



## THE HERO'S PRE-DISCURSIVE AND DISCURSIVE ETHOS IN NADINE GORDIMER'S *MY SON'S STORY*

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### **Abstract:**

Written in a context of social and political turbulences, *My Son Story* puts light on the different occurrences that shaped Apartheid history. In her alight elan to unveil nooks and crannies of the gloomy pages of South African elapsed history, Nadine Gordimer goes deep down in her country's past to pinpoint ins and outs of a daily harassed and strongly subjugated people to the law of the strongest. Thus, this paper explores and analyses the semantic features of the discourse of resistance, grounding our reflection on the quirks of ethos and subjectivity of a heroic stand. To this end, it gouges out the different communicational assets that have raised the personae of a combatant to the sheer ranks of the heroes of freedom in South Africa.

**Keywords:** ethos, pre-discursive, discursive, discourse, apartheid, strategies, conflict

### **Introduction**

Based on racial segregation and separate development, Apartheid in South Africa, was an expression of violence that burdened Nonwhites of the worst. Through the different juridical acts, South Africans were dismembered into racial groups, laying bare a country where reigned the law of the strongest. It was in such a context that Nadine Gordimer pinpoints the lives of the subjugated, highlighting the inner wrong in the innards of a wobbly system.

In *My Son's Story* Gordimer maps out the road of commonness to condemn the racial barriers and social marginalization. She raises heroes who put the shoulder trap of sacrifice to champion the destiny of the weakest. Indeed, in the aforementioned novel, stands out a hero who, in talking and acting in the name of his people, devotes to weed out the hefty root of social unfairness his community experiences. Having regard to that fact, Gordimer lines her ideas in the limelight of the political sphere and prevails upon a pre-discursive and a discursive ethos to play god in her own nation.

Generally used as a communicating means to act upon others, ethos is part and parcel of logos and appears in verbal or non-verbal interactions and recurses to affection and fascination. It gives ground to a feeling of know-how that impacts on the listener's attitudes toward the speaker's discourse. Hence the necessity, in this analysis, to loom large the

physical and moral personality, and the language use proficiency to argue out the hero's vision and mission as a key-stepping stone in the struggle against discrimination in South Africa. For that purpose, we will base our analysis on Maigneueau theory, insisting on the *supra* image for prediscursive ethos and that of Ducrot on the discursive and referential ethos.

### The Hero's prediscursive Ethos

From Ruth Amossy's stance, pre-discursive ethos is not but "The pre-existing image of the speaker" (Amossy 1999 : 155), which in concordance with fine social and moral aggregates that determine the personality of the speaker, strengthens and impinges upon the enunciator arguments to turn them into convincing utterances. Ethos is therefore, as stated in the following:

*"Everything that, in discursive enunciation, contributes to issue an image of the speaker to the audience. Voice tone, speech flow, choice words and arguments, gestures, mimicry, gaze, posture, adornment, etc., are all, elocutionary and oratorical, sartorial and symbolic signs by which the speaker grants himself a psychological and sociological image"* (Preiss Axel 1992: 48)

*"One can see that the question of identity is directly linked to verbal communication efficiency which a stepping stone of rhetorical preoccupation"* (Amossy 2010: 212). This assertion from Amossy, is much telling on the umbilical link that does exist between the art of convincing and the physical personality. Amossy's point is furthered by Roland Barthes according to whom prediscursive ethos is about *"appearing and not about being, [...] It refers to character traits that the speaker must show to the audience, no matter how sincere, to make a good impression"* (Barthes 1970: 212). Both Amossy and Barthes insist on the visible and invisible data that contribute to give credit to the enunciator's stand and discourse. Their point is shared by Ali Alsafar. The latter defends that ethos *"corresponds to the previous image of the enunciator, what we already know about him"*.<sup>i</sup> (Ali Alsafar 2015: 328).

Dominique Maigneueau who defines pre-discursive ethos as the *supra* aspect of somebody discourse that foremost spotlights the image that the audience can receive from the issuer. That image is pertaining to certain elements as the speaker's role in the social space, his or her functions institutions, its status and power, but also on the basis of the collective representation and stereotype circulating about his person, on which the enunciator relies in his speech, to confirm or transform them<sup>ii</sup>.

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<sup>i</sup> [l'ethos préalable, comme son nom l'indique, correspond à l'image préalable de l'énonciateur, ce qu'on sait déjà de lui.] My translation.

<sup>ii</sup> [certains éléments comme le rôle que remplit l'orateur dans l'espace social, ses fonctions institutionnelles, son statut et son pouvoir, mais aussi sur la base de la représentation collective et du stéréotype qui circulent au sujet de sa personne, sur lesquelles l'énonciateur s'appuie dans son discours, pour les confirmer ou les transformer.] My Translation

Furthermore, in her aim to voice the oppressed's mind in days of Apartheid, Gordimer pays heed to a bereft of all hope political system to vector sicken communities who refuse to chicken out before the law of the jungle and the stoutest. Her call to beef up a multiracial nation by and for the different fixings of the South African country concedes her with a power to shape and guide a hero's way of life and capacity to shift the position lines.

In *My Son's Story*, Sonny, one of the round characters, to facilitate an adhesion of his fellows to his personality, endows to correspond his daily preoccupation with the profile of a collective representation of what a leader should be. He makes use of a particular form of communication based on different maxims of conversation. From this point, he adopts an intentional behaviour oriented toward an objective. The narrator informs that: "*it was only selfrespect*" (N. Gordimer 1990: 18). The positive and beautiful images are accompanied by wording that implies language acts. The linguistic stand he profiles is linked to his ambition and his community social organization.

The social structure that defines the coloured community creates along some micro universes in which huff and wrath accumulate to build up some attitudes, orientates and organizes coloured's mind and psych. Verbal interaction becomes therefore a scene of rules and roles that derives from conventions. Speech acts appear then as micrographies that portray social, political and economic matters. As a teacher, Sonny highlights his ability in dedicating time and energy to his people's living standard improvement. His son testifies that: "*it was because of what he did at school, and then later when he got the township manager to let him start up the youth club ; people saw him as one of themselves*" (Nadine Gordimer 1990 : 18).

In laying naked his moral qualities, Will's father launches a call to please and legitimize his enterprise of self-marketing. According to Will's argument, Sonny implicitly puts himself up through his virtuous steadfastness to build a new future for his fellows in Benoni. Hence, the noble and honorable motivation that goes along with his image of the Good Samaritan. The fragment "*to came to him naturally*", (Nadine Gordimer 1990 : 19) sounds as a modalization of intensification and puts in bold Sonny's personality which is heightened by his heart of survive. His achievements in the struggle against Apartheid mirrors, to the eyes of his community, the profile of a Christ-like figure. The status of a teacher he incarnates overrules that of the father and values his prediscursive ethos. The highly-reasoning social actions he daily concretizes in favor of community tinkle as a poly-operating discourse orientated by the narrator who portrays the professional and social sides of his father to the righteousness of generosity and altruism. His standpoint in favor of the weakest highlights his good intention and raises his words in full truthfulness:

*"[w]e believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided."* (Krista C. McCormack 2014:136.)

In spite of being coloured, Sonny is said to be black. This *blackness* of his skin is an "*organ of action*" (Lorenzo Altieri 2009: 14) an instrument which plays a first fiddle role in confidence and mastership building. Sonny's standpoints are then portrayed as a movement that targets a common will to act in the name of the weakest. His physical appearance

becomes a symbol that transcends racial cleavages between Blacks and Coloureds to position as a rallying account from which glints a feeling of trust and reliance:

*"The narrative describes Sonny's racial identity as black, especially when he faces the black uprising at school, and blurs the distinction between 'real black', 'black' and 'coloured'. In defining the real 'black' as siblings of the 'coloureds' the novel underlines 'black solidarity' as a focus of political mobilisation in the liberation movement."* (Toshiko Sakamoto, [www.ritsumei.ac.jp/.../](http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/.../))

As a state of being, reliance is a subjective indicator of esteem and respect. It is a mental agreement that bridges two partners who share a common goal to achieve. Thereon, Sonny stands as the right-hand man, the actor to whom the woeful communities in Johannesburg have invested their confidence to lead them into a New Jerusalem and another Canaan shore. The believability he enjoys from his mates is grounded upon values pertaining to courage, proficiency, discretion and effectiveness. Besides, Sonny plucks up bravura and loyalty to bear a Moses-like mission through which he drives at unlatching his people from the restrictions imposed upon them. The nobility of such a humanist aim buttresses his positive and constructive reputation, and opens wide, for him, the road to an undisputed leadership. In so being, his commitment, by the sides of Non-whites in the struggle against apartheid, omens of a horizon full of challenges to overcome the matter of skin colour and race, which is central in the acquisition of the *liga sign* status.

In these circumstances, Gordimer establishes a link between the ethics of chastity and the ethos that derives from skin colour and race in a context of apartheid. Identity becomes no longer a question of race, but a matter of principles and *ad-nauséam* commitment against social unfairness.

It is then expressed as a concentric circle to which belong those who share, in spite of their racial differences, the ideal *élan* of a common will to live together. Sonny's personality saddles itself with the image of a *man of the people*<sup>iii</sup>. His discourse and stand against apartheid is then dampened by the value of an individual of wisdom endowed with the sense of sacrifice and heroism. At long last, the ethos that relieves from his personality combined physical and psychological features that reflect collective representations of good and hope. Sonny's behaviour corresponds to a beam of witticism which is associated with a physical complexion and a particular attitude expressed toward the have-nots inside and outside his community. Sakamo illustrates: *"Gordimer to introduce a symbolically hybrid and cross-cultural force to counter the fixed identities which apartheid structures have put in place in South African society"* (Toshiko Samatoko [www.ritsumei.ac.jp/.../](http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/.../))

In a context of resistance against racial segregation, Sonny's step-by-step warfare defines and articulates a relationship based on symmetry and propinquity. With his fellows' expectations, he wears the cloak of a protector full of tenderness and compassion for Non-whites. Indeed, the efficiency of Will's father *peritextual indices* position him as a speakersman, a bearer of hope whose life and bliss are in mostly associated with the spirit of

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<sup>iii</sup> Borrowed from one of Achebe's titles' novels: *A Man of the People*.

resistance. The narrator informs in the following: *"if he was responsible to the struggle then the struggle was responsible for him, Sonny became Sonny. He had no existence without it"* (Nadine Gordimer, 1990: 199). The image of Sonny becomes an image of an icon in total fusion with the cohesion of a people's struggle.

The teacher's aura is then intoned as a hypotext – the first text which is inspires and influences another text connected to it – (Georges-Elia Safarti 1999: 751) that tells much about Sonny's beliefs and vision on his people's destiny. His personae expresses a homogeneous entity big with the *techné* that persuades and convinces his diversify auditory who, beyond any shred of doubt, is convinced by his prediscursive and extra linguistic discourse. Therefore, they are under the weight of will's father's persuasiveness and remain at his beck and call. The deeds and gestures that mould the endorser's singularity fasten his ethos and turn Sonny's presence into an enunciator who speaks without uttering linguistic words. The brawler's constant attitude grounds on seemliness and goodwill toward his fellows voices intrinsic values of a upstanding and honest man.

Sonny unshakable support to black students' uprising definitely depicts him as a transcultural actor that crosses racial barriers to flag the symbol of unity and solidarity. He stands in the vantage point of *"in-betweens and un-belongingness"* (Toshiko Samatoko [www.ritsumei.ac.jp/.../](http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/.../)). Coloured identity and cultural transformation portray his personae as a hybrid character who suppresses hierarchy to express oneness and uniqueness in brotherhood. In conjunction with the group spirit he highlights, Sonny's presence in the veld is a double-sided action that gives prominence to his authority and endows him with a go-between capacity to give a hearing and a talk to the different dominated communities: *"Sonny's sense of identity is characterized by its 'un-belongingness' and he is situated 'halfway between' the 'real blacks' on the one side of the veld and the Whites on the other. He is in a position in which he can communicate with both communities"* (Toshiko Samatoko [www.ritsumei.ac.jp/.../](http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/.../)). His prediscursive ethos is that of a coloured whose identity is described as *"an advantage in political terms"* (Toshiko Samatoko [www.ritsumei.ac.jp/.../](http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/.../)).

Definitely, in *My Son's Story*, Nadine Gordimer portrays one of her protagonist with positive social values, grant him with an altruist minded-set before assigning him mission to speak and fight in the name of freedom and Non-whites' dignity in South Africa. And goes to say the *"efficiency of speeches is strongly linked to the authority of the speaker"* (Amossy, 199: 127). Sonny's social values are expressed on the sharp edge of perfection to enhance his personae as a shoulder to cry on. He stands as a credible voice that delivers a message of oneness among the helpless communities for a rainbow nation rooted in the values of equality and equity.

### **Discursive and referential Ethos**

According to Aristotle, discursive Ethos *"is built mostly in and by the discourse of Speaker"* (Aristotle quoted by Ducrot 1984: 201). This point deepened by Decrot according to whom *intra-discursive utterances* are to be separated from their enunciator. As a key point on discourse analysis exercise, Ethos is the:

“...appearance that gives [to the speech] the flow, intonation, warmth or severe, the choice of words, arguments (...). In my terminology I will say that the ethos is attached to L, the speaker as that this is because he is the source of the enunciation that he sees himself with certain characters which, in turn, make this an acceptable or a repulsive saying.” (Oswald Ducrot 1984: 201)

In every respect, discursive Ethos puts on surface the author's inner personality, his/her moral and social value. It mirrors somebody's identity. On this point, it will be worthwhile to specify that our analysis is to be based on what the “hero,” in *My Son's Story*, says and what is said about him.

As a freedom fighter, Sonny's language use sounds as a behavioral value meant to target a specific objective. Having shouldered the heavy responsibility to lighten and guide his fellows on the path of resistance against apartheid, he echoes a discourse that highlights the social cracks which divide and scramble the South African society. He opens his speech with an interrogation that rather expresses an *ad hoc* necessity to raise a combating consciousness among Non-whites than to ask to be informed about the audience's point of view. His interrogation is a language act that enables him to act on his listeners to hustle their emotions and tickle their self-pride. In so doing, his performative intention bears the value of a rhetoric false interrogative utterance that requires no answers from the audience. It sounds then as a reminding of a sad and bloody event that costs the life of nine young boys and plunges Non-white community into mourning. He then refreshes their mind and brushes open their flounce tang to get them adhere to the relaying cry of a people in turmoil.

To better imbricate emotion and ethos, Sonny activates the *ennoia* (good will and kindness toward one's fellow) viewpoints of his speech. The discourse he articulates pictures the nine x-out boys as “*comrades*” and then as “*people*.” Such a gradation style mind-blows the audience, freaks them out and establishes, by dint of plaintiveness and pitiableness, an umbilical link between Non-whites and death. They are the people condemned in the hands of ruthless regime. They are stigmata (according to Goffan are individuals whose social and living conditions disqualify and isolate them from society at large) go through daily discriminatory laws. He argues: “*nine young people who were hardly yet grown to be men, but who were men in their resistance to the people who have surround homes*” (Nadine Gordimer 1999: 113).

In his address to his people, the freedom fighter immerses his arguments into a descriptive approach. He employs two fragments coordinated by the conjunction “but” to express two contradictory information. (“*nine young boys who were hardly yet grown to be men*”) drive at showing the tragic and unfair destiny reserved for the young boys. A judiciary dimension of discourse appears and highlights the wrongness of a system which stiffens the weak and protects a handful privileged clique. The semantic value of this fragment is deconstructed by the second one introduced separated from the first one by the conjunction “but” in “*but who were men in their resistance to the people who have surround homes*” and this to say boys were too young to die but old enough to fight in the name of justice and equality and freedom. As a consequence, they are to be honored (comrade we honor) and remembered with aff. An episodic and demonstrative sound hints from Sonny's speech and

inserts the idea of *"two laws, two justices"* (Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo 1976: 25). The use of a gory lexicon (death, terrorized, resistance, killed) portray South Africa as a land of right denial, tissue of misrule and chronic violence; a place where the have-nots are painstakingly tamed to get their lives richly dressed with liveries of racism that totally exclude them from any kind of social opportunities. In so being, it becomes clear cut that the imbrued glossary the freedom fighter puts to use is *"full of emotionally-charged, words and phrases that create a [pathetic] image"* ( Hienriet Clark and Rebecca Winter 2015 : 2)

As a member of a community with high emotional reasonality, Will's father points an accusing finger at the apartheid regime he views as an expression that souses coloured and Black societies in a bath of violence that bears the malignity of collective massacre. He vows: *"these young comrades and thousands of others who have been killed by apartheid's agents, the police, the army, the witdoek"* (Nadine Gordimer 1999: 113). The enumerating style he recourses to (the police, the army, the witdoecke) helps better the staging of Non-whites soreness and misery. Sonny valorizes his image as a leader and that of the poor to degrade, by the same token, the standing point of the white community. He transforms the sad destiny of nine boys into a communal cause and therefore stirs his audience's consciousness. The recourse to the story telling technic enables the character-narrator to lay naked the hideous side of apartheid. The enumerative side is not a simple juxtaposition of a criminal praxis. It puts on view *"a global enunciation, cohesion and coherence"* through which is portrayed a homogeneity between violence and non-violence (Jean Michel Adam 1991:113). Through this argumentative strategy, Sonny puts forward a discursive ethos that cements the axiology of resistance in a context of mutual hate and reciprocal harshness.

In the tribute, he pays to the nine boys, Sonny keeps on his descriptive and performative style. And with the anaphorization of the segment *"they will never,"* referring to the nine boys victims, appears as an unfailing commitment to denounce and fight out an unfair regime.

In the following statements:

(S1): *"They will never share with all our people in this country's wealth, instead of working to provide thirteen percent of the population with the highest standard of living in the world while the majority of the people cannot feed their children."*

(S2): *"They will never know what is to get out of ghettos like this one and live where there is electricity and clean running water in descent houses"*

(S3): *"They will never know the time when our sick will no longer lie on the floor in apartheid hospital while there are wards full of empty beds in hospitals for whites ; when our old fathers and mothers will no longer have to stave on pension a fraction of those whites get."*

(S4): *"They will never know the single and open education for all, never mind colour or race, our democratic education will establish, and they will not know that the migratory labour system, which now divides husbands and wives, parents and children, and has created the prostitutes, the homeless children of streets, and the spread of the terrible disease called AIDS, will be a horror of the past."*

(S5): *"They will never walk on our land, our land restored to to the people, instead of being sent away after the day's work to urban rubbish heaps like this and to rural resettlement slum in areas of our country given tribal names and called 'foreign states'."*

(S6): *"They will never live in the unitary, non-racial, democratic country our struggle is going to create."*

The pragmatic value of these assertive statements is to be found in their denouncement of a situation of wretchedness. The constative dimension of these assertions highlights the frustration of hopelessness that determines the native's mind. The point about good and evil sounds out and Sonny delineates indirectly the apartheid regime as being held by those who *"give them tribal names and called them foreign states"*. Good and Evil are said to be the discretion of their free will. They ascribe themselves the might of the law and bereave themselves from any form of moral rules. Sonny adopts a comparative approach and dichotomizes social realities in South Africa.

Comparative elements	White community	Non-White communities
Living Standard	"High standard of living"	Working to provide thirteen percent of the population with the highest standard of living in the world.
Health	Empty beds in hospitals for Whites	Sicks lie on the floor in apartheid hospitals
Pension	Good pension	They get the fraction of those Whites get
Education	Open education for all	No single open education for all.
Land issue	Land owners	Sent away to urban rubbish.
Freedom	Born free	Die without freedom.
Economic system	Owner of means of production	Economic system divide men and women, husbands and wives, create prostitutes; widen the rank of AIDS bearers and homeless people.

Such a gloomy picture read by Will's father will have a perlocutary effect on his listeners. The sensitive fiber is jerked and pious emotions flash out to let the audience gobble into prayers of hope bona fides: *"the amen, stirred deeply through the crowd seemed to sway them towards the graves. The comrades held them back, there were silence"* (Nadine Gordimer 1999: 114). Victims are sacralized and Sonny bears the hallmarks of *"the political hero"* (Lorenzo Altieri, 07: 2008). He is the one who incarnates the Non-white communities' aspirations. Will's father's logic deduction in his sensitive discourse discharges tar-jerking complaints and leaves the auditory on the rough edges is quite convincing: *"Where logic normally reigns, then, credibility assessments based on "[e]motion, intuition, and common sense perspectives" are not only allowed but encouraged."* Brown, quoted by (Krista C. McCormack 2014: 137).

Sonny's fierce stand against unjust brutality hands him out a glorious status that a social figure who defends a people who is in quest of a political coherence. And given that *"there is no hero without an auditory"* (André Malraux, 29: 1937), Sonny's audience moving reaction describes him as a glorious actor with glorious deeds that are achieved against barbarity and savagery. Peter Reilly best informs on how illustrate deeds can hit in force: *"Countless factors can influence how an audience perceives a persuader's credibility."* (Peter Reilly 2013: 1171). In fine, a telling comparison is grooved by his auditory in these terms: *"we greet you Mandela, call us Mandela"* (Nadine. Gordimer 1999: 115). The audience is favorable to his cause. They free themselves from any kind of restriction to surge into a hysteria that tells much about their attachment to their leader.



## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it can be said that Sonny, in his humdrum combat against racial segregation, succeeds in bearing the landmark of a unifier. He achieves the process of bringing around his personae all those who are driven by the noble cause, in spite of their racial differences, to wipe out the political and economic system that breaks down their existences as human beings. His leadership pasted on his in-between racial stance (neither black nor white), in addition to his affability and his intentness in the defense of the helpless, sketches him out as the man of the job. Besides, the communicative technics he recourses to specify his discursive ethos induces the rhetoric of the persecutory values of his discourse that forges receptivity among his fellows.

Nadine Gordimer who has sharpened Sonny with prediscursive and discursive major assets, remains faithful to her option to conceptualize and write out a way of being and becoming in a nation torn apart by hatred and social disjunction. Sonny's personality stirs hope and sounds loud as the consensual symbol who, by dint of his ethos capacities, flags out the necessity to dispirit the crumbling of responsibilities to address challenges pertaining to freedom and equality for all racial groups in South Africa.

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