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# SEEING THE UNSEEN THROUGH INVERTED: THE POLITICS OF INVERTED NARRATION IN CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICAN CIVIL WAR IN NADINE GORDIMER'S "THE ULTIMATE SAFARI"

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# Abstract

The purpose of this research paper is to study the politics of Inverted Narration in Context of South African Civil War in Nadine Gordimer's 'The Ultimate Safari' by application of Lewin's Field Theory. This paper proves that the war is the cause of turmoil in external "boundary zone" of the system. "Field" of war is interacting with "field" of writer's mind and fusion gives birth to technique of inversion. The external turmoil of South African Civil War and strict censorship imposed by government causes the writer to invert the obvious lens of the story into the inverted lens; a white leader's critical narration into a black child's innocent narration; grandmother to take the role of the grandfather; the writer from a passive narrator to an active fictional leading grandmother; to the place of man to the place of the animal; war time to the pre-civilized time and baby brother to the place of baby monkey. As a result of this narration, author reflects history of South Africa and Black race through the channel of unseen. As a whole, it proves that the politics of inverted narration lies in creation of dazzling effect to the reader and his active participation in evaluating the inverted symbols.

#### Introduction

South Africa has a history of struggle from passiveness as a colonized country to resistance for independence. Towards the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century (from 1899 to 1902), world witnessed the end of South African war after centuries of conflicts. After water shedding event of World War One and Two, in South Africa, Afrikaner National Party emerged to be victorious in 1948 with some hopes of a better future for South Africans. Ironically, it turned out to be a new test for the nation in form of Apartheid era which covered a span of almost 40 years.

Apartheid was a kind of political ideology of (NP) National Party of South Africa. It was based on separate progress of different racial sectors in the country but its implementation was always based on the ideology of "difference." Under this law different racial groups were living not only differently but unequally. Under this period, it was impossible to have a social interaction between different racial groups and to live a life as equals. On the whole, this system was totally against majority of South African population based on the difference of race.

Apartheid was a reign of censorship for people of South Africa who hardly emerged from a long battle of physical colonization. The focus of the reign was to suppress voice of African authors, writers, media and films to control all kind of propagandas that could be helpful in shaping opinions. The purpose behind this censorship was to control masses and their opinion to strictly maintain ideology of difference between White and Non-white. During this period, the government had always been trying to silence the writers to reshape the truth by distorting it. In order to have a closer look at what is the real truth inside politicized history books. Nadine Gordimer in her writings gives an internal view of history which is her story of writing and South African struggle to resist against racial segregation.

She spent most of her life fighting for her anti-Apartheid struggle. She is always assumed as a political writer internationally but she never accepted this tag. In most of Gordimer's writings she is influenced by political atmosphere of South Africa which is reflective in her writing. She never accepted herself as a political person. Gordimer said in an interview with TheParis Review: "the real influence of politics on [her] writing is the influence of politics on people (Nick Ostdick, 2015, p.2)." In her writing she always tried to talk about people of South Africa who were greatly affected by political and historical situation of South Africa during resistance for independence and later "Post-Independence" Apartheid period.

At the time when Gordimer was writing Jump and Other Stories(1991), she was greatly affected by political turmoil, racial violence, censorship as after 1984-89's Township revolt, the country was in the state of Civil War, emergency and censorship. During this time period, Nadine Gordimer's "The Ultimate Safari" retells the story of South Africa which is silenced by iron hand of government. Every nation is a narration and Nadine Gordimer becomes the actual voice of the oppressed and racially segregated community passing through cruelty of civil war. In order to fulfil her responsibilities as a writer who is writing under severe censorship and disturbed by political turmoil, she seems to develop a novel technique of inversion in her writing that can be observed in course of this research paper.

The theoretical framework of this paper is taken from Kurt Lewin's The Field Theory in Social Sciences. According to Field Theory everything in the world can be seen as a whole or in shorter words inter-related. This equation is not so simple like one thing affects another but it means that everything exists in a context. It is not possible that one person cannot be affected by the situation in which he is living. Lewin explains that a person's behavior can't be viewed in isolation field. They have to be observed in a context. They cannot be isolated from the situation they are in. In this theory, by field the theorist means a kind of environmental field. By field the

theorist means a kind of environmental field or is simple words it may be the total situation of a person in context of the environment he is living in. Lewin believes that meaning of any situation is determined by the relationship between different things and the context in which it occurs. As a psychologist Lewin believed that the fears anxiety and psychological conditions are the result of the way society is organized (Lewin, 1951). There is a close relationship between individuals and environment. As individuals are responsible for shaping environment similarly, environment is responsible in shaping individuals and their behavior. Field Theory is very important since "it looks at all events as a function of the relationship of multiple interacting forces. Interacting forces form a field in which every part of the field effects the whole and the whole effects all parts of the field" (Yontef, 2002, p.33). So, narrator's images and characters as "fields" are to be seen in author's "relationship of multiple interacting forces" since they are defined by the "ultimate" environment they live in (Yontef, 2002, p.67).

By analyzing this research in context of this theory means that Nadine Gordimer at the time of writing was greatly affected by political turmoil caused by Apartheid and Civil War as she was one of the "field" (Lewin, 1951). As being one of the field, the effect of this turmoil on writer's mind gives birth to technique of inverted narration that helps the reader see the unseen through inverted.

This research paper is the study of technique of inversion that is used by Nadine Gordimer in "The Ultimate Safari" and is developed in context of Civil War, severe censorship and political turmoil. This technique is used in such a way that it helps the reader seeing the unseen facts and clues in the story. It is the presence of inversion that makes the reader see the narrative and the picture comparatively clear. It is an important fact to consider that Nadine Gordimer is writing this story in Observer, London, 27/11/88 which is shown in the form of a Travel Advertisement. So the narrative being presented through the story is not direct; It is inverted and is definitely reversal of the normal. Inversion can be taken as a sort of reversal of position, shape, relationship or arrangement. In short, it is something which can be diverted or de-arranged from normal.

War is the in-balance in external boundary zone of the system. It causes the actual physical disruption to the landscape and environment of the country. Use of weapons kills wildlife and environment, shatters soil, destroys plant life, and disrupts water flows, leaving ecosystems in turmoil. Including death and destruction caused by war, there is impact of war on human psychology through environment from general behavioral change to serious psychological problems. Human beings are not isolated beings. They are an essential part of ecosystem and they can be studied in relationship with the environment they are living in. The distorted effect of Civil war and political turmoil is evident in author's narration. Under Gordimer's efforts to retell the story of South Africa under severe censorship she seems to develop a unique style of narrative writing that is rather inverted but will help us see history/[herstory] through the channel of unseen. My thesis statement is that external turmoil of the environment is structurally embodied in inverted images within the story, a form of structure showing seen through unseen.

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate how far the technique of inversion reflects the writer's state of mind. The paper also tries to find the purpose of using technique of inversion with respect to text and context of the writer and the effects it generates on readers. This paper is significant enough to explore the technique of inversion in context of Nadine Gordimer that is not researched before. The technique is rather complicated because of multiple conscious and unconscious layers associated with images constructed by the author but it speaks

directly to reader while transcending boundaries of the race, color and the censorship. Gordimer's narration requires active involvement of the reader in unfolding meaning of the text. It is not just about text, it also involves author and her context with a proper involvement of the reader. This paper significant enough to highlight the mechanism through which meaning is produced.

#### **Literature Review**

Narration in the simplest words is the methodology of story-telling. Narration is the most important feature in the process of writing. The authors use different types of narration to meet their objectives and transfer their convictions to the reader. The narration has been seen differently in different historical phases. Throughout the history the narration has been seen as a complicated procedure. In order to understand the meaning of narration at different time of history, it is tried to analyze with different critical perspectives.

For a very long time in history of English Literature a perspective has been used to understand narration is called Biographical criticism. In this kind of criticism, it was recommended to analyze text in relationship with author's life and the works he is writing. In this criticism focus was entirely on author's biography. This criticism remained a part of analyzing literature for a very long time. This method was used by Samuel Johnson in Lives of The Poets.

Lives of the Poets is a famous work written by Samuel Johnson. This work consists of biographies of fifty-two poets who had lived during eighteenth century. The format of the book consists of a long narrative of poet's life and his development as a character, then it discussed a summary of his personality and at the end it discussed critical analysis of his major poems in relationship with his biography (Regier, 2007). In context of this work, author's presence is a dominant feature of the narrative that makes her convictions clear to the reader. However, this paper is not just about author's events of life. The author's presence is embedded through the structure producing meaning in active participation of the reader. This paper will try to study how author's conviction is embedded in text in the form of technique of inversion to reach her readers and the part of reader in the process of meaning production.

During 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century this kind of works were considered as an insight or a superficial understanding to work on a limited level. This critical methodology started getting outdated in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> Century by advent of New Critics of 1920s who used the term Biographical Fallacy to avoid this kind of criticism. They believed that it is undermining work of literature by associating it merely with certain events of author's life. It is oversimplified to associate to events, persons, works and places of the text with events, persons, works and places of the writer's life to produce meaning. According to New Critics, it was illogical to ignore importance of author's imagination that can create anything that has not been created before.

New Criticism was a dominated way of looking at a narrative in 1920s. The focus of this kind of criticism was on intensive reading of the text. The focus of this school was on evaluation of the text with the ambition that text is everything. This school believed that text of a narrative is self-sufficient, self-contained and self-referential whole which is sufficient in the process of meaning making. In this school one important work is of I.A. Richards' New Critical Methodology(1976) in which he coined the importance of text as a text which is sufficient in the process of meaning making.

In domain of New criticism a very important critical essay is of T.S.Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In this essay Eliot developed his concept of "objective correlative."

According to this concept the author must be detached from the text. He must confine his emotions to himself and not to the text. In this essay Eliot condemns Dryden, Milton and Metaphysical poets who wrote their works influenced by biographical incidents in their lives (Eliot, 2009). This theory is relevant to this paper for providing a framework for the idea that meanings are embedded in text and text is sufficient to produce meaning that can be decoded. The problem with this methodology of Eliot was that it neither included reader's response nor author's presence in the text that is problematic. However, this paper will try to investigate how Nadine Gordimer's narrative is producing writer's conviction through technique of inversion embedded in text with an active participation of the reader.

New Historicism is a famous literary criticism based on ideas given by Stephen Greenblatt and Gallagher in his book Practicing New Historicism. According to Stephen Greenblatt, a literary text must be interpreted within historical context of the author and the critic. A work of art is product of its environment and ideologies. This thing does not only include author but critic too. Greenblatt looks at the work in a broad context. He tries to investigate how the context of the writer affects and reflects itself in the text. In a way text becomes re-reading of history.

In this book for New Historicists, history is analyzed as an archive. They believe history is no universal truth. It is a co-text in the process of fiction writing. It does not only serve as a background or biography of the author (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000). The problem with Greenblatt's criticism is that he didn't typically talk about the right combination that is required in the process of meaning making. It talked about the historical context of the author and the critic but does talk about his history and author serve as a catalyst who weave into structure of the text some inverted images that help extracting meaning through distortion.

Autobiographical criticism is outdated but a writer cannot be fully detached from its work. Writer leaves a part of itself in his text. It is not as simple as "autobiographical criticism." An active participation of the reader may help unfolding the meaning written consciously and unconsciously embedded in the textual structure. What is conscious and what is unconscious is itself a question? Because Freud's division of conscious and unconscious mind was an attempt to understand working of human mind, not an absolute law or signature to the field of Psychoanalysis. There is no absolute law to understand working of human mind and can never be, rest are the "attempts." Bingqing Li's recent research about "Compartmentalization of Conscious and Unconscious" is very relevant. He mentions the complexity between these two divisions by analyzing his daily habits:

Initially conscious and imposed action of going to the bathroom has gradually become one indispensable part of my daily life, one process that I can finish automatically and unconsciously. In contrast, we have daily routines that we perform so fluently, without being aware of them, that we regard them as unconscious processes. When we really try to interpret these processes, we find sophisticated, conscious reasoning underlying our daily routines. I really cannot figure out the exact compartmentalization between unconscious and conscious. On one hand, some conscious behaviors can be turned into unconscious ones after being repeated again and again. On the other hand, some actions which are normally considered to be unconscious hold logically and rationally underlying conscious reasoning processes. (Bingqing 2010, p.1)

If is evident from the research mentioned above that the compartmentalization of conscious and unconscious is very complicated. If we apply the same concept on narration, it

becomes evident that complicated compartmentalization of conscious and unconscious is also evident in narrative of Nadine Gordimer which can only be interpreted through active participation of the reader.

If the author is detached from its work, one can still find unconscious meanings of text related to author because author leaves an unconscious part of himself in his work. It is human psychology to tell the tale especially in war when human being is under pressure and gaze of censorship. For this purpose, the idea of fiction theory is that the relationships between the imaginary worlds of fiction and the actual world in which we live are complicated, and that one cannot declare fictions as simply stories that are not "true." Theorists of fiction challenges questions about perplex relations between the boundary of fiction and the "real" world in which we live. The philosopher Nelson Goodman writes in Ways of Worldmaking the question of creating imaginary worlds and categorizes our ways into coding, decoding and recoding (1978, p.62).

The fictional world that most resembles the actual world is based on the "principle of minimal departure." This idea refers to the fundamental property of an imaginary world that is minimally different from the familiar world in which we live. This research paper is also an attempt to fill the gap between actual and fictive through reader's interpretation of inverted images by active participation.

In reviewing literature, different works are analyzed which discuss about importance of biography in narrative writing, while many focuses on importance of text as an ultimate source of meaning. Many works discuss about context of critic and author in production of narrative writing. There are papers which talk about complexity of compartmentalization in process of performing a task. Many papers agree on the point that there is a relationship between real and fictive world but these papers don't discuss about right combination required in the process of meaning making. However, this research will talk about importance of external environmental and historical factors like Civil War of South Africa as co-authors in creation of inverted images embedded in the text that will help see through unseen by active participation of the reader. Under Gordimer's efforts to retell the story of South Africa under severe censorship she seems to develop a unique style of narrative writing that is rather inverted but will help us see history/[herstory] through the channel of unseen. My thesis statement is that external turmoil of the environment is structurally embodied in inverted images within the story, a form of structure showing seen through unseen.

#### **Research Methodology**

This paper uses qualitative research methodology. This research paper is using soft data in the form of articles, reviews, books, theoretical works of critics, psychologists and online data bases.

The theoretical framework of this paper is taken from Kurt Lewin's The Field Theory in Social Sciences. According to Field Theory everything in the world can be seen as a whole or in shorter words inter-related. This equation is not so simple like one thing affects another but it means that everything exists in a context. It is not possible that one person cannot be affected by the situation in which he is living. Lewin explains that according to this theory a person's behavior can't be viewed in isolation field. They have to be observed in a context. They cannot be isolated from the situation they are in. In this theory, by field the theorist means a kind of environmental field. By field the theorist means a kind of environmental field or is simple words it may be the total situation of a person in context of the environment he is living in. Lewin believes that meaning of any situation is determined by the relationship between different things

and the context in which it occurs. As a psychologist Lewin believed that the fears anxiety and psychological conditions are the result of the way society is organized (Lewin, 1951). There is a close relationship between individuals and environment. As individuals are responsible for shaping environment similarly environment is responsible in shaping individuals and their behavior. It is through expansion of "field" the world of reality and fiction is analyzed in context of the writer, her history and the narrative technique that involves reader in the process of meaning making.

### **Data Analysis**

Gordimer was writing against Apartheid and censorship. During that time, Government was banning most of her works. She was under consistent restrictions imposed upon her by government of South Africa. Her writing was under restrictions. In that terrible situation, she develops a new "safe" style of writing in war time by using innocent child narration and "inverted images" with multiple layers of conscious and unconscious meanings.

The external conflict of the environment, South African Civil War and political turmoil causes the writer to invert the normal lens of the story. She is an anti-apartheid author, writing against her government and White people in their own newspaper Observer, London. This inverted lens has provided a space to say that is unsaid story of a nation and cannot be said under severe restrictions imposed on Gordimer because of censorship. This lens has provided her the position to take her people's side by not taking their side directly. This is like marketing of a nation. The more marketing she does, the better narratives she gives of her people and history of South Africa. She is making the normal lens hidden and hidden lens normal for doing so. She is using emotionless narration for creating emotions. She is showing the real face of Apartheid and Civil War by showing inverted images. For example:

The African Adventure Lives On... You can do it! The ultimate safari or expedition With <u>leaders</u> who know <u>Africa.</u> TRAVEL ADVERTISEMENT,

Observer, LONDON, 27/11/88. (Gordimer, 1991, p. 11)

The writer is consciously using child narration for hiding the inverted lens. But in the flow of narration, the inverted lens gets visible and child narration gets too unfit for such sensible comments as "our country is the country of people, not of animals" (Gordimer 1991, 12). Invisibility of inverted lens is the will of the writer. But visibility of lens at some places like "chickens chased by dogs" in narration is unconscious overflow of emotions. For example:

What happened? I don't know. My father also had gone away one day and never come back; but he was fighting the war. We were in the war, too, but we were children, we were like our grandmother and grandfather. We didn't have guns. The people my father was fighting-- the bandits, they are called by our governments—ran all over the place and we ran away from them like chickens chased by dogs<sup>1</sup>. (Gordimer, 1991, p. 11)

The writer is inverting from a white into a black narrator who is eleven years old and experiences the tragedy at the age of nine. Coincidentally, Gordimer was herself nine years old when she started writing the short story. In terms of age, the beginning of author's "writing safari" is also beginning of child's "ultimate safari." Here Gordimer is again inverting the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Inverted lens is getting visible.

politics of black skin, White masks that has been the result of colonization in the form of identity crisis. She gives her own narrative as a writer having white skin, black mask. She is inverting the complete politics associated with the idea of superiority associated with white color. She is a White writer disguised as black narrator. She becomes one of Blacks in terms of her identity and emotions in terms of her struggle against Apartheid and racism. In spite of all the restrictions imposed on Gordimer, she ends up showing the true spirit of freedom by using technique of inversion.

War inverts the grandmother to take the role of the grandfather. The writer herself has the courage of the grandmother. Gordimer was sixty-eight years old when she was writing this story and she was sharing the burden of great political and national responsibilities. She is consciously putting the "strong" conventional image of African woman in war times through image of the grandmother. She actually wants South African women to be like the grandmother in pursuit of their true freedom. That's why the grandmother is a nameless "grandmother", a "grand" mother indeed. She is more strong and ambitious in comparison with the grandfather or patriarchy. For example:

I say 'grandmother' before 'grandfather' because it's like that: our grandmother is big and strong, yet not old, and our grandfather is small, you don't know where he is, in his loose trousers. (Gordimer, 1991, p. 12)

[...]

So, they decided – Our grandmother did; our grandfather made little noises and rocked from side to side, but she took no notice – we would go away. (Gordimer, 1991, 12)

The image of grandmother and grandfather is very symbolic as grandfather's attempt to leave charge of leadership and grandmother's attempt to take new charge is representing the change of world order. It reflects how apparently weaker ones have to take charge of South African Civil War in pursuit of freedom. It represents that everyone is capable of taking charge in pursuit of their freedom.

This description of grandmother can also be an unconscious comment on image of strong women in Postmodern times because at the back of Mozambique's "field", there is "field" of the world. On the back of Mozambique war there is "field" of World War. The author is greatly influenced by political turmoil and South African civil war. Through image of grandmother she is portraying worldwide rise of feminist movements and women empowerment. Hence, this inverted role of grandmother proves to be a microstructure explaining macrostructure of the worldwide phenomenon.

The political turmoil and Civil War causes the narrator to invert man to the place of the animal. On conscious level, the juxtaposition of animals is a comment on power dynamics in the country. As the characters enter into Kruger Park, the imagery of men as animals reinforce through each image. Kruger National Park is one of the largest game reserves in Africa. Initially, the purpose of the Park was to save diminishing number of animals. At the time of war and Apartheid, it was serving the purpose of camp for white people who were involved with Government in Imperialistic activities and those who used to pay Government fine taxes for their tourism. Symbolically, Kruger Park represents African heritage which no longer belongs to them. Kruger Park is history of South Africa. Native Africans who are supposed to rule are themselves in state of animals in this park. For example, author says: "we must move like animals among the animals, away from the roads, away from the white people's camps" (Gordimer, 1991, p. 13). Africans should rule over animals as they are famous for it but in

Kruger Park, animals are ruling over them. Same is the power dynamics of the country. African as majority should rule the country but white minority is ruling over them. For example, the narrator says:

We know about the Kruger Park. A kind of whole country of animals—[...] but all the same our country is the country of people, not animals. We know about the Kruger Park because some of our men used to leave home to work there in the places where white people come to stay and look at the animals. (Gordimer 1991, 13)

On unconscious level, juxtaposition of men as animals is also a comment on idea of general human tendency to behave like animals in Modern and Post-Modern war times since "field" of author's mind is interacting with the "field" of the world that is common for all intellectuals. World War had shaken the belief of Western civilization and intellectuals were talking about human tendency to develop animalistic attitude in certain conditions. Russell talks of the same idea in his essay "Ideas That Have Harmed Mankind." Barash's Understanding Violence is a notable work in this field. Freud to Arthur Schopenhauer, man was discussed as animal because of his instinctual violence.

The turmoil cause by war is also reflected into the inverted image of "baby brother in place of baby monkey." The word "monkey" is fore-grounded here. The baby monkey is the opposite of super-civilized-human. It also reminds of evolution of humans from monkey ancestors. The war causes the baby to invert into a baby-monkey. For example:

My little brother clung against my stomach with his arms round my neck and his legs round my waist like a baby monkey to its mother. All night my first born brother kept in his hand a broken piece of wood from one of our burnt house poles. It was to safe himself if the bandits found him.

We stayed there all day. Waiting for her. I don't know what day it was; there was no school, no church anymore in our village, so you did not know whether it was a Sunday or Monday. (Gordimer 1991, 12)

Following highlighted words as "a baby monkey, a broken piece of wood, it was to save himself" refers to pre-civilization time. The "Baby monkey" is a symbol of pre-civilized times. "A broken piece of wood" was used as a pre-civilization tool to save oneself from danger. School, church, Monday and Sunday are also marks of civilization which have diminished because of war. So, the inversion to the baby-monkey refers to the unconscious fear of author about extermination of human race as a result of wars, political turmoil and violence.

# Conclusion

It is evident from the examples mentioned above that Under Gordimer's efforts to retell the story of South Africa under severe censorship she seems to develop a unique style of narrative writing that is rather inverted but helps us see history South Africa and Black race through the channel of unseen. The politics of inverted narration lies in creation of dazzling effect to normal reader. The author makes sure that story must be conveyed only to those readers who takes active participation in evaluating the embedded inverted symbols in the text. The author makes sure it is not only the author but active reader who can help in production of meaning. The external turmoil of the war is structurally embodied in inverted images within the narrative. The political effect of this inversion is helping the reader see with the help of unseen.

The inversion shows the distorted state of the narrator's mind. Although this is a civil war but there is uncertainty of war achieving its purpose. The inverted images are negative, even the

grandmother taking the role of grandfather is in the state of stasis in the end. The so called hope produced by child's wish to go back home is adding to the hopelessness of the grandmother. When she says "there is no home", she actually says there is no hope. Consciously created hope by the author is unconsciously telling hopelessness of the author. This is a true fact that the country was passing from its crucial times in 1991 when the story was being written.

The writer cannot be fully detached from her work because her work is "interdependent" to her "field of mind" and "field of the world." They are not separate entities that are brought together. They are not "in a Field" but "of a Field" (Yontef, 2002, 19). Even if the author is detached, one unconscious part of itself remains in its diction or in images like environmental turmoil caused by war is reflected through her ultimate inversion of lens, images and roles.

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