before. July orders Martha to refrain from one of the beds in her hut as well as a Primus stove in favour of the Smales; a decision that Martha accepts without complaints although she questions the situation in her mind. However, since Martha and his mother are strong women, they are used to managing on their own during July’s absence; therefore he is now obliged to discuss matters concerning the Smales with them. “When he was in the company of the women it was like
being in the chief’s court, where the elders sitting in judgment wander in and out and the
discussion of evidence is taken up, now where they drift outside to take a breath of air or
relieve themselves among their tethered horses and bicycles hitched the proceedings have
moved on to” (21). It is obvious that July’s power is limited among his wife and his mother,
since he has to receive their approval concerning certain issues. Nancy Bailey claims that
Martha and July’s mother do not confirm his new identity as a man of possession. “The wife so
hesitant and shy and the mother so old and frail in appearance unite to reject not just the white
woman but the whole power structure which July seeks to exert through them”(217). Therefore,
it is evident that July’s new identity as a man of power is a source of irritation for his family.
Instead of winning their approval he encounters their annoyance and questioning.

Furthermore, Martha’s aggravation with reference to the arrival of the Smales’ can be
explained by the absence of the monthly payment that she used to receive from July, which she
finds now at risk. Moreover, due to his presence she has to endure pregnancies more frequently.
Before, while he worked in town, he used to arrive every second year and every second year
she gave birth to another child. Consequently, for Martha, July’s arrival as well as the arrival of
the Smales’ signifies more burdens for their poverty-stricken family with possibly more
children to feed. However, during one occasion she confronts July with questions regarding the
Smales’ presence in their village. Martha expresses her fear of having white people in their
village and also the fact of that Bam has brought his gun. Emphatically, July explains that the
revolution forced them to escape from the city and the most appropriate place for them to hide
is here in their village. Nevertheless, July’s appropriation of the Smales’ car, suggests a
brighter future for their family as Martha admits his ability to drive may be a source of income
for the family. In a way, this interestingly shows how July’s wife helps define and legitimize
July’s new potential.
In addition, the disapproval of the Smales’ presence is also distinguishable in July’s mother. From her point of view, she has no desire to integrate with the white people as she considers them to bring bad luck; such as trouble with the police and authorities. When July explains the events during the revolution, where the black people shot the white people, his mother’s anxiety is obvious. She fears that white people will take revenge for these actions since they are more powerful than black people. During this conversation, July describes the shift of power in society; the white people can no longer harm the black people. July is aware of his position with reference to the Smales family. In front of his mother and his wife, he declares that only he has the authority to decide whether or not the Smales will remain in their village.

In summary, July exercises attempts of domination in his social interactions with Martha and his mother. On the other hand, the women also demonstrate resistance and therefore July is obliged to negotiate with his women in matters that concern the daily tasks in the village. However, from the perspective of Gramsci, they all belong to the same group; the dominating group of their society. One can distinguish that July is considered to be the authority since he receives some financial support from the Smales. Moreover, he is a man of possession since he is in charge of the Smales car. Consequently, July can also be described, in the terminology of Gramsci, as an “organic intellectual” (Storey 83), which signifies that a certain person is assigned to be the leader and who rules the structure of culture in a society. “That is to say, all men and women have the capacity for intellectual endeavour, but only certain men and women have in society the function of intellectuals. Each class, as Gramsci explains, creates ‘organically’ its own intellectuals” (Storey 81). Since July has a background from life in the city, he appears to be the most suitable person for this task. During his years in town with the Smales’ family, he has experienced the structure of power in the society of white people. July is used to handling money since he used to have his own savings account and he knew how to
behave in various social contexts. Consequently, the social interactions in town have made July more sophisticated which has prepared the way for a dominant position in the village.

11. Conclusion.

In this essay, I have made an attempt to study the differences in the protagonists’ social interactions as well as differences in their social behaviour during the interim order of the interregnum. Moreover, I have examined the protagonists from Gramsci’s perspective of hegemony in order to more deeply explore the altered structures of power that are depicted in the novel. It can be argued that life in July’s village during the interregnum lacks firm norms and distinct structures of power. However, even within this chaotic social context it is feasible to interpret how power is redistributed among the protagonists. Upon their arrival to village, the former positions of power change and Bam and Maureen, the previous master and mistress, have become dependants to their former servant. As July is in command of the Smales, he has power over them, though he retains certain characteristics of a servant.

July demonstrates his dominance in his social interactions with the Smales. Gramsci’s theory of hegemony can be applied when analysing July’s newly gained authority. As Gramsci argues, the group which dominates present their idea to be a natural part of their culture and the presentation is hardly noticeable to the subordinate groups. This is obvious when July gradually appropriates the Smales’ car as well as their car keys. July justifies the appropriation as natural since he provides them with groceries. Thus, during his interactions with the Smales, July refers to black peoples’ appropriations of white peoples’ possessions as a frequent occurrence during the interregnum. Additionally, in spite of his wife’s and mother’s disapproval of his possession of the Smales’ car, both women interpret that the family will gain from July’s newly acquired abilities in future; a regular income from another profession.
Initially, both Bam and Maureen attempt to resist the loss of their possessions. Bam, however, gradually accepts the new cultural structure of the village and he integrates well. On the other hand, Maureen does not adjust to the new social context. As her husband loses his social status her independence appears to grow and consequently their relationship comes to an inevitable end. In addition, in the village, her relation to July demonstrates an ongoing power struggle. Nevertheless, Maureen belongs to a subordinate group within this social context and she does not seem to cope in the village. Her sole alternative is to flee.

Finally, the Smales’ children demonstrate an ability to adjust to the new social order which can be explained by their lively social interactions with the black children of the village. It can be argued that the children represent hopes for the future; what follows after the uncertain life of the interregnum.
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