

## Countering the Apartheid History in Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story*

### Abstract

*This research tries to investigate Nadine Gordimer's counter point against South African laws and beliefs during apartheid in her My Son's Story. It meets its aim by applying New Historicist insights: to relate the text to its context. More specifically, the New Historical concept on counter history is used to make analysis on anti-apartheid position of the author in My Son's Story. It is based on major new historicists Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher's concepts on counter-history and anecdotes, which reports that any text, necessarily is the history within itself. Moreover, it brings several insights from Joel Fineman, who views that literary texts, though formally small, expose the history. This novel deals with relationship between the blacks and the whites during South African apartheid. Despite excessive hatred to the white regime, the black characters develop close relationship with whites at personal level. This work explores both blacks and whites relationship and strategy to adjust in the anti-apartheid society of South Africa. Moreover, Gordimer's socio-political context and its influence in her work is explored. Likewise, this research explores the whites' threat during the anti-apartheid revolution. However, while the official knowledge helped to construct the history of black-white relation as detached and often in hostile way, Gordimer challenges such narratives or produced what is referred to as counter-history. Furthermore, it draws the conclusion that, My Son's Story counters the South African laws and belief in order to find the equal space in the Anti-apartheid society, ruled by both races.*

### Key Words

*Anti-apartheid, counter history, new historicism, text, context, race, representation*

In, *My Son's Story* (1990), Nadine Gordimer exposes both the protagonist and

narrator, Sonny and Will respectively, from colored identity. Set in the atmosphere of racial separation, when Apartheid in South Africa was getting infamous, novel counters the Apartheid History circulated through South African official history. The major protagonist, resisting, the apartheid in South Africa is caught up in interracial affair with a white woman, Hannah Plowman. Likewise, the narrator, son to Sonny, desires the same woman or at least a woman from the white race. Furthermore, female characters too undergo through the abrupt transformation from their confined space of home to the broader space of politics. To be precise, Aila, a silent house wife to Sonny, after being known Sonny's affair with Hannah, suddenly decides to take part in ongoing revolution to overthrow the white racist regime. In the similar way, Baby, a daughter, is also caught up by the revolutionary attempt to throw white regime and eventually joins the resistance group to fight against apartheid laws.

In contrast, Hannah Plowman, white blonde, a human rights activist for United Nations, despite her racial superiority openly falls in love with Sonny, necessarily from inferior race. Gordimer exposes the different history of blacks and whites relationship during the Apartheid by presenting the alternative relationship between blacks and whites. Likewise, the characters from the mixed or black race build the emotional attachment with white characters and vice versa. Furthermore, Gordimer exposes the white characters working as fuel for the revolution against white regime. Written at the end of the State of Emergency, novel represents the characters from both, colored identity and white race, both ready for transformation for racial equality and interconnection, thereby marking transformation. Moreover, most of the characters belong to coloured identity.

Despite being white writer from South Africa, Gordimer depicts black character in quite different manner as she depicts white. Entering through the text, Sonny, the

major character, despite being responsible to his family and community of coloured identity gets involved with a white woman, however, from the community of oppressor. Interestingly, his son, Will, despite his hatred to his father for being involving with a white woman desires for the same woman. The female characters undergo through the sudden change. Sonny tries to adjust both into the revolution and struggle against segregations, on the other hand has warm relationship with white, in an individual level. The narrator Will seeing his father with a white woman, unconsciously though, expresses his desire to have the woman from white race. Hannah plays very positive role in the revolution against apartheid laws, systems and belief. Sonny desires Hannah so much that, he takes her as an inspiration for his revolutionary thoughts. Interestingly, Hannah Plowman gives equal space to Aila and Baby, women from black community. Likewise, Aila's boss doctor Josood, a doctor from Indian community, representing distinct ethnicity and race, remains amicable to Aila and her family throughout the text. Furthermore, even the white characters get involve in the struggle against apartheid laws and violation.

With this regard, Gordimer in her characterization counters the then apartheid history. Her characters and their relationship counter the apartheid history of South Africa. Racial Segregation in South Africa began in colonial times, moreover, Apartheid began in 1948, when the National Party came to power. Following the division, many systems of segregation pervaded in South African culture as well as law. For instance, Population Registration Act, Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Act of 1949, Immortality Amendment Act of 1950s, brought even further division between blacks and whites. Gordimer's characters and their relationship in one or the other way counters the official history circulated through the South African Laws and beliefs.

Sonny's relationship with Hannah Plowman replicates the historical need of adjustment between blacks and whites in the age of post State Emergency period. Furthermore, Will's excessive desire for the blonde, the white woman, demonstrates how social institution like family and marriage cannot be banned on the basis of race as prohibited by the then government. Moreover, interracial inclination between characters, justifies the author's counter point against the official representation of hostile relationship between blacks and whites during Apartheid. Moreover, Aila's response in her action to move away from traditionally confined space of home to political activities, however pushed by Sonny's infidelity counters the grand narratives and representation of women from black community. Despite being, white writer in South Africa at the end of Apartheid, Gordimer takes part in circulating the ideology of racial equality thereby countering the Apartheid history.

Various critics have studied Nadine Gordimer, and *My Son's Story* from different perspectives. However, only few critics have investigated the text in term of its context. Moreover, the complex relationship between the major protagonist, Sonny's and a white woman is often undermined. Likewise, female character's transformation is either analyzed from the feminist perspective or overlooked. Likewise interracial relationship among characters is not explored. As far as our approaches go, the novel's opposition to prevailing modes of thought is undermined. More closely, in his analysis of Gordimer's previous novel *July's People*, Erritouni Ali argues, "Gordimer assumes that blacks will emerge victorious from their struggle for political and economic justice, and white will find themselves in subordinate position, ruled by blacks" (69). In this context, the critic, however, acknowledges Gordimer's novel as the product of fear in the white people during anti- apartheid movement but undermines her context. The present project illustrates how Gordimer

counters the then law where blacks were regarded as totally separated being.

Likewise, King Bruce in his review of *My Son's Story* contends, Gordimer's "novel the personal, specially the psychological and moral, intersect with and is influenced by the political" (32). Here Bruce, however analyses the political reasons behind character's attitude, does not pay attention on exact historical circumstances. The present paper along with political reasons for the actions undertaken by character pays equal attention on historicity of the text.

Jorshinelle T. Sonza in her essay, "My Turn Now: Debunking the Gordimer 'Mystique' in *My Son's Story*" observes, "The novel transforms the male centered text into a more womanly space. Sonny's activism as black male is disabled through his questionable relationship with a white mistress, party members doubt his allegiances because of his connection with Hannah, international human rights activist" (105). Sonza looks Sonny's involvement with Hannah only in terms of morality and valorizes Aila for making space in the text. Sonza overlooks historical necessity of the period and Gordimer's intended meaning behind female characters transformation. She is confined only in the gender issue. Additionally, she underestimates the atmosphere that leads Aila to make her space enough in the text. The purposed research explores, in deeper level, Sonny's need for Hannah as historical necessity of transformation, more specifically, need for interracial relationship.

Likewise, Jill Fritz Piggot in novel's review, "Son and Lover" analyses Will from psychoanalytical lense. Will is analysed, solely, as counterpart to Sonny who develops hatred to father. As Piggot contends, "He often imagines Hannah from his father's perspective, but he jealously hangs on to material about his mother"(8). However, the critic identifies Will desire for a white blonde, but it is analysed only

from psychoanalytical perspective thereby undermining the interracial affection and context. This research demonstrates the fact that, Will's desire for the white women as the desire for interracial affection.

Elaine Fido in her essay, "The Guest of Honor: A Feminine View of Masculinity" argues, "By examining the relationship of masculinity to power and, therefore, to politics, Gordimer shares her concern with a growing number of feminist writers" (97). Fido, observes Gordimer's work only from the perspective of feminist light, the purposed research observes her work not only from the feminist perspective rather makes analysis on how the then historical consciousness has impact on this work. The research focuses contextual reading to analyse the causes and writer's intention to find the new mode of insertion

More broadly, a post- colonial theorist Homi k Bhabha argues, "Aila in *My Son's Story* emanates a stilling atmosphere as she makes her diminished domesticity into perfect cover for gun-running: suddenly, the home turns into another world, and the narrator too notices that "it was as if everyone found that he had unnoticingly entered a strange house..." (12). The present research, lays its foundation on Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt's ideas on counter history. Here, Bhabha focuses on ambiguous atmosphere of unhomeliness with gender identity. Apart from that, this research analyses Aila in terms of context. Sonny's attempt to shifts his position from the son of mine worker to teacher for the community replicates shift of blacks into the new space thus in power. Hence, Sonny's character is not analyzed as a product of ambiguity rather attempt is made to analyze Sonny's character from the perspective of shift in power relation.

Kathrine Wagner in *Rereading Nadine Gordimer* argues that Gordimer focuses on primacy of race rather than gender and class, in his words, she is informed

by, “settler postcolonial consciousness of Africa-as-not-Europe” (v). Her research is confined within the boundary of race, gender and post-colonial issue. Hence, Wagner overlooks equally important issues associated with its context. This thesis explores writer’s position as informed by historical consciousness. Gordimer maintains her historical position giving space to self-representation of marginal group, specifically, black woman.

Furthermore, J. U Jacobs, in his review “Nadine Gordimer’s Intertextuality: Authority and Authorship in *My Son’s Story*” analyses the novel from the perspective of inter-textuality. Moreover, Jacob’s concern is on other texts that influenced Gordimer’s text. Thus, this review solely, observes text and overlooks context.

Almost all the research, done upon either Gordimer’s work individually, or in *My Son’s Story* either focus on gender and race issue. Bringing departure from previous researches on Gordimer’s work, and particularly in *My Son’s Story* this thesis explores how Gordimer puts an assault on the grand narratives inherited from last century. This research is departure from either romanticized or demoted position of character to bring the objective analysis on how Gordimer counters the apartheid history of South Africa. Likewise, South African law and socio-cultural issues are taken into consideration to make contextual analysis of the novel.

Theoretical insights from New Historicism explore Gordimer’s fiction in this light. New Historicism interprets literary texts as historical and cultural artifact. It regards contexts as equally important as texts. Furthermore, New Historicism claims itself to be the process of revisiting past. It aims to show that each era and period has its own conceptual and ideological framework. It tries to demonstrate the fact that past is different from the contemporary use of past.

Additionally, new historicists regard literary texts as history. More

specifically, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher in their text, *Practicing New Historicism* use the term ‘counter history’ in order to put an assault on the grand narrative inherited from last century. The authors in this text, regard anecdotes, thus fictions, equally important as history. A fiction, for their part, exposes the other dimension of history. Moreover, Gallagher and Greenblatt contend that fictions can oppose the prevailing mode of thoughts. And fictions could find the new point of insertion.

Defining counterhistories, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt use the term counter-history to name, “a spectrum of assault on the grand recits inherited from the last century” (53). For their part, “counterhistories have tried instead to revive that alterity, fostering disciplinary eccentricity, and it was that eccentricity that the anecdote carried into literary criticism as well” (52).

Likewise, another critic Joel Fineman claims that any anecdotes would puncture the historical grand narratives. For him, fictions in significant ways, determines the practice of historiography. To quote Fineman in this context;

the anecdote is literary form that uniquely lets history happen by virtue of the way it introduces an opening into teleological and therefore timeless, narration of beginning, middle and end, The anecdote produces effect of the real, the occurrence of contingency by establishing an event as an event within and yet without the framing context of historical successivity, i. e both comprises and refracts and the narration it reports. (61)

Moreover, New Historicism paying close attention to the contexts tries to dig out the different dimensions of the history. Again, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher, in this context state, “There is literature’s own dormant counter historical life might be reanimated: possibilities cut short, imagings left unrealized, projects half



formulated, ambitions squealed, doubts, dissatisfactions and longings half felt, might all be detected there” (74).

Moreover, new historicism claims itself to be the process of digging out belief system of the time. It explores the ideological influences and power relationships by reading literature in its context. To define new historicism in Harold Vesser’s words:

New historicism is not simply the way of reading literature in its contexts. It is also about power relations, ideological functions, epistemic transformation, modes and systems of representation, transgression of genre, discursive formations and production of objects of knowledge. It provides useful insights into how literature interacts with texts of all kinds, produced and shaped by the discursive practices of power relations which those texts in turn produce and shape. (151)

Hence, equally important as context, analysis of power relationships and co-text are considerable elements for new historicist analysis.

*My Son’s Story* serves as important part of history. Giving space enough to the black in her narrative Gordimer exposes the other dimension of history, often overlooked. As the white writer, she presents the characters like Sonny, Will, Baby and Aila, thus to expose what it meant to be the black during South African Apartheid. Likewise, the author depicts the picture of South Africa during the State of Emergency. White supremacist ideologies used in literature, sciences, news, media, entertainment, school texts and advertisement is countered throughout the novel. As narrator Will in the very beginning of the story admits what it meant to be black in South Africa, as lines go, “Cinemas had been open to us only a year or so; it was double freedom I took: to bunk study and sit in the maroon nylon velvet seat of a cinema where whites live”(Gordimer 3). Gordimer’s narrative through narrator’s

voice exposes the discrimination in South Africa along with her counter point that what happens when two races are banned to be together in the public places, as the narrator as a child bunks the class not only to watch the movie, but also to feel what it means to remain in the seat where whites live. Gordimer exposes several aspects of discrimination against blacks and non- white in the nation. How public places like public library, public toilets and zoo were still banned for the blacks is reported throughout the fiction.

Moving beyond the grain, Gordimer does not hesitate to depict black character with positive images such as beautiful and intelligent. As narrator admits explaining Sonny, a father, “He had cousins in the Cape who belonged to a resistance movement of their kind’s own and one of them came up with him his mate to stay in the old people’s house for a weekend while trying to get a branch going into the, community, but they could see that, although he was so intelligent” (24). Likewise, the novel counters the white supremacist ideologies used in literature, social science, news media and environment. For instance, the author depicts black female character as beautiful as white women. Moreover, Gordimer presents black people as people with their own culture, as Will describes his mother:

There were no beer brandy lying around our yard and no shuffling and giggling to music so loud it made the transistor radio balanced on a stoep steps buzz and tremble. Uncles and Aunts came to us for tea, and once in a while to Sunday lunch when my mother would have spent the whole Saturday preparing the traditional foods that had come down to her, like her oriental beauty half hidden by neat blouses and skirts, while the rest of that side of her ancestral heritage had been buried in generations of intermarriage and cross cultural alliances of other kinds. (19)

Gordimer depicts black community with their own history and culture thereby countering the prevailing thought that blacks are the people with no culture and history.

Moreover, Gordimer deconstructs the very discourse constructed by the white regime during apartheid period. White's discourse presents blacks as lazy, unintelligent and inferior, in contrast Gordimer depicts black characters as intelligent and educated, smart enough to write their own history. White institutional structure more specifically, law enforcement is countered. As a part of Apartheid, Gordimer counters, both explicit and implicit images of blacks. Moreover she problematizes the representation of blacks in the laws and media of the period.

Gordimer's socio-political context has determined this fiction. Moving through the South African history, Apartheid officially began following the General Election of 1948. New Legislation divided the people between the whites and the non-whites. Many systems of segregation pervaded in South African culture as well as law. Most specifically, several laws Population Registration Act, Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Act of 1949, Immorality Amendment Act of 1950s, had brought even further division between blacks and whites. This text, most specifically counters the prevailing thought circulated in two acts: The Mixed Marriage Act and Immorality Amendment Act of 1949. To quote Ian Loveland in this context, "White man and black woman who were married to each other would not be natives" (74). Likewise, 1949 act- Prohibition of Mixed Marriage, "prohibited (with prospective effect) marriage between European and Non- European" (244). These acts were enacted by the Parliament of South Africa in order to extend the prohibition of marriage and sexual intercourse between blacks and whites.

Moreover, in 1957, Immorality Amendment Act was repealed, but continued

essentially the same prohibition. However, when Gordimer published the novel in 1990, the prohibition finally lifted by Immorality and Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Amendment Act of 1985, but roots foregrounded by previous laws were prevalent in the society. Opposing the very prevailing discriminative thought between blacks and white is counter challenged through the characterization and emotional relationship between black characters and white characters. Likewise, in order to depict the prevailing thought Gordimer presents the characters like Baby who still regards relationship between black and whites as immoral, ideology promoted by the previous law or Immorality Amendment Act of 1950. Baby's attempt to commit suicide after Sonny's involvement with Hannah Plowman replicates the then prevailing thought foregrounded by several acts against blacks.

Gordimer depicts the white characters as the helping hand for the blacks against white racist regime. A representative of an international human-rights organization Hannah helps Sonny to make contact with the real world outside when he was imprisoned. Hannah represents those whites in the South Africa, who helped blacks during the Apartheid Period. Moreover, Sonny gets constructive solution from her, for the organizational problems. Sonny's and Hannah's relationship is depicted as the essential relationship between blacks and whites as they were restricted from the years, as separation was legitimized by the General Election of 1948. Inter-racial affair between white activist Hannah and Sonny replicates the then growing threat of whites. As a white writer of South Africa, when Apartheid was getting infamous and blacks were making space in the politics, Gordimer shares threat circulated among whites marginal. To quote Vesser in this context, "All texts, all documents are representations of beliefs, values and forms of power circulated in a society at a given time in specific circumstances and all texts of given time are in some ways

interconnecting and interactive”(132). This text represents the then probable threat by the blacks in the near future, hence countering the representation of whites as oppressor during the apartheid.

Moreover, Gordimer tries to create the bridge between the blacks and the white throughout the novel. As Gordimer choses apartheid atmosphere as a setting and white characters helping the black in the course of revolution, her work constitutes a social history. As Sonny includes Whites in his speech;

They have died without freedom; but they have died for freedom. We have heard from young comrade who is not up there on the hill pointing a gun at us, although he is white. The presence of our white comrades from the city here today is surely proof that the nine died also for this freedom of all people of this country who want to see oppression destroyed and are ready to join the people's struggle to achieve this. That is the meaning of the death of the nine, for us. (114)

The novel brings blacks and whites together in the battlefield against oppressive white regime. By doing so, Gordimer both inspires whites to go against oppressive white regime, as well as reassures blacks that whites are not necessarily enemy to them.

Gordimer depicts whites not only helping blacks in the personal level but also institutionally. As Hannah Plowman helps black leaders to avoid imprisonment or at least to shorten the trial, author, however, subtly suggests the fact that despite the race people of South Africa fueled anti- apartheid movement. As lines go;

Hannah met Sonny for coffee, for further discussion. It was possible- to take one's dark face into a coffee bar. And with a white woman companion; to pull out her chair for her and sit opposite her. It had been possible for some time, although, coming from a small town where such barriers fell more slowly if at

all, and after two years in segregated prison, Sonny still had a strange feeling: that he was not really there, a commonplace meeting of this kind was not happening to him. (64)

Gordimer subtly tries to assure blacks that time is changing gradually. Moreover, she tries to persuade that separated blacks and whites should try to build the bond between each other. Black character is depicted as someone to make journey through the new space where blacks and whites come together. More subtly, Gordimer suggests the fact that black people as the people to go through the new experience of equality and freedom.

South Africa remains a complex mix of different races, cultural identities, languages and ethnic bonds. Race and ethnicity became particularly explosive ideas during the apartheid era, when the government used it for political and racial purposes, racially and ethnically discriminatory policies and segregation however repealed throughout the amendment acts, remained among the community, socially and culturally. The apartheid government created four official racial categories: black, coloured, white and Asian/Indian. The author envisions multi-racial democratic society in the than conflicting atmosphere. As Alia works for the Indian doctor and shares close emotional as well as professional bond despite different race and ethnicity. Gordimer envisions ethnic bond through the relationship of Alila and an Indian doctor Jasood. As the narration goes, “Dr Jasood regarded the loss of his money as the contribution to the struggle. When Sonny went with his son Will to thank Aila’s old employer, he continued to write some report on a patient while while he spoke –she is worth more than ten thousand rands to us God bless us” (262). The above statement justifies Gordimer’s claim that there was close emotional bond among different ethnic groups even in the midst of apartheid conflict in South Africa.

Moreover, Gordimer subtly suggests whites to learn a lesson from different the relationship between blacks and other marginalized group of the South Africa.

Gordimer's threat has become explicit while she brings character like Jasood, who helps blacks to go against white regime. It demonstrates the fact that, while other groups unite against white, it would become threat to whites.

However, in 1985 "The Immortality and "Prohibition of Mixed Marriage Amendment Act" came to repeal the laws prohibiting marriage and sexual intercourse between white people and people of other races, but prevailing mode could not be avoided. Gordimer exposes the very prevailing mode of thought, at the same time she counter challenges those mode of thought. Regarding counter histories Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, contend, "Counter history opposes not only dominant narratives, but also prevailing modes of historical thought and methods of research; hence when successful ceases to be 'counter'" (52). In the similar vein, besides rand narrative instigated by laws Gordimer counters the prevailing modes of thought.

Even in the extreme age of apartheid the black characters find white characters as a need. The narrative time and again introduces Sonny's inner desire with the phrase "needing Hannah". Moreover, the narrator Will, despite his hatred to his father exposes his desire for the same the woman from white race, subsequently from the race of oppressor. As Will regards Hannah as "The school boy's wet dream. My father's woman" (15). Gordimer exposes blacks attraction for whites and whites attraction to black as natural instinct thereby countering the separatist history of South Africa.

Furthermore, Gordimer exposes the other alternaive history of South Africa during apartheid era through her fiction. To quote Fineman in this context,

The literary form that uniquely lets history happen by virtue of the way it introduces an opening into the teleological, and therefore timeless, narration of beginning, middle and end. The anecdote produces the effect of real, the occurrence of contingency, by establishing an event as an event within and yet without the framing context of historical successivity, i. e it does so only in so far as its narration both comprises and refracts the narration it report. (61)

Gordimer's narration, in the similar way, comprises the discrimination between different race and ethnicity in the South Africa, at same time the very narration it reports. Take for instance, it reports the fact that there was disharmony among black and white during the apartheid, thereby depicting it to be the disharmony in the eyes of law and few whites only. As Will admits, prevailing mode of thought even after law was outlawed in 1985, "Yes no law against such a couple, now, but by tradition the combination continues to be something shock, even if it has to be dismissed for business reason" (210). Gordimer counters the very narration of separation, through characters who develop even deeper relationship between the people from different races.

Moreover, white's involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle is depicted as unavoidable. Gordimer confines the than whites into those who are in power;

It is enemy- the police, the Ministers of Law and Order and Justice- who decides who the leaders of the people are; it is the measure of the attention, the hounding and harassment you receive, that makes you 'Sonny'. Under the State of Emergency in the Country the public gathering at which his speeches had been so successful were banned. The press, fearful of prosecution and shut-down, took on chance on reporting only the words of leader so prominent, took a chance on reporting only the words of leaders so prominent,



so well- known in the outside world that the government hesitated to act when these leaders defied the law (263).

Depicting, few law, order and justice as the enemy to blacks and the oppressor, Gordimer secures whites space in the South Africa populated by majority of blacks. Moreover, she assures blacks that except few whites of white regime entire the world is by their side.

Gordimer envisions the democratic South Africa ruled by blacks. Hence, her novel is populated by colored characters. Dominic Head making comment in her later novel, *None To Accompany Me*, suggests, “Gordimer pursues a personal literary revisionism paralleling the novel’s topical investigation of her perennial question: where do whites fit in?”(3). Gordimer, however in this fiction shares the threat circulated among the then South African whites during the period. She investigates the adjustment and adaptation of groups in the power sharing for sooner future.

Gordimer’s character selection itself appropriates the different races in South Africa. Most specifically, she appropriates the blacks. As the text has given space enough to the black characters and narration is told by blacks, Will and Sonny, respectively. Moreover black female characters, too, are given space enough in the textual scape. Likewise, black’s family is presented as equally important and educated and smart. As Will’s describes his parents:

They decided to have children, but no more than two. The facelessly begotten families for the poor, from which they came, were not for them. Yet they did not plan to privilege these children beyond the decencies of opportunity and healthy, happy growth they believed were child’s right. One of the early sweet intimacies between them was that both has rejected any religious beliefs, although to please the people she occasionally followed public rituals. They

found that for them both the meaning of life seemed to be contained, if mysteriously, in living useful lives. (9)

These lines demonstrate Gordimer's intention to present black as cultured as whites, in order to assure the blacks that how positively whites take those black community and individual. Gordimer approves blacks by representing them as the educated people. She exposes blacks as the developing and growing community despite their weaker background. Novel tries to assimilate black into the community of educated and intellectual in order to share the space to the blacks in the sooner future.

Gordimer disrupts the South African history about black and white as necessarily separated races. In this context, clarifying Foucault's concept on counter-history, Alec Machoul and Wendy Grace contend, "Foucault's counter-history also had to conceive of bodies of knowledge (discourses) as potentially discontinuous across history rather than necessarily progressive and culminative" (4). In the similar way, Gordimer's text tries to discontinue the history about blacks and whites' relationship in South Africa during Apartheid and during the revolution against white regime. Moreover, Gordimer, in the very act of writing fiction populated by black characters counters the then South African belief about the whites as oppressive.

Moreover, Gordimer creates positive image about black/ white relationship from previously detached position. She tries to create positive image at the time South Africa was feeling sense of detachment from each other since the apartheid era. Gordimer tends to be more explicit by rendering blacks as the group of people making their own history. As Will admits:

My time that's coming with politics. I was excluded from that, it didn't suit them for me to have any function within it, but I m going to be the one to record, someday, what he and my mother/Aila and Baby and the others did,

what it really was like to live a life determined by the struggle to be free, as desert dwellers' days are determined by the struggle against thirst and those of dwellers amid snow and ice by the struggle against the numbing cold. (276)

In this vein, Gordimer depicts blacks as the conscious enough group to write their own history. Moreover, novel tries to counter the official history that depicted blacks as people without history, thereby bringing a black narrator observing all the details to make record of their own..

She challenges dominant historical narrative found in official discourse law. Moreover, she tries to create new historical knowledge about blacks and white. For Gordimer's part, discriminative was confined only within few laws and acts, "the town whose walls were wandered around by the Saturday people was the Castle; the library whose door he stood before were the gates of law at which K sat, year after year, always to be told he must wait for entry" (17), in the very act of reporting what south African official narrative restricted blacks of, Gordimer reports the desire of blacks to pursue education and desire to get involved into the educational practices. As Will reports about Sonny; "Sonny is the one who wants to unite education to the particle life of the blacks. As narrarive describes Sonny, "He saw the need to bring together the school and the community in which it performed an isolated function- education as a luxury, a privilege part from the survival of preoccupation of the parents" (9). Hereby, Gordimer acknowledges the fact that blacks at the time of anti-apartheid revolution understood the need of the black community and way for their communities' betterment. Thus, subtly suggests whites to think about blacks differently than before.

Soon, Gordimer assures that how even the whites were helping for the educational need of blacks, equally; "What else might he do? For the uplift of the

community, he enterprisingly approached the Rotary Club and Lions' Club in the white town with respectful requests that they might graciously send their doctors, lawyers and members of amateur theatre and music groups to lecture or perform in the school hall"(90). Here, Gordimer suggests, explicitly, the expectation of the blacks from the whites during the period equality development in South Africa and potential help from the whites for the educational development among the blacks. Moreover, Gordimer counters the official narrative by reporting the fact that blacks and white had mutual understanding and help even during the revolution between blacks and whites during the struggle against oppressive white regime. The author intends to report the fact that whites and their different clubs had very positive role in bringing black community and their educational need together.

Moreover, Gordimer's personal attachment with various organizations cannot be separated from her work. Hannah as an activist to the international organization closely supports the blacks struggle against whites. Gordimer, personal involvement and activism replicates Hannah's role. In an interview Gordimer admits;

I had of course, my attachment to the African National Congress(ANC), which I'd had all along, but it was underground. But then with the formation of the non-racial United Democratic Front in 1983, you could openly vow yourself. So, I think that was the great encouragement. Here was some sort of organization to which I could attach myself. (151)

Her involvement in the major anti-apartheid organization like United Democratic Front replicates blacks and white South Africans goal to establish a non-racial, united South Africa in which segregation is abolished. As the organization was formed regardless of race, sex, religion to promote an end of the apartheid, it brought the races together. Hereby, Gordimer challenges the white regime that tried to separate

blacks and whites. Moreover, this involvement justifies the than whites precaution to adjust in the non-racist South Africa. Moreover, Gordimer's characterization demonstrates the fact that black consciousness is not necessarily to attack whites.

Likewise, novel opposes part of generalization about the whites. Through Hannah's personal history she demonstrates the fact that the sudden generalization about the whites as oppressor is banal. Hereby she presents alternative representation of the whites in her text. As Hannah's part is presented;

It's not so long since you learnt to change the idea you had of yourselves as powerless against whites. The old Left did it, by god! Thank god. Only the Old Left. Now realities to be accepted...it is going to be hard for many, looked at from here. It means the loss of absolutes- you know what I mean? I m a missionary's granddaughter.... It makes people insecure. You can screw up the courage to do what you have to do to get rid of the old structure that hold you down if you can believe there is a paradise on the other side. (9)

Hannah's part precisely demonstrates Gordimer's intention as an white individual in the insecure period of anti- apartheid movement. Through Hannah's characterization the author intends to convey the fact that blacks cannot blame whites simply because they belonged to white missionary and regime in the past. Gordimer calls blacks to make realization the fact that now scenario has been changed. Moreover, Gordimer assures black, to feel secure from the side of whites even though they belonged to white regime in the past. In doing so, Gordimer presents the alternative part of blacks history, that, whites not necessarily had intention to oppress the blacks.

Moreover Hannah's role in the novel, at once, however seems immoral, going to depth Gordimer justifies her role as the moral one. As her role is explained, "She did not exclude Aila;it was one of the things he found remarkable about her, moving,

that she did not want to oust Aila- from his mind when they were together. She conceived of Aila as an equal, not an adversary defeated” (68). The author, through Hannah’s, however, extramarital relationship with Sonny conveys it as her counter point to South African laws and beliefs. The restricted blacks and whites relationship is countered but Gordimer justifies Aila’s role as justifiable when she presents Hannah who gives equal space to Aila. Describing Hannah’s role while Sonny’s wife gets imprisoned, Will makes a comment:

Sonny was amazed; intruded upon. Hannah wept. The tears moved down slowly down her broad cheeks and she did not turn from him or cover her face in decency with her hands. She had no right to weep for Aila! - For god’s sake, Hannah. But the tears welled and found their way over the contours of that dear face. (69)

Hannah’s part demonstrates the author’s intention to depict white characters as supporters to blacks. The author claims the space for the whites too, in the South African democratic society brought forth by anti- apartheid movement.

Likewise, the novelist seems to be informed by black consciousness of the period. The black narrator, itself speaks in the part of black consciousness. Silent Aila’s and her daughter Baby’s involvement into revolutionary activities replicates the rising consciousness of blacks. More specifically, Aila however silent, all of sudden joins the military wing of revolutions as Will surprisingly makes remarks on his mother:

Now she believes, she does, she does, she does, he has made his daughter into a revolutionary, sent her into exile, to live in the camp, never to come home, perhaps to die even if she did not bleed to death that other time. He has done this although it is the truth that he did not even know she had just joined the

military wing of the movement. (124)

Sudden change of female characters and their decision to join military demonstrates the black consciousness to fight against white regime. Gordimer as the white writer subtly warns the oppressive white of South Africa to imagine the outcome of the black consciousness.

Likewise, the author admits the fact that even the whites during the anti-apartheid raid had suffered as those of blacks. As narrator reports, “The young people were singing, we greet you Mandela, call us, Mandela in the rhythm of a walking song, gently harmonizing rather than rousing, parting from the dead with respect. Hannah and other whites took their pace, flowing with people, people flowing past, life draining out of graveyard” (114).

This explanation contributes to the idea of the then South African whites as the helping hand for the blacks of equally important part of the struggle since it posits “we” instead of “black” or “colored” people. In this way, *My Son's Story* appropriates the white South African for what they contributed for the anti-apartheid movement. It also counters the blacks' discourse to represent whites as enemy.

*My Son's* story can be considered as positive portrayal of black South African in the white's writing. So, Gordimer wrote the novel to tell the story from inside, which portrays the historical moment of change, integrity of blacks and whites. For example, two black narrators tell the story from inside. Similarly, she acclaims black South Africans to the level of educationist and intellectual, as can be inferred from the narrator's description, “He was kept busy planning and running workshops-‘resistance education’- in shanties and mud churches under the guide of local club meetings...”(159). Author intends to qualify blacks, thus to bring them into the historical moment of change where they mingle with the whites.

Gordimer seems to be disappointed with how blacks had taken the whites. She cites several evidences where blacks utterly hate whites simply because they belong to white race. For example Will questions Hannah position, though sometimes, while she tries to help Aila. As new historicism claims literature cannot be separated from the context. In the similar ways Gordimer's disappointment to blacks can be justified after knowing her context. In this respect, regarding Gordimer's context, Helen T Verongos contends;

Some of her most difficult moments came into 1970s, when the black consciousness movement sought to exclude whites from the fight for majority rule. That period cut her off from many intellectual and artist and left her work vulnerable to criticism from many black African's who contended that a white could never authentically tell a story through the eyes of black character.

(n.pg.)

Thus, as Verongos reports, Gordimer was excluded from many African blacks, throughout this novel, Gordimer intends to include blacks and whites together. Hereby, Nadine counters the black consciousness movement that excludes people from the white race, she intends to present characters like Hannah who actively takes part in struggle against apartheid.

Moreover, new historicism concerns to the shift of power, to quote Brannigan in this context, "It is historical in that it focuses on how various texts make connection with each other in the same epoch, textualizing historical changes and shifts and describing ideological formation and power relation at work in the epoch" (151). The shift in power relationship is explained through Sonny's position in educational acts- shift from mine worker's son to intellectual teacher. Sonny is taken in the community as the figure for pride:



The pride the old people took in him was not just snobbery of the poor and uneducated, that rejoices in claiming one who has moved up out of their class, and which, although their hubris hides this aspect from them, contains also, always the inevitability of sorrow: his desertion. The pride came from an instinct, like water- diviner's for the pull of his twig, for Sonny's distinction. And this in spite of the fact that he had turned out darker-rather than lighter skinned than the rest of the family- something that normally, might have down- graded him among them. Everything he was and did evidence distinction. (6)

Gordimer textualises the historical changes of South Africa and shift in their power relationships. She acknowledges the shift in power relationship from whites to blacks. Hence, the novel depicts increasing power of blacks thus implies whites losing their power. Additionally, Sonny's leadership and Will's determination to write their own history approves power shift from whites to blacks in the then South Africa.

Over and above that, *My Son's Story* tells the story from the perspective of common people to counter the South African laws and beliefs. While blacks and whites were still banned to get married and have attachment, the novel counters the very laws and beliefs. The text reports, both the than laws and beliefs thereby countering the very narration. The author herself hints to her counterpoint to show how it was impossible to separate blacks and whites simply with the enforcement of few laws.

Furthermore, the text raises the threat circulated among whites during the struggle of the anti-apartheid movement. In addition to this, it reports the then white South African's attempt to make their space in the new world of democracy. Moreover, by countering the official history instigated by few whites, it promotes

interracial relationship. At first Sonny's relationship with Hannah appears to be the immoral relation, nonetheless as the pages go on turning, this interracial relationship is justified.

Additionally, through individual relationship between blacks and whites, the author counters official history instigated in South African laws and beliefs. Likewise, the appropriation of blacks into the narration and positive images of blacks, demonstrates author's intention to bring blacks and whites together, as the demand of post- apartheid South Africa.

*My Son's Story*, however, is the fictional report, and directly appears as the product of South African society. Additionally, the novel exposes the counter point that whites equally share the part in the democratic South Africa as they were themselves the part of the anti-apartheid revolution. Likewise, it further approves the blacks from previously disapproved position thus to counter the detached history of blacks and whites.

## Works Cited

- Ali, Erritouni. "Apartheid Inequality and Post-apartheid Utopia in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*". *Research in African Literature*, vol. 37, no. 4, Winter 2006, pp. 68-84.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Brannighan, John. *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. MacMillan Press, 1998.
- Bruce, King. "Literature and Revolution in Easter Europe". *World Literature Today*. vol. 65, no 2, Spring, 1991, pp. 351.
- Gallagher, Catherine and Stephen Greenblatt. *Practising New Historicism*. Chicago Press, 2001.
- Gordimer, Nadine. *My Son's Story*. Bloomsbury, 1990.
- Grace, Wendy and Alec McHoul. *A Foucault Primer*. Routledge. 1993.
- Driver, Dorothy. "Nadine Gordimer: Politicization of Women". *English in Africa*, vol.10, no .2, Oct.1983, pp. 29-54.
- Fido, Elaine. "A Guest Honour: A Feminine View of Masculinity." *World Literature Written in English*, vol.17, no.6, 1978, pp. 30-97.
- Fineman, Joel "The History of Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction". *The New Historicism*, edited by Harold Vesser, Routledge, 1989, pp. 61-88.
- Head, Dominick. *Nadine Gordimer*. Cambridge, 1994.
- Jacobs, J.U. "Nadine Gordimer's Intertextuality Authority and Authorship in My Son's Story" *English In Africa*, vol. 20, no 2, Oct. 1993, pp. 25-45.
- Lazar, Karen. "A Feeling Of Realistic Optimism- An Interview with Nadine Gordimer". *Skidmore College*. pp. 1-18.
- Lockett, Cecily. "Feminism and Writing in English In South Africa". *Current*

*Writing*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1991, pp.1-21.

Loveland, Ian. *By due process of Law? : Racial Discrimination and the Right to Vote in South Africa*. Hart Publishing, 1999.

Piggot, Fritz Jill. "Son and Lover My Son's Story." *The Women's Review Books*, vol. 8, no 4, 1991, pp 8-9.

Sonza, Jorshinelle. "My Turn: Debunking the Gordimer Mystique in My Son' Story." *African Literatures*, vol.25, no.4, Winter, 1994, pp 105-116.

Wagner, Kathrin. *Rereading Nadine Gordimer*. Indiana UP, 1994.

Verongos T, Helen. "Nadine Gordimer, Novelist Who Took ON Apartheid, Is Dead at 90". *New York Times* 14 July, 2014.

Vesser, H Aram, ed. *The New Historicism*. Routledge, 1989.